

Focus Group Moderator Guides

Focus groups are a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher; in essence, it is the researcher-driven interest that provides the focus . . . but the data comes from the group interaction.

(Morgan, 1997, p. 6)

Focus Groups Defined

Focus group research is an increasingly popular qualitative data collection strategy and is used effectively by many educational researchers. One of the common pitfalls, however, is that many novice researchers (and even some experienced ones) may be unclear about what constitutes a focus group. There are several defining characteristics that distinguish a true focus group from other types of group interactions. As Krueger and Casey (2015) note, a focus group is “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (p. 2).

Focus group interviews, long accepted as a data collection strategy in social science research, originally surfaced in the 1940s as a method to test the public’s response to World War II propaganda (Barbour, 2007). After years of use in business and marketing domains, focus groups have gained increasing acceptance and popularity in other research domains. As a qualitative research method, focus groups remain an ideal strategy for obtaining in-depth feedback regarding participants’ attitudes, opinions, perceptions, motivations, and behaviors (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Fern, 2001; Liamputtong, 2011; Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998; Patton, 2015; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). As Morgan (1997) further notes, focus groups are useful when it comes to discovering not only what participants think but why they think as they do.

In general, focus groups comprise several distinct features. Small in size, they typically range from 6 to 12 participants; participants are

purposefully selected, based on their commonalities, and often include participants originating from pre-existing groups. The discussion is focused, with a specific sequence of questioning, moving from general and broad open questions to specific and more complex or challenging questions. Sessions typically last between 60 and 90 minutes and are structured in their design, emphasizing consistent questioning across groups (Fern, 2001; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Vaugh et al., 1996).

As Morgan (1997) stresses, focus groups are collaborative interviews designed to capitalize on the group's evolving interaction. In this sense, the focus group differs from one-on-one interviewing in that each group generates its own outcomes and responses by virtue of being together. Yet, while the synergy of the group experience is ideal for cultivating rich and descriptive information about the topic under exploration, the process of designing and conducting these group interviews can also be challenging, especially for the beginning researcher. Even more critical, the researcher must develop an effective moderator's guide to facilitate the discussion and obtain meaningful, descriptive data.

Focus groups are not meant to consolidate individual interviews into a single, more efficient interview (Morgan, 1997; Morgan & Krueger, 1998). They differ from groups whose purpose is otherwise, such as therapy (patient-centered), presentations or debates (group-centered), or meetings/decision-making (leader-centered). The interactions of these specialized group discussions help participants further understand the topic of interest, yielding information not otherwise available through other data collection strategies. Unlike other types of groups, focus groups capitalize on the beliefs, ideas, and individual perceptions that surface as a result of a moderator-guided discussion framed in an interactive context.

There are numerous benefits as well as challenges associated with focus group research. The focus group's synergy generates responses among participants that build on the collective perspectives of group members; the give and take of the conversation brings issues to the surface resulting from these group's interactions. This process allows for extensive sharing, comparing, and elaboration among participants, offering the researcher an excellent and rich source of primary data. Conversely, focus groups may not provide an opportunity for sufficient depth of emotional responses and may yield only superficial results on a given topic. In this way, a researcher must be careful to determine if a topic is appropriate for focus group designs, especially if a topic is sensitive in nature. If a topic is particularly sensitive, it may not provide a safe environment for participants to fully or openly disclose their feelings on that subject (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Morgan & Krueger, 1998).

Additionally, some groups suffer from dominant or disruptive personalities who hijack the conversation, in which case the moderator must carefully manage and redirect the discussion. Finally, focus group results are not intended for generalizability but rather support the development of survey instruments that allow quantitatively derived results to be generalized (Barbour, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Liamputtong, 2011).

Focus Group Applications

Although often viewed as a self-contained exploratory, qualitative data collection strategy (Pizam, 1994), focus groups often supplement other data collection methods such as survey questionnaires, observations, and interviews (Morgan, 1997). Focus group interviews, therefore, can be integrated with qualitative projects in three different ways: (1) for use in exploratory/emergent designs, used when little is known about a topic or issue, and when focus groups can uncover the context, language, ideas, and expectations in more detail; (2) for use in self-contained designs, when focus group results can provide the sole source for data collection, viewed as a strategy to explore personal narratives, experiences, and shared experiences; and (3) for use as supplemental designs, when focus group results inform instrument design or serve as triangulation in mixed methods research designs. In this role, focus groups probe findings, corroborate similarities or differences, or reveal bias or inconsistencies in the preceding or subsequent findings (Liamputtong, 2011; Pizam, 1994). Additionally, focus groups may support the exploration and diagnosis of organizational dilemmas, employee satisfaction and workplace concerns, organizational planning and envisioning processes, program evaluation, and institutional needs-assessment (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Requisite Skills and Characteristics of the Focus Group Moderator

All qualitative researchers must possess characteristics akin to those of a therapist, counselor, or coach; they need to listen, to communicate with sensitivity and compassion, and to elicit a participant's story in rich detail. The focus group moderator must demonstrate these skills but must also be able to step back from the conversation when appropriate.

Unlike the qualitative interviewer, who must consciously direct the conversation and the interaction between himself or herself and the interviewee, the focus group moderator must distinguish between starting the group's discussion and knowing when to turn that discussion over to the participants. As Flick (2009) suggests, the focus group moderator facilitates and guides rather than directs and controls the group's discussion. This skill is learned and developed over time and with practice; in addition, there are other essential moderator skills and characteristics that contribute to the focus group's success (Barbour, 2007; Krueger & Casey, 2015):

- Communicating the focus of the study's purpose and the way the findings will be used
- Focusing the discussion, keeping things on track, while still allowing the participants to direct the flow of the conversation
- Respecting all points of view
- Actively listening, effectively probing and clarifying participant comments
- Maintaining a nonjudgmental and nondefensive stance
- Actively encouraging everyone to speak and contribute to the discussion
- Managing difficult situations, difficult participants, and conflict within the group

Focus Group Types and Variations

A wide variety of focus group types are available to researchers. The single purpose session is the most common type, where a sole topic is explored with a single facilitator. Variations on single purpose focus groups, however, are numerous, as illustrated in Table 6.1. Depending on your research questions and your topic, one of these focus group types is ideally suited for your project (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Morgan, 1997; Vaugh et al., 1996). Each of these focus group types uses a customized moderator's guide to reflect the purpose of the group session.

While this list is brief in its description of each type, many excellent resources are available to provide a full description of the varieties of focus groups, the scope of groups for different industries, the recommended

Table 6.1 Focus Group Types

Focus Group Type	Purpose
Single Purpose	Single topic, single moderator
Multiple Purpose	Single topic, multiple groups, multiple moderators; allows for across-group comparisons
Double-Layered Designs	Participants represent different strata of the same population, allows for specific focus on a subset or target group
Two-Way	Two different groups are paired, where one group actively discusses the topic at hand while the other group observes them and then discusses their interactions and conversation
Dual Moderators	Two moderators cofacilitate a single group where one moderator contributes procedural expertise and the other contributes content expertise
Dueling Moderators	Two moderators deliberately take opposing sides of a single issue to generate debate among participants
Brainstorming	Designed to generate preliminary or exploratory ideas for a project, plan, or event, using a process where participants combine roundtable comments with visuals or flipcharts to record ideas
Program Evaluation	Designed to assess and evaluate programs and recommend actions for improvement
Envisioning/ Planning	Designed to envision or plan for a program's future goals, objectives, and actions, using a combination of flipcharts, visuals, lists, and other interactive tools
Online/Virtual/ Teleconference	Participants interact and converse virtually, where the moderator runs the session from a platform that engages participants in conference calling, online meeting platforms, chat rooms, and other virtual meeting places, although these groups limit the moderator's ability to observe nonverbal cues in person

procedures for running focus group sessions and recruiting participants, and other considerations about these group discussions. The focus of this chapter is to assist researchers in the development of the moderator's guide to maximize the focus group session, which will support the study's objectives.

Getting Started With a Basic Template

General Design Considerations

The single purpose focus group moderator's guide remains the standard template for all focus group types. Minor modifications are all that are needed to transform the single purpose focus group template for use with other types such as the multiple purpose group, the double-layered design, and the online/teleconferencing group, all of which can adopt the basic moderator's guide template with ease. The same general design considerations apply to all of these focus group types, which depend on the development of comprehensible questions, a standardized sequence of those questions, probes that support the questions, and the time estimates allotted for each question.

Developing Focus Group Moderator Guide Questions

The purpose of the focus group is to cultivate synergy among group members and to get them to talk to each other, rather than to you as the moderator. Writing an initial list of ideas for your topics and possible questions is a good way to get started; review this list to ensure that your topics and questions directly address the purpose of your focus group and your research objectives. Sometimes a researcher may get sidetracked with a line of questioning that seems interesting but will not actually contribute to the session's focus or purpose.

As with other types of qualitative questions for other types of qualitative tools, it is important to maintain a neutral and straightforward tone with your questions. Avoid complicated or double-barreled questions; avoid value-laden or leading questions. Frame questions in a positive and nonjudgmental manner, and avoid bias or culturally insensitive language. Finally, keep the list of main content questions brief, no more than six, and ideally closer to four or five. These content questions comprise the heart of your discussion, but they are positioned between entry and exiting questions, so you need to make time for all the questions in your guide. Finally, maintain consistency in your questions across moderator's guides, should you require several different guides for several different group sessions where your participants or topics might deviate slightly. There may be instances where the mix of your groups will require slightly different variations on your questions, or your groups may represent slightly different views of a single topic. While variation may be necessary across your focus group guides, the key is to maintain

consistency in at least 80% to 90% of your questions in order to compare and analyze the data uniformly (Billups, 2013).

Sequencing Focus Group Moderator Guide Questions

As most researchers will tell you, there is an established sequence for focus group questions. Krueger and Casey (2015) provide an excellent overview of this sequence and are supported by Barbour (2007), Fern (2001), Liamputtong (2011), and Morgan (1997). This sequence is aligned with time allotments for each question, which helps the moderator maintain a flow and a timeliness to the group's discussion. Earlier questions require less time and serve as entry into the discussion; later questions require more time and help participants ease into more complex or difficult topics.

The sequence of the typical focus group session includes the following progression:

- *Icebreaker/Opening Question* (60 seconds per person), where the questions are easy to answer, nonthreatening, and typically include simple introductory elements such as the person's first name, place of work/school, length of time at that location, or other basic pieces of information. The icebreaker also creates a climate where the moderator goes in a circle to make sure that each participant speaks out loud in front of the rest of the group; this action makes it easier for people to speak again during the remainder of the session. Going around the circle allows the moderator to establish a welcoming and inclusive feel to the group discussion by validating that everyone's voice is important to the discussion, regardless of how benign the icebreaker questions might seem.
- *Introductory Question* (60-90 seconds per person), where a topic is introduced that is related to the session topic but is still general enough to be easy to answer, nonthreatening, and encourages participants to contribute to one more round of speaking out loud and getting used to speaking in the group. This topic may cover a connection with the topic in some way, such as "tell us, in a minute to a minute

and a half, about a phrase or expression you would use to describe how you feel about teaching college students.”

- *Transition Question* (1–2 minutes per person), where the discussion moves more specifically to the topic under study. In this phase, the general, broad conversation topics become more focused and more personal for participants. This is also the first time in the discussion when the moderator lets participants speak on their own impulses, rather than creating a structure for everyone to speak; it is the beginning of moving from a moderator-directed conversation to a participant-directed conversation, so the question must generate that inclination for participants. Questions are directly related to the session topic, and the moderator uses probes to encourage rich, detailed examples and descriptions of the participants’ experiences.
- *Key or Content Questions* (open-ended, entire segment comprises approximately 40–45 minutes of the 90-minute focus group), where the real work of the focus group happens. The questions posed in this part of the discussion anchor the entire discussion; at least three or four substantial questions are asked by the moderator, and sometimes there might even be four to six questions. However, it is unlikely that more than four or five questions can be asked of participants without sacrificing the necessary details and stories that should come with participant perspectives. Asking too many questions may mean that insufficient details are provided, since participants may feel rushed by the moderator or may feel that there is not ample time for everyone to contribute to the discussion. Careful crafting of content questions is essential to answering your research questions and building a sense of synergy and ease in your group.
- *Debriefing/Concluding Question* (60–90 seconds or time determined by moderator depending on nature of the discussion), where the moderator determines that after the key questions have been covered, the group must exit the discussion safely and comfortably. There may be times when

participants are deeply affected by a discussion or when their emotions or memories are disturbed in some way; creating a safe space within which participants can debrief, unload feelings, or process the discussion is another important element in focus group research. The questions created for this final phase should acknowledge the discussion that has just occurred but also return to a general level of discussion to depart from the intensity or intimacy of the main discussion.

Developing Probes

Each question in the focus group moderator's guide requires probes intended to keep the conversation on track. These probes assume different forms, such as asking for examples or stories; asking participants to rank or list things; or soliciting impressions, memories, ideas, goals, or aspirations. Regardless of the type of probe you use, it must relate to your questions; in other words, provide a time frame or time orientation (the future, the past, a specific time period) that helps the participants anchor their responses. Provide a specific reference to the question, and ask for further details for examples; probes such as "is there an example of that which you can share?" or "given what you just shared, how do you see that changing for you within the next year?" Other types of commonly used probes include those from the following list:

- What do you think about?
- Tell me more about that?
- How would you describe . . . ?
- What would you do if . . . ?
- Can you give me a specific example of that?
- Does anyone have something to add to what (*insert name*) said about that?

Probes are inserted in the guide after each key/content question and after the transition question; they are not typically used with icebreaker, introductory, or debriefing/concluding questions (Liamputtong, 2011; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014).

Using the Moderator's Guide to Conduct the Session

The moderator's guide serves as a script for the moderator(s) and the note-taker/recorder. The guidelines for procedures, operations, and instructions play an important role in the focus group process. Therefore, when developing your guide, be sure to explicitly state your step-by-step procedures for welcoming participants, administering consent forms and pre-session questionnaires, distributing name tags and other materials, explaining the study's purpose and treatment and reporting of data, assurance of privacy or confidentiality of individuals and the findings, and the duration of the group session. These procedural guidelines assure participants that the session is well organized and adequate preparations have been completed. Before you commence the session, it is also important to establish group norms and ground rules. These activities take time, yet they are essential to providing a safe environment in which participants can speak freely and openly.

Thus, the focus group moderator's guide serves multiple purposes. First, the guide anchors the group discussion as the moderator uses the questions to direct the sequence and coverage of topics under study. Second, the guide serves as a procedural map, a blueprint of how the group discussion and process will unfold. Third, the guide provides a structure for operations, reminding the moderator and the note-taker/recorder or assistant moderator about the supporting activities that must occur to ensure a smooth process. Finally, the guide serves as the guidepost for the postsession debriefing, where the moderator and the note-taker/recorder or assistant moderator compare thoughts, notes, and initial impressions about the discussion. A carefully designed moderator's guide is, therefore, imperative to the success of the focus group (Billups, 2013).

Creating the Pre-Focus Group Profile Questionnaire

Most moderators administer a pre-focus group questionnaire to gather demographic data for each group. This pre-session survey is not only an excellent way to create a profile of the participants, but it also allows each person a "safe entry" into the focus group space and time

Template 6.1

Focus Group Moderator's Guide: Single Purpose

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ *GROUP:* _____

DATE: _____ *TIME:* _____

PLACE: _____

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the focus group to take, and your plans for using the results.
- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep participants' identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of a focus group session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.
- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.

- The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant)
2. Introductory Question (90 seconds per participant)
3. Transition Question (1–2 sentences in description per participant)
4. Content Questions
 - a. Content #1
 - i. Probes
 - b. Content #2
 - ii. Probes
 - c. Content #3
 - iii. Probes
 - d. Content #4
 - iv. Probes

Closing Question/Debriefing

5. What else would you like to tell me about?
-

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.

(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time.)

Note: An exemplar of the single purpose focus group moderator's guide is available in Appendix C.

Template 6.2

Focus Group Pre-session Participant Profile Questionnaire

Pre-session Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in today's focus group session. Please take a moment to answer the following questions so we can better understand who you are, your work/industry background, and some of your preliminary thoughts about today's topic.

GENDER: _____

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION: _____

PROFESSIONAL FIELD/INDUSTRY OF PRACTICE: _____

CURRENT POSITION (OPTIONAL): _____

Question

- Today, we will be talking about effective leadership practices; in your own words, please share your perspectives on what makes a leader effective.

- In one sentence, please tell us how you would describe your *own* leadership style.

Other Thoughts or Questions?

Is there anything else you wish to share with us regarding today's session? Please feel free to jot a few thoughts, questions, or observations in the space below:

Thank you! Please return this questionnaire to the moderator when you are finished.

to get a sense of the other attendees, the moderator(s), and the setting. In focus group research, every activity, every tool, and every connection has a purpose. A basic template for the presession participant profile questionnaire is listed below.

Focus Group Note-Taking Recording Sheet

Every focus group moderator uses a guide to direct the group conversation in a session. As part of the focus group team, every moderator works with a note-taker/recorder in order to document several levels of interactions, comments, and nonverbal behaviors of group members. These supplementary data provide a context for the focus group discussion and assist the moderator/note-taker team when debriefing at the end of the session. Just as a recording sheet is a necessary tool in the interviewing process, so it is with the focus group process.

There are three levels of documentation that the note-taker should watch for and record: group interactions, nonverbal behaviors on the

Template 6.3 Focus Group Note-Taking Recording Sheet		
Interviewer notes/observations	Nonverbal cues	Quotable quotes

part of individuals and the group as a whole, and finally, the representative remarks made by group members that reflect the general tone and meaning of the focus group discussion. The note-taker recording sheet facilitates the documentation of these elements.

The note-taker must observe the way group members speak to one another, the tone of their voices, the speed of talking, and their body language responses to fellow group members and to the moderator. All of these cues indicate the various levels of comfort, honesty, and rapport that add to or detract from what they are saying. Using an instrument to record representative statements and group nonverbals is essential to understanding the group's discussion and should be used in conjunction with the moderator's guide.

Template Variations: Focus Group Moderator Guides by Focus Group Type

As noted above, there are several variations on the basic single purpose focus group moderator's guide. The variations listed in Table 6.2 are frequently used by moderators, each for a specific purpose and with specific features. A definition of each type, with a corresponding template, mirrors Table 6.1.

Table 6.2 Moderator Guides by Focus Group Variation/Type

Type	Key Feature	Description
Two-Way Design	2 guides	Two different groups are paired, where one group actively discusses the topic at hand while the other group observes them and then discusses their interactions and conversation
Dual Moderators	1 guide, 2 roles	Two moderators cofacilitate a single group where one moderator contributes procedural expertise and the other contributes content expertise

Dueling Moderators	1 guide, 2 roles	Two moderators deliberately take opposing sides of a single issue to generate debate among participants
Brainstorming/Envisioning	1 guide, w/ visuals	Designed to generate preliminary or exploratory ideas for a project, plan, or event, using a process where participants combine roundtable comments with visuals or flipcharts to record ideas; envisioning a plan for the future
Program Evaluation	1 guide, w/ visuals	Designed to assess and evaluate programs and recommend actions for improvement

Template 6.4.1

Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Two-Way Designs (Group #1)

In the two-way focus group, one group actively participates in the discussion, moderated by the facilitator; the other group observes the discussion, after which the moderator solicits their observations and perceptions about the first group's interactions. Therefore, there are two templates used for the two-way design: one template is designated for Group #1, and the other is designated for Group #2.

Two-Way Design Template: Group #1

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ **GROUP:** _____

DATE: _____ **TIME:** _____

PLACE: _____

(Continued)

(Continued)

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the focus group to take, and your plans for using the results. Explain the purpose of the two-way design and the phases of the process (Group #1 discussion, observed by and then reviewed by Group #2).
- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep their identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of a focus group session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.
- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.
- The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant)
2. Introductory Question (90 seconds per participant)
3. Transition Question (1–2 sentences in description per participant)
4. Content Questions

- a. Content #1
 - i. Probes
- b. Content #2
 - ii. Probes
- c. Content #3
 - iii. Probes
- d. Content #4
 - iv. Probes

Closing Question/Debriefing

5. What else would you like to tell me about?
-

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.
(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time to prepare group members.)

Template 6.4.2

Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Two-Way Designs (Group #2)

Two-Way Design Template: Group #2

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ *GROUP:* _____

DATE: _____ *TIME:* _____

PLACE: _____

(Continued)

(Continued)

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the focus group to take, and your plans for using the results. Explain the purpose of the two-way design and the phases of the process (Group #1 discussion, observed by and then reviewed by Group #2).
- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep their identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of a focus group session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.
- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.
- The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant) (This question should focus on their initial impressions of Group #1's interactions, so asking about a word or phrase that members would use to describe that session would be an effective icebreaker.)

2. Introductory Question (90 seconds per participant) (This question should follow up on the icebreaker by asking members to describe the ways in which they felt that Group #1 interacted or communicated.)
3. Transition Question (1–2 sentences in description per participant) (This transition question should focus on the essence of the discussion in Group #1 and the extent to which Group #2 members feel that they addressed the questions, shared experiences, and/or effectively interacted and communicated.)
4. Content Questions (The moderator uses the content questions to explore the various observations of Group #2 regarding the interactions, communication style, nonverbal behaviors, and depth of content evidenced in Group #1.)
 - a. Content #1
 - i. Probes
 - b. Content #2
 - ii. Probes
 - c. Content #3
 - iii. Probes
 - d. Content #4
 - iv. Probes

Closing Question/Debriefing

5. What else would you like to tell me about?
-

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.

(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time to prepare group members.)

Template 6.5

Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Dual Moderators

In the dual moderator focus group, two moderators work in tandem to facilitate the group's discussion and interactions. Typically, the moderator with content expertise asks the questions while the moderator with procedural expertise ensures that all the questions are asked and helps to keep the discussion on track. One moderator's guide is used for this type of session, but the moderators agree on assigning roles for the session. For instance, the content moderator (CM) may ask all the main questions, but the procedural moderator (PM) may probe the responses. The PM may also oversee the completion of the profile questionnaire and consent forms while the CM welcomes members to the session.

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ *GROUP:* _____

DATE: _____ *TIME:* _____

PLACE: _____

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the focus group to take, and your plans for using the results.
- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep their identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of a focus group session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.
- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.
- The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant) (CM)
2. Introductory Question (90 seconds per participant) (CM)
3. Transition Question (1–2 sentences in description per participant) (PM)
4. Content Questions
 - a. Content #1 (CM)
 - i. Probes (PM)
 - b. Content #2 (CM)
 - ii. Probes (PM)
 - c. Content #3 (CM)
 - iii. Probes (PM)
 - d. Content #4 (CM)
 - iv. Probes (PM)

Closing Question/Debriefing

5. What else would you like to tell me about?
_____ (CM)

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.

(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time to prepare group members.)

Template 6.6

Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Dueling Moderators

In the dueling moderator focus group, two moderators deliberately take opposing views on a topic in order to engage the group and generate conversation about these opposing viewpoints. The same moderator's guide can be used, with the content questions assigned to Moderator #1 (M1) and Moderator #2 (M2) to juxtapose their stances.

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ *GROUP:* _____

DATE: _____ *TIME:* _____

PLACE: _____

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the focus group to take, and your plans for using the results.
- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep their identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of a focus group session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.

- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.
- The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant)
2. Introductory Question (90 seconds per participant)
3. Transition Question (1–2 sentences in description per participant)
4. Content Questions
 - a. Content #1 (Moderator #1)
 - i. Probes
 - b. Content #2 (Moderator #2)
 - ii. Probes
 - c. Content #3 (Moderator #1)
 - iii. Probes
 - d. Content #4 (Moderator #2)
 - iv. Probes

Closing Question/Debriefing

5. Synthesis: Reviewing the different viewpoints and the final assessment of the group regarding the discussion (Moderators #1 and #2 cofacilitate this last question)
6. What else would you like to tell us about today's discussion? _____

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.

(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time to prepare group members.)

Template 6.7

Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Brainstorming/Envisioning

Brainstorming focus groups are fluid, open discussions that involve considerable interaction and physical movement, using newsprint, Post-It notes, and other interactive tools to create an environment of creative idea-generating discussion. These groups require fewer questions but greater use of lists and visual aids to advance the discussion.

Similar to the brainstorming focus group is the envisioning/planning group, where the emphasis is on soliciting member views about the creation of an organizational plan or vision. The moderator acts as a planning facilitator in many ways; the group is asked very specific questions regarding organizational mission, vision, values, goals, and action steps. These sessions often include many of the same visual aids as you might see in a brainstorming group, such as newsprint, whiteboard, lists and rankings, and Post-It notes. These various tools help participants articulate and share their ideas about future directions and aspirations for the organization or unit they are discussing. The templates are interchangeable in many ways and are presented below as a single template design.

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ **GROUP:** _____

DATE: _____ **TIME:** _____

PLACE: _____

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the focus group to take, and your plans for using the results.
- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep their identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of a focus group session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.
- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.
- The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant)
2. Introductory Question (90 seconds per participant)
3. Transition Question (1–2 sentences in description per participant) (Visual aids may be used at this point.)
4. Content Questions (These questions often involve group interaction around visual tools to articulate thoughts to help group members not only hear what others are saying but to see how those viewpoints can be organized for mission/vision updates, goals, and action plans.)
5. Content Questions (Visual aids are commonly used for all content questions.)
 - a. Content #1
 - i. Probes
 - b. Content #2
 - ii. Probes
 - c. Content #3
 - iii. Probes
 - d. Content #4
 - iv. Probes

(Continued)

(Continued)

Closing Question/Debriefing

6. What else would you like to tell me about?

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.

(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time to prepare group members.)

Template 6.8

Focus Group Moderator's Guide for Program Evaluation

In the program evaluation focus group, the moderator solicits participant views of a program and works toward recommendations for action and improvement. Visual aids are often used with these groups, such as newsprint, whiteboards, charts, lists, rankings, and other tools that help participants articulate their impressions, assessments, and recommendations for future action. In many instances, participants are allowed to preview program information prior to the session to help them prepare for the questions and the activities.

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ *GROUP:* _____

DATE: _____ *TIME:* _____

PLACE: _____

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the focus group to take, and your plans for using the results.

- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep their identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of a focus group session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.
- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.
- The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (60 seconds per participant)
2. Introductory Question (90 seconds per participant)
3. Transition Question (1–2 sentences in description per participant)
4. Content Questions (These questions often involve group interaction around visual tools to articulate thoughts to help group members not only hear what others are saying but to see how those viewpoints can be listed, ranked, categorized, or clustered for future action.)
 - a. Content #1
 - i. Probes
 - b. Content #2
 - ii. Probes

(Continued)

(Continued)

- c. Content #3
 - iii. Probes
- d. Content #4
 - iv. Probes

Closing Question/Debriefing

- 5. What else would you like to tell me about?
-

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.

(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time to prepare group members.)

Dyadic Interviews: The Facilitated 2-Participant Interview

On the continuum of the individual interview to the synergistic group interview (focus group), lies the dyadic interview. As Morgan (2016) notes:

Traditionally, qualitative interviews have involved a single participant in one-to-one interviews or several participants in a focus group. There is thus an interesting gap in the size range, which does not include interviews that involve pairs of participants. Dyadic interviews fill that gap. (p. 9)

Dyads are researcher-facilitated two-person interviews, where the researcher serves as a moderator to encourage dialogue between the participants and to generate discussion on predetermined topics (Morgan, 2016; Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013). Dyads are also known as joint, peer, paired, and two-person interviews. Ultimately, the dyadic conversation allows for a closer and deeper connection between participants due to the smaller number of persons involved; the conversation is more actively coconstructed between participants. Many of the characteristics of conversational analysis interactions find a place in the

Template 6.9

Moderator's Guide for Dyadic Interviews

Dyads are researcher-facilitated interviews with two participants, where the researcher serves as a moderator to encourage synergistic dialogue between the two participants and to generate discussion on predetermined topics (Morgan, 2016). The template follows the same structure as the one designated for a single purpose focus group.

Information About the Focus Group

PARTICIPANTS (GENERAL): _____

MODERATOR: _____ **GROUP:** _____

DATE: _____ **TIME:** _____

PLACE: _____

Introduction, Process, Consent

- Introduce yourself.
- Review the study's purpose, how long you expect the interview to take, and your plans for using the results.
- Note that the interview will be audio-recorded and that you will keep their identities confidential.
- Distribute any profile survey questionnaires at this time, as appropriate to your study.

Ground Rules

Ground rules and group norms are always established at the beginning of an interview session to ensure mutual respect, consideration, and a supportive atmosphere for the discussion:

- All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.
- All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.

(Continued)

(Continued)

- Group members will avoid dominating the conversation and will allow time for others to speak.
- The interviewers have the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus of the conversation, as appropriate.
- Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.

Questioning Sequence

1. Ice Breaker Question (1–2 sentences per participant)
2. Introductory Question (general topic)
3. Transition Question (general topic)
4. Content Questions (Questions become more specific progressively through the content section.)
 - a. Content #1
 - v. Probes
 - b. Content #2
 - vi. Probes
 - c. Content #3
 - vii. Probes
 - d. Content #4
 - viii. Probes

Closing Question/Debriefing

5. What else would you like to tell us about?
-

Wrap Up and Thank You

- Thank you very much for your time today. We appreciated hearing your insights on this topic.

(If there is going to be a follow-up reflective process, please indicate that at this time to prepare group members.)

dyadic interview; the elements of “turn-taking,” response and reaction, and pairing of ideas is evident in a dyad.

Like the focus group, the interactions of all participants form the basis for the interview. These interactions develop and expand based on participant perceptions of the topic and the questions posed by the facilitator (Morgan, 2016). The synergy of these two-person conversations means that dyadic interviews share some properties with focus group discussions while also reflecting some of the properties of in-person, 1-on-1 interviews (there are also triadic interview formats, but they are less known and little used; Morgan, 2016, p. 15). The researcher uses a special guide to conduct this type of interview, but the overlap with the focus group moderator’s guide is important to consider. While similar to the moderator’s guide in its structure, designed to capture the conversation flow, the technique of funneling is embedded in the guide (Morgan, 2016, p. 63). In this approach, the facilitator ensures that the topics first covered in the discussion are general, nonthreatening, and encourage open dialogue between participants; as familiarity ensues, the funnel closes, and the questions become more specific. Because there are fewer participants in the discussion, each individual has more time to speak and more time to process as the conversation proceeds. The dyadic guide, therefore, eliminates some of the time restrictions inherent in the focus group guide, and instead allows for longer topic coverage and deeper discussion.

Piloting Focus Group Moderator Guides

As with all instruments and tools, moderator guides should be piloted prior to live data collection. A pretest should be conducted with a small group of three or four individuals who resemble but will not be included in the final participant group. If there are multiple guides used in a particular design, all the guides should be pretested.

The pilot process helps the researcher understand whether the focus group questions are clear, in the right order, are redundant or overlapping in any way and to what extent they adhere to the appropriate time allotments. The pretest also informs the researcher about the instructions, procedures before and after the session, and the partnership with the note-taker/recorder, or assistant moderator. Once the pilot test is complete, the moderator’s guide is revised and ready for final implementation.

Transforming Focus Group Data for Analysis

As a data source, focus groups generate rich, descriptive information to provide participant perspectives on a topic, but this data is extensive and often overlapping. When faced with the volume of focus group data, many beginning qualitative researchers assume that analyzing it is similar to analyzing other types of qualitative data. This assumption, however, dilutes the distinctions and richness of information that results from the focus group discussion (Billups, 2016).

In order to prepare your data for analysis, you must be aware of how the data will be treated during analysis. Therefore, transforming your focus group data for analysis includes the following:

1. After a review of your research purpose and research questions, organize all transcripts, recorder notes, and debriefing/member checking notes from all the focus group sessions, and read through them once without stopping to make notes or codes (if you conducted multiple focus groups, this will take some time).
2. After a period of at least 24 hours (to allow for processing and to avoid “recall confusion”), review all materials a second time, and create margin notes about the distinctions between individual comments and group interactions/dynamics.
3. Read all materials a third time, and begin to make a preliminary code list, starting with broad categories; continue this process until all chunks of data have been assigned preliminary codes.
4. The next level of analysis seeks to find repeated patterns of meaning at the group interaction level, by reviewing the data and juxtaposing the contrasts between individual perspectives and group interactions (Are there key differences between individual views and the actual group perspective? Is one individual forcefully asserting their viewpoint at the expense of the general mood or sentiments of the group as a whole?).

Next, using Krueger and Casey’s guidelines (2015, p. 147), consider how your data may be analyzed using the following six aspects:

- Frequency—how often was something mentioned, and what is the relevance of and weight of all statements?
- Specificity—seek detailed comments and identify comparisons across cases and within cases.
- Emotion/nonverbal—record nonverbal and emotional responses, and corroborate them with participant comments (some participants become emotional when they feel they are not being heard, while at other times emotional commentary serves as a catalyst for group consensus).
- Extensiveness—consider how many participants said similar things versus how many times a single person reiterated an idea (look across your groups for variations on extent).
- Outliers—review all outlier statements to determine whether they reflected something worth pursuing (this is essential as every discussion will include some comment that seems off topic but may have value).
- Relationships—what were the relationships between statements and content, and what did they mean? Were alliances formed among group members, and how did this affect the conversation?

Classic Approach

While many qualitative researchers debate the best strategies for analyzing focus group data, Krueger and Casey (2015) are the acknowledged experts in this realm. Their Classic Approach strategy is one of the most common and manageable processes that can be applied to focus group data (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The nature of focus group analysis is reflected in its systematic and continual nature; analysis begins with the first completed session and is ongoing with all subsequent sessions. One of the process's main challenges is to balance the voices of the individuals with the collective and emergent perspectives of the group, a process that is fluid and changeable as the discussion evolves. Reflecting on the interactions among the participants allows for the complexities of group dynamics to inform data analysis. Unlike individual interview data or observation/document analysis data, issues of frequency, specificity, emotion, and extent are key elements. Additionally, deviant or outlier case analyses play an important role in understanding these data.

Analytical Frameworks

Using the Classic Approach analytic strategy provides for an overlay of a choice of several frameworks, allowing for deeper interpretation of the data. The choice of a framework is dependent on the nature and purpose of your focus group research objectives and allows you to examine your data from different perspectives, allowing for alternative explanations. As a framework for understanding how to prepare your focus group data for analysis, three of the most frequently applied frameworks are outlined in the following (Krueger & Casey, 2015, pp. 157–158).

Key Concepts Framework. The goal of this framework is to identify the factors of central importance, common to most of the participants in the discussion, which aids in understanding how participants view the topic in question. This framework focuses on the centrality of comments rather than on the extremes; the most commonly stated or agreed upon concepts are important in identifying the core elements. This framework is commonly applied when designing or assessing new or existing programs or when seeking to address customer/client needs; outliers or extreme perspectives are minimized in this framework.

Critical Incidents Framework. The objective here is to identify critical events that have shaped participant decisions or actions, grounded by the emotional or organizational forces surrounding those incidents. There is less emphasis on patterns in the data (themes) and more emphasis on extracting the details of the incidents to explain what has happened in the organization or group. This approach is often used when exploring program successes or failures, organizational functioning or dysfunction, or identifying triggering causes or catalysts in a group process.

Testing Alternatives Framework. The primary goal for this framework is to identify the most preferred choice among several alternatives and to avoid succumbing to the most assertive voice in the group; seeking and identifying group consensus is essential in this framework. The most common application of this framework is intended for pilot testing programs or services, curriculum, or academic processes. Participants are provided with a set of options to consider, and the group facilitator manages the conversation to elicit opinions and eventual group consensus. The brainstorming or scenario exploration exercise acts as a prelude to organizational planning or goal setting, and this framework aids in clarifying important organizational objectives.

HIGHLIGHTS

Focus Group Moderator Guides	Focus groups are carefully planned and guided synergistic group interviews.
	Focus groups are used to support exploratory, self-contained, triangulation, or supplementary data collection.
	Focus group moderators must be adept at group management, guiding discussions without controlling those discussions and respectfully letting the group direct the flow of topics.
	Types of focus groups include single and multiple purpose groups, double-layered design groups, two-way designs, dual moderators, dueling moderators, brainstorming groups, program evaluation groups, envisioning/planning groups, and online/virtual/teleconference groups.
	Single and double purpose groups, double-layered design groups, and online/virtual/teleconference groups use the same basic moderator's guide; other variations use the basic template as a starting point to customize guides for specific group types.
	Moderator guides follow a standard question sequence with icebreaker, introductory, transition, content questions, and closing/debriefing questions.
	Dyadic interviews are a form of a synergistic discussion and use a moderator's guide similar to that of other focus group types; triad interviews are also an option.
	Piloting the focus group moderator's guide requires the selection of approximately three individuals to pretest the guide.
Focus group data analysis requires special strategies specific to the approach, typically applying the Classic Approach and the overlay of three distinct frameworks.	