

Activity ➔ 83

Running focus groups

STUDENT HANDOUT

This activity helps you to think about the focus group method and find out more about how to run a focus group. This is a collection of interacting individuals, with common characteristics or interests, holding a discussion that is introduced and led by a moderator. This person ensures that the discussion stays on topic, while controlling breakaway conversations, dominance and disruption. The aim of a focus group is not to reach consensus: instead, it is to gain a greater understanding of attitudes, opinions, beliefs, behaviour and perceptions (with the focus on interaction as part of the research data). Focus groups can be used in an exploratory way to help inform a questionnaire, or they can be used towards the end of a project to help explain emerging themes, for example. In some projects, researchers use focus groups as the only data collection method. Participants are chosen from the study population, using a variety of sampling techniques (depending on methodology).

Search online for two focus group demonstrations. Watch the demonstrations carefully, taking notes as you do so. Think about what the moderator is doing, how questions are asked and how participants are encouraged to speak. Think about the purpose of the focus group and decide whether or not you think it is generating the kind of information that is required. You can also think about the wider picture: how focus groups are used in research, problems that could occur (and perhaps have occurred in your chosen demonstrations) and how these can be overcome, for example.

Now imagine that you have been asked to write a review of both of these demonstrations for your university magazine (you can write one review to discuss both demonstrations, perhaps to compare or contrast, or write two separate reviews, depending on preference). The editor wants you to make sure that reviews are interesting, informative and help the reader to understand more about how focus groups are run (and perhaps the focus group method in general). The structure, style, length and content of review are a personal choice, but make sure that your peers are able to learn from what you have written. Ensure that links to your chosen demonstrations are provided, all material is referenced correctly and that you are not in breach of copyright when using any online material.

Hand your review(s) in by the stated deadline. I will compile all reviews into a PDF that will be sent to all students on this course. You will be able to read each other's reviews and access the resource later in your studies, if you decide to use focus groups in your research.

Learning outcome: By the end of this activity you will have a greater awareness of the focus group method and understand more about how focus groups are run. You will have produced a collection of focus group reviews that can be accessed if you decide to use focus groups for your research project.