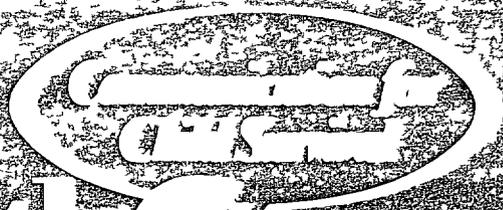


A SKILL-BUILDING GUIDE FOR MAKING FOCUS GROUPS WORK



HealthCom

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the field of health communication, focus group research has become a powerful tool for exploring the opinions of various segments of society and making their voices heard in the creation of effective messages, materials, and programs. Getting It In Focus: A Learner's Kit for Focus Group Research is based on the 15 years of experience of USAID's HEALTHCOM projects in using focus group research in developing nations. A major goal of HEALTHCOM has been to produce materials that are practical and useful. We hope that users of this kit will find it meets both of these criteria and helps them utilize focus groups wisely and effectively.

Many talented people have contributed to the creation of this kit. Anne Roberts, Deputy Director for Training and Curriculum Development, directed this effort, leading a team of highly experienced experts that developed the kit's concept and the Skill-Building Guide. Mary Debus of Porter/Novelli contributed her extensive experience with using focus groups in commercial and social research and provided advice during all steps of the process. Consultant Elizabeth Younger drew upon her years of work in focus group implementation and training to develop the initial drafts and identify key exercises. Valerie Uccellani, AED Senior Program Officer, utilized her experience in training and materials development to give the Guide a new shape, refine the content, and incorporate the findings from the field tests. Sylvia Lopez Gaona, Program Officer for Training, further refined the Guide through field testing and careful coordination of the translations, design, and production.

Technical Editor Barbara Boyd helped mold the text of the Guide into prose that we hope is clear to our international audience of readers. Training Assistant Nicole Foster aided in the production, distribution, and revision of numerous drafts of the Guide. She received help with the final draft from Tamarra Holter, Robert Letourneau, and Sarah Marlay. Judy Zatsick and Bryn Green, AED's graphics experts, designed the layout of the Guide.

The Video was conceived of, produced, and co-directed by Lynda Bardfield van Over, AED's Executive Creative Director, with the technical assistance of Ms. Debus. HEALTHCOM Resident Advisors Tom Reis, Nora De Guzman, Jehangeer Said Haider, Patricia Barriga as well as HEALTHCOM home office staff members Judy Graeff and Renny Seidel provided ideas on the kind of video that would be most useful. A group of international communication specialists participating in Dr. Royal Colle's 1992 summer course at Cornell University gracefully agreed to serve as a focus group on the topic of focus groups and provided us with insights into the use of this research technique. A second group of international participants at the Western Consortium for Public Health at Santa Cruz also served as a pre-test group for the initial video script. Francophone African, Filipino, and Latin American residents of the Washington area were recruited to play the roles in the French, English, and Spanish versions of the video. Girard Video, Inc., under the supervision of Executive Producer Steven Kostant, did the actual shooting of the video.

Field tests of the Guide were conducted in Austin, Texas with the support of Pam Padgett, Director of LifeQuest, Inc and in El Paso, Texas where Rosa Benedicto and Rebecca Ramos of the U S - Mexico Border Health Association led a group of health workers from Community Partnerships through the kit. Many people assisted in reviewing drafts of the Guide and providing helpful feedback that improved its quality. These included Dr Carol Bryant of the University of South Florida, Dr Claudia Fishman of the School of Public Health of Emory University, Dr Richard Krueger of the University of Minnesota, Joan Schubert of CARE/International, and Lonna Shaffritz of AED. Staff members of the Maternal and Child Health Branch of the Centers for Disease Control and staff and students of the schools of public health of Emory University and Johns Hopkins University shared their field experiences and knowledge of the needs of focus group moderators.

In addition to the people who provided time and energy to this ambitious effort, the HEALTHCOM team was able to draw upon other key materials for doing focus group research. PATH/PIACT generously shared the training materials they have developed over the years. The reference sheets and some exercises provided in the guide used these materials as their model. Several of the group skill-building exercises were inspired by sections of Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers by Mambo Press. Dr Richard Krueger's excellent reference book, Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research by SAGE Publications, provided the team with important insights.

The third component of the kit, The Handbook for Excellence in Focus Group Research, was originally written for AED by Mary Debus in 1988. It quickly became a popular resource book for development professionals throughout the world and provided us with the inspiration to develop a more extensive package of learning materials. We hope that this expanded set of materials will prove useful to our international colleagues and help many of you use focus groups appropriately and effectively in support of your development programs.

Willard D. Shaw, Ed D
Director
HEALTHCOM Project
Academy for Educational
Development (AED)
October, 1994



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Before You Start

Where Do You See Yourself?

Because you have opened this kit, you must be interested in focus groups! Perhaps you are interested for one of the following reasons

- You have heard about focus groups and wonder if they could be useful to you in your work. You want to know more about this research method
- You are familiar with focus groups and want to learn the skills to moderate them
- You have moderated focus groups, but they have not been as useful as you had hoped. You wonder why this has been the case
- You want new and effective materials to train others in focus group research

Our Experience May Help You

The Health Communication for Child Survival projects of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have been assisting ministries of health worldwide to increase the impact of child survival programs through improved health communication for more than 15 years. Focus group research is an important component of this work, helping us to clarify what people think and feel about various health topics.

Six years ago, we began distributing *A Handbook for Excellence in Focus Group Research*. This Handbook has been reprinted many times and translated into several languages. Researchers say they find it a useful reference for planning and moderating focus groups. Trainers say it is a powerful tool in helping them conduct workshops on focus group management. Some readers, however, tell us that they find the handbook too advanced for their needs.

We have observed that many of you encounter problems conducting focus group research. You invest time and money in research that fails to generate the kind of information needed to make well-informed program decisions. Understandably, you feel frustrated.

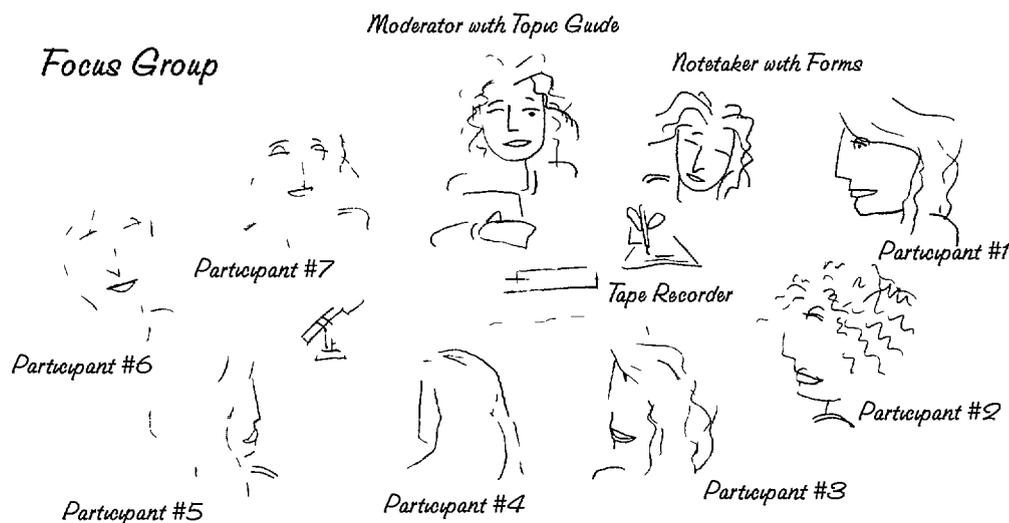
Doing effective focus group research is not simple. You need to think through difficult problems and make hard choices. You also need to follow certain procedures very carefully.

If It Is So Hard, Can I Do It?

Yes, you can! This skill-building Guide will take you through all the steps you need to plan and/or moderate focus group research. The Guide provides you with worksheets and exercises. It helps you make better use of the Video and Handbook. The Video illustrates key skills and potential problems for focus group moderators. You will see an actual focus group in action—pretesting health materials to combat childhood diarrhea—and learn along with the group's moderator how to strengthen moderating skills. As you advance, you will be able to use the Handbook to strengthen your planning, moderating and analytical skills.

Before you start, please carefully review the following information.

What a Focus Group Is



A focus group is a loosely structured, informal discussion among six to ten individuals that is used to gather information on a particular research topic. The discussion is guided by a moderator—a person who encourages participants to talk freely and reveal their thoughts and feelings about the research topic. Usually, focus group discussions are repeated with several groups of similar people until the discussions no longer reveal anything new relevant to the research.

Focus groups have been widely used for many years in the private sector. Today they are also popular with governmental and nongovernmental organizations that want insight into why people think or act as they do about a particular issue. Such information can be invaluable to

- generate ideas for programs, campaigns, or materials

- pretest educational or promotional concepts, messages, and materials
- improve a product or service by clarifying people's attitudes and needs or
- identify issues for quantitative research or to clarify quantitative findings

Examples of Focus Group Research

Organizations with diverse missions use focus group discussions in different ways to understand and respond more effectively to the needs of the communities they serve. Here are some examples of how focus groups have been used.

- **To generate ideas for a program, campaign or material**

An urban health clinic decided to expand its services. Clinic staff thought clients would want additional evening services for working men and women. As part of designing a survey to test client preferences for these alternatives, the staff used focus groups to learn how clients reacted to new service hours. Clients indicated that they wanted morning clinics for small children who were often too tired to attend the evening clinics. The staff added this new option to their survey and found clients agreed that it was a priority. The clinic now operates two morning clinics for young children and pregnant women.

- **To pretest educational or promotional concepts, messages and materials**

The Noor el Hussein Foundation in Jordan conducted focus group research with parents to test the effectiveness of the foundation's promotional spots for breastfeeding on television. The groups revealed the importance to mothers of having the TV mothers look into the baby's eyes while nursing. This insight helped increase early initiation of breastfeeding in public hospitals and home births by more than 50 percent.

- **To improve a product or service by understanding people's attitudes and needs**

The Ministry of Health in Zambia conducted focus group research to learn more about people's knowledge of and attitudes toward AIDS and the use of condoms. Researchers found that few of the participants were aware that condoms protected against AIDS. There was very little discussion of the topic between sexual partners. Program planners used this information to produce a series of radio dramas featuring a conversation between a man and woman on using condoms for AIDS prevention.

- **To identify issues for quantitative research or clarify findings**

During a recent outbreak of cholera in Ecuador, a large-scale survey of people's knowledge, attitudes, and practices was undertaken in which respondents ranked health above family and work. Focus group research helped explain these findings. Health was valued most because without it people could neither enjoy their families nor fulfill their responsibilities. This information was utilized in the successful campaign against cholera with the theme, "Take care of your health because when you get cholera, you are not the only one who suffers."

Role of the Moderator

Researchers often ask who should moderate focus groups. In general, the most effective moderator is someone who identifies easily with the participants, speaks their language well, and inspires trust. The moderator should either be familiar with the research topic or be given enough information beforehand to be able to guide the flow of the discussion and understand points raised by participants. Because focus groups are designed to reveal what people truly think, the moderator should be flexible, listen well, and consider all opinions.

During a focus group, the moderator uses a prepared topic guide to focus participants on the research issue. A skillful moderator is careful never to educate or give information. Instead, the moderator asks, probes, listens, and learns.

Advantages and Limitations of Focus Group Research

Unlike some research methods, such as surveys that answer the questions *how many* or *how often*, focus group discussions are a form of research designed to answer the questions *why* and *how*. When done well, focus group discussions can direct and stimulate thinking about a particular topic.

The advantages of a group discussion as a research method are fairly obvious. When people talk in a group, they often react to each other—expressing feelings or ideas that they might not have if they were interviewed them individually. In a group, a researcher can hear a variety of thoughts, words, and statements relatively quickly. And if the atmosphere is relaxed but attentive, people will enjoy participating.

Focus group discussions by themselves, do not generate the depth of comprehensive information needed for organizations to make solid programmatic decisions. This is because the information obtained cannot be quantified or generalized. Some voices in a group discussion dominate others. Not all the participants say what they really feel. Only a small portion of a community can participate. Researchers, therefore, should creatively combine several methods of research to learn what they need to know and to make effective programming decisions.

How to Use This Kit

On your own, you should do the following

- 1 Carefully read this introduction (**Before You Start**)
- 2 Go to the first part of the Guide (**A Step-by-Step Approach to Focus Group Research**) and work through the first six steps to prepare for your own focus group research. When you need additional information, refer to the Handbook. Try to find one or two experienced focus group moderators who can review your worksheets.
- 3 Before you practice moderating (Step Seven), watch the Video in this kit and the clips that follow. Use the second section of the Guide (**Answers to Questions Raised in the Video**) to help you learn more from the Video.
- 4 Finish the last two steps (Steps Seven and Eight) in the first section of the Guide. Get help with your practice from a skilled moderator if you can.
- 5 Read the information and do the exercises in the third section of the Guide (**Information and Exercises for Improving Moderators' Skills**) to build your moderating skills. If possible, arrange to do some of the exercises with others.

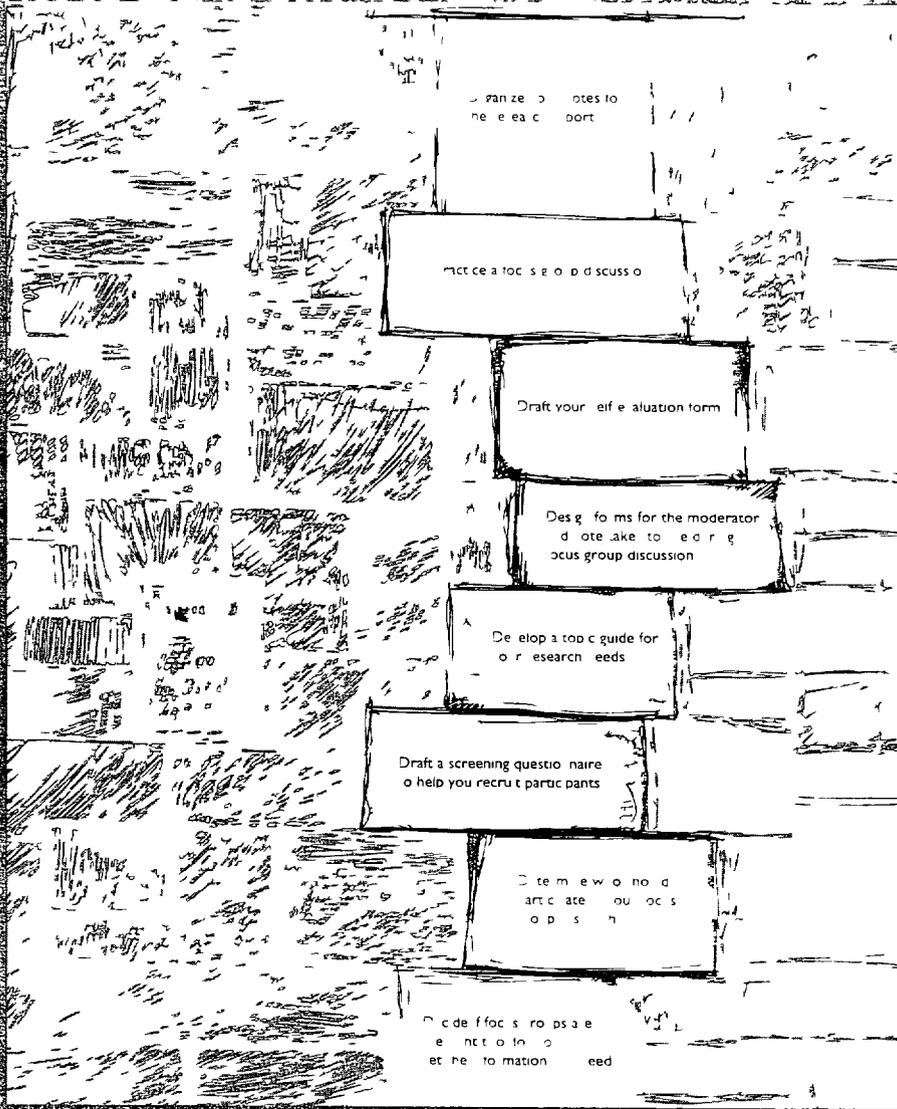
Together with colleagues, do the following

- 1 Review the Guide to familiarize yourself with its contents and decide how much time your group will need to work through it together.
- 2 Set up a schedule of times for your group to meet to go through the first six steps of the first section of the Guide, see and discuss the Video, complete Steps Seven and Eight and practice moderator skills.
- 3 At the first session, choose a group facilitator to lead your group through the process. Try to find a skilled moderator to comment on your efforts as you practice the exercises and begin to work in the community.

In a workshop setting, do the following

- 1 Refer to the Appendix, which offers specific suggestions on how to design and facilitate a four-day workshop using the Video, the Handbook, and each section of the Guide.
- 2 Designate a facilitator to encourage participants to exchange thoughts, share experiences, and experiment. Try to find a skilled moderator to comment, especially when participants practice moderating among themselves and in the community.

A Step-By-Step Approach to Focus Group Research



A Step-by-Step Approach to Focus Group Research

Introduction

In this section of the Guide, you will learn how to prepare for your own focus group research, using eight steps of preparation. **Steps** are explained with

- information to help you understand the step and why it is important
- an example of the step in action (taken from the same research dramatized in the Video)
- one or more worksheets to help you complete the step
- references to the **Skill** section of the Guide and
- references to the Handbook so that you will have more information about doing focus group research

Carefully read all the material for each step before doing the worksheets. When you are ready to complete the worksheets, use a pencil so that you can make revisions as you go along.

If you plan to moderate focus groups for others' research, complete Steps One through Four carefully with them. If you are doing your own research, you may complete the steps by yourself. It will be very helpful to you, however, if you can get an experienced researcher to comment on the work you do for each step.

Each step builds on the preceding step. When you complete them, you will know when to use a focus group discussion for your research needs. You will have learned how to select and screen participants and how to develop a topic guide for your research. You will have the necessary forms to get you started as you practice moderating a focus group discussion. From that discussion, you will be able to organize your notes for the research report.

Does this sound too difficult? We hope not. You may find some of the information hard to understand at first. If you work through it slowly and carefully, however, you can develop the skills you need to conduct effective focus group research. Think of how helpful that could be in your work!

The Eight Steps

- 1 *Decide if focus groups are the **right tool** for you to get the information you need*
- 2 *Determine **who** should participate in your focus group research*
- 3 *Draft a **screening questionnaire** to help you recruit participants*
- 4 *Develop a **topic guide** for your research needs*
- 5 *Design **forms for the moderator and note taker** to use during a focus group discussion*
- 6 *Draft your **self-evaluation form***
- 7 ***Practice** a focus group discussion*
- 8 *Organize your notes for the **research report***

1

STEP ONE

DECIDE IF FOCUS GROUPS ARE THE RIGHT TOOL FOR YOU TO GET THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

Your first big decision is whether focus groups are the right tool for your research. All too often, people start focus group research without looking closely at what they need to find out. Determining what you need to know is the first step. If focus groups are an appropriate method, you will use a list of what you need to know to complete the preparation steps that follow. If you are moderating the focus group discussion, always keep in mind the purpose of the research and use it to guide the focus group discussion.

There are two general kinds of research: quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative research methods, such as written surveys or closed interviews, give numerical estimates (e.g., 20 percent of mothers surveyed breastfed their last child). This type of research generates conclusive data. It estimates how many, verifies the number of times, or documents differences between things that can be measured in numbers.

Qualitative research does not lead to numerical estimates. It gives the researcher a deeper understanding of what people think, feel, and do (e.g., some mothers feel breastfeeding is not modern). Qualitative research helps if you need insight into why people think or act as they do about a particular research topic.

Because only a relatively small portion of people take part in focus groups, they cannot be used as a basis for drawing conclusions about what most people think, feel, or do. Unless they are combined with quantitative methods, focus groups should not form the basis for large-scale policy decisions. In general, qualitative research is best combined with quantitative research to achieve general research objectives.

Focus groups are one of several qualitative research methods. Other methods are observation, individual in-depth interviews, and community meetings. Each has its own advantages.

For a comprehensive discussion of the different kinds of research and comparison of different methods, see the Handbook, pages 2-10.

EXAMPLE

A movie team was asked to produce a short educational film on diarrhea and oral rehydration salts (ORS) to show in an area where diarrhea is a major child health concern. The producers designed different storyboards (a series of pictures with captions) to illustrate different ideas for the film. Before finalizing production, they called in a team of researchers.

What did they need to know?

As a team, the producers and researchers discussed what they needed to know so that the film would be effective in reaching and educating mothers in rural areas. Here is their list:

WE NEED TO KNOW

- 1 *How rural women react to each of the four diarrhea/ORS message ideas presented in the storyboards*
- 2 *How the women react to the images presented in the draft storyboards*
- 3 *The number of rural cinemas that would show the film on diarrhea and ORS*

Was qualitative research appropriate?

With this list of what they needed to know, team members discussed the kinds of research they could use to get the information. The researchers thought that qualitative research alone could tell them how women react to the different storyboard approaches. If it was done well, the research would show why the women react that way. The researchers did not need data on how many women reacted one way or another.

The researchers decided that quantitative research (surveys) would be the best way to determine how many cinemas would air the film and when. They also did some qualitative research (interviews) with some cinema owners to help explain why they would or would not show the film.

Were focus groups appropriate? Should the researchers have combined them with other qualitative methods?

The researchers felt that focus groups would be better than interviews to get women's reactions to the storyboards. In a group, the women could be encouraged to reveal more about what they liked or did not like.

1

EXAMPLE

To better understand the results of the survey with cinema owners, the researchers decided to use qualitative research. They chose in-depth interviews over focus group discussions because detailed information from a few owners would answer their questions. Also, the researchers decided that convening a focus group of individuals located in many different rural sites would not be practical.

After deciding that focus groups would answer some of their questions, the researchers listed the specific needs that focus groups could address:

WHAT WE WANT TO LEARN FROM FOCUS GROUPS

- 1 *Understand how the different messages are interpreted by rural mothers*
- 2 *Understand if the proposed messages are acceptable to them*
- 3 *Identify those images that the mothers like and those that are not effective*
- 4 *Get suggestions on how to revise the images and messages*

The moderator kept in mind this list of objectives during the focus group discussion.

WORKSHEETS

Think about the decisions that you (your program or service) need to make now. List what you need to know to make these decisions effectively. The following phrases may help you get started: *What we do not know is* , *We have doubts about* , *We do not really understand*

1

WORKSHEET

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW
1
2
3
4

Complete the checklist below to determine whether qualitative research is right for you.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WILL WORK IF
<input type="checkbox"/> We do not plan to quantify the information we gather
<input type="checkbox"/> We need people's reactions and ideas
<input type="checkbox"/> Familiarity with the participants' own words will help us achieve our objectives
<input type="checkbox"/> We want the freedom to probe beyond people's initial response to a question
<input type="checkbox"/> We are searching for reasons behind an attitude or practice

Complete this checklist to decide if a focus group

- is appropriate to your research needs or
- should be combined with other qualitative methods

FOCUS GROUPS ARE RIGHT IF
<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion among participants will help us gain insight
<input type="checkbox"/> The group atmosphere will stimulate honest responses
<input type="checkbox"/> We can limit the discussion to a few well-defined topics
<input type="checkbox"/> We hope that the group will raise new themes or ideas
<input type="checkbox"/> We can manage the logistics (e.g., convene a group with at least six participants who fit the focus group profile)

If you have decided focus groups are appropriate, consider what you want to learn from them. Make a list of research objectives for your focus group discussion. (These are not specific questions for the focus group participants. You will develop those in Step Four.)

WHAT WE WANT TO LEARN FROM FOCUS GROUPS
1
2
3
4

If Step One has convinced you that focus group discussions are the right tool to get the information you need, and you have decided what you want to learn from them, you are ready to go to Step Two. In this step, you will determine who should participate in your focus group research.

DETERMINE WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN YOUR FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH



Creating a list of characteristics that your focus group participants must have is one of the most important steps in preparing for your research. You may be tempted to talk with a lot of different people. It is better, however, to think carefully about who could best help you learn what you decided in Step One you need to know.

In the worksheet for this step, you will describe one research group clearly. Think about the participants while you complete all the remaining steps in this Guide, because the types of questions you ask each group should be different. (If you need to use other research groups, develop a separate set of steps for each group.) Here are some important considerations:

- **Think beyond your target group** The term *target group* is generally used to describe the people that programs or materials are meant to reach. The key to successful programs or materials often comes from understanding what a variety of people think or feel about a topic. Doing some research with people outside the target group may be useful.

E.g., pregnant women or young mothers may be the target group of a breastfeeding promotion program. However, focus group discussions with mothers-in-law or husbands of pregnant women may reveal resistance or support that the promotion program needs to address.

- **Think about people who will be important to the success of your service or product**

E.g., if you plan to use focus group discussions to help improve immunization services, you may want to do focus groups with both the staff that provides the services and, later, with the families you hope will use the services. Ask yourself whose actions, attitudes, or perceptions will influence your target groups.

- **Do not forget what you already know**

E.g., you may want to develop weaning food recipes that families can prepare at home. If you know that grandmothers generally prepare foods for young children where you live, include grandmothers in your focus group discussions. Mothers of weaning-age children can be another research group.

Participants in a single focus group discussion should be similar to each other in terms of the topic being discussed. Avoid putting participants in a focus group with others whose presence may keep them from saying what they truly think or feel about a topic. To do this, consider such factors as social class, life cycle, user and nonuser status (current behavior), level of expertise, age, marital status, culture, sex, literacy/formal education, urban/rural location, and other characteristics relevant to your topic. Plan to conduct at least three focus groups (and more if you are still learning new things of interest) with each subgroup.

See Handbook pages 12-13 for a more detailed explanation of characteristics to consider.

EXAMPLE

Recall that the researchers in our example want to produce an educational film that effectively explains and promotes the use of ORS in rural areas

How did they select a research population?

The researchers knew that mothers had the primary responsibility of caring for children with diarrhea, and that diarrhea is most dangerous to young children. They also knew that the film was aimed at the general public and that women who worked as health care providers or educators knew much more about ORS than mothers in general. The researchers defined their participants as

- Women from rural areas
- Women with children five years old or younger
- Women who do not work as health providers or educators

How were participants divided into subgroups?

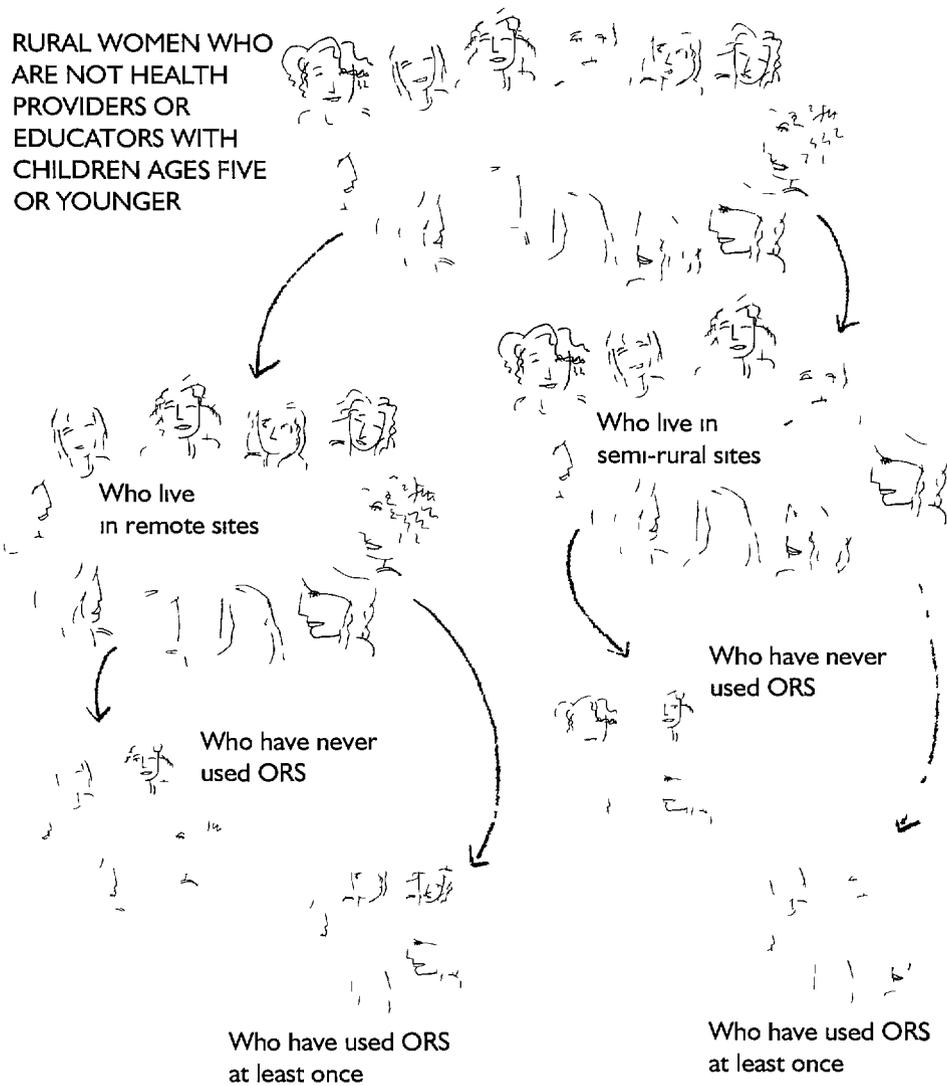
The researchers decided to further divide the women who met these characteristics into separate focus groups and do a few focus groups with each of four subgroups. First, they decided that women in remote rural areas may have access to ORS and health care advice different from that of women in semi-rural areas. They organized four groups in remote and semi-rural sites.

The researchers also decided that they might get different reactions to the storyboards from mothers who had used ORS and mothers who had not. Therefore, they set up separate focus groups with mothers who had used ORS and mothers who had not. They planned three focus groups with each of the subgroups they created. The following table describes the distinct characteristics of each subgroup.

2

EXAMPLE

SUBGROUPS			
RURAL WOMEN WHO ARE NOT HEALTH PROVIDERS OR EDUCATORS WITH CHILDREN AGES FIVE OR YOUNGER			
<i>Who live in remote sites</i>		<i>Who live in semi-rural sites</i>	
<i>Who never used ORS</i>	<i>Who have used ORS at least once</i>	<i>Who never used ORS</i>	<i>Who have used ORS at least once</i>
<i>Subgroup 1</i>	<i>Subgroup 2</i>	<i>Subgroup 3</i>	<i>Subgroup 4</i>



WORKSHEETS

2

WORKSHEET

Think about people who will be most useful for your research purpose. They will make up your research population. Remember that you can do more research later, but start now with the people who can best tell you what you need to know. Describe what these people have in common.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR MY RESEARCH	
1	
2	
3	

Look at each characteristic and decide if you need to subdivide it further. When determining when and how to divide participants into separate subgroups, consider the following:

- Will we tailor or promote services differently to a subgroup than to other members of the research population?
- Will we ask a subgroup questions different from those we would ask other members in the research population?
- Will participants in a subgroup speak more openly if we talk with them separately from other members of the research population?
- Can we screen these people to make sure they fit the subgroup?
- Can we do at least three focus groups with this subgroup?
- Would we get more insight by talking with these people separately or together?

Write the descriptions of your subgroups, using the worksheet format. Stop when you feel you have enough groups to whom you would ask the same questions and who would talk freely with each other. Set priorities for selecting groups. Remember, it will take time and resources to conduct the groups and to analyze the results, so set clear priorities.

SUBGROUPS			

You have decided that focus group discussions are a good research method for you and you have identified the characteristics of your participants. Now you are ready to go to Step Three. You will learn to draft a screening questionnaire to help you recruit the participants you need.

DRAFT A SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE TO HELP YOU RECRUIT THE PARTICIPANTS YOU NEED



Think about one subgroup from your worksheet in Step Two and plan how to recruit participants. This will require some creative thinking! Ask yourself where you can get access to people who you do not know, who do not know each other, and who fit your participant description.

Take care to use unbiased channels to recruit and screen focus group participants. For example, rather than rely on health clinic staff personnel to recruit families for a focus group discussion, you may want to recruit in a neutral area, such as the marketplace. There you can contact both those who go to the clinic and those who do not. Women who go to the clinic may think differently from those who do not.

It is important to screen people to determine whether they fit the description for the subgroup you have selected. You cannot assume that what people tell you in a focus group is representative of what all people like them would tell you. However, you are counting on them to give you insights into what others like them think, feel, and know. This is why conducting several focus groups with the same subgroup is necessary.

Use a screening questionnaire to make sure your participants represent your target group. To avoid having someone who does not fit the criteria arrive for the discussion, administer the questionnaire individually by telephone or in person when recruiting. If people arrive who do not fit your criteria, you may invite them to another group, interview them separately at another time or simply explain that you cannot include them in the current focus group. Administer the screening questionnaire again just before the discussion begins. This is especially important if you relied on others to recruit participants.

An option for researchers planning to conduct focus groups with several different subgroups is a screening questionnaire that helps identify participants for each of the planned subgroups on one form. The advantage to this approach is that you will not have to visit a community more than once to recruit for all of your groups. The following questionnaire also includes instructions for the recruiter to assure that they give all mothers invited the same information about the group meeting. Using the participant description the research team developed in Step Two, this type of questionnaire would look like this:

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Date _____ Place _____

Hello my name is _____ and I am working for _____ on a research study with mothers about their family's health. May I ask you a few questions to see if you are among the people we are trying to reach?

1 How old is your youngest child?

- 5 years or less older than 5 (do not invite)
 no children (do not invite)

2 Have you ever worked at a health center or been a health educator?

- No Yes (do not invite)

3 Where do you live? _____

- Rural area Urban area (do not invite)

4 How far is that from the capital city? _____

- near (Consider for subgroup 1 or 2)
 far (Consider for subgroup 3 or 4)

5 ORS is a salty/sugary mix that some women give to their children when they are sick. Have you ever used ORS with your children?

- Yes (subgroup 1 or 3, depending on answer to question 4)
 No (subgroup 2 or 4 depending on answer to question 4)

Determine if respondent should be invited and, if so, to which subgroup. Inform her that the discussion could last up to two hours. Tell her about any incentives the women will be receiving for their participation. If she accepts, confirm the date, time, and place with her. Ask her name and how she can be contacted. Thank her for her time.

Notes

Subgroup invited to _____
(number, date, time, place)

Name of Screener/Recruiter

Participant's name and how to contact

Often, officials or influential persons will assume that they should be involved in any activity with outsiders that occurs in the community. An inexperienced moderator may find it difficult to discourage their participation. If this problem seems likely, discuss it beforehand with your colleagues and develop a tactful strategy to deal with the situation (e.g., interview these officials separately or explain that you understand they know about your programs and you need to talk to those who are less well informed).

This careful screening process of ensuring that your participants meet your criteria is essential to achieving useful and reliable findings. Be sure that all those involved in recruiting and moderating understand the need for screening.

Incentives, reimbursement for travel, refreshments, or inexpensive small gifts are always appreciated and make participants feel good about joining the group. If you are taking people away from their work or otherwise inconveniencing them, you should consider some compensation for their participation. Guard against participants answering your screening questions falsely to get the incentive. Decide whether those who do not qualify but arrive at the site will get the incentive you offer.

Keep the screening questionnaires. They will be helpful later in preparing a list of group members for your research report.

See the Handbook pages 11-22 for more information on the logic and logistics of setting up focus groups. page 22 includes a sample screening questionnaire.

3

EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE

How did the researchers screen participants to make sure they fit the description from Step Two?

They asked recruiters to invite women who met the criteria they had developed, using the screening questionnaire shown below. Because the moderator had not done the recruiting herself, she re-screened participants with the same form as they arrived for the focus group discussion.

As is shown in the Video, one woman was an educator at the clinic and did not fit the criteria listed. She was not invited to participate in the discussion.

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE	
Date <u>Jan 7</u>	Place <u>Medina</u>
My name is <u>Teresa</u> and I am working on a research study for <u>a video on children's health</u> . May I ask you a few questions to help us do research here in your community?	
1. Where do you live? <u>Medina</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rural area near capitol <input type="checkbox"/> Other (do not invite)
2. How old is your youngest child?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Five or younger <input type="checkbox"/> Six or above (do not invite)
3. Have you ever worked at a health center or been a health educator?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes (do not invite)
4. ORS is a salty/sugary mix that some women give to their children when they are sick. Have you ever used ORS with your children?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No (do not invite)
Thank you so much for your time	
Notes	
Subgroup discussion invited to <u>2</u> (date, time, place)	
Name of Screener/Recruiter <u>Teresa</u>	
Participant's name and how to contact <u>Caby - Village Market</u> (if invited)	

WORKSHEETS

Using the table you created in Step Two for your subgroup, draft a screening questionnaire. Your introduction should be brief. Describe who you are and the general purpose of the research. Be careful not to give information that may influence answers to the screening or discussion questions. Include questions that apply to each criterion of your subgroup and invite only those who meet all of them. Make sure the questions are direct, simple, and non-threatening.

3

WORKSHEET

SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE	
Date _____	Place _____
Introduction	
Questions	<input type="checkbox"/> Invite <input type="checkbox"/> Do not invite
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
Thank you	
Notes	
Subgroup discussion invited to	
_____ (date, time, place)	
Name of Screener/Recruiter	

Participant's name and how to contact	
_____ (if invited)	

A good option for administering the screening questionnaire immediately before the group begins is to use a list of questions with two columns. The person screening the participants asks questions and records answers in one of two columns. Column A is used if the answer fits the criteria, column B is used if the answer does not fit the criteria. Only people whose answers all fall in column A are invited to participate. This simple version is useful when you are screening for one particular subgroup and checking for one set of criteria.

PREDISCUSSION SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE	
<p>Questions</p> <p>1</p> <p>2</p> <p>3</p>	
Column A	Column B
<p>Notes</p> <p>Your first name _____</p> <p>Name of subgroup _____</p> <p>Focus group date time, place _____</p> <p>Participant's name and way to contact _____</p>	

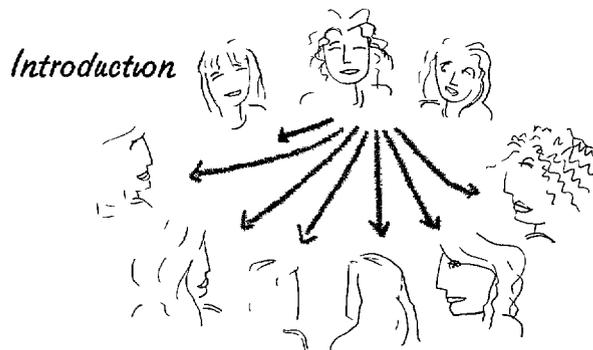
Now you are ready to go to Step Four to learn how to develop a topic guide for your research needs.

DEVELOP A TOPIC GUIDE FOR YOUR RESEARCH NEEDS

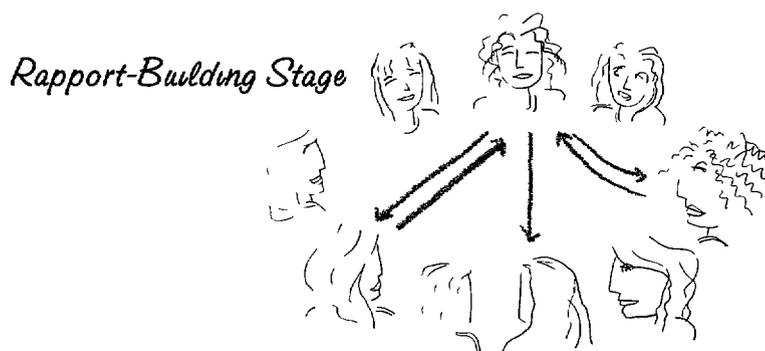


During the focus group discussion, the moderator uses a topic guide. Keep in mind that developing the topic guide is an extremely important step in the preparation process because members of the research team, including the moderator, must **rethink the need for different kinds of information and insights**. It is also a creative step because many different approaches can be taken in the guide to obtain information and stimulate discussion.

There are four progressive stages in a focus group: introduction, rapport building, in-depth, and closure. Each stage has an important purpose.

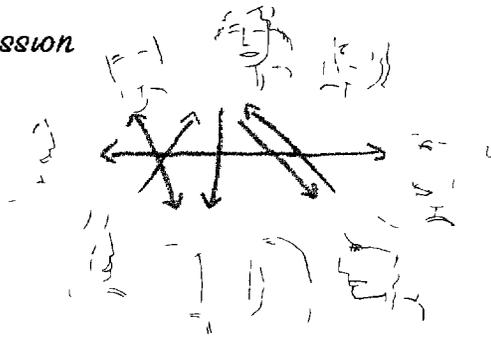


Introduction - The moderator explains the goals of the discussion and describes what will happen. She or he asks participants to introduce themselves. The purpose of the introduction is to prevent misunderstandings and make participants feel more at ease. The moderator does almost all of the talking. The introduction takes about 10 minutes.



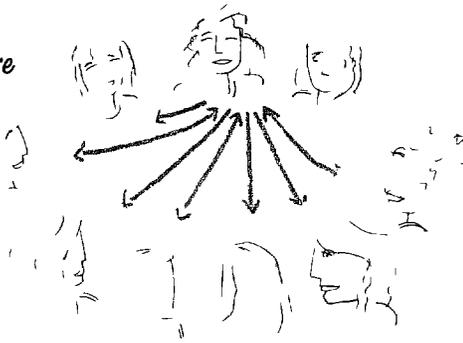
Rapport Building - In this stage, the moderator asks easily answered questions that encourage each participant to begin talking in the group setting. The purpose of these questions is to create an environment where participants feel comfortable and safe about speaking. The moderator does some of the talking, but participants begin to play a more active part in the discussion. This stage should last about 10 minutes.

In-Depth Discussion



In-depth - The moderator focuses on the main questions in the topic guide, encouraging conversation that reveals participants' feelings and reactions to the issues being researched. The participants do most of the talking with the moderator guiding and directing the conversation, but not leading it. This is the longest stage, lasting about 60 minutes.

Closure



Closure - The moderator summarizes impressions of points of agreement and disagreement as well as any patterns or conclusions that emerged during the discussion. Participants are asked to clarify, confirm, or elaborate on these impressions. The moderator does most of the talking in this stage which should last about 10 minutes.

On the worksheet, you will prepare an outline for your topic guide around these four stages. Here are some pointers for each stage.

Introduction Stage

- Use a tone that is both inviting and serious. The goal is not only to relax people (humor helps) but also to present the research as serious and important.
- Explain the general purpose of the study and your role in it. Do not give any information that might influence participants' responses later on. For example, tell participants you want to find out how they feel about their children's health rather than mentioning diarrhea.

See the Handbook pages 40-42 for a discussion of the four stages of a focus group. pages 23-27 discusses how to draft and use this kind of guide. examples of topic guides can be found on pages 19-21 and pages 25-27.

The Handbook page 40 gives pointers on writing the Introduction. Do not let the term 'warm up' confuse you. it is the introduction and rapport building stages combined.

See Using Simple Language in the Skill Section pages 100-102 for more information on using words that are appropriate.

- Explain the reasons for procedures such as audiotaping and having participants speak one at a time
- Express your interest in hearing different points of view
- Make it clear that you did not develop the materials or ideas. This shows that you will not be hurt by negative reactions
- Ask an introductory question that is interesting and does not show differences in status among participants

Rapport Building Stage

- Use one or two open-ended questions that everyone in the group can comfortably answer and that are interesting enough to spark their involvement. The questions should relate to your research, but they can be quite general
- Encourage everyone to contribute by waiting for someone to speak. Glance at particular individuals and ask, "Does anyone . . ."
- Avoid too many probes in this stage

In-depth Stage

- Refer to your list on what you want to learn (Step One). Based on this list, think of approximately six to eight major issues you want to cover. Write questions grouped around each of these issues that will help you find out what you want to know.

If you set out to cover too much during a single focus group discussion, you run the risk of pushing participants too fast. You may not discover the reasons behind their initial, more superficial responses, although you need to do so. A short topic guide will help you find questions or ideas that you can interject appropriately to match the flow of the discussion.

- Order the questions so that they progress from the general to the specific. Be sure to anticipate what will make sense to the group members as they respond to each question.
- List some possible probes under each discussion question. The probes should clarify or deepen responses.
- Go back to each question and consider creative approaches that may help meet your research needs. The challenge is to find an approach that will give insight into the participants' personal attitudes and experiences without threatening their comfort or privacy. Using imaginative approaches can be particularly helpful in cultures where people are not accustomed to expressing opinions. Here are a few ideas:

See the Skill Section pages 89-94 for more information on asking questions with care; pages 106-117 on encouraging participants to interact with one another; and page 75-82 for suggestions on non-verbal communication.

See the Skill Section page 93-99 on probing.

The Handbook pages 41 will help you to write the rapport building and in depth stages of the topic guide pages 29-33 presents different approaches you may use to elicit information and stimulate discussion during the in depth stage

Present the group members with a description of a scene or picture (e.g., a photograph of a teen breastfeeding) and get their reaction

Ask participants to imagine something (e.g., the ideal immunization clinic) and then describe it to you

Set up role playing among participants (e.g., a husband and wife discussing birth control) and listen to what happens

Share what other people have said about an issue (e.g., pregnant women should not eat too much because a large baby will make for a difficult birth) and see how the group reacts

Present the group with photographs of a variety of young men. After showing each one, ask "Do you think this man uses a condom?" Possible probes might be "What makes you say that? Is there anything that might make you think otherwise?"

- Try to avoid simple questions that can be answered with only yes or no. This type of question does not encourage discussion. Focus groups give you the opportunity to ask questions that give you new insights about your topic. Use it!

E.g., do not ask group members whether their children have had diarrhea in the last month. You will get more by asking "Tell me about the last time your child had diarrhea." Possible probes are "What did you do? How did that work? What do you think other mothers should do when their child has diarrhea?"

- If the purpose of your focus group is to pretest promotional or educational materials, be sure to have the materials on hand. Build your questions around this material.
- Draft questions based on decisions or actions that will be taken from the focus group findings.

E.g., if you are doing focus group discussions with program staff members, do not ask them about the kind of training they want to do their job better unless management is open to the possibility of developing and supporting training for its staff.

The Closure Stage

- Point out what you see as significant differences (e.g., opinion, practice, perception) among group members and give participants an opportunity to clarify their positions.

- Write one or two questions to get participants' final reactions and additions

E.g., "Is there anything we did not discuss that seems relevant?"

- In a nonjudgmental way, briefly summarize what you heard from the group on the various topics discussed. This section is hard to write beforehand. Write two or three statements that you may use to structure your summary to the group.

How to use your topic guide while you moderate

- Keep to the discussion questions. Listen carefully to what participants say and respond with probes to get unexpected, but relevant, information.

E.g., you may be asking questions about breastfeeding and using probes to understand what foods women think affect their milk and how. If a woman mentions how alcohol affects breastmilk, you may want to probe to understand more. But if a woman starts to discuss how breastfeeding makes her tired, it is best not to pursue the topic because it is not directly related to your topic of interest. You may make a note of it and talk with team members about the value of discussing tiredness if it comes up in future focus group discussions.

- To help you decide when to probe, always keep in mind what you need to know. Perhaps this is the toughest thing about moderating. Learning this takes time. Be patient.
- Take care not to probe too much early in the discussion. This may give the impression that you want a lot of detail, which will waste time and can mislead you. You also want to encourage all participants to talk.
- Take care not to probe one person too aggressively or for too long. This may make the person uncomfortable, make others feel excluded, and influence the responses of others. Be friendly and include all the participants in the discussion.
- Address the whole group with your probes, looking around at each participant. This will encourage everyone to respond and will give you a better feel for the variety of responses within the group.

- Reorder the questions as needed to match the flow of the group discussion. If you think of a new discussion question during the focus group session, you may want to make a note of it and wait until closure to ask it. This way you will not get diverted from asking the planned questions but will still benefit from questions that provide insight.
- Save time for any new information that may result from your summation and the discussion that may follow.

EXAMPLE

The researchers for the ORS educational film wrote a slightly different version of their topic guide for each of the subgroups described in Step Two. We will focus on the subgroup made up of mothers in remote rural areas who had used ORS. The examples below reflect the topic guide they used with these mothers.

Introduction

First, an explanation was given:

Good afternoon, ladies. My name is Teresa Rivers, and I am visiting your community just to be with you today. Thank you for coming. A focus group is a relaxed discussion.

The purpose was then presented:

We are here to talk about the health of your children and get ideas for an educational film about children's health. The purpose is to get women's reactions to the ideas before making the final film. I will not be sharing information or my opinions. Your opinions are what matter. There are no right or wrong answers. You can disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. I would like you to feel comfortable saying how you really feel.

Next the procedure was discussed:

I am using a tape recorder so that I do not miss anything you have to say. But everything is confidential. No one will know who said what. I want this to be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other women in the group without waiting to be called on. But only one person should talk at a time. The discussion will last approximately one hour. There is a lot I want to discuss, so I may move us along a bit.

Last came the participant introduction:

Now, how about if everybody tells us her name, how many children she has, and their ages.

4

EXAMPLE

Rapport Building

Here is one question Teresa asked to build rapport

Tell me something about the last time one of your children was sick

In Depth

Teresa showed each storyboard. Then to understand how these mothers interpreted the diarrhea/ORS messages, she asked this question and followed it with a probing question to obtain more detail

What do you think this film is trying to tell mothers?

Probe Repeat their words and ask *Anything else?*
Allow silence

Teresa asked this question to understand if the proposed messages were acceptable

What does the film tell you?

Probe *So, what do you think about that?*

Teresa asked this question to identify images that appealed to the mothers or were rejected by them

What do you think of the pictures we just saw?

Probes *What about it do you like? What is there that you do not like? Anything else? What about it is good? Unclear?*

Teresa asked this question to get ideas on how to revise the images and messages

If you were making this film is there anything that you would change?

Probes *What makes you say that? Anything else?*

Closure

Teresa planned to fill in these sentences on the spot based on the outcome of the discussion. She said

Though there were many different opinions about the film ideas, it appears that Does anyone see it differently? It seems most of you agree, but some think that Does anyone want to add or clarify an opinion on this?

To evoke further response Teresa made a request

Based on our discussion, it seems that the film should I will definitely review the tape and talk with more women before making recommendations for the production of the films What do you think is most important for me to share with the producers of the films?

She concluded by conveying her thanks

Thank you so much for coming tonight Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful

4

WORKSHEET

WORKSHEET

Draft your own topic guide. What is your focus group about? What general questions can you ask to put your participants at ease? What specific information do you need? How can you probe for further information? Refer to the information in the beginning of this step as you draft your guide.

TOPIC GUIDE

- 1 Introduction (approximately 10 minutes - explanation, purpose, procedure, participant introduction)

- 2 Rapport building (approximately 10 minutes - one to two questions)

- 3 In-depth discussion (approximately 60 minutes - six to eight questions with possible probes)

- 4 Closure (approximately 10 minutes - summary, request, thanks)

Now that you have completed the difficult task of developing your own topic guide, you can turn your attention to some other forms needed to do focus group research. You are ready for Step Five.

DESIGN FORMS FOR THE MODERATOR AND NOTE TAKER TO USE DURING A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION



Moderator's Summary Sheet

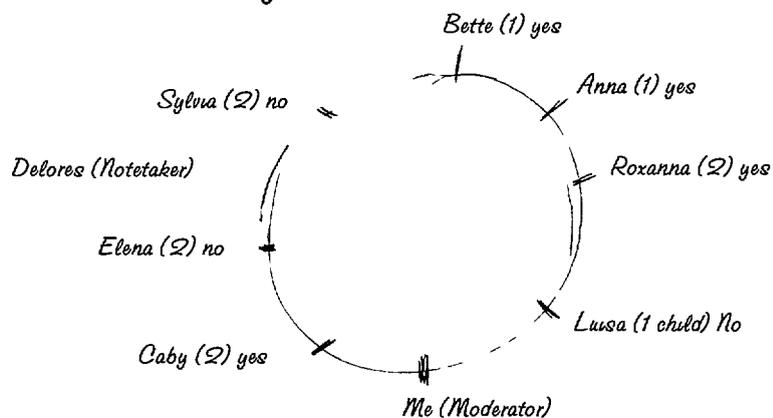
A summary sheet including names and key information on focus group participants can help moderators personalize the discussion. It includes

- reminder of participants' names (name tags are hard to read)
- reference to what the group does or does not have in common and where their experience differs and a
- cover sheet for the focus group report

Here are two suggestions for the style of the moderator's summary sheet

- A simple circle on a blank sheet of paper. The moderator makes notes around the circle during the introduction and in the early stages of the discussion

Moderator Summary Sheet



- A form (see example) that is prepared before the group meets and that lists everyone who participated in the focus group and key information on each, both taken from the screening questionnaire. This style can also serve as a cover sheet for the focus group's final report

Note Taker's Form

All focus group discussions should have a note taker (sometimes referred to as an assistant moderator). This person should watch and listen attentively throughout the group, writing down as much as possible of what group members say and how they react to different questions. The amount of detail that goes into a note taker's form will depend on his or her personal style and experience.

Inexperienced note takers may want to cut out the topic guide and put each question on a separate sheet to allow enough space for notes. The advantage of this format is that it helps organize the notes and observations by question for a debriefing immediately after the focus group meets. The disadvantage is that it is sometimes difficult for the note taker to quickly find a place for notes on questions that are asked spontaneously and those that the group discusses out of the anticipated order.

An option is the double-column format. The note taker writes in the questions as they arise during discussion. The form uses two columns to help organize the notes by type: (1) general comments and quotes and (2) observations, such as group interaction and nonverbal behavior and interpretations. The advantage of this format is that it encourages the note taker to include these areas without prematurely mixing objective content with subjective observations.

NOTE TAKERS' DOUBLE-COLUMN FORM	
Date, time, location _____	
Moderator _____	
Note taker _____	
Audiotape code number _____	
Comments/Quotes	Observations/Interpretations

Some note takers prefer to work on plain paper and organize everything after the group is over. Experiment with different formats. The two most important things to remember are that the note taker should

- be involved in the development of the topic guide and be just as familiar with the guide as the moderator
- take the time right after the focus group meets (or as soon as possible that day) to organize notes and review them with the moderator

EXAMPLE



EXAMPLE

**MODERATOR'S SUMMARY SHEET
FOCUS GROUP PRETEST OF ORS STORYBOARDS**

Location Medina
 Moderator Teresa Rwers Date Feb 20
 Observer/note taker Dolores Eddies Time began 10 00 am
 Audiotape code number 005-102 Time ended 11 00 am

Woman's First Name	Number of Children Under Six Years Old	Name of Closest Health Center	Used ORS?
<i>Caby</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Region 3</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Elena</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Flora</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Mercedes</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Sylvia</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>yes</i>
<i>Sonya</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>yes</i>

WORKSHEETS

5

WORKSHEET

Choose a format you like for your moderator's summary sheet. Include whatever information you think may be useful to have on hand as you moderate the focus group discussion and to easily identify the group when the discussion is over.

MODERATOR'S SUMMARY SHEET

Location _____ Date _____
Moderator _____ Time began _____
Observer/note taker _____ Time ended _____
Audiotape code number _____ Group number _____

Choose the option that best fits your style for the note taker's form

NOTE TAKER'S FORM	
Location _____	Date _____
Moderator _____	Note taker _____
Group number _____	Audiotape code number _____

Now that you are comfortable with using these forms, you are ready to go on to Step Six to draft your self-evaluation form

6

STEP SIX

DRAFT YOUR SELF-EVALUATION FORM

A self-evaluation form is an important tool to build your moderating skills. To help keep your attention on the skills you want to think about while moderating, design this form before the focus group discussion.

There are many style options for a self-evaluation form. Here are two options plus a completed example.

1 Simple Yes/No Check Boxes

MODERATOR SELF-EVALUATION		
CHECK BOXES	Y	N
Did I wander too much from the topic guide?		✓
Did I ask any yes or no questions?	✓	
Did I avoid the question "Why?"		✓

2 List of Questions

- Did I talk too much?
- Did I move the group too quickly into a new question instead of letting the participants talk through a relevant issue?
- Did I watch body language?

Leave space to make notes for the next time.

In the example taken from the Video, a rating scale was used. It is best to avoid midpoints on such scales, have an even number of choices to force your reflection on your actions as moderator.

For more ideas on what to include in your evaluation consult the Handbook pages 43-46.

EXAMPLE

Below is the evaluation form that the moderator used during the research in Mexico

6

EXAMPLE

MODERATOR SELF-EVALUATION

Date February 20 Name Teresa Rivers

Topic Diarrhea/Treatment

I have conducted a 60-minute focus group with respondents

On scale of 1-10, where 10 is high and 1 is low here is how I would score myself

	LOW										HIGH
1 Maintained rapport	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
2 Included everyone in the discussion (without serial interviewing)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
3 Stayed on purpose	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
4 Asked questions that opened up respondents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
5 Used active listening skills (acknowledgement, linking)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
6 Probed for clarity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
7 Kept my ego out of the conversation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
8 Did not put words in mouths of respondents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
9 Knew my guide well	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
10 Focused on the participants, not my papers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

6

WORKSHEET

WORKSHEETS

Self-Evaluation Form

Design a self-evaluation form. Include the things you feel are most important to remember and improve upon as you learn to moderate focus group discussions. Do not copy the statements from the example. Consider them, but think about other points, such as doing a smooth and comfortable introduction or showing empathy, concern, and respect.

MODERATOR SELF-EVALUATION										
Date	_____									
Name	_____									
Topic	_____									
Location	_____									
SELF-EVALUATION										
I have conducted a complete focus group. On scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is low and 10 is high, here is how I score myself on key things I need to pay attention to.										
Key Things	LOW									HIGH
1 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10 _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

You have completed the first six steps necessary to undertake focus group research. Now it is time to watch the Video and review possible answers to the questions raised at the end of the Video (see **Answers to Questions**). Once you have done this, you will be ready to complete the final two steps of this section: conducting a practice focus group discussion and organizing your notes from the experience.

PRACTICE A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION



Before doing a practice focus group, review the **Skills** Section and, if possible, do the exercises. This will help you develop the skills you will need to moderate the practice group. To prepare for the practice focus group, organize a group of six or seven people from the subgroup for which you have written a topic guide. By conducting a focus group discussion now, you will strengthen your moderating skills.

Try to find an experienced moderator to observe you and/or to go over the findings with you. If this is the first time you are moderating by using the preparation steps, do not plan to use the findings from this group. As you go through these steps in the future, you will be able to rely more confidently on the information gathered from your focus group because you will be more skilled in the process of conducting the research.

Before the day of the focus group, you and the note taker should pay special attention to these logistics:

- Recruit participants according to defined characteristics. Remind them of the focus group discussion by telephone, mail, personal contact, or word of mouth.
- Choose a site for the group that is relatively quiet and private. Make sure it has enough chairs that can be arranged in a circle and electrical outlets. It is important that the site be accessible to the participants and available for up to two hours. (It is hard to predict the length of a focus group discussion, but two hours should be a maximum.)
- Plan for and purchase refreshments and incentives if they are to be used.
- Organize and test equipment and materials (e.g., tape recorder, batteries, and at least two blank tapes).
- Gather or prepare samples or drafts of any materials to be pretested.

*The Handbook page 11-2
practice a thorough list of
logistical preparation for a
focus group*

You and the note taker should become well acquainted with the topic guide. Read it through and practice aloud to test the wording and flow.

Immediately before the focus group the note taker should do the following:

- Have refreshments organized,
- Greet participants and collect screening forms, if used,
- Take primary responsibility for the tape recording equipment, if used.

The Handbook page 37 lists key points that may help the observer/note taker to give valuable feedback to the moderator

The Handbook does not directly address the role of note taker however page 42 describe how to approach the responsibility of observing a focus group See the Skills Section pages 103-105 becoming Objective

See the Skill Section pages 104-115 Encouraging Participants To Interact

During the practice the moderator should keep in mind these two essentials

- The self-evaluation criteria, that is, what skills do I feel I need to pay special attention to improving
- The research objectives, that is, what we want to learn from this group

The note taker should

- Be a keen observer and alert to how participants respond facially and physically to different questions and comments Make notes
- Take careful notes of what participants say, with direct quotes when possible, to capture a common or notably distinct point of view related to the research Take complete notes even if there is a tape recorder

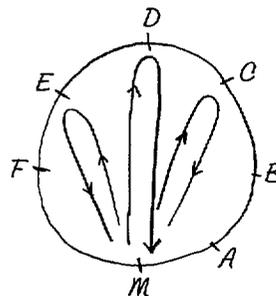
After the practice, it is important for you to reflect on the experience from both the content and the process of your first focus group discussion The most common way is for the moderator and the note taker to complete and discuss the self-evaluation form together Highlight three things you want to do differently next time

Another way to learn to be a more effective moderator is to use pictures Close your eyes and envision what happened during the focus group discussion In general, who spoke and how often? Draw a picture that you think best represents the verbal exchange of the group

M = Moderator, Letters = Participant's First Names

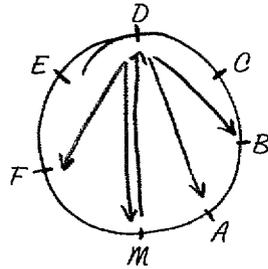
Look at the picture(s) in the three examples and consider the following

- Did the moderator fall into serial interviewing (asking the same question to a number of participants)? How could this have been avoided? (See example 1)



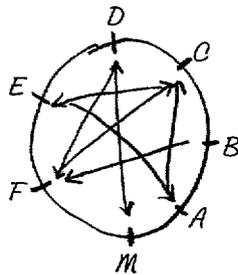
Example 1

- Did one participant dominate the group? How could this have been avoided? (See example 2)



Example 2

- Did participants talk with each other? How could this be encouraged the next time? (See example 3)



Example 3

You are now ready to organize your notes

8

STEP EIGHT

ORGANIZE YOUR NOTES FOR THE FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Fill in the Gaps

Because conversation can be very rapid, it is unrealistic to expect a note taker to write verbatim everything that was said during a focus group meeting. Therefore, the note taker should write the major ideas presented and record any of the participants' nonverbal communication that seems particularly important.

Even when the note taker is taking thorough notes, it is possible that relevant information may be left out. Therefore, it is extremely important that the note taker and moderator get together immediately after the focus group discussion (or as soon as possible on that day) to review the notes to add any information that may be missing. This is especially true if the moderator and/or note taker are conducting many focus groups because it is easy to forget important facts from the first groups and to confuse the data of different groups.

After your practice focus group, you and the note taker should do one of two things:

1. Review the notes together, or
2. Listen to the audiotape(s) of the group while filling in gaps.

Keep in mind that the quality of the notes will directly influence the outcome of the data analysis because audiotape transcripts can never capture the subtleties of the discussion. Good notes are the key to successful analysis and, therefore, to successful programs. Good notes allow the individual doing data analysis to work primarily from them and to use the audiotapes (or their transcripts) only as supplements.

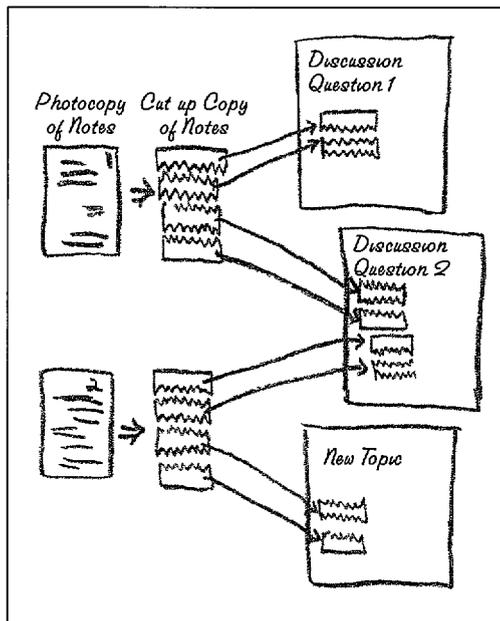
Either way, use your memory to add notes to interpret what was said.

Organize the Notes

After filling in any gaps, organizing the notes helps you understand the data you are finding. Here is a method of doing so:

- Photocopy your notes.
- Write each of the six to eight discussion questions from your topic guide on the top of separate sheets of paper.
- Using scissors, cut up the photocopy of your notes and glue all the information relevant to each discussion question on the appropriate sheet of paper.

- Create new sheets labeled with appropriate question headings for data that does not fit under your existing discussion questions. Try to group the new data by question or issue.
- Once you have cut and pasted all your notes onto sheets with headings, review the information for each question. Using the forms found at the end of this step, write a summary of the major findings for that question. Continue until you have written summaries for all of your questions.



Process Review

You can learn from each focus group you conduct by asking yourself the following questions

- Are focus groups providing me and my colleagues with the kind of information that we want, or should we be using some other research methodology? Should we complement focus groups with other research methods? (See Step One)
- Are the participants we selected able to give us the information we want or do we need to change the participant characteristics? Do we need to change (or pay more attention to) our screening questionnaire? Is there some information we want from all participants that can be gathered on the screening questionnaire? If the information is private or sensitive, can we administer a short questionnaire at the end of the group session? (See Steps Two and Three)
- Do we need to change any of the discussion questions or probing questions to get the information we are trying to find? Do we need to add new questions or delete any? (See Step Four)
- Do we need to change the moderator's summary sheet or how the note taker is organizing notes during the meeting? (See Step Five)
- Can I be more effective by changing something in my moderating style? Can I improve my self-evaluation form? (See Step Six)

- Can we identify any emerging patterns that can confirm or refute any of our assumptions about our research question?

Most of the participants said _____

Some of the participants said _____

A few of the participants said _____

Recognizing Patterns

As you moderate, look for similarities or patterns within key issues. Ideally, you should identify these patterns during the focus group discussion and confirm them with the participants to make sure that any pattern is an accurate interpretation of what the participants are saying. If you do not spot a pattern until after the focus group session, e.g., by listening to the tapes, you should confirm the pattern during future focus groups. Here are two examples of the kind of questions that can confirm patterns suggested by discussion in the groups.

- *Some of you have mentioned that you do not give water, soup, or breastmilk to your children when they have diarrhea. Am I understanding correctly that you feel that children with diarrhea should not drink liquids?*
- *Bananas and porridge were mentioned as foods given to infants with diarrhea. How would you describe mashed bananas and porridge? What makes them acceptable for children with diarrhea?*

Any patterns you or the note taker identify (and possibly confirm) should be brought to the attention of the person analyzing the focus group data.

Cautions About Analysis and Focus Group Data

These recommendations will help you organize your research findings and think about how the information you have learned can help you improve the findings. However, this organization does not constitute focus group data analysis. Focus group data analysis takes practice, skill, and feedback that cannot be acquired (or provided) through a guide such as this one.

Remember that data from a focus group represent only a small proportion of the population from which you have drawn your participants. Your findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to the entire population. Also, focus groups are a qualitative form of research, so findings should not be presented through numbers or percentages, but rather through descriptive terms.

EXAMPLE

The researchers conducting the focus groups for the ORS educational film had not intended to investigate what kind of food mothers gave to children suffering from diarrhea. But during the second focus group session, the participants spontaneously mentioned what they fed their children during three different parts of the discussion. When the moderator and note taker reviewed their notes, they realized that food represented an unexpected and important question. As they organized their notes, they created a sheet of paper labeled "Foods Given During Diarrhea" and, using the cut-and-paste method, placed all their findings about food on this sheet.

8

EXAMPLE

FOODS GIVEN DURING DIARRHEA

Give my baby soft foods like mashed banana

I never breastfeed my baby when she has diarrhea

My mother-in-law always makes this wonderful porridge when any of us gets diarrhea. After eating it for a few days, the diarrhea always goes away.

Mother said should not eat soup when have diarrhea

Do not need to change diet when have diarrhea

- *Pharmacist says you should give ORS*

I cut way back on the amount of water my son drinks

The moderator and note taker developed the following summary after reviewing the sheet containing all the data about foods given during diarrhea. Here is how they organized their notes.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Location	<i>Medina</i>	Group #	<i>3</i>
Moderator	<i>Teresa Rwers</i>	Note taker	<i>Dolores Eddies</i>
Type of Participants	<i>Mothers of children five years old or less, semi-rural, not ORS users</i>		

DISCUSSION QUESTION: FOODS GIVEN DURING DIARRHEA

Finding 1 Some mothers give their children banana and porridge

Participant quote supporting finding

I give my baby mashed banana

My mother-in-law always makes this wonderful porridge when any of us gets diarrhea. After eating it for a few days, the diarrhea always goes away.

Finding 2 Some mothers do not give their children with diarrhea breastmilk, soup, or water

Participant quotes supporting finding

I never breastfeed my baby when she has diarrhea.

My mother told me babies shouldn't have soup when they have diarrhea.

I cut way back on the amount of water my son drinks.

Finding 3 Only one participant mentioned ORS. (Researchers' interpretation: mothers who have not used ORS do not know they should give it to their children when they have diarrhea.)

Participant quotes supporting finding: *none*

Data Review To Refine the Approach

After organizing their notes, the moderator and note taker reached the following conclusions:

- We are definitely getting the type of information we were hoping to find, so we will continue with focus groups and do not need to supplement them with other research methods (at this time)

- The participant characteristics we included in our screening questionnaire are helping us select individuals who can give us the information we need. We do not need to add any questions. Some comments by a few participants, however, have left us wondering whether they may have had children die of diarrhea (which would have influenced some of their answers). It is therefore important to know from all our participants if they have had children die from diarrhea. Since in our culture losing a child is sometimes interpreted as being a sign of a careless mother, we believe that we will get an honest answer to a question about the death of a child from diarrhea only after we have established some rapport with the participant and when the question is asked in private. We will ask participants individually after the focus group if they have lost children to diarrhea.
- We also decided we need to add a few more groups of mothers who have not used ORS when their children had diarrhea to learn more about why they do not use it and how to get them to use it.
- We need to add some questions about food, such as “What do you feed your child when he or she has diarrhea?” Probing questions about soft/bland foods and withdrawal of liquids should also be added to explore the potential patterns we uncovered in our second group. Last, we want to add a question to the topic guide for mothers who do not use ORS to explore why they do not use it. If we have confirmed the pattern that liquids are withheld from children with diarrhea, then we need to probe to see if the mothers do not use ORS because it is “liquid.”
- The moderator needs to encourage shy participants more and to be careful to ask open-ended instead of closed questions.
- There are two possible patterns that need to be confirmed.

Some mothers feed their children with diarrhea soft food (researcher’s interpretation, bland foods may also be acceptable)

Some mothers reduce the amount of liquids (breastmilk, soup, water) they give their children when they have diarrhea

- Possible questions to confirm these patterns, and which should be added to the topic guide, include the following

Bananas and porridge were mentioned as foods given to infants with diarrhea. How would you describe mashed banana and porridge? What makes them acceptable to give to children with diarrhea?

Some of you have mentioned that you do not give soup, breastmilk or water to your children when they have diarrhea. Am I understanding correctly that you feel that children with diarrhea should not drink liquids?

8

WORKSHEET

WORKSHEET

Organizing Your Notes

Use the following sheet to help you summarize your findings after dividing your notes. Use one sheet for each of the discussion questions you identified.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	
Location _____	Group # _____
Moderator _____	Note taker _____
Type of Participants _____	
DISCUSSION QUESTION (or questions)	
Finding 1	
Participant quote supporting finding 1	
Finding 2	
Participant quote supporting finding 2	
Finding 3	
Participant quote supporting finding 3	
Possible Pattern	

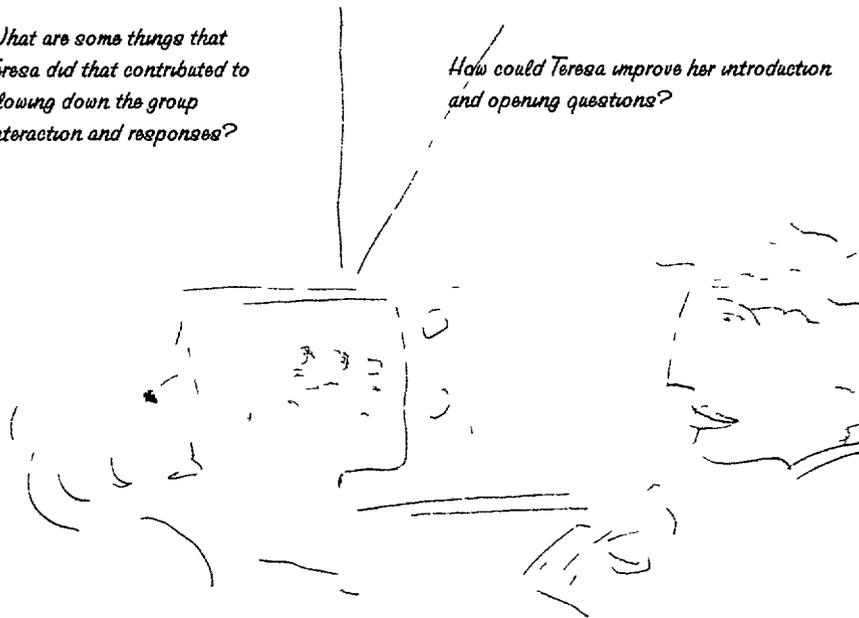
Answers to Questions Raised in The Video

What are some other issues in participant selection?

What can a moderator expect a typical group closure to be like?

What are some things that Teresa did that contributed to slowing down the group interaction and responses?

How could Teresa improve her introduction and opening questions?



What are the potential disadvantages of giving focus group participants a break?

What is the appropriate way to handle participant questions that come up during the group?

Answers to Questions Raised in The Video

Introduction

This part of the Guide is to be used with the Video included in the kit. The Video is a dramatized portion of a focus group, divided into four progressive stages.

1 Introduction

The moderator explains a focus group, the moderator and participants introduce themselves.

2 Rapport Building

The moderator puts participants at ease and gets them talking.

3 In-Depth Discussion

The participants share their thoughts on the discussion topic.

4 Closure

The moderator summarizes the discussion and thanks the participants.

Before using this part of the Guide, watch the complete Video once, including the clips that follow it on the cassette. Pause where indicated. Questions are presented at each pause to help you think about key moderator skills and common pitfalls.

Warning In the early part of the Video, the moderator is referred to as a discussion leader. The suggested responses mentioned in the Video are included in this section of the Guide, not in a separate pamphlet.

Consider each question as it appears on the screen. Then go over the suggested answers to that question provided on the following pages. Work through each question in this way. See the appendix for recommendations on using the Video in a workshop setting and to clarify terms used.

You may want to watch the Video again before you moderate your first few focus groups. It can serve as a review of skills you need to keep in mind.

The Video illustrates the use of focus group discussions for pretesting materials. Remember that you may use focus groups for other purposes. The overall style and process, however, should be the same.

Questions

- 1 What are some other issues in participant selection?
- 2 How could Teresa improve her introduction and opening questions?
- 3 How could Teresa have improved the rapport-building phase?
- 4 What could Teresa have done differently in exploring the group's reactions to the ORS packet?
- 5 In addition to serial interviewing, what else did Teresa do that inhibited the conversation and what could she have done to improve the participants' response?
- 6 What are some things that Teresa did that contributed to slowing down the group interaction and responses?
- 7 What can Teresa do to continue the group dynamic and get more in-depth information on the important topic of diarrhea and dehydration?

8 *What are the potential disadvantages of giving focus group participants a break?*

9 *What can a moderator expect a typical group closure to be like?*

10 *What is the appropriate way to handle participant questions that come up during the group?*

In the focus group discussion shown in the Video, mothers are reacting to materials intended to help women like themselves learn to use oral rehydration solution when their children have diarrhea. Their negative reactions to the pretested materials proved invaluable to the creators of the spots. The core message, "Let your child's diarrhea flow," was rejected and another version of the spot was produced. The negative reaction to materials or concepts presented during focus groups can be effectively used to reexamine, discard, or shape ideas. When you watch the Video, try to concentrate on process, not content.

See Step 4 pages 27-32 for more information on the stages of a focus group discussion.

WHAT ARE SOME OTHER ISSUES IN PARTICIPANT SELECTION?

- It is important to get the right number of participants in a group—no fewer than six and no more than ten. You may find it easier to encourage and maintain everyone's involvement in the discussion with a small group (six to seven people).
- Invite more participants than necessary. If you get more than ten, you have several options: (1) split the group, recruit two extra note takers, and ask the original note taker to moderate half of the group in another room, (2) thank the latest arrivals for coming, give them any incentive you were going to distribute, and ask if you may contact them for another discussion if one is planned, or (3) where the participants are literate, give the last to arrive a copy of the discussion questions and ask them to write responses.
- It is best if group participants do not know one another or the moderator. At the very least, avoid personal connections that might inhibit open and honest discussion.
- It is best to recruit participants objectively by using a list of criteria to find people with different points of view and experiences.
- Make sure everyone in the group is similar with respect to factors that may influence the discussion, such as sex, age, and experience. For example, if you are doing focus groups on pregnancy prevention, separate young teenagers from older ones, girls from boys, and those who have been (or are) pregnant from those who have never been pregnant. If participants are uncomfortable with others in the group, discussion may be strained.
- Everyone should have similar experiences with respect to the topic you are exploring. If, for example, you wanted to learn how mothers mix ORS after their visit to the local health clinic, you might choose participants for one group from those who have used ORS in the past six months and have taken children to the health center during that period.
- It is best if participants have similar status, education, and social positions. Otherwise, some may dominate the discussion. For example, in a group about healthy nutritional practices, those with lower social status may defer to those with higher status. This might mean that you would hear what participants feel they should think or do, not what they really think or do.
- Participants should be screened for fluency in the language or dialect you are using. You may want to talk with each participant before the group begins to assess and ensure adequate fluency.

QUESTION 1



WHAT ARE SOME OTHER ISSUES IN PARTICIPANT SELECTION?

For further information on participant selection, read *Determining the Focus Group Composition* (pages 12-16) in the Handbook and *Step 2* (pages 15-20).

QUESTION 2



HOW COULD TERESA
IMPROVE HER
INTRODUCTION AND
OPENING QUESTIONS?

HOW COULD TERESA IMPROVE HER INTRODUCTION AND OPENING QUESTIONS?

- Encourage the participants to express their points of view, even if they disagree with one another
- Explain that the session is being recorded and notes are being taken because the information being gathered is so valuable that nothing should be lost
- Draw the participants out and raise the level of enthusiasm with stimulating (but not too prying) questions, such as "What is the name of your youngest child, and how did you select that name?"
- Start the discussion by telling something personal about herself (e.g., number of children, husband's name), but being careful not to share anything that would reveal her opinion of the research topic
- Wait for a participant to volunteer to speak instead of selecting someone. This helps establish the moderator as a guide, not a leader of the group
- Use more nonverbal responses, such as leaning toward the participants and smiling. This shows she was receptive to what the participants had to say. Avoid showing agreement or disagreement with any comment
- Relax. If the moderator is visibly nervous, it may cause the group to feel nervous as well

See the Skill Section pages 89
94 Asking Questions with
Care and pages 78-82
Recognizing Nonverbal
Communication

For further information on the
introductions in a focus group
read Moderator's Opening
pages 40 in the Handbook and
Step 4 pages 27-36

HOW COULD TERESA HAVE IMPROVED THE RAPPORT-BUILDING PHASE?

- Invited participants to share personal experiences, without forcing intimacy For example, Teresa could have opened with “Tell me about your child’s health,” or “Tell me about the last time your child was ill ” Instead she says, “Let’s start by talking about the health of your children ” She then asks, “How have they been?” The question is so common that people give a routine response, such as “fine,” without really thinking
- Used open questions, such as, “Tell me about your child’s health,” rather than closed questions such as, “Can anyone tell me what the last illness was that your child had?” Closed questions are usually ineffective because they elicit only one- or two-word responses and do not generate discussion among participants
- Allowed participants to complete sentences or thoughts without interruption New moderators like Teresa who are eager to get to the core of their subject often interrupt This interferes with rapport because it makes participants feel that what they have to say is not important
- Waited to see if the group introduces a concept before introducing it herself
- Encouraged everyone to speak at least once in the first 10 minutes If this is not done, participants tend to fall into such lasting roles as listener or dominant talker This makes it difficult to effectively moderate the group

3 QUESTION



HOW COULD TERESA HAVE
IMPROVED THE RAPPORT
BUILDING PHASE?

See the Skill Section pages
106-117 Encouraging
Participants To Interact and
page 89-94 Asking Questions
with Care

For further information on the
rapport building phase read
Stage I The Warm Up
page 40 in the Handbook For
a thorough discussion of mod-
erator techniques useful at all
stages read Section 5 pages
29-33 in the Handbook

QUESTION 4



WHAT COULD TERESA
HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY
IN EXPLORING THE
GROUP'S REACTIONS TO
THE ORS PACKET?

WHAT COULD TERESA HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY IN EXPLORING THE GROUP'S REACTIONS TO THE ORS PACKET?

- Asked other group members' initial impressions to the packet before probing. For example, she could have asked, "Does anyone have any other ideas about what the packet is trying to do?" This is important because one participant's answers to probing questions can easily influence others' comments and their real opinions will not be revealed.
- Allowed for silence. Many moderators tend to jump too quickly to new topics, fearing that they will not cover everything or that silence will bring tension. Trust the group to (almost) run itself.
- Probed in the spirit of mutual exploration, being careful not to force a deeper level of explanation if you sense people are uncomfortable with that level. "What about the packet? Is it trying to tell you something?" and "How is it trying to help?" are effective probing questions. They help to highlight the participants' own reasons why they like something or feel the way they do.
- Asked for different points of view. "Who disagrees with that?" Be careful, however, not to set up confrontation. For example, avoid asking questions such as "Who disagrees with Caby?"
- Gotten opinions about the package from other participants before changing the subject.

See the Skill Section pages 95
99 *Probing for More*

For further information on
probing read *Stage II The
Body of the In-Depth Focused
Discussion* page 41 in the
Handbook

IN ADDITION TO SERIAL INTERVIEWING, WHAT ELSE DID TERESA DO THAT INHIBITED THE CONVERSATION AND WHAT COULD SHE HAVE DONE TO IMPROVE THE PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSE?

- Encourage conversation among participants Their comments and questions to each other often reveal the most interesting and heartfelt issues Serial interviewing (asking the same question of several participants, one after the other) inhibits stimulating cross conversation
- Not put uncomfortable participants on the spot by singling them out, although these individuals should be gently asked to express their thoughts
- Use open-ended questions, such as "What did you think of the video?" rather than closed-ended and threatening questions such as, "Did you learn anything new?"
- Probe without questioning a participant's own store of knowledge For example, ask "Did the spot give any information that might be new to mothers?" instead of, "Did you learn anything new?"
- Probe without requiring personal negative comments "What do you think other women like you would think?" rather than, "What do you think," if participants seem uncomfortable with saying negative things

**5
QUESTION**



IN ADDITION TO SERIAL INTERVIEWING WHAT ELSE DID TERESA DO THAT INHIBITED THE CONVERSATION AND WHAT COULD SHE HAVE DONE TO IMPROVE THE PARTICIPANTS RESPONSE?

See the Skill Section pages 106-117 Encouraging Participants To Interact pages 89-94 Asking Questions with Care and pages 95-99 Probing for More

For more information on participant response see Section 8 page 48 in the Handbook

QUESTION



WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT TERESA DID THAT CONTRIBUTED TO SLOWING DOWN THE GROUP INTERACTION AND RESPONSES?

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS THAT TERESA DID THAT CONTRIBUTED TO SLOWING DOWN THE GROUP INTERACTION AND RESPONSES?

- Teresa asked two questions in one “Was there anything that you didn’t like or maybe didn’t understand?” This confuses participants. They do not know which question to answer. Pause and decide on a clear, single-issue question before starting to talk. Also, both the questions Teresa asked could only be answered with a yes or no, further inhibiting responses.
- When she did not get a response, she switched to a new question and jumped to a new topic. Observe the group’s reaction to this and decide if it is best to move on or try a new way to encourage participation.
- Teresa may have undermined participants’ self-confidence by asking them what they “did not understand” rather than asking if the material or message was unclear.
- Similarly, she may have implied judgement by asking “Why?” An experienced moderator may have used nonjudgmental questions, such as “Tell me more about that?” or reflective listening, instead of asking “Why?”
- She did not allow time for silence. There are many possible explanations for a normal lag in conversation. Besides feeling confused or intimidated, participants may be getting tired. They may have so much to say that they do not know where to begin. They may simply need time to consider something they have never thought about before. It would be better to take a break in the circle or leave time for relaxed silence.

See the Skill Section pages 89
94 Asking Questions with
Care and pages 38-88
Listening Effectively

WHAT CAN TERESA DO TO CONTINUE THE GROUP DYNAMIC AND GET MORE IN-DEPTH INFORMATION ON THE IMPORTANT TOPIC OF DIARRHEA AND DEHYDRATION?

QUESTION 7

- Teresa could encourage debate by asking group members to react to what others have said. For example, after one participant says, "It helps get the bad stuff out," and another responds, "No way, diarrhea is dangerous," Teresa might address the group this way: "So diarrhea is good, but it is also dangerous?"
- She could use body language (such as looking at and leaning toward a group member to encourage her participation) to get others involved in the discussion.
- After all group members have given their opinion on the issue (or material), Teresa could begin to probe for underlying meanings. For example, she could ask the following questions:

"What do you mean by dangerous?"
"In what way is it dangerous?"
"What about it is dangerous?"
"Dangerous?"

Here are some general pointers:

- When you moderate a discussion on a topic about which the participants know much more than you, research it so that you do not waste time during the discussion asking participants to explain factual information. For example, before moderating a discussion among staff members about service delivery in their health promotion program, familiarize yourself with the internal policies of that program.
- As a moderator, you will inevitably hear comments you do not understand. Do not pretend to understand because you may (1) draw incorrect conclusions about the topic, (2) miss an opportunity to expand the focus of your research, or (3) give the participants the impression that you were not listening when you mistakenly refer to what they said. Instead be honest and ask for a brief clarification of what was said. For example, "Let me be sure that I got this. The policy is X, but you feel it should be changed to Y? Is this correct?"



WHAT CAN TERESA DO TO CONTINUE THE GROUP DYNAMIC AND GET MORE IN-DEPTH INFORMATION ON THE IMPORTANT TOPIC OF DIARRHEA AND DEHYDRATION?

- Recall comments participants have made that are relevant to each other and to the research. For example, "Several of you mentioned the words *fear*, *afraid* and *scared* during our discussion. Let us talk more about these feelings." This is known as linking.
- To get the whole group to talk about it, reintroduce a relevant and important issue participants have raised. "Earlier many of you mentioned that you felt hospital staff members were rude. Let us talk a bit about how we feel when people are rude to us." This is known as reweaving.

See Step 8 pages 48-54 for more information on linking and the Skill Section pages 78-82 Recognizing Nonverbal Communication pages 95-99 Probing for More and page 89-94 Asking Questions with Care.

For additional moderating tactics see Stage II The Body of the In-Depth Focused Discussion on page 41 in the Handbook. Further explanation of linking and reweaving is offered on the same page.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL DISADVANTAGES OF GIVING FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS A BREAK?

- It can be difficult to get the group dynamic started again
- It is hard to get everyone back together at the same time. Some participants may get bored waiting and leave. This is one reason to give participant incentives after the group session is finished.
- Often the richest data come at the end of a group session. Stopping the group when the conversation is flowing can be counterproductive.
- If you do take a break, remember that any conversation can be extremely relevant to key research questions. The note taker may keep the tape going during the break and again after the formal closure of the discussion to capture conversation.

QUESTION



WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL
DISADVANTAGES OF
GIVING FOCUS GROUP
PARTICIPANTS A BREAK?

*See the Skill Section pages
106-117 Encouraging
Participants To Interact*

QUESTION



WHAT CAN A MODERATOR EXPECT A TYPICAL GROUP CLOSURE TO BE LIKE?

WHAT CAN A MODERATOR EXPECT A TYPICAL GROUP CLOSURE TO BE LIKE?

- The moderator should try to summarize the group members' points of view on key issues to (1) check his or her interpretation of what participants said, (2) clarify doubts, (3) note issues on which there was group consensus, and (4) note where differing opinions were expressed
- Linkages and patterns may be difficult to identify and describe
- The group closure should start 15 minutes before the scheduled ending time so participants have a chance to voice agreement, disagreement, or additional thoughts. There may not be a consensus of group opinion, and closure may actually stimulate more discussion
- The note taker should be invited to contribute to the discussion using the notes of what was said
- What one participant said should not be singled out, and the moderator should not quantify how many people agreed or disagreed with a certain conclusion
- The participants should be told that the summary is what the moderator understood from them, not the moderator's own point of view. It is not a lesson about what is right with respect to the issues discussed
- A note should be made of issues that ought to be added or explored more deeply in future focus groups or other research. Ask the group members their opinion about this

For further information on group closure see Stage III Closure of the Group page 42 and on the ladderwork technique read Specialized Group Processes page 31 in the Handbook

WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE WAY TO HANDLE PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS THAT COME UP DURING THE GROUP?

- Redirect the question to the group. If the participant's question is a request for the moderator's personal opinion on the group discussion topic, this will assure all the participants that it is their opinions that are important, not those of the moderator. Assure participants that technical questions will be answered by the moderator after the group discussion has ended.
- Invite an educator to visit the group at the end and answer questions. Or, if you have the background, you may want to respond to questions or apparent misinformation among participants once the session is over.
- Make a note of questions, concerns, or misinformation (a participant's comment presented as truth) that occur during the session. After the session, go back to these and share factual information (not opinions or emotions), distribute informational materials, or refer the participant to a reliable source. You may need to send the information to participants if you were not prepared for an issue that arose.
- After the discussion is completed, distribute brochures and other handouts as resources. It is always useful, as well as ethically important, that sensitive and difficult topics are handled by providing participants with as much information as possible.

You have completed your study of the key elements in moderating focus groups as shown in the Video. In Step Seven, you will apply these elements in your practice to build your own skills. The next section will also help you do this.

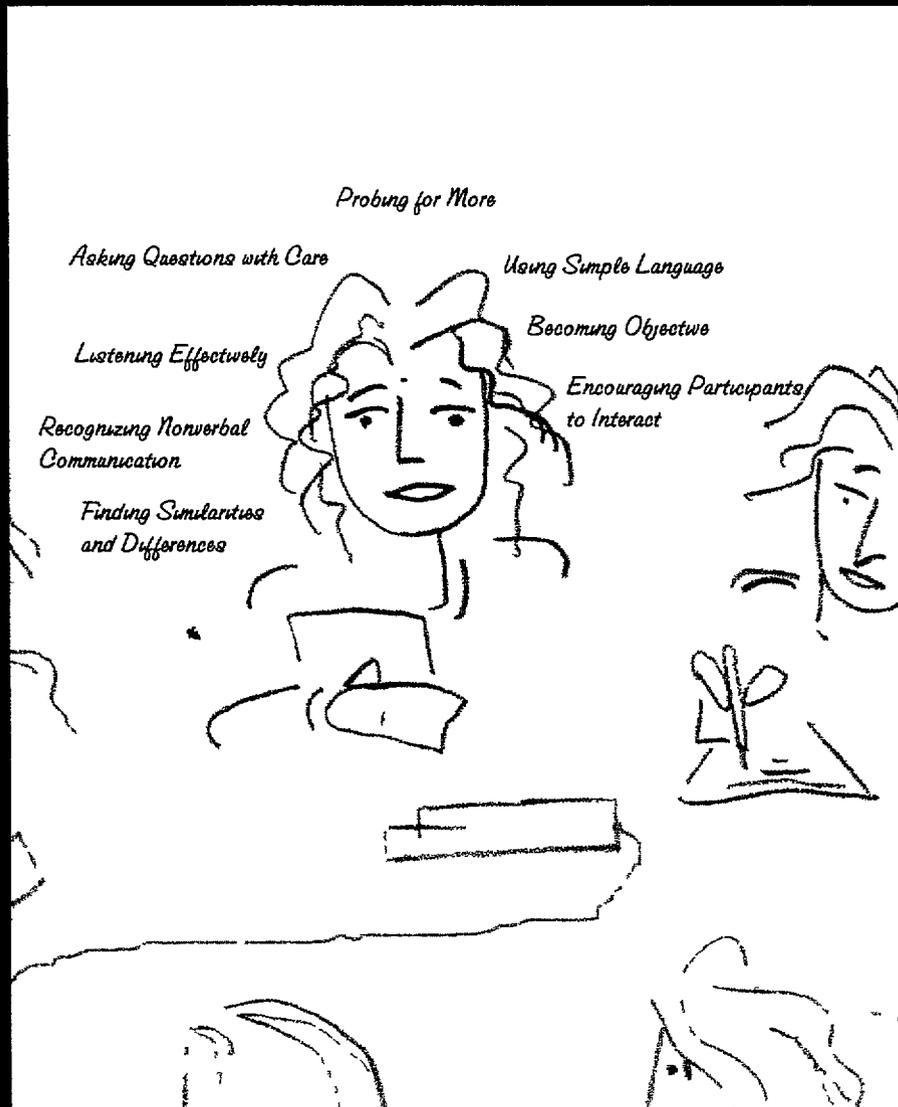
10 QUESTION



WHAT IS THE APPROPRIATE WAY TO HANDLE PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS THAT COME UP DURING THE GROUP?

For further information on strategies for handling the questions see The Questioning Respondent page 49 in the Handbook

Information and Exercises for Improving Moderators' Skills



Information and Exercises for Improving Moderators' Skills

Introduction

To be an effective moderator, you will need practice and feedback on your work from an experienced moderator. If you master the skills on the following pages, you will learn to moderate more quickly and effectively. The challenge is to understand the skill, practice it, and apply it.

Each of the following eight skill areas is ordered so that it builds on the ones before. For each skill, you will find (1) an overview, and (2) group exercises.

For most skills, there are options for different exercises. Each exercise uses an experiential learning approach. Choose the exercises that you think would work for your group.

If you are using this kit by yourself, read the overview of each skill and try to get a group together to do the exercises for the skills you feel you need most to improve. Practice and discussion are the best ways to learn.

If you are a workshop leader, see the **Appendix** for specific suggestions on how to prepare for these group exercises and fit them into a workshop schedule.

The materials you will need for the exercises include a flip chart, markers, paper, cards, and tape.

Skill Areas

Finding Similarities and Differences

Recognizing Non-verbal Communication

Listening Effectively

Asking Questions with Care

Probing for More

Using Simple Language

Becoming Objective

Encouraging Participants To Interact

Finding Similarities and Differences

OVERVIEW

Good researchers are like drivers. They think about where they want to go and then decide on the best route to get there. You could put a group of people in a room and tell a researcher that you want to know how many people like their job. The researcher would probably do a survey, asking each person one by one, "Do you like your job?" Then the researcher could give you what you asked for—a quantitative description of the group (*13 of 50 people say they like their job*).

But if you told the researcher you wanted to know how the people in the room felt about their work, the researcher would probably try to answer your question by using interviews or focus groups. The researcher would ask such questions as, "Tell me about your work," or "How do you feel about your work? What do you like? What do you dislike?" After asking such questions, rather than telling you how many people in the room like their work, the researcher could describe overall similarities and differences among the group—a qualitative report (*most of the people felt that their work some of the people a few felt very strongly that*).

How Moderators Use This Skill

Like the second researcher above, your goal as a focus group moderator is to understand similarities and differences among the participants. How did most participants feel? How did most participants react? Why do some participants think one thing and others disagree?

With practice, you will become better and better in finding similarities and differences among participants. You use this skill in at least two ways:

- To summarize what came out of a group before concluding the discussion

(E.g., So, tell me if my impression is correct. Most of you feel your work is challenging.)

- To write a summary report on the focus group

(E.g., Most of the women in this group felt that their work is challenging, but some felt that men in their office are given more challenging work.)

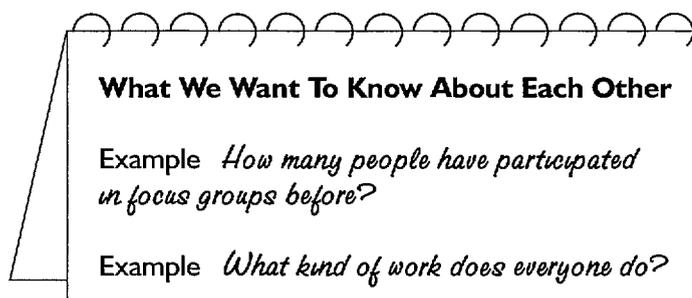
GROUP EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below. Introduce it by explaining to workshop participants that they will learn and practice an important skill for focus group moderators, finding similarities and differences within a group. In this exercise, participants will identify similarities and differences among themselves as a way to practice the skill. Briefly describe the skill and ask participants whether they have used this skill to moderate focus groups.

Conclude the exercise(s) by distributing the overview of the skill to each participant. Give them time to read it. Discuss the skill and answer any questions they may have about using the skill to moderate focus groups.

Option 1 Walk Around and Find Out (approximately 45 minutes)

- 1 Ask the participants what they would like to know about the other people in the workshop. Write the points on a flipchart or large sheet of paper.



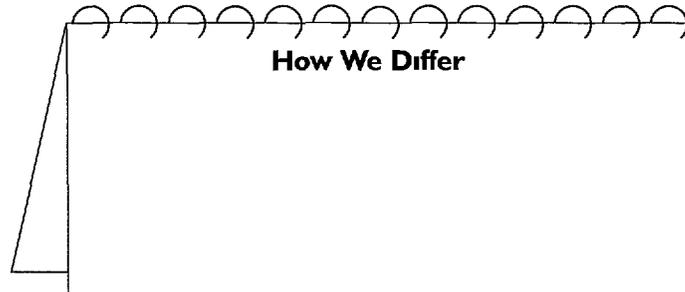
- 2 Next, invite everyone to pick one of the items on the list and take it as their responsibility. Explain that they will have about 10 minutes to walk around and interview others. As they do this, each person should find out as much as he or she can about the item from the others.
- 3 After they have collected this information, ask everyone to sit alone and summarize what they found out. They should note similarities and differences in the group, using phrases like "most of us" or "some of us" (e.g., most of us have seen focus groups before, but only a few of us have tried to moderate them).
- 4 Encourage the participants to look for the ways their responses to questions are similar, even if the responses seem different at first glance (e.g., everyone might work in a different organization, but all their work may be related to serving people in the community). Explain that focus group moderators have to look at what people say in more than one way to find a common thread. Discourage the participants from using numbers in their summaries (e.g., six of us have seen focus groups, but only two have moderated one). Explain that this is important because, as focus group moderators, they will need to avoid quantitative summaries.
- 5 Ask each person to take one minute to present a summary.

Option 2 Small Groups (approximately 50 minutes)

- 1 Create groups of five to six people. Ask each group to find out as much as it can about what the members have in common, using whatever process or questions they wish. They can consider any aspect of themselves (e.g., background, goals, concerns, work life, home life) or any aspect of their work environment (e.g., daily responsibilities, training, likes, dislikes).
- 2 Ask the groups to consider what their members have in common and to record their findings on flipcharts or large sheets of paper.

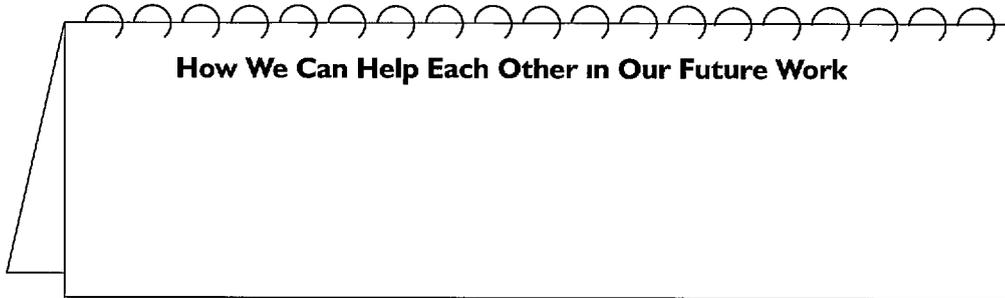


- 3 After 10 minutes, ask the groups to consider what is different among their members and record what they learn.



- 4 After 10 minutes, have each group describe itself to the other groups. Each should describe what its members have in common and how they differ using terms like "most of us, but a few" or "some of us, but others." See Option 1, point 4 for more instructions to a group.

- 5 Ask all groups how members could use what they learned to help each other in their future work



How We Can Help Each Other in Our Future Work

Recognizing Nonverbal Communication

OVERVIEW

All of us communicate without using words. This type of communication often speaks louder than our words, even though such communication is so subtle that most of the time we are not conscious of it. Nonverbal communication includes the kind and amount of eye contact, other facial expressions, the way we sit or stand, and movements of the hands, body, or head. It also includes the tone of voice we use.

It is relatively easy to control our verbal communication. We can do nothing about nonverbal signals, however, until we are aware of them and become skillful in interpreting their meaning.

Recognizing Nonverbal Actions

- **Posture** The way we hold our bodies can convey that we are interested in what a participant is saying and give confidence to shy or hesitant participants. We can, for example, lean toward them in a friendly and encouraging way. If our posture is stiff or cold, we may discourage them from speaking or indicate that they should wait for permission to speak.

Participants may hold their hands over their mouths or wrap their arms around their bodies, indicating discomfort and reluctance to speak or disagreement with the person who is speaking.

- **Facial expressions** Head and facial movements are probably the clearest indicators of attitudes toward others. With these movements, we can convey positive or negative emotions, doubts, or agreement. Shaking the head can be negative, nodding can be positive. A friendly, questioning expression can encourage discussion. Eyes show our level of interest and respect for what others are saying. Often, new moderators show shock or discomfort on their faces because of an opinion, term, or belief expressed by a participant. This quickly inhibits discussion and limits the value of the data being collected.

Participants may show enthusiasm, concern, disbelief, or sorrow through their facial expressions during the discussion. These are important clues to their feelings about the research topic and should be noted as part of the data being collected.

- **Hands or bodies** A moderator can use hand movements effectively to encourage discussion among participants. Often, members of the group will speak directly to the moderator as the leader of the group. By gently gesturing toward another member, the moderator can often direct a speaker's gaze and comments to another participant, slowly discouraging a person from relying on the moderator to give "permission" to speak.

How Moderators Use This Skill

Sensitivity to these nonverbal signs will help you moderate in two ways (1) you can use nonverbal signals to encourage participants to enter freely into the discussion, and (2) you can observe the nonverbal signals participants give so that you can understand what they are really saying and thinking about the topic under discussion. You can pick up their feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, anxiety, excitement, or enthusiasm and use them to interpret what the participants say.

It will be important for you to decide what nonverbal signals work best in your culture to encourage discussion, show respect for others' opinions, welcome new ideas, and remain nonjudgmental about what you hear. Are some nonverbal cues between members of the same sex different from those between members of different sexes? You will need to decide these things before you begin moderating your first focus group. You will also need to be aware of your own as well as the participants' nonverbal actions during the group.

*Adapted from Communication Briefings: A monthly idea source for decision makers
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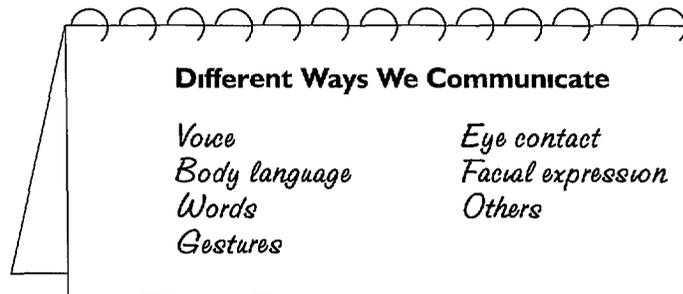
GROUP EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below. Introduce it by explaining to participants that they will learn and practice the important moderator skill of nonverbal communication.

Perform the exercise and conclude it by distributing the overview of the skill to all participants. Give them time to read it. Discuss the skill and answer any questions they may have about the use of the skill to moderate focus groups.

Option I Silent Partner (approximately 30 minutes)

- 1 Ask participants for examples of different ways people communicate with each other. Note what they say on a flipchart or large sheet of paper. Add to what they say to make the list more complete.

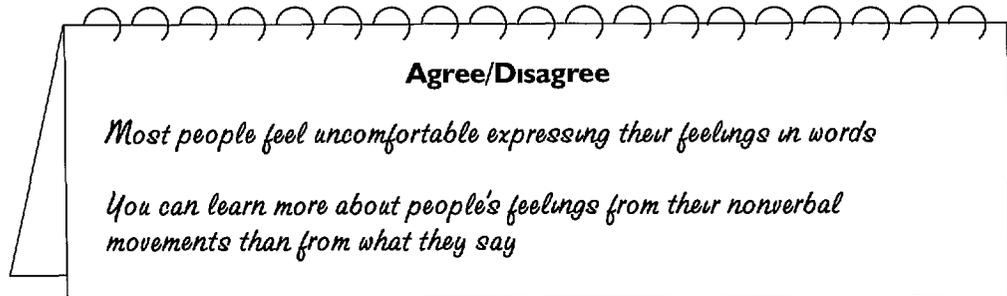


- 2 Ask the group to form pairs. One person in each pair should talk for five minutes about an individual problem or concern. The person's partner should try to communicate interest and understanding and help in any way desired, except verbally. The partner may not speak! The pairs will then switch roles and repeat the exercise. The second partner should talk about an entirely different problem.
- 3 After five minutes, stop and allow two to three minutes for the pairs to talk freely.
- 4 Discuss the exercise with the group. Consider the following:
 - How did it feel to talk for five uninterrupted minutes?
 - How did it feel to be prevented from talking?
 - Did you feel that your partner understood you? How did you know? (E.g., expression, body movement, eye contact)
 - Did anyone feel helped? Why or why not?
 - Why is silence so difficult to tolerate?

- What specific body behaviors communicate understanding and support? (E g , "Mmmm," eye contact, leaning forward)
 - What happens when nonverbal behavior does not match the verbal message? (E g , confusion, uncertainty, mistrust)
 - Give examples of contradictory verbal/nonverbal messages (E g , saying "yes" while frowning)
- 5 Apply these thoughts and feelings to your role as focus group moderator Consider what examples of negative nonverbal communication you should generally avoid when you moderate
- Nodding too much (giving the impression that you agree)
 - Looking away from a speaker (discouraging this person from continuing to talk)
 - Acting impatient
 - Acting distracted
 - Permitting interruptions
 - Smiling or frowning at inappropriate moments (judging or showing disrespect)
- 6 Ask what nonverbal communications moderators should use to encourage participation and put people at ease
- Showing an attentive but unthreatening facial expression and body posture (E g , leaning toward the group when encouraging people to talk)
 - Sitting back and looking around the circle when trying to keep participants from talking directly to you
 - Nodding or smiling slightly to encourage someone to share an opinion
 - Giving appropriate empathetic expressions (E g , a sad face when listening to a sad story)

Option 2 Feelings Charade (approximately 20 minutes)

- 1 Spark debate by asking group members if they agree or disagree with the statements shown on the flip chart



- 2 After dividing the group into pairs, have the members of each pair tell each other about a time they were misunderstood or they misunderstood what someone else said. Have them ask each other how attention to nonverbal clues could have helped in better understanding.
- 3 Ask for volunteers to act out different emotions before the group. They may use expressions and body language, but no words or vocal expressions. Here are some suggestions for an emotion or mood:
 - Anger
 - Frustration
 - Disinterest
 - Boredom
 - Disgust
 - Grief
 - Happiness
 - Fear
 - Joy
- 4 Ask the other participants to guess the emotion or feeling being acted out.
- 5 Review the acting/guessing by asking whether it was difficult to interpret emotions without a verbal explanation.
- 6 Ask the group how a moderator can make sure of learning from participants' nonverbal communication, and then enhance their answers with the following:
 - Watch constantly for nonverbal clues by the person talking
 - Listen to tone of voice
 - Look for discrepancies between what participants say and the clues they send with their bodies
 - Look around the group using peripheral vision and short glances to see the body positions and facial expressions of people who are not talking. If appropriate, encourage them to discuss what you read from their nonverbal communication.

Listening Effectively

OVERVIEW

Effective listening is a fundamental part of effective moderating. If you do not listen carefully and consistently during a focus group, several things may happen:

- You might miss a good opportunity to get at the heart of your research

E.g., Some mothers show warmth in their tone of voice when describing the way the mother and child are pictured in the spot you are testing. You could easily miss this if you do not listen carefully. You would not find out that mothers respond best to spots showing mothers gazing into their baby's eyes.

- You might leave participants feeling excluded, or worse, offended because you ignored something they said. This is especially true if they shared something personal or private

E.g., A mother's voice falls as she talks about taking her child to the doctor after several days of illness. You miss her guilt and worry that she waited too long. You upset her by probing to learn more about it.

- You might leave the discussion with the wrong impression because you missed what participants really said or thought you heard something you did not

E.g., A mother shyly mentions that "people" say that vaccinations cause sterility. You nod and explore this with the group. You are listening to someone else talk about forgetting an appointment. You conclude that mothers do not go for vaccinations because they forget. You miss the thought that some mothers do not go because they are afraid. You do not clarify this point after the session, leaving others thinking that you have agreed with the participant that is afraid of sterility.

Hearing Versus Inferring

What you hear is what people actually say with words. What you infer is what you think they said based on their words, their nonverbal signals, and your own previous impressions and experiences. As a moderator, it is important for you to distinguish between what you hear and what you infer.

**LISTENING
EFFECTIVELY**

SKILL

During the focus group discussion, you may repeat what you heard, using participants' actual words. This helps to get a participant or other members of the group to talk more about something mentioned during the discussion.

E g , So you said you were worried when the fever started

Reflect on what you inferred. Use your own words to tell participants what you think they were trying to say. This helps to get the group to confirm or clarify your impressions. Along with the words you are reflecting the emotional content of what was said.

E g , It sounds like you were frightened when that happened

After the session, as you organize your notes, you should take notes on what you actually heard people say. You should also take notes on what you inferred from what they said. This can be useful when the focus groups are analyzed in their entirety.

Warning Be careful to check yourself. Make sure the data analyst knows when your personal impressions influenced what you heard (*E g , I felt that the mother was frightened*).

Pointers for Listening Well

- Keep your mind centered on the speaker. Try to put yourself in the person's place and understand what he or she is thinking and feeling.
- Maintain a nonjudgmental expression as you listen.
- Talk only when necessary to clear up a confusion or move the discussion along. If someone is talking too much, find an opportunity to gently interrupt.
- Watch participants' facial and body expressions.
- Allow silence. People need time to think about what they will say. You need time to think about what you heard. Waiting for someone in the group to speak rather than filling the silence can also be very effective in encouraging speech as can using supporting sounds, such as "Aha aha."
- When you do not understand what someone said, you may clear up the confusion by trying the following:

Ask a nonleading question

E g , Could you tell me more about that?

Repeat their words and pause

Say what you think they said (words plus emotional context) and pause

How Moderators Use This Skill

Effective listening during a focus group takes considerable practice. You have to balance listening skills with your job as moderator.

- Interrupting is sometimes important because one focus group participant could dominate the group. The moderator can still be a good listener by acknowledging what the person is saying and gently suggesting that other participants join in the discussion.

E.g., Excuse me, Aida. You mentioned something very interesting earlier and I would like the group to get back to it. How do others feel about vaccinating?

- You have to listen to one person while being aware of what else is happening in the group. You should ask that only one person talk at a time (to help you and to catch everything on tape). You still have to be thinking while someone is talking: how this is similar to or different from what you have been hearing, how other people are reacting to this, and whether anyone is uncomfortable and why. You also need to think where you should go from there in the discussion to learn more about issues of interest to the research.

GROUP EXERCISE

Select one of the exercises below. Introduce it by explaining to participants that they will learn and practice an important moderator skill: listening. Briefly describe the skill.

You may want to catch their attention by asking them to stop and listen. Allow one to two minutes of silence. Periodically ask, "Are you listening?" Ask participants what they heard. Explain that they already know how to listen, but usually do not. This exercise will help them listen more attentively, not only as focus group moderators but also as listeners in their everyday lives.

Do an exercise. Conclude it by distributing the skill overview to the participants. Leave enough time for them to read the overview and to ask whether there are any questions about the skill or using it to moderate focus groups.

Option 1 Hot Topic (approximately 60 minutes)

- 1 Have the group pick a topic that everyone seems to have an opinion on, such as a local political issue.
- 2 Take the group members to a quiet space and let them get comfortable. Explain that you would like them to talk about the hot topic. This is not a focus group at all. It is just a discussion similar to one that people have at a party. Group members should listen to each other and express their own opinions on the topic. Everyone should talk at least once, but no more than twice.
- 3 After 20 minutes, stop the discussion and bring everyone back to the workshop room.
- 4 Discuss the difference between hearing and inferring. Write the following questions on a flipchart or large sheet of paper and ask one member of the group to record the answers.

- What did you hear during our hot topic discussion?

*E.g., I heard Jaime say, 'Voting is a waste of time
No one I ever vote for wins.'*

- When no one has anything to add, ask, "What did you infer from the hot topic discussion?"

*E.g., I inferred that Jaime really does believe in
voting because of the tone of his voice and because
all his comments suggest he votes whenever he can.*

- When no one has anything to add, ask the group to “correct” what others said, that is, come to agreement about what was actually said. Ask people to react to what was inferred.

E.g., Jaime agrees he does believe in voting and was being sarcastic with his first comment.

- Ask the group to complete the sentence, “I could have listened better during this discussion if _____”

E.g., I wasn't thinking about my own opinion at the same time.

- 5 Ask everyone to review pointers for effective listening. According to your own cultural tradition, revise the list so that everyone agrees these are appropriate pointers to keep in mind when trying to listen well.

Option 2 Two Talkers and a Listener (approximately 45 minutes)

- 1 For this exercise, review and discuss the skill overview.
- 2 Select three hot topics as a group and write them on a large sheet of paper or a flipchart.
- 3 Divide the group into groups of three. Each member of each group will take a turn as the listener.
 - Start with the first hot topic on the list.
 - Two group members should talk about this topic, and the listener should try to listen effectively.
- 4 After 10 minutes, ask each group to stop. Then take five minutes to discuss what was said in their small groups.
 - Have the listener report to the talkers.

What I heard was _____

What I inferred was _____
 - Have the talkers answer the following questions.

Do you think you were heard correctly?

Do you think the listener inferred accurately?

What could the listener have done to be more effective?

Repeat with two other topics so everyone has a turn as a listener.

Option 3 The Radio (approximately 10 to 30 minutes)

- 1 Give everyone a piece of paper. Play the radio for two minutes. Ask group members to take two minutes to write everything they heard. Have them compare notes to see what they missed and others heard.
- 2 Ask participants to take two minutes to write what they inferred. Have the group members compare what they inferred, how the inferences differed, and what caused them to infer what they did.
- 3 Discuss why moderators need to be aware of what they actually hear and what they infer from what they hear.

Asking Questions With Care

OVERVIEW

ASKING QUESTIONS WITH CARE

SKILL

Based on what they hear and see, the moderator's main role is to ask appropriate questions at the right time. The context in which a question is asked and how it is phrased shape how it is answered. There are many different ways of asking questions. Here are some of most common.

Open-Ended Questions

- They invite responses of more than one word
- They allow for a wide range of responses

Questions that begin with "What," "How," "Who," "List what you think," "Can you tell me," "Can you explain how," "How do you feel about," "Tell me more about," "What can you add to that," or "Where" are open-ended questions. They are used throughout the four stages of moderating to learn about participants' feelings, actions, reactions, and knowledge. "How do you feel about family planning?" and "Where do you think most women hear about the health clinic?" are examples of open-ended questions. The first question is very broad. This is good during an initial, in-depth discussion. The second question sets some limits on the responses without directing answers. This is good when the moderator wants to learn more about an issue of interest.

Closed Questions

- They can be answered with very short responses (e.g., age, color, date, yes, no)
- They do not encourage respondents to elaborate on a topic

Closed questions may begin with phrases such as "To what extent," "How much," or "How many." They are used to get background information from participants during the introduction phase or when the moderator wants brief responses or clarification (e.g., "How many children do you have?" or "How much do you think people should pay for this service?")

Yes/No Questions

- These closed questions can only be answered by the words yes or no

Questions that can be answered by yes or no are generally not useful because they give a moderator very little insight into how a person feels. They can actually be misleading. Such questions as "Did you understand the messages?" should usually be turned into open questions such as "What are the messages trying to tell you?"

Two Questions in One

- They ask respondents to consider or react to two things at one time
- They should be turned into two clear questions with time for the respondent to consider each
- They are not appropriate during any stage of focus group discussion moderation

Two questions in one confuse and disturb participants (e.g., how do you feel about family planning and how does your husband feel?) They elicit responses that are difficult to analyze

Forced and Leading Questions

- They direct the respondent toward a particular response
- They introduce assumptions that respondents may not have considered
- They should never be used when conducting research
- They are not appropriate during any stage of focus group discussion moderation

Forced and leading questions limit the scope of responses to the moderator's bias and can cause valuable information to go undiscovered. Forced questions predetermine how a participant can respond. The question, "do you breastfeed on demand or only at certain times each day?", pushes the participant to say one or the other, even if she does not breastfeed. It implies that the moderator believes the participants should breastfeed, which may make them feel there is a "right" answer to questions.

A leading question would be, "Don't you think it is good to breastfeed your new baby?" This question implies that the moderator places some value on breastfeeding. This may lead the respondent to say they think breastfeeding is good even though they may not because they want to please the moderator. A better way to ask this question is, "What do you think about breastfeeding a new baby?"

Leading questions can be more subtle, but are always poor practice. For example, if participants in a focus group do not mention that parents do not bring their children in for vaccinations, it would be inappropriate for the moderator to ask, "Why don't you bring your children to get vaccinated?" This question assumes that parents do not bring their children in for vaccinations and may suppress information about why some parents do not have their children vaccinated.

How Moderators Use This Skill

Questions must be worded and ordered carefully to get the insight you need for your research. It is important to ask questions that will stimulate rather than discourage discussion. Moderators should carefully test and revise the questions in the topic guide to make sure that questions are as open as possible. Closed questions are used only to limit the range of responses. Two in one, leading or forced questions should not be used. Moderators should never ask, "Why?" or any questions that imply they know what the answer will or should be.

Before the group meets, the moderator prepares the questions and probes for the topic guide. It is important to keep them as broad as possible to stimulate discussion. The moderator and note taker then review the questions and discuss possible responses to make sure that questions are as open and non-leading as possible. They use closed questions only when they want to limit the range of responses as, for example, in probing. They check to be sure they have no "why" questions or any questions that imply what the answers should be.

GROUP EXERCISES

Do Exercise 1 before Exercise 2. Introduce both exercises by explaining to participants that they will learn and practice an important moderator skill: asking questions with care. During the exercise participants will see that the way questions are asked affects how people answer them. They will also decide whether and how different types of questions can be used by focus group moderators.

Conclude the exercise by asking participants if they have used this skill to moderate focus groups. If they have not, ask them to suggest ways they could use it. Distribute the overview of the skill to the participants. Leave enough time for them to read it and to answer any questions they may have about use of the skill in moderating focus groups.

Exercise 1 Effective and Ineffective Questions (approximately 60 minutes)

- 1 Divide the group into two teams
- 2 Put cards with the different types of questions into a box, basket, or pile in the front of the room. Below are some examples.

WARNING The type of questions should not appear on the cards

How many children do you have? [Closed question]

What have you heard about family planning? [Open question]

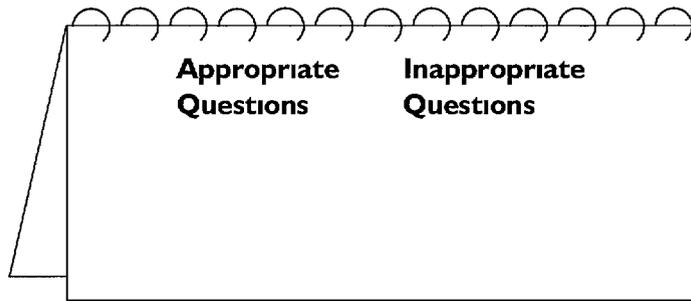
Don't you think you should breastfeed your new baby? [Leading question]

How do you feel about the supervision you get and how could it be better? [Two questions in one]

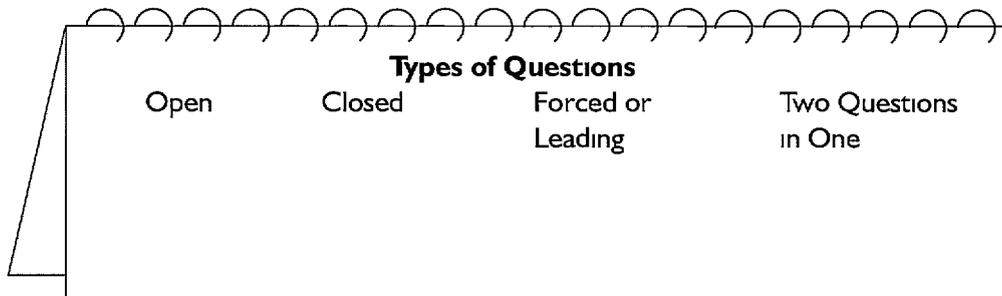
Did you go to the reading class? [Closed question]

Do you use condoms with all your partners or just your main partner? [Forced question]

- 3 Continue to make up cards until you have at least two examples of each type of question. Remember not to mark what type of question it is on the card.
- 4 Have each participant select a card.
- 5 Divide a sheet of flipchart paper in half and label the columns: Appropriate Questions and Inappropriate Questions.



- 6 Have participants place the cards in the column that best describes the question
- 7 Explain that skilled moderators think about the wording of questions when they write a topic guide. They often check themselves when asking questions to make sure the way they word a question will encourage honest and open responses
- 8 Review the five most common types of questions and write them on a flip chart. Explain when each type of question should or should not be used. Refer to the skill overview to explain which types of questions are considered appropriate and when they are considered inappropriate



- 9 Have the group members move their cards from the last flipchart to the new flipchart to illustrate different types of questions. Compare what they thought was appropriate or inappropriate with what they think now

Exercise 2 Creating Questions of Different Types (approximately 30 minutes)

- 1 Divide the group into teams. Briefly describe the different types of questions. Ask the teams to write two examples of each type of question. Encourage them to think about their research topic when formulating their questions. When they are finished, ask two volunteers from one team to read their questions. For example, two people from one team read their forced questions. Have another team decide whether the question does or does not reflect the category it was intended to represent (e.g., "Is the sample question really a forced question?") If the question was stated correctly, the team gets a point

- 2 If the question does not reflect the category it was intended to represent (e g , it was supposed to be a forced question but is really a closed question), then ask the team who wrote the question to rephrase it to fit the intended category
- 3 Before moving on to the next example, ask if the question that was just presented is appropriate to use during a focus group and if it can be phrased in a more effective manner Ask the other team to try to rephrase the question to make it more appropriate and/or effective (e g , "Don't you think you should breastfeed your baby?" could become "How do you feel about breastfeeding your baby?")
- 4 Continue having the teams read, comment on, and rephrase questions until all questions have been read Invite group members to think about their own experience in asking and responding to questions Ask what else affects how people answer questions For example, someone might point out that the tone of voice and inflection can make a difference in the way a question is perceived

Probing for More

OVERVIEW

Probing is a way to get additional information or to better understand what someone has said. A probe can be a question, statement, or moment of silence.

Reasons to Probe

- To learn more about underlying meanings or feelings

E g , Jenny, when we were discussing the clinic staff, you said they were rude. I would like to hear more about that.

- To clarify a specific word in a participant's answer

E g , I am not familiar with the term, 'sexing up'.

- To get more information about a behavior or process

E g , So how do you prepare the dish once you have all those ingredients?

- To finish an incomplete thought or statement

E g , Martha, you started to say that you tried ORS once but

- To find out the basis for a participant's previous answer

E g , answer: It works.

Respond to the statement by using a probe.
How can you tell that it works?

Some Ways to Probe

- Remain silent to allow participants time to amplify what they said
- Restate what the participant has just said
- Repeat the participant's words as a question

E g , It's good?

**PROBING
FOR
MORE**

SKILL

- Gently confront the participant to clarify a position

E g , I'm a little confused Earlier I thought you said but now I'm hearing

- Use key word probes in response to participant's statements

E g , It's good What about it is good?

It would be convenient In what way would it be convenient?

- Use the third person technique

E g , You seem to feel strongly about this How do you think others might feel about it?

- Use questions that begin with "what" or "how" (open questions) because they invite an in-depth response and demand thought

Things to Avoid

- Avoid questions that begin with "do you" or "are you" because they are closed questions which generally provide very little information In some cases, however, they can help elicit honest, personal reflections about specific research topics (e g , so, Julio, do you agree with what the doctor told you?)
- Avoid questions that begin with "why" because they can put a participant on the defensive Usually the question can be restated using "what" in the place of "why" Sometimes it is impossible to avoid using "why" In this case, you should be careful to use the word in a nonjudgmental tone and manner
- Avoid too much probing on the same issue or statement because this may make a person feel pushed
- Avoid judgmental tones that make a person feel that you are challenging his or her truthfulness or logic

How Moderators Use This Skill

Probing is often the key to (1) learning something new from a focus group, (2) being inspired by a focus group, and (3) having a group truly change the moderator's perspective on an issue Without probing, even a long and active focus group discussion can generate superficial and predictable findings One of the great advantages of this type of research over structured interviews or surveys is that the moderator has the opportunity to probe He or she can go beyond a participant's initial response to help achieve the research objectives Although possible probes on certain issues should be

built into the topic guide under main questions, probes cannot be entirely planned. This is because you never really know what interesting and relevant issues will be raised by participants! With practice in moderating groups, you will become better at knowing not only how to probe but, more importantly, when to probe. That is what good moderating is all about.

Examples of Probing Questions and Statements

- Can you tell me more about that?
- What about that?
- What do you mean by that?
- What makes you feel that way?
- Can you think of an example of that?
- I would like to know more about your thinking on that issue.
- I am not sure I understand how you are using the word.
- What are some of your reasons for liking it?
- What about it do you like?
- What does the message say for you?
- What does it say to you personally?
- What were you thinking as you were watching it?
- What stood out in your mind? What other things made an impression?
- You started to say something about ?
- You mentioned something about ?
- Did you get any new insights about ? from the ?
- What words would you use to describe ?

GROUP EXERCISES

Introduce the exercise by explaining to participants that they will learn and practice an important moderator skill—probing effectively. Briefly describe the skill. Explain that during the exercise they will get a better idea of how to get further meaning and clarity without offending or threatening participants.

Do each exercise. Distribute the skill overview to participants. Give them time to read it and answer any questions they may have about the use of the skill to moderate focus groups.

Exercise 1 What Have I Done? (approximately 45 minutes)

1. Seat the group in a large circle in chairs or on the floor and explain that for 15 minutes you are going to interview them separately about _____ (a topic that the group has in common, such as living in the same town). Ask everyone to pay attention to the process, that is, what you are doing and saying as the interviewer.

2. Face someone in the group. Ask a general question about the topic you have chosen and gradually begin to probe the participant's responses by using questions and other techniques suggested in the skill overview. Probe well, but make some mistakes (e.g., use "why", be aggressive). After five minutes, face someone else and interview him or her in the same way.

3. Ask the interviewees how they felt when you interviewed them?

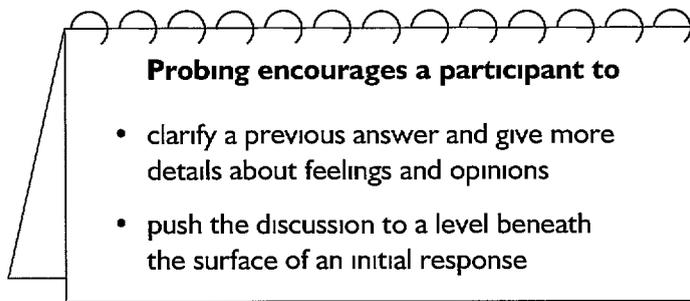
Ask the whole group

- What did you notice about my actions and questions?
- What did you notice about the kind of information shared during the group interview?

Ask someone to write group members' comments on a large sheet of paper.

4. Explain that what you were doing is called probing, which is useful for interviewers and focus group moderators. The challenge in probing is to get depth and clarity without making a person talking feel uncomfortable. Ask participants what the purpose of probing is. Expand on their answers.

5. Use a flip chart or large sheet of paper with the following information



- 6 Ask group members to think again about the kinds of questions and techniques you used as the interviewer. From what they have seen, ask them what are effective ways to probe and what are ineffective ways to probe.

Exercise 2 Testing It Out (approximately 45 minutes)

This exercise should be done only after completing Exercise 1.

- 1 Ask group members to stand in a circle with the examples of probes from the skill overview.
- 2 Designate one member of the group to make a statement. Explain that the person to the designated member's right will offer one possible probe (or pass). The next person will offer another possible probe (a question or a statement or silence), and so on until no one else wants to suggest a good probe for that statement.
- 3 Give the designated member a card with a statement on it from the list shown below (or one of your own invention).

Statements To Elicit Probing

- Children should not be immunized
 - Children should not be given fluids when they are sick
 - Iodized salt prevents goiter
 - The pill causes cancer
 - It is bad to drink alcohol when you are pregnant
- 4 Move around the group clockwise. The last person to offer a good probe will begin the next round with a new statement. Continue through five rounds or until you feel the group is ready to move on to discussing the exercise.
 - 5 After each round, point out ways to make the suggested probes more effective (see the skill overview). E.g., Suggest that participants restate "why" probes.
 - 6 At the end of all rounds, discuss the exercise. Ask what questions or techniques seemed to work best and whether there are any questions or techniques that should be avoided.

Using Simple Language

OVERVIEW

When asking questions or carrying on a discussion during a focus group session, it is important to use vocabulary appropriate to the background and level of expertise of the participants. Technical terms should be included only if the participants are already comfortable with them.

It is common for professionals in any field to use terminology that the general public does not understand. Often they use this terminology to be technically correct. Using language that is too formal or technical, however, can intimidate participants in a focus group discussion and make you seem different from and more expert than they are.

It is also important to ask participants what terms they use rather than suggesting a "correct" term. Research has shown, for example, that people have many terms for diarrhea, each with distinct (and important) symptoms and causes. Trying to lump all these perceived differences under one technically correct term would prevent valuable insights.

How Moderators Use This Skill

Complex language is not appropriate when communicating with participants. It is important to match your questions or information to the vocabulary of group members. To make sure your information is clear:

- use short words and sentences
- use words that the participants understand and
- listen and ask for terms they use

Focus group discussions are often used to help design materials for the public. As moderators begin to adopt "the language of the people" and check to make sure they are using the terms correctly, they identify the language to use in their materials.

GROUP EXERCISE

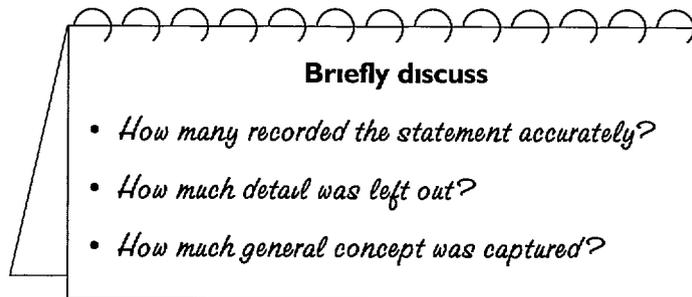
Exercise 1 Simplify, Simplify (approximately 45 minutes)

- 1 Introduce the exercise by briefly describing the skill Explain that in this exercise participants will consider the advantages of simple language They will practice using simple language so that they can do this as focus group moderators
- 2 Stand before the group and read the following statement once

The medical risks of pregnancy are greater in adolescent women than in women over 20 years of age Problems more likely to occur are prematurity, low-birth-weight babies, maternal and infant mortality, anemia, and preeclampsia

Ask everyone in the group to write what you have just read When they have finished, ask a few participants to restate what they have understood from the statement

- 3 Use a flipchart or large sheet of paper to guide a discussion of the following



- 4 Now read the following statement

Girls under 20 suffer more health risks during pregnancy There is a greater chance than with older women that a teenage mother or her baby will become sick or die

Consider the following

- What do you understand from this version of the statement?
- How is this version different from the first?
- What in the wording of the first statement makes it hard to understand?

- 5 Write the following sample question, which includes technical terms, on the flipchart

What is the reaction of females in this region to anti-malarial chemoprophylaxis during pregnancy?

Ask participants to write how they would rephrase the question so that it is clear to focus group participants who do not have medical training (e.g., how do women in this region feel about taking medicine to prevent malaria when they are pregnant?)

Ask group members to talk about what they have written

- 6 Discuss why it is important to word questions and comments in language appropriate to the participants' own language

Ask the participants to give examples from their own work where complex words make a simple point seem difficult

- 7 Ask how using simpler language would strengthen focus group moderating

Some examples include the following

- Avoiding misunderstanding
- Establishing "approachability"
- Avoiding having a focus group moderator viewed as an expert, which may inhibit participants

Discuss examples of the above

- 8 Close by distributing the overview of the skill to the participants. Give them time to read it and answer any questions they may have about the use of the skill to moderate focus groups

Becoming Objective

OVERVIEW

The moderator's personal values may differ from those of the participants. To deal with these differing values, it helps to remember that

- the backgrounds and experiences of individuals influence their perceptions, values, and belief systems
- when people understand their own values, they can better appreciate and respect those of others

Focus group moderators must be aware that their values may influence the way they communicate. They should ensure that they do not impose their beliefs on participants. It is important to show respect for the values of others as they emerge in focus group discussions. For issues involving values, there are no right or wrong answers.

How Moderators Use this Skill

Moderators' personal feelings or values about the research topic or participants can influence how they conduct focus group discussions. Their experience with and attitude toward the topic may influence how they present information. They should not let participants know through words or expressions how they feel about a topic or what participants are saying. It is important that they appear objective in how they present information and ask questions.

**BECOMING
OBJECTIVE**

SKILL

GROUP EXERCISE

Exercise 1 What I Feel and Why (approximately 60 minutes)

- 1 Introduce the exercise by explaining to participants that they will (1) explore their value systems, (2) discuss beliefs contrary to their own values, (3) experience the difficulty in expressing their values to others, and (4) better understand how personal belief systems influence all of us
- 2 Briefly describe the skill Ask how participants have used this skill to moderate focus groups or how they plan to use this skill Use the information in the overview to expand on what they say
- 3 Ask everyone to stand Explain that they will be "taking a stand" on certain issues Ask them to listen as you read one of the following statements (or ones you have prepared based on your research topic) written on the flipchart As they listen, they should think about how they feel about the statement and decide whether they agree with it or not Ask those who agree with a statement you have just read to stand in one designated area Ask those who disagree to stand in another area Those who are not sure should stand between the two groups
- 4 Read the following statements one at a time
 - Family planning is against our traditions
 - A mother knows what is best for her child
 - Women should obey their husbands
 - People know only what you tell them
 - You cannot avoid death from cholera if it is your time to go
 - There is no such thing as too many people
 - Women should breastfeed only in the home
- 5 After each statement, ask the members of each group to discuss among themselves why they agree or disagree with the statement Each group should select a spokesperson After five minutes, have the spokesperson for the "agree" group report to the others why they agree Then ask the spokesperson from the "disagree" group to do the same

If there is an "undecided group," give its members the opportunity to move into one of the other two groups at this point
- 6 While the groups are still in their separate locations, ask for a volunteer of the "agree" group to defend the opposing position Then ask a member of the "disagree" group to defend the opposing position

- 7 Bring the groups back together Ask the participants to reflect on and discuss the following
- Were you surprised by your own answers? By those of other participants?
 - What are some of the reasons for different feelings among the group?
 - Did the reactions of others make you feel uncomfortable about expressing your view or make you want to change your position? What points made during the discussion led the “undecideds” to adopt a position?
 - How did you feel when you had to defend the opposite point of view?
- 8 Continue with other statements until you feel the group members have learned to reflect on what they feel and why
- 9 Close by distributing the skill overview to the participants Allow the participants time to read the material and answer any questions they may have about use of the skill to moderate focus groups

Encouraging Participants To Interact

OVERVIEW

The amount of time the moderator should spend talking in the focus group varies during each of the four stages of the group session, as described in Step Four. As the discussion moves forward through the four stages, the moderator should encourage the participants to do most of the talking until the concluding stage.

Focus group research is more likely to find valid information when the participants speak and respond to one another instead of directing their comments to the moderator. A purpose of this training is to provide the skills that enable you to create this essential dynamic. Because participants see the moderator as being in charge and more knowledgeable about the process and the subject, they will tend to look to the moderator for permission to speak and approval for speaking. The skills that encourage a more relaxed and natural discussion among participants are key to success with focus group research. Do not, however, let participants engage in private, parallel conversations at the same time that someone else is talking.

How Moderators Use this Skill

One of the most challenging tasks for the moderator is to create and encourage the discussion among participants that should take place during the in-depth stage. It is critical to encourage discussion because this is when some of the richest data are found and when unexpected issues usually surface.

Some techniques to help encourage discussion among participants are

- Be careful not to interrupt a discussion among participants the first few times they begin to talk to one another. Even if the initial discussions drift away from the research topic, it is better to let them continue for a few minutes so that the participants get the idea that they may talk to each other. Once discussion in the group gets going, however, you should interrupt the discussion if participants are getting off the subject.
- Restate the rule (which should be mentioned during the introduction) that participants do not have to wait for the moderator to invite them to speak. They should feel free to respond to one another. The moderator is interested in hearing all opinions.
- Refer questions to the group.

E.g., What do you think about what John just said?

- Use your body language to give someone “permission” to speak
This is especially important if it appears as though a person wants to say something about what someone else has said

E g , You can look at the person, subtly tilt your head, and raise an eyebrow in a “questioning” gesture

Once you are comfortable in using these techniques effectively, you can try some of the following more challenging techniques

- Use silence to your advantage Do not be intimidated if no one is talking Silence can make participants talkative as they feel compelled to fill the void created by the absence of discussion
- Use incomplete statements

E g , I don’t know, maybe breastfeeding isn’t so , and wait for responses

- Use controversial or erroneous statements and wait for responses
You might preface these with “some people say that ”

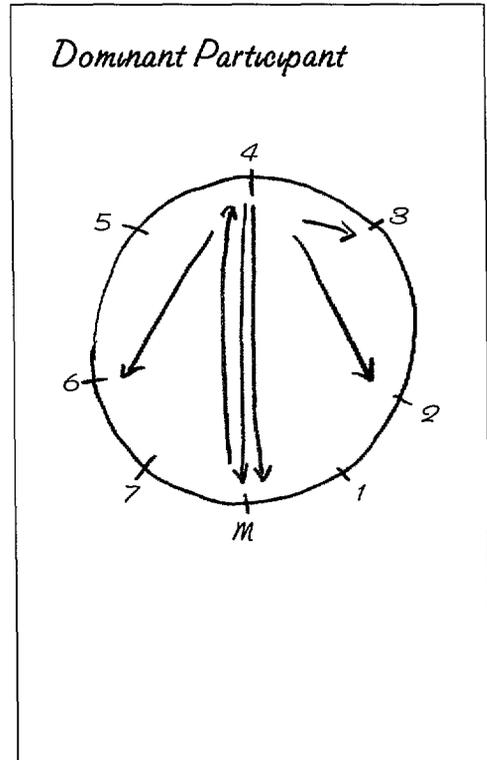
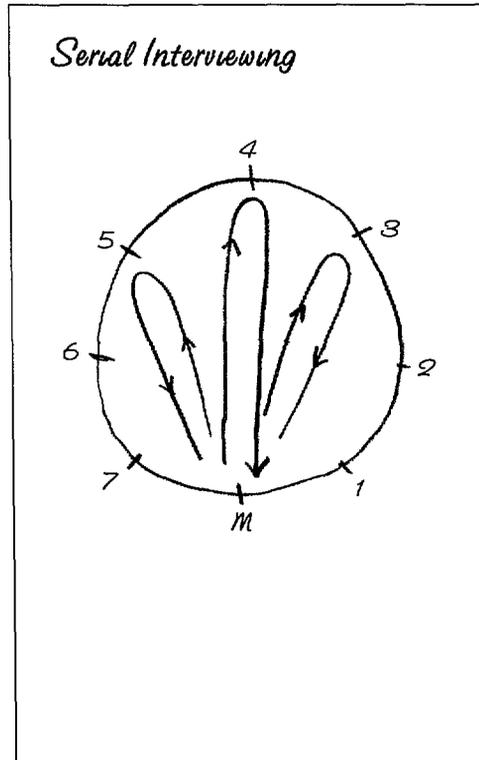
E g , Some people say that breastfeeding causes mothers to resent their babies

- Practice a form of sophisticated naivete

E g , Oh, I didn’t know that Can you tell me more about it?

A skilled moderator may want to review more advanced techniques for creating group discussion presented in the Handbook on page 32

Visualize the pattern of conversation in your focus group discussions to see if they reflect the patterns described in Step Four. If your pattern resembles the two illustrations below, you have not achieved a true group discussion. In the first, you have fallen into serial interviewing and in the second, one person has dominated the discussion.



GROUP EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below and prepare the materials you will need, including flipcharts and copies of the skill overview for participants. The exercises teach different skills. When possible, it will be helpful to complete all the exercises.

To introduce the exercise, distribute the overview and give participants 10 minutes to read it. Then allow 10 minutes for review and questions.

Explain to participants that the purpose of the exercise is to become more aware of how much a moderator or a participant can dominate a discussion. The following exercise demonstrates ways to avoid this by stimulating more participatory discussion.

Do the exercise. Close by looking again at the skill overview. Give participants time to read it and edit any of the techniques for sparking group discussion that they think they need to change for the culture in which they will be doing their research.

Exercise 1 Sparking Conversation (approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes)

1. Before the session, prepare cards with the sample topics and questions for this exercise. You could also create new cards with general topics and questions. See examples below.

CARD 1
Topic <i>Working Women</i>
Questions
What do you think about having women in the workplace?
What impact does it have on the family when women work?
What advantages are there to having women doing paid work?

CARD 2
Topic <i>Difficulties in Moderating Focus Groups</i>
Questions
What do you find (or expect) to be the most difficult thing about moderating a focus group discussion?
What do you find (or expect) to be the easiest thing about moderating a focus group discussion?
What do you (or would you do) to mentally prepare yourself for leading a focus group discussion?
How would you describe leading a focus group discussion to a colleague?

ENCOURAGING PARTICIPANTS TO INTERACT

EXERCISES

CARD 3

Topic Training

Questions

- What do you think about the training?
- How would you have structured the training differently?
- What do you think about the training site?
- What do you think about the food at the training?

CARD 4

Topic Pollution

Questions

- How has pollution affected our country?
- What can we do to reduce pollution?
- How can we influence our politicians to make changes that will reduce pollution?
- What can we teach our children that will help them reduce/control pollution?

CARD 5

Topic Tourism

Questions

- What is the impact of tourism on our country?
- What can we do to encourage tourism?
- What do we do to discourage tourism?
- What do we want tourism to be like in our country in the year 2000?

CARD 6

Topic Family Planning

Questions

- What is family planning?
- What are the advantages of family planning?
- What are the disadvantages of it?
- What should our children be taught about it?

CARD 7

Topic *Family*

Questions

What is the biggest influence on families today in our country?

What do we think families will be like when our children (or grandchildren) start having their own families?

How can we make our families stronger in the future?

What role should the government play in influencing our families?

CARD 8

Topic *Work*

Questions

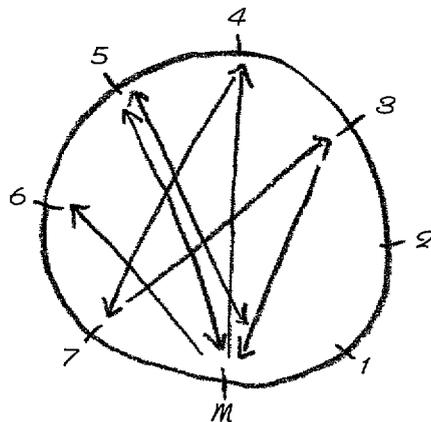
What do you think about your job?

What would you change about your job?

What would you like your job to be like in 10 years?

What do your family and friends think about your work?

- 2 Put cards into a container and ask the participants to each select a card. Tell them not to share the contents of their card with other participants.
- 3 Seat everyone in a circle. Explain to participants that they will have 10 minutes to lead a discussion based on the topic and questions on their card. Remind them that the moderator needs to get participants to talk with each other and not just with the moderator. If the moderator uses up the questions on his or her card, he or she needs to ask additional probing, open-ended questions.
- 4 During each discussion, make a diagram of the group by drawing a circle and putting in a number for each participant and the moderator. Each time the moderator or a participant speaks, ask someone to draw a line on the diagram.



5 After each discussion, briefly consider the following

- Using the diagram, determine if a discussion took place between all participants? Did anyone dominate the discussion? Who? Why?
- What did the moderator do that encouraged group discussion?
- What did the moderator do that inhibited group discussion?
- Did the moderator talk too much? If so, what could she or he have done to talk less?

Exercise 2 Culturally Appropriate Ways To Encourage Groups To Talk
(approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes)

- 1 Divide the participants into two groups and assign the first four questions listed below to one group and the second four questions to the second group. Give each group 40 minutes to discuss their questions.
- 2 The groups should answer these questions in a culturally appropriate manner. The goal is to create a list of actions that will help the moderator to facilitate group interaction. Each group should write its list of recommendations on a large sheet of paper.
 - What kind of signals can the moderator send using **body language** to encourage the conversation? (E.g., in some cultures it is considered confrontational to look someone in the eye, but in other cultures it is considered rude or untrustworthy not to look a person in the eye during direct conversation.)
 - Are there any rules of **social etiquette** that can help or hinder a moderator? (In some countries it is socially unacceptable for a younger person to interrupt an elder. It would therefore be necessary for the moderator to be of the same age as or older than the participants.)
 - What culturally appropriate signals can the moderator give to show **unconditional regard and acceptance** of the group's participants?
 - What can the moderator do to appear **objective**?
 - How can the moderator **interrupt** a participant without appearing rude?
 - What can a moderator do to **encourage someone who is shy to talk**?
 - What can a moderator do when the group **wanders off the subject**?
 - Discuss how **conflict** is managed in a group situation in your culture. What can the moderator do to encourage the expression of conflicting views?

- 3 Give the first group 10 minutes to present its recommendations and allow 10 minutes for questions and further suggestions. Repeat the process for the second group. Summarize the key points that emerge.

Exercise 3 Round Robin Practice (approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes)

- 1 Select a topic guide drafted by one of the participants. Have him or her describe the focus group objectives (Step One) and participant profile (Step Two). Explain that you will use their guide for this exercise.
- 2 Arrange everyone in a circle for a mock focus group discussion. Ask one person to take the role of note taker for the entire practice. Explain that all others will have an estimated five minutes to take a turn as moderator. Each should pick up where the last one left off and try to carry the thread of discussion. Urge them all to think ahead. ("What will happen if I ask this? Where will the discussion go? Is that what I want?")
- 3 Explain to those who are not moderating that they should play the role of focus group participants, responding as they think someone would who fits the participant profile.
- 4 Begin with one moderator and progress through the topic guide.

As facilitator, you should do the following

- Keep time. After five minutes, ask each moderator to pass the guide to a neighbor.
 - Pause after each of the four stages of the topic guide for group members to reflect on the process and provide feedback to each other on moderation skills and what is happening in the group.
 - Call attention to specific moments at which the moderator might have been more effective by taking a different approach.
- 5 After the practice, have group members complete a collective evaluation form and discuss which skills they need to improve. Look specifically at common mistakes made by new moderators (e.g., serial interviewing, allowing the group to wander, missing opportunities for probes, talking too much).

Exercise 4 Handling Problem Situations (approximately 1 hour, 15 minutes)

- 1 Before the session, prepare cards from the information below. Each card should describe a different problem participant. (Do not include the Strategy on the cards.)
- 2 Fold the cards to hide the information. Number the cards on the outside and distribute them among participants.
- 3 Ask participants to remember their own numbers, open the card, and silently read the description of the types of participants they will be during the group discussion. Explain that they should assume the roles described on the cards only when their own numbers are called. They should not reveal what roles they will play.
- 4 Organize the group for another practice focus group discussion. (You may want to use another draft topic guide created by participants earlier in the workshop.) Have one person volunteer to start as moderator.
- 5 As the group moves from stage one (introduction) to stage two (rapport building), call out "card number 1." Allow the moderator to try to handle this "problem participant."

- Pause after about five minutes to do the following:

Ask the moderator, "How did this problem participant make you feel?"

Ask the group the same question and "What did the moderator do to deal with this participant?"

Ask cardholder 1, "What problem behavior is suggested on your card?"

Ask the group, "How else could a moderator deal with this problem?"

- Ask cardholder 1 to become the moderator and resume the practice focus group discussion. Call out card number 2 and continue the process until all problem situations have been explored.
- Distribute copies of Special Participant Problems and review the suggested strategies.

Special Participant Problems * (for use with Exercise 4)

*Adapted from the Handbook
pages 48-50*

The dominating participant This person attempts to take over the group, that is, he or she initiates the conversations, defends his or her position, seeks to influence others and must have the last word

Strategy I

Avoid eye contact or turn your body away from the dominating participant. Call on other members of the group by name. If necessary, politely tell the dominating participant that although his or her thoughts are very interesting, you would like to have the ideas of other group members as well.

Strategy II

On occasion it may be necessary to ask a dominating participant to leave the group. This can be done by explaining to the participant that "because you know so much about _____, we would like you to complete a more detailed, in-depth questionnaire on the subject." A "diversionary" questionnaire can then be administered to the dominant group member outside of the group room.

The expert participant This is a special variety of dominating participant. Even if he or she is not attempting to lead the group, others will defer to him or her and opinions will be stifled.

Strategy

Determine if the participant is a genuine expert or a pseudo-expert. If genuine, remind him or her that all comments are important and that others should be permitted to contribute. Ask the expert to respond only after others have been heard. It may also help to preface issues with phrases such as, "I know John is probably aware of..."

If the participant is a pseudo-expert, ask other group members to comment on his or her responses. It may even be necessary to be forceful and challenge him or her as much as the group will tolerate.

The timid participant This person is hesitant to speak at all, may be shy or anxious about the group situation, or may not feel his or her opinions are worthwhile.

Strategy

Use eye contact to pull the timid group member into the discussion and to communicate interest in what he or she has to say. Observe the timid member closely to see when he or she is ready to speak. If necessary, find an easy, nonthreatening question and encourage a direct response. If participant becomes too ill at ease, continue the discussion with other participants and come back to him or her later.

The verbose participant This person goes on and on, seemingly without end or purpose. He or she may be a compulsive talker or may be excessively nervous.

Strategy

Be more directive. Use probes to request specificity and concreteness. Direct the participant back to the topic at hand. It may be necessary to politely interrupt him or her. Remind the participant of the many topics you need to cover in a limited time frame. Do all of this carefully without alienating the participant.

The irrelevant participant This person makes comments that do not relate to the topic and can steer the group off the subject. He or she may be nervous or simply a poor listener.

Strategy

Try restating or paraphrasing the question. Consider coming back to the question later.

The incomplete participant This person gives partial answers or even nonresponses, such as "I don't know." These participants are especially frustrating. Their behavior often comes from lack of confidence or unusually high anxiety.

Strategy

Work on strengthening rapport early in the discussion to prevent this from happening throughout the group. Try to get elaboration through restatement. Use other probing techniques.

The confused participant This person appears confused or overwhelmed during the group. He or she communicates this either verbally or nonverbally.

Strategy

Acknowledge the situation ("You seem confused.") Try to rephrase the question or, perhaps, provide an example. Attempt to ask the question again later in the interview.

The overly positive participant This person is glowingly positive in all responses. He or she may want to please you by telling you what he or she thinks you want to hear.

Strategy

Remind the participant of what he or she has been told during the warm-up that you want to hear both positives and negatives. Try playing a trouble maker ("I have heard some people say just the opposite.") Try third-person language ("What about other people who you know? How do you think they would feel?")

The negative participant This person is negative in all responses. He or she may be using this interview to vent years of frustration and hostility. He or she may be determined not to tell you any favorable ideas or information.

Strategy

Be careful. Avoid reacting defensively. Try to defuse the participant by acknowledging his or her hostility or negativism ("You seem to be angry about this. That's okay, because I want to find out how you really feel.") Try probing in the third person.

The hostile participant This person "attacks" the moderator personally.

Strategy

Again, use care. Try to defuse the participant by acknowledging the situation. Do not react defensively! Try a short period of silence. Put the onus on him or her to explain the reasons for the attack.

The disrupting participant This person disrupts the equilibrium of the conversation. The participant may state that another group member's ideas are wrong or that the moderator's questions are stupid.

Strategy

Attempt to stabilize the discussion quickly. Ask other participants to comment on the disrupting participant's statement. (This may be dangerous if the disruptive statement embarrassed or angered someone.) Or present an alternative point of view: "that's interesting, but I have heard some people say that they feel..." This gives other participants the opportunity to choose one side or the other and continue the discussion.

The questioning participant This person continues to ask the moderator for his or her opinions and feelings.

Strategy

Plead lack of experience or expertise on the subject. If that is inappropriate, acknowledge the situation ("like anyone else, of course I have an opinion about this, but our purpose today is to find out how you feel.") If necessary, offer to give your opinions after the focus group discussion has ended. Another approach is to inquire about the thoughts and feelings that led to the participant's questions. Try restating the question to the group.

Focus Group Researcher's Credo

Focus Group Researcher's Credo

Now that you have completed this Guide please consider this credo. We hope you will want to put checks in each box!

I, as a focus group researcher, solemnly agree that I will always follow these principles

- Have Clear Research Objectives**
Without a clear list of research needs you cannot proceed because it is not possible to develop a truly effective topic guide or to analyze research findings properly. You may also make the mistake of doing focus group discussions when another research technique, such as quantitative research, is more appropriate.
- Maintain Objectivity at All Times**
If all parties involved in the focus group research are not objective, you may end up with personal preferences or vested interests. This will distort the research results and lead to less valid findings. If you approach the research with a bias, you may hear, evaluate, and elicit responses and conclusions that you want to hear. You need to be objective enough to discard completely or change dramatically the program, a product, creative materials, or any other subject matter that may be under investigation using focus group research.
- Have a Well Thought-out Topic Guide**
If you do not have a carefully thought-out topic guide that addresses the research needs and has been discussed thoroughly between the research team and the moderator, it is unlikely that the outcome of the focus group meet the research needs or prove truly valuable.
- Respect Your Participant Selection Criteria**
If you do not have the right participants or the appropriate participant mix, your results may be questionable. If the participants in the focus groups do not meet the selection criteria, you must be willing to disregard findings from that group.
- Use a Skilled Moderator**
Moderating is not easy. You need to find the best people to do the job and see that they are adequately trained. A beginning moderator can usually elicit acceptable research results, but a highly skilled moderator can make all the difference. You need to strive for that level of skill.
- Use Focus Groups Qualitatively, Not Quantitatively**
Focus groups should never be analyzed quantitatively (that is, by citing numbers or using percentages). You are looking for patterns and "whys," not numbers. However, focus group results may yield hypotheses or other insights that will lead you to undertake quantitative research for verification.

APPENDIX: WORKSHOP DESIGN



NOTES TO A WORKSHOP LEADER

How Should I Design the Workshop?

On the following pages, we suggest a complete four-day workshop. During the workshop, participants use the Guide, watch the Video, and refer to the Handbook. Read through the suggested design now to understand how it works. Watch the Video and read the Handbook.

Change the workshop design to fit your participants' needs and the available time you have, but make sure that the following things are accomplished:

- See that participants complete the worksheets in **A Step-by-Step Approach to Focus Group Research** in sequence from the beginning to the end. The steps build on each other so that participants can use what they learn in one step before moving to the next.
- Participants should understand the function of focus groups before they watch the Video.
- As you tailor the design to your participants, keep in mind that they should practice listening and probing before they practice moderating a whole focus group discussion. Also, they should practice moderating focus groups among themselves first and then practice in the community.
- Set up the practice focus group in the community before the workshop begins. Try to recruit focus group participants who match the description for one of the workshop attendees' research activities, if you know this ahead of time. If not, think of a possible focus group research activity that will be of interest to your workshop participants. Complete Steps One through Four for this activity and recruit the participants for it. The day before the practice, remind focus group participants and visit the practice locale.

What Equipment or Materials Will I Need?

For most of the workshop, you will need only a flipchart or large sheets of paper and markers. On the second day, you will need a television and a video cassette player to watch the Video. See the materials column on the workshop design for specific materials you will need to prepare or to photocopy for participants.

How Much Experience Do I Need?

To lead this workshop, you should feel comfortable encouraging people to learn from their own experiences and mistakes. You should know what focus groups are and how to moderate well. If you are not a skilled moderator, find one to help you during the workshop. Specifically, the skilled moderator can help to (1) give feedback on the worksheets and (2) co-facilitate some skill-building exercises (e.g., asking questions with care,

gentle but productive probing, and conducting round-robin practice) Most important, a skilled moderator can help by observing and discussing the practice focus group discussion in the community (Step Seven)

How Should I Organize the Group Exercises?

Before doing any of the exercises in the **Skills** Section, do the following

- Read through the skills descriptions and exercise options
- Pick the exercise best for your group
- Reestimate the time needed for each exercise according to the experience and size of the group
- Adapt and prepare materials for each exercise (They are shown and described within each exercise)
- Photocopy the skills descriptions for workshop participants, but—in most cases—wait until after the exercises to hand them out This way participants are more likely to learn through their own experience rather than from just what is written in the handouts
- Always make the link between the skill and the act of moderating a focus group discussion For example, show how probing can be used and misused in focus groups

SUGGESTED WORKSHOP DESIGN

DAY ONE

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Focus Groups The Big Picture	45 min	<p>Discuss each section of Before You Start, pages 2-6</p> <p>Explain that the purpose of this activity is to familiarize everyone with concepts they will explore over the next few days. Ask everyone to sit in a circle with the pile of cards in the middle.</p> <p>Read one of the words. Anyone can take the card and define it for the others. Ask "Does anyone disagree with that definition?" "Does anyone want to add to it?" Read the definition in the glossary. Discuss briefly and continue for each.</p> <p>Hand out copies of the Before You Start section and give participants time to read it on their own. Point out the references to the Handbook, which they can use to get more information throughout the workshop and in their future work.</p>	<p>Cards each with one word selected from the glossary</p> <p>Flipchart</p> <p>One copy per participant Before You Start</p> <p>One copy per participant <i>Handbook for Excellence in Focus Group Research</i></p>
Group Introduction	1 hr	<p>See Skill Finding Similarities and Differences, pages 74-77. Do Exercise 1. This exercise not only builds moderator skills but helps the group get to know each other.</p>	<p>One copy per participant. Overview page 74.</p>
Overview of the Workshop	30 min	<p>Explain that participants will prepare for their own focus group research, watch and discuss a video, complete exercises to build moderator skills, and practice among themselves.</p> <p>Discuss the workshop schedule and logistics. Explain the flow of sessions. Describe the practice focus group for day three that you have set up. Explain that one or two people will do the practice in the community while others observe and take notes.</p>	<p>An agenda for the four-day workshop on a sheet on the wall.</p>
Break	15 min		

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Building Moderator Skills	30 min	See Skill Recognizing Nonverbal Communication , pages 78-82 Select an exercise	One copy per participant Overview, other materials described in the exercise
The Training Video	1 hr	<p>Go through the Answers to Questions Raised in the Video part of the Guide Show the video once and get the group's overall reaction</p> <p>Questions you may want to pose to the group "How did the video make you feel about moderating?" or "What thoughts do you have now about using focus groups in your work?"</p> <p>Explain that participants will watch selected clips from the video and discuss each in detail later in the workshop Remind them that this is an example of using focus group discussions to pretest materials After lunch, they will look at other ways in which focus group discussions have been used and start to prepare their own research activity</p>	Video TV and video cassette player Flipchart
LUNCH			
Completion and discussion of Step One, Decide if Focus Groups are the Right Tool for You to Get the Information You Need, pages 10-14	1 hr	<p>Ask participants to think of an actual research activity they plan to do in the near future Then break into teams of one to four people who plan to work on the same research activity Explain that they will work through all preparation steps together over the next few days</p> <p>Ask them to read by teams the information and the example provided in Step One Complete the Step One worksheets As participants work, walk around and give guidance</p> <p>Have teams give each other feedback in pairs or by rotating from team to team</p> <p>Feedback question "Would you recommend we change our worksheets?" "If so, how?"</p>	One copy per team overview, example, and worksheets for Step One

DAY ONE

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Break	15 min		
Completion and discussion of Step Two, Determine Who Should Participate In Your Focus Group Research, pages 15-20	1 hr	As before, ask the group to work in teams	One copy per team overview, example, and worksheets for Step Two
Building Moderator Skills	1 hr	See Skill Asking Questions with Care , pages 89-94 Do Exercise 1	One copy per participant Overview other materials described in the exercise
Review and Wrap Up	15 min	Close with a discussion in pairs, "What were the three most valuable things you learned today about moderating focus groups?" In a large group ask each pair to share one response until all points have been stated	Flipchart

Participant Preparation for Day Two

Revise worksheets from Steps One and Two following suggestions of the group
Reading Handbook, sections 5 and 7

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Completion and discussion of Step Three, Drafting a Screening Questionnaire, pages 21-26	30 min	Continue to have the group work in project teams Help teams complete worksheets	One copy per team information, example, and worksheets for Step Three
Completion and discussion of Step Four, Develop A Topic Guide, pages 27-36	1 hr, 30 min	Continue to have groups work in teams Help them prepare worksheets	One copy per team information, example, and worksheet for Step Four
Building Moderator Skills	1 hr	See Skill Listening Effectively , pages 83-88 Choose an exercise	One copy per participant Overview, other materials described in the exercise
Building Moderator Skills	1 hr	See Skill Probing for More , pages 95-99 Select an exercise	One copy per participant Overview, other materials described in the exercise
LUNCH			
Training Video Answers to Questions Raised in the Video pages 57-69	45 min (5 -10 min per question, depending on size and experience of group)	Show clips that follow immediately on the videotape Do questions One through Five Pause after each and have one participant record everyone's comments to the question on a flipchart or large sheet of paper Encourage participants to use examples from their own experiences to explain and clarify what they say After each discussion question, enhance and correct their responses, using Answers to Questions , pages 57-69	Video, TV video cassette player Optional One copy per participant of Answers to Questions
Break	15 min		

DAY TWO

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Focus Group Practice Among Workshop Participants	1 hr, 10 min	See Skill Encouraging Participants To Interact , pages 106-117 Do at least one round-robin practice in which everyone gets a chance to moderate	Materials described in group exercise
Training Video Answers to Questions Raised in the Video	45 min	Discuss questions Six through Ten	Video TV video cassette player Optional One copy per participant of Answers to Questions
Revision of Step Four, Develop a Topic Guide for Your Research Needs	45 min	Based on the round-robin practice and the exercises on Questions and Probing, ask each team to revise its topic guide Encourage the teams to read the guide to several friends and colleagues to make further revisions before they do their own focus group research	Topic guides developed in Step Four, Skill Overviews on Asking Questions With Care Probing For More and Encouraging Participants To Interact (Participants should already have copies of this material)
Review and Wrap Up	15 min	With participants in pairs, review three things they learned about focus group discussions	

Participant's preparation for Day Three

Read Handbook, Sections 3 and 8

As a reminder, call those you recruited for the practice focus group (tomorrow)

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Moderator Skill Building	2 hrs	See Skill Encouraging Participants To Interact pages 106-117 Choose an exercise(s)	One copy per participant Overview, other materials described in the exercise
Break	15 min		
Completion and discussion of Step Five, Design Forms for the Moderator and Note Taker To Use During a Focus Group Discussion, pages 37-41	1 hr	Create forms to use during the focus group discussion using worksheets	One copy per team overview example, and worksheet for Step Five
Do and Discuss Step Six, Draft Your Self-Evaluation Form, pages 42-44	30 min	Draft Self-Evaluation Form using worksheets	One copy per team information, example, and worksheet for Step Six
Completion and discussion of Step Seven, Practice a Focus Group Discussion page 45-47	30 min	<p>Prepare participants for the practice by reviewing the topic guide they will use Show the first four steps you completed in preparing for the practice so that participants understand the research purpose</p> <p>Use the information in Step Seven to make sure everyone has a role for the practice focus group discussion</p> <p>Two people may want to switch into role of moderator</p> <p>Two people may want to use note taker's forms</p> <p>One person could greet and screen participants for the second time</p>	<p>One copy per participant Topic guide you drafted for the practice (or one you have chosen from participant drafts)</p> <p>Overviews and worksheets for Step Seven</p>

DAY THREE

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Completion and discussion of Step Seven Practice a Focus Group Discussion continued		<p>One person could prepare visuals to document the process of the group</p> <p>Explain that today's practice should help everyone better understand focus group research but more practice should be arranged. After the workshop everyone who plans to moderate focus groups for actual research should schedule a practice in the community. In other words, they should do Steps Seven and Eight with their own participants and topic guide.</p>	
LUNCH			
Focus Group Practice Among Community Members	2 hrs, 30 min	See Handbook, Section Three, pages 11-16 to help with logistics of practice group	<p>Six to seven members of the community, a topic guide, note takers forms</p> <p>A quiet location refreshments, tape recorder (optional)</p>
Completion and discussion of Step Seven Practice a Focus Group Discussion pages 45-47	1 hr	<p>Ask the moderators to complete and discuss their self-evaluations from Step Six and use these self-evaluations or pictures from Step Seven to discuss their experiences</p> <p>Explain that tomorrow you will use the content of this practice group discussion to organize and summarize notes</p>	One copy per team overview from Step Seven, and worksheets from Step Six
Review and Wrap-Up	15 min	In pairs, participants should discuss three things they learned about themselves today. Go around the room and ask pairs to share what they learned.	

Participants preparation for Day Four
Read Step Eight

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Completion and discussion of Step Eight Organize Your Notes for the Research Report	2 hr	<p>Explain that participants will practice organizing and summarizing notes from yesterday's practice They can follow this same process when they do their own discussion group after the workshop</p> <p>Using the notes from yesterday's practice, everyone should discuss Step Eight and work on it together</p> <p>You may want to have small groups work on summarizing different discussion questions Discuss how this practice would help prepare them for their own future focus group research</p>	One copy per team overview example, and worksheet for Step Eight
Break	15 min		
Building Moderator Skills	45 min	See Skill Asking Questions with Care pages 89-94 Choose an exercise	One copy per participant Overview, other materials described in the exercise
More Practice Among Workshop Participants	1 hr, 15 min	See Skill Encouraging Participants To Interact Do Exercise 4, Handling Problem Situations, pages 106-117	One copy per participant Overview, other materials described in the exercise
Assess the Needs of Workshop Participants	15 min	<p>Ask group members what they would like to work on this afternoon Explain that they can split into smaller groups work in project teams, or work individually, using the Video the Handbook and/or the Guide</p> <p>As workshop leader, you may suggest additional skill-building exercises from the Guide, based on what you and the group members feel are their weaknesses</p>	
LUNCH			

DAY FOUR

Workshop Session	Time Estimate	How to Lead the Session	Session Materials
Focus on Needs of Workshop Participants	3 hr	<p>Ideas</p> <p>Do more skill-building exercises. Go back to skills you touched on or new ones, such as Using Simple Language</p> <p>Do more round-robin moderating (with special feedback on how and when to probe)</p> <p>Continue to practice with problem situations</p> <p>Show the Video one more time and ask ‘What new things did you notice this time?’ “Why do you feel that it is important for you as a future moderator?”</p>	
Closing Exercise	1 hr	<p>Do the second exercise under the Skill Finding Similarities and Differences</p> <p>This exercise will build the skill and help participants stay connected to each other in the future</p>	

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

The following words and phrases are particularly important when used in discussing focus group research

Active listening is listening carefully to the discussion and using nonverbal communication and feedback from the participants to move the discussion logically from one point to the next

Feedback is giving participants useful ideas on how they could improve what they have just done or said. It is important to get feedback on your moderating skills from an experienced moderator to learn to moderate effectively

A **focus group** is a loosely structured, informal discussion among six to ten individuals who meet to reveal information on a particular research topic. In focus group research, a skilled moderator encourages people to talk with each other and gains insight into their feelings and thoughts on a particular topic

A **focus group moderator** sparks and guides the discussion among focus group participants. The moderator tries to keep people talking about issues of interest to the research without including personal opinions or attempting to educate participants

Four stages of focus groups are the introduction, rapport building, in-depth discussion, and closure. Focus groups are structured so that the group passes through all four stages of discussion

Linking is when a moderator recalls comments that participants have made that are related to each other. For example, "Several of you mentioned the words fear, afraid, and scared during our discussion. Let's talk more about these feelings."

A **moderator's summary sheet** is a form that includes names of and key information on focus group participants. It can help moderators personalize the discussion with a particular group of participants. It serves as a reminder of who is in the group and what they have in common. This information can be useful as a moderator guides the discussion

Nonverbal communication is conveying information without using words. This includes eye contact, facial expressions, movements of the hands, body, and head, and tone of voice

A **note taker's form** is used by a note taker (sometimes referred to as an assistant moderator), who uses the form to write as much as possible about what the group members say and how they react to different questions

Open-ended questions are questions that begin with “what,” “how,” “who” or such phrases as “list what you think,” “can you tell me,” “can you explain,” “tell me more about.” These kinds of questions are used often in a focus group discussion because they encourage thoughtful, undirected, and honest responses from participants.

Probing is the use of questions, statements, or silence to get additional information or deeper meaning from what participants say during a focus group discussion.

Qualitative research provides information on what people think, feel, and do. For example, some mothers feel that breastfeeding is not modern. Qualitative research is helpful in identifying issues of importance to better understand the reasons why focus groups give this kind of information.

Quantitative research methods, such as written surveys or closed interviews, give numerical estimates. For example, 20 percent of mothers surveyed breastfed their last child. Quantitative research generates conclusive data. It estimates how many people there are, verifies the number of times something happens, or documents differences between things that can be measured in numbers.

Reweaving is a technique a moderator uses to reintroduce a relevant and important issue that participants have raised to get the whole group to talk about it. For example, “Earlier many of you mentioned that you felt that hospital staff members were rude. Let us talk a bit about how we feel when people are rude to us.”

A **screening questionnaire** is used to make sure focus group participants are representative of your selection criteria. If possible, screening questionnaires are administered individually several days before the group meets. They are also used to ensure that participants are alike in regard to the research topic.

A **self evaluation form** is a personalized form completed by a moderator after a focus group discussion has taken place. It should include issues the moderator feels are most important to remember and improve upon in further focus group discussions.

Serial interviewing asks the same question of several participants, one after the other, and inhibits stimulating cross conversation. Moderators should instead encourage cross conversation among participants. Their comments and questions to each other often reveal the most interesting and heartfelt issues.

Subgroup (or homogenous group) of participants means that participants in a focus group are similar with respect to the topic being discussed. Researchers consider social class, life cycle, user status (current behavior), level of expertise, age, marital status, culture, sex, literacy/formal education, urban/rural location, and other characteristics to decide who belongs together in a focus group. If a group is homogeneous, participants will be more likely to say what they truly think or feel about a topic.

A **summary report** is prepared from notes organized from the discussion. The report lists the discussion questions from the topic guide and uses words (not numbers) to summarize what participants said. For example, "Most mothers felt that " or "few mothers disagreed ". Quotes may be used to represent points of view. Later, summary reports may be used to write an analysis of the total number of focus groups done for a research activity.

A **topic guide** is used by focus group moderators to help them decide what to ask participants. Topic guides should include the four stages of a focus group discussion. Less experienced moderators use guides that list specific questions or statements they plan to pose to the group. Under each question or statement, the guide lists possible probes. More experienced moderators may use a less structured list of topics and decide on questions as they go along.