

Practicalities

- ⇒ It is important to adopt an objective and neutral role during data collection. Questions should be neutral and researcher interaction should be kept to a minimum.
- ⇒ Due to the rich nature of qualitative data it is standard practice to audio-record Interviews and focus groups to assist future data analysis.
- ⇒ Recordings need to be transcribed. This is an very time consuming process, so using professional transcription services is quicker and usually more cost effective.
- ⇒ Qualitative data analysis is also time consuming, so leave time for this. The process is to read, and re-read transcripts identifying common themes. Asking a second person to review the themes relative to the transcripts can be useful to check validity. See website for guidance on qualitative data analysis.

Conducting interviews and focus groups: a best practice checklist

Decide on your research question and develop an interview schedule, or focus group topic guide, study information sheets and consent forms.

Consider your sampling strategy:

- ⇒ Who are you targeting? And how?
- ⇒ Set out an inclusion and exclusion criteria to define eligibility for the study.

Consider whether you need ethical approval for your study; if so seek this as early as possible.

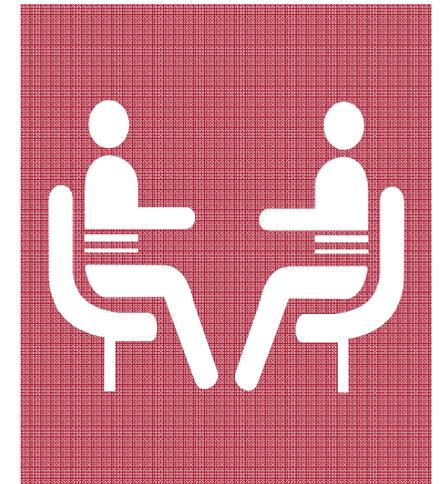
Consider piloting interview schedules and other forms with participants to ensure clarity of wording and that they are adequately capturing the right data.

Set out a protocol detailing who will be involved with transcription and data analysis.



Conducting focus groups and interviews

A best practice short-guide to conducting focus groups and interviews



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What is qualitative research?

- ⇒ In its simplest form qualitative research can be seen as any method which generates data in the form of words.
- ⇒ Qualitative research methods are often used to understand the meaning that people attach to what they experience.
- ⇒ Qualitative research does not seek to generalize or conclude but to gain insight and explore.
- ⇒ Areas of inquiry may be pre-defined but there is an openness to explore the findings that emerge.
- ⇒ Client numbers are lower compared to quantitative research due to the intensive nature of qualitative research.

The most commonly used qualitative methods are **interviews & focus groups**

Interviews

Interviews are an excellent way of exploring an individual's personal views and experiences.

Interviews can differ in the level of structure they have. They can be:

- ⇒ unstructured (no interview schedule and very exploratory).
- ⇒ semi-structured (guided by an interview schedule but the researcher has flexibility to add in interview questions as/when necessary).
- ⇒ structured (where no flexibility exists to deviate from the interview schedule).

Semi-structured interviews are most popular, as they allow you to tailor your approach to the interviewee, but ensure everyone is asked similar questions.

It is considered best practice to stop data collection when you reach data saturation (i.e. you are not getting any new information). Generally speaking, informative and reliable results can be achieved from 7 –15 interviews or 5-10 focus groups.

Focus groups

Focus groups are a way of exploring group attitudes and opinions, and can be useful for research questions when you are interested in a consensus. They may also be less intimidating for some target groups. Like interviews, focus groups can vary in the level that they are structured by a topic guide, but you typically have less control over where the group discussion will lead.

Focus groups normally consist of a group of 5-10 people. A final decision on numbers will depend on your participants. The aim is to create an environment where participants engage in healthy discussion (rather than shouting each other down) and feel able to voice their opinions freely. Therefore, a fully representative sample may not always be possible.

This short best practice guide is bought to you by the University of Bath in collaboration with Bath & North East Somerset Council.
For more information contact the Active Lifestyles and Healthy Improvement Team on 01225 396429