

Assessment in Focus: Conducting Effective Interviews and Focus Groups

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Practice Interview and Focus Group

The best way to learn how to conduct interviews and focus groups is to practice.

While we won't be able to mimic actual research conditions in our workshop today, we've planned an exercise designed to help you get a bit of experience.

We'll spend 30 minutes practicing interviewing and another 30 minutes practicing focus groups, and will use the same questions for each method:

Questions:

- What professional development opportunities do you attend at METRO or other local organizations?
- What do you look for in professional development? Why do you attend professional development events?
- What makes for a really successful professional development experience for you?
- What are some of the challenges or frustrations you experience around professional development?
- Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Practice Interview:

We'll have 30 minutes total for the practice interview. Find your partner (preferably someone you do not know), and flip a coin to determine who will be the interviewer (heads) and who will be the participant (tails). Give the interviewer a minute or two to review the questions above.

Spend 15 minutes on the interview. Interviewers should take notes as best they can during the interview. Remember to keep a neutral stance, allow your participant space to answer, and to try to avoid asking leading follow-up questions.

After 15 minutes of interviewing, we'll pause (it's okay if you're not finished discussing all of the questions!) so that we can report back on our interviewing experiences.

What surprised you about the interviews? Did any questions or concerns arise?

Practice Focus Group:

We'll also have 30 minutes total for the practice focus group. Find your group, and roll a die to determine who will be the facilitator – highest roll is the facilitator, second-highest is the note taker, and everyone else will be the participants. Note that if you were an interviewer during our previous practice session, you should be a participant during the focus groups. Give the facilitator a minute or two to review the questions above.

Spend 15 minutes on the focus group. Facilitators should not take notes, but focus on moderating and probing. The note takers should not do anything but take notes during the focus group. Remember the notes and recording will be analyzed together. Facilitators should keep a neutral stance and to try to ensure that each participant has space to respond to the questions. Allow for a variety of opinions; it's not about building consensus, it's about hearing the variety of experiences.

After 15 minutes of the focus group, we'll pause (it's okay if you're not finished discussing all of the questions!) so that we can report back on our focus group experiences.

What surprised you about the focus group? Did any questions or concerns arise?