Classic Assessment I: Focus Groups & Interviews

Although the standard Likert-type surveys are often used seem like the go-to assessment tool, they are not always the best tool for the job. Asking students to respond to open-ended questions empowers them to determine what is important and from their perspective.

Session attendees will learn how to:
• identify features of qualitative methods.
• run focus groups and interviews effectively.
• analyze narrative feedback (written or oral) with content analysis methods.
Qualitative Design Features

- Prioritizes participants’ perspectives and their understanding of those perspectives in a given context.
- Data are words, stories, and narratives.
- Uses inductive logic to build patterns, categories, and themes from the data.
- Data and analyses provide a holistic, complex picture with a rich description of the phenomenon.
Use Qualitative Methods to

- explore participants’ individual experiences.
- explore how participants create meaning from their environment.
- explore areas not yet thoroughly researched.
- discover relevant variables to include in future surveys.
- understand a holistic perspective of a understudied or local phenomenon.
Types of Qualitative Methods

➤ **Narrative**: Priorities participants’ stories

➤ **Phenomenology**: Seeks to understand the essence of a common experience or concept.

➤ **Grounded Theory**: Seeks to develop theory from observations (inductive analyses).

➤ **Ethnography**: The study of cultures in a specific or common context.

➤ **Case Studies**: Prioritizes in-depth descriptions of an individuals experience with a particular case or situation.
Narrative Data Gathering

- Interviews
  - One-on-One
  - Time-consuming
  - Good for sensitive topics
- Focus Groups
  - 5-10ish people
  - Faster than interviews
  - Thoughts generated with group interaction
Sampling

❖ Recruit those who have the information or experiences relevant to the given study.

❖ Diversify your sample relative to the program or concept under investigation.

❖ Sample size is based on importance, time, and saturation.

❖ If responses can be short, questionnaires may be an option.
Focus Group Considerations

- Encourage participation and ‘piggybacking’
- For high stakes studies, organize a practice round
- Select questioners that will limit response bias
- Use on-site note-takers
- Establish trust and rapport with your participants
- Prepare an Focus Group Protocol (script)
- Note and categorize common and important responses that reflect the phenomena of interest.
Probing Questions

» Don’t simply ask “why?”

» As for attributes, characteristics, and influences

» How did you decide x?

» What was your thought process that lead you to decide x?

» Can you describe or show me an example?
Inductive Steps
Content Analysis

➤ Organize raw data by question—e.g., a page full of responses to a single question.

➤ Review responses—note common terms and concepts.

➤ Group common terms/concepts and describe the category. Should be mutually exclusive.

➤ Create an ‘other’ category.

➤ Category totals are important, but the emerging meaning/understanding of the concepts is the end goal.
I learned a lot living in the residence halls this year. With a roommate, we figured out how to give and take. We took turns choosing what to watch on TV and set ground rules for guests. I also learned to take care of myself. My dad wasn’t going to do my laundry or buy food. One of the most important things I learned was to stand up for myself. Before college I didn’t express my opinion. This year I learned to speak up or else I wouldn’t get what I wanted or needed.
I learned a lot living in the residence halls this year. With a roommate, we figured out how to give and take [Compromise]. We took turns choosing what to watch on TV and set ground rules for guests. I also learned to take care of my self [Independence]. My dad wasn’t going to do why laundry or buy food. One of the most important things i learned was to stand up for myself [Assertiveness]. Before college I didn’t express my opinion. This year I learned to speak up or else I wouldn’t get what I wanted or needed.
Deductive Steps
Content Analysis

➢ Select a guiding theory (e.g., Bloom’s Taxonomy, Chickering’s Vectors, VALUE rubrics) and define categories.

➢ Organize raw data by question—e.g., a page full of responses to a single question.

➢ Unitize and place responses in the predefined categories.

➢ Create an ‘other’ category.

➢ Report category count totals
The TQA
A Three Question Assessment

➤ What ideas did this presentation generate for you?

➤ Did you learn something today that might help you perform your job better? Please describe.

➤ What could be changed about this presentation to make it more helpful or effective?
References


