



- 1. It's not about you**
- 2. Be an active listener**
- 3. Open up, Don't close down**

- 1. People don't say what they mean**
- 2. Combine spoken + Unspoken Signs**
- 3. Don't (always) take things at face value**

- 1. Listen to your gut**
- 2. What's NOT being said**
- 3. Beware of the easy response**

How can you mitigate for unnatural behaviours due to the research setting?

Eg. Does someone really behave naturally in a focus group and does that invalidate response

Ah 'unnatural behaviours'! People act unnaturally in all sorts of settings (and not just research / group discussion) In real life and in research, who you are speaking to, where you are, what you are doing can contribute to 'unnatural behaviour'.

First up - look up Bruce Tuckman and read up on group dynamics and how to manage them. Groups go through phases and it's our job to recognise and act upon them.

Secondly - Be aware of the sorts of things people would lie about in public (good parenting, healthy eating, drinking excessively)

Finally, and most importantly, be aware of the fact that people will ALWAYS act unnaturally in any research environment (online, face-to-face, doing a survey) – the onus is not on them to act naturally, but for us as researchers to INTERPRET their actions, words and behaviours. That's not to say people lie all the time but it's up to us to create the most suitable environment for the objectives and be alert to reading between the lines.

And it's not that respondents acting unnaturally will invalidate response, it's a lack of interpretation and application of that response that is important.

Also don't ask unnatural questions. Treat the 'focus group' as a discussion.

It's a conversation ... not an interrogation.

How might you lessen the impact of a domineering character from skewing a group response?

How about trying to make sure one vocal respondent doesn't take over a focus group?

Domineering respondents are not as common as you think they are but it's good to be prepared for them.

Your body language is important

- Use firm hand gestures to indicate you want someone to stop talking
- Or even face away from domineering respondent if possible

Set-up the rules of the game up front so you can always refer back to what you said if someone gets difficult

- *"We've got a lot of material to get through so please don't be offended if I want to move the conversation on"*
- *"It's important that I hear from everyone"*

Measure the energy of the room – if a respondent won't stop talking approach their persistence with a joke and pass the conversational baton on using both your authority and body language (literally open up to the rest of the group)

- *"Okay, Barry, we all know that you don't like the pigeon idea but let's hear from someone else..."*

How do you keep a focus group on track to get most out of a session?

A good intro to lay down the rules may sound boring but is essential for helping you out later on when people start going off on tangents / getting distracted / start flirting with each other.

Make sure you let people know at the very start:

- *“There is a reason you are here and I want to hear from everyone”*
- *“I may be strict, but I’m not trying to be rude. We only have 90 mins / 2 hours to get through and talk about these ideas and I don’t want to keep anyone late!”*

And remind them of these rules if they begin to break them. Also don’t be afraid to remind them **they are being PAID!**

Don’t feel the discussion guide rules you. You rule the discussion guide. In fact write throw your discussion guide away. Write down your three key objectives before the groups and keep those in front of you.

Looking at your discussion guide can make respondents feel like they should be answering a series of questions. You want to make it feel like it is a conversation. Not an ‘interview’.

But equally... don’t be afraid if you’ve missed anything at the very end to re-read the guide and say ‘I’m just going to check if I’ve missed anything out from my questions...’

Any tips for minimising the researcher effect, especially during ethnography

Good question!

We are not ethnography experts but know that more often researchers are moving towards auto-ethnographic approaches.

Two things you might want to consider:

1. Sign them up to a mobile ethnography app (Search for Journey HQ). Probably gets closest to removing the researcher and puts the power of material in the respondents hands.
2. Give them the camera. Or their friend / husband / children the camera and get them to ask the questions too. Give them a clear brief.

Clients with scientific, quant heavy backgrounds can often struggle to see the value of qual. Have you any killer arguments / case studies for sell in that have worked well in the past?

It's difficult to think of a like for like comparison of a qual and quant project but there are several campaigns we would have worked on that would not have made it if we hadn't used qual (e.g Be More Dog, McVitie's Sweet to name two).

The reason being that these were campaigns that, rationally, should not hold, but emotionally had a huge impact on people. Throughout both, respondents repeatedly said things like 'It doesn't make sense, what does a dog have to do with mobiles / biscuits?', all the while laughing and smiling. Both being ideas that they couldn't stop talking about even as they left the studio.

The big distinction is that qual allows you to arrive at 'unknown unknowns' (so things we don't know we don't know or things you did not intend to find out) whereas quant, at best, deals in 'known unknowns' (things we don't know)

Qual gives you an understanding and a genuine feeling for the **issues and potential**.

It is also flexible in a way that quant can't be. If a question or line or inquiry comes to you in a group you can always explore that gut reaction, which could lead to a really powerful insight. Or if you want to focus on one topic more than another then qual again gives you that flexibility to explore.

How can you make sure the people involved in a focus group open up to the stranger asking them questions as they would in front of a friend?

Don't skimp on your warm-up. Make sure EVERYONE has had the chance to talk in the first 15 minutes. They should feel like a group with some common ground – talking to one another – before those first 15-20 mins are up.

Make sure people are comfortable – tell them where the toilets are, get them a drink. If they've come from work they are likely to be hungry – get them a sandwich!

Again, keep thinking 'It's a conversation not an interrogation'

Explore ideas and themes rather than directly ask question after question.

Open questions instead of closed ones. 'How does idea x relate to what we've been talking about?' vs 'Do you like idea x'

For your discussion guide start broad then filter down.

But also **be aware that you are not their friend**. You are a moderator and you have a role and you also have a level of authority. They will open up to you even if you don't treat them like a friend. It's up to you to be aware of the cycles of behaviour that people go through in a group to help you manage their contributions.

Equally – everyone has their own style of moderating (some friendly some more strict...) find your voice and your stance through practice.

What's the best way to present focus information back to a client; or to make it as useful as possible for a campaign?

This is a broad question! Really depends on the project! But here are some general thoughts.

In our experience (and it's been a bit of buzzword for the last few years now) constructing **stories** from findings is far more interesting than plodding through what everyone said.

- What is your story? What have we learned about the participants as people? What have we learnt about the context of the category? How does this apply to the way in which participants responded to the creative ideas?

Think about the structure of your debrief. Do you use context to build into an argument or do the client need to hear the big news straight away?

Always have one or two anecdotes up your sleeve from what participants said in groups to share in a debrief. Always goes down a treat both when the clients have viewed (they will immediately remember and bring the respondent to life in their head) and when they haven't.

Video, of course, is a great way of bringing participants and points to life. We find littering them throughout as shorter clips works better than making a whole film from your footage.

Also give the clients something easy to digest. Don't be afraid to make up some diagrams and models to help summarise themes. Give them a key visual to remember and take away.