

ONLINE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION: 3 ESSENTIAL TIPS

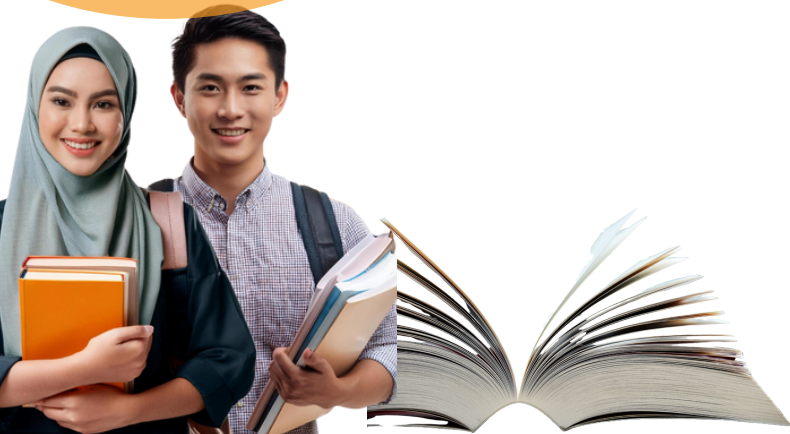
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Focus groups (FGD) are an invaluable qualitative method for gathering deep insights from participants (Krueger, 2014). Drawing from my personal experience conducting these sessions with pharmacists from diverse backgrounds, I would like to share three key suggestions that foster insightful discussion and productive analysis.

1. INTERVIEW GUIDE IS NOT A RIGID SCRIPT: ALWAYS ASK "WHY" TO DIG DEEPER

An interview guide should serve as a flexible roadmap, not a rigid script. The most valuable insights in a FGD often emerge when you allow space for exploration. When a participant says something unexpected or interesting, do not hesitate to follow up even if the question is not written in your guide. What matters is that your follow up still connects to your overall research objective. Simple prompts like "Why?" or "Can you tell me more about that?" can move the conversation beyond surface-level responses and uncover a deeper understanding of the topic.



2. BE CLEAR, PRECISE, AND GUIDE THE CONVERSATION

Time is limited, and the goal is to maximise the value of what participants share. Some participants may drift too long about unrelated details. As the moderator, your task is to remain a firm but friendly guide. If the discussion veers off-track, gently interject with a prompt to redirect the participant. A simple phrase like, "That's a very interesting perspective, thank you for sharing. To bring us back to our main topic..." is often sufficient to acknowledge their input while steering back the conversation to your key questions.

3. FAMILIARISE WITH THE TOOLS

Choosing the right meeting tool is crucial. A platform like Google Meet is a convenient starting point, as it allows you to record the session and generate a live transcript. However, it is important to understand the limitations. In my research context, for example, participants are Malaysian pharmacists who commonly use a mix of Malay and English, the English-only transcription struggles to accurately capture the Malay words, which limits its usefulness for detailed analysis used in our discussions.

Pro-Tip

Record the video and use a specialised service like Turboscribe.ai (<https://turboscribe.ai/>) for transcription afterward. Even with its free version, it performs better than Google Meet at capturing both English and Malay, giving you a more accurate starting point for analysis, giving you a much more accurate starting point for your analysis. Remember, a final manual check is still essential. I recommend verifying the transcript directly on their webpage, where the e editor allows you to select any sentence and instantly play the corresponding audio from your recording. This makes the checking process quick and efficient.

REFERENCE:

Krueger, R. A. (2014). Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research. Sage publications.