

## Advantages/Disadvantages of focus groups, interviews & pre/post-tests

The table below summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of focus groups, interviews, and written instruments such as surveys, tests, or questionnaires, to help you choose the best method(s) to analyze each aspect of your program that you wish to evaluate.<sup>1</sup>

METHOD	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can collect general and complex program information in a short time</li> <li>Permit on-the-spot follow-up to explore participant responses</li> <li>Often yield rich information as participants respond to each other's comments and raise unexpected topics</li> <li>Do not require that participants be literate</li> <li>Often provide an enjoyable experience for participants as they engage in dialogue</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be hard to analyze the data and compare across subgroups</li> <li>Opinions of outspoken people may be incorrectly taken to be the common viewpoints</li> <li>Participants may be reluctant to express their true feelings to the group</li> <li>A good facilitator is needed to maximize group participation</li> <li>Can be challenging to get the required number of participants together</li> </ul>
Semi-structured in-depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can collect general as well as complex program information</li> <li>Permit on-the-spot follow-up to explore interviewee responses</li> <li>Can address topics that interviewees may be uncomfortable discussing with peers</li> <li>Can accommodate participant's schedule</li> <li>Do not require that interviewees be literate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Require more time and resources than other methods</li> <li>Are a challenge to analyze and compare across different groups of interviewees</li> <li>Participants may be reluctant to express their true feelings to the interviewer</li> <li>A skilled interviewer is needed to avoid biasing the responses</li> </ul>
Written questionnaires, tests, or surveys <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can collect information from many people at the same time</li> <li>Are less expensive to administer and analyze than other methods</li> <li>Allow anonymity for respondents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It can be difficult to create questions that are understood as the survey creators intended</li> <li>The information obtained tends to over-simplify or need explanation</li> <li>No opportunity for on-the-spot follow up to explore participants' responses</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Some of the content of this table was adapted from Marcia Festen & Marianne Philbin, Level Best, San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2007, pp. 78-79, citing C. McNamara's "Overview of Methods to Collect Information, 1998..

<sup>2</sup> If a survey is administered orally, some of the advantages and disadvantages of interviews apply. However, anonymity can still be maintained after the initial interview.

	Allow comparisons across participants (or over time for the same participant) by using common computer software	Require that respondents be literate.
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