

# How to analyse and report on qualitative information

**After your interviews or focus group or survey you might feel as if you've just tipped open a huge jigsaw – so many pieces of information! How does it all link up to form a picture? How do you even start to put it together? This how to guide will help you through the process.**

There are no rigid rules for how to analyse and report on qualitative information. Just keep asking yourself:

- What is this information telling me?
- Are there contradictions? Why?
- Is this believable?
- Am I finding it unbelievable because I am making assumptions which aren't correct?
- Is there other evidence to support this?

The following will help guide you through the process.

## Decide on how much work you need to do – the scope

Before you begin your analysis, remind yourself of the purpose of the interviews or focus groups. The information you need might be quite limited—which means you don't have to do a lengthy or detailed analysis—or you might be doing research, in which case you might want to capture every piece of information.

## Transcribe your notes or your recordings

If you were doing a large-scale research project you would then transcribe your audio. This can be done manually, which can be time consuming and expensive (unless you have students or volunteers to help) or you may have access to software that can transcribe such as Microsoft Teams.

Another option is to listen to the recording and make additional notes of anything you missed that you think important.

## Sort the information into categories

Now you have to sort your notes into categories, or themes. You do this by deciding what is significant. You might decide something is significant because it's been repeated to you often or you might have only heard it once, but it's significant because it's a really important insight or piece of information.

Start by reading through your notes.

Look for the big ideas that come up through the discussions. Write these down as headings. Re-read your notes and put dot points under each heading of all the issues/concerns/details that have been talked about that fit under the heading. It doesn't matter if things fit under a few headings – you can make a final decision where they go later.

Eg: fears about being homeless (the theme)

- if I can't pay the rent I will lose my house – mentioned 5 times
- partner has damaged the unit in his 'temper' outbursts, I'm worried that they will kick us out when they find out (mentioned 2 times)

Look for specific responses, examples based on people's experiences. These should be given more weight than stories that are vague or impersonal. Look at this example: *'When I don't have any money left I can't put more money on the Pay As You Go [electricity meter] so I can't keep the kids warm. Sometimes we go like that for days and I get really depressed.'* That is much more specific than *'When I don't have any money left it's really hard. I dunno, it's hard and I hate it.'*

*Hint:* Ideally the person who did the interviewing or facilitated the focus group should do this analysis.

## Change your mind and start again!

After you have sorted everything out, look at it all again. You will probably decide it all needs resorting. This is your brain analysing and re-analysing the information, creating connections and making sense of patterns. You might have put a whole lot of notes or quotes into a category called *'cost of living problems'* and then noticed that there is a lot of information specifically about transport. So you might decide to split the information into *'transport problems'* and *'other cost of living problems'*.

There are no rigid rules for how to do this – you just have to dive in and think deeply. Keep asking yourself:

- What is this information telling me?
- Are there contradictions here? Why?
- Is this believable? Am I finding it unbelievable because I am making assumptions which aren't correct? Is there other evidence to support this?
- Does the person I interviewed agree with the conclusions I'm reaching?

When you have done this, you have analysed your information.

## Write the information up

You can do this in different ways, you can:

- **use the 'raw data'**. That is, you can use the participants' comments as quotes, like this:  
*I had \$15 a day to meet the daily needs of me and my three children. I rang and said I was desperate, and they gave me an emergency appointment but there was no way I could get there.*
- **describe the information more generally**, such as *'a theme noted in focus groups on our crisis service was that lack of transport was a major problem for people trying to get to our service'*.
- **describe the way the discussions flowed** – for example: *'a theme noted in focus groups on our crisis service was that lack of transport was a significant problem for people trying to get to our service. This was part of a general concern about the rising cost of living; a number of participants reported using their petrol budget to buy food or pay rent.'*

It's not appropriate to report the results in a numerical way, that is, you can't say *'70% of the focus group participants reported that...'*

Add summary statements at the beginning of each theme, and conclusion statements at the end that sum up the content.

You are now ready to put it all together and report on it.

## Reporting on your information

You need to write up the information, or data, from your interviews or focus groups in a report. Start by working out the order in which you want to report on things, and what you have concluded from listening to the information. The first section has to be called *'methodology'*. This is where you explain how and when you collected the information.

A sample structure:

1. Methodology
2. Introduction
3. Theme 1: participants reported service helped them
4. Theme 2: the barriers to clients using our service

5. Theme 3: the things that helped our clients access our service
6. Conclusion, or summary.

## More Resources

Evaluation Toolbox – [Focus Group](#)

infed.org – [Using focus groups in evaluation and research](#)

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