

Focus group

A conversation led by a moderator with a small group on a specific topic, to learn their opinions and how they build them by talking to each other.

In Spanish

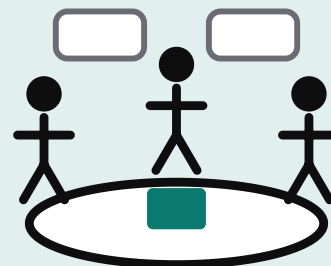
Grupo de discusión

Origin

The focused interview of Merton and Kendall (1946)

Output

A group's opinions and how they build them through conversation



What it's for

Useful for exploring attitudes, words and reactions to an idea, and seeing where people agree or argue.

Key elements

A shared stimulus

The whole group reacts to the same thing: a concept, an ad or a prototype.

Moderate without steering

Make sure everyone speaks, not just the most confident.

Choose the group well

People with something in common, so they speak with confidence.

How it's done

1



Prepare. A topic guide and the stimulus to be shown.

2



Moderate. Open the conversation and share out the turns.

3



Analyze. Look for themes, agreements and disagreements.

Applications in design

✓ When to use it

Early on, to learn the language and reactions to a concept.

✗ Avoid

Using it to measure how many people prefer something: it is small and the group sways opinions.

👁 Don't fall for it

What people say in a group isn't what each does alone: don't use it to check how something is used.

Connections

Builds on

■ Say vs. do

Related to

■ In-depth interview

Authors and works

1946	Robert K. Merton and Patricia L. Kendall	Described the focused interview about a specific situation everyone has lived through, for individuals and groups.
2014	Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey	Wrote one of the most widely used practical guides to running focus groups.

Sources

Original sources

- Merton, R. K., & Kendall, P. L. (1946). The focused interview. *American Journal of Sociology*, 51(6), 541–557. [View source \(https://doi.org/10.1086/219886\)](https://doi.org/10.1086/219886)

Secondary sources

- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2014). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (5th ed.). SAGE.

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026