How to Carry out Follow-up Interviews

When you analyze insights from any type of user research, you make a lot of interpretations as to why your participants did what they did and said what they said. That's especially true when you do research where you *can't* ask your participants questions during the research session—for instance, observations, diary studies and surveys. In those cases, you can get an invaluable added perspective on your results if you go back to your participants and do a follow-up interview based on your results. To do this, you can follow these steps:

1 **Set up interviews with your participants.**

If you know ahead of time that you'll want to do follow-up interviews with them, plan for these at the beginning of your research project. This will give you adequate time to plan how you want to do the interviews.

[Continued on next page]

[Continued from previous page]

2 Decide on an interview method.

Follow-up interviews can be either group or individual interviews. You should choose the method which best suits your personal preferences and the nature of your project. For example:

- Individual interviews are best if you're working on a project that involves a sensitive topic. Participants might find it hard to discuss sensitive topics in a group, and you should therefore do your best to accommodate this. And remember, sensitive topics can be anything from weight loss problems and sexuality, to mistakes made when using a product or why they love to listen to Justin Bieber on Sunday mornings.
- Group interviews can be a good idea if your research is on a topic where participants have a lot of common ground, such as a shared love of surround sound systems. In group interviews, your participants can inspire new insights in each other—just be aware they can be a little difficult to manage and you'll need to ensure everyone's opinion is heard.

3 Write an interview guide.

Go through your research results to decide on the focus for your follow-up interviews. Choose results where you feel you didn't fully understand what happened, or where something particularly significant occurred. It's a good idea to have relevant sections of your data (video recordings, quotes and so on) ready to show participants to help them understand your question (they may have performed an action without thinking, for example). Your original research might have sparked questions you didn't think to ask in your first research session, and you can add those questions to your interview guide as well.

[Continued on next page]

[Continued from previous page]

4 **Carry out the interviews.**

When you carry out the interviews, explain your analysis and conclusions—including why you reached those conclusions—and ask your participants if they agree. You can also choose to use your analysis as a basis for doing ideation with your participants – e.g., you can ask them for ideas on how to improve your product if you've noticed they had problems with it. Always round off the session by asking your participants if they have anything they want to add.

5 **Update your analysis to include feedback from your participants.**

We recommend you use the data from your follow-up interviews to expand on your original analysis—i.e., *don't* do a separate analysis based on your follow-up interviews alone. If you have already done a thematic analysis, you can use the new data to add to and change your themes. If your original data isn't sorted into themes yet, put both your original and new results into a big data pile and do a brand-new thematic analysis based on your combined data. It's important to be aware that what your participants say during the follow-up interview isn't necessarily more accurate (or any more true) than what you observed in your first round of research. Usually, your interview participants want to please you, and this means they'll over-rationalize their behavior when you ask them why they did something, just to provide you with an explanation. So, take insights from the follow-up interviews with a grain of salt when necessary!

[Continued on next page]

[Continued from previous page]

6 **Create participant profiles.**

For the final step of your analysis, we recommend that you create a profile for each participant. This will make it easier for you to communicate your research now you have multiple studies with the same participants. A profile usually contains the following:

- A name or made-up name
- An approximate age
- A brief summary of other facts relevant to your study—e.g., “a young couple who just moved in together and are getting used to cooking for themselves every day”

We recommend our template on thematic analysis if you’re not sure of the steps involved in this part of the process.

Do you want to learn more?

Learn how to use this template to your best advantage in our online course **User Research – Methods and Best Practices**. Sign up for it today and learn how you can gain and apply user insights through qualitative research if you haven't already started the course.

User Research – Methods and Best Practices

Beginner course

User experience (UX) design requires you to understand the pains and pleasures of your users—and user research is the way in which to do just that. In that sense, it's actually the largest part of the field... meaning it's essential for you to have the relevant skills and knowledge if you want to be competing with the best. In our course **User Research – Methods and Best Practices**, you'll learn the best practices for getting first-hand knowledge of your users, thus enabling you to design the optimal product—one that's truly relevant for your users and, subsequently, outperforms your competitors'. In the course you'll be equipped with templates that will give you pointers on how to effectively interview your users, conduct observations, and best present your findings to stakeholders. You've already downloaded one template, now take the next step and master the full range of user research techniques!

Learn more about this course >

How to advance your career with our online courses

Take online courses by industry experts.

Lessons are self-paced so you'll never be late for class or miss a deadline.

Get a Course Certificate.

Your answers are graded by experts, not machines. Get an industry-recognized Course Certificate to prove your skills.

Advance your career.

Use your new skills in your existing job or to get a new job in UX design. Get help from our community.

See all our courses >

About the Interaction Design Foundation

INTERACTION DESIGN FOUNDATION

Est. 2002

With over 66,000 alumni, the Interaction Design Foundation is the biggest design school globally. Industry leaders such as IBM and Adobe train their teams with our courses, and universities such as MIT and the University of Cambridge include our courses in their curricula. Our online courses are taught by industry experts and cover the entire spectrum of UX design from beginner to advanced. We give you industry-recognized course certificates to advance your career. Since 2002, we've put together the world's biggest and most authoritative library of open-source UX Design literature created by such noted authors as Don Norman and Clayton Christensen.