



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.

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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.

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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!

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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.

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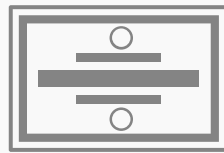
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