



Successful Tape Recording from a Transcriptionist's Point of View

SPECIALIST

Nancy McGhee, Transcriptionist

INTRODUCTION

When conducting focus groups or personal one-to-one interviews, you can enhance the reliability and validity of your findings, if you insure that all the words are transcribed. But you can't do that, unless all the participants' words reach the tape recorder clearly. Below are a few tips to make this happen:

1. Test the recorder at the beginning (possibly several times) and make sure all of the right buttons on the tape recorder are pushed. Put a tiny piece of tape on the buttons if it is hard to remember which buttons to use. Make sure that the recorder is not on "Voice Activated" as this will not work for recording a session that needs to be transcribed.
2. When you are seating participants, they **MUST** be close to the recording machine and the microphone. Ask participants to speak clearly and loudly, and to lean toward the recorder, if need be.
3. Make it very clear to the participants that they need to speak up loudly and that they **CANNOT** speak over each other. The voices meld together and are impossible for the transcriptionist to hear. Only one participant should speak at a time. You may need to remind the participants several times of this because participants get excited and forget. Ask participants not to have side conversations while somebody else is speaking. Remind them that the focus group is being recorded, and that the transcriptionist will need to hear each participant's voice clearly.
4. Anticipate ahead of time and be very careful about background noise. The Mic picks up background noises very easily and drowns out the participant who is speaking. You cannot have doors slamming, vehicles making noise outside, dogs barking, neighbors running lawn mowers, phones ringing, participants banging drawers or doors, pets walking around the table, participants coughing, and chairs sliding, and expect to hear the participants' voices.



5. Unfortunately laughter from others drowns out what some participant is saying. Wait till the laughter is over and then ask the participant to repeat what he/she was saying. Coughing is similarly disruptive during recording, and the participant should be instructed to wait until the coughing has ended before continuing to speak.

6. Keep an eye on the end of the tape. If you come to the end of the tape in the middle of a response, ask the participant that is speaking to “hold that thought,” so that you can turn the tape over without losing any information. Another remedy is to have an assistant moderator, someone not related to the program, turn the tape over.

If all of these tips are followed you will have a much better quality tape and the transcriptionist will be able to hear each voice and give you a better quality product. When a transcriptionist comes to a place in the tape that reflects multiple voices, all a transcriptionist can say to you is “If I cannot hear it, I cannot transcribe or type it!!”

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Other information on focus groups can be found at

PA Example #1: Adams County: Extension’s Image. Available:
<http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-others/PAEX1.pdf>

PA Example #20: Using Focus Groups to Test a New Program. Available:
<http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf-ex/PAEX20.pdf>

Tipsheet #29: Focus Groups – 4H and Youth Development. Available:
<http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/pdf/TS29.pdf>

Nancy Ellen Kiernan, Ph.D., Program Evaluator, nekiernan@psu.edu

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