

## Step 6

### Analyzing a Focus Group Transcript

**This is a mini lesson that introduces students to the work of finding patterns in a focus group transcript. A short exercise to give them some practice follows this lecture.** This is best used after you have a sense of the overall method for focus group analysis which can be found in the overview of this step above. Notice, the skill of finding patterns may not be new to your students. We have found it useful to remind students that social scientists also look for patterns and have developed methods to do this. Bill deliberately used a prompt and responses from another *TfC* focus group's work because we have found that it is often easier to teach a new skill with unfamiliar material. After this exercise the class began analyzing the prompts and responses from their own focus group.

**Mini-Lecture<sup>1</sup>: Making (but not making up) answers to your research question by analyzing the data you collected.**

Students often think of writing as a creative activity. But, they don't think of analyzing their focus group data as at all creative. We think they should. Analyzing what our focus group participants have said is all about finding connections between their statements and common patterns among their comments. Connecting and grouping is important for research because we are interested in what most of members of our focus group are saying and what ideas reappear in an interview or across many interviews. These common patterns don't call attention to themselves; statements by our participants don't include the words, "hey, I am part of a common pattern, notice me." Moreover, researchers can't go find out if they got the right answer when the

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<sup>1</sup> With all the resources in this guidebook, but especially lectures like this one, you will want to adapt this to the needs of your class.

find a pattern in the responses. There is no answer in the back of the book for these kinds of questions. So, how do they make decisions if they are unsure if they have identified all the patterns or the right patterns in the data they have collected?

Researchers are not just finding or discovering something that is hiding in plain sight. Rather they are *making (but not making up) findings*. That is, they are finding connections between two, three or four statements that won't go together unless they are put together in the researcher's mind and then are explained so that others can understand the logic behind those connections. The data that a researcher is working with is not made up – responses from focus group participants are what they have said – what the researcher is doing is connecting and grouping these responses, convincing others that these comments actually go together and express what the group (as opposed to the individuals in the group) was saying. This can't be done quickly. It takes time.

In a world where most work involve moving information from one place to another, this work is different. This is a high degree of difficulty task and (thus) one that is well worth your time. I want to show you how we do the creative work of analysis. I think it might be challenging and, yes, fun to look for patterns in responses from a focus group another *TfC* class conducted.

***What patterns do you see in these responses?***

Remember, that one way to surface patterns is to group or code responses that go together. Have students place the statements that follow the prompt below into at least two groups and then provide a name for each group. Then, see if they can use the groupings to make an answer to the prompt.

**Prompt: Why don't more people vote in local elections?**

### **Focus group responses:**

- When people don't have kids it's tough to stay involved and care about school things
- People don't vote because they are content-don't find out if it doesn't hurt
- Boils down to lack of knowledge-don't know enough don't vote enough
- Apathy-just don't care
- Why vote if promises candidates make can't be kept
- Disgust at the lack of civic duty-don't bother to look into issues
- People die for this right every day and others don't even vote!
- People complain but they don't vote
- Bad example set-should find the issues right in front of them
- Bedroom community, people live here but aren't involved in community life, "don't care."
- Voting over a long period-of-time would be easier, people don't know when they are available to fill in an absentee ballot (ex, being sick, emergencies)
- How can people improve the lazy people?
- Many people, who work too much and don't have enough time on their hands, too busy to pay attention and to be involved is that laziness? Or is that just being busy?
- My vote doesn't matter.