

TRANSCRIBER Guidelines

First Point: It is important to realize that you are not analyzing the dialogue at this point. The only function of the transcriber is to type of a transcription of the dialogue as faithfully as can be managed. Analysis comes at a later phase in the process. As a result, DO NOT paraphrase or synopsise the dialogue. Rather, record it as best you can, word for word, in the exact order that dialogue transpired.

Labeling The Session Transcriptions

Please label the final transcription record that is typed up in the following fashion:

yy/mm/dd.1_college_facilitator_transcriber

Type the date as year/month/day. I know this format seems odd, but it will auto-sort the transcription titles by date. Use leading zeros for single digit date elements (e.g., 05 for the fifth of the month). Type the college in a consistent fashion across transcripts. Type the last name of the facilitator (and first name, in cases where more than one facilitator with the same last name was used; and do the same for multiple transcribers with the same last name). If more than one session fell on the same day and was moderated by the same person, add a one-place decimal after the date.

Example: 17-11-01.1_mcdaniel_fergusonjessame_wrightjoel.xlsx
17-11-01.2_mcdaniel_fergusonjessame_wrightjoel.xlsx

IMPORTANT: Please label the recordings with the same title that designates the transcript document. That way, we can intuitively match transcripts with recordings, if we need to go back to the recording.

Fidelity In The Record

Remember, your only role is to type up a transcript of the dialogue as faithfully as you can. Participants may make comments that are interesting to you, but remember, the session is about what the participants have to say, NOT about what you already know or have to say. Part of your job is to stay out of the dialogue altogether. If you have interesting insight, tell the coordinator at your college your thoughts.

Fidelity is Paramount: It is important that you faithfully record what is said in the session. However, several things will make this task a challenge. First, the pace of dialogue may likely be such that you cannot type word-for-word everything that is said in one go. As a result, you often may have to back the recording up a little in order to clarify what was actually said. Do your best to capture the comments as faithfully as possible. Second, people are going to cut each other off, and people are going to talk over each other. Develop a CONSISTENT annotation for noting these things. As an appendix to the transcript, write down and include a key to denote what your annotations mean, so that others can read your transcription and fully understand how you annotated it. Here are some suggestions:

Use consistent shorthand to annotate who said what. Once you designate a title to a particular participant, use that same title for any dialogue generated by that participant. For example, if you have designated the participants by gender and number:

male1: "I mostly go to the library to look up stuff on the computer."

male2: "Yeah, me too."

female1: "Mostly that's what I do too."

male1: "Sometimes I do have to go back to the microfiche, though."

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Use dashes to denote when a person is being talked over:

male1: "Then I told him that I needed --"

male2: "I had the same problem!"

male1: "-- some help understanding PubMed."

Use ellipses for dialogue that simply stops abruptly or trails off.

female1: "Well, I did tell him..."

Use brackets for your own notes in the transcript. For example, if dialogue is not audible, use [inaudible]. If there is a long pause that you feel is significant, use [pause in dialogue] on its own line.

Managing Context In Dialogue

One role you fulfill is to note who said what. It won't be necessary for us to match comments with a specific person through your notes. However, the goal should be to match comments consistently with the same person. It might not always be too easy to tell voices apart in the recordings. If someone's comments consistently uncover a specific position from a given participant, however, it might be vital to note that specific person's train of thoughts throughout the session. Remember, if we can't follow a given person's train of thought throughout the session, we might actually miss their overall perspective, which might yield significant findings through the contexts of the dialogue.

Use Consistent Annotation: As you transcribe the recording, you may have to make on-the-spot decisions about how to annotate something. Just be sure to consistently use that same annotation for the same thing, and be sure to write down what that annotation means (and write it up in the appendix at the end of the transcript).

Managing Clarity in the Your Notes: Natural language use is very contextual. Dialogue that seems obvious at the time may not be totally clear in transcripts. You may encounter challenges in which dialogue isn't totally clear, or it isn't totally clear who is saying what, and to whom. Do the best you can. Try as best you can to annotate context that you think will clarify dialogue, but only sparingly. Do so using brackets.

Transcribing Your Notes

Confidentiality: Remember to own confidentiality of the recordings and transcripts. Use a set of headphones to listen to the recordings (which will also likely aid in hearing the dialogue). Don't share the recordings or your transcripts with anyone other than your designated contact person for them.

Communicating With the Moderator and Scribe: Don't hesitate to reach out to the moderator and/or the scribe if you need clarification. Remember that this focus group research is a collaborative effort. Also, the scribe's typed notes should be made available to you, so that you can more clearly transcribe the dialogue as faithfully as possible.

Reliability Is Key: Remember that reliability is as much an issue for qualitative research as it is for quantitative research. Reliability means consistency of measurement, which (for focus group research) means that the record of the dialogue should be as faithful to what was actually said as possible.

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QUESTIONS: Please do feel free to contact me with specific questions. My contact information will be available through the focus group moderator or the person coordinating this research at your college.

Joel Wright