

# Getting a Clear Picture: Using Focus Groups to Understand Students' Needs

Leslie Warren, Information Literacy Librarian  
Moraine Valley Community College

## Developing Focus Groups

**Invest in planning.** Figure out what you want to know and whom you want to know it from.

**Choose a moderator skilled in maintaining group dynamics.**



**Write good questions.**

- No more than about 12 questions
- Open-ended (can't be answered yes/no)
- Easy to understand
- Neutral questions that don't guide participants to a particular answer
- Ordered from easier to harder
- Ordered from less personal to more personal

## Conducting Focus Groups

**Limit the activity to no more than about 1 ½ hours**

**Limit group size to six to 12 participants.**

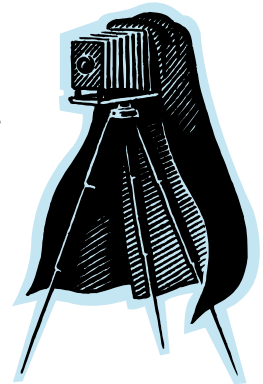
**Provide a comfortable location for discussion, with all participants facing each other.**

**Introduce the activity to the participants.**

- Introduce the moderator and any assistants
- Explain the purpose and planned use of the focus group materials
- Set ground rules, including being respectful to everyone in the group

**Take careful notes or record the focus group.**

**Allow for spontaneity by being flexible with questions.**



## Additional Resources

Kay Bishop, "Recipe for Focus Groups," *excerpt from "Using Focus Groups with Young People," Knowledge Quest* 30, no. 3 (Jan. /Feb. 2002): 36-37.  
[http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume30/30\\_3\\_recipe.pdf](http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/kqarchives/volume30/30_3_recipe.pdf) (Accessed 01/19/06)

Richard A Krueger, Professor and Evaluation Leader, University of Minnesota, "Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews." Oct. 2002,  
<http://www.shadac.org/collecting/collateral/Handout%20October2002.pdf> (accessed 1/19/06)

Chris Olson & Associates "10 Pointers for Better Focus Groups," from *Marketing Treasures*, Sept. 2005,  
<http://www.chrisolson.com/marketingtreasures/vol14/Vol14N9SEPTEMBER05.html#10%20Pointers%20For%20Better%20Focus%20Groups> (accessed 01/19/06)

## Representative questions asked in the NILRC focus groups Fall 2004

### Research Assignments

- ? *Students to write response on index card then discuss:* When I say "research," what do you think I mean? What is an example of research that you would expect to do in college?
- ? What makes a research assignment different from other assignments that you have?
- ? Why do you think teachers assign research papers or projects?
- ? How many research assignments have you done this year?

### Research process

- ? When you are given a research project, how do you begin your research? Why?
- ? What other resources would you consult? What are the benefits and weaknesses of those resources?
- ? How do you conduct a typical Internet search?
- ? How do you know if you have chosen a reliable Internet site?
- ? What is the biggest problem you encounter when you are trying to find information?

### Library Use

- ? How often do you use the Media Center / Library?
- ? What kinds of activities do you engage in at the library?
- ? What do you use it for most often?
- ? How comfortable are you using the library?
- ? How have you utilized the librarian to help you?
- ? How often do you use your public library?