

C. Video Recording Guidelines

Goal

- To capture complete and usable video sound bites from 90-minute focus groups and to ensure reasonable consistency in style and quality across multiple focus groups and/or colleges.

Possible Products

- Video clips for college website(s)
- Short, edited videos to be shown at conferences, presentations, and meetings

Physical Set-Up

- Preferred: 6-9 people seated around approximately three classroom-style tables arranged in a U or V shape. Focus group participants face the Facilitator and the camera and also see each other. The long rectangular classroom tables, end to end, but somewhat wrapped into a semi-circle, make it easiest for the participants to be reached with a boom microphone from the front. A second audio option is to provide table microphones positioned along the table so all participants can be heard equally. A third option is to place an audio recorder with an omni-directional microphone in the middle of the room or table. *See Room Set-Up Diagram – Appendix B.*
- Room may be classroom, TV studio, or any large room that will accommodate the diagrammed setup.
- Room should be nondescript. Remove any distracting elements such as pictures, statues, etc. If more than one college will be part of the videotape, remove college identifiers, such as logos or seals. If using a TV studio, avoid using a black curtain. Lighter colors are better.
- Room should be as quiet as possible. Avoid loud air conditioning systems and nearby distracting noises. Sensitive microphones will pick up the noise and make it difficult to achieve the desired quality in edited tapes.
- Position camera next to the Facilitator so that all individuals around the table can be seen. The camera will pick up full-face shots as participants look toward the Facilitator and profile shots as they look toward each other. The camera should also be able to capture a complete wide shot that includes all the participants.
- Use table tents or name cards (first name only) to identify participants for the Facilitator.
- Make sure chairs don't spin or rock—all chairs should be stationary.
- Ensure video equipment produces high quality recordings

Audio

- Option 1 (preferred): Boom microphone with a boom operator controlling its location depending on who is speaking. Only one is needed per focus group
- Option 2: Table microphones, positioned so that the sound levels are as equal as possible for each participant. Microphones should be placed as close as possible to the people talking – one microphone placed equidistant between each two individuals should work well.
- Option 3: Audio recorder with omni-directional microphones – in the center of the room table; this will not produce as close a “presence” as microphones placed closer to the participants, but the sound will be adequate.
- Participants should not move the microphones during the taped discussion. The equipment should be as transparent to the participants as possible.

Lighting

- Use of reflected light (umbrellas) or soft lights will ensure uniform, flat lighting for each site.
- TV lighting is preferred over natural light for a uniform look.
- Do not shoot with only available light. The resulting footage will be shadowy and faces will be harder to see. If the college does not have lighting equipment, this can be rented for minimal cost.

Camera Framing

- The camera should frame primarily close-ups (head and shoulder shots). Close-ups are desirable, even if an individual’s face can only be captured in profile.
- Occasional wide shots or group shots are helpful to establish the scene. When opportunities arise, get reaction shots of each participant to provide adequate footage for the editing process.
- The camera operator should attempt to tape complete statements, avoiding a sense of always playing catch up once a comment has begun. The Facilitator can help by soliciting complete statements. (Generally, Facilitator questions should not be heard on the edited video segments.) In addition, the Facilitator should, when possible, solicit responses systematically around the table, left to right, right to left, etc., in order to facilitate quick easy pans and resets for the camera operator. This makes it possible for the camera operator to know who is speaking next and makes it easier to position the camera for the next comment quickly. The facilitator should also instruct participants to avoid interrupting one another so that that camera operator can capture complete sound bites.
- The camera operation should not interfere with the focus group discussion. However, stopping for a tape change is okay.
- Either before or after the focus group discussion taping, get several shots of the Facilitator asking specific questions, as well as several reaction shots from the Facilitator. Though it is intended that the Facilitator and her/his questions remain off-camera, having a few shots of the Facilitator will allow for more flexibility in editing the video.

Instructions for Participants

- Request that focus group participants dress in camera-friendly clothing. Specifically, they should avoid strong patterns (such as stripes or checks that tend to move on camera), high contrast color combinations and chunky and/or shiny jewelry. They should avoid dark colors, specifically navy blue or black. Medium tone solid colors look best.
- Ask participants to write with pens, not pencils (including the Facilitator). A pencil makes a scribbling noise that is picked up by the microphone.