

Make insights from observations

Gather, organize, and reflect on data

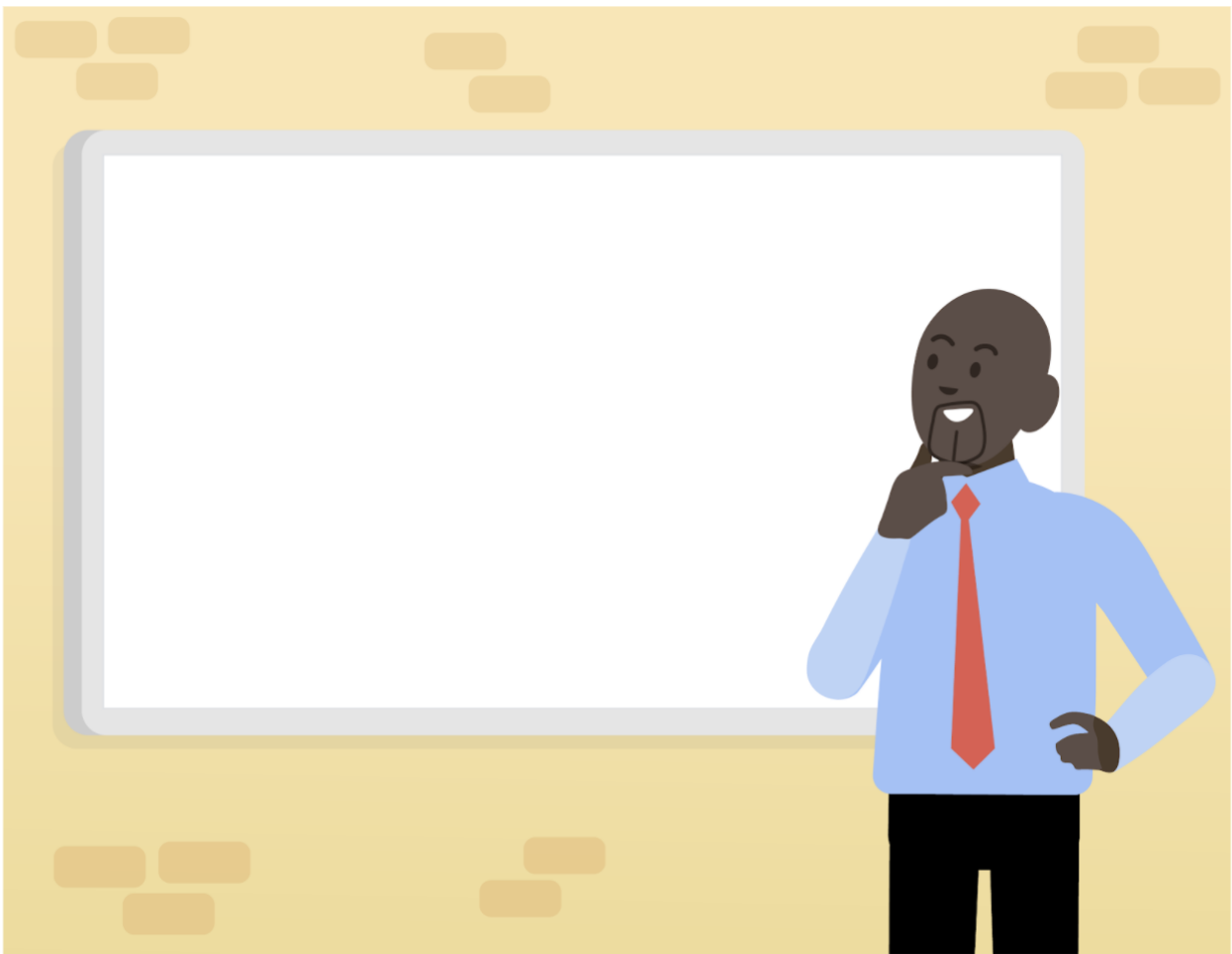
- Video:** Gather and organize data
4 min
- Reading:** Learn more about creating affinity diagrams
20 min
- Practice Quiz:** Practice Activity: Create an affinity diagram for the Gmail labels feature project
1 question
- Reading:** Activity Exemplar: Create an affinity diagram for the Gmail labels feature project
10 min

Find patterns and themes in data
Week 3 review

Learn more about creating affinity diagrams

Ready to do a fun activity that will help you organize the data from your usability study? As you learned in the video, an **affinity diagram** is a method of synthesizing that organizes data into groups with common themes or relationships. You can do this activity by yourself, but in the real world affinity diagramming is often done as a team so you can organize research data quickly and efficiently. Let's go through the process step-by-step!

Find a place to create your affinity diagram



You'll need a large space to put all of your sticky notes. A room with a large whiteboard, window, empty wall, or any other smooth surface with room to place sticky notes is best.

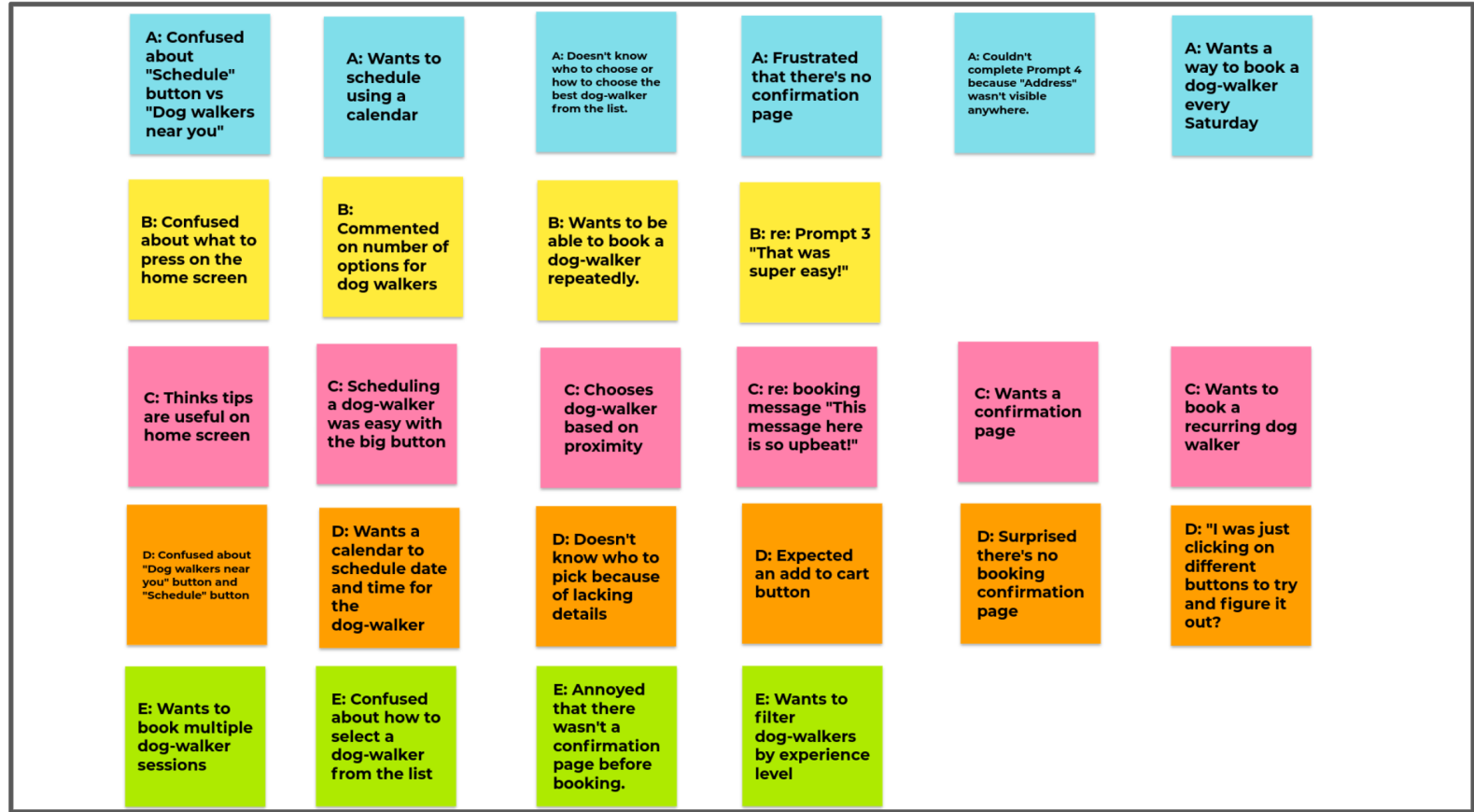
Create sticky notes

To make an affinity diagram, all of the observations from your research study participants need to be transferred onto individual sticky notes. Sticky notes can be generated in a few different ways:

- If you used spreadsheet note taking or took notes on a single piece of paper during the usability study, you'll need to transfer all of the observations and quotes from the participants onto sticky notes.
- If you or the study moderator took notes on sticky notes during the usability study, you can skip this step or make revisions to the sticky notes you've already written.

Each sticky note lists a single idea, observation, or direct quote from a participant — so you're going to have a lot of sticky notes! The information on each sticky note should be no longer than one sentence, and the sentence should make sense without explanation so that it's easy for everyone to understand quickly. For example, the phrase "hard to read" would not make a good sticky note, because it's too vague. But the phrase "hard to read text on homepage" gives your team enough context to understand what the note is about.

If you're quoting a participant directly, use quotation marks on your sticky note. Quotation marks demonstrate that you're including the exact word or phrase the participant used. If you're summarizing an idea or opinion a participant had, you don't need quotation marks; simply write a brief sentence or phrase describing their feedback.

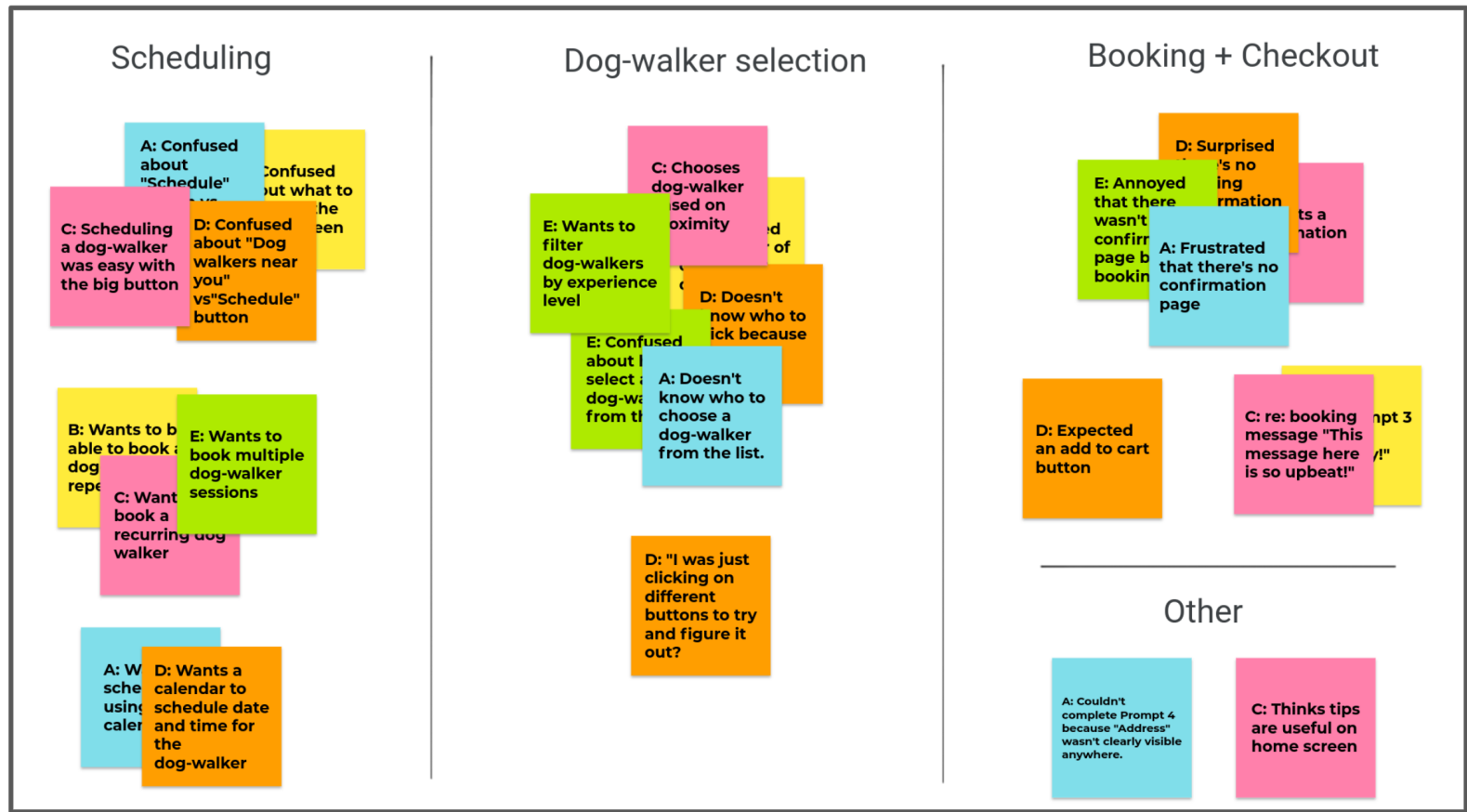


For example, imagine you conducted a usability study to understand how to improve the dog walker app. Here are some observations and quotes that were collected during the research.

- Frustrated that there's no confirmation page
- Couldn't complete Prompt 4 because "Address" wasn't visible anywhere
- Wants to book a dog walker every Saturday
- Confused about what to press on the home screen
- Chooses dog walker based on proximity
- Expected an add to cart button
- "I was just clicking on different buttons to try and figure it out"
- Annoyed that there wasn't a confirmation page before booking

You would put each one of these observations and quotes on its own sticky note. After you've written all of your sticky notes, spread them out so you can clearly read all of the sticky notes at once, like the graphic above demonstrates.

Put sticky notes in groups



With all of your sticky notes ready to go, it's time to cluster the observations and quotes into groups. You can either list a couple of groups to get started, or you can come up with group names as you go.

For example, there might be a group that you know there's feedback about, like "Scheduling." If this is the case, you can create this group from the start. As you review the sticky notes, add them to this group. For example, sticky notes that say "Wants to book multiple dog walker sessions" and "Wants a calendar to schedule date and time for the dog walker" would belong in the "Scheduling" group.

Or, as you review the sticky notes, you might notice that two of notes are related, like: "Wants to filter dog-walkers by experience" and "Confused about how to select a dog walker from the list" In this case, you'd create a new group called "Dog walker selection." It's part of the process to come up with groups as you go.

Continue until there are no sticky notes remaining

Try to categorize as many of your sticky notes as possible, which will ensure that all feedback from participants is represented in distinct groups. Ideally, you should end up with three to ten groups. In the dog walker app example, the affinity diagram has three groups: "Scheduling," "Dog Walker Selection," and "Booking + Checkout."

If there are a few sticky notes that don't belong in any of the groups you made, that's normal; sometimes only one person in your study had a problem with a feature or experience. But you should strongly consider the observation or quote, and determine if it should stand alone in its own group or receive further consideration before disregarding it entirely.

Do a second review

The beauty of affinity diagramming is that there are no "right" answers. You can make as many or as few groups as your observations require. Take some time to review your groupings and determine if you want to move any sticky notes around, or even make a new group. Have fun with your data and the connections you can draw from it. You might end up with a really unique group that you didn't notice at first!

Here's a pro tip: If you have a lot of sticky notes within a group, you should consider creating sub-groups to further organize the data. It's almost like doing the affinity diagramming exercise all over again, but with a subset of the sticky notes.

Create your own affinity diagram

When you have a lot of research data to sort through, it can be overwhelming to hunt for patterns and make a plan for iterating on your product. Creating an affinity diagram helps you group together research insights so that you can further understand and define the problems in your product and design.

In addition, affinity diagramming helps you think outside of the box. The interactive and visual format of affinity mapping allows you to make connections within your data that you may not have noticed by simply reading through your notes. This helps you think of new, creative ways to solve user problems.

Now it's your turn to sort through research data, and have some fun while you're at it. Remember, there's no right or wrong way to group data in your affinity diagram. Play with your sticky notes and come up with unique groupings. It'll be worth the effort!

If you want to learn even more about affinity diagramming, check out this [article](#) from Nielsen Norman Group that highlights some best practices for affinity diagramming.

Mark as completed

