



Focus group methodology for Doctor Who viewing behaviors

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1 Works for me dx.doi.org/10.17504/protocols.io.bjjykkpw



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ABSTRACT

This protocol is a description of how Hannah Gunderman facilitates her focus groups around *Doctor Who* episodes in order to better understand how viewers perceive messages of empathy, geography, and social themes in the episodes. In this example, Hannah describes her focus group protocol for the *Doctor Who* episode "Vincent and the Doctor" (Series 5, episode 10). This protocol is meant to demonstrate how the protocols.io platform can be used to document workflows and methods within humanities researcher, showing how the platform can be for *any* researcher regardless of domain area.

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GUIDELINES

If using this methodology, remember that all of your protocols MUST be approved by your organization's Institutional Review Board.

Introduction

1 Project Abstract:

Focus group methodology has been extensively used by researchers in communications, media studies, and media geographies to gauge how viewers interact with and learn from a television show. When studying concepts of empathy, landscape interpretation, and science fiction fandom, focus groups are particularly effective in testing not only individual reactions to a show but also collective responses to themes and plot points. For this study, focus groups

were held in which viewers possessing various levels of Doctor Who fandom watched an episode, followed by a collective discussion between the moderator and participants on themes of landscape, empathy, and emotional geographies within the plot. The results of the focus groups shed light on not only how viewers respond to themes of empathy and landscape in a show, but also how the presence (or absence) of fandom influences the viewing experience. Geographically, this work speaks to media's potential to project certain messages across audiences with varying levels of engagement. This is particularly significant as media increasingly engage with ideologies, mobilities, and opinions across the world.

Note: The workflow described here was used in Hannah Gunderman's dissertation for fulfillment of the Ph.D. in Geography from UT-Knoxville in 2018. The dissertation can be found in TRACE, UT-Knoxville's institutional repository, here: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/4994/. The chapter which uses this protocol is Chapter 2: Assessing *Doctor Who's* Influence on Empathy Towards Mental Illness and Landscape Awareness through Focus Group Methodology. All focus group participants signed IRB-approved consent forms.

Prep 20m

- 2 Arrive to the viewing room at least one hour prior to the start of the focus group. Queue up the episode of choice (in this case, "Vincent and the Doctor" from Amazon Prime at the link here: https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B003G8Y4QO/ref=atv_dp_season_select_s5. Check the lighting, audio, captions, and other technical requirements.

Ensure there are enough pencils/pens/writing utensils, Likert Scale forms for pre- and post-viewing, and IRB consent forms for the participants who are scheduled to take part in the focus group.

IRB - Consent Forms 10m

3 

10m

Once all registered participants have arrived, distribute the consent forms to each participant. Read through the consent form, and ask participants to sign if they are comfortable. If any are not comfortable, express that they can leave the study at any time without any consequence (which includes leaving the study before it starts). Collect the consent forms, and store them in a secure folder in a locked office (or however you have outlined these procedures in your IRB).

Focus Group Process 2h

- 4 Distribute to each participant the paper copy of the "Pre-Viewing Likert Scale" and a writing utensil, and allow them up to five minutes to fill out the form.

Questions (Pre-Viewing)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I understand mental illness					
It is possible to control a mental illness					
I understand what depression is					
I feel close to someone who has depression					
I am familiar with Vincent van Gogh					
I can recognize the artwork of Vincent van Gogh					
I am familiar with Provence, France					
I feel I have a personal bond to Vincent van Gogh					
I can describe the landscape of Provence, France					
I feel prepared to interact with someone who has depression					
I think of Provence, France when I think of Vincent van Gogh					

Figure 1: Pre-Viewing Likert Scale form for participants to fill out prior to watching the episode.

- 5 Collect the Pre-Viewing Likert Scale forms, and turn on the episode. Ensure that all participants can clearly see and hear the episode. Take a seat in the back of the room, and watch the episode alongside the participants. 45m

- 6 After the episode ends, distribute the Post-Viewing Likert Scale forms (and a writing utensil, if needed) to each participant, and give participants 5 minutes to fill out the form. **NOTE: this is the same form as shown in Figure 1, with the change of the text in the first column to "Questions (Post-Viewing)".** 5m

- 7 Collect the Post-Viewing Likert Scale forms and start your audio recording device. Alert participants that they will now progress to the next stage of the focus group experience, which involves a group discussion of the following questions: 1h
 1. After watching the episode, what can you say about Provence, France?
 2. Did you develop a bond with any of the characters?
 3. Did you dislike any of the characters?
 4. Was mental illness a prominent theme in the episode for you?
 5. Do you feel that you could speak about Van Gogh's life to another person?
 6. Did you feel empathy toward any of the characters? If so, who and why?
 7. Do you like science fiction?

These seven open-ended questions serve as starting points for discussion - based on your individual IRB protocol, you may have the flexibility to follow up on answers given in discussion. Prior to asking the questions, remind your participants of any recordings (audio or video) that will be taking place, based on the details in your IRB protocol. Devote about 10 minutes to each question, or until the discussion is exhausted or patterns and/or consensus in the discussion are reached.

- 8 After all questions are finished, alert the participants that the focus group is completed and they may leave. 5m

Post-Focus Groups

3h

- 9 Immediately backup the audio files and begin transcription, ideally in the same day as the focus group. 3h