

Wardle McLean's Little Book of Qualitative Wisdom



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Welcome to Wardle McLean's Little Book of Qualitative Wisdom. We wrote it to help you get even more from your qualitative research.

There are few agreed principles about how best to design and conduct research. What follows here are some of the maxims we have learnt hold true for most projects most of the time.

We hope that you find this pocket-sized book useful. You're welcome to disagree, but do tell us and add to our wisdom.

Wardle
McLean



—The Art of Conversation

Illustrated by Victoria Wainwright.



Which methodology?

Groups for embarrassing topics - sharing is reassuring.

Interviews where status could be an issue (eg. finance).

Groups to look into the future; interviews to discover the past.

Groups for strategic directions; interviews for factual details.

Groups for publicly consumed media (TV/radio ads); interviews for privately consumed media (press ads, magazines, websites, brochures).

Observation to catalogue behaviour.



Stimulus material

Too much stimulus material means not enough talk.

Less talk means fewer issues are resolved.

More talk more depth.

Apart from advertising stimuli, research concepts benefit from being descriptive and not persuasive.

Not all advertising stimuli in a project need to be of equal quality or the same format. Choose whatever stimuli best suits the core idea.



The respondent is king!

We want respondents to be themselves, we don't want to change them.

...teenagers will giggle
...young men will brag
...shy people will remain shy
...and dominant people need to hear their own voices.

Different respondents shine in different modes: some are more verbal, some are more visual. We try to bring out the best in them all.

Respondents don't tell lies any more than anyone else; they tell the truth as they see it at the time.

Respondents are more forthcoming when they are amongst people like themselves



The respondent is king*but*

Respondents don't talk strategy; don't do what respondents tell you to do.

Respondents don't talk findings; don't take what they say literally.

We can't ask respondents the objectives. It's our job to translate the objectives into questions and their answers into findings.

It's often hard for respondents to tell us why they **don't** do something.

Respondents can only tell us what they **think** they will do in the future; and what they **thought** they did in the past.



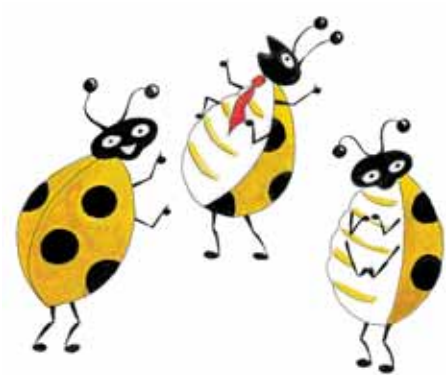
Recruitment

Respondents are better defined by behaviour than attitude. Use attitude statements sparingly.

Recruiting 'enthusiasts' is more useful than 'creative' respondents. Creativity will come from real enthusiasm anyway.

Someone can be an 'opinion leader' in one area, but not in another.

We use different locations to eradicate bias; not usually to find out how they differ.



Recruiting user types

The tenor of a group differs depending on whom you talk to:

Users are the most positive.

As the champions of the brand, they can tell you most about your brand.

Lapsed users are the most critical.

So don't invite your boss to view these groups!

Non users are the least talkative.

It's early home after these groups, as they have little to say.



All groups are different

Freedom and flexibility are what allow a moderator to run a successful group.

To extract the value from any group, we have to 'go with the flow'.

Even the seemingly irrelevant can turn out to be a key insight.

An exercise should be abandoned if it's not working.

So, the best topic guides resemble a favourite pullover - with room to move - not like a straitjacket.

Warm-ups can be valuable sources of insight; hurrying them is counter-productive.



All groups are different

A lively group isn't necessarily a good group. A group that allows time and space for self-reflection can be more useful.

Respondents reveal their true nature when they are in conversation with another person.

What respondents say is only a part of the story; it's how and when they say it that speaks volumes.

Just one or two comments from a 'quiet' respondent can be more valuable than a verbal barrage from a chattier type.

The rhythm of a group can tell you a lot about the material they see: a 'dead' atmosphere could be due to a 'dud' concept.



Using viewing facilities sparingly

Respondents can feel judged and are less likely to reveal their spontaneous thoughts and feelings.

The mirror distances the observer from the respondent; it's difficult to **like** consumers after seeing a group discussion!

You feel closer to respondents when you view a group in the same room.

Not as good for gauging reactions to advertising or design, which they haven't seen before. Its harder for them to give considered opinions if they feel they are being judged.



Viewing in the same room

Please tell us beforehand who is coming.

Arrive at least 10 minutes before the start of the group.

Don't say you're the client within earshot of the respondents.

Wear clothes appropriate to the respondents you're viewing (casual clothes rather than suits usually); try and blend in.

Sit in equal view of all respondents, if possible.

Don't join in but don't appear to switch off/go to sleep completely.



Even more about viewing in the same room

Either take notes all the way through or not at all (and not of personal details).

Don't correct respondents - their perceptions are what matter.

Observers will be introduced as who they really are at some stage, either at the beginning or the end.

Take the opportunity to talk to respondents but avoid using jargon.



Communications research

We show the ads or packs early on in the groups to give us a clean reading. Contextual information can come later.

Whether or not respondents like the ad, the design or the leaflet, is not the most important thing. Communication and engagement are key.

We always aim to understand what the concept says about the brand before deconstructing it.

Creative ideas are delicate flowers. Research must be constructive not destructive; we aim to develop not evaluate.



Debriefing

Findings go down a metaphorical funnel, from verbose reportage just after the group, to one sentence a year later.

So verbal debriefs directly after a group miss out on the most insightful findings.

We love interactive debriefs. It's where findings turn into useful insights. The more discussion the richer the final insights.



Our perfect project

The more time we have the more helpful we can be.

Include us as a member of the team - tell us as much as you can, not as little as you can get away with!

Involving us early in the project makes for a better relationship. Pre project discussions and a chance to influence the stimulus material are always welcome.

Quality research takes time.

We love to hear what happened as a result of our research, too.

It's only natural to want the **highest quality**, at the **lowest price**, and the **speediest turnaround**. We can only ever provide two of these. You choose.



Crib sheet on ethics

Respondents' identities must never be revealed to clients.

Respondents' interests are more important than ours.

Respondents have to be told what to expect before agreeing to participate.

We tell respondents as much as we can, not as little as we can get away with.

When recording sessions, aurally or visually, we need to tell respondents how the tape will be used and you need to make sure that these restrictions apply.

Tapes and questionnaires must not be kept longer than they are needed.