

University of New Mexico, Portuguese Program, Focus Group Protocol

1. Purpose

The purpose of the focus group is to obtain mid-semester diagnostic information for maximizing the immediate effectiveness of the three Portuguese courses: Portuguese 101, Portuguese 275(S) for Spanish speakers, and Portuguese 275 for non-Spanish speakers. A facilitator will ask small groups of learners ($N = 6-10$) to provide their perceptions and opinions on the appropriateness of the class to their expectations and needs, and on the design and implementation of the course curriculum (i.e., course content, activities, workload, textbook, instruction, assessment).

2. Necessary resources:

- Two classrooms, each with capacity for up to 12 people; classes should be split in two at the beginning (first alphabetic half and second, to keep the distribution relatively random)
- Personnel: 2 facilitators
- Equipment: Two digital or tape recorders, extension cords, extra tapes, and batteries
- Consent form

3. Procedures and guided questions

(A) Opening: Briefly introduce yourself

(B) Present the purpose of the FG:

We are here today to talk about your learning experiences so far in this Portuguese course. As you know, this is one of several new courses that have been designed to better meet the needs and interests of different groups of students here at the University of New Mexico. So, the purpose today is to get your perceptions on several aspects of the class so that your instructor and the department can make improvements where they are necessary. Your perceptions are what we want to hear about. There are no right or wrong answers, of course—you should just say what comes to your mind.

(D) Explain the discussion procedure

Ask students to read and sign the consent form (Maybe this should be done in class before the FG session; students could take it home and bring it back signed as a time-saving strategy)

I will be taking notes and tape recording the discussion so that we do not miss anything you have to say. As you know everything is confidential. No one, including your teacher, will

know who said what. This should be a group discussion, so feel free to respond to me and to other members' opinions in the group. It is also important for everyone to have equal opportunity to express their opinions. You can jump in at any time, but I would appreciate it if only one person spoke at once. During the discussion, you can agree or disagree with each other, and you can change your mind. The discussion will last approximately 45 minutes. There are several questions we need to cover, so I will move the discussion along in order to make sure that happens.

(E) Key questions

Placement

Now let's talk about this particular course (Portuguese 101, 275S, 275N) and your decision to enroll in it.

- How did you learn about this course?
- Do you feel this is the right course for you? Why/why not?
- Did the introduction presented by the instructor of the course at the beginning of the semester help you choose the right course for you?
- Is there any information you wish you might have had when enrolling in the course?
- To what extent does the course meet your expectations?

Textbook

Let's talk about the textbook you are using.

- What is good about it?
- Tell me what you don't like about the textbook.

Class activities and materials

What do you think about the things you do in class?

- Are there particular activities or materials that really help you learn?
- Are there activities or materials that do not help so much?

Instructor

Tell me about your instructor

- What does your teacher do that really helps you learn?
- What suggestions do you have for the instructor in order to improve the class?

Workload

- How is the workload for this class?

Assessments

→ Tell me about the assessments: Do they help you to learn?

Successful learning

→ Based on your experience so far, if you were to give advice to students who are going to take this course, what would you tell them they need in order to be successful in this course?

→ How do you feel your knowledge or lack of knowledge of Spanish affect your learning?

Changes

→ Are there any specific changes that you might recommend for improving this course?

4. Wrap-up and recap

Though there were many different opinions about _____, it appears unanimous that _____. Does anyone see it differently? It seems most of you agree on _____, but some think that _____. Does anyone want to add or clarify an opinion on this?

Is there any other information regarding your learning experiences in this class that would be useful for me to know?

5. Closing remarks

Thank you very much for providing us with your perceptions and opinions about this class. Your comments have been very helpful, and I will summarize the results and report them to the department, so that they can make sure that these courses are the best they can be.

Example Facilitation Probes

Acquiring more information:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- What made you think so?
- How do you know that?
- What would be the best avenue(s) for ---?

Finding discrepancy:

- It's interesting that some of you found () effective, while others found them not so effective. What do you think may account for these differences?

Notes to the facilitators:

- (a) Keep the discussion focused on the topics of interest
- (b) Balance participation
- (c) Avoid judgmental responses, such as “great” or “excellent”
- (d) Attend to participants’ responses (nodding, smiling) to maintain conversation flow

Notes to the note takers (if available; otherwise these will have to be sought post-hoc by listening to the tapes)

- (a) Take notes on key words (Try to capture their key ideas and reflect their wording)
- (b) Take notes on any vote counting that occurs
- (c) When topic changes, switch to another page
- (e) Record general information of the FG session (Date, course name, group composition).
- (f) Immediately after the FG session, go through the notes. Identify the major points stated by the participants. Add your impressions and any meta-reflective comments about the FG session (any notable group dynamics or circumstances that may have influenced the discussion?).