

Tutorial 5: Affinity Diagrams

Human Computer Interaction

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Affinity diagrams are a great way to build a shared understanding of qualitative data. Researchers start with a large amount of qualitative data written on small sheets of paper. They then sort the data as a group and in the process develop a shared understanding of what the data means.

1 Roles

Today your Tutor will be playing the role of “Facilitator” and everyone else will be “Participants”.

Facilitators are in charge of explaining the affinity diagramming process to participants and answering any questions during the session. Facilitators may participate in the diagramming process or simply guide the process without being directly involved.

Participants are the ones building the diagram. They require no special training and should “be themselves” for this exercise.

2 Data

The data you will be working with was collected from Facebook groups for incoming UG1 and MSc students before they arrived on campus (FAQ-FB) and a list of common questions that are asked at the Informatics Front desk during the first couple of weeks of the semester (FAQ-M).

The goal of the data collection was to understand the types of questions new students have when coming to the University of Edinburgh for the first time.

3 Recommended Protocol

It is up to the tutor how they would like to run their affinity diagramming session. The following protocol is a typical approach, but there are several alternatives that will work just as well.

1. Divide into teams of about 6 people each. No less than 3, no more than 10.
2. Place all the data slips onto the table or wall randomly so that all the writing is visible. Placement should be random at this point. If placing on the wall, then use the provided masking tape.
3. (About 15 minutes) In silence (no speaking at all) try and sort the data. You are not allowed to speak to your team members during this process and you are definitely not allowed to ask them why they put something somewhere. You may ask the facilitator (tutor) clarifying questions.
4. (About 15 minutes) Once the sorting starts settling, that is, once your team has formed some clusters of data and the movement has calmed down, you should start using the provided sticky notes. You are still not allowed to speak. But you are allowed to write things on sticky notes and put them on the table or wall. Once something has been added to the table/wall you cannot remove it, though you can sort it.
5. (About 10 minutes) Once the table/wall is settled and very little is being moved around you can start speaking to each other and discussing the patterns which have emerged.
6. As a class you should discuss the results.