

# Affinity mapping

## What is it

This data analysis method involves writing the findings of UX studies on post-its, sticking them on a surface, and then moving them around to create groupings or themes. It encourages discussion about how points relate to one another. Post-its can be grouped and re-grouped until there is a consensus about their placement. Affinity mapping can help us identify the most significant results from our research and in turn suggest the areas in which we might need to make changes.



## Things you need

- A dataset or body of findings, e.g. student comments from usability testing of a website
- A group of UX researchers, ideally the same people who carried out the study that gathered the findings
- A workspace suitable for animated discussion where other colleagues won't be disturbed
- A large surface, e.g. a tabletop or a wall
- Post-its - it can be helpful to use several different colours, such as if you want to create groupings in advance and then critique them, or to give each person their own colour so it's easier to see who placed which point in a particular grouping.
- Extra post-its and pens for recording extra ideas that people have during the workshop
- A stopwatch (a digital watch or mobile phone is fine)
- (Optional) - sticky strips to indicate where post-its relate to multiple themes
- **Alternative** - in the interests of sustainability, consider using a Padlet wall instead



## How to do it

1. Before the session - get some help to write out one point per post-it from the results you want to explore, and stick them all on the wall or table in no particular order.
2. Start the stopwatch and give everyone an appropriate length of time (e.g. 2 minutes, 5 minutes) to move the post-its into groups, removing any duplicates and combining points where appropriate.
3. Now, work through each grouping of post-its and give everyone the opportunity to suggest alternative placements and point out post-its with several themes. Again, do this as a timed activity.
4. When there is broad agreement about the groupings, invite suggestions for theme names for each one and identify any sub-themes.
5. Record the themes and sub-themes, e.g. by taking photos or recording them in an email to all participants. The themes generated through this technique can then be used to generate solutions to problems, e.g. "How might we...?" At the end of the affinity mapping session, decide on what will happen next to guard against the tendency of gathering data but not doing anything with it.

