



Card Sorting

Asks participants to rank or categorize index cards with topics in a way it makes sense for them, revealing how information is interrelated (differently) in a group.



Information Ideation Consultation Co-Decision



<15 people

15-30 people
30-100 people
100-250 people
> 250 people



Preparation:

1-2 months for invitation of the participants etc.

Implementation:

30 – 180min

Follow-up:

1-2 days for analysis and documentation



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Resources for a short interview



At least one person

for preparation, moderation and documentation

The Method: What is it, when to use it and what outcome to expect

Card Sorting is a design research technique where participants organize pieces of information, which is presented on labelled cards, in a way it is logical to them. The aim is to find out how to display information so it is most useful for a certain user group, or to rank it. Card Sorting is great for building any systematic ordering of different elements, be it the structure of a web application, website or citizen portal, layout (e.g. brochures), tasks and processes of organizations or importance-sorting topics to inform strategies (e.g. for social problems). Card Sorting results in having a greater understanding of the mental models of a target audience, how different information is related to one another, which terminology is familiar, concrete options on how to best display information as well as insights to the significance of different topics.

The Process: How to conduct it in an in-person setting or online using a PC/laptop with video option

The method follows three steps and has three options:

- 1. Preparation:** The facilitator lists all elements of a topic, then writes them on (virtual) cards, one item per card. Participants are invited. The procedure is test run.
- 2. Conduction:** Participants are instructed to organize or rank cards as logical for them, by using:
 - **Closed Card Sorting:** Participants sort labelled cards into categories that are pre-defined. This is an evaluative exercise that works best for prioritizing and ranking elements and information as well as for improving an already existing information or content structure.
 - **Open Card Sorting:** Participants sort labelled cards into categories that they create and label. This is best for finding new structures, appropriate terminology and participant-led issues.
 - **Hybrid Card Sorting:** Participants sort labelled cards into pre-defined categories and may add their own or re-label. Allows for validation of existing structure as well as free expression.

Once the sorting is done, participants explain their choices and card organization.

- 3. Report:** Organizers analyze how often which cards were grouped together, the struggles for participants as well as similarities/differences between several sessions.

Blended participation

- Not recommended for the card sorting itself. It should be decided prior to the event whether it will be in-person or online.
- Card sorting can be one method used in a longer (blended) participation process

Digital communication

- Useful to reach and activate potential participants and to inform the broader audience about the results as well as follow-up action.

Good to know

- Limit the number of cards to 30-50 in one round
- Mix cards for any new round to prevent bias
- Allow silence to give space for thinking
- Can be run with one participant or in groups of 3-5
- Around 15 participants in total give useful results
- Consider cards in size 10cmx15cm, thicker paper, all in the same visual style (font, text size, color etc.)
- Upfront, inform participants about a potential recording and that it's not about testing them
- Read further:
 - www.justinmind.com/blog/card-sorting/
 - https://www.reflectionaction.org/tools_and_methods/62/?from=ov (Topic prioritization)
 - www.card-sorting.com/card-sorting-tools/ (Digital tool)