



The Five Whys

This easy research method will help you uncover the deep motivations and assumptions that underpin a person's behavior.

STATS

Suggested Time

15 minutes

Level of Difficulty

Easy

Materials Needed

Pens, paper

Participants

Design team, person you're designing for

PROCESS PHASE



INSPIRATION

IDEATION

IMPLEMENTATION

The Five Whys is a fantastic method to use to get to the core of a person's beliefs and motivations. Sure, you may feel like a four-year-old asking "why" every time a person answers your previous question, but if you stick with it, and give the person you're interviewing the time, space, and permission to really go deep, you're likely to wind up with a few key insights. You'll use this method while you're conducting an [Interview](#) and start with really broad questions like "Do you save much money?" or "How was your harvest this year?" Then, by asking why five times you'll get to some essential answers to complicated problems. This can be a great method to use if you're trying to get at the human and emotional roots of a problem.

STEPS

- 01** | This one is pretty easy. Start by asking a pretty broad question about your Interview participant's habits or behaviors then ask "why" to their response five times in a row.
- 02** | Remember that you're not asking a horizontal question, (ie "Why else didn't you get a good harvest this year?") you're actually going for depth (ie "Why weren't you able to buy the fertilizer you needed?").
- 03** | Write down what you hear, paying special attention to moments when it feels like you've moved a level deeper into understanding why the person does what she does.
- 04** | Keep in mind that you might not get to the core stuff until the fourth or fifth "Why."