

**IDEATING & TESTING**

Affinity Mapping & Synthesis

Turn a pile of research notes into a short list of insights

Use this when	Making sense of research findings
Time needed	2–3 hours
Who's involved	The people who did the research
You'll end up with	Named themes and actionable insights

How to use this guide

After research you're left with a mountain of notes, quotes, and observations. Affinity mapping clusters them from the bottom up, so themes emerge from the evidence instead of from your assumptions. It's how a pile of raw data becomes a short list of insights you can act on.

The steps

1. Get every observation, quote, or data point onto its own note — one idea per note.
2. Spread them all out where everyone can see them.
3. Silently group notes that feel related. Don't name the groups yet — let them form.
4. Once a cluster feels stable, name it for the pattern it shows.
5. For each cluster, write the insight it points to — a finding, not a feature.
6. Rank the themes by how important and how well-evidenced they are.

Capture your observations

Dump everything here first (or use sticky notes). One row per observation.

Observation / quote	Source (who / where)

Themes & insights

Once you've grouped them, capture each theme and what it means. The "so what" column is the part that drives decisions.

Theme	The insight (what it means)	So what — implication

EXAMPLE

Theme: "Parents drive booking." Insight: the buyer and the user are different people. So what: the booking flow must reassure a parent, not just an athlete.

Tips

- Let groups emerge — resist sorting into categories you already had in mind.
- Watch the outliers; a lone note is sometimes the most important signal.
- Phrase insights as findings about people, not as solutions.