

EPFL MSE234 Autumn 2025 Focus Groups

Welcome and thank you for joining me today! You met me before when I introduced myself to your class, but I'm Mac, a University of Calgary doctoral candidate in mechanical engineering doing education research.

The purpose of the study is to compare the Swiss and Canadian engineering education practical sessions, with the goal of developing improvements. We want to learn about your experience and learning in your MSE234 practical sessions this semester. As current engineering students, you have the best knowledge on the learning experience in the practical sessions. You are the experts on this topic, and I hope your discussion helps illuminate this situation. As well, we are interested in your own personal interpretation, regardless of whether it's shared by other students; please feel completely free to share your opinion, especially if it differs from your peers!

This is a focus group. I have a series of questions for you to discuss as a group, and your conversation will help me understand your practical session experience. While I'll be guiding the conversation, my job here is more a moderator than an interviewer. Again, you are the experts!

Please note that we will be recording audio for this session to ensure that we accurately record your responses. The focus groups cannot be completely anonymous as they are in person; however, only the 2 members of the research team will listen to the audio while we transcribe it into text to protect your identity. Please consult the info sheet if you have more questions and ask me. You have until May 1st, 2026 to withdraw your consent. However, the nature of focus groups means that while we can remove portions of your response, we are unable to remove segments where you were in conversation with other participants. In the case of withdrawal, the research team will work with you in removing your responses.

I've planned the session to take one hour, but we may end sooner. Coffee and refreshments have been provided, please feel free to help yourself!

Now that we've covered the boilerplate, let's get into it. We'll focus on all the practicals to date and talk about your learning experience – how you were prepared for the practicals, how the sessions contributed to your course learning and careers, if the practical helped you perform better in evaluations, and how engaged you were. Again, we're focused on your personal experiences; we want to collect a wide variety of experiences and perspectives, and the goal isn't to reach agreement on how the practicals went but rather just to talk about your experiences.

These questions will be printed out and provided to students at the start of the session.

1. What about your practical sessions contributed to or detracted from your understanding of materials science?
2. What about the MSE234 practical sessions prepared you for your future courses and careers?
3. What contributes or detracts from your engagement in your materials science practical sessions?
4. Did any practical sessions stand out to you as particularly positive or beneficial learning experiences? *I.e. sessions that you found especially helpful in learning course material and preparing for your future careers.*
 - a. What contributed to this perception?
5. Did any practical sessions stand out as particularly negative or detrimental learning experiences? *I.e. sessions that you found did not help you to learn course material and prepare for your future careers.*
 - a. What contributed to this perception?
6. If you could make one change to the practical sessions you took this semester, what would you change and why?
7. Is there anything else that anyone would like to talk about regarding the MSE234 practical sessions that we didn't get to?

Researcher Prompts

These are questions I'll be asking to follow up on your responses, encourage a broader range of opinions, and to ensure clarity.

- Could I summarise your experience as "...”?
- Does anyone have a different experience or perspective on this aspect of the practicals?
- Who feels differently about ---- ?
- How does X's comment/perspective align with your own experience?
- Is it fair to say ---- about the practicals?