How to approach thematic analysis

PART 1: Getting prepared to analyse data in NVivo

Our step-by-step guide helps you through the natural progression of analysis into NVivo.

STEP 1
Review your research questions and/or research approach
• Ensure you have a clear research question.
• You may want to import them into NVivo for easy reference.

STEP 2
Read a few transcripts and write summary memos
When you open a transcript, click on Memo Link in the Ribbon (or tool bar) to create a linked memo to that transcript. As you read your transcript you can switch to the memo to write up key points.

STEP 3
Create a research journal and develop a coding strategy
• Review the summarized memos you wrote for the transcripts.
• Create a research journal as a memo and write up the key issues coming out from the interviews (See How to create a research journal for more information)
• Reflect on how they relate to your research questions and develop an initial broad coding strategy.

Figure 1

Figure 2
Code for the broad topic areas (themes)

To code for broad topic areas / themes: open a transcript, click on ‘coding stripes’ and select ‘Recent coding’ to see what you have coded as you code.

There are several ways that you can code in NVivo. Find out which way works best for you:

1. Select the text and then drag it onto the code.

OR

2. Select the text and right click and select ‘Code’. You can also click ‘Code’ in the Ribbon. And the short-cut key is CTRL-F2.

Start coding using the Mind Map

- In thematic analysis, you may already have a coding framework. Alternatively, you may be working in an emergent way. Or you may know some initial codes and will develop the rest in an emergent way. Whichever way, you can start coding at a broad level.

- You can create your initial Nodes (containers that hold all the content about a theme) in the Mind Map and convert them into Nodes from there.

- Later, you can go into each Node, review the range of things that were covered in that topic and then code more finely within the node (that is called ‘coding-on’).
**STEP 6**

**Review your coding**

- After you have finished coding for a broad topic area, review the coding by double-clicking and opening it.
- Get a quick feel for the kinds of things covered in that Node by creating a Word Cloud. The Word Cloud can give you some quick ideas about how you could code the broad Node more finely.

**Figure 6**

An example of a Word Cloud for the ‘natural environment’ Node

**Figure 7**

- You can see that finer codes are likely to involve water, quality, habitat, development, fish, etc.
- You can code in a Node in the same way that you code in a transcript. Remember to put the Coding Stripes on to see ‘Recent Coding’ while you code.

**STEP 7**

**Re-organize your Nodes**

- Remember that in re-organizing your Nodes, you are creating a catalogue of your codes, so you can access them quickly. The rules of a catalogue system are to keep like with like, and you should only have one Node for a code. Never duplicate Nodes.
- It is easy to move Nodes around: right click and ‘cut’ and then right click over where you want to put them and select ‘paste’.
- You can also merge Nodes that are the same: right click and select ‘cut’ and then right click over the Node you want to merge and select ‘merge into selected Node’.

**Figure 8**

- An example of a Word Cloud for the ‘natural environment’ Node
- You can see that finer codes are likely to involve water, quality, habitat, development, fish, etc.
- You can code in a Node in the same way that you code in a transcript. Remember to put the Coding Stripes on to see ‘Recent Coding’ while you code.
**STEP 8**

**Explore your data using Coding Queries**

You may have been taking notes in your Research Journal as you were coding your reflections on patterns in the data. You will be shifting from an analysis of the text, to an analysis of the codes and relationships between them. In this case, there seemed to be a relationship between water quality and the decline of the fishing industry.

In the Ribbon, select the Explore tab and click ‘Coding’.

**Figure 9**

**STEP 9**

**Identifying themes**

Write up any patterns you have found in your Research Journal. However, if it is a key issue, you may want to create a new memo on it.

- Use ‘See-Also Links’ in your memo to link to the evidence of any pattern in your data.
- Copy the text that supports your analysis.

**Figure 10**

- Switch to view your memo in the Detail View (or create a new memo)
- Type a summary of your point, then select a few words from that text, right click and select paste as ‘See-Also Links’

**Figure 11**

- The text you have highlighted will turn pink and at the bottom of the memo there will be a hyper-link to the extract you selected in the original file.
- In addition, if you export the memo with the ‘See-Also Links’ to Word, the ‘See-Also Links’ come out as endnotes, with the file name they came from – making it easy for you to start writing up in Word with evidence from the data.

**Figure 12**

For more general guidance on doing thematic analysis see:


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