

Analysing final materials

If you have only used one method such as interviews in your evaluation, it is likely you will still have a number of transcripts to analyse. Using multiple methods of course creates more data, but also possibly different types of data - quantitative, as well as qualitative, such as fieldnotes and transcripts. It therefore helps if there is a structure to making sense of these materials, finally resulting in your report.

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is essentially a way of identifying the strongest ideas, issues, concerns and practices that emerge from your data. It is a process that allows us to evidence from the dataset as a whole, by looking at each piece (e.g. transcript, page of notes) individually and in turn.

The first part of the process is **coding**. This can be done using software, by making comments on a document in Word, or by writing on a printout. This involves reading through a transcript, for example, and highlighting significant points or statements. As you highlight sections, give each a name, so it's clear what is significant about this. It might be the subject matter, the emotion that someone is expressing, discussion of a certain key event - we call this title the code. As you continue through the transcript you will identify many more codes, but also list somewhere and remember previous codes, so that you can look out for that code occurring later, either in the same transcript, or in your other materials. Software such as Nvivo can tell you immediately how many times you've used a certain code, but even on paper, you'll soon get a sense of which occur more frequently. Also be aware that as new codes are identified possibly quite late in the process, you may need to make a pass back though from the beginning to see if they occurred earlier too.

Across all your materials, you may end up with numerous sections coded up, and a long list of code names. The next stage which will help you make sense of this, and write it up, is to group codes into **themes**. If one of your codes identified 'people enjoying the event' and another code pulled out statements describing 'people disliked the event', these might be grouped under a theme of 'audience responses to the event'.

First codes: is the project meeting its objectives?

It can help in the first instance to draw your focus from the project's objectives, which are likely to be what you agreed with the stakeholder to evaluate. If you perceive that your report structure will squarely use these objectives as headings or sections, then it makes sense to decide even before looking at the materials that some of these will be first on your list of codes, to look out for. If one objective was to generate new audiences, a code might be 'new audiences have been generated' or in the case of an audience member interview 'has never been to such an event before'.

More codes: what else are you seeing?

However, don't treat this as a box-ticking exercise whereby you simply identify how many times an objective has been met across the dataset. It is just as likely people would say they 'have been to such events before' or 'didn't know about these events at all in the past'. In this respect then, also identify those new codes as they emerge. Some codes might only be evidenced two or three times, whereby others might be repeated in their dozens, but this is the nature of the process - the strongest themes and findings float to the top. The stakeholder will feel they are getting real value from your evaluation if you can identify the nuance that the data reveals, as well as any useful additional findings.

Writing up the themes

These themes then provide you with sections of your findings write up. For example, in a theme about the audience responses, you can talk through how "some people had clearly been to the events before, but others had not, and hardly ever usually went to arts events at all". This appears in a narrative here, but it draws on the codes that are part of that theme. To more strongly evidence this and demonstrate the rigour in your work, you could also mention how often a particular idea came up, how many people expressed a certain opinion, how strongly people felt something, etc. without necessarily reducing it to a clinical discussion of codes. Within those codes, you can also of course quote from your transcripts, to demonstrate the ways people expressed this, adding colour to your summaries.