

Conducting Thematic Analyses of Interviews and Field Notes*

Theodore Zorn, University of Waikato

1. Make at least two copies of the text to be analyzed.
2. On a notepad, write out the research question. If there is more than one, provide ample space between the questions, and write each question in a different color ink.
3. Also on the notepad (or somewhere visible), write Owen's criteria for thematic analysis:
recurrence: at least two parts of the discourse reflect the same thread of meaning, even though different words are used
repetition: key words, phrases, or sentences are repeated in at least two parts of the discourse
forcefulness: in oral discourse, significant changes in volume (whisper or speaking loudly), inflection, positioning (especially, putting an idea first in a list or explanation), or the use of dramatic pauses or introductory/follow-up phrases that indicate the importance of a segment of discourse ("Here's the main thing" "What I really think is" ". . . and that's what it all boils down to." ". . . so that's what I really think."); in written discourse, forcefulness is communicated by underlining, circling, or highlighting, using all CAPITAL letters, or the kinds of introductory or follow-up phrases mentioned above.
Note that not every instance of a theme needs to be forcefully communicated; for it to be a theme, however, it should sometimes be forcefully communicated.
4. Read through the text to be analyzed, and underline potential answers to the research question. If there is more than one research question, underline answers to each question in the same color ink that you used to write the question. Underline only the part of the utterance that most directly answers the question, since you may later determine that another part of the utterance is a separate theme or answers another research question. It is also possible, of course, that the same utterance answers more than one research question. In this case, underline with more than one color.
5. The **first** time a theme is noted, use a highlighter to identify the **place** in the text in which it is observed. Afterwards, use the same color highlighter each time the theme is observed. Highlight only the part of the utterance that captures the gist of the theme, for the reasons mentioned in #3.
6. On the notepad, under the appropriate research question, write a brief description of the theme and highlight it in the matching color.
7. Each theme identified should be highlighted in a different color.
8. Re-read the text to identify themes that you may not have noticed on the first reading, to revise theme descriptions, and to re-categorize particular segments of the text.
9. Identify major themes by their frequency and by the degree to which they are closely associated in meaning and in discourse with other themes.

*Adapted from Owen, W. F. (1984). Interpretive themes in relational communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 70, 274-287. For an example of thematic analysis applied to organizational communication, see Zorn, T. E., & Ruccio, S. (1998). Motivational communication in college sales teams. *Journal of Business Communication*, 35, 468-499.