

Coding and Reporting Qualitative Results

Coding Qualitative Data

- It is always best to read through all comments or responses before attempting to group or code data.
- It is good to start simply with one broad layer of coding organized around three to seven major themes (and no more than 10). Try to use categories that, from your initial reading of all comments, you are certain a good number of responses will fit into.
- For comments that appear to be outliers, create a miscellaneous category. Results from this category can later be revisited to see if they fit within the developed framework, but coding them individually will only muddy attempts at analysis.
- Some comments will address more than one category. These comments should be coded in each of the categories they address.
- Once comments are grouped in overarching categories, review each created category for an additional layer(s) of organization.

Reporting Qualitative Findings

- It is best to start any report of qualitative findings with a brief explanation of how data were processed and coded, as well as how data exemplars were chosen for presentation. Remaining open about the process of how qualitative data were made empirical builds trust in the findings presented.
- It is best to allow readers to visualize the structure of data coding in the presentation of results. Data should be presented so that the reader is able to view the different levels of coding and how data were categorized and subcategorized.
- Quantifying top layer coding results can be a way of demonstrating the relative importance of different ideas or concepts in the data, and helps to legitimize findings for quantitatively-oriented audiences.
- It is best, however, not to quantify results beyond the first layer of coding. This can give a false sense of the nature of the data, by misplacing the emphasis on numerical representation, as opposed to the rich description they provide.
- When presenting findings, it is most effective to include actual examples of comments that reflect the concept being coded. This also helps to build trust in findings presented, as it elucidates the connection between the open text comments analyzed and the coding structure imposed in analysis.