



## checklist

- Thematic analysis is a way of finding patterns in seemingly random data.
- Interpreting and segmenting data in a consistent way is essential in order to carry out a thematic analysis.
- Coding is a vital process in thematic analysis as it describes segments within our data and ascribes meaning to them.
- There is a wide variety of coding techniques available to you as a researcher. The only way to find the best coding approach for your research is to experiment.
- Themes begin to emerge in your data as you begin to see similarities and differences across the codes you have generated.



## project

The purpose of the following exercise is to get you, the researcher, to start thinking about a subject and topic thematically. Lending on Johnny Saldaña's (2013) idea that film titles often reflect the essence of the work (discussed in section 22.2.2), think about the title/name of your favourite film, book or song. Now attempt the following tasks:

- 1 Select three parts or sections within your film/book/song that 'stand out' or are significant to you and write a small paragraph about the content of each section.
- 2 Now write down (or discuss with a classmate) how the content, in each of your sections, relates to the title of your film/book/song.
- 3 Explore the title of your film/book/song in relation to other sections. Work towards answering the question: does the title adequately reflect the content? If so, how?
- 4 Is there any existing literature or theory within your own subject that can help to develop your understanding of this theme?

For illustrative purposes, I have given you a case study of this exercise below, with a running commentary of why the tasks in this exercise are relevant when beginning to think about completing a thematic analysis.

### Case Study

One of my favourite films is the black comedy *In Bruges*, starring Colin Farrell and Brendan Gleeson. The premise of the story revolves around two men who are sent to Bruges (in Belgium) 'to hide' after committing a serious crime for their boss. Throughout the film I constantly noticed how Colin Farrell's character, 'Ray', could not enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of the European Medieval town of Bruges. This was apparent because Ray constantly made negative comments about the town, the other tourists and the local beer. Even when he showed a glimpse of enjoyment from being in Bruges, he still made a condescending remark about the city: 'that's the one thing I like about Europe, though. You don't have to learn any of their languages.' By contrast, Brendan Gleeson's character, 'Ken', made an active and conscious attempt to explore the town by visiting some of the landmarks and sampling the local beers. Throughout the film,

the dialogue between Ken and Ray often revolved around the desire to enjoy Bruges (for Ken) and the negative comparisons to 'back home' (for Ray). This duality between the two opposing views of Bruges climaxed when Ken said to Ray: 'you're about the worst tourist in the world'.

You might now be thinking about the relationship between my outline of this film and conducting a thematic analysis. But my description of some of the narrative within the film is a particularly good example of how small pieces of dialogue (in other words, the data) can be understood within a wider theme that encompasses and explains these narratives. In my example then, a key theme that overarches the dialogue is *the tourist experience*. Therefore, within our own analysis, we could explore what constitutes 'the tourist experience' by using the data to give weight to the arguments we shall make. Similarly, when writing our analysis, we always use the work of other researchers to make sense of our own ideas. In my example then, John Urry's (2002) concept of 'the tourist gaze' would be helpful in understanding the interactions between 'Ken' and 'Ray', because, as Urry (2002: 1) suggests, 'when we "go away" we look at the environment with interest and curiosity. It speaks to us in ways we appreciate, or at least we anticipate that it will do so'. Using our data, and Urry's (2002) concept of 'the tourist gaze', we could ask questions such as, what constitutes the tourist experience? And why was 'Ken' captured and enchanted by 'the tourist gaze', whilst 'Ray' actively rebelled against it? When asking and answering these sorts of questions, we are simultaneously starting to understand why the film is titled *In Bruges* – the film is about the different types of experiences we can have when arriving at a foreign destination for the first time, experiences that shape the way we perceive our immediate surroundings and our place within them. Whilst I am not seeking to give in-depth answers to these questions and ideas here, I am instead demonstrating the relationship between coding, theming and situating our ideas within previous research that has been conducted within the area of study.

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