

Coding, analyzing, and presenting qualitative results

What is qualitative data? Words! Generally, the responses to open-ended questions in your pre/post test questionnaires. It is also collected through individual interviews, focus groups, or reviews of documents or other types of written records.

What do I do with it?

Step 1. Check your data. Make sure you have everything together that you need to conduct analysis.

Ask: Do I have enough resources and responses to analyze the data.

Step 2. Add ID numbers to each questionnaire, respondent, group or site so you can identify and go back to the data later.

Step 3. Prepare your data for analysis. You may want to make copies of the data files (either hard copies or electronic copies) in case you are going to mark up a document during your analysis (I often use different colored highlighters to begin my sorting). You will also want to identify the source of your data such as by individual case number, source or site.

Ask: Are my questionnaires, interviews or other documents organized so I can go back to the original documents to check my work?

Step 4: Get to know your data. Take a look at it, read over it and start jotting down your initial impressions on what you are learning about the data. This first review also includes considering the quality of the data.

Step 5: Start to focus your analysis.

Ask: How does it make sense to focus all of this data? Why am I doing the analysis and what questions do I want to answer with it?

Basically, what you are going to do is **content analysis** of the narrative responses. So you will want to start thinking about the best way to organize your data. If you have text that responds to questions on a survey, then it makes sense to start organizing by the survey questions. Organizing your data around the main questions you are trying to answer with your research is another way to start (if you have focus group or other interview data). You can also focus your data around topic, time period or event. Another way to organize your data is around case, individual or group. For instance a “case” may be one school or school district. An individual may be a first time participant in the program. And one group may be your 8th grade student participants in your “clubs”.

Step 6: Categorize Information. Once you get your thoughts together about how you are going to organize your data...you will start sorting your data into those “buckets” or themes that seem to emerge through your review of the data.

Ask: What patterns or themes in the data are popping out at me? Do I see a good example of that theme or pattern?

Identify themes or patterns: Look through the responses for ideas, concepts, behaviors, interactions or terms that are used by the respondents.

Example 1: Looking for patterns or themes in the data

Text: What are some of the ways we can improve the program?	Themes/Patterns
Do more activities be hands on. Talk more about real incidents. Talk more about real cases. Have more people come in Talk more about sexual harassment because that is bigger than alcohol. To improve the program they should make it last longer. Do more activities. Keep having volunteers. Find a way to make it more interactive and by that I mean get people that have experienced it first hand. Make it longer. Do more events with the students in the class. More demonstrations to make it seem like we could stand it. Shorten the lesson on some topics, & involve the teens more. None because I like it just the way it is.	Activities Make it real, have people tell their stories. Focus on sexual harassment. Make it longer or look at the frequency/duration of the topics. No changes or no comment

Organize these themes or patterns into coherent categories that summarize the crux of the text/narrative. As you read through the data pull out examples (called exemplars) to illustrate the idea, them or meaning of the text.

As you review data and start your organizing you may also notice more themes, categories start to emerge. Jot these down and start to include other responses that fit into these categories.

Start using codes to identify your themes or patterns. For example, if you have a question what about the program was most helpful to you.....you might get responses like: I liked the sharing with other kids. You might code this as Sharing or S. All other responses about sharing or being with friends you would indicate with an S.

Example 2: Starting my coding schema

Question	Categories
What are some of the ways we can improve the program?	Include real life examples of the topics and have people who have experienced the topic present information on it. (RLE) 12 Include activities that involve the teens more; make the curriculum more engaging (ITM) 18
None, it's great the way it is (NC) 22	Look at the topics and spend more time on those that resonate with the students (RWS) 14

Note: Possible code abbreviations are designated in the parenthesis.

Step 7. Identify patterns and connections within and between the categories you have created. When you are organizing your data you will start to see patterns and links both within between the categories.

Ask: How do the responses, themes, patterns appear to be linked? Is there any thread that runs through 2 or more of the themes that could suggest subthemes or linkage between the responses?

Assess the importance of the different themes and then determine if those variations are important to your analysis.

Ask: What are the key similarities and differences in the way your participants are responding...are there subtle differences or are they substantial?

For example, if you have 3 groups of 8th graders and one group of respondents is very positive in their responses and the other seems to be mixed in their responses about what they learned. You may want to tease through those different groups to compare between them. You'll want to write a summary for each of the categories and themes that emerge.

Ask: Do some themes appear to be included in the data more than others? This question can help you identify the relative importance of various data. After you code all of your themes or categories, you may want to actually count the number of times a theme or category comes up. The count will provide an estimate of the importance of this theme to your group of participants.

Example 3: Looking for connections in the themes

What you liked most	What you liked least	Ways to improve the program
The speakers that had personal knowledge and we could relate to them	Lecture format from the teacher and the part on laws about consent	Include real life examples of the topics and have people who have experienced the topic present information on it. (RLE)
The drama pieces and hands on activities	Lecture format and stuff on laws and school policies blah, blah, blah....	Include activities that involve the teens more; make the curriculum more engaging (ITM)
Information on sexual harassment and how to stop it because it happens a lot at school	Not being able to talk about what goes on at this school	Look at the topics and spend more time on those that resonate with the students (RWS)

Step 8 Interpretation: Telling a Coherent Story with the Data.

Use your themes and the connections you find in the data to explain your findings. Determine, what is really important from the information you analyzed; both positive and negative. You will want to organize your "story" around the format you chose at the beginning of your analysis whether that was based on the item number in your pre/post questionnaire or by another type of grouping logic.

Ask: What format makes the most sense for my audience? You can use various formats for summarizing your findings whether in tables, text or diagrams. Be sure to include exemplars that really capture the essence of the themes or patterns from the data.

Step 9: Peer Review... Have someone check your analysis to validate your findings and interpretation of the data. Your peer reviewer should challenge your findings so you can reflect on them and fine-tune them if needed.
Ask: Have I looked at the data from the respondents' perspective and captured the essence of their ideas in my analysis?

Step 10: Write up your report and share with your stakeholders. Make sure to address limitations and alternatives to your interpretation as well as using the data to support the data interpretation and tell the program story from the perspective of the participants.

Ask: Who is my audience and how do I want to package the findings so they resonate with the audience?

Example 4: Summary of Qualitative Results

The students that participated in XYZ Workshops on Dating Violence Prevention in general felt the information was useful to help them understand dating violence. The participants especially liked the hands-on activities that engaged them in learning about dating violence prevention. For example, several participants mentioned the drama and acting activities were useful and also mentioned having presenters with real life experiences on the issues helped the participants understand the impact of dating violence and sexual harassment.

Additional resources: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/resources/pdf/Tipsheet20.pdf>