



Themed notes method - making notes during research

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- Evaluating a source
- A guide to critical reading
- Themed notes method
- Showing analysis and evaluation in your writing
- Constructing an argument
- A guide to developing an argument map
- A guide to synthesis
- A guide to critical writing

Introduction

As you progress through university, you will need to include more references in your assignments. Equally, you will need to show more synthesis/ analysis/evaluation of the information that you read. To assist this, it is recommended that you create a set of themed notes. This guide explains how to use a thematic analysis tool to help you develop the skills of evaluating the arguments within multiple sources more deeply and it can be used to spot similarities and differences between different arguments and start to pick holes in them.

Creating themed notes will mean that everything you have found about topics of interest is located in one place (i.e. you do not have to work with multiple pieces of paper). This makes it much easier to see themes/ trends/patterns in the information you have found which can be colour coded and then discussed in your assignment.

Themed notes really need to be made using a grid in order to capture and organise the key points from each piece of literature. This is best done on a computer.

How to create themed notes using the thematic analysis tool on page 3 below

1. Prior to creating your notes, you need to:
 - a. Read through your assignment question and associated guidelines and break down the question into the areas you need to research. Write these areas down as headings/themes – this allows you to structure your notes.
 - b. Start to search for a wide range of papers related to each of the areas (headings/themes). Add the full reference to the source you have summarised/quoted in the first column.
 - c. Identify the type of study and input this information into the grid, e.g. research paper/research article or conceptual/theoretical article.
2. Read and summarise (in your own words) what each author has said about each area of interest/record any useful quotations, definitions the context of the research and purpose of the paper. Summaries/quotations should be positioned under the corresponding heading/theme (s).
3. Identify the limitations of each paper:
 - a. A good research paper should identify its limitations.
 - b. Does the paper answer the research question? Are there unanswered questions at the end of the study?
 - c. What were the methodological flaws or research limitations? Bias: Are there underrepresented groups? gender, age, social class and ethnicity? How large is the sample? If the sample is small, then the impact of the findings is limited.
4. Include notes on the implications of this paper on your assignment brief.
5. Repeat steps 2 and 3 for other sources that you read.
6. Review the Thematic analysis tool after you have input a few papers. Compare and contrast themes from each paper and highlight similarities and differences. What are the common themes and how could these be used?

(adapted from Wason and Southall, 2016)

Example of a thematic analysis tool (this can be adapted to suit higher level assignments, see example 2 below)

| Author, title, journal, date | Type of paper / context / purpose | Theme 1 | Theme 2 | Theme 3 | Limitation(s) | Project implication(s) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|------------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

(adapted from Wason and Southall, 2016 p.31)

Thematic analysis tool – L4/L5 example 1

| Author, title, journal, date | Type of paper / context / purpose | Theme 1 | Theme 2 | Limitation(s) | Project implication(s) |
|--|--|--|-------------------------|--|---|
| Luschei, and Zubaidah, (2012) 'Teacher training and transitions in rural Indonesian schools: a case study of Bogor, West Java', <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Education</i> . | Research paper (primary research) The effectiveness of teacher professional programmes in rural areas of Indonesia To explore the training needs of teachers in rural areas of Indonesia | 1. Differences in teachers' values and practices | 2. Shortage of teachers | The study did not use pre and post-intervention data to measure the effectiveness of professional development programme for either the teachers' or students' perspectives | Research is lacking in rural schools across various regional areas in Indonesia |

Thematic analysis tool – L6/L7 example 2

| Full reference | Type of paper | Context(s) | Objective(s) | Research design | Main themes | Critiques | Project implications |
|--|----------------|---|---|---|--|--|--|
| Luschei, T. F. and Zubaidah, I. (2012) 'Teacher training and transitions in rural Indonesian schools: a case study of Bogor, West Java', <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Education</i> , 32(3), pp.333-350, doi: 10.1080/02188791.2012.711241 | Research paper | The effectiveness of teacher professional programmes in rural areas of Indonesia and how such programmes help improve teaching practices in schools with difficult conditions and limited resources | To explore training needs and instructional strategies employed by teachers in rural areas of Indonesia, particularly in Bogor region (West Java) | A qualitative method using interviews with: (1) 38 headmasters and teachers from nine primary schools; (2) a district official. | 1. Teachers' pedagogical practices and perspectives vary across the nine schools being studied 2. Shortage of qualified teachers 3. Large classes of mixed year groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student learning outcome not measured • Classroom observations to gauge any discrepancies in the data • identify whether what the teachers say in the interviews correspond to what they do in lessons • No baseline and post-intervention data available • Unable to identify the effectiveness of professional development programmes from the perspectives and attitudes of both teachers and students. | further and future research is needed focusing on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remote or rural schools across various regional areas in Indonesia • students with low motivation • overcrowded classes • inadequately trained teachers limited teaching resources |

Please note:

Start each summary with a reference (for example, Jones (2013) found.....).

It is advisable to start each quotation with a reference (for instance, King, (2013, p.156) stated “.....”) and format this in a different font colour – this will remind you to double check your referencing should you use the quotation in your assignment.

You do not need to link summaries about the same topic together until you start writing the assignment.

You should also keep a record of where you have searched for information (e.g. specific journal databases) / search terms. This should be created in a separate document or via using save search options available on databases.

As you develop your themed notes you may need to add in additional headings or break existing headings down into sub-headings.

It can be useful to have an ‘other’ heading at the end of your notes. Here you can include any summarises sources that do not neatly fit into an existing heading. As your notes become more comprehensive and you gain understanding, you can decide if the content should be retained, added to an existing heading / new heading or removed.

Further information

The Learning Resources Study Hub provides a range of opportunities (such as workshops and drop-ins) for you to enhance your academic skills. For more information visit:

lrweb.beds.ac.uk/studyhub



References

Wason, H. and Southall, J. (2016) ‘Thematic Analysis Grid’ *Critical Thinking Skills Toolkit Student Guide* p. 30-31 [unpublished] (Available from: Kingston University)