

Analysis

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Description

The term ‘analysis’ in academic writing and research has multiple meanings. A common meaning is to take something apart in order to understand its component parts and how they relate to each other. In studies of literature, one approach to analyzing a text is to explain how one or more of its components functions and contributes to the whole (Barnet & Cain, 2012). For example, in analyzing Robert Frost’s poem “Mending Wall,” Madsen and Ruderman (2016) argue that the speaker of the poem cannot decide whether to repair a wall:

1) A modern pastoral in blank verse, [the poem] is also an elegy, in this case for an unstated or un-nameable loss: “something there is that doesn't love a wall.” 2) Besides the tortured syntax of the line, the speaker acknowledges not only his ambivalence about the activity of mending a wall, but also his befuddlement, his inability to say with any certainty what it is in the world or in us that does not love a wall. (Madsen & Ruderman, 2016, p. 87)

In sentence 1), the authors present their claim, quoting the specific line of the poem; then in sentence 2) connect the use of the indefinite pronoun to a larger claim about uncertainty and ambivalence as the broader message of the poem.

A related definition of analysis is to identify connections, patterns, and the underlying workings of a phenomenon or a set of data, whether numeric, textual, visual, or in another format. In qualitative research, analysis often begins with the researcher writing codes, or labels, for the data. During the analysis process, researchers also write analytic memos that describe the process by which codes and later stages of analysis have been generated as well as broader ideas suggested during this process (Saldaña, 2015). For example, in an **article** on how students use texts, images, and sounds in digital writing, Jiang (2018) describes his data analysis process:

26 I started with organizing the data. ... What then followed was a reiterative reading
27 of ... each data file. I first compared [one type of data] with [another] and highlighted
28 textual segments that revealed any changes in students' writing behavior. ... I then
29 examined [students' responses] by looking into the interviews and informal
30 conversations. (p. 64)

31 Analyses of quantitative data typically use statistical methods to compare **results**, describe
32 trends, and simulate outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Writers of quantitative texts
33 usually describe how the data were organized and prepared for calculation and the procedures
34 performed to test hypotheses.

35 **Variations and Tensions**

36 In social sciences and humanities fields, analysis often involves using theoretical
37 lenses to understand data and create **results/findings**. As findings emerge from qualitative
38 data analysis, a researcher considers which aspects of a **theoretical framework** might help in
39 understanding a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For instance, Jiang (2018) uses
40 investment theory about motivation for learning and a theory of identity to analyze how
41 students' efforts in learning to write changed as they use digital means of expression and how
42 their identity developed through this experience.

43 **Graduate Student Voice**

44 To me, writing analyses of poems, novels, or empirical data means discussing not
45 only my argument or findings, but also how I arrived at them, by responding to my guiding
46 research questions. —Weijia Li

47 **Reflection Questions**

- 48 1. When you read texts in your discipline, how do authors describe their data analysis
49 process, if they are analyzing data?

50 2. If your discipline uses theory in the process of analysis, how do writers use theoretical
51 lenses in their analysis?

52 **For Further Reading**

53 Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing*
54 *among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE. The chapter, “Writing a qualitative study”
55 (pp. 213-242), introduces strategies for writing about data analysis including from
56 approaches such as phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography.

57 Scott, J. (2019). *Data analysis write-ups*.

58 https://jgscott.github.io/teaching/writeups/write_ups/ This blog post introduces a
59 structure for writing quantitative data analysis and provides tips and exemplars.

60 **References**

61 Barnet, S., & Cain, W. E. (2012). *A short guide to writing about literature* (12th ed.).
62 Pearson.

63 Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and*
64 *mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE.

65 Jiang, L. (2018). Digital multimodal composing and investment change in learners’ writing in
66 English as a foreign language. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 40*, 60–72.

67 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2018.03.002>

68 Madsen, K. D., & Ruderman, D. B. (2016). Robert Frost’s ambivalence: Borders and
69 boundaries in poetic and political discourse. *Political Geography, 55*, 82–91.

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71 Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE.

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