

## Content Analysis

The purpose of the content analysis is to conduct a research project on a sociological issue or topic, using a mass medium as a source of data. The topic should be one of sociological interest: inequality in society, the effects of demographic or technological change, changing statuses and roles in social institutions, or how culture shapes perceptions, for example. The medium you select should be one to which you have easy access, and can include newspapers, magazines, books, movies, television shows, radio programs, music, webcasts or blogs, government documents or advertising in its various forms. Within the medium, you will want to focus on a particular type of symbolic representation, such as text, photos, video images, or sounds.

You should do some background research on your topic to identify a problem and develop a specific research question. The research question is a simple idea that you want to study. You will collect data that will help you explain what you want to know in your research question. Note that a research question should be stated so that you develop an explanation and support the explanation with evidence. A research question is not a question that you want to answer directly (e.g. with a “yes” or “no”) or prove true or false.

Once you have narrowed your topic and developed a research question, you need a means of measuring your data. Depending on your medium, you can measure spatial or temporal characteristics, for example the amount of space on a page dedicated to a particular topic, or the amount of time a news broadcaster talks about a topic in a half-hour news program. You can tally results, that is, counting the number of times specific words are used in an article or broadcast. You can measure directionality as well, that is, whether a topic is portrayed as positive or negative, for example. You should clearly specify your measurement strategy before you collect data.

Within your medium and subject (symbolic representation), you need to develop a systematic means of sampling. This may mean recording newscasts for two weeks straight, finding advertisements in three women's magazines for one month in three different years, or reviewing various blogs that present a conservative political viewpoint. Again, you should develop a sampling strategy before you go out and choose your sample. You should not simply find content that is convenient or easy.

Next, you carry out your data collection strategy, measuring the characteristics you identify in the content you are assessing. This may mean going through and watching TV shows and tallying every time a character uses a word, smokes a cigarette, or addresses someone of the opposite sex, depending on your topic. Collect your data carefully, record it as you collect it, and be as systematic as possible.

Once you have your data, you need to analyze it and infer its meaning. This probably means putting your data into categories and determining percentage values for each category. Your analysis also includes an interpretation of what the results mean, in light of the particular problem and research question you are addressing. Do not try to adjust your results to match your expectations; report on what you find. It is all right if your results are inconclusive; simply report what you found and explain that you could only find weak evidence or no evidence to support your theory.

Write about your results, specifying your problem, research question, methods, results, and interpretation. Your paper should describe the problem that motivated the research, provide the context and specific question, and explain why the question is important and worth addressing. You should describe exactly how you conducted the research: how you chose your medium and content, how you selected the sample you studied, and how you measured your results. You should also clearly describe your results, including any problems you had along the way that may have affected your results. Then, you should describe what the results mean.

Your paper should be about 12 pages. Please turn it in on July 27.