

NVIVO

Introduction to Thematic Analysis

Webinar Series:

Evolving Research in Qualitative and Mixed Methods

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Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke developed an approach to thematic analysis, now known as reflexive thematic analysis, that they first wrote about in 2006 in the journal *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. This paper now has over 130,000 Google Scholar citations and has had a profound impact on the landscape of qualitative research. They have since written numerous papers, books chapters, commentaries, editorials, and encyclopaedia entries about thematic analysis and most recently have published the book *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (2022, Sage). Their website www.thematicanalysis.net provides links to all the resources they have created for thematic analysis.



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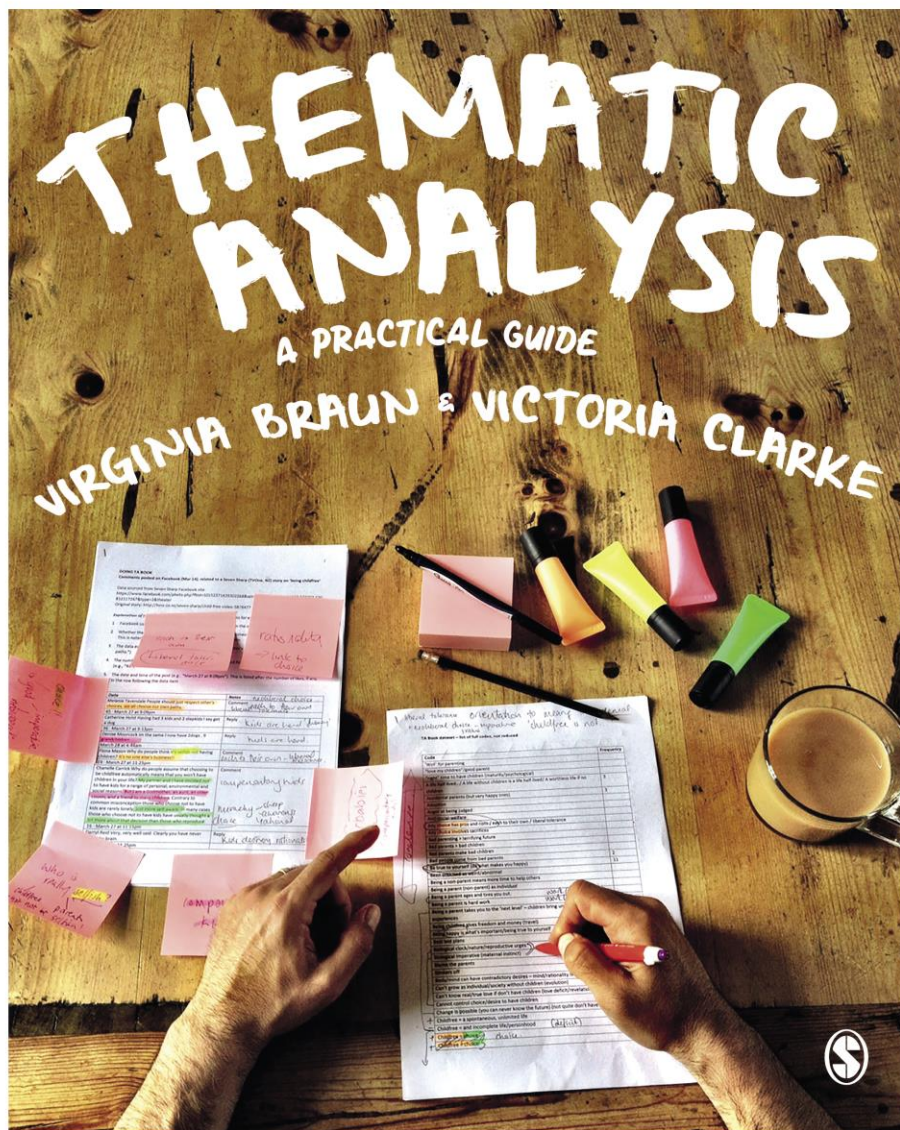
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England



Introduction to thematic analysis: Understanding, conceptualising and designing (reflexive) TA for quality research

Prof Virginia Braun
School of Psychology
Waipapa Taumata Rau/The University of Auckland

Presentation for NVivo
29/30 November 2022



Using thematic analysis in psychology

Virginia Braun¹ and Victoria Clarke²

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Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology. In this paper, we argue that it offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. We outline what thematic analysis is, locating it in relation to other qualitative analytic methods that search for themes or patterns, and in relation to different epistemological and ontological positions. We then provide clear guidelines to those wanting to start thematic analysis, or conduct it in a more deliberate and rigorous way, and consider potential pitfalls in conducting thematic analysis. Finally, we outline the disadvantages and advantages of thematic analysis. We conclude by advocating thematic analysis as a useful and flexible method for qualitative research in and beyond psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 2006; 3: 77–101

Key words: epistemology; flexibility; patterns; qualitative psychology; thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001) within and beyond psychology. In this paper, we aim to fill what we, as researchers and teachers in qualitative psychology, have experienced as a current gap – the absence of a paper which adequately outlines the theory, ap-

plication and evaluation of thematic analysis, and one which does so in a way accessible to students and those not particularly familiar with qualitative research.¹ That is, we aim to write a paper that will be useful as both a teaching and research tool in qualitative psychology. Therefore, in this paper we discuss theory and method for thematic analysis, and clarify

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Before I begin

Collaborative thinking
developed with Victoria Clarke

Located thinking

- Disciplinary
- Geographically
- Identity and imagining...



Understanding TA



TA is not a single thing... more like a family

Our way of clustering...

- ‘Coding reliability’ versions of TA
- ‘Codebook’ versions of TA (different names)
- ‘Reflexive’ versions of TA (our approach)
- Other versions

Finlay’s differentiation:

- Scientifically descriptive
- artfully interpretative

“At a very basic level, TA is a method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes - themes are your ultimate analytic purpose. TA is - more or less - a method for data analysis, rather than a methodology” (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

Focus on patterns of meaning aka themes *across* a dataset (but what’s a pattern?)

Processes of coding >> themes

Reporting ‘themes’

A method not a *methodology*

(but: method-ish)

Family differences NVIVO



Paradigmatic differences... or... what are we (conceptually) doing here?

What *paradigm* are we operating within?

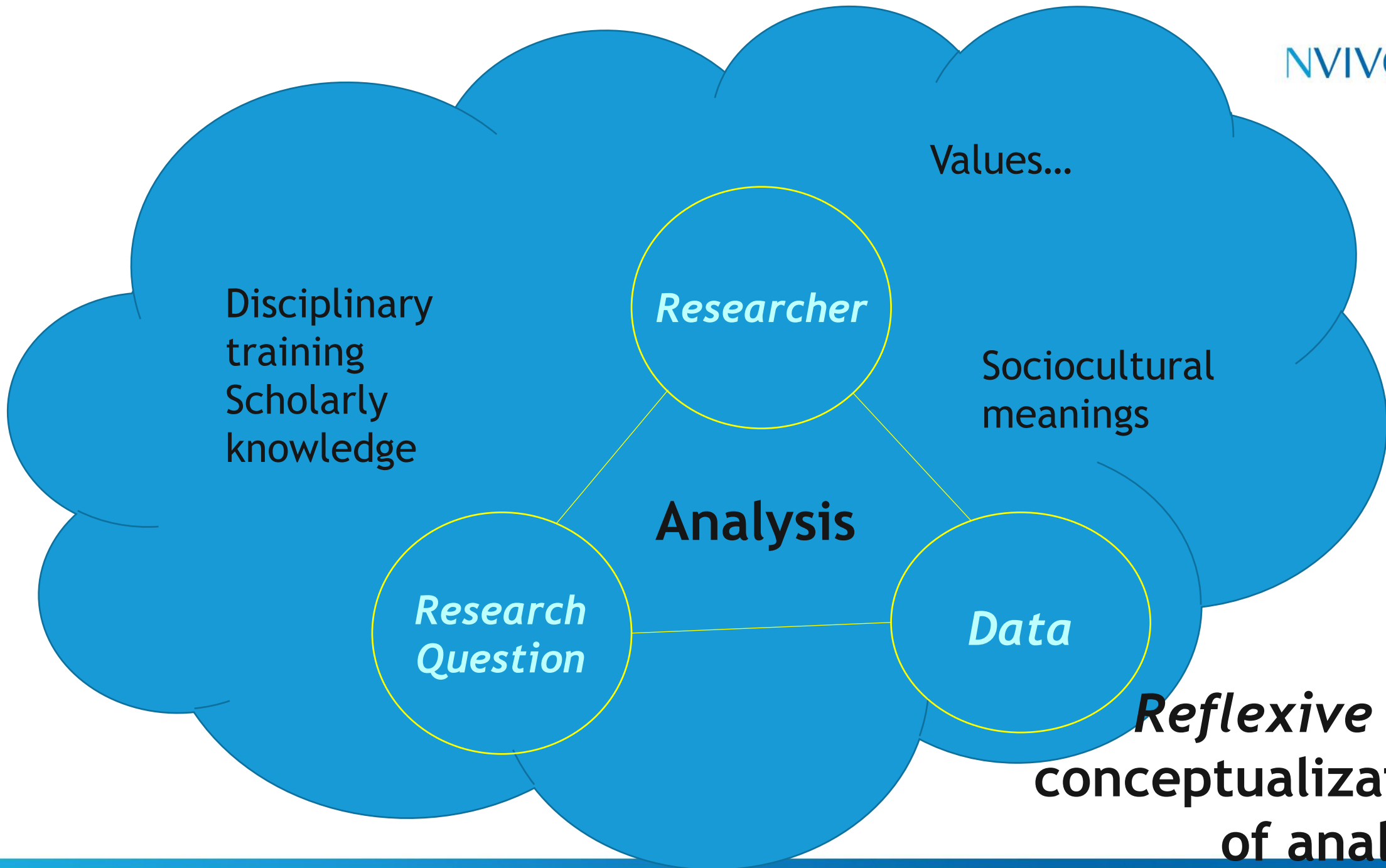
- Small q // postpositivist
- Big Q // nonpositivist

How do we conceptualise analysis?

- Contextual, situated knowledge?

What do we make of subjectivity?

- Threat
- Resource (integral)



**Reflexive TA -
conceptualization
of analysis**

Family *differences*



Research practice differences

- Conceptual (discovery <> production)
- Practical (identifying themes <> developing analysis; themes inputs or outputs)
- Directed/linear or open/exploratory?



Family *differences*

What is a theme?

- United by focus/topic?
- United by shared core concept?



A signpost with four directional signs against a sunset sky. The signpost is a dark metal pole with four signs attached. The top-left sign is green with a white arrow pointing left. The top-right sign is brown with a white arrow pointing right. The bottom-left sign is dark with a white arrow pointing down-left. The bottom-right sign is dark with a white arrow pointing down-right. The sky is a mix of blue and orange, with clouds at the bottom.

What's *particular* about reflexive TA?

Big Q/artfully interpretative
Research subjectivity valued >
reflexivity essential!

Coding open and organic (codes as
analytic 'entity')

Themes as analytic 'output'

Multiple *ways* to do *reflexive* TA
(theoretical alignments etc)



Take home: Know your TA!



DOING (REFLEXIVE) TA: A SIX PHASE *PROCESS*

1. Familiarisation
2. Coding
3. Searching for/Generating/constructing (initial) themes
4. Theme development and review
5. Refining, defining and naming themes
6. Writing/Stopping

NB: The process is *not the purpose*, nor a guarantor of quality...

Common problems in published TA

Misunderstanding/misrepresenting (lack of diversity)

Mismatches:

- Conceptual
- Methodological (practice based)
- Reporting
- Quality criteria



Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal*

<i>Broad category</i>	<i>Specific area of problematic practice</i>
<i>Conceptual and methodological (mis)understanding</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undifferentiated TA • Mischaracterising TA • Inadequate rationalisation for the use of TA • Failing to theoretically locate TA or swimming (unknowingly) in the waters of positivism
<i>The use and/or reporting of use of TA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misadventures with reflexivity • Inadequate description around analytic approach and process • Confusion around a deductive orientation • Conceptual incoherence around themes • Too many themes? Thinness, fragmentation and missed opportunities. • Deploying theoretically incoherent quality standards

Manuscript currently under revision

Avoid problems by becoming a *knowing* practitioner...

Don't treat thematic analysis as a singular method

Talk about *which* version of TA you used...

Make 'choices' (thoughtfully, appropriately) and *show* you made choices.

Engage in conceptual and design thinking



Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 1-6.

What do I mean by conceptual and design thinking?

Conceptual thinking:

- Research values (awareness)
- Ontological assumptions
- Epistemological assumptions

Design thinking:

- Design coherence / methodological integrity (Levitt et al. 2017)

Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative*



10 fundamentals of *reflexive* TA NVIVO (for conceptual & design coherence)

1. Researcher subjectivity is the primary “tool” for reflexive TA
2. Analysis cannot be accurate or objective, but can be weaker/stronger
3. Good quality coding/themes come from combining depth of engagement and distancing (the value of time!)
4. Coding quality is *not* dependent on multiple coders; a single coder is typical
5. Themes are analytic *outputs*; are developed after coding and from codes
6. Themes are patterns of meaning anchored by a shared idea or concept
7. Themes are *produced* by the researcher through systematic analytic engagement with the dataset
8. Assumptions underpinning analysis need to be acknowledged
 - Why don't we like “saturation”?
9. Data analysis is conceptualized an art not a science
10. *Reflexivity* is key to good quality analysis

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1), 3-26.



Five key challenges...

- Fitting method to purpose... (claims *and* practice)
- Working in a team, and using reflexive TA coherently
- Time (tensions & pressures)
- Reporting (challenges in style, length, and from reviewers, editors)
- Choosing appropriate quality criteria...

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). The ebbs and flows of qualitative research: Time, change and the slow wheel of interpretation. In B. C. Clift, J. Gore, S. Gustafsson, S. Bekker, I. C. Batlle, & J. Hatchard (Eds.), *Temporality in Qualitative Inquiry: Theories, Methods and Practices*

Quality and being a *reflexive* (TA) practitioner...

You are not a robot

You are not a mechanic

What are you then?

An *adventurer*...

- Values-led
- Reflexive
- Active
- Positioned

= Thought**FULL** (*aka, don't just think of this as 'rules to follow'*)



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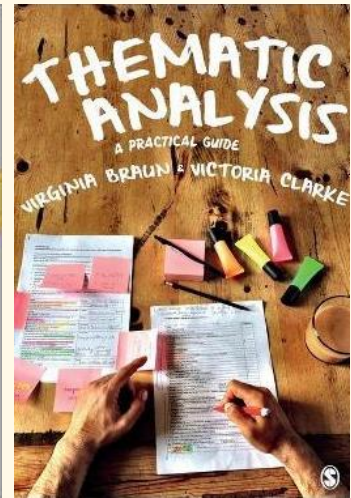
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Thank you!
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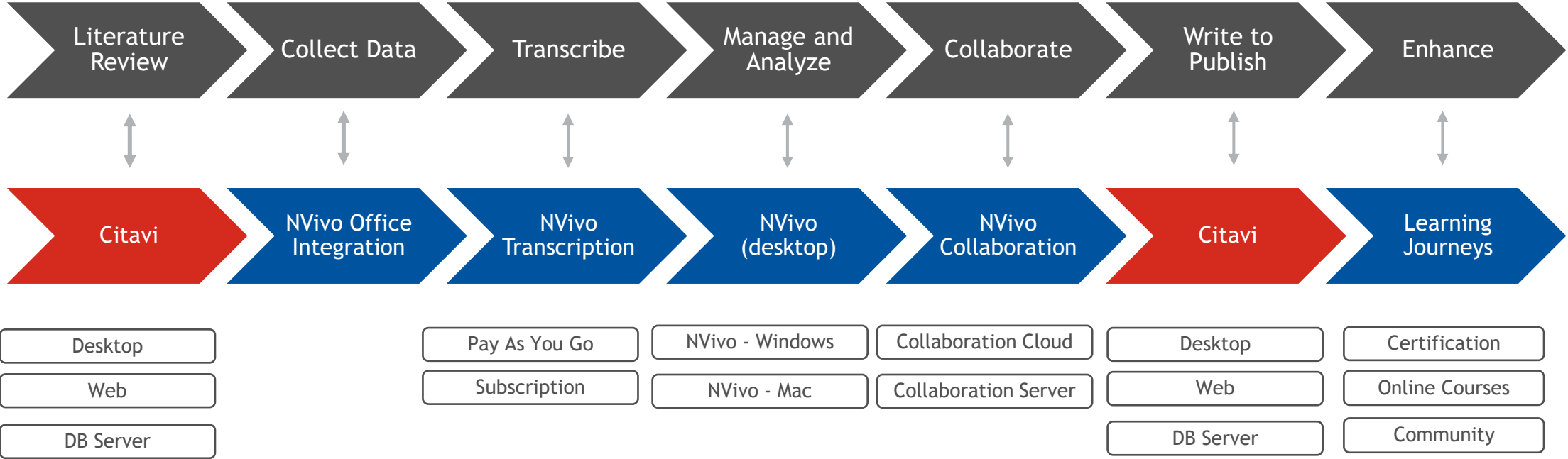
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The research Process



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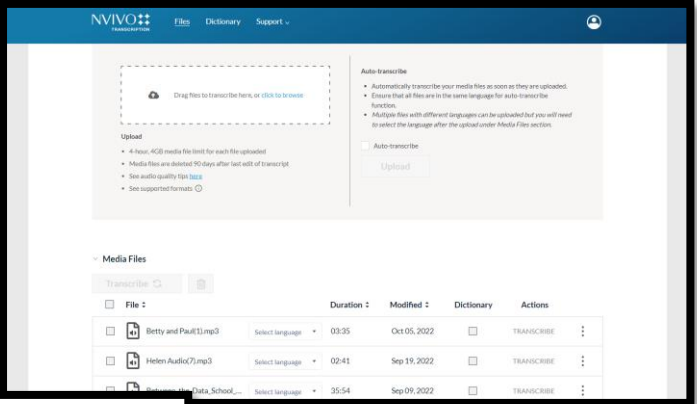
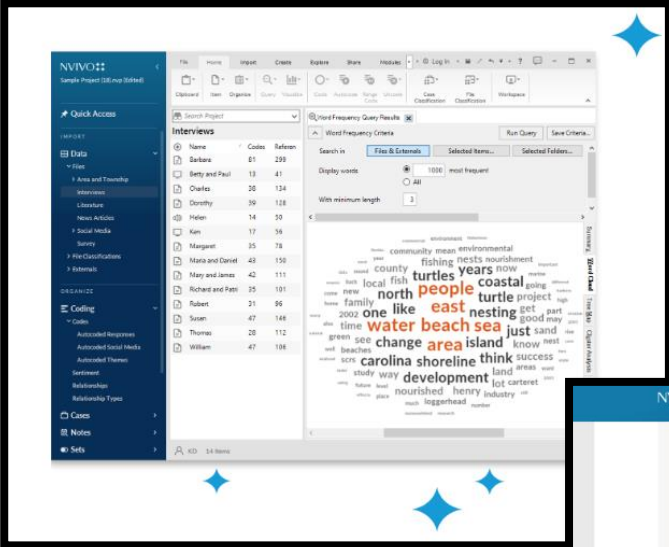
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