

ATLAS.ti 5.5: A Qualitative Data Analysis Tool

Part I: Terminology of ATLAS.ti

As you work with the program, these somewhat arbitrary terms take on greater meaning.

Hermeneutic Unit (HU):

This is the skeletal structure of your project. Hermeneutics is defined as the science of interpreting text empirically.

Primary Documents (PDs):

Your data – usually textual – but can also be video and images. Sometimes Atlas.ti refers to PDS as PTs (primary text); they are the same. PDs may include transcribed interviews, field notes, observations, etc. A PD *is not the same* as your actual data; it is called a PD once it is linked to your project.

Quotation:

These are the pieces of data (text, video, etc.), of any length, that are selected for analysis. Think of it as the text you might highlight on paper.

Codes:

Terms of analysis or interpretation you assign to your data (text). Think of codes as the notations you make in the margins of your documents.

Objects:

Items created in your HU (codes, memos, families, etc.).

Memos:

Developing ideas or notes as you analyze and code your data. Memos can be “free” or attached to specific PDs or codes. Some people use memos to keep a diary of their thoughts throughout the research process, eventually using it as a draft for a publication.

Comments:

Comments are similar to memos, but they really act more like screen notes. They cannot be exported from Atlas.ti like memos and other objects.

Families:

If you have many PDS, families can help you group or categorize them. For instance, a family could be all of your interviews or field notes.

Networks:

At the highest level of analysis and interpretation are networks. Here you can define conceptual relationships between your objects (codes, quotations, etc.). For instance, you may find a relationship between one code “motivation” is responsible for growth in “reading ability.”