

An Introduction to ATLAS.ti Qualitative Research Software



Q: What does the acronym ATLAS.ti stand for?

A: The name stands for “Archiv fuer Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache,” which when translated from the German means an archive for “technology, the life world, and everyday language,” and the extension “ti” stands for “text interpretation.” Other packages include *NVivo*, *MAXQDA*, and *HyperResearch*.

[I] Creating the Hermeneutic Unit (HU) and Assigning Primary Documents

1. To begin, create a folder on your hard drive that will contain the new Hermeneutic Unit (HU) and all PDs
2. To assign a Primary Document (text, video): Click on Primary Docs button > Assign Primary Docs icon > browse to select documents (note: once assigned, PDs should not be changed/edited/moved). *Note: If you assign Word (doc) files they cannot be modified within Atlas; however, rich text (rtf) files can be modified.*
3. Once PDs are assigned they appear by title in the window beside the P-Docs button; to view a Primary Document, select/click on it in that small window. *Note: in order to scroll through the PD with a center button on a mouse (or with finger combinations on track pad), one must first click on the PD text or in the margin, otherwise it will, by default, scroll through the PDs (which looks very wild/strange on the screen)*
4. To renumber all PDs: Click on P-Docs button > Misc > Renumber All (or Change Position)
5. The background wallpaper in Atlas.ti can be changed with a right click in main window > Select Wallpaper
6. Clicking on the “bomb” icon in the toolbar causes an “I hate computers!” message—helpful when frustrated

[II] Creating Quotations, Codes, Memoes, and Super Codes

1. To create free-standing Quotations (one of Atlas.ti’s unique and powerful features) simply highlight the text, right click, select Create Free Quotation. *Note: There is a neat click sequence for selecting text in Atlas.ti. One click positions the cursor; a double-click selects a word; two double-clicks, a sentence; three double-clicks, a paragraph; four double-clicks, the entire PD; five double-clicks, toggles back to no selection.*
2. To create a code (which automatically creates a related freestanding quotation instance), simply highlight the text, right click, select Code > Open Coding (type name the first time), or Code In Vivo (using first line as code), or Code by List (select from existing codes, or Quick Code (applies previously used code). Notes: (i) When using Code by List, you can code the same selected text with two or more codes simultaneously—hold Shift or Control key to select contiguous/selected codes, respectively; (ii) To enlarge/reduce the length of an existing coded quotation, first click on the bracket, then highlight the text for the new target length, then click on the icon “Revise Quotation Size.”
3. To create Memos (i.e., notes to self), one can do this as freestanding memos, or attached to selected quotations. To create freestanding memo, highlight text then select Memos (from Menu at top of screen) > Create Free Memo. To attach a Memo to a quotation, highlight the text then select Memo > Attach Memo, or click on the memo icon at the left of screen.
4. To create Super Codes, go Codes > Output > Query Tool, then double click on the Codes you wish to include (they then appear in the boxes on the right of the Code Manager Query Tool window), now click on “Create Super Code” button; enter a name for the new Super Code or accept the default name created from the query expression and click OK; the newly created Super Code immediately appears in the list of codes (red icon instead of default yellow) and can now be used new queries and further data analysis.

[III] Modifying Codes

1. To change the name of a code: First go to Extras > Prefs > General Prefs > Margin > In-Place Action > (click on radio button) Global Rename so that all instances of this code in all Primary Docs will be changed accordingly; then click on Codes button, double click on selected code (or Code > Rename from menu) to rename. All coded instances should change in the HU.
2. To change the length of a coded instance (either making it longer or shorter than the original), first select the full quotation by clicking on its bracket in the right-hand margin (note: do not highlight the text itself as this will not adjust the existing coded instance.), which has the effect of highlighting the text sample in the main

PD window. Now, select the actual desired text length and then select Codes > Modify Boundaries, or more simply just click on the Revise Quotation Size icon at the left of screen (with red 2-way arrow).

3. While there is no “undo” button in Atlas.ti, owing to how the “external system” set up and actions are stored, one can in effect undo all actions made within the software. For example, to delete a coded instance, select the yellow code icon in the right margin, then right click > Unlink. To delete the associated freestanding quotation instance, click on the bracket (which highlights the text in left window), then right click > Delete.
4. To merge codes: In Code Manager, select target code name, then select Misc > Merge Codes, then select the one to change, click on Ok; the number of coded instances in the target code should now include the extras.

[IV] Viewing/Printing Quotations Using Single/Multiple Code Filters

Open Code Manager (either click on little box with “Codes” written on it, or go Codes > Code Manager from file menu); select the code or codes (hold Shift [contiguous] or Control [selected] key for multiple codes); in Code Manager menu go Output > Quotations for Selected Code(s) > choose from Editor (like an embedded Word document that allows you to view/edit the data), Printer, File, or File/Run output. *Note: You will notice that on the outputted data, each coded quotation instance is stamped by the PD number, the coded instance number for the whole PD (e.g., P 2:4 means fourth coded instance in PD 2), the line number(s) of the text, and the editor of code.* Text/quotations can then be copied/pasted into Word documents for report/article writing.

[V] Other Features in Atlas.ti

1. Tools > Word Cruncher provides a detailed word number count for all words in single/multiple/all PDs
2. Codes Manager > Output > Codes-PDs-Table produces a Frequency Matrix of all coded instances in PDs
3. Many other data analysis features are described in detail in the free, on-line Quick Tour, Full Manual, and video Tutorials located here: <http://www.atlasti.com/tutorials.html>

[VI] Multiple Researchers Working with Atlas.ti Asynchronously and/or at Distance

1. To merge HUs: Begin with opening target/final HU; then Tools > Merge with HU > find (browse) for new NU > choose options (select from menu of same/different PDs/codes depending on context).
2. To export the entire HU including PDs and related codes/coding: Tools > Copy Bundle > Create Bundle and a new “.acb” file is created (Atlas copy bundle) for export/emailing with attachment. To receive/open and .acb file, open Atlas > Tools > Copy Bundle > Install Bundle > select options/ok.

Note: If PDs become orphaned due to changes of location/PD content, one can still maintain the coding without starting all over again (note also that back-up files are automatically created in Atlas): (i) If “Not Found” message appears along bottom, open P-Docs manager, click on the PD in focus > Data Source Management > Change Path > Yes (for “Are you sure?” warning) > browse for new locations; (ii) If original PD has been edited, the “Non-synacable” message appears because file length has changed, so open P-Docs manager, highlight PD in focus > right click and select Assign > browse for new target PD location > Yes (for “Are you sure?” warning)—note that an extra copy (without coding) of the PD is also created here and can just be deleted.



Created 20 November 2009
Dr. Daniel Jarvis
Associate Professor of Education
Faculty of Education
Nipissing University
North Bay, Ontario, Canada