

## What is a data chapter?

Adrian Holliday

Dr Adrian Holliday | Professor Emeritus | Applied Linguistics & Intercultural Communication  
| Canterbury Christ Church University | Website: [adrianholliday.com](https://adrianholliday.com)

This presentation, plus other guidance can be found at <https://adrianholliday.com/handouts/>

See also my chapter, 'Writing about data', in *Doing & writing qualitative research* (Holliday 2016)

## Issues

Students have increasing difficulty writing data chapters

Examiners often dissatisfied because

Not structured according to the themes that emerge from analysis

Begin with pages of yet more literature, methodology and theory

Indicating a reluctance to engage fully with data

Do not show researcher thinking - too descriptive

Insufficient discussion of actual data

### Basic principles

Ensuring a full discussion of the data

the core of the whole thesis

stands out clearly, is demonstrated explicitly

not lost in the detail of theory and methodology

But different  
ways of doing  
this

## The purpose of the data chapter

### Common confusions

Between writing about data in the methodology chapter and then again in the data chapters

Between 'results' and 'data'

Data  $\neq$  the outcome of the research

Data = the material where the outcome can hopefully be found

Between 'data', 'discussion' and 'findings' chapters

**Discussion** takes place throughout the thesis

Findings emerge piecemeal from the data

There is a **final discussion** of the whole thesis in the **Implications chapter**

### Methodology chapter

**Describes & discusses how** the data is collected and analysed

And **how** the outcome of the analysis (e.g. themes) governs **how** the data chapters will be structured

Does **not** contain any of the analysis or the data

***About the data & analysis - not the actual data***

### Data chapters

Contain **extracts from the data** that **demonstrate** the analysis

Organised according to the emerging themes

With **discussion** about how each extract develops the theme

## Demonstrating what can be found in the data

### Communicating with an audience about what you think is going on in the data

**Pointing** at each part of each extract and **explaining** to the audience

'This phrase', 'this might', 'what is interesting',  
'connects with', 'I think that', 'perhaps', 'what might  
be going on here'

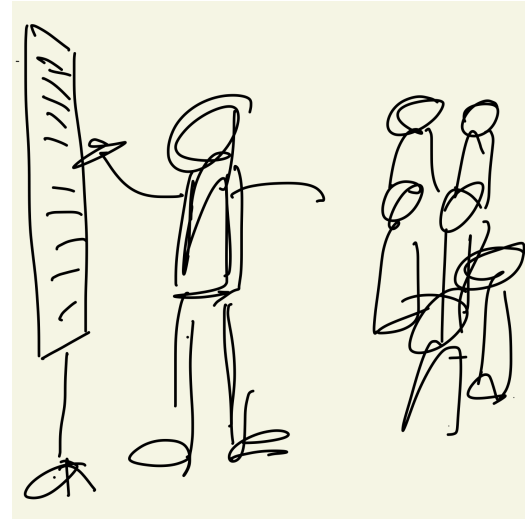
Hesitant, connecting back and forth, suggesting,  
remembering, recalling, reference to other extracts  
and themes

What is relevant to the study, and also unexpected

Remembering throughout that the data represents fleeting  
moments of social life

**Managing inevitable intersubjectivity** (Clifford & Marcus  
1986; Holliday & MacDonald 2020)

**Demonstrating** what can be found in the data and where findings are emerging



## Step 1: Analyse and devise themes

The themes and sub-themes will then be used to organise your data chapters

### Chapter 5: Methodology

...

As a result of the analysis, the following three major **themes**, each with four sub-themes, emerged:

1. Institutional cultures: (a) small cultures in conflict, (b) ...
2. ...

These were then used to structure the three data chapters and their respective sections.

It is important to note that during the process of writing the data chapters, analysis continued, as the process of finding appropriate data extracts and then making sense of them sometimes resulted in modifying and even re-naming the sub-themes. This was in conversation with new, unexpected understandings and memories of being in the field that the writing process invoked. It also enabled the taking of extracts of previously unremembered parts of the data. The holistic analysis also enabled this conversation across all the data types.

With perhaps a **very small** illustrative example from the data

## Step 2: Plan the data chapters

A **working search for extracts** that will be discussed in each sub-theme

**Some important arithmetic** - based on 80,000-word PhD thesis

(Different for EdD and Master by Research theses)

Three data chapters = one third of the thesis = 27,000 words

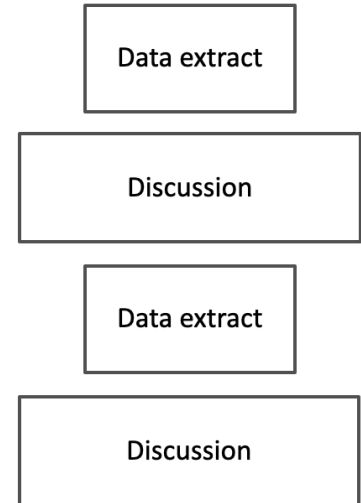
Each chapter = 9,000 words

**Half of this should be extracts** from data = 4,5000 words

(Each extract will be followed by an equal length of discussion)

**Each extract should be long enough** to show complex context

Might also be visual data



But, which extracts might not become apparent until you begin the actual writing

And **can emerge during the writing**

### Step 3: Begin writing

**Start the first data chapter - and get into the data as quickly as possible - at most by the end of the first page**

Reference to literature only emerges in response to each extract

Everything about analysis and approach has **already been said** in the Methodology chapter

#### Chapter 6: Institutional cultures

This first data chapter deals with the major emergent theme: .... Within this theme we see ... [no more than two or three sentences]. The four sections of the chapter each deal with one of the sub-themes: ...

##### 6.1 Small cultures in conflict

In this first sub-theme, we see ... This is exemplified in the following extract in which ...

[Extract] ..... (..., interview)

It is significant in what ... describes here as '...', that she seems to be ... There is a sense that ... This interpretation resonates with my observation of ... as recorded in the following research diary entry:

## Step 4: Develop findings

Each section of each data chapter should end with **findings as they develop**

...

What can be seen emerging from the discussion of data in this section is ...

This therefore develops the notion of ... from the previous section. ...

This relates to the discussion of ... in Chapter 3. ... It supports the position that ... as expressed by ... (...) in opposition to the notion that ... as expressed by ... (...)

### 6.5 Conclusion

What can be seen developing through the successive sections of this chapter is ...

### Chapter 8: Transporting cultural experience

The discussion of data in Chapters 6 and 7 showed an emerging understanding of how ... This chapter will develop this understanding by ...

### Chapter 9: Implications

In this chapter I will draw together the findings emerging in the three data chapters. Brief references will be made back to key instances in the data which exemplify the points made. New knowledge will be indicated by how these findings relate to wider discussions as developed at the end of each section of the data chapters. I will then look at how far the initial research questions can therefore be answered and ...

### Example 1 (Duan 2007: 156–157)

The reasons for Teacher Liang passing the letter to us were, I thought, to teach us something from the letter, to offer us encouragement, and hard-working spirit. I felt that Teacher Liang was a good teacher. The reasons for her to hit us or scold us were to nurture and educate us - to enable us to become useful, successful people. She did everything for our own good! (Diary, Wang Yang)

This Teacher Liang is the **same one** that scolded Wang Yang in **the first extract**. It **seemed** that he had already changed his view regarding this teacher. In the incident above, Wang Yang seemed to dislike the teacher. But in this extract, it **seems that** he tries to find some justification for his teacher's ill treatment of him, even defending his teacher for what she had done to him, showing his understanding for her scolding him. **This does not necessarily mean** that he has changed his view. It may indicate consistently ambivalent feelings towards her. **On the one hand**, he hated his teacher for scolding him in public. On the other hand, he showed consent in witnessing his teacher's recital of the discourse. This **may** suggest that there is evidence of the dominant discourse within the students' discourse.

**The following extract shows just such a feeling: ...**

Building **thick description** (Geertz 1993/1973) through interconnecting data extracts and showing the complexity of social life (Holliday 2016: 113)

## Example 2 (Collins 2016: 273–274)

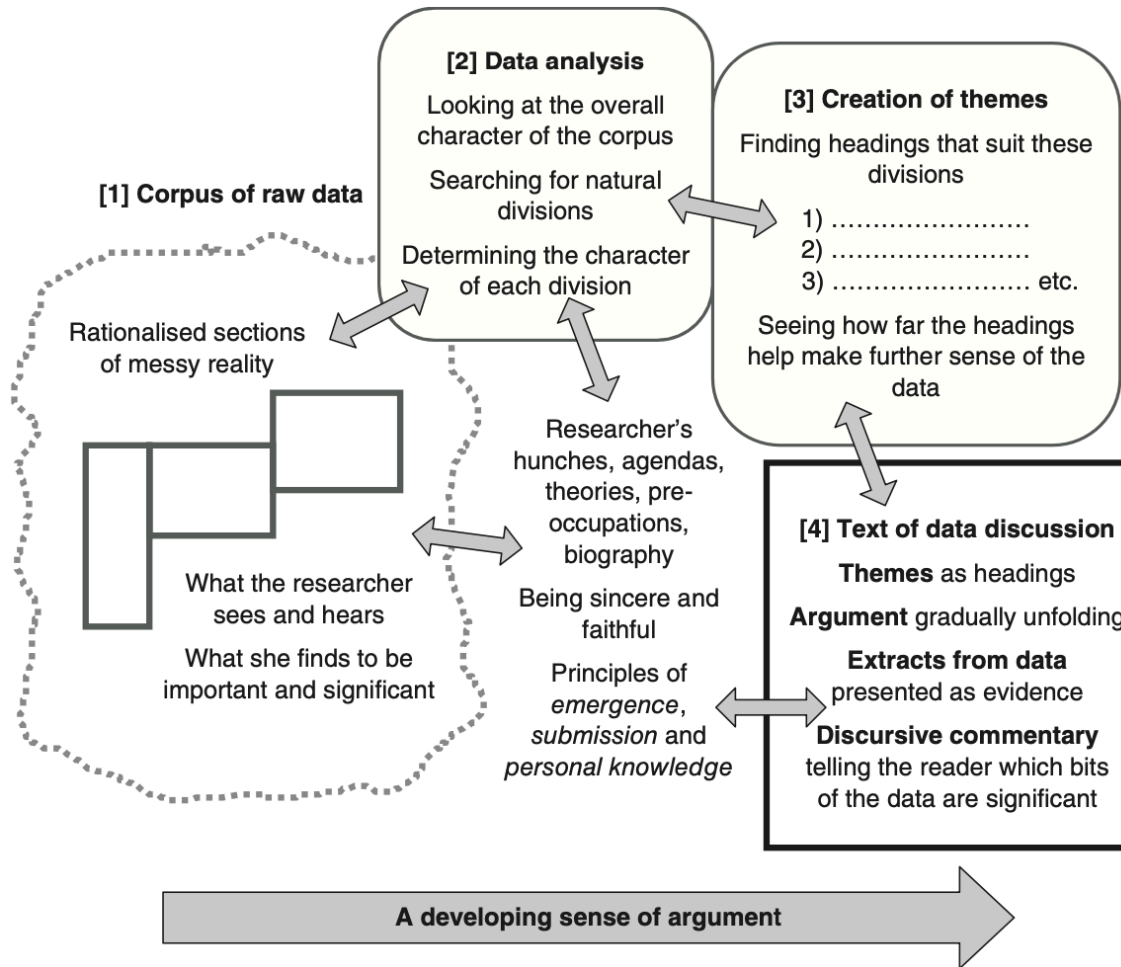
This questioning of the underlying essentialism, which is part of the fabric of Universities, was **seen previously** in Ingmar's objection to ... in section 8.2.2 and is **also acknowledged** by Betty's following comments which relate specifically to ... questions over the naming of the programme:

... (Interview: Betty December)

Betty's comments highlight **two issues**. Firstly, with respect to the subject matter, it is impractical to expect substantial staff buy-in to the emergence unless there is a hefty institutional push and incentive or unless sufficient staff members feel an affinity with the subject matter. **However**, institutional push is also not a guarantee for support as it can depend on which part of the institution is seen to be promoting the subject matter. This is particularly crucial when the subject matter is emerging as a term or in a form which has no academic or subject area home or support structure.

Secondly, flying the flag for a particular subject area may well require a degree of inherent and strategic essentialism. Spivak's (1988) notion ... may be relevant in this case, despite the fact that as Phillips points out, Spivak subsequently distanced herself from what she saw as misuses of the notion of strategic essentialism (Phillips 2010: 2). ... **However, the above data** suggests that ...

## From data to writing



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