Analysis of texts

No single term that I have run across covers all forms of analysis applied to symbolic content. Each term I have found—textual analysis, content analysis, text analysis, discourse analysis, rhetorical analysis and so on—at least implies a particular type of content, a particular form of analysis, etc. I chose analysis of texts because it comes closest to providing an umbrella term for any type of scholarly (or other) form of analysis of symbolic content. We'll be looking at analysis of texts as a family of methods aimed at evaluating the meaning of a text or group of texts. A text can be seen as an enduring bounded corpus of symbolic content. This accepts a range of phenomena as texts. Not only books, television shows, paintings or recorded conversations are considered texts but also churches, maps, responses to open-ended survey questions, fashion ensembles, store layouts and on and on.

While psychologists are especially well-versed in experimentation, sociologists and political scientists in survey research, and anthropologists in ethnography, the analysis of symbolic content is a special focus of the communications discipline. A perusal of communications journals will quickly demonstrate how widely used varied forms of text analysis are within the discipline.

Because this is a seminar it is appropriate (and expected) for each of you to take responsibility for teaching as well as learning. I cannot keep up with the vast number of methods and topics that fall under this umbrella, but can provide a theoretical base, experience and examples that relate to much of this field. I'm hoping to learn a great deal from this experience as well as enjoy the opportunity to explore this extremely active and rapidly expanding area of research.

I will emphasize the inseparability of theory and method in the course, so exposure to text-related theory and research will be as prominent as discussion of methods per se. As a consequence, we will be taking a rather broad approach instead of focusing on only one or a few means of studying texts.

Grading

Grading for this course will be determined by weekly assignments and online comments via Blackboard, leadership of one discussion session, a content analysis project report and presentation and a computerized text analysis project report and presentation. We will be discussing the projects in the seminar as they develop.
The breakdown of the percentage contribution from each source follows:

Weekly contributions: 30%
Discussion leadership 10%
Content analysis project 30%
Qualitative analysis project 30%

Work that is not turned in on the due date will receive a 10% decrease in points awarded per weekday late, unless you provide a University-recognized excuse for the delay or you have made prior arrangements with me. Work must be made up within one week of return to class.

Weekly contribution:

Each week I will post a question on Blackboard that relates to the readings and prior discussion. You will be expected to respond to the question. Often, this will require application of content from the prior week’s class and/or the required readings, so don’t wait to complete the readings until the class is upon us. Normally the response would be no more than 1,000 words but I may specify another count on occasion.

Discussion leadership:

Beginning the third class period you all will be expected to take the lead in discussing assigned topics during certain class sessions. You will be reporting on your experiences while working with text analysis assignments as well as taking the lead in critiquing particular assigned readings. The quality and logic of your analysis, as well as your preparedness in leading the discussion, will determine your grade.

Content analysis project:

Applying the knowledge gained from your text and associated readings, you will undertake a content analysis project with the goal of presenting it at a national convention and, ultimately, revising it and submitting to an academic journal. Every class member will propose a study based on a problem he or she wishes to tackle, a proposed sample, and a theoretically-appropriate approach to be applied. From among these proposals, at least two will be developed into actual projects and carried out by teams of coders, etc. More on that later.

Computer text analysis project:

To cap off the course, each of you will carry out a computerized text analysis of some sort on a topic of your choosing. As before, you will need to outline your theoretical approach (though you may be engaging in inductive research and therefore pretty vague at first), outline the sample of digital text you wish to analyze, and some explanation of how you will approach the texts. During finals week you will present your project and the findings you have generated.
Policy on diversity

All class members will be treated with respect by the instructor and fellow students. All critique of student work or ideas is to focus on helping class members improve their research abilities. No criticism of the character or appearance of any class member will be allowed.

Class Schedule (May be adjusted as the semester unfolds)

The following class schedule may be adjusted according to the needs of the class as it proceeds. Any changes will be announced in class and on Blackboard.

January 10  Texts and Meaning

Neuendorf, Chapters 1-2


January 17  Content Analysis and Theory Development/Explication/Conceptualization

Neuendorf, Chapter 3


January 24  Sampling

Neuendorf, Chapter 4


January 31  Developing Concepts and Coding Categories

Neuendorf, Chapters 5 and 6


February 7 (I will be out of town) Preparation and coding

Neuendorf, Chapter 7


February 14  Quality control during coding

February 21  Visual Content Analysis


February 28  Computer content scoring

Neuendorf, Resource 3 (skim)


Stevenson, R. L. In praise of dumb clerks: Computer-assisted content analysis. (pp. 3-12)


March 7  Longitudinal content study


March 14  Spring Break
March 21  
**Thematic analysis**


March 28  
**Presenting data and inducing relationships**

Neuendorf, Chapter 8


April 4  
**Framing and narrative analyses**


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**April 11**    Unstructured Contexts/Big Data

Neuendorf, Chapter 9

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**April 18**    Health and risk


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**April 25**