

## In Vivo Coding

Jimmie Manning  
Northern Illinois University

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### Abstract

In vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants. This form of coding can be especially helpful when researchers interact with participants from a particular culture or microculture to help highlight how those participants use specific words or phrases in their interactions that might not otherwise be understood when using other forms of coding. In vivo coding is championed by many for its usefulness in highlighting the voices of participants and for its reliance on the participants themselves for giving meaning to the data.

**Key words:** coding, ethnography, grounded theory, multiculturalism, voice

In vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants. Although *in vivo coding* is probably the most common name for this form of coding, it is also referred to as *verbatim coding*, *literal coding*, and *natural coding* (Saldaña, 2016). Some researchers use it as an initial form of analysis to help lead to more-sophisticated analysis techniques, although many researchers effectively use it as the only form of coding in a study. Because in vivo coding does not rely on assigning researcher-generated codes to data, it is often used as a teaching tool to help developing qualitative researchers gain familiarity with the inductive nature of coding processes.

In its earliest form, in vivo coding was used to assist with the development of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014). After in vivo codes are developed, more complex or nuanced categories are developed through axial coding. Although many grounded theorists use in vivo codes in this manner today, researchers from other qualitative traditions—especially ethnographers and those doing case studies—will use in vivo coding to better understand the slang, jargon, or other specialized vernacular used in a particular culture (Manning & Kunkel, 2014).

The potential for in vivo coding to honor the voices of participants in a particular culture or microculture is often championed by qualitative researchers. In vivo coding can be helpful to understand stories or ideas through the actual words of participants, and it has also been noted

for its ability to help offer a sense of nuanced meaning that other forms of coding might not allow. Because the meanings of words or phrases identified through in vivo coding can be specific to a particular culture, it is important that member checking or other forms of meaning-oriented validity be used to ensure the researcher is understanding both the meaning and context-specifics of words or phrases used by participants (Saldaña, 2016).

Although at its core in vivo coding mostly focuses on words, researchers often use results of the coding to consider how language and social interaction come together to form a social scene (Manning & Kunkel, 2014). To that end, in vivo coding can be especially helpful for data involving cultural-special episodes such as the arrival of a baby or a wedding; everyday cultural practices; social rules such as being a student or serving in public office; relational interaction; or cultural identities, such as race and sexual identity, among others.

Because in vivo coding relies on words, it is important to consider whether or not other nonverbal forms of social interaction are important when designing a study or pursuing it as a form of coding. Some have critiqued in vivo coding as not being inclusive of those who are unable to speak. In vivo coding should also not be confused with NVivo, a popular line of software for analyzing qualitative data.

**SEE ALSO:** IECRM0012; IECRM0027; IECRM0028; IECRM0082; IECRM0149; IECRM0266

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### **See also:**

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