

THEMATIC ANALYSIS IN A DISSERTATION (UK 2026)

Chapter 4 Template + Worked Example + Write-Up Phrases

Premier Dissertations — Practical Guide for Masters & PhD Students

Updated: December 2025 (For Academic Year 2026)

Reviewed by: UK Academic Editor

How to Use This Template

If you are writing Chapter 4 (Findings) using thematic analysis, use this PDF as a “write-as-you-go” checklist.

You will:

- 1) turn raw transcripts into codes,
- 2) group codes into themes,
- 3) present themes with evidence,
- 4) write findings in an examiner-friendly style.

Tip: Your examiner is looking for clarity and linkage:

Theme → evidence → interpretation → connection to research question.

1. Thematic Analysis in a Dissertation (What It Actually Means)

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify patterns of meaning (“themes”) across a dataset such as:

- interviews,
- focus groups,
- reflective journals,
- open-ended survey responses,
- field notes.

In a dissertation, thematic analysis is not “highlighting nice quotes”.

It is structured interpretation:

- you label meaning (codes),
- you group codes (themes),
- you present themes to answer the research questions.

2. Thematic Analysis Dissertation Structure (UK Chapter Map)

Use this to keep Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 separate:

Chapter 3 (Methodology)

- Why thematic analysis is suitable for your study
- Sampling, data collection, ethics
- How you analysed data (step-by-step)
- Trustworthiness (credibility, dependability, reflexivity)

Chapter 4 (Findings / Results)

- Themes (with evidence)
- Short interpretation inside findings (what the theme shows)
- Minimal theory here (avoid long literature comparisons)

Chapter 5 (Discussion)

- What the findings mean in relation to:
 - your literature review,
 - your conceptual/theoretical framework,
 - implications,
 - limitations,
 - recommendations.

3. Step-by-Step Thematic Analysis Workflow (Dissertation Version)

Use this method to stay consistent and transparent:

Step 1 — Familiarisation

Read transcripts more than once.

Write brief “first impressions” notes.

Step 2 — Coding (Meaning Labels)

Code line-by-line or segment-by-segment.

Codes should be short and specific (e.g., “fear of judgement”, not “feelings”).

Step 3 — Generate Candidate Themes

Group related codes.

A theme must be a meaningful pattern, not a topic label.

Step 4 — Review Themes

Check:

- Do your themes have enough evidence?
- Are they distinct from each other?
- Do they reflect the whole dataset?

Step 5 — Define & Name Themes

Write one sentence explaining each theme:

“This theme captures ... because participants repeatedly ...”

Step 6 — Write Findings (Chapter 4)

For each theme:

- 1–2 sentence explanation (plain English),
- supporting quotes (evidence),
- short linking line back to the research question.

4. Coding Sheet Template (Copy/Paste Table)

Use one row per data segment.

Participant ID: _____ Transcript/Source: _____ Date: _____

DATA EXTRACT (quote/segment):

INITIAL CODE (short label):

WHY THIS MATTERS (1 sentence meaning):

POTENTIAL THEME (if obvious):

5. Theme Development Template (Codes → Theme)

Use this table to show logic (and to keep your chapter organised).

Theme Name: _____

Theme definition (one sentence):

Key codes in this theme:

- _____

- _____

- _____

Evidence (participant IDs / frequency notes):

- P__ , P__ , P__

Short explanation of what this theme shows:

6. Chapter 4 Theme Presentation Template (Examiner-Friendly)

Use this exact structure for each theme.

THEME 1: [Theme name]

1–2 sentence overview:

This theme reflects ... (what it captures). Participants described ... (main pattern).

Evidence (quotes):

Choose 2–4 strong quotes. Introduce each quote with context.

Example phrasing:

- “Several participants described ...”

- “This was particularly clear when Participant 3 stated ...”

Quote 1 (Participant ID):

“ ... ”

Interpretation line (keep it short):

This suggests ... (what the quote indicates in relation to the theme).

Quote 2 (Participant ID):

“ ... ”

Link back to the research question:

Overall, this theme contributes to answering RQ1 by showing that ...

7. Worked Mini Example (Codes → Theme → Write-Up)

Use this as a model for your own writing.

Example Research Question:

RQ1: How do university students experience academic stress during dissertation writing?

Raw extracts (short):

P2: "I kept rewriting the same paragraph because I thought it wasn't good enough."

P6: "I avoided meeting my supervisor because I didn't want criticism."

P9: "I felt like everyone else understood research methods except me."

Initial codes:

- perfection pressure
- fear of criticism
- avoidance behaviour
- lack of confidence in methods

Theme name:

Theme 1 — Fear of Evaluation and Self-Doubt

Theme definition:

This theme captures how students experienced stress through fear of judgement, which led to avoidance and repeated self-editing.

Chapter 4 write-up (model):

Theme 1 — Fear of Evaluation and Self-Doubt

This theme reflects students' anxiety about being judged, which often resulted in avoidance and a strong tendency to over-edit their work. Several participants described rewriting sections repeatedly because they believed their work would not meet expected standards. For example, Participant 2 explained, "I kept rewriting the same paragraph because I thought it wasn't good enough." This indicates that stress was linked not only to workload, but also to perceived academic expectations.

Avoidance was also described as a coping response. Participant 6 stated, “I avoided meeting my supervisor because I didn’t want criticism.” Taken together, these accounts suggest that fear of evaluation shaped both emotional responses and behaviours during dissertation writing. Overall, this theme helps answer RQ1 by showing that academic stress was experienced as self-doubt and anticipation of judgement, rather than time pressure alone.

8. What Examiners Penalise (Quick Checklist)

Before submission, check you have NOT done the following:

- Themes that are just topics (“Time Management”, “Family”) with no meaning explained
- Too many themes (quality beats quantity)
- Quotes without interpretation
- A descriptive “story” with no link to the research question
- Findings mixed with long literature comparisons (move that to Chapter 5)
- No transparency (reader cannot see how codes became themes)

9. How Many Themes Should a Dissertation Have?

There is no fixed rule, but most dissertations present:

- Undergraduate: 3–5 themes
- Masters: 4–6 themes (often with subthemes)
- PhD: fewer themes is acceptable if each theme is deep and well evidenced

Rule of thumb:

Use the number of themes needed to answer the research questions clearly — not to “look bigger”.

Final Chapter 4 Readiness Checklist (Print This Page)

- Each theme answers a research question (directly or indirectly)
- Each theme has enough evidence (multiple participants/sources)
- Each theme has 2–4 strong quotes (not pages of quotes)
- Each quote is introduced, not dropped in
- You explain what the quote shows (1–2 sentences)
- You keep Chapter 4 (findings) separate from Chapter 5 (discussion)
- You use consistent participant labels (P1, P2...) and keep it confidential
- Your theme names are clear, meaningful, and specific

Need Feedback on Your Themes?

If you want a UK editor to review:

- your coding-to-theme logic,
- your Chapter 4 structure,
- or your thematic write-up clarity,

You can request a free review via Premier Dissertations.

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