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Laura Sefton on Getting Started with Atlas.ti Qualitative Analysis Software

Laura A. Sefton
University of Massachusetts Medical School

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Getting Started with Atlas.ti Qualitative Analysis Software

Hi! My name is Laura Sefton, Research Coordinator at the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Center for Health Policy and Research. My colleagues and I use Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software to facilitate our program evaluation work. Atlas is one of several software packages available to evaluators. The Center chose to purchase Atlas (1) to standardize our work across the organization thus facilitating collaboration and (2) because many were already Atlas users, thus minimizing the number who'd learn new software. Based on our experiences, I've put together some tips and resources which may be helpful to new users or those considering purchasing qualitative analysis software.

Hot Tip: Three great Atlas.ti functionalities our project teams have used:

- ✓ *Or**ganize documents into families** so you can use the 'filter' function to see just the family of documents you want. This robust software allows users to work with many types of documents, including text, images, video, and audio files. Filtering allows you to put disparate project documents into the same HU (Hermeneutic Unit-the file that contains the linked project documents) and choose to look at one set or type of documents.
- ✓ **Create memos** to track your work or thoughts as you move through your data analysis. All users can create and iteratively edit memos to share information with the team.
- ✓ **Add comments** to your coded text. This is another method of tracking or sharing your thoughts with others. I've used this to tell my colleagues why I coded the text in a particular way. They can edit the comment to let me know if they agreed with my logic or have other thoughts.

Lesson Learned: Documents appear in the 'Primary Document' pane in the order in which they were added to the HU but they can be reorganized using the *Renumber* and *Change Positions* functions.

Lesson Learned: Atlas allows users to make edits or other text changes to a document after it's been assigned to the HU. Use the *Document Access* function under the Edit menu to make the changes.

Rad Resource: Browse the Atlas.ti website to explore training options, download user manuals, sign up for the mailing list, or join the users' forum. Training options range from free webinars to paid in-person consultants. Atlas offers single, student and a variety of multi-user licenses for commercial, educational, or government organizations.

Rad Resources: Advance preparation can make the coding and analysis work easier and faster. These previous AEA365 blog posts can help you:

Susan Eliot on Attributes of a Successful Qualitative Coder

Heather Bennett on Before the Coding Begins…