



# Getting Started Guide



Free Guide  
English

# MAXQDA 2022

## Getting Started Guide

Support, Distribution:

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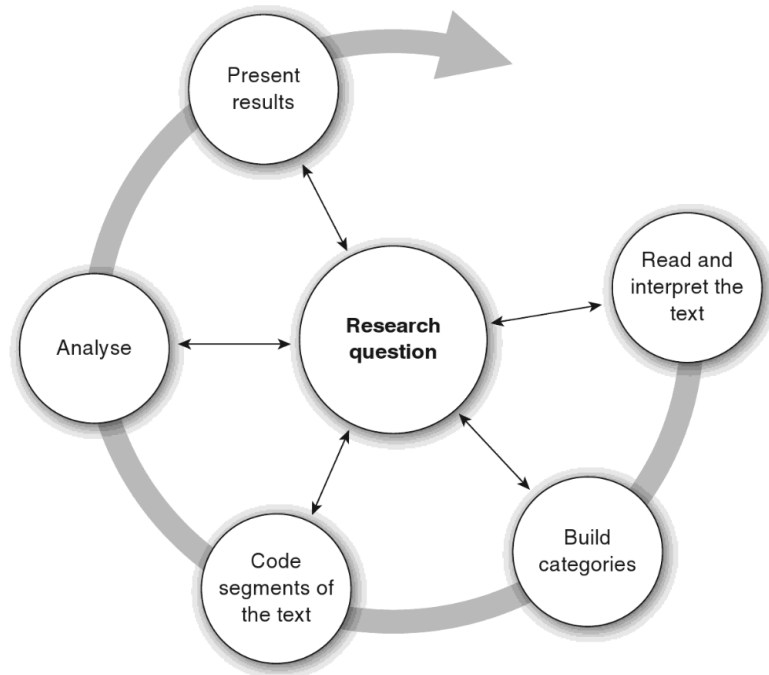
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## Introduction

Welcome to the **MAXQDA Getting Started Guide!** As no one likes to read long introductions and manuals, we tried to make this one as short as possible to help you get started as quickly as possible. The guide will enable you to start your analysis and make your own experiences with MAXQDA. We will focus on the actual usage of the program, and not on the presentation of different analysis and research methods. If you want to find out more about those, we have provided a list of useful publications in the chapter “Further literature”. As you may know, there is an endless number of different qualitative methods. But most of them can be conducted with the help of MAXQDA as they all follow the same basic structure as pictured in this illustration.

The vast majority of qualitative analysis methods work with categories. These can either be created from within the data or based on prior knowledge of the data, existing theories, or recent research results. Categories are often also named codes or keywords, but whatever the name, they all have the function to organize and systematize the data, often even working as analytical codes. Analytical codes are the result of an analytical process that exceeds simply determining a topic, and this is what we refer to as *Codes* in this guide. Coding data can take a long time, but don't worry: there are many different ways to make use of QDA (qualitative data analysis) software. It's not always necessary to code your data in order to analyze it with MAXQDA; you can also use it simply for organizing your data or searching for words and word combinations.



## The MAXQDA interface

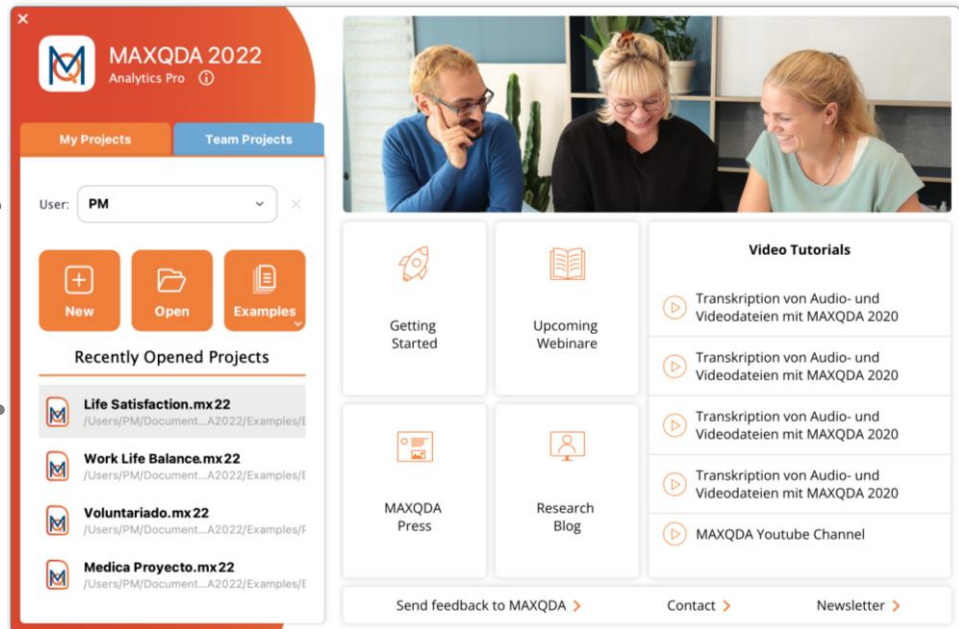
### Starting MAXQDA

When opening MAXQDA, you will see a window on the top left that lets you type in a user name or a user abbreviation (which can be more practical in your later work).

To create your first MAXQDA project, click *New Project*, name your project and save it to a place of your choice. The best location for a MAXQDA project is in a local folder on your computer, not on a network drive or on a USB flash drive. You should also avoid saving your project in folders that are synchronized by a cloud service like iCloud, Dropbox or Google Drive. These services may compete for access to the project database while it is open in MAXQDA.

Enter your name or initials here

Double-click on the file name to open a recently saved project



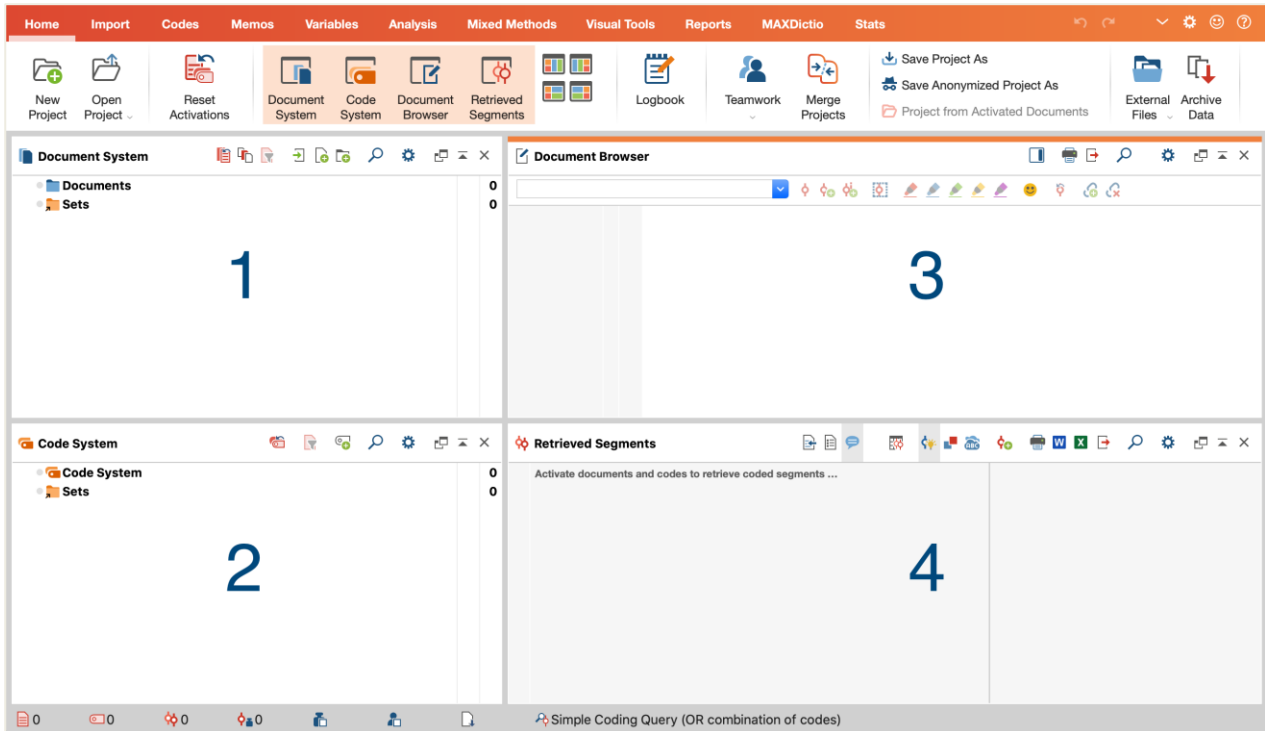
MAXQDA 2022 project files have the file ending *MX22*. You can also recognize these files in Windows Explorer or Mac Finder by the description “MAXQDA 2022 Project”.

MAXQDA uses *Projects*, like Excel uses workbooks (.xlsx), and Word uses text documents (.docx). Nearly everything you import to or create with MAXQDA (like your *Codes* and *Memos*) will be saved in *Projects*.

The right side of the start screen provides you with several links, for example the option to open up the MAXQDA online manual, watch MAXQDA video tutorials or send feedback to the MAXQDA team.

## The user interface

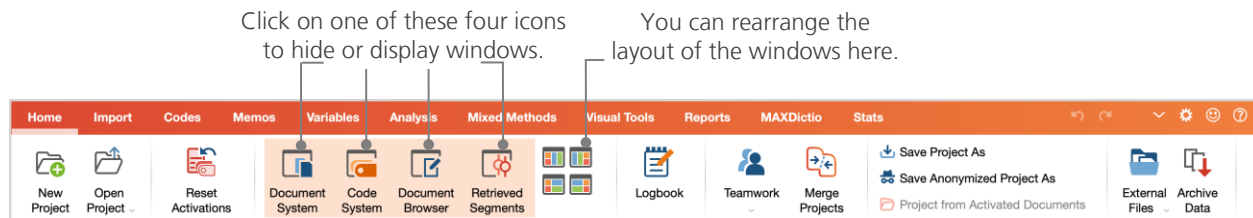
Once you successfully created and saved your first MAXQDA project, the following screen will appear with the four main windows still mostly empty.



The division into four windows makes working with MAXQDA very easy: as you can see, the first window (1) in the upper left corner contains the *Document System*, the window below (2) contains the *Code System*, the window in the upper right corner (3) is the *Document Browser*, and the fourth window (4) is called *Retrieved Segments*. (Don't worry if you only see three windows. The fourth window is hidden when you start MAXQDA for the first time, because you don't need it at the beginning of your analysis.)



These four windows make up MAXQDA's basic structure. You can rearrange them by swapping the windows' sides, or by displaying the windows in three instead of two columns. You can change those settings in the main menu with the four symbols on the "Home" tab.



These tabs (some programs may call them "ribbons") are located at the top of the MAXQDA window and offer access to many of MAXQDA's features. On the "Home" tab you can open or close individual windows and arrange the screen according to the work you intend to do. On top of that, you can "undock" individual windows from the four-window structure and drag them to a different position or even a second computer screen. To open and close the windows, you can click on the button for the respective window(s), or simply close a window by clicking the "x" symbol in its upper right corner.

Now, let's return to the four main windows! All the files you wish to work with will be imported into the *Document System* window. In case you use codes and subcodes, you can manage them in the *Code System* window. You can view and edit your data in the *Document Browser*. The *Retrieved Segments* window is where the results of your retrievals will be displayed later on.

## A few notes on data storage and saving

MAXQDA administers everything you import, comment, or define in one single file, the *Project file*. So, once you create it: **one project = one file**. As we learned earlier, those files end in MX22 (older versions' projects end in MX20 or MX18).

In order to ensure that your project is always safe, please read the following box:

MAXQDA automatically saves everything that is imported or created by the user (that's why there is no save button). However, you should still make sure to create daily back-ups via the option *Save Project As*, which you can find in the "Home" tab and save them on a secondary storage device.

To sum up, the *Project file* contains all the data material you need to work on your research project, bachelor thesis or master thesis. But there's an exception to every rule: if you use a lot of audio or video files, the *Project file* may become too large, even after importing only a few video files. The standard setting therefore automatically embeds pictures and PDF documents only up to a certain file size (5 MB), whilst audio and video files are saved separately. Of course, you can change these settings. But when your *Project file* becomes too large, it may be difficult to exchange it with others.

## Important keywords

Here are some of the most important keywords you should know for your work with MAXQDA:

**Projects** are the system files, or “work units” in MAXQDA. They contain all imported data, like texts, PDFs, pictures, tables as well as the codes, memos, comments you created.

**Documents** are those units that you want to analyze. They can be interviews, focus group protocols, video or audio recordings, articles from scientific journals and many more.

**Codes** are your most important analysis tool. They can be assigned to anything you consider worth marking, be it text segments, sections in a photo or parts of a video.

The **Code system** or **Code tree** describes the entirety of all codes and subcodes which can be ordered hierarchically.

**Coding** is the act of assigning a code to a marked segment of your material.

**Coded segments** are those material segments that have been assigned a code.

**Memos** basically serve as your records. You can note your ideas, assumptions, and questions for your next analysis steps, or formulate first hypotheses regarding possible connections in the data.

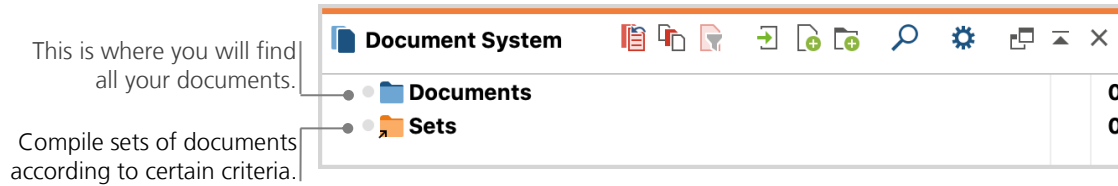
**Comments** are shorter than memos. You can use them to assign comments like “contradictory”, or “important part!” to coded segments.

**Overviews** are tabular presentations omnipresent in MAXQDA. There are overviews of coded segments, memos, variables, links and so on. All MAXQDA overviews follow the same principle and allow easy access to individual elements so that you don’t lose track of your data.

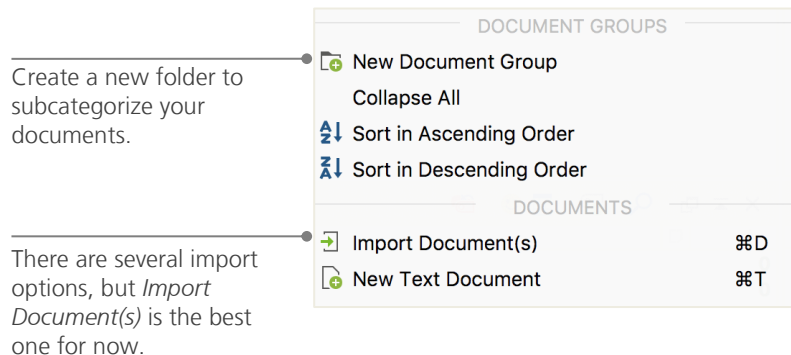
## Import and explore your data

### Importing data

Before we learn about the different ways to import your data let's have a closer look at the *Document System* window.



When you right-click the word *Documents* or the symbol next to it, a large context menu will open. You can see a part of it here:

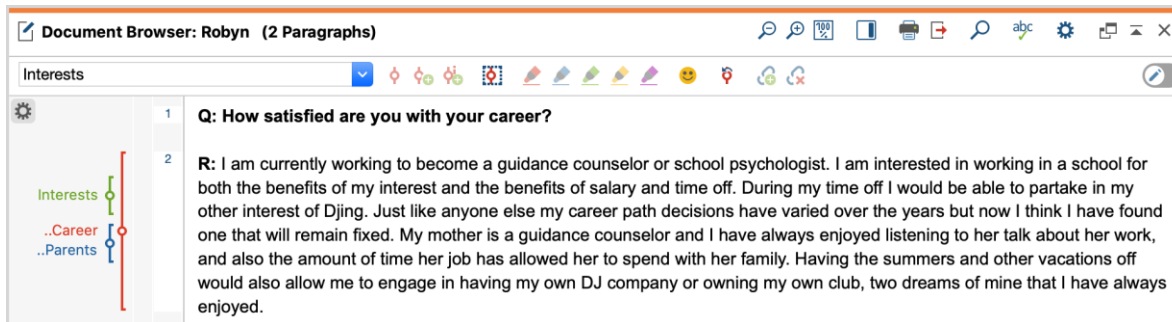


Alternatively, you can go via the "Import" tab menu and click on the appropriate symbol for your data type, e.g. *Transcripts*, or – even easier – drag and drop the files from Windows Explorer or macOS Finder into the *Document System* window. On the "Import" tab you will see additional options to import special types of data, including importing documents from spreadsheets, focus group transcripts or creating a text directly in MAXQDA.

In the way that your computer lets you create folders to organize your files, MAXQDA's *New document group* function lets you create document groups to organize your documents. Right-click a document group and choose *Import Document(s)* to import them or drag and drop your documents from one group to the other.

### Exploring data

Analyzing qualitative data does not really work without you knowing the data. So MAXQDA makes it easy for you to look through your files: simply double-click on a document in the *Document System* window, and it will be opened in the *Document Browser*, looking roughly like the interview transcript in the following example:



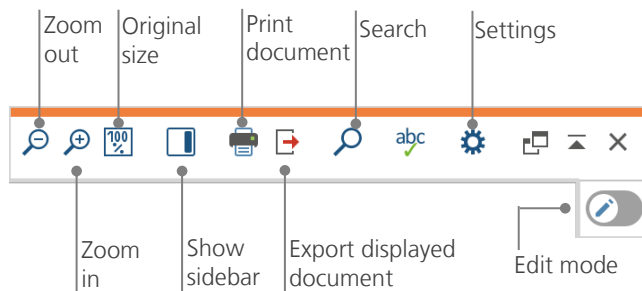
Paragraph numbers make it easier to discuss certain segments in a team (“Have a look at the comment in paragraph 4!”) as well as coding whole paragraphs at once. You can also use the paragraph numbers to quote your data sources. If you need a more precise numbering of your data, you can change the display to line numbering at any time by right-clicking in the text and selecting *Convert to Line Numbered Text*.

In the example above you can see three colored vertical stripes, as well as a yellow sticky note symbol next to the text. The latter shows that a memo has been attached to that paragraph. The vertical stripes are the so-called coding stripes symbolizing which code the text was assigned to (in this case the codes “Interests”, “Career” and “Parents”). To view long code names, simply enlarge the coding column by dragging the grey line next to the coding stripes to the right.

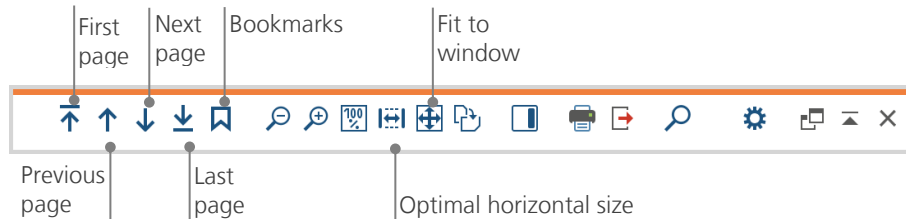
**What is a memo?** Memos serve to create notes and records to attach them to texts, text segments, document groups, images, audio or video files, and even codes – just like you would do with “real” sticky notes.

When you open a text in the *Document Browser* for the first time, that sector will still be empty as you have not coded nor created a memo yet. Just try to create one now: double-click somewhere in the memo sector and a memo dialog window will automatically open. As we will talk about memos in more detail later, this is all you need to know for now.

In the very top of the *Document Browser*, a toolbar shows you the most important features.



If you import and open a PDF document in the *Document Browser*, you can use a few additional settings. You will see that you are provided with icons, which enable you, for example, to zoom in or out or to jump to the next page of the PDF file.



At some point of your research, you may wish to print a text including the paragraph numbers (or save this display as a PDF with a PDF printer). To do so, choose the symbol *Print document* or use the keyboard shortcut *Ctrl+P* (on Windows) or *cmd+P* (on macOS). The print dialog will give you a variety of choices for the design of your print:

The image shows a software interface for printer settings. It is divided into several sections:

- Printer:** A dropdown menu showing "Printer" and a button with three dots.
- Copies:** A numeric input field set to "1".
- Pages:** Radio buttons for "All" (selected) and "Pages", followed by a text input field containing "i.e. 1-3; 5-1; 1-; -5".
- Orientation:** Radio buttons for "Portrait" (selected) and "Landscape".
- Margins [cm]:** Input fields for "Left", "Right", "Top", and "Bottom", all set to "2,0".
- Header/Footer:** Checkboxes for "Header" and "Footer". The "Header" section includes a text input field with "Suikkanen 2011", a checked "Date" checkbox, and an unchecked "Page number" checkbox. The "Footer" section includes an empty text input field, an unchecked "Date" checkbox, and a checked "Page number" checkbox.
- More settings:** A table with three rows:

Display codings	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Display memos	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Max. coding column width [%]	25

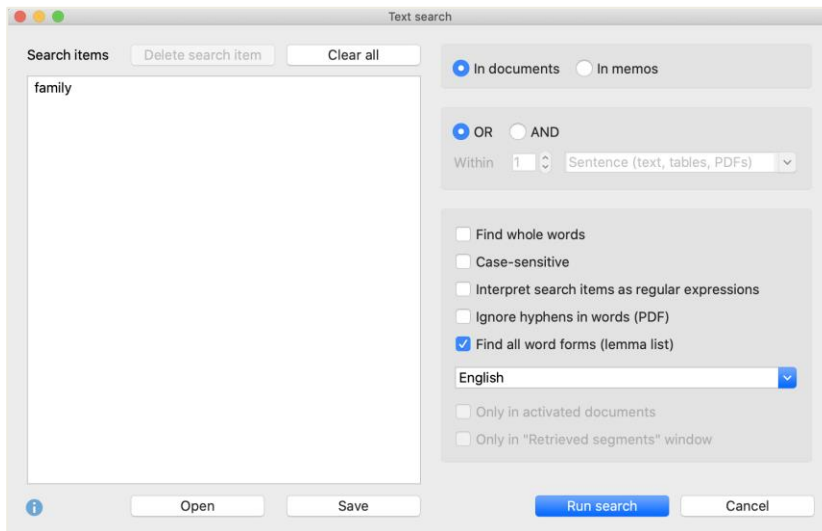
Annotations on the right side of the image point to the following features:

- "Chose the margin size" points to the margin input fields.
- "Define a header or footer" points to the header and footer configuration options.
- "Choose whether to display codings and/ or memos" points to the "Display codings" and "Display memos" checkboxes.
- "Maximum coding column width intended for print" points to the "Max. coding column width [%]" input field.

## Search your data

The exploration phase of your research may call for the necessity to search your documents for certain words. In MAXQDA, word search can be done locally in each of the four main windows, that means in one window at a time. You will find a magnifying glass symbol in each window to enter the search word upon click. MAXQDA will display the term's frequency, and you will be able to navigate from each hit to the next to view its context by using the arrow keys.

A more powerful tool than the local search is the *Text Search* (to be found in the "Analysis" tab). The *Text Search* enables you to search several documents at a time; it is not restricted to opened documents.



In this example, all available documents will be searched for the term "family".

As soon as the window opens you can enter as many search items as you like at once. Use the return key to end your entry or add a new search string. Each search item is placed in a new line. The standard setting follows the "OR" logic, i.e. as soon as one of the search items is found, it will be listed as a hit. Clicking an item in the results table that lists all search hits will show you the relevant paragraph in the *Document Browser* window.



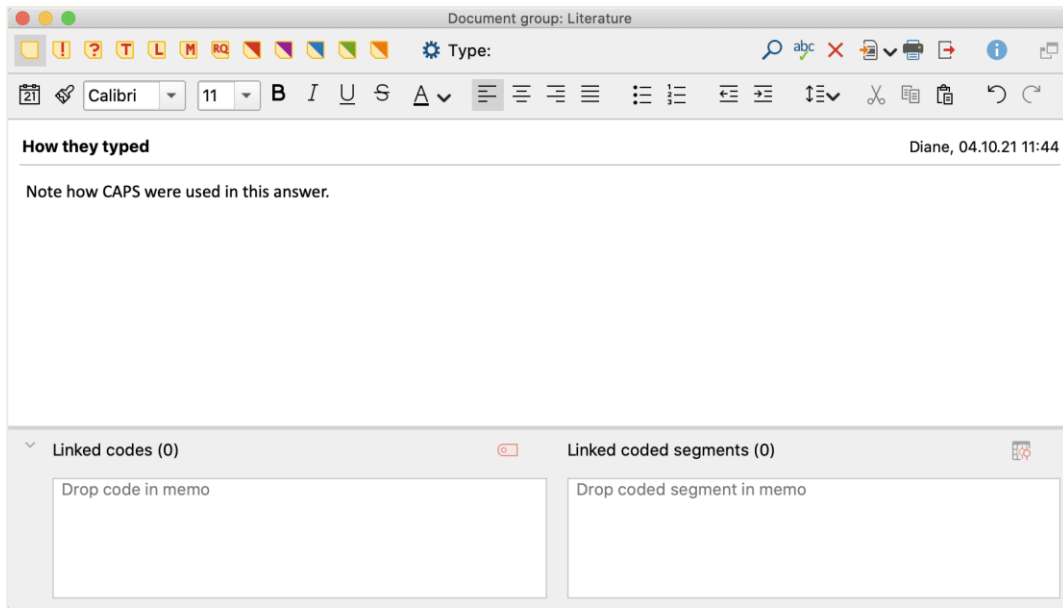
## Color-coding and memos

Sometimes you may want to mark something in a text or note comments, hypotheses and further ideas, before you have even started thinking about categories and the general direction of your analysis. Just like you may then highlight passages in a book or stick a sticky note to a page, you can use the *Highlight coding* function in MAXQDA to mark texts with five colored, virtual pens (red, blue, green, yellow, and purple). You can find the color-coding icons at the top of the *Document Browser* window.



You can select any text part with your mouse and then click one of the symbols to highlight it with the color of your choice. The difference to highlighting in “real life” is that it is much easier to find those passages again in MAXQDA than to skim through a book. How to retrieve coded segments created with *Highlight coding*, will be described further down in *Data analysis*.

As we learned, color-coding is a useful tool to mark important things even before the explicit coding process. Another useful tool is the *Memos* function. With the help of *In-document memos* you can attach memos to any place in any document. Select any part of a document, right-click on the highlighted selection and use the context menu to create a new memo for you to fill with your thoughts and ideas:



You can put in a title for the memo, assign a matching symbol for the type of memo, and link it to certain codes.

Similar to color-coding, it is simple to retrieve Memos. You can find all types of memos and a special memo search feature on the "Memos" menu tab. The search results are displayed in MAXQDA's *Memo Manager*, where you can easily manage, edit, and filter all your memos, e.g., by only displaying memos you have written during a certain time period.

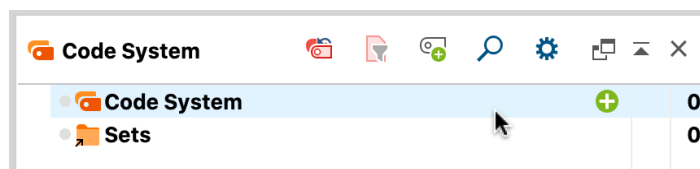
## Code your data

### Coding data segments

As we learned earlier, the central work technique among most analysis methods is **Coding the data**. But what does this mean? Coding describes the process of selecting part of the data material, for example a paragraph or one part of an image, with the mouse (just like in Word or other programs) and assigning a code to it. This is principally the same as tagging contents, but coding in empirical social research includes much more than that.

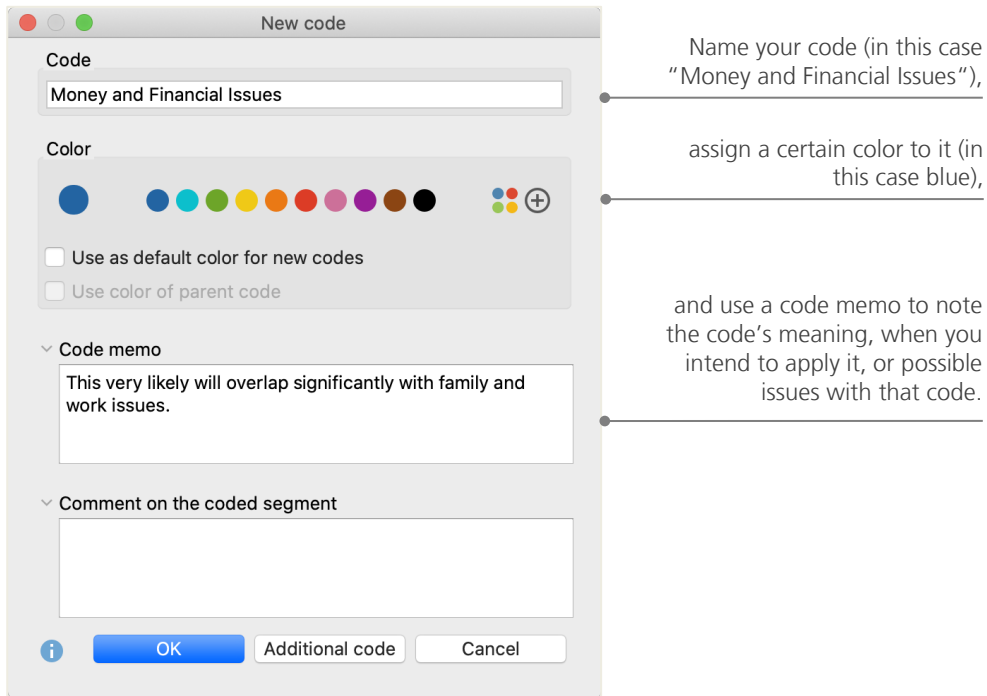
So, what is a code then? Your first associations may be of secret services and their coding and decoding machines, or of codes as strictly regulated mappings as in Morse codes. Both associations are misleading! In the context of qualitative research, a code is more of a label used to name phenomena in a text or an image. In technical terms, a code is a character string that can consist of up to 63 characters in MAXQDA, be it several words or more cryptical strings like "CR128". In social research, codes can possess different meanings and take on different functions in the research process: there are *factual codes*, *thematic codes*, *theoretical codes* and many more (see Rädiker & Kuckartz 2019, Richards 2014). From simply looking at the code itself, its role in the research process is not always clear: it could be of minor importance or play a key role. Only its context or framing will shed light on that.

So, how can codes be created? Simply click on the green plus symbol in the *Code System* window that appears when you hold your mouse over the first line. Using the plus symbol, you can later add new codes to each level of your code system.



Click the plus sign to add new codes.  
Use the magnifying glass symbol to search  
for a certain code.

A dialog window to define your new code opens:



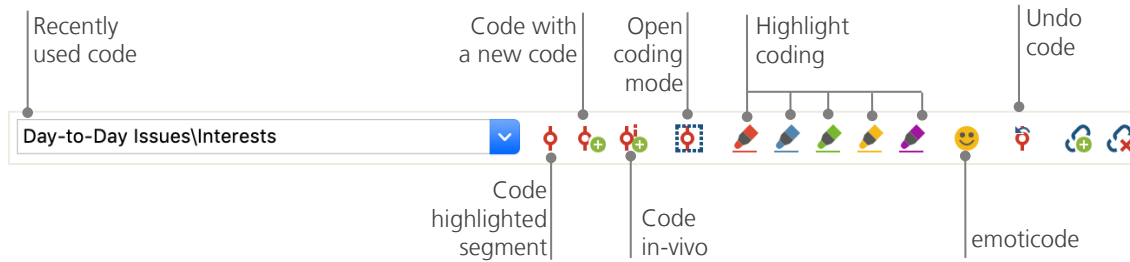
Name your code (in this case "Money and Financial Issues"),

assign a certain color to it (in this case blue),

and use a code memo to note the code's meaning, when you intend to apply it, or possible issues with that code.

How can I assign a code to a certain document section? First, you select a section with your mouse (if you want to mark the whole paragraph, just click the paragraph number). Then you either drag and drop the marked section onto a code, or the other way around, i.e. you drag the code on the selected section. Once you did that for the first time, you will see that the number next to that code in the *Code System*, showing how many times a code has been used, changed from "0" to "1". If you look at the *Document System* you will see that the number of coded segments in a document is displayed next to each document as well.

MAXQDA offers you other coding possibilities; you can access them via right-clicking a selected section in the document or via the icons in the toolbar *Code*, which is located at the top of the *Document Browser* window. The toolbar looks like this:



The code that you used last is always displayed on the very left. If you click the red coding symbol on the right, it will assign this code to a selected text section. Each of the following icons refers to a different coding function; you can for example click the *Undo code* symbol and then choose one or several codes from a drop-down list.

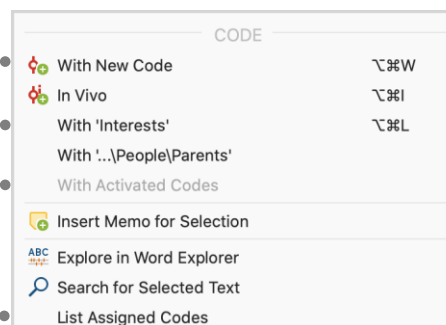
The context menu in the *Document Browser* contains even more coding options, which you can see when you right-click into a marked text section:

Create a new code and assign it to the highlighted segment.

Code with recently used code.

All activated codes will be assigned.

Codes that are assigned at this section will be listed.



## Analyze your data

### Activating documents

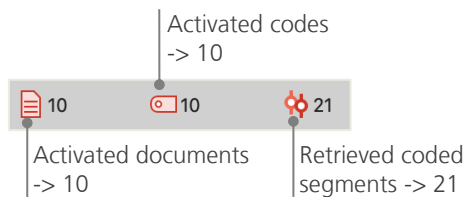
Maybe you saw the option *Only in activated documents* earlier in the dialog window for the *Text Search* and asked yourself what that means. *Activation* is one of MAXQDA's key concepts: it means that you can select documents (and/or codes) for your analysis and then work only with the selected items. How does the activation work? This is very simple: in every document's or document group's context menu you will see the option *Activate* right at the top. More experienced MAXQDA users will simply click the document or folder symbols to activate the document or a document group.

Documents	385
Interviews New York	146
Riley	51
Luca	27

Documents	385
Interviews New York	146
→ Riley	51
Luca	27

You can immediately see if a document or group is activated. Both the name and the symbol will be red, and a red arrow will appear in front of them. Further below, MAXQDA's so-called *Status bar* displays the total number of documents currently activated. Should you wish to limit your search to certain texts, activate them first and then chose the option *Only in activated documents* in the dialog *Text Search*.

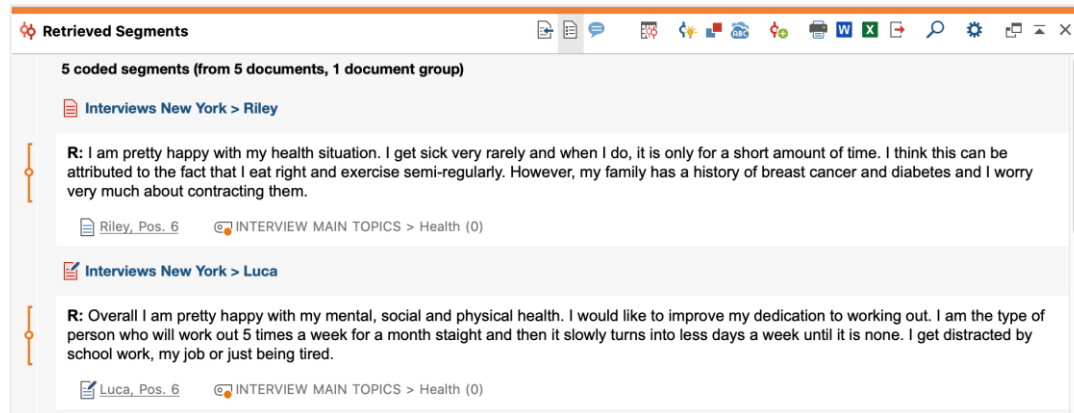


How can I reset the activation? Simply go to the *Document System* window and click the icon *Reset activations* on the toolbar. Alternatively, you can click the document or document group symbol again.

## Retrieving all segments coded with one code

Coding isn't everything and your analysis is certainly more than just coding. At one point you will want to stop coding and start looking at the results of that process. The easiest way is to retrieve all segments assigned to one specific code. If you, for example, do a research based on interviews, you may ask: "What was said about a certain topic and who said what?" The magic word to get exactly those answers is *Retrieval*. In MAXQDA such a *Coding Query* works – similar to the *Lexical search* – via activations.

Activate all documents that you want to include in the *Coding Query*, as well as those codes assigned to the segments you are interested in. Activation of codes works just like the activation of documents (right-click the code and choose the option *Activate* or click the symbol in front of the code name). All coded segments found will appear in MAXQDA's fourth main window, the *Retrieved Segments* window. Below every segment you will see the segment's source information. In the example below, the segment can be found in *paragraph 6* of document "Riley".

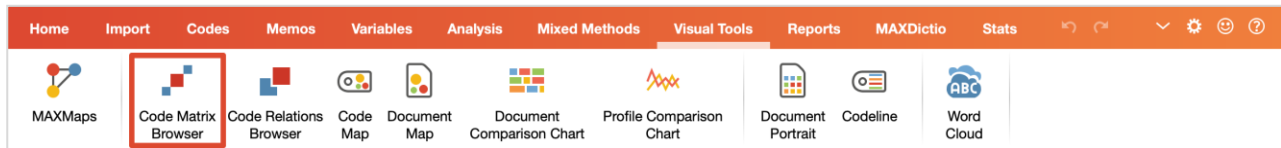


The source info does not only tell you which document a certain segment is from, it also lets you go directly to that document: simply click the document name, and the document will be loaded to the *Document Browser* window with the coded segment right at hand, so that you can easily view it in its context.

## Using visualizations

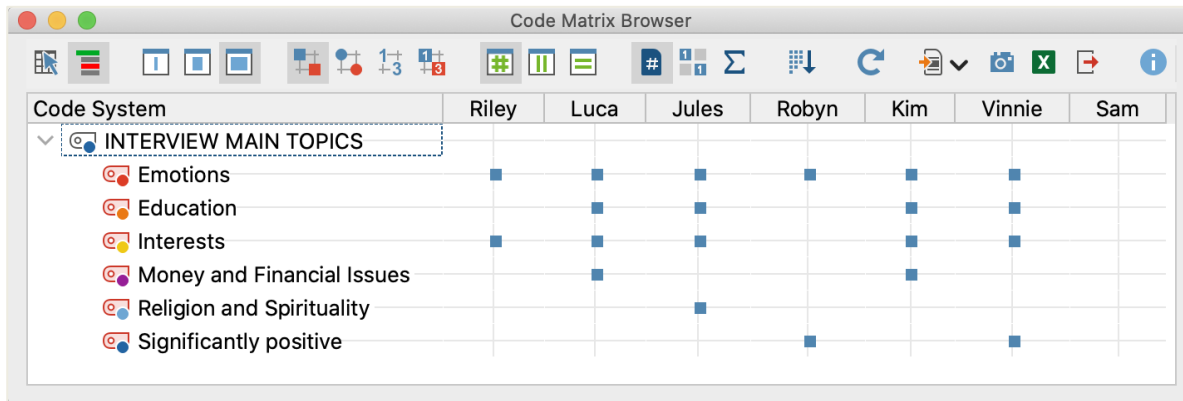
Visualizing results is one of MAXQDA's strengths which is why we want to include this chapter in a *Getting Started Guide*. There are several ways to visualize data in MAXQDA, starting with the possibility to assign individual colors to codes and documents. This does not only help you with the visual organization of your data, but colors can also be given certain meanings. MAXQDA is the first QDA software to allow the use of emojis as a code symbol. This may be particularly useful to overcome language barriers, for example when working in international projects.

The visualization tools also allow you to show data connections in a comprehensible way. The most used visual tool is the *Code Matrix Browser*, which you can open via the "Visual Tools" tab.





So, what does the Code Matrix Browser show?



The screenshot shows the Code Matrix Browser interface. The window title is "Code Matrix Browser". The interface includes a toolbar with various icons for navigation and analysis. Below the toolbar, there is a "Code System" section with a tree view showing "INTERVIEW MAIN TOPICS" expanded. The main area is a matrix with columns for respondents: Riley, Luca, Jules, Robyn, Kim, Vinnie, and Sam. The rows represent interview topics: Emotions, Education, Interests, Money and Financial Issues, Religion and Spirituality, and Significantly positive. Blue squares in the matrix indicate the presence of a topic in a respondent's interview.

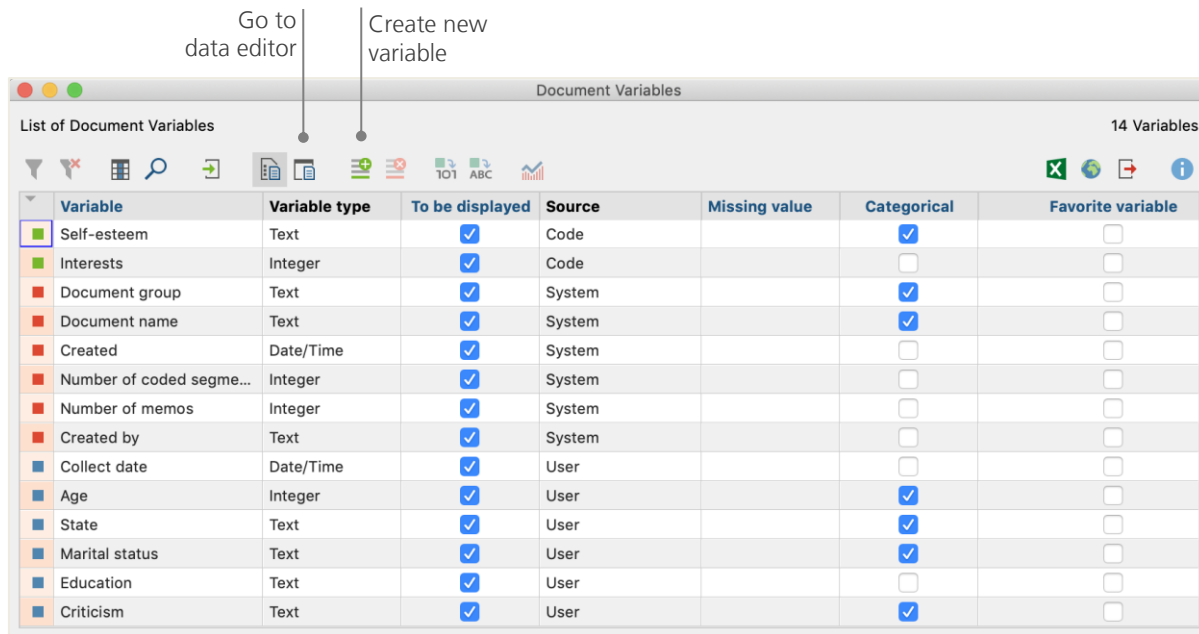
Code System	Riley	Luca	Jules	Robyn	Kim	Vinnie	Sam
INTERVIEW MAIN TOPICS							
Emotions	■	■	■	■	■	■	
Education		■	■		■	■	
Interests	■	■	■		■	■	
Money and Financial Issues		■			■		
Religion and Spirituality			■				
Significantly positive				■		■	

The columns list the different documents; in this case each document is one respondent in an interview study on life satisfaction. For example, the respondents were asked about issues they encounter on a daily basis. You can see here that all of them mention emotions, but that only two of the respondents mention money-related issues.

## Conduct mixed methods analyses

### Defining document variables

One of the most important MAXQDA features is its support of mixed methods approaches. For every document in the *Document System* a whole set of attributes (that is, variables as used by statistics programs) can be managed. You can, for example, record personal data or background information for interviews as variables or variable values, and use them for your mixed methods analysis. The option *List of Document Variables* in the “Variables” tab will open the following dialog window:

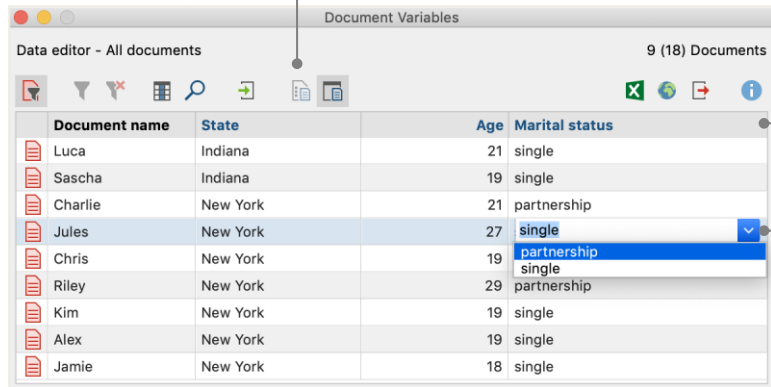


On opening, you will see that several variables have already been defined. These are the so-called system variables whose values are automatically set by MAXQDA and cannot be changed. The option *New variable* lets you define further variables. The most common variable types are Text (like “teacher” or “student” for the variable “occupation”) and Integer (like whole numbers for the variable “number of children”). You can define new variables anytime.

## Entering variable values

To enter values for the *Document Variables*, use the toolbar in the *List of Document Variables* and switch to the *Data Editor*.

The toolbar lists the most used functions, e.g. returning to the variable list.



Simply click the column heading to sort the data according to that column's content.

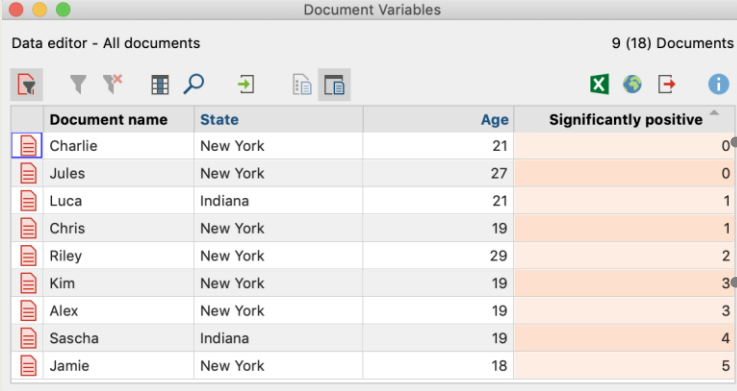
Double-click to enter a value.

Document name	State	Age	Marital status
Luca	Indiana	21	single
Sascha	Indiana	19	single
Charlie	New York	21	partnership
Jules	New York	27	single
Chris	New York	19	partnership
Riley	New York	29	partnership
Kim	New York	19	single
Alex	New York	19	single
Jamie	New York	18	single

The document variables table can be exported to Excel or SPSS format, which means that you can continue working on them with statistics programs like SPSS or Stata and conduct a statistical analysis.

## Transforming code frequencies into variables

The frequency of segments assigned to a certain code can be transformed into a variable, which will receive the code's name. Right-click on the preferred code and choose *Transform into a Document Variable* in the context menu. In the following example, the code "Significantly positive" has been transformed into a variable:



The screenshot shows a window titled "Document Variables" with a subtitle "Data editor - All documents" and "9 (18) Documents". The window contains a table with the following data:

Document name	State	Age	Significantly positive
Charlie	New York	21	0
Jules	New York	27	0
Luca	Indiana	21	1
Chris	New York	19	1
Riley	New York	29	2
Kim	New York	19	3
Alex	New York	19	3
Sascha	Indiana	19	4
Jamie	New York	18	5

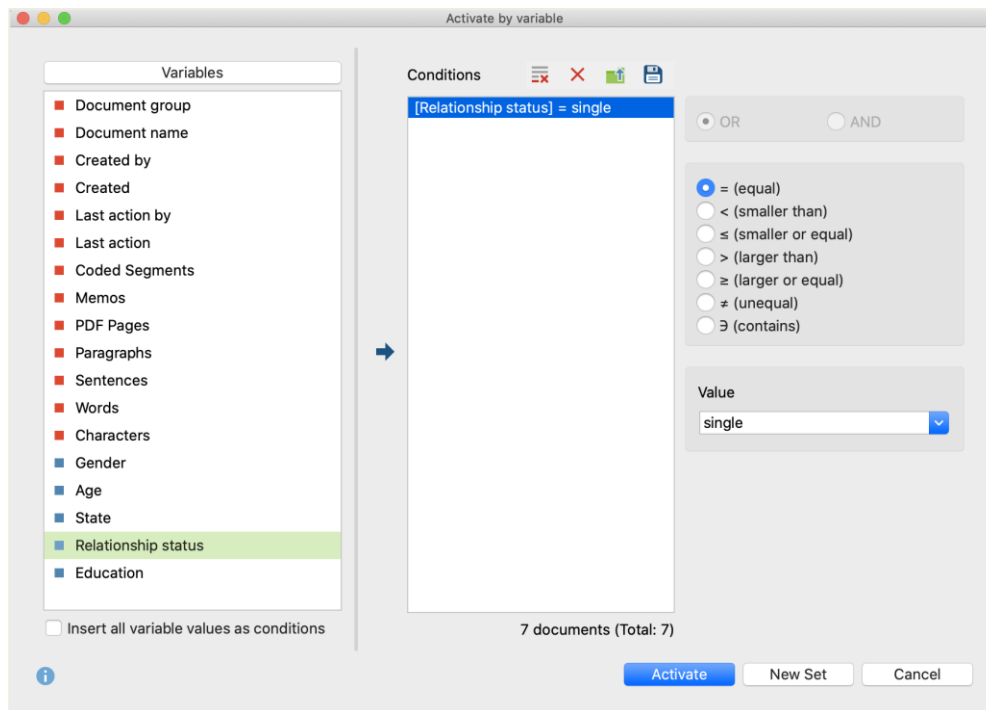
Nothing has been assigned the code "Significantly positive".

3 passages have been assigned the code "Significantly positive".

## Using document variables in your analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data can be connected in a variety of ways. The easiest way is to choose the document variables as selection criteria when you run a *Coding Query*. This will enable you to compare sociodemographic characteristics like “What did single participants over 50 say about XY?” or “How did the suggestions by participants in a partnership compare to those who are single?”. The relevant selection can be made with the function *Activate Documents by Variables* in the “Mixed Methods” tab.

First, choose a variable from the list on the left (in this case: Relationship status), press the arrow and then choose the variable value on the right (in this case: single). As soon as you click *Activate*, all documents with matching variable values will be activated in the *Document System*, in this example all interviews with respondents who are not in a partnership.



## Further literature

Charmaz, Kathy (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed., SAGE.

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Gizzi, Michael C.; Rädiker, Stefan (Eds., 2021). *The Practice of Qualitative Data Analysis. Research Examples Using MAXQDA*. MAXQDA Press. <https://doi.org/10.36192/978-3-948768058>

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Woolf, Nicholas H.; Silver, Christina (2018). *Qualitative Analysis Using MAXQDA: The Five-level QDA Method*. Routledge.

## Goodbye

We hope this guide helped you get started with MAXQDA. Of course, MAXQDA offers a whole range of further analysis functions and tools. To name a few examples, you can:

- ❖ create literature reviews
- ❖ transcribe audio and video files
- ❖ import and analyze Twitter and YouTube data
- ❖ analyze focus groups
- ❖ visualize data or results
- ❖ conduct a quantitative text analysis with MAXDictio
- ❖ generate reports and statistical frequency tables

You can find a wide range of resources on our website [www.maxqda.com](http://www.maxqda.com)

- ❖ free introductory webinars
- ❖ online manual
- ❖ video tutorials
- ❖ list of upcoming workshops
- ❖ professional MAXQDA trainer database
- ❖ research blog, user forum, and more...

## MQIC – MAXQDA International Conference

The annual [MAXQDA International Conference](http://www.mqic-berlin.com) brings together MAXQDA users from all over the world in Berlin, Germany. The conference offers a rich program that covers everything related to MAXQDA and mixed methods research. It's a unique opportunity to network with other MAXQDA users and get to know the MAXQDA development team. Find out more at [www.mqic-berlin.com](http://www.mqic-berlin.com).

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