

# Literature Reviews with NVivo

NVivo can be used in a different way for Literature Reviews. Instead of the focus being on coding documents (i.e. the research articles themselves), it is more efficient to **code your own notes** on those documents.

It can also be beneficial to import the research documents into the NVivo Project so you can also use NVivo to help you search for relevant content. You can use NVivo to **import your PDF documents** and use NVivo to **search** within them, and to **code good examples, quotes** etc. so that you can find them more easily when you need them.

For the Review itself, I have found that the most efficient approach is to **create Notes for each document** (linked to the relevant documents for easy reference), and **code sections of these notes to Node/Codes** for your Literature Review. This is a better approach than directly coding sections of the actual articles, because when you open the **Node/Code**, it essentially collates what you have already written in notes and all you need to do is clean them up for your review.

**Please Note:** versions of NVivo that pre-date *NVivo Release 1* and *NVivo 14*, refer to Codes as “Nodes”.

## *Creating Notes in NVivo*

### OPTION 1: Create Notes as Memos

To Create a Note as a **Memo** for each PDF document you import as an **Internal File**:

- Right-click on the document and select **Memo Link --> Link to New Memo**.
- Give the Memo a name which identifies it as belonging to that document (e.g., “Abbott (2006)”). This will make it easier to see which note belongs to which article when you open a **Node/Code** (it will be written as Memos/Abbot (2006) in the blue hyperlink above the quote).
- Then just type your notes into this Memo for the article in question.
- When you’ve finished your notes, code the information to the relevant **Node/Code(s)** for your Literature Review.
- You will find all your Memos in the Sources Area, in the Memos Folder.

## OPTION 2: Create Notes as External Documents

To Create a Note as a **Document** associated with each document you import as an **External File**:

- Right-click in the list view of the **Externals** File Area and select **New External**.
- Give the new **Link** a name which identifies it as belonging to that document (e.g., “Abbott (2006)”).
- Click on the **External** tab, and select the File Type (e.g., File Link) and File Path to the document to create a link to that File on your computer. Optionally you can enter a **Location Description** and define the **Contents**.
- On the **Attribute Values** tab you can give the document a **File Classification**. Then Click **OK**.
- This will automatically create a new text document associated with your file, in which to write and code your notes.

## OPTION 3: Create Notes as a New Document

To Create a Note as a standalone **Document** not associated with a **File**:

- Right-click in the list view of the Files Area and select **New Document → New Document**.
- Give the new **File** a name which identifies it as belonging to that document (e.g., “Abbott (2006)”).
- You can also give it an optional **File Classification** (e.g., *Journal Article*) on the **Attribute Values** tab. Click **OK**.
- This will create a new text document in which to write and code your notes.

## Example Node/Code for a Literature Review

Define the scope of your research **first**. This will allow you to target exactly what you need to include in your review. You can structure the **Node/Codes** based on the format and/or focal points of your Review. That way, for instance, you could collate all your Notes relating to the gaps you find in the literature, by coding them as “Gaps”. Then when writing up, you open the **Node/Code** and it’s all there in one document.

(e.g., to compile notes relating to a “Theories” section etc.).

The image shows a screenshot of a software interface for organizing a literature review. It features a tree-like structure of nodes and codes. The root node is '1\_INTRODUCTION', which branches into 'CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK', 'CONTRADICTIONS', 'DEBATES', 'DEFINITIONS', 'ISSUES', and 'SEMINAL LITERATURE'. The next level is '2\_BODY', which branches into '1\_CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER' (further divided into 'POST-2000' and 'PRE-2000'), '2A\_METHODOLOGICAL GROUPING' (divided into 'Disciplines or Type of Evidence' and 'Mixed Methods', 'Qualitative', 'Quantitative'), '2A\_THEORETICAL GROUPING' (divided into 'Concept A', 'Model A', 'Theory A'), and '2C\_THEMATIC GROUPING' (divided into 'Factor A', 'Theme A'). The final level is '3\_CONCLUSION', which branches into 'GAPS IN LITERATURE' and 'IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED'. Each node and code is represented by a blue circle icon and a text label.

| Name                            |  |  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| 1_INTRODUCTION                  |  |  |
| CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK            |  |  |
| CONTRADICTIONS                  |  |  |
| DEBATES                         |  |  |
| DEFINITIONS                     |  |  |
| ISSUES                          |  |  |
| SEMINAL LITERATURE              |  |  |
| 2_BODY                          |  |  |
| 1_CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER           |  |  |
| POST-2000                       |  |  |
| PRE-2000                        |  |  |
| 2A_METHODOLOGICAL GROUPING      |  |  |
| Disciplines or Type of Evidence |  |  |
| Anecdotal                       |  |  |
| Historical                      |  |  |
| Psychological                   |  |  |
| Scientific                      |  |  |
| Sociological                    |  |  |
| Mixed Methods                   |  |  |
| Qualitative                     |  |  |
| Quantitative                    |  |  |
| 2A_THEORETICAL GROUPING         |  |  |
| Concept A                       |  |  |
| Model A                         |  |  |
| Theory A                        |  |  |
| 2C_THEMATIC GROUPING            |  |  |
| Factor A                        |  |  |
| Theme A                         |  |  |
| 3_CONCLUSION                    |  |  |
| GAPS IN LITERATURE              |  |  |
| IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED             |  |  |

It's also a good idea to include Contextual **Node/Codes** to help identify relevant sentiments, comparisons, effects etc. That way you could refine your Notes to find evidence for "Weaknesses identified" in "Theory A" for instance. You would do this by conducting a Coding Query in the overlap between text coded at both **Node/Codesd**. Or you could conduct a Matrix Coding Query to quickly identify both the Weaknesses and Strengths (in columns of the matrix) of Theories A, B and C (in the columns).

