



## Qualitative Inquiry: Making Sense of the Data

*“Qualitative inquiry captivates the most useful of all human capacities- the capacity to learn from others” – from Halcolm’s Evaluation Laws*

- ❑ Data can be obtained through direct interview, direct observation, and written documents.
- ❑ In qualitative inquiry, the RESEARCHER is the instrument. Validity in qualitative methods hinges to a great degree on the extent of the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork (Patton, 1990).
- ❑ Qualitative analysis is like an art form: it requires reflection, diligence, and persistence.
- ❑ TRIANGULATION – qualitative data can be used to confirm/rebuke other sources of data; having more than one person check the qualitative analysis can help to make things “clear” and “accurate”.
- ❑ GOAL OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: to identify common phrases, patterns, themes, relationships and sequences that helps to explain your topic of interest.

### SOME SIMPLIFIED STEPS TO GET YOU STARTED

1. Get all your data in one place.
2. Create an AUDIT TRAIL: This might be as simple as numbering surveys, but it might be as complicated as taking an interview and numbering every line (when you are working with qualitative data you always want to know where you got your information).
3. Create a TABLE: This can be done in WORD or EXCEL. You will need a column for “Audit Trail”, Theme, Code, and Data.
4. If your data is not already typed out, start typing it into the table. Always indicate the “Audit Trail”, and something that identifies the content of what the information says (code). Some paragraphs/questions, sentences will have more than one “issue” or “code”. Be sure to separate them.
5. Keep track of the “codes”. You might find that several “codes” fit into a larger, overarching “theme”. These are the things you want to identify. Themes and codes.
6. Make note of specific examples from your data that epitomize your “codes” or “themes”. You can use these examples in your final report (if it’s a direct quotation, you might have to obtain permission from the participant who provided the quote).

7. Check and recheck your data. Let your participants see a summary so they can provide feedback...does your analysis match their opinions? Why/why not? What questions does your analysis pose? If you were to do more research, what questions would you ask based on your qualitative analysis?

Example: This data was collected from teachers to answer the question: **“What are some barriers you have encountered in implementing the homework club program?”**

<u>Audit Trail</u>	<u>Theme</u>	<u>Code</u>	<u>Data</u>
2-1	Successful implementation requires more information/accurate information	Knowledge	- parents are not aware that the program exists, the information is not getting home
3-1		Knowledge	- students think that it's a detention club, they don't know they can come if they need help with their homework
4-1	Homework club might not be offered at the optimal time for reaching students in need	Time of day	- some students have a hard time getting home from school at the time it is offered, and parents want them home for supper
5-1		Time of year	- I find that students are less likely to come close to Christmas, or right after Christmas, but this is a problem because exams are at the end of January...but our homework club doesn't even get STARTED until November
4-1		Interest level	- what kid wants to sit around doing homework after school?
6-1		Outside involvement	- my students are all into extra-curricular activities, hockey, basketball, music lessons...they don't have TIME for homework club

- ❑ When data is in table format you can “sort” it by code, or by theme to get everything you need in one place!
- ❑ You don't HAVE to use tables, you can cut and paste text (into piles of similar themes). This works well for “visual” learners.