How to create a research journal

NVIVO

PART 1:
Understand the importance of a research journal and creating one

NVivo was designed with research journals in mind, so you can work effectively. Ideas are fragile objects and if you don't write them down, they can fade away.

What is a research journal?

A research journal is a log of your thoughts and ideas on your research, including but not limited to:

- You are writing to reflect on your developing ideas
- Reflection
- Challenges
- Flashes of inspiration
- New connections you discover between literature and data
- Ways to move forward
- Questions for supervisors or colleagues

You are writing to yourself to reflect on your developing ideas. No one is going to assess your journal — it is for your eyes only so record your thoughts no matter how wild or tenuous they may be. The important thing is to have a record which you will be able to go back and read to see how your ideas developed.

> You should start writing your research journal as soon as you begin to have ideas about a research project, however it is never too late to start.

Why have a research journal?

The point of the research journal is to help you chronicle your research process. Ideas and thoughts on your research area develop, grow and change over time. If you have documented your thoughts along the journey, it makes it much easier to track and map out the research progress. It also means you free head-space for new and emerging ideas, without losing what you already know.

> Think of a journal as an exercise for the brain — to help build those reflexivity muscles.

Having a research journal in NVivo will enable you to:

- Keep track of your research thoughts, ideas and theories
- Monitor your progress and see how your research has progressed and changed over time
- Note any challenges
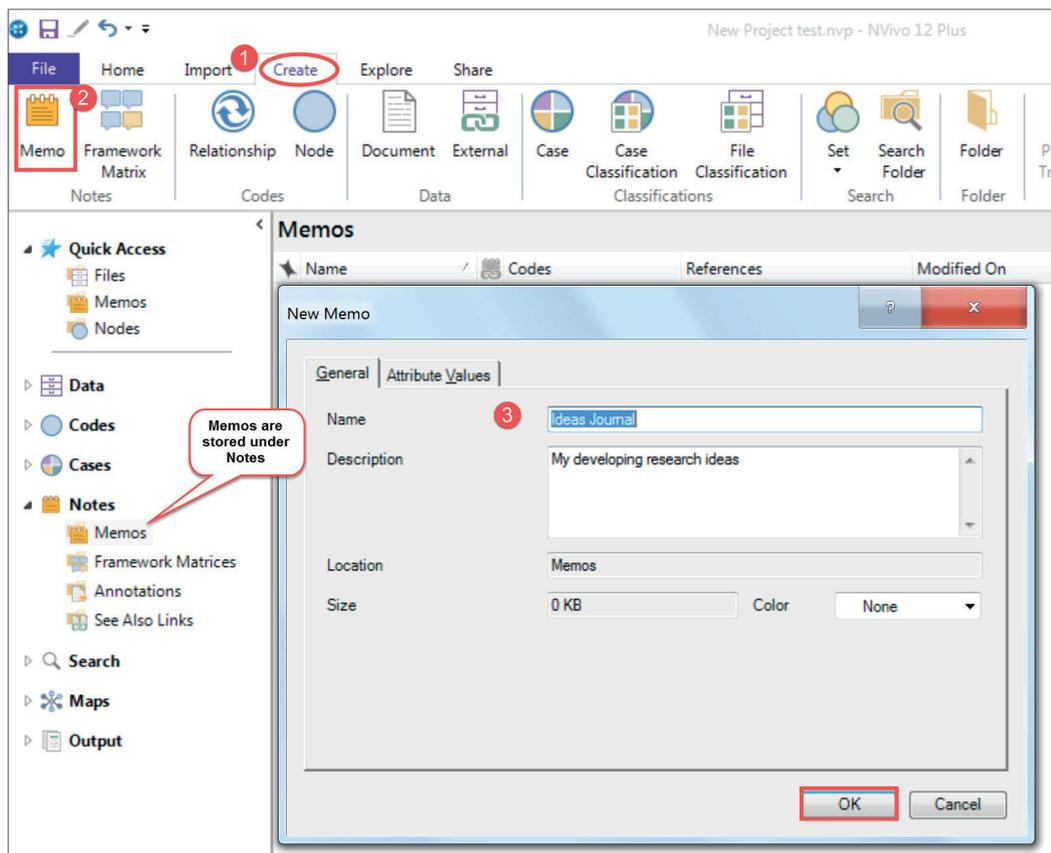- It also helps keep you in the habit of writing

Benefits of using NVivo for keeping a research journal

- Have all your research material and documentation in one place
- Create multiple memos based on themes, topics, interviewees, ideas
- Ability to link memos to other project items
- In NVivo you can code and analyse your journal, and use it as a data source.

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PART 2:
Create and use a research journal in NVivo

You create a research journal as a memo in NVivo. Figure 1 shows you how to do this. Memos are stored in the Notes section of the Navigation View. To create a memo, click on the Create tab in the Ribbon (or tool bar) and select Memo. Give it a name. Click OK and start writing. You can date/time stamp your journal by CTRL-SHIFT-T.

Figure 1: Creating a Memo

If you have already started your research journal in Word, you can import it as a Memo from the Import tab in the Ribbon. Then you can continue to write in your journal in NVivo.

Further reading

Cabraal, Anuja (2013) Keep a research journal: it is important, Blog Post

Jackson, Kristi (2017) Thinking outside of the box with memos and other motivational tactics in NVivo, NVivo Blog Post

Paré, Marie-Hélene (2017) The hidden power of 'see also' links, NVivo Blog Post

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