Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative Methods
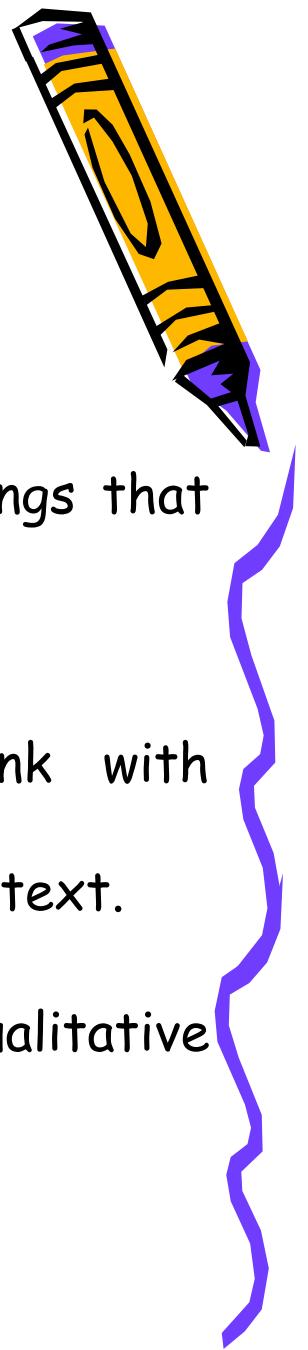
1. Get over the idea that research means counting.

2. The focus is on subjective experiences, or the meanings that people use.

3. Because meaning resides in language (people think with language), qualitative research largely involves studying text.

4. The best device for collecting and analyzing qualitative information is the human brain.
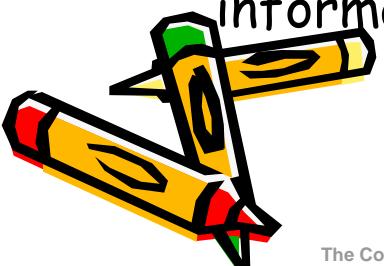
Qualitative Methods

5. Qualitative research is local, concrete.

6. Observations and findings depend on understanding contexts and the meanings held by the people in those contexts and the meanings of the things in those contexts.

7. Observations are typically of interactions in smaller groups or selectively defined settings.
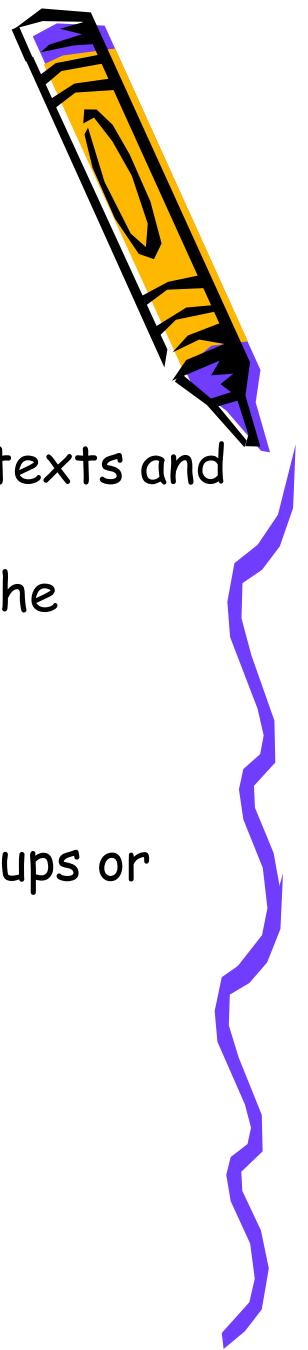
Qualitative Methods
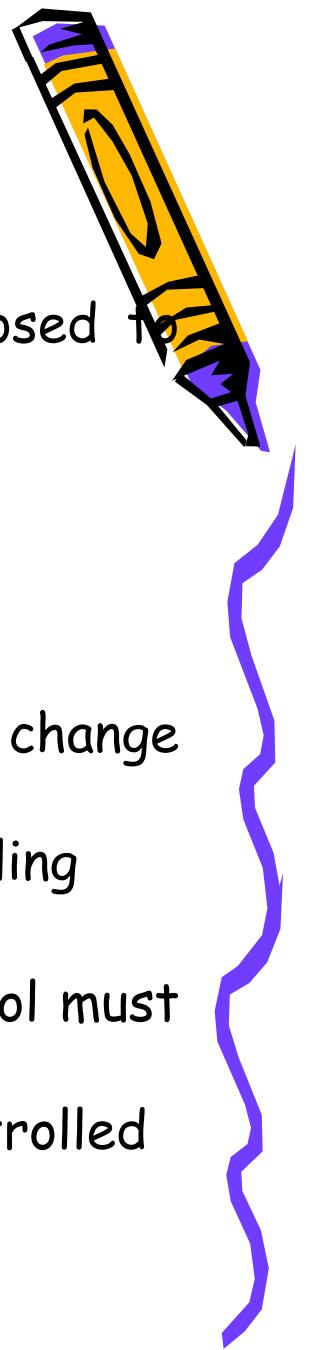
8. Qualitative research often provides idiographic (as opposed to nomothetic) causal explanations.

9.   Qualitative research is typically inductive.

10.   The research is reflexive—design is flexible and can change given the needs of the research. E.g., Theoretical Sampling

11.   The researcher must be reflexive as well—the brain tool must be calibrated, understood, active, paid attention to, controlled
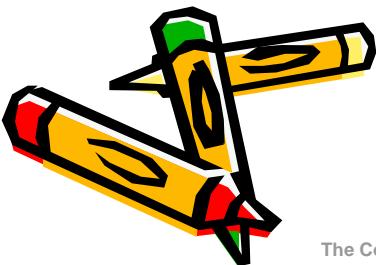
Qualitative Methods

12. Qualitative research is very practical, logical, and critical of itself. Researchers constantly ask, "Am I accurately depicting the social world given the ways I am collecting and analyzing my data?"

13. Good qualitative research is often the most rigorous, difficult research.
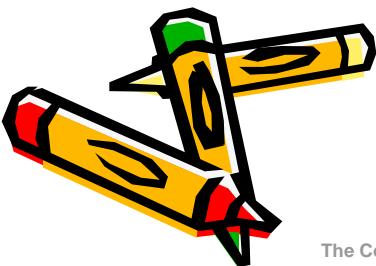
Qualitative Methods

When should I use qualitative methods?

- When variables cannot be quantified

- When variables are best understood in their natural settings

- When variables are studied over real time

- When studying intimate details of roles, processes, and groups

- When the paramount objective is "understanding"

What sort of research questions can qualitative methods best answer?

Consider the following:

- 'Lived experience'

- 'Insider' perspectives

- Context/ Meaning oriented rather than measurement oriented
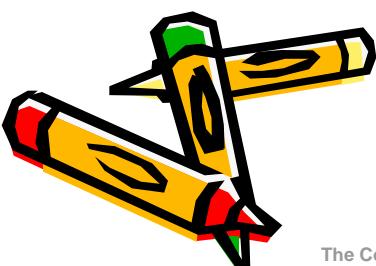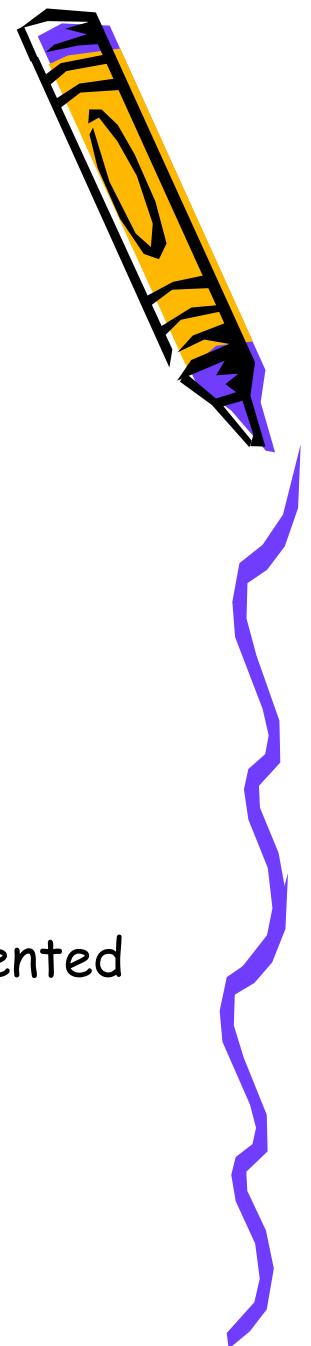
Slumdog Millionaire 2008

"Qualitative Research is like peeling onions" Ulin, Robinson, Tolby (2005)

What layers of meaning

are evident here?
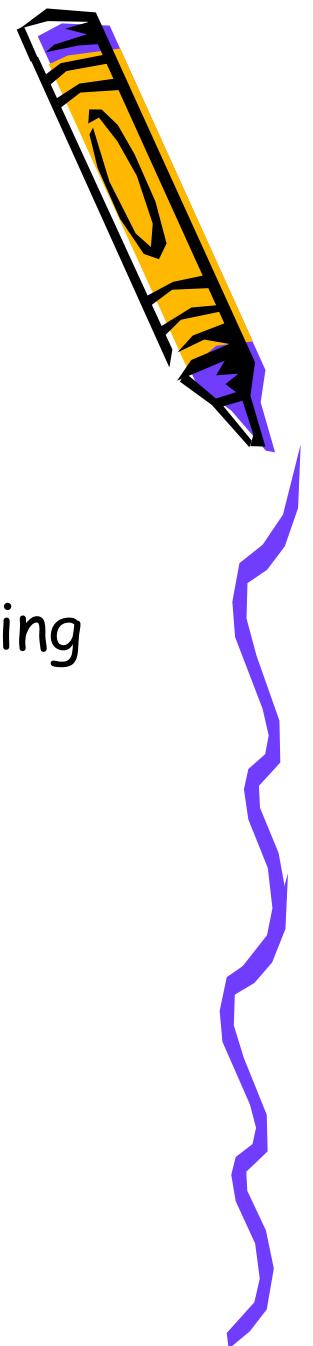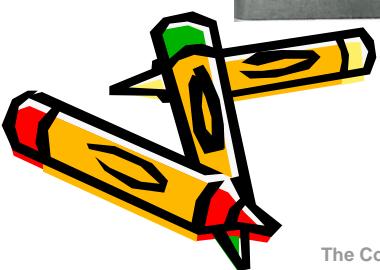
Peeling the Onion

- Qualitative research focuses on depth, meaning, and detail

- Adjectives like rich, deep, thick often used in talking about qualitative data

- Deliberate focus on 'subjectivities', the participant is the expert

- Focus on building understanding from the ground up (refer grounded theory for more on this)

- Valuing the insider perspective is crucial

Qualitative research strategies
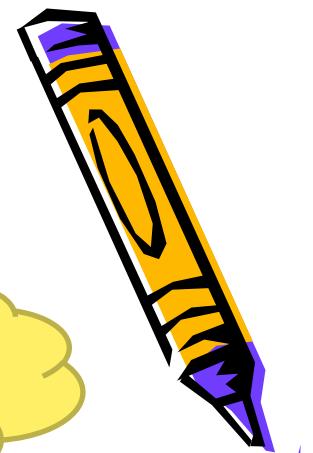
Observations Interviews Cases studies

Step 1

These often inovle face-to-face interactions between researcher and participant

The researchers need to be flexible and sensitive to the needs of the social context within which the data is obtained.

Step 2

The data is then analysed and interpreted. To look for themes is more common than trying to confirm a hypothesis.
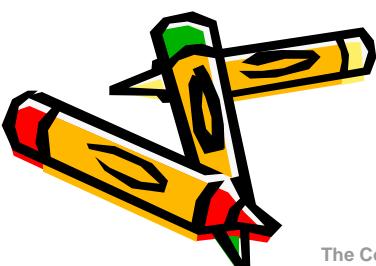
When dealing with qualitative research – it is imperative to be able to tolerate a degree of uncertainty.
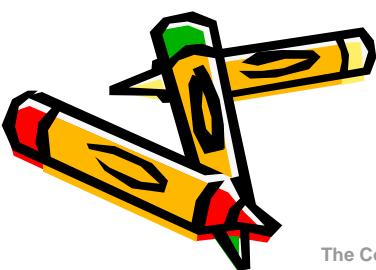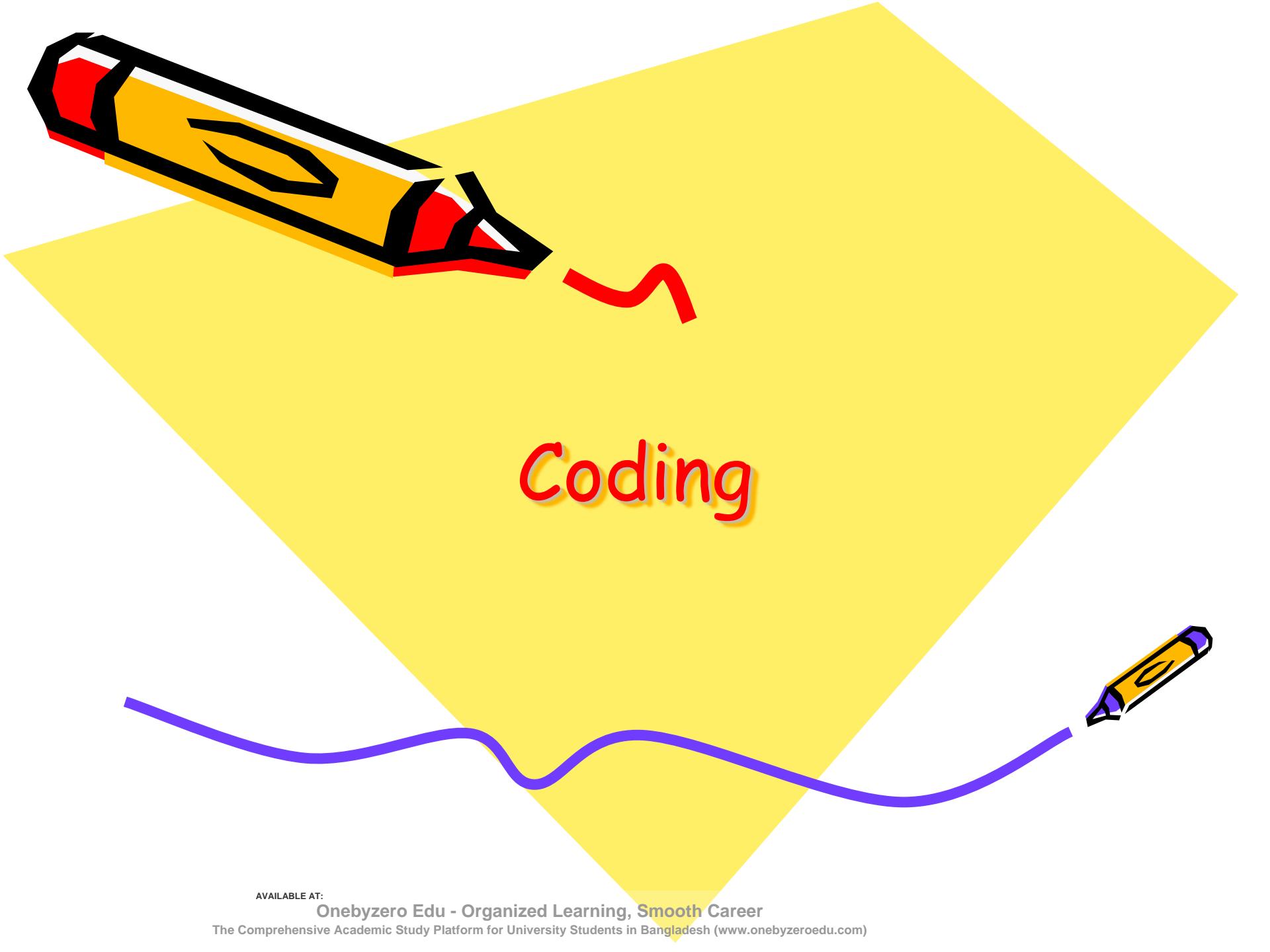
Coding

Coding

What is coding?

- In qualitative analysis, coding is the process of identifying categories and meanings in text, creating and applying a name or code to each, and systematically marking similar strings of text with the same code name.

- Coding permits systematic retrieval of categories and meanings during analysis. Codes help researchers identify patterns in data.
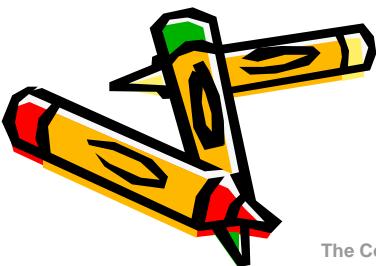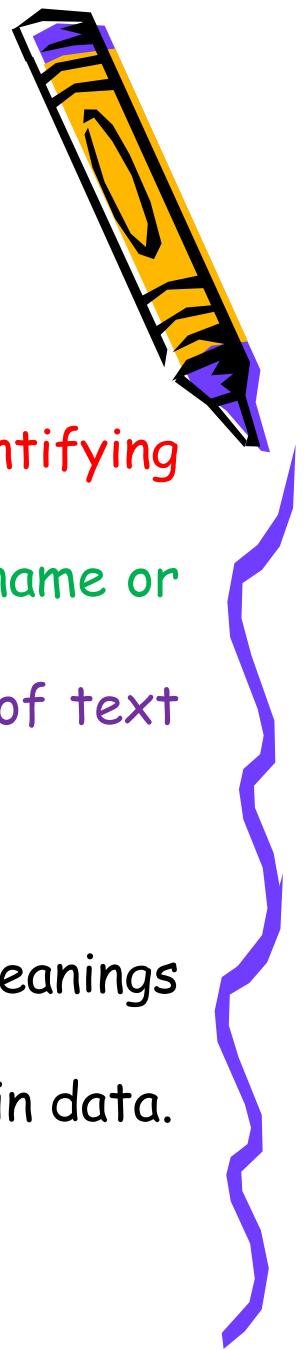
Coding

- One codes only relevant data (Not all text must be coded to complete the project)

- Codes may be based on:

  Actions, Behaviors, Topics, Ideas, Concepts,

  Terms, Phrases, Keywords, and so forth

- Coding is purposeful interpretation, with mindful reflection on the meanings of the persons, context, interactions, statements, assumptions, and so forth
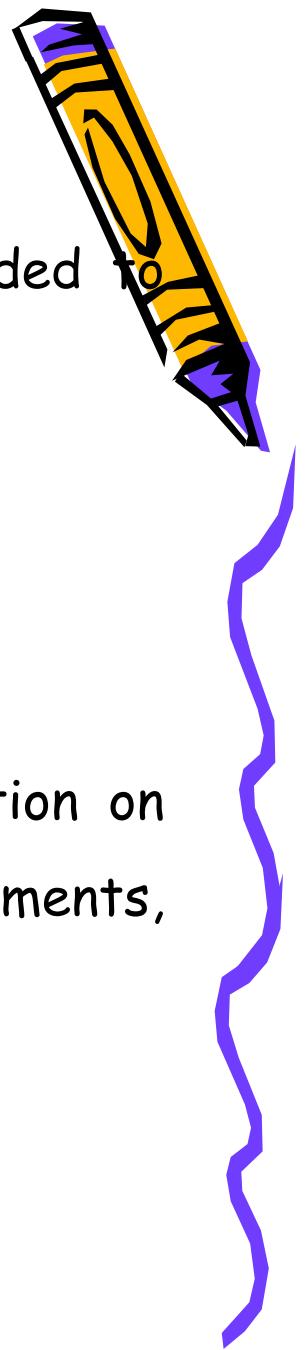
Coding

An example of "old school" coding

When you move into your own home, you're alone. There is no bustle of people around the house. I miss having someone to chat to when I get home. I put the TV or some music so there's some background noise, the silence makes me feel so alone. Sometimes I will be sat watching trash TV and thinking I should be out doing something rather than watching this rubbish. I read a lot but sometimes I am too tired and just want to veg out. But it's been good to move out of mum and dads as it's not healthy to rely on them as they won't last forever. I become independent and made my own decisions. It's good they still there when I need them. It's good to have some distance as when I was at home I was arguing a lot with my dad and that was made me decide it was time to go.

feelings

Living alone

New relationship with parents

Independence

Old relationship with parents

Argument with Dad
Relation with father
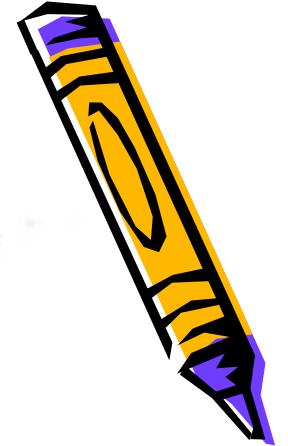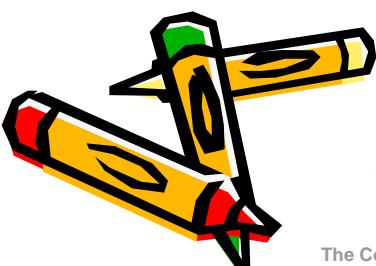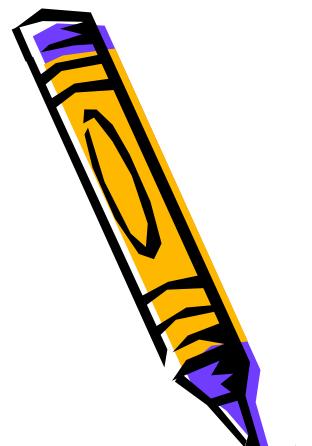
Quantitative research involves analysis of numerical data

Qualitative research involves analysis of data such as words, pictures or objects
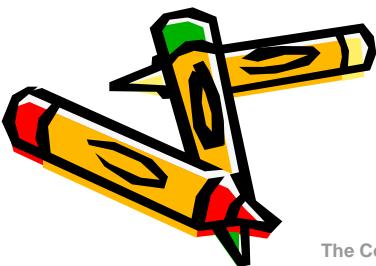
Deductive thinking (Quantitative)

THEORY

HYPOTHESIS

OBSERVATION

CONFIRMATION
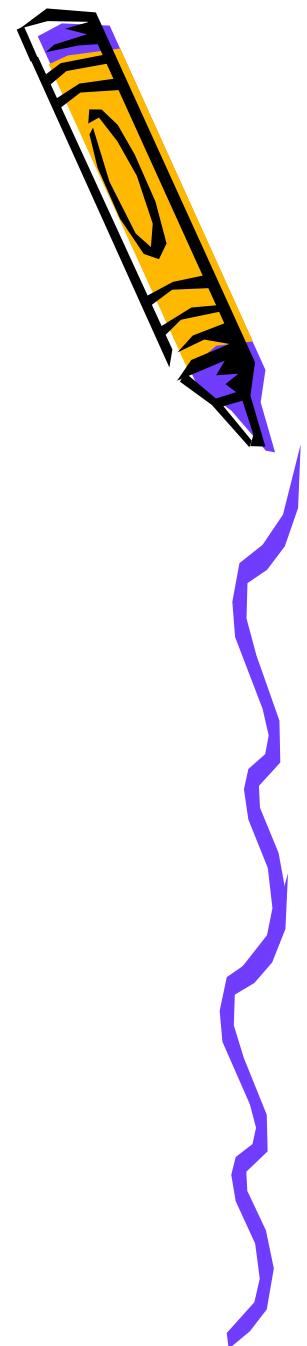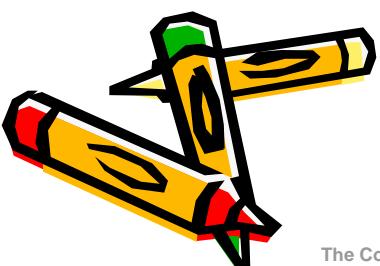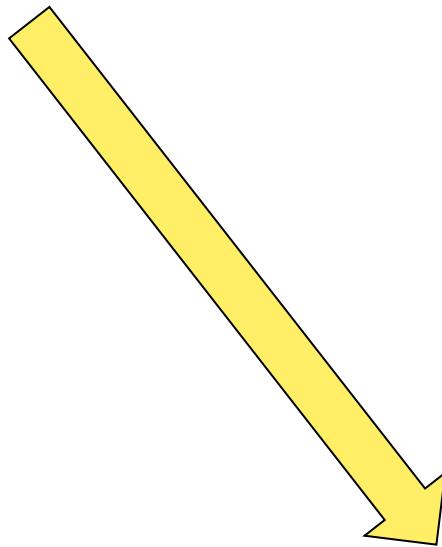
Inductive thinking (Qualitative)

OBSERVATION

PATTERNS

HYPOTHESIS

THEORY
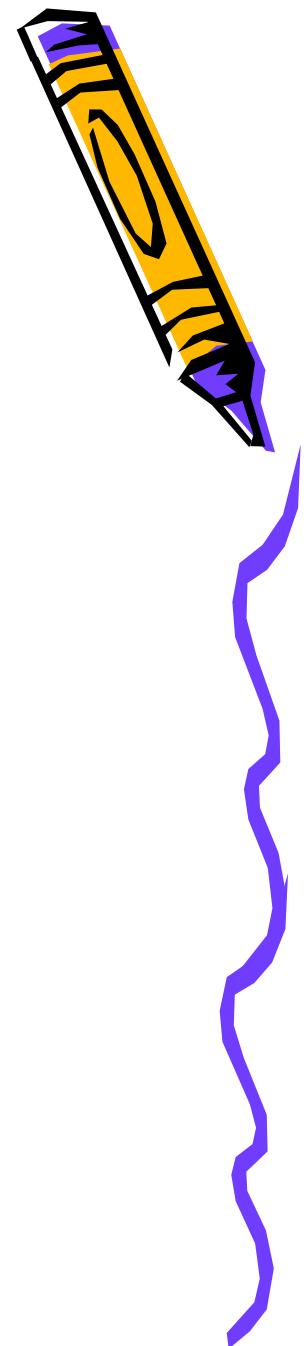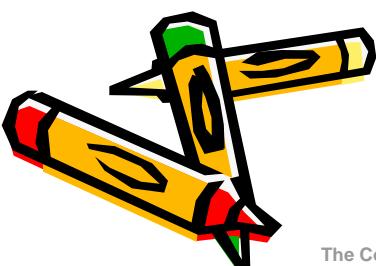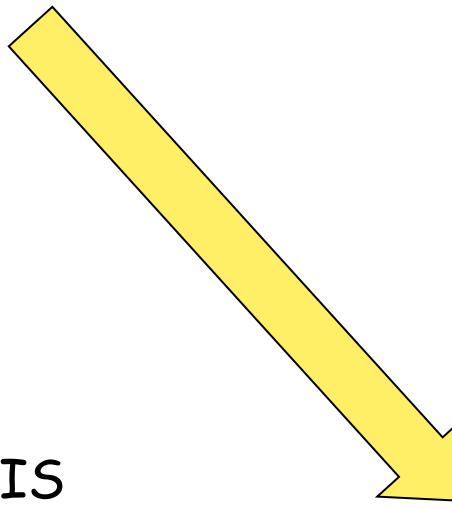
Quantitative and Qualitative Methods

- Quantitative methods relate to numbers. Data must be able to be represented with numbers and presented in terms of statistical patterns/ associations.

- Qualitative methods – non quantifiable, focus on values, processes, experiences, language and meaning. Data is often words/ text.

- Both methods have their strengths and weaknesses

Differences between quantitative and qualitative research

| Aspects of Research	Quantitative	Qualitative
Relationship between researcher and subject	Distant	Close
Relationship between theory/concepts and research	Confirmation	Emergent
Research Strategy	Structured	Unstructured
Image of Social Reality	Static and external to actor	Processual and socially constructed by actor
Nature of Data	Hard, reliable	Rich, deep
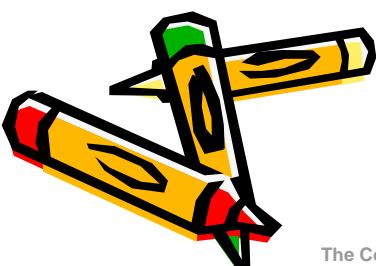
What decides whether to use

Qualitative vs. Quantitative data?

- Purpose of research

- Characteristics of participants
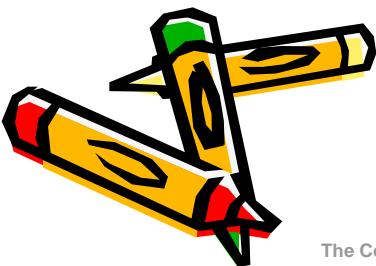
(Induction)

(Deduction)
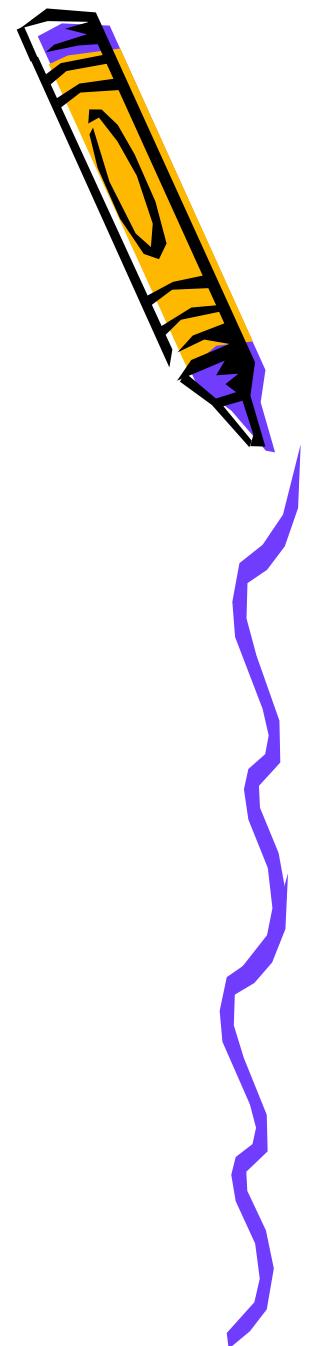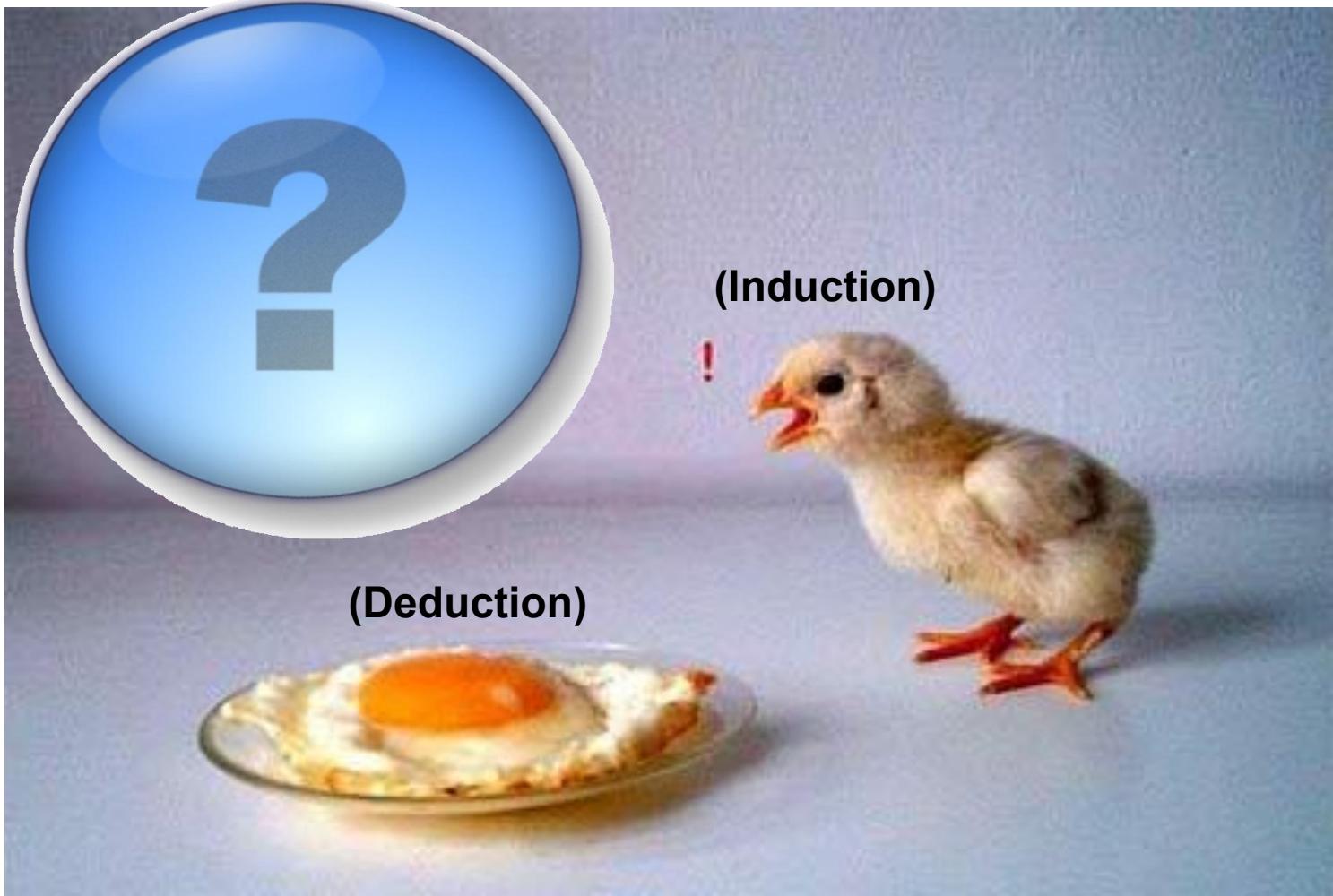
(photo courtesy of dailyhaha.com)

Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research