

A really quick guide to coding in NVivo

Intro

Hello this video is going to be a very quick Whistlestop tour of how to create a code in NVivo for if you are in a hurry and just need to get going. If you are looking for a bit more detail, including tips and tricks for managing and organising your codes, stay-tuned or skip to later in the video.

I will start the video at the point where you have your data to be coded (often in the form of an interview transcript) and you have an idea of how you want to go about your coding. If you are not sure about either of these things, take a look at our other resources for more guidance.

There are lots of ways that I could approach coding, one of the first decisions is whether I want to develop codes as I go and generate them from the data, this may also be termed inductive coding, or whether I want to have a set of codes before I start to code to, this may be termed deductive coding. It is not uncommon for researchers to use a mixture of the two.

Coding directly from the data

First, I'll show you how to create a code directly from the transcript. Let's say my research is about life as a PhD student so I want to capture the snippets of information that relate to this. Here the student talks about getting up early so I might like to code this as one part of the student's DAILY ROUTINE. So how would I do this? Well all I need to do is highlight the section of text that I want to code, go up to the circle icon which sits in the toolbar at the top of your open file tab, select 'Code Selection' and under 'Create New:' select 'Top Level Code'. You can now type in a name for your new code. There is also a box for a description of the code. This is not essential but can be very helpful for creating a codebook and helping to keep consistent with your coding.

In the next question the participant talks about using an app to help manage their time as a strategy to help with their PhD so I might want to code this section of text under 'strategy'. I highlight it, and go to the circle icon (I can also get the same options by right-clicking the highlighted text) select 'Code Selection' and under 'Create New:' select 'Top Level Code' to type in the new code and there we have it.

In Vivo Coding

Later, when answering the question, what do you like least about doing a PhD, the participant talks about “not doing it right” Now I could assign that to my own code, perhaps something like negative experiences or thoughts but actually, I think that the words are quite powerful in themselves so I want to make them into a code as they are. This is called an “In Vivo” code and NVivo has a special function for that.

You may have noticed the ‘Code in Vivo’ option on the dropdown list under the circle icon. You can also quickly code ‘in vivo’ by highlighting the content to be coding and then clicking the icon on the codes toolbar at the bottom of the screen which looks like this:



Keeping track of coding

To keep track of what you have and have not yet coded there are a couple of useful tools in NVivo. Highlight and coding stripes.



The highlighter tool highlights completed coding so that you can see what you have already done.



The coding stripes tool shows you which code the section has been coded to.

Just click on the icons (above) which are near the top of the screen and select the coding that you wish to keep track of.

Deciding on how much to code

A common question is ‘how much should I code?’ There are various opinions on this but, I have found that it can relate to personal preference and is up to you and how you approach your data. If you prefer to code smaller portions of text, it is possible to expand and see the context which I will show you later on, so don’t worry about forgetting.

Okay, so that’s the basics of coding as you go. If that’s all you need then feel free to stop the video here. In the next part I am going to talk a bit about how you might go onto organise your codes or, if you had decided to use a more deductive approach in the first place, how you might set up your codes to start with.

Organising your codes

To do this we will go to the coding tab.

As you can see, the codes we have created are now here. But if we had not made these we could add them in going to 'Create' in the toolbar (usually) at the top of the screen and then select 'Code' which has a circle icon. In the dialogue box you can enter your new code as before.

Coding with pre-determined codes

If you return to your file, you can now code to existing codes by using the same process as before, (e.g. highlighting the content that you wish to code and right clicking) but instead of needing to create a new code you can click on the one that's already there and then click 'Code Selection' at the bottom of the dialogue box.

Organising your codes (some more)

We can also re-organise the codes that we already have by making some codes appear as subcategories of others.

If we decide that actually two codes are very similar, or we have accidentally created two of the same code it is also possible to merge the two codes together. To do this you right click and 'cut' the code that you wish to merge. Then you left click the code that you wish to merge into (the code with whichever heading you want to keep) and select "Merge Into Selected Code".

Alternatively, if you left click and select 'Paste' rather than 'Merge Into Selected Code' then the 'cut' code now becomes a subcategory of the selected code. You can see that a code has subcategories by the presence of the little blue '+' sign. Clicking on the sign allows you to view which subcategories are present for the code. In NVivo the top level codes are also known as 'Parent' codes and the subcategories are called 'Child' codes. It is possible for child codes to have further child codes, enabling you to build a coding hierarchy.

So now you know how to either inductively or deductively get going with coding in NVivo.

Reviewing the content of your codes

A final thing to show you in this video is how you can see what data you have under each code. Now there are other ways to do this, such as with matrices and queries but as they are covered in other resources I will just show you this basic approach.

To view the content coded to each code you can double-click the code. This will open a new page for you and list the coded content under titles (in blue) which tell you which files that content has come from and what proportion of that file the content relates to.

If you would like a reminder of the context of the coded content then you can right click the content, select 'Spread Coding' from the menu and decide whether you want narrow (the surrounding sentence); broad (the surrounding paragraph); custom (you can decide how much or how little context you want using the dialogue box); or entire file.

Summary

In this screencast I have shown you the basics of how to create and apply codes to your files. I have included details about how to organise and reorganise your codes and some tips for keeping track of your codes as you go.

I hope that you found it useful. Thank you for listening/reading and all the best for your research.

Example transcript

The lived experience of a PhD Student:

I: What is a typical day for you?

R:

I: What strategies do you use to help you make progress with your PhD?

R:

I: What do you like least about doing a PhD?

R:

I: What is your favourite part of doing a PhD?

I: What is a typical day for you?

R: Usually, I try to get up early and to my laptop by 7am. I used to fit in a short workout before I started but that has gone a bit by the wayside now. I have a strong, sweet coffee to get me going and work until about 10am when I have breakfast. I'll usually spend the first hour on sort of admin tasks, answering emails and deciding what I need to do in the day and then I get on with a specific task. Sometimes, I might join one of the University 'shut up and write' groups as they help to motivate me.

I: What strategies do you use to help you make progress with your PhD?

R: I have an app which helps me to keep track of how many hours I spend working a day. This helps me to make sure that I am fulfilling the requirements of my project but also helps to remind me when I might need to take a break and makes me feel better about switching off in the evening because I know that I have done a full day's work.

I: What do you like least about doing a PhD?

R: I find that there is a lot of uncertainty around doing a PhD and I often feel that I am not doing it right. I think imposter syndrome is quite common among people doing their PhD.

I: What is your favourite part of doing a PhD?

R: I love the opportunity to explore and to learn. I can get more engrossed in a topic than I have been able to in any other job. I particularly like the interviewing and PPI aspect of my study as I have been able to meet some really, lovely and intriguing people.

I: What is a typical day for you?

R: I'm more of a night owl so I tend to start and finish work a bit later than most people. I need a bit of time to wake up in the morning so I might have a coffee and read a non-research related book to get me started. I find this helps me to 'hit the ground running' when I actually start studying. I try and schedule in regular breaks, and perhaps go for a walk as part of my lunch break, but some days I can get so engrossed in my work that I find that it is 4pm and I haven't even left my chair. I tend to listen to some music before I go to bed, it helps me unwind.

I: What strategies do you use to help you make progress with your PhD?

R: I think having a good working area is really important. Like having good lighting and a comfortable chair makes a real difference.

I: What do you like least about doing a PhD?

R: I find that doing a PhD can be quite lonely. Sometimes I can be busy working and not leave the house all day. I realise that I haven't even spoken to anyone.

I: What is your favourite part of doing a PhD?

R: I like it when I get to work with other people and have discussions about our research. There are so many fascinating projects going on and it is great to get new ideas from talking to different people.

I: What is a typical day for you?

R: First thing, I go to the gym or do a workout. It helps me get energised for the day. I then spend a couple of hours of either focussed writing or reading before taking some time to sort out things like, answering emails etc. After lunch I try and get my teeth into tasks such as screening for my systematic review or running my quantitative analyses. My evenings vary. Some days I have football training, others I might work late and sometimes I just need to chill and maybe cook a nice dinner.

I: What strategies do you use to help you make progress with your PhD?

R: I am a pretty organised person. I keep a diary of the things that I do each day so that if ever I want to check a decision I can look back on it. I also set myself daily, weekly and monthly goals to help me keep to plan and meet my deadlines. I find it really satisfying when I can tick things off my list.

I: What do you like least about doing a PhD?

R: There are times when it is just really difficult. Sometimes it seems like everyone has a different opinion on your project and it can be hard to know which is the best route to go. Sometimes you have to just remind yourself that you only know through trying and the PhD is a learning process.

I: What is your favourite part of doing a PhD?

R: I really like solving puzzles and for me, the PhD is just like one huge puzzle to solve. I like that it challenges me, I can't imagine ever being bored whilst doing my PhD

I: What is a typical day for you?

R: The morning is always hectic as I have to get the kids fed and watered and off to school. I usually find that I can settle into the work zone around 10am and then I aim to have a few really productive hours before lunch. Sometimes it works. If I'm on a roll I

might keep working. I go to collect the children and then might take them to their various after school activities, make tea, have some family time etc. If I can I will try and fit in more work once the children are in bed, but sometimes this is just not possible. I aim for quality over quantity.

I: What strategies do you use to help you make progress with your PhD?

R: Music really helps me. I have different sorts of music for different things, for instance, I have soft classical music to help me focus when writing, but when I am doing a task, I sometimes need a bit more of a beat to keep me motivated. I try to make the most of my time by breaking down my work into shorter achievable tasks so that I get a boost as I complete each one and do not feel overwhelmed.

I: What do you like least about doing a PhD?

R: It's hectic. There are lots of things to juggle and sometimes it can be tricky to keep all the plates spinning.

I: What is your favourite part of doing a PhD?

R: I just love it! I am really passionate about my topic as it has personal relevance for me so I love learning and talking about it. It's just great to feel that I am helping to move the research forward and, hopefully, making a difference for people in future.