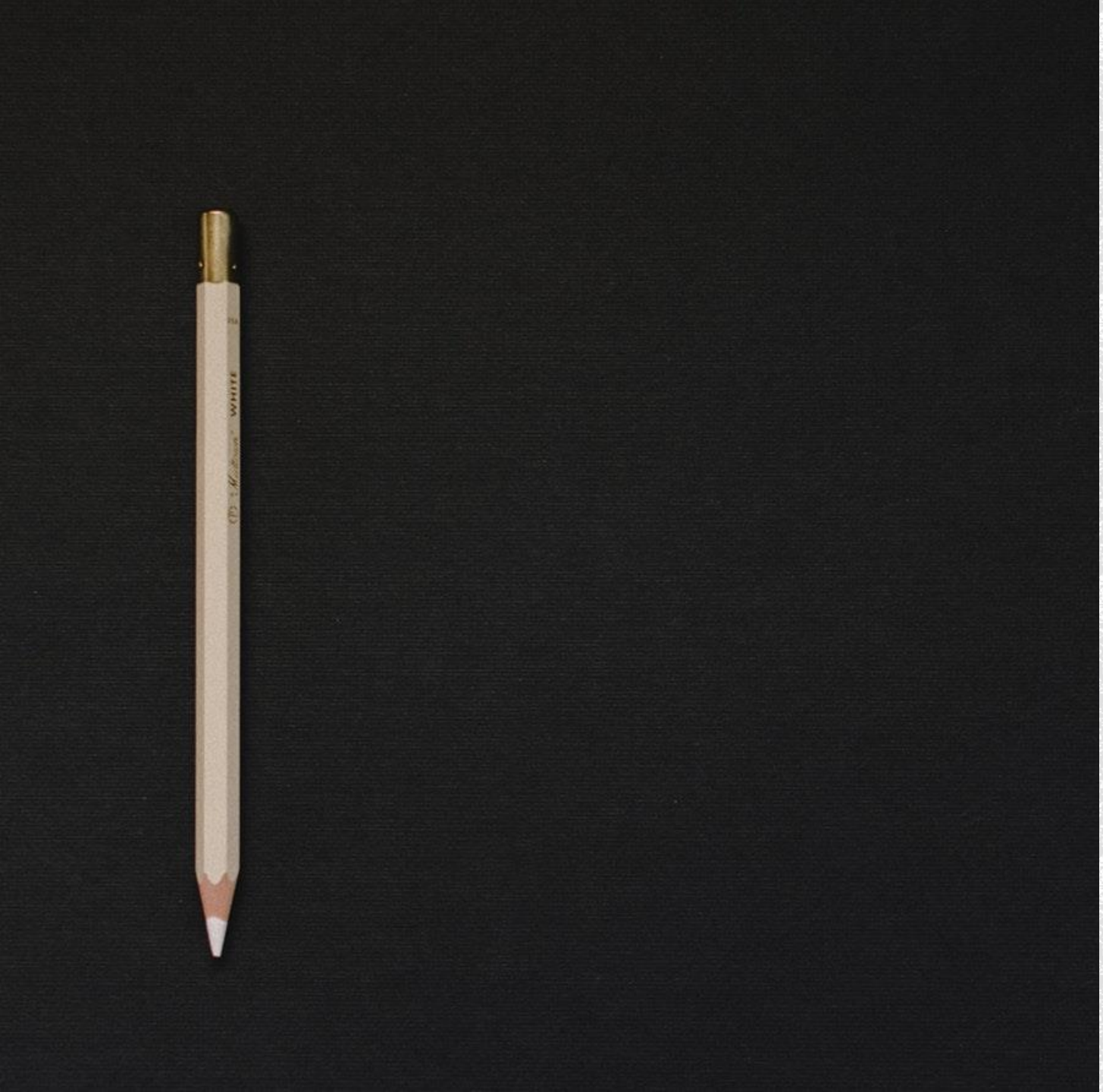


QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER'S TOOLKIT

Dr Jarek Kriukow

QUALITATIVE RESEARCHER

Develop research that will make an impact

- Research consulting
- Data analysis services
- Self-study courses
- Academic support

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- Professional researcher and research consultant based in Edinburgh
- I facilitate lectures and workshops on various aspects of qualitative research and provide **one-to-one online support** to students and professionals interested in qualitative research.
- I have worked for the University of Oxford and University of Edinburgh.
- **I am passionate about research and its power to change people's lives. I developed *Qualitative Researcher* to teach research skills to students and professionals worldwide…**

ABOUT THIS BOOK

- As I recorded new videos for my Youtube channel and wrote new articles for my blog, I realised that it becomes increasingly difficult to find things I posted in the past.
- Because of this, I decided to compile this book of resources. It consists of short articles related to qualitative research, as well as links to relevant content I created in the past - all in one place.
- Importantly, I will be regularly updating this book to make sure it includes all the latest content I posted and extensively covers most important issues in qualitative research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT IS RESEARCH:

Definitions, types and procedures

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

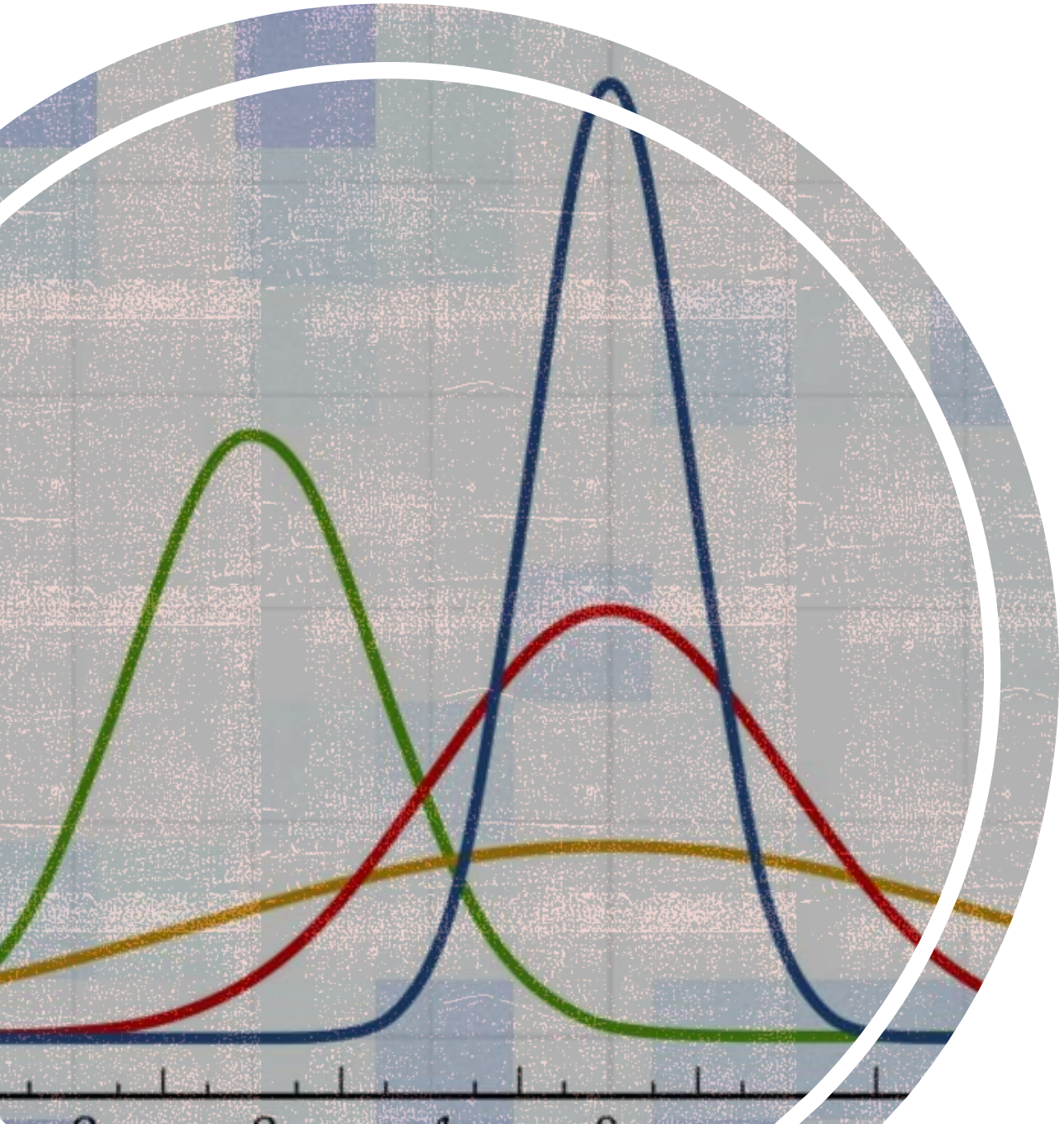
- Systematic investigation into, and study of, materials and "sources" (e.g. people) in order to establish facts and/or reach new conclusions
- A research cycle is as follows: 1) pose a question → 2) collect data to answer the question → 3) analyse the data to find the answer
- We conduct research when we have a question/problem to resolve, when we want to explore the "unknown" – whatever it is
- We are natural born researchers!

DIFFERENT "RESEARCH DESIGNS" (SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS "METHODOLOGIES")

Qualitative research

Quantitative research

Mixed Methods research



QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: DEFINITIONS, AIMS, CHARACTERISTICS

- Has to do with "quantities", or numbers
- Often involves statistics, complex statistical tests that have to do with "variables"
- Large sample sizes (i.e. many participants are recruited)
- The aim is often to generalize findings, based on a representative "sample" of a population (a smaller group of people who represent the "population" – the whole group of people about whom we wish to generalize – can be a country, can be "males in the UK", or "Chinese students")
- Common quantitative data collection methods are questionnaires and structured observations (e.g. controlled observation that includes a control and experimental group)

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

The main strength of quantitative research is the ability to generalize, and even "predict the future" (based on observed patterns, it is possible to make claims about the probability of these patterns occurring in the future)

The main weakness is that it is not a suitable approach if we want to investigate people's stories, problems, experiences, beliefs, attitudes, etc.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: DEFINITIONS, AIMS, CHARACTERISTICS

Has to do with "qualities" – individual characteristics, characteristics attributed to certain events, experiences, etc.

carried out when we wish to understand meanings, look at, describe and understand experience, ideas, beliefs and values, etc.

often conducted in educational settings - for example, a study of students' learning styles and approaches to study, which are described and understood subjectively by students, would be more effective as a qualitative, rather than quantitative, study.

The sample size is smaller than in quantitative research, and the aim is never to generalize. The aim is to understand a specific problem or experience, in a specific unique context, in as much depth as possible.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- **Qualitative interview**

By far the most common method of qualitative data collection. Can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured.

Watch the following videos to learn more about qualitative interviews:

- Types of interview,
- Developing an interview guide (protocol),
- Conducting qualitative interviews

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are essentially a "series of discussions to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest" (Krueger and Casey, 2009: 2). Typically, these seemingly informal discussions occur in a group of no more than 12 individuals who share some common characteristics and have a direct experience of the topic, and, thus, are treated as 'experts'. These discussions are facilitated by a moderator. The analysis of focus groups' data involves both the verbal content of the debate and the non-verbal communication

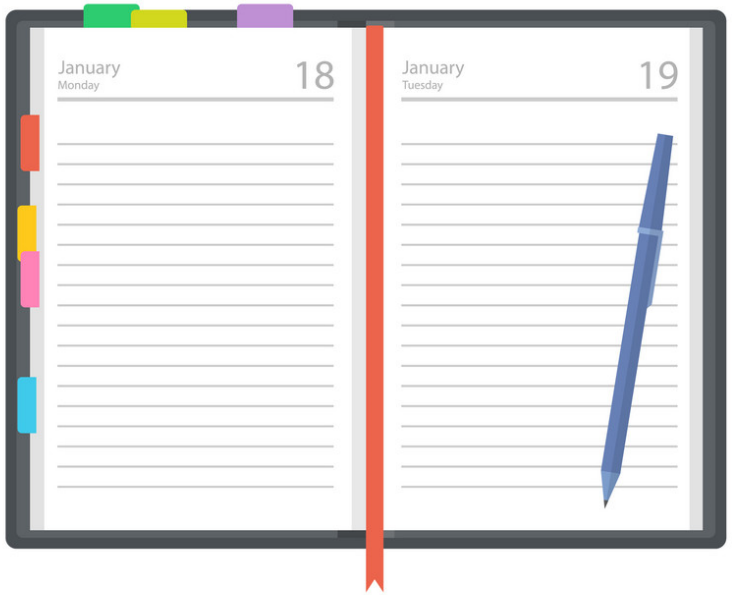
(You can watch more about focus groups and how to analyse focus group data HERE)

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- **Reflective journals**

The research participants are asked to make regular entries in their journal. They can be completely unstructured, or they can follow a structure suggested by the researcher (e.g. "please reflect on experiences on a given day that stand out for any reason", "please describe something positive about today's lesson").

The methodological usefulness of reflective journals is that they give the researcher access to situations where direct observation would be difficult to carry out and they allow the participants more time to generate ideas, hence generating more reliable data from a 'natural' context.



QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

- **Participant observation**

Unlike quantitative controlled and structured observation, qualitative "participant" observation takes place in (relatively) 'natural' settings.

It provides the researcher with ways to observe nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other, and check for how much time is spent on various activities.

MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

- Increasingly popular type of research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection
- Various mixed methods designs, depending on how the 2 approaches are combined. If you wish to learn more about different types of mixed methods design, feel free to watch the following 4 videos:

- Basic decisions and designs in mixed methods research
- Mixed methods parallel design
- Mixed methods explanatory design
- Mixed methods exploratory design

ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA

- There are many techniques and methods of qualitative data analysis, including:

- **Content analysis**. Involves categorizing verbal or behavioural data to classify, summarize and tabulate the data (this is a very structured, scientific and almost "quantitative" approach).

- **Narrative analysis**. used to analyze text that may come from variety of sources including transcripts from interviews, diaries, field notes, surveys and other written forms. Narrative analysis often involves reformulating stories presented by people in different context and based on their different experiences..

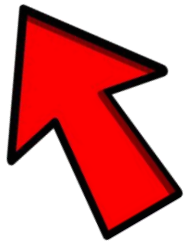
- **Discourse analysis**. A method of analysis of naturally occurring talk and all types of written text.

- **Grounded Theory** - also called analytic induction. This is a method that attempts to develop causal explanations of a phenomenon from one or more cases being studied. Explanations are altered as additional cases are studied until the researcher arrives at a statement that fits all cases.

- **Conversation Analysis** - examines the use of language by people as a type of action or skilled accomplishment. A key concept in this analysis is the principle of people taking turns in conversation. Meanings are usually shaped in the context of the exchange itself.

ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA

- DON'T WORRY - you don't have to know, or understand, all these approaches!
- In the most "common-sense" type of analysis, you will be collecting verbal data from the participants, and then inspecting that data in order to answer your research questions. It is common-sense because inevitably, when you ask someone certain questions, for example, the next thing you do is listen to their answers and try to somehow organize the content of what they told you. If you asked more than 1 person, you will, most likely, also want to compare these different people's opinions… And this is exactly what happens in qualitative data analysis!
- To learn a bit more about the general purpose of qualitative data analysis before reading about the specific steps it involves, watch this short video about qualitative data analysis



THE PROCESS OF QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

1. **Become familiar with the data**. Read and re-read the data, write down your initial impressions and observations, it is also useful to reflect on what you think you Will find in the data.

2. **Categorize and organize the data.** This is often referred to as coding the data. Although "coding" may sound overwhelming, and very "scientific", in practice it means assigning certain labels to pieces of text. If your participants are talking about challenges of group work, for example, you will mark this fragment as "challenges of group work", and later break this further down into the specific challenges they mentioned. If you do the same with "advantages of group work", you will already have an emerging thematic framework for your data.

3. **Interpret the data and explain findings**. Look at your framework and what you found. Think about what the data tells you, and whether it answers the questions you had when you began your study. If there are still things that you do not understand, try to go back to your data and look for these answers. Use the data to answer additional questions that may have emerged (why was one student happy with group work and the other one wasn't? What are the differences between their experiences?)

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS LECTURE

If you want to find out more about qualitative data analysis, click on the image below to watch a short clip in which I outline 4 most common steps in qualitative data analysis

WHAT NEXT WITH YOUR DATA ANALYSIS

- If you are aware of these basics of qualitative data analysis (and maybe you are a bit further in your study already), you may be wondering "what happens next, after coding the data?"
- I have often spoken to students and fellow researchers who got "stuck" at the coding phase – they have coded the data and did not know what else to *analyse* – in other words, how to proceed and how to answer the research questions???
- I have suggested many techniques for "unlocking" the data analysis, including writing about the data, drawing models, or investigating negative cases. To find out more, you can either read this short blog post about unlocking the data analysis, or watch a short video in which I explain what to do after coding and how to develop theoretical concepts.

HOW MANY PARTICIPANTS ARE ENOUGH IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

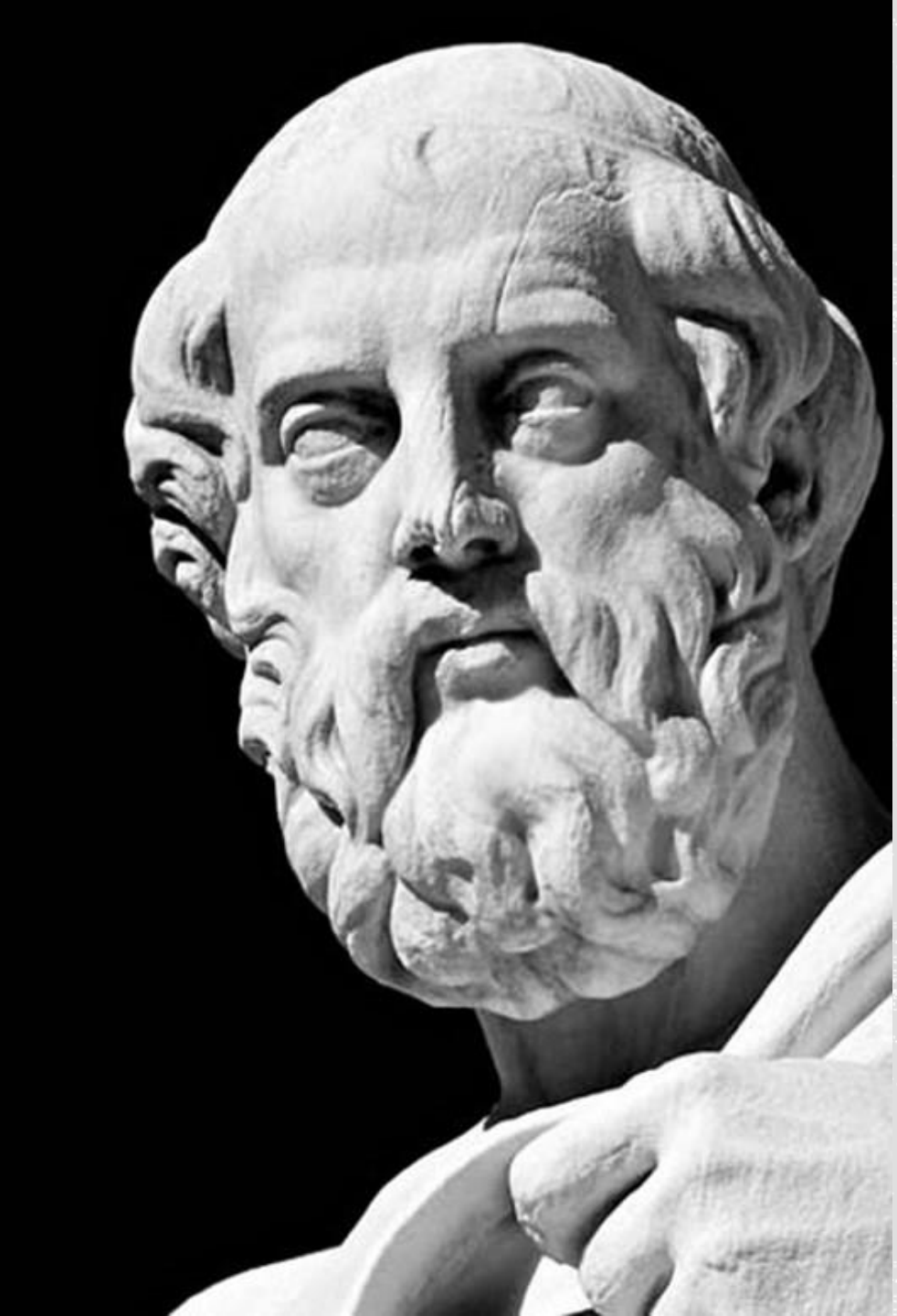
- This is another common question and one that may cause a lot of frustration. A common answer is that you don't need to recruit more participants when you have reached a point of "saturation" which is the point at which gathering new data does not provide any new theoretical insights into your topic…
- Ok… So, how is a student supposed to know when he/she *Will* reach the point of saturation? How is he/she supposed to plan his/her study in advance???
- In this video, I offer a solution and explain how to choose a sample size in qualitative research … and convince our supervisor that we know what we're doing

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

- In *Quantitative* research, reliability refers to consistency of certain measurements, and validity – to whether these measurements "measure what they are supposed to measure".
- To explain the concepts of validity and reliability better, I like to use a bathroom scale analogy: if the scale is *reliable*, it will show you the same weight if you step on it three or more times in a row – it is reliable because it is consistent in showing the result. The scale is *valid* if it shows you your weight, not height or the room temperature – the scale is valid because it measures what it is supposed to measure.
- Things are slightly different, however, in *Qualitative* research…

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

- The concept of reliability is not that relevant in qualitative research because, unlike in quantitative research (in which a good, scientific instrument will produce the same result consistently), it is difficult to talk about the same kind of consistency – if I interviewed you three times in a row, what you tell me is unlikely to be exactly the same each time! Therefore, from the *scientific* point of view, the results would not be reliable.
- For this reason, what is more important in qualitative research is validity of findings. To learn more about validity in qualitative research, read this short article, and then watch this video in which I discuss 6 strategies to increase validity.

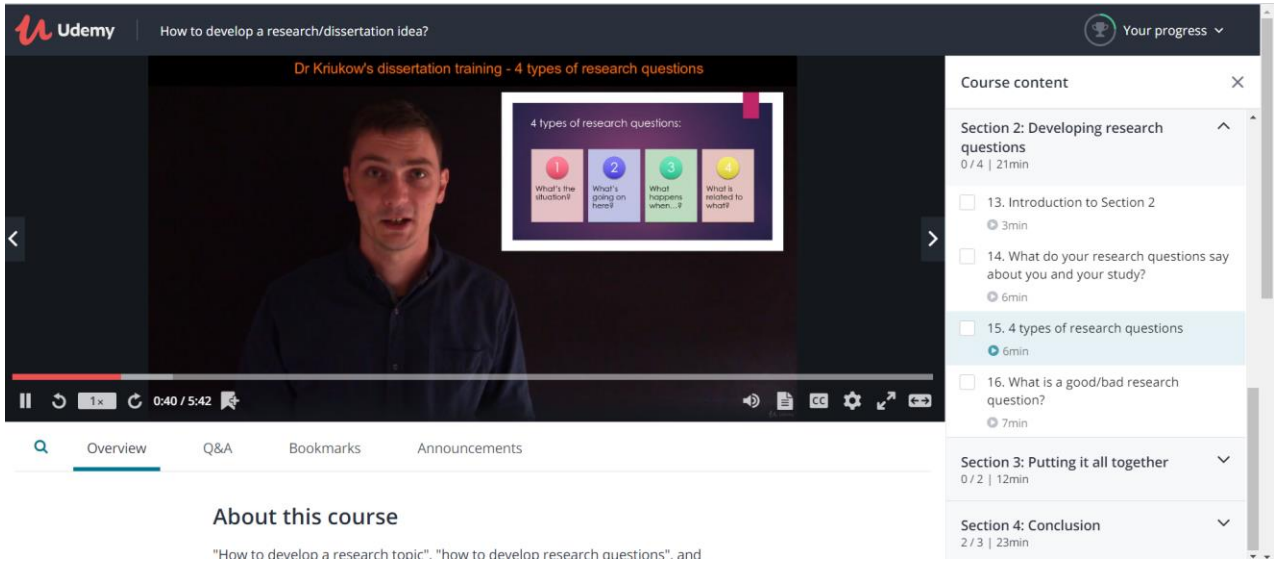


PHILOSOPHICAL WORLDVIEWS – WHY ARE THEY SO IMPORTANT?

- You may not even realise it, but *what* and *how* you decide to research says a lot about your assumptions about the nature of the world, the nature of knowledge or how to gain access to that knowledge.
- Therefore, Positivism, Interpretivism, Epistemology, Ontology and other confusing terms are actually quite important, whether you like it or not ☺
- Perhaps the best way to explain these terms to you without confusing you further is to do so through this video

DISCOUNTS FOR MY SELF-STUDY COURSES (CLICK ON THE COURSE TITLE TO WATCH THE TRAILER AND ACCESS THE DISCOUNT PAGE)

- **From zero to NVivo 12**. Learn to use NVivo, the most popular and powerful software for qualitative data analysis! Being able to use NVivo is also a skill that will help you get a job as a researcher, research assistant/associate, etc.
- **How to analyse qualitative data**. Too often qualitative data analysis is equated with simply coding it. As I will show you in this course, however, data analysis starts way before coding, and finishes way after the coding is done.
- **How to develop a research/dissertation idea**. I had to write my own Master's dissertation in 4 months while caring for 2 children and working full-time. I managed to write a strong PhD proposal in just 2 days and to complete my PhD degree in just over 3 years. I know how to manage time effectively, and how to make the best of it when it's limited. Now I want to teach you the same.



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- My personal website and blog. Read my blog, receive notifications about new content, and explore different services that I offer.