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Introduction: Free Style Memoing

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## **Introduction: Free Style Memoing**

Barney G. Glaser, PhD, Hon. PhD

This neglect is partly my fault to be corrected in this book, which will deal with the vital aspect of memoing. Memos are a very important GT procedure that is fundamental to the GT generation analysis of grounded theory. This book emphasizes the importance of memos from the very start of the GT research to the working paper. It highlights and focuses on memoing in the hopes of aiding researchers, especially novice beginning researchers, with the management of the plethora of ideas that emerge with no loss thereof as GT research progresses.

It is normative for no one to read another persons memos. I have never known someone to ask another person to read his memos or someone to ask another person to read his memos. Thus memos can take any form. They are normatively and automatically private. Their style is free. Memos can take any form, shape or whatever without being critiqued or evaluated. They have no perfection. They give autonomy freedom to the researcher. They are a precursor to writing a working paper on the emerging theory. They grow from jots to growth in lengths that capture style and integrative complexity as the GT research progresses.

Memos are neglected as a GT procedure. Memos are where the emergent concepts and theoretical ideas are generated and stored when doing GT analysis. They are a neglected procedure mostly in writing about doing GT, yet they are vital to GT analysis for recording ideas, saving and tracing growth of analysis and integrating GT concepts as they emerge from constant comparative analysis during open coding and selective coding when theoretically sampling. Memos track the generation of a substantive GT from start to working paper.

### **Memos tie together the concepts**

This book is redundant to much of my writing in *Theoretical Sensitivity*, *Doing GT* and *Stop Write*. But it brings it all together in one book ideas on memoing and underscores the importance and use of memos. The goal and value of this book is to have all four previous chapters in other books in one volume and add to them my many subsequent thoughts on memoing and the thoughts of my colleagues and students about memos as a vital grounded theory method procedure. Memos are the media which tie together the concepts for a grounded theory for a paper or book. This book clarifies the use of memos which have been lauded for doing GT research, but often distorted in some way by formalization and natural academic tendencies of guidance. And further by relating them to other QDA methods of research which require aspects of doing memoing inimical to doing GT. This book is ideal for teaching and discussing the use and value of memos.

Books on doing GT, especially the books that remodel GT, give only brief discussions of writing memos in a page or two and then return to their main discussion of a GT method procedure. The vitalness, vitality, and significance of memos is slighted by an implicitly ordinary assumption that they will be done.

Memoing to accumulate memos can be described as building an intellectual capital memo bank of ideas and concepts from start of one's GT research to final sorting. Memos are the written records of the researcher's thinking, both conscious and preconscious realizations as the research and the researcher grow. Memos will vary in subject, coherence, interest, theoretical content, conceptual clarity, and future usefulness to a subsequent working paper or finished paper. There are no rules for writing them. They preserve what is easily forgotten over time as the researcher collects and codes data by constant comparison.

Putting ones ideas on paper is so they will not be forgotten and the mind is free to go on to other subsequent ideas. The ideas need only make sense to the writer/researcher when he/she goes back to review them. The ideas are preserved and easily recalled with analytic meaning. They are not lost.

Memoing, like all GT procedures, originated out of my collaboration with Anselm Strauss when doing the dying study. When we would discuss what we were finding in the dying data we would become overloaded with conceptual ideas and possibilities of conceptual focus. So I would try to write about them on index cards and further categorize them. But that became too structured and burdensome and too early in developing suitable concepts to formulate a theory about dying. So I started jotting memos to myself which varied from a jot or scratch to four pages. And thusly, I discovered what I have laid out in this book on memoing and how useful and important it is in generating grounded theory. The reader who memos will no doubt find his own useful aspects of memoing as he pursues his personal style. This will help his growth in trusting his own personal creativity.

Of course, memoing was just one of many procedures discovered when doing and writing *Awareness of Dying*. But memoing was least pronounced as a GT procedure within the popular discovered conceptual jargon of GT methodology. Procedures of which the reader knows many with grab. Hence the neglect of writing on memoing. This book will start researchers thinking of possibilities within and using the variability memoing. The reader will likely go beyond my discussions, examples and topics on memoing since I cannot cover everything. Memoing is not optional. It is a vital, important research procedure. So memo, memo, memo continuously memo. Memos ensure the quality of the emerging theory.

I turn now to discussions on memo free style writing and how memos track the growth of the generating of a theory. They also track the growth and development of the researcher's skill in generating a grounded theory's concepts and final integration by an emergent theoretical code emerging in the final sorting for a working paper (See *Stop Write*, Glaser 2008).

Anna Sandgren, a GT teacher, states the value of memoing for students. I paraphrase what she says: “Students sometimes worry about the value of memoing and worry about not seeing the value of memoing in the beginning of their researcher. They say it is not necessary when starting their research, but soon they understand its value and learn how important it is and that they cannot do a GT without memos. With a rich memo bank it is easy to write up a working paper on a theory and also to see which concepts are saturated or not. Also when sorting the memos it becomes easy enough to see gaps in the emerging theory.”

Thus memos have much value for generating a substantive theory. As the reader will see, memoing is not a simple normal task. It becomes more like a “lifestyle,” since the researcher has to be “on” all the time, ready to write a memo when ever an idea occurs, EVEN if it is in the middle of the night or during other activities, so ideas are not lost.

### **Free style**

Memoing on schedule may be OK, but memoing at any moment the idea occurs is important so the idea is not lost. No matter what your activity stop and memo if an idea occurs. Stop sleep, work, leisure, sex, driving a car etc., and memo your ideas before they are lost. At minimum, memo jot to ask oneself to do a full memo on a concept later. Jot a reminder memo so the idea is not lost. If you do not have enough time or are tied up in a situation, memo jot to memo later. A memo jot can be on any piece or scratch of paper. Grammar is irrelevant as one never shows the memo to anyone. The cliché is “stop, jot” at any moment, anywhere.

As I have written in other books, a memo has no prescribed structure or format. They can vary from a memo jot or grow to an almost full length paper based on mature memos later during the grounded analysis. As memos mature, they can end up pages on conceptually integrated grounded thought. Memos and sorting them assist researchers’ thinking through the labyrinth of emergent meanings and conceptualizations and their configurations while simultaneously recording a progression toward an emergent substantive GT.

Many teachers structure up memos as a requirement for GT research. They want them titled and subtitled by categories etc. They ruin the stop-jot, and they move away from the flexible expression of memoing or coding no matter what length. A memo can be written any way as they grow in maturity as the researcher codes, selectively codes, and theoretically samples etc. Memos track and grow in formulation with the experientialist’s increased growth of the GT analysis and the growth of the researcher.

The overwhelming pattern in graduate school PhD training is the training of the candidates to do procedures correctly so the student can be certified. Memos are included. Thus it is not surprising that PhD students want to know if they are doing memoing correctly. They want to show them to their supervisors to be guided and ok’d. And many

supervisors want to guide their students' memo writing and some write memo guiding in their books on doing GT.

Thus the quest to be guided and corrected is normative for PhD candidates. This quest must be given up when it comes to memoing for analysis for a GT. The candidate can and should use his autonomy to develop his own style and should not show his memos to anyone, colleagues or supervisors. They are private, which allows and fosters his autonomy and creativity to let emerge, unadvised, the GT generative analysis as the research goes on. Personal privacy stimulates preconscious processing of the data as the research constantly compares and generates ideas and sees patterns. There will be plenty of time to show others the analysis is a working paper written from sorted memos. Thus the training of the PhD candidate to memo is simple. It is to be personal and private as memos go every which way as they grow in formulating a theory from grounded clarity, as his memos mature.

Tom Andrews, an experienced grounded theorist and teacher, writes to me about the quest for guidance in memoing by students and the difficulty of giving up the normal quest. Tom writes: "Those new to GT, but particularly PhD students, want to be told in a very prescriptive way how to write memos. I am constantly being asked about this. They want to be told what a memo should contain and how it should be written. They need constant reassurance that they are doing them "right". Am I doing it right? is the question I frequently hear. Students constantly want me to look at their memos to give them some support or legitimacy but they learn quickly not to ask. It is almost as if they want detailed guidance on how to write memos. And indeed, some supervisors and authors approve such guidance in an attempt to provide more direction. However, this only serves to complicate what should be an open and free thinking process. Some students are unsure as the purpose of memoing and default to their reflexivity of QDA. I tell students that all they need to do is sort their memos into a theory. I do not think that many students truly grasp that it is through the memos that their theory *is* developed. Sorting memos is one of the least understood procedures of GT."

Tom is clear and correct. Hopefully this book will guide students to private, free style memoing and then eventually in the end to theoretical sorting for a theoretical code and a working paper. Formal training to memo can easily kill the autonomy and creativity of grounded memoing as the trained researcher tries to formalize up his memos when trying to conceptualize emergent patterns. Forming up memos fosters preconceptualization to meet format requirements.

A PhD candidate wrote me: "My other joy with the GT method is that it gives me permission to free write to develop memos. You have freed me from doing the impossible, constantly quoting and trying to describe quotes under QDA methods." For sure, the freedom to do private memos knows no bounds among PhD candidates, especially those stuck in intensively supervisory required conformity departments.

The student continues, "I often think that doing a PhD was the wrong career for me. I should have gone into creative writing. But with my finding classic GT, my creativity is taxed doing memos which is a better form of creativity for me." The creativity tapped in

writing memos is important as long as it is grounded. Grounded creativity will flow through to good writing for the substantive emergent theory.

### **No critique**

Do NOT critique your own memo style or your efforts at writing them. They are private and capture both your grounded and preconceptive thinking. And you never know when your ideas might fit with relevance in your emerging theory. A memo can suddenly become very important as the comparative analysis proceeds. There is little or no anticipating a memo's eventual relevance and fit to an emerging theory. Even with final sorting for a working paper a demoted memo can become relevant for a subsequent paper/theory from a different sorting. Writing memos copiously will over time build a significant memo bank and can become a significant intellectual asset all your own for generating more than one grounded theory from the collected data. But for sure, focus only on one theory at a time.

Novice GT researchers should not be shy of memoing. There are no rules for them, and memos are private and grow in clarity and precision and relevance as the novice develops skill in writing them and develops conceptual knowledge of his research data. Memos are vital in tracking and keeping track of the emergent main concern of the participants and how they continually resolve it. This discovered conceptualization will be new to the researcher and will be easy to lose without memoing by forgetting the unfamiliar new concepts. They are vital to tracking the collection of data and the conceptual changes that may result as new data surprise the researcher as he constantly compares the data for analysis.

Andy Lowe, an experienced GT researcher, wrote me: "Many pseudo and novice GT researchers fail to fully understand that intellectual creativity only flows freely when we externalize our thoughts by memo writing. Theoretical memos are a vital device to unlock the connections between the conscious, unconscious, and preconscious mind. Memo writing is a liberating process because it encourages the GT researcher to acknowledge and develop his latent ability as an author autonomist of his theoretical capitalist supervisors and committee members. Memo writing grows in skill and soon enough the GT researcher becomes disciplined and rigorous so his intellectual development can evolve. Once the memo writing process becomes a daily practice, the GT researcher's confidence increases dramatically because he begins to understand that concepts will emerge and there is no need to worry or be tempted to forcing the data into a preconceived pattern. The main issue for the PhD candidate supervisors is not to allow the GT researcher to do any talking BEFORE memo writing has saturated and has run its course." So much so true.

Asking me questions about memoing is not an "ignorance display" as one student put it. The variability that occurs in private memos is so great that there is no perfect sure answer to describing a perfect memo. I never know which was "I will take answers to email questions of how to" or what is a memo. I will, however, not reveal to others who asked what questions as they are private. I preserve the researcher's autonomy.

Memos can facilitate research teams or collaborative research, IF, and be careful, the collaborator understands the data and memoing. But be careful, when collaborating, of giving up the autonomy and personal strength of the right to privacy of your memos. The power of privacy is not to be given easily. Having memos read or reviewed by others always tends to make one sure of their formulation and their level of perfection. Judith Holton emailed me: "Sharing memos with others whether supervisors, collaborators or colleagues runs the risk that the research will shift focus from conceptual ideas to writing style, grammatical perfection. This premature perfection can undermine the researcher's openness in favor of getting 'right'. It also will tend the researcher toward preconceptions." Judith is quite correct. Yet dangerously so, sometimes premature circulating private reflections in memo form can be quite inspiring when shown to team members who are supportively excited by the memo. But do not do this at the risk of autonomy and privacy.

When a finished paper is submitted to a committee, showing memos, if need be or required, can provide a history of the generation and emergence of the conceptual substance of the emergent theory. Later, after a paper is showable, memos can show how a substantive theory was arrived at. This situation seldom occurs as substantive theories are not proven. They are grounded and general and modifiable. Some authors give examples of their memos as extensive formulations, sometimes with diagrams or charts as if all memos should be like that. The answer is NOT SO. Memos are just ideas, any form, free style and pushing formulation misses this point. Extensive and mature memos that border on being a part of a paper, can be shown as just that – part of a paper, not as memos. Fine, but memo papers are a small part of the memoing procedure and process from start to working paper.

Lora Lampert in her article on memoing in the *Sage Handbook of Grounded theory* supports the private style, "ones own, and not prerequired by formats." She says her paper presents "my own variation on the themes of memoing. Any one variation of memoing should not be taken as general or better than another. Learning to memo is a private skill suitable to the psychology of the researcher alone. What is important is no matter what the researcher's style of memos is that he memos to help generate the emergent conceptualizations from the data so too much to remember is not lost. Reviewing memos on a category can help generate new emergent concepts and links between them. But the reviewing is a private personal matter of the researcher." Lampert agrees with personal style, even though much of her article deals with how to formulate and format them. Hard to resist formatting.

One student has captured the freedom of memoing to the max. Robb Shoaf emails me, "Memos are free verse. The free association of ideas that begin as inspired by a category or incident of a category that takes on a life of its own and go in directions we could not have foreseen, sometimes parallel or sometime deeper. The researcher should allow himself this ultimate freedom from the beginning. To be sure, memos will form up as they mature with clarity." Yes, indeed, memos lead to exciting discovery when the style of memoing is free.

A teacher wrote me to paraphrase the free style of memoing: "I had a student who drew picture diagrams to memo, so while she was talking about the diagrams, I

memoed them in writing to show her how they could be recorded for later sorting. When I demonstrate memoing to my students, I realize it is my style, which may not be their style. They eventually just get it according to their own style. When trying to teach memoing, I found it is best to relax and just let it happen as part of the magic of the GT process. I should not worry much about teaching memoing and just encourage its happening." Thus, doing memos come naturally like note taking. Thus, a teacher need only advise the novice student to do them in their own style and not worry any so called established style. But memoing they must do from the start of their research."

Another teacher wrote me that "many students are not trained in the ongoing process of taking notes in class. With all the information available on the internet why spend the time on writing one's own notes? This makes no sense, as the information can be quite different between self and the Internet and the student loses the creativity of memoing. Also, memoing methods media abound today for taking good notes and memoing on the spot. One can do memos on a cell phone, in an email, a smart phone or a tablet or a computer." Whatever the choice or choices, the media should be available to constantly memo as the stream of analysis occurs to keep track of. And most important, the memos should be printable so they can be cut up, piled and sorted. Otherwise they may be easily neglected or forgotten. Sorting a pile of memos is their end use for analysis."

The normal fear of getting memo style "right" in our academic world of seeking perfection disappears as the experience of generating theory grows. Another student wrote me: "Memo writing until I worked at it and gave myself permission to free write seemed daunting, I so wanted to get it right. Now it has become part of me so I think I must have gotten it right. My style has become a part of me." To be sure, as the analysis continues, the fear of not memoing "perfectly" diminishes and memo skill increases and becomes natural. The fear of not getting it "right" will diminish over time as the skill of writing them in one's private style grows and with it is rich production and power of analysis. It is part of the growing experientiality of generating GT.

Anna Sandgren, a GT teacher, writes kernel wisdoms on fear of learning memoing. "It is good for the students to see varied examples of different ways of memoing, to see that they can memo in their own personal way. They can memo in a way that suits them best and it is ok." Of course since memos are private, it will be difficult to see varied examples. Trusting to variation is in order, but it will not matter so much as personal style takes over.

Anna continues: "If students want to type write on paper, on computer or in their own scribble etc., it is ok. Memos can be in any form in written word or in figures etc." I add to Anna's thoughts and emphasize that whatever the initial form, be sure your memos can end up in writing on paper so they can be sorted easily. Diagrams are difficult to sort clearly since they are of varied purpose.

Anna continues that "drawing figures helps me a lot during the theoretical coding process. I draw figures of the different options of theoretical codes to see how my concepts relate to each other. Some of my drawings might not be so grounded all the time, but it helps me to trigger my creativity so when I go back to my memos and write more memos

on memos I see how everything finally fits.” So obviously free style spawns many routes to a final working paper. Drawings and diagrams may help, but they indicate many variables, which then should be written up singularly so they can be sorted.

Anna closes with the same observation as many other teachers.. She says “At the same time that memoing without any rules are freedom for some people, it could be difficult for other students that are not used to having such freedom. They are used to following guides on ‘how to do’ and only feel safe with guides when they do not know, they think, how to write memos. They feel insecure and confused as a consequence.” To be sure, this is a possible beginning of memoing, but as these students focus on writing and not talking they soon become confident in style and privacy. Experientiality solves the fear and lost issue.

Style is what it is for each researcher and develops in skill and coverage over time as the research progresses. A student wrote me “I seem to memo best in the morning. Morning memos are a purging of all the work my mind has the night before. I get some pretty good ideas in the morning and it flows. I still do not have the habit of constant memoing if that makes sense. As a result, I think I miss the random ideas that occur during the day. I have an Ipad and use pages to document my memos although I really like to hand memo. I think memoing on a computer forces me to edit and I miss some of the free flow aspects that happen when I hand memo. I also like the idea of hybrid memoing where I scribble notes in a big think notebook, in my memo bank and memo jots in my field notes.”

### **A challenging learning curve**

Obviously, the learning curve of free style memoing using recent computer and cell technology is bumpy and challenging. The curve raises its own individual problems to solve unique for each individual researcher. Two items students must resolve is that all memos must finally be printed so they can be piled and be hand sorted. Then with sorting the memo ideas will finally find their place in the generated theory with fit and relevance. Memos that seem out of fit with the emerging theory will find themselves when being sorted. Keep in mind that memo learning curves vary, since they are about a private style. Private memoing is another dimension of the autonomy that GT research brings into the researchers career. Learning memoing is a vital part of the experientiality of going conceptual which fosters the researcher pride and excitement in knowing with confidence how to do GT research.

The constant questioning of oneself, of one’s memo, such as are they conceptual or abstract enough, am I relating concepts correctly, have I discovered the best theoretical code when sorting etc., etc., is autonomous. This questioning goes on constantly and answers improve with constant self learning. It is normal to quest an academic ok from a supervisor or colleague, but unnecessary and likely to be subversive to the researcher free individual style. Waiting for an ok will get tiresome. The researcher learns that outside comments are momentary. The merit of ones memos comes out in sorting for a theoretical code and doing a working paper (see *Stop Write*, Glaser 2012) which he can show to others.

Worrying their goodness for future sorting and subsequent writing will stimulate any necessary changes to one's memos by comparing to other memos suitable for sorting and generating more memos if changes in some memos become necessary for discovery of a good theoretical code and conceptualization that organizes the memos better for a working paper. Memos correct each other. Thus, the researcher is by personal style and privacy not locked into a particular preconceived theory as emergent changes and modifications occur in his memos as he sorts them for a working paper. This paper will show to others how he sees all the concepts fitting together. To be sure, the working paper can then be shown to significant others for comments.

### **Stop, jot**

Stop, jot is the memoing style jargon. Interrupt any activity to stop and write a memo on any idea. Do not talk the idea alternatively as you will likely to lose it because talk dilutes energy and motivation. Catch the idea any way any time in writing and note its grounding or preconception if possible. Capture the idea with imputed correction if need be. Writing the memo any way you can when you get an idea usually means you are capturing preconscious realizations that are grounded as your mind wanders over constant comparisons of incidents in your data. Note preconceptions which may lead to theoretical sampling and use selective coding to check them out. Note possible theoretical sampling for selective coding. You are on your own style, these are just ideas. But as the analysis proceeds and memos mature, theoretical sampling, selective coding, and possible theoretical codes will start to appear within your free style framework. Your free style should be open to surprising realizations and especially so for a eureka moment about a main concern, or a core category or a subcategory or a theoretical code. Expressing the memo any which way to capture ideas means you do not worry about grammar, English, spelling type of note etc. Just get the realization or plain idea down without talking. Do not, if possible, preconceive the ideas, their fit or relevance prematurely for the emerging theory.

As I have said, novices go through a period of some doubts and confusion beginning memoing. No showing memos to colleagues or supervisors puts the resolution of these doubts firmly on the researcher's shoulders. The tendency is to get them ok'd, which diminishes as one style develops during the progress of the research. These doubts occur even for those novices who have memo'd for other aspects of life or study and thus are experienced.

Here is some thought from a student who trusts to the future value of memoing and his growing skill. He writes me: "Memoing seems to be the key to GT research. However, I am in a bit of confused state about memoing. At this point I am memoing about questions that pop up as I code my interviews. I do not have a problem generating ideas and I think my memos will help put the ideas together. Memos are the only way I can remember ideas. Memos make me think about what is going on in the data, which I like. Yet, memos still seem to be an elusive concept to me, but I am trusting the memoing process. So I keep memoing. I may have to force longer memos. I am still memoing ideas as questions hoping answers will follow. I reserve my private right to write disjointed memos."

We see that growing pains surely come with the development of memoing skill. The memoing skill grows more and more to suits the needs of GT research. Doubts and confusion about memoing diminish as memos mature. Most researchers go through these growing skill pains and discover in due course the great benefits of memoing for GT analysis. And all this goes on privately so experienced memo makers have no perfective model priority. Fear of memoing properly has no bearing on the researcher's analysis. Examples of so called good memos seen in some books on doing GT are derailing as they miss the point that from beginning to end of the analysis as memo track the emergent theory privately. Also "good" memos book style easily derails the analysis with proper preconceptions. Free style is far more creative.

And of course, not showing memos also means not talking about them to maintain free style. Some colleagues' talk can be about the same as memo on your memo, which stimulates critiques, blocks, feeds fear, and derails your memo. Talk about or showing memos can make for over formalization memos that paralyze emergence before sorting, memos that yield a theoretical code that organizes the integration of the emerging theory. Do not yield your autonomy by preconceiving a theoretical code ahead of sorting for it. Do not allow yourself to structure up by preconception a theory before sorting. Some researchers just assume it's always a basic social process involved way before sorting, which is pure preconception. The memo bank of free style memos is there to sort for the theoretical code that fit with relevance. It is a shame to force when the memos are there for sorting.

Tape recording interviews gives a researcher the "feeling of hearing it all," not missing anything etc. Tape recording, I have warned over and over in my books, is too much coverage and too slow to get to analysis because of waiting for type written form. I have always advised taking field notes during interviews, to develop the field note skill and also to have data to start constantly comparative analysis THAT night the data is collected. And of course, start memoing along with the analysis so no ideas are lost. Forgetting ideas in the beginning is especially easy. Yes, free style memoing starts immediately with constant comparisons of the first interview data and even before analysis starts. Yes, memoing starts immediately with data collection, if not started before. It starts with note taking at the same time as taking field notes and very soon after as the researcher is filled with thoughts from listening to answers to interview questions.

### **Memoing holds preconscious thoughts**

Eventual theoretical completeness is GT's conceptual goal. Its goal is not achieved by full descriptive coverage provided by tape recording. It is achieved by the constant comparative analysis method tracked by memos and achieved by beginning to see the platter in the field notes. Memoing holds intuitive preconscious thought that generates emergent concepts that name patterns of behavior that fit, are relevant and delimit the conceptual theory. It is difficult to memo conceptual patterns from tape recordings that are not yet typed. Also, collecting data by tape collects too many interchangeable indicators of

patterns. It is over coverage and beyond concept saturation of interchangeable indicators. Adequate memoing catch all this by warning of waste of time and effort. The conceptual analysis is kept on track by memoing. The dictum is to start memoing immediately with starting data collection by field notes. And starting requires an autonomous free style to memo, since “who knows” what they should look like from the start. Memos take on a companionating power with the GT analysis, and worrying about the analysis is far more important than worrying about a “right” or “perfect” memo style. A suitable personal style will grow with the analysis.

Nudist recording of interview or observation data does away with the power of interchangeability of indices indicating patterns of behavior, thus, the power to delimit data collection, or descriptive coverage and thus delimit conceptualization. Or why keep collecting data on an already emergent concept and its relation to the emerging theory? Memoing tracks and helps control this waste of time, energy, and power of conceptualizing once a pattern has been discovered. Subsequent indices are interchangeable. The memo style is irrelevant as long as it gives the researcher this power. Memos take the researcher on to the intuitive grasp for selective sampling and coding for related concepts. Memoing field notes keeps up the current generating analytic activity of where, what, and who to interview next for more related concepts. The researcher learns to trust his style of memoing more and more as he memos his way to the sorting of mature memos for a working paper. Recording interviews no matter the device use stalls, if not totally blocks, this process. Recordings are not flexible enough for sorting and provide too much descriptive coverage. Hand sorted typed or written memoing can track and rescue this stall in favor of conceptual theory emerging quicker.

Asking me or other experienced GT researchers how to memo is not an “ignorance display,” as one student put it. The variability that goes on in private memoing is so great that there is no perfect answer for what a perfect memo looks like. I never know which way I will give an answer to both relieve insecurity yet not tell him what to do. Email me ([bglaser@speakeasy.net](mailto:bglaser@speakeasy.net)) For sure I will not reveal the question, nor who asked it in order to maintain memo privacy.

One student wrote me about how private memos filled with description function to spare the reader all the boring details of description that go into conceptualizing a pattern. They are not necessary to detail when writing up the inductive result which is abstract of time, place and people. And thus, when descriptions which yield the conception will soon be forgotten, and the substantive theory takes on a life of its own. The student further said: “It became clear to me that data do not speak themselves. There has to be a conceptual idea that helps them speak in memos as they are memoed when going back and forth between data and concept. It is not necessary or required in GT research to detail to the reader in the final paper how one generated their theory using all the GT procedures (such as coding, sampling comparing etc) to eventually end up with an abstract theory. Memos preserve this generating detail data privately.”

Hans Thulesius, a well known grounded theory researcher and teacher, confirms my dictum of free style memoing. Hans says “Memoing is very important in GT research, but

you can memo in whatever way you like. Hand writing, typing or drawing diagrams but keep them private. When you have a big stack of memos you can begin hand sorting them, placing them in smaller piles on a big table. Then writing more memos are triggered by the sorted memos which when you reach saturation will eventually lead to a working paper.” Hans continues about free style memoing: “Every person finds his or her own way of writing and organizing one’s memos. The most important thing about memos is that you get out your ideas onto paper. Glaser warns against rules for memos since they can stifle the creative memo writing. Memos should be written at any time to capture the ideas that come when you compare and code data. And stay open to whatever emerges and memo it at all stages of doing GT.”

Many students write me about the joy of free style memoing. It brings out their autonomy with the freedom to discover and then keep it memoed. The variation that occurs in free style memoing is amazingly wonderful. Brian Steven, a PhD candidate, wrote me “Can I say as a PhD, I am so excited having discovered GT, but oh I wish I had done so much earlier in my PhD. My write ups have been hampered by trying to fit QDA methods. I am free of trying to describe quotes under QDA methods. My other joy is that it allows me to free write and develop memos.” Yes, indeed, the excitement of free style memoing is part of the total excitement that comes with generating an emergent theory from data. Memos track this excitement as we shall discuss in the next chapter.

The variation that occurs from free style memoing is truly amazing, and wonderful, and unpredictable. Another student said that his daytime memos are increasing since he switched from internet memoing, which made him edit them, to doing handwriting in large notebook pads. His memo jots are increasing and he has a growing lessening need to have his memos ok’d. I trust many readers feel in their own story this growth of autonomy in a lessening need to be ok’d as they grow with the analysis.

Further this student says: “It gets tiresome waiting for approval of my memos, so I am memoing as I think memos should be. I write memos on memos on ideas about what concepts mean and how they may fit together.” Thus, memoing in private has taken over his GT analysis and it works. Many novices and researchers experience this take over of private memoing on concepts with delight as they work toward saturation of concepts and sorting memos for a working paper. They find that sorting their memos gives too what they think about their concepts the meaning and sense and need for personal ok’ing their private memos. And they realize no one else could have ok’d their memos properly. Private ok’ing of memo styles grows with the analysis. Ending with sorting memos finally gives all the meaning, creativity, autonomy, and ok sense wished for in personal memo style for generating one’s grounded theory. Memo styles vary widely but no matter what the style the consequence of sorting them has to be the same: an integrated, conceptual substantive theory. I deal with sorting memos at length in the next chapter and chapter 6.

