

The difference between just hanging out and doing fieldwork is writing. Without writing, the sharp incisive details about people, places, and cultures are lost to us. The overheard conversation, the aftereffect of an image, or the undertone of an encounter with an informant dissipates unless it is written down. Fieldworkers turn hanging out into a scholarly art form, but this relies on a dependable system of taking notes.

What are fieldnotes?

Fieldnotes are the immediate capturing in writing of your observations, conversations, and interactions at the fieldsite. Researcher's fieldnotes are recognized as a *construction* of that field experience. The fieldnotes you gather and record will not be like anyone else's. They will represent your perspective—gathered, recorded, mapped, and written according to your own conscious and unconscious choices about what you see and hear at your fieldsite.

What exactly should the notes contain?

Although each fieldworker develops his or her own system, any set of fieldnotes needs to include all the following details.

- Date, time, and place observation
- Specific facts, numbers, details
- Sensory impressions: sights, sounds, textures, smells, tastes
- Personal responses to the act of recording fieldnotes and how others watch you as you watch them
- Specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations, and insider language
- Questions about people or behaviors at the site for further investigation
- Continuous page numbering system for future reference

What is the double-entry journal format?

Double-entry notes are designed to make your mind spy on itself and generate further thinking and text. To write double-entry notes, divide the page vertically, using the left side for direct observations—concrete, verifiable details. The right side is the place to capture your personal reactions, opinions, feelings, and questions about the data on the left side. It's a good idea to number each observation (left side) and response (right side) to keep track of your data collection.

Collect, expand/summarize, and reflect on your fieldnotes.

Take a set of fieldnotes at the site you are considering or at which you have decided on becoming a participant-observer. Note important information like time, location, date, weather, and your vantage point. You may also draw a sketch or a map of the space, indicating shapes, objects, focal points, and movement patterns. Listen and look at the people there, and record as much information about them as possible. Create consistent shorthand or code that you understand in order to develop a note taking scheme that you will be able to follow throughout your project. Practice ways to differentiate between verifiable information and your own subjective reactions on the data. Once you have a good number of pages, review them, and try to write a short summary of your fieldsite using your best details, so that another person will understand them. While you may develop a personal code, at this point, your notes should be clear enough to share with someone else. This is your first step toward shaping your work for an audience.

In class we will share our fieldnotes and ask the following questions of each other's notes. You can start by asking them yourself.

- Are the notes readable? Are the pages numbered and dated?
- What background material does someone need to understand the history and location of this place?
- Does the researcher include information about his or her subjective feelings as he or she observes?
- What other details should the researcher include so that another person could see, hear, and become immersed in the daily routines of the place?
- What details are most interesting? What would you like the researcher to write more about?
- What other data do you need to confirm some of the researcher's initial observations about this place?

Analyze your fieldnotes.

Question your notes. Look over your notes and ask three key questions:
What surprised me? What intrigued me? What disturbed me?

Due Dates

Refer to your syllabus for the schedule of due dates.