

<p>Anthropology 1100 Assignment 1: Ethnographic Observation Exercise Due in class February 4, 2008</p>
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Introduction

This assignment is designed to give you the opportunity to make observations of a 'cultural scene' as an anthropologist would and to try out a key method of anthropological research for yourself. You will be required to write a short description of your chosen scene and then to make a comment on those observations. This assignment also provides you with some of the materials you will require for completing your essay assignment, due later in the term.

Recommended Process: Summary

1. Choose an ethnographic scene, one which has some human activity (see below). This process will be discussed in class. Keep in mind that you will have to repeat the observations of this scene for your essay later in the term.
2. Observe your scene for 15 minutes and no more.
3. Make short notes as you observe your scene, or, if making notes is impossible during your observation, make short, point form notes immediately after your observation is over.
4. Fill out your notes once as soon as possible after your observation is done.
5. Complete a short write-up of 3 pages. Your write-up will describe the scene and make a comment about it.

Recommended Process: Detailed Instructions

1. Choosing an Ethnographic Scene

Choose a scene that is contained in a small area and has a definite focus of human activity. These scenes need not be fancy or complicated ... you will get enough information for the write-up while watching just about any activity.

Also, you must choose a scene that you can return to again. Your essay assignment later in the term will involve revisiting the scene, observing it again for 15 more minutes, and making comparisons with your original observation. This requirement should encourage you to observe a public place or activity.

I STRONGLY suggest you choose a scene that you are not directly involved in, OR, do not know much about. Choosing an unfamiliar scene will make this assignment easier for you. Typically, the people who do poorly on this assignment observe the place that they work because work places are too familiar to people and they make assumptions about what they have seen.

Examples of Possible Ethnographic Scenes

- The coming and going of shoppers in a mall
- Getting on and riding the bus
- Buying coffee at a coffee shop
- Crossing at a cross-walk

Examples of Difficult or Challenging Ethnographic Scenes

- A family party or party with friends: This would be difficult because as a primary participant, you will find it very hard to sit back and observe what is going on around you.
- Scenes discovered while traveling: It will be hard to return to do a similar observation again.
- The place that you work: Almost always, you can not put aside what you already know about the scene. This results in conclusions about the scene that are not based on observations you made during your 15 minute time period.

PLEASE NOTE: Do not choose scenes that are likely to have children as their focus. This includes daycares, parks, or playgrounds. Clearly many scenes will have situations in which the observation of children is unavoidable, such as at a mall, but we do not have approval of the College's Ethics Committee to study scenes where children are the primary participants. Please talk to me if you have any concerns in this regard or are unsure if your scene will focus on children's behavior.

(If your completed observation is of children, you will be penalized with a lower mark and you will have to choose a new scene for the second assignment.)

2. Observation

Observe your scene discreetly for about 15 minutes. In many cases, the easiest way to do this is to find a place to sit quietly and then to simply watch what is going on. Please do not talk to people or interview people during this time.

3. Note taking

Take notes in a small notebook. If it is possible to make notes during your observation, do so, but do not find yourself so focused on taking notes that you do not watch what is going on. Your notes should include:

- Information about the scene itself – who is there, lighting, physical description, etc.
- Information about what you saw people doing

You must submit your notes along with your write-up on the assignment due date. I will return the notes with your graded assignment.

4. Filling out your notes

When your fifteen minutes are up, leave the scene. In a quiet place, fill out your notes. Be sure to include more details about the topics above. At this time, you should start to think about themes, patterns, or conclusions in what you saw.

Note: This step is critical. Not only is it a key component of any anthropologist's activities, you will need to use these notes later in the term when you do your second observation. If the notes of your original observation are poor, it will be difficult for you to compare your second observation with this first observation.

5. Write-up and Submissions

Your write-up is limited to 750 words or three pages, double spaced. Do not write more even though you might be able to. In your write-up, you should discuss the following things and your papers will be graded based on this list:

- What you did. This may be a simple statement of where you went, how you set up to do your observation, and perhaps why you made those decisions.
- A general description of the scene. These are taken from your notes and should give me enough to understand what you were seeing.
- What you saw people doing. These are taken from your notes as well. This is the heart of your description and should provide me with the details of how the people you saw were involved in the scene you were observing.
- A general conclusion about what you saw. This conclusion might be as simple as a detailed comment on the activity like something you never realized about the scene you observed. *This requirement is key for a good grade*, as this exercise is about observing a scene and commenting on it. It is more than just description. Keep in mind, however, that your comment does not have to be earth shattering ... it may be fairly straightforward and mundane while still moving your paper from observation and description towards analysis.

You will need to make decisions about how much to tell me and what is important about your scene. It may not all be important.

A complete assignment includes your write-up (#5 above) and your field notes (#4 above).

Other Notes

- This is an observation exercise only. Do not interview people involved in the activity. Participate enough to allow you to fully observe the scene. This may mean that you simply choose a seat in or near your scene and watch what happens for the fifteen minute period.
- Do not feel that you need to make a startling conclusion or observe something completely radical. A lot of anthropological observation is based simply on careful and detailed description of what most of us otherwise take for granted.
- I can not say it enough: Your conclusion must be based on something you saw during the observation period. If you know more about your scene than you saw during the 15 minutes, you can not use it.
- See chapter 2 in your text for a discussion of participant observation. Also, your week two lecture notes will help you with examples of how anthropologists think about ethnographic observations.
- You do not need to conduct any library research to complete this assignment.
- Good writing counts and poor or sloppy writing will result in a lower grade. This means that your paper should be written in paragraphs with topic sentences, complete sentences, and a thesis to give the text direction. If you are unclear about how to compose this assignment please discuss it with me or contact academic services at the college. Please have someone proof read your write-up for spelling and grammatical accuracy.
- You can email me to discuss your choice of cultural scene or your write-up anytime. I will respond promptly. If you want me to look over your write-up I am willing to do so during office hours.

Due Date, Late Papers, and the Value of the Assignment

This assignment is due at the beginning of class on February 4, 2008. Consider completing the observation this week, so that if you run into problems you can discuss them with me.

This assignment is worth 20% of your grade and it will be marked out of 20. If you hand it in after February 4, it is considered late and you will lose 1 point out of 20 per week late (5%) starting on February 5.