

Writing and Rhetoric II - Ethnographic Inquiry Research Proposal

The assignment:

For this assignment, you will write an essay that develops your proposed ethnographic inquiry into a research project proposal. The goal is to explore possibilities and generate questions, reflecting on why you want to research this particular community, what you already know about it, what line of questioning you might pursue, what you hope to discover, and why it is important to for the rest of us to pay attention to what you discover in your research. You also want to convince your classmates and me (your teacher) that your ethnographic inquiry project:

- Is interesting,
- Is substantive and worth pursuing,
- Has complexity,
- Has a path for your primary and secondary research

As you know from our class discussions and syllabus, your ethnographic inquiry research must involve a community that you are connected to in some way. As with all inquiry research, we are not going to start with a hypothesis about what you think you will find. Instead we are going to start with an exploration of the assumptions you have (an understanding of where you are coming from) and the kinds of QUESTIONS you think you can explore about people, society, and culture in relation to your primary research in this community.

Writing the Essay:

We're going to work on crafting your discussion of these questions into a coherent proposal essay that does six things. In this assignment, those six things are broken down into six distinct areas as an approach to organizing your ideas. In your essay you should weave them together as a coherent whole, connecting each part and not simply pasting six separate answers together. There will most likely be some overlap in your responses, so you can integrate what you need to say where you think it is appropriate.

Plan to write 3-6 word-processed pages, 12-point font, for your Exploration Essay.

1. In a first section, introduce the community/site you plan to research.
Where/what/who are they? What attracted your interest this community as a site for ethnographic research - a personal experience, a personal question, a personal connection? Really help your readers understand why you have a driving interest in researching this site/community.
2. In a second section, explore your assumptions about this community and/or commonly held assumptions (by others) about this community?
Are there value judgments you think people make about this community? What do YOU instinctively think about when you think about this community or site? You can build on what you know or what you *think* you know about how this community is widely

perceived. What are the problems or limitations of these typical perspectives?

3. From there, develop an explanation of how you see your research in and about this community as connected wider issues themes or ideas in society. ***What do you believe you can learn about as a result of studying this community and your interaction in this community?*** Are going to challenge or confirm any of the assumptions you discussed in section two? Find out ways that it is more complex than it seems?

As this point, you can't just say, "Um...I'm going to learn about, um, this community..." You don't have to be right here and your research is not going to set out to prove whatever statement you make, but you do need to articulate what is of interest in this community in terms of what you can learn about yourself or about the world.

This provides an initial focus statement for your research even though much of what you end up focusing on will be discovered through an analysis of the data you actually gather at your site.

- a. An effective formula to start a focus statement (*and this focus may change over time, but it's a starting point*) is to acknowledge general understandings or assumptions about your community and then turn to ask some potential research questions. For example:

Most people don't think of their everyday city bus route as a community at all. Instead, they just see a bunch of individuals getting on public transportation to get where they are going. On my bus route, though, I think there is something more complex going on in terms of how regular passengers learn to interact as a kind of community of strangers. I'm interested in exploring just how community might be defined on city busses, how it is formed, and what the behaviors of the passengers tell us about city life and Midwest USA patterns of behavior overall.

4. In a fourth section, propose your ethnographic, primary-data research plan. ***Specifically, where and when do you plan to go? Do you have the access you will need? Do you anticipate any difficulties "entering" the site? Will you observe or interview or do both of those things? How and why do you plan to participate or not participate in social interaction on the site? How might this research be reciprocal? In other words, how can you serve this community through your research?***
5. In a fifth section, consider what types of existing research (secondary sources – academic books & journal articles) you might use to gain insight into what is going on in your community and to explore the connection between that community and wider society. What disciplines might you explore (anthropology, urban studies, history, sociology, political science,

international relations, ethnomusicology, women and gender studies...) and why? What types of media or popular culture sources might provide additional contextual information? Don't be afraid to theorize connections here. These ideas may change as you conduct your research, but you must begin to wonder about these things in your proposal ***You do not need to list specific sources here, but you must describe how you think particular types of source material will be helpful and why. In other words, where/how do you anticipate conducting your secondary source research and why are you heading in that direction?***

6. In a final section, conclude with a specific discussion of why the consideration of your community research matters to the rest of us. ***What do we stand to discover or gain as a result of your ethnographic inquiry and research? What does this help us to see, to experience, or to understand?*** Why should this matter to us? This is the "so what" of your research proposal.

Other things to consider:

- ❖ Your purpose here is to explore AND to help us understand your exploration – why it is important and how you will go about learning more about your issue.
- ❖ You want to allow complex thoughts, but also build your ideas in an coherent and clear manner.
- ❖ This essay is not about definitive answers to your questions, it's really about the questions themselves— why they are important, and what the multifaceted possible answers might reveal. Make room for partial truths and complexities– not easy solutions to world problems.

Requirements:

- ❖ MLA 2009 format; No less than 750 words