Drafting your Ethnographic Essay

Finding a Focus, Choosing a Controlling Idea for Your Research

The first step in finding a focus is to read through all of your fieldnotes two times. As you read, notice when and where you become particularly interested in what you have written. Circle, mark or note these passages in some way. Write a brief summary of each idea/passage on a separate sheet. After you identify what interests you most, move on to search for patterns that will lead you to focus. You can follow the step-by step-process below as a path to create a kind of umbrella or guiding focus statement for your essay:

1. Read through the list you compiled from your fieldnotes and identify which parts of your fieldnotes interest and engage you most. Look at the larger arc. Are most of your points taken from your thoughts and feelings or are you more interested in the analysis observation?
2. Search for patterns in your list, and make a new list of those patterns. Keep an eye out for things that strike you as meaningful and interesting and that happen again and again. As you explore patterns, also look for things connected to those patterns. Find patterns within patterns. how do you connect ideas with language? Do you seem to repeatedly use the same phrases? When and with respect to what observations? This may help identify relevant patters of observation.
3. From your list of patterns and connections, select the ONE larger idea/pattern that interests you most. You know you're on to something if you find a pattern and can see how it connects to other observations you've made during your research and /or to what other scholars or writers have said.
4. Take that one interesting idea/pattern and develop an "umbrella" statement or a broad focus statement. You can start, for drafting purposes, with something as simple as "In this paper, I will…(discuss, explore, explain, analyze, etc.)." Here you are articulating the big idea for your essay. You can always return to the statement to make is more sophisticated in the context of a focus paragraph later,
5. Expand that statement by breaking the pattern that you are focusing on into any number of supporting observations. Follow your initial broad or umbrella focus statement with that break down. "First, I will….Second…Third…." with each of those statements specifying the supporting material. These first, second, and third statements provide the framework for the body sections of your research essay.

As you examine patterns you find in your own comprehensive observation list and look for an idea, theme, or metaphor to connect them, keep in mind the ways in which a focus moves from observations to a more developed discussion of the ideas you note. As you connect the dots of your pattern, you may begin to understand where your essay could "land," which implications become most compelling to you, and which elements for discussion could make clear the complexity of reality and truth. When you identify some of these more powerful elements, take the time to write about any connections you see between those patterns or expand on any unfinished thoughts. From this list, you need to choose the

idea/pattern that interests you most, that you think you can really write about, and that you can support with other observations from your notes. You have found your focus!

Introducing your Research

Often, students begin the writing process without ever thinking about a potential audience. The focus is only on completion of the task, the crafting of a piece of writing that fulfills the requirements of the assignment. Whether or not the piece is interesting or accessible is often beyond consideration. This makes a kind of sense given that most all essays for class are only read by the instructor and, often, whatever a students may be writing about has already been written about many times before. The impact of the writing is limited and, therefore, only understood in a very narrow sense: what I need to do in order to achieve in this class.

Certainly, you have a similar goal here: writing what you need to in order to achieve in this class at the level you desire. However, the authors of this text also know that students become more engaged with their writing, more invested in the crafting of prose, when they believe that their words are relevant. Our goal is to have each student treat this project as if it matters not only to themselves, but to a larger academic conversation. The idea is that your writing should matter so much that you work to engage the reader from the very beginning, using evocative, thoughtful prose in order to create a visceral connection between the reader and the audience. Having writing matter just because it might reach a huge audience is often beside the point. Much of what is written in academia has a limited audience at best. But the power and point of a piece can resonate far beyond the page when the author connects with the material and works to inspire anyone who may read the text to engage with the text, to participate in conversation and think about how these ideas impact knowledge.

The actual crafting of prose—conscious writing—depends upon feeling interested in and connected with the research focus. This is why you began this process with a personal connection to your research site. In addition, participant-observation and the writing of fieldnotes creates a bodily relationship with the research process and invites you to begin writing about you research project in a focused way long before the first draft of their essay is due. These aspects of the ethnographic writing process make involvement accessible.

Rather than thinking about your introduction in the shape of a funnel, working toward a thesis statement, consider what it would mean to really get the reader hooked. What if your introduction were a kind of “opening scene” for your essay? Think about how an opening scene of a film sets the tone for whole movie ----the colors, the texture, the music, the character details. The introduction to your essay is your opening scene and it provides room for you to write in a more open and creative style than you may think is usually associated with “academic” writing. Use this first bit of writing to make your research come alive and prepare your readers for what you will share with them in the rest of the essay.

You have done quite a bit of rereading of your fieldnotes to get to this point in the development of your essay, but as you build your introduction, return to your fieldnotes once again. This time, as you read through your notes, look for a particular moment, event, or idea that connects to your focus. Is there a

particular compelling detailed moment or can you pull together a compilation of detailed moments to set the scene for your essay? Your goal in the introduction is to reach out to your readers, to pull them into the experience of your site, and to make them want to know more about it.

Work from your fieldnotes to re-make a story, to turn it into a creative piece of nonfiction as a way of engaging the reader.

Presenting the Methodology and Focus

Following your introductory piece, you will shift into what you might consider the more traditional, nuts and bolts, section of your introduction – your methodology and focus. In this section, you will discuss the process you went through as a researcher and expand your broad focus statement so that it details for your readers exactly how you plan to develop and explore that focus. You will explain how you went about your ethnographic research and present, for the first time, what you want to share about the site.

For the first draft, there are a few prompts/questions that may help you transition from the catchy introduction into your methodology (how you connected to your site, how you conducted your research) and then into your expanded focus statement. Think about the following:

- How can you make a direct connection between the scene you present in the introduction and the larger issues at your research site that you plan to discuss?
- Can you provide background on what the larger meaning or context of the site is?
- How was your interest in the site generated at the beginning of the project, and how do you feel about it now?
- What was your research process? How often did you visit the site? Did you observe, interview, participate, or do any combination of those things?

For drafting purposes, we suggest that students start with something formulaic and expand from there, for example, "During the past semester (or the last 9 weeks, or 3 months, etc.) I have been observing/participating in _____. Through my research, I discovered _____." In that last sentence, you will give an inkling of your "big idea"– where did you find meaning in your research?

Following your methodology statement or paragraph, you then transition expanded focus statement (In this paper, I will…First…Second…Third…) that you developed from you work in Chapter 8. You can include a brief "review of the literature" section, highlighting some of the most relevant or interesting ideas in the work of published authors that you have been able to make connections with. This does not need to be an in-depth discussion. Save that for digging into the ideas in the body sections of your essay. Rather, give your readers a sense of the ideas from authors that have informed your inquiry. Here, too, you can start with a bit of a formula if you need to and tweak for style later. For example:

> Throughout the course of my research, the work of several authors provided insights into ways to approach my inquiry. In Duty Bound, Mark Blitz crafts a wonderful book based on philosophical truths that defines the purpose of the media. His work provides a basis for me to argue that the current media is, in fact, affecting the American people's rights in a negative way.

Similarly, Eric Alterman's, What Liberal Media? has been very provocative for me. Alterman argues that the current Conservative Elite, by controlling the media via monetary resources, has gained power over the American people's ideas. Finally, for a global perspective, I draw from Joel Simon, in "Muzzling the Media: How the New Autocrats Threaten Press Freedoms," as he explains the nature of countries that hide under the guise of democracy but have authoritarian control over the media in order to maintain their power.

Following this section, you will move out of the introductory pieces and into the body sections of your inquiry, developing your exploration of your site as articulated in the focus statement.

It is important to note that the prompts, questions, and formulas here are designed to help you get started with the expression of your own research methodology and focus for the essay. They are an excellent structural starting point, but you do not have to only use the formula or feel like you have to include answers to all of these prompts. You, as author, will make the decision about how to present the information.

Selecting Examples and Evidence

If you have had any kind of writing instruction prior to this class, you probably already know that one of the most important elements in developing an idea is providing examples to guide your assertions. In the case of ethnographic writing, these examples are drawn from your memory and your fieldnotes. Your fieldnotes, as primary data are then the source for your primary evidence.

It is primary evidence that supports your focus and allows you to make clear why you have found a certain behavior or idea significant. Rather than thinking about evidence as a way to prove your point, it may be more helpful to consider primary evidence as an opportunity to provide your reader with an example of what you mean, what you have seen. If you are truly trying to engage the reader in a conversation, to inspire a response from them, you will want to provide examples from your fieldnotes you found to be compelling. The fact is that if you found something interesting, you will probably write about it in an interesting way, thereby piquing the interest of the reader. It is this sort of interest—another level of connection—that will prompt a response.

Given the goal of creating conversation, the question about how to effectively use primary source evidence then is three fold:

1. Which examples should you choose?
2. Where in the paper do they go?
3. How do you present them?

Think about the writing of a longer essay as a series of shorter pieces. If you consider the introductory section and the concluding section as two short essays, you are then left to write two or three shorter essays in order to flesh out your idea. In many ways, the introduction begins with an example of your idea, but since the real purpose of the introduction is to interest the reader, the effect of this example is to inspire the reader to continue reading. This example will not necessarily be considered as evidence of

your observation/focus. As a result, you need to think about other possible examples you can use in order to develop a discussion of your focus statement.

While the focus is definitely critical to determining your example/evidence choices, the most important consideration in choosing an example from your fieldnotes is: What would you like to accomplish with your essay? This question may be difficult for you to consider if you are still having difficulty seeing yourself as an authority on you own research. You might want to say something in particular way or to inspire someone to think about something a different way. Though it is usually not realistic to assume that any one piece of writing will "change someone's mind," there is no shortage of opinion, research, or writing for that matter, that does not support the notion that writing can assist people in shifting their perspective, in thinking about things in a different way.

There is a difference between identifying and iterating a focus and choosing relevant examples. Let's start with a student focus:

> In this essay I will discuss the connection between Polish folk dance and heritage. I will write about the meaning of the circle and what it symbolizes to all of us in the group. Also, I plan on discussing my observations on what goes on during practice and what I have observed about the group and how they view heritage. As I write this essay, I want people to start thinking about their own heritage and what they can do to become closer to it. I also want people to become more aware of the Polish culture and have a better view of it. I would like to get people to participate in their ethnic backgrounds, so they can come to know their culture more.

The focus for this essay is, "the connection between Polish folk dance and heritage." Martyna developed this focus statement by considering a pattern in her analysis observations—that dancing connects her to her Polish heritage. The example of this connection, however, is not limited to Martyna's observation—the idea that she feels a connection. She cites the use of the circle in her dance group as a symbol of connection, a way that the group illustrates their connections with each other.

Once you choose your evidence, the examples for your essay, the way of explaining and exploring your focus, you need to also decide where to discuss the examples and how you will present the example. There is no hard and fast rule about where and how you should present your examples. Martyna decided that the larger example of the circle should follow a section on the history of her dance group and her own connection with the group. This first section then provides context for her discussion of the symbolic function of the circle.

In her section entitled, "Family and Heritage in Wici," Martyna uses the circle as a way of illustrating the connection between dance and heritage. One can better examine the logic of an essay, the connection between focus and evidence, by looking at the first few lines of each paragraph. Here, we are able to not only identify how they have used the example to their benefit, but to note the logic in the development of an idea. In the section that focuses on the circle, we note definite attention to the relationship between the focus on dance and heritage and the example of the circle as evidence of such a connection:

- Paragraph 1: The circle that we stand in at the beginning and end of practice is symbolic. It represents our heritage and all of us coming together as a family.
- Paragraph 2: There is a connection between the circle we stand in and the people in Poland.
- Paragraph 3: The circle represents us coming together and taking part in something not all people take part in. Being a part of something like a folk dance group shows that we are doing something that connects us to our Polish heritage.
- Paragraph 4: Our dance group is also symbolic. We symbolize the Polish youth who are going to pass on to others all that we have learned and experienced as a part of this group.

In this four-paragraph section, of her essay, Martyna uses one example—the circle they form during dance group—in order to develop the connection between her heritage and dance. She begins with the idea that the circle is symbolic of this connection. Then she develops this metaphor to extend the connection beyond the boundaries of the group to all people in Poland. She then reiterates this idea through the personal, rather than the theoretical connection and finally extends the metaphor one more time, crossing temporal, not just geographical boundaries. In short, the circle connects the people to dance, to other people in Poland, to each other and finally to those not yet born or exposed to Polish dance and heritage.

The point is that the examples you choose from your fieldnotes need not be complicated or even numerous. While Maryna does provide "evidence" of her assertion of the connection between dance and Polish heritage in the form of personal experience and self-reflexivity throughout this essay, she really only uses one bit of primary data in her essay in order to make her point. The key is that she examines that evidence from multiple perspectives, she explores its metaphorical potential, thinking about how it may be perceived, considering is as a representation for all the ways in which she feels connected to her heritage through the dance group.

As you consider your own focus statement and reexamine your list of observations in search of appropriate, fruitful examples, and think about which observations may enable you to connect your focus with the larger purpose (the SO WHAT?) of your essay. Here are some ways to begin to do this:

- Do not think that you need many of these examples, or that you need to know exactly how or where you'll place them at first.
- Choose first and then as you write, experiment with ways of presenting the example—use your creative flair in order to bring a situation to life.
- Extend any metaphorical connections you may make between ideas.
- Reconsider how and why you made note of the observation in the first place. Was it the result of thinking about place and space, ritual and symbol, representation? If so, use those ideas as guides for developing a longer discussion of this connection.

Selecting Effective Secondary Source Evidence

While your primary data/evidence/observations are indeed central to the writing of your essay, you will also need to consider the role of the secondary source, the theoretical statements, or academic opinion in propelling your discussion. As already stated, secondary sources should not be considered as "evidence." They do not contain the proof, or evidence of your assertions—your fieldnotes contain such information. However, secondary sources are extremely helpful in situating your discussion within a larger academic conversation, in making clear that your ideas, thoughts and feelings about your field research is well-informed. Recalling the list of qualities of ethnographic writing, we focus now on point #6: Ethnographic writing stems from review of secondary sources and the exploration of primary data.

In Chapter 5 we discussed the annotated bibliography as an initial way of highlighting the relationship between primary and secondary research. One of the main goals in producing this piece of writing is to identify two or three academic works that you find relevant/valuable/interesting with respect to your chosen field research.

Once you have identified a few academic sources that you find relevant to your primary research, you'll need to spend some time with each. That is, you'll need to re-read, or even to really read (as the case may be) enough of each text to get a general idea of the actual academic thought involved. We suggest you work with no fewer than three or four sources to begin, depending upon the requirements of your particular instructor/assignment.

Working with your stated focus, you'll want to consider what the author of each text has to say that may in some way relate to your research. More importantly, you need to begin thinking about how you might apply or use the thoughts and words of other authors in order to allow you to expand your own discussion in your essay. The idea here is not to find EXACT matches of support for what you did or what you think. As you may have already discovered, it may be extremely difficult to find someone else who has researched group behavior in an anime club, or the relationship among people who take their dogs to dog-walking parks, or the reasons behind our personal connection in a Laundromat. These aren't highly researched topics and most probably do not have a supporting wealth of literature from which to directly call upon for current thought, theory or even statistics.

The following is a suggested method for examining secondary sources in order to identify useful quotations, ones that will enable you to bring your own research into conversation with academic ideas and theory. While some processes revealed in this text are really just about sitting down and doing the task—the collection and writing of fieldnotes comes to mind here—in choosing possible quotations for your essay, we urge you to spend a great deal of time reading and thinking about the texts themselves before randomly selecting quotations. The more thought you put into this task, the better prepared you'll be to actually work with the quotations as you write your essay.

1. Identify the three sources from which you'll pull quotations. Begin by writing at least a paragraph about why this text seems relevant to the FOCUS of your essay. What does this author make you think about? How does it help you crystalize a discussion?

2. Identify three quotations per text that you consider to be "workable" quotations. Go to the computer and open a WP (word processing--like MS word) document and begin with the full citation of the work in MLA format (or the format indicated by your teacher).
3. Once you've got the citation, write two or three sentences that effectively summarize the idea that the author is speaking about in this passage. The idea can be very broad, very general. The goal is to simply reiterate the author's most useful point.
4. Then, type/write three different passages directly from your source. These passages ought to be ones you consider to be interesting and possibly usable in a final essay. These passages may be as much as be a couple paragraphs in length, but don't record anything less than three sentences per quotation. It'll be too hard to recall the context later. Whatever you do, don't forget to note the page numbers next to the quotations!
5. Once you have identified no less than six quotations in two different ACADEMIC sources, you need to create a bit of thoughtful prose. Try to explain—if only for yourself—how you understand the relationship between the quotations you have chosen and your own primary data examples. How do you want to use any of these quotations? Which seem particularly relevant, interesting to you? Why you are drawn to these quotations?

This exercise may become a bit tiresome, or somewhat laborious in nature, but the point is that in "pre-selecting" quotations, you can "try them on" in your text. This textbook provides guidance and strategies to assist you in writing your essay, but there is no way around committing the time and effort necessary for thinking and experimenting with different options. Know that whatever time you may spend choosing your examples and your quotations, and however important such tasks may be, the most important part is the actual writing, the time spent in bringing these elements together on the page in one single essay.

Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Documenting Source Material

The purpose of using quotations from other authors is not to provide "proof" of what you say, but rather to situate your own work within a certain academic conversation. It is also important to note some guidelines for actually incorporating these quotations into the body of your text. The following contrived example presents a way of beginning a paragraph that works through one idea:

> In Making Up Titles, Susan Gentry argues (or use any active descriptive verb that might work here such as explains, asserts, illustrates, suggests, defines, states, explores, challenges) some sort of an idea that should be summarized from the book.

Once you have this sort of intro sentence or so, then you enter into the quotation. You can do so with a shorter quotation:

> Gentry states, "In this day and age….." (74).

Or, you may have a longer quotation (more than 25 words) in which case you set up the quotation (all indented but still double-spaced) with a colon (such as I continue to do on this page):

> Gentry states:
> In this day and age there are many quotations we may slip into our writing in order to fill space. However, rather than thinking of quotations as a way of filling space, you need to consciously consider the quotation as a bit of writing with a purpose. As a result, you need to carefully choose the quotations you use, making sure to never assume that there is one great, or best quotation out there. (74)

Following the quotation, be it long or short, you'll need to EXPLAIN what's being said and then enter a discussion of the idea with respect to a specific example or your research project overall. Though the content of the paragraph bit below is weak (as it is all made up) but the format may give you an idea of HOW to be thinking about how to be thinking about working with quotations.

> Here, Gentry explains that we are being asked to search for quotations that may be relevant to our topics, even though we may not feel confident with respect to selection. Selection, she maintains, is a part of trusting the process. Writers do not look for the perfect quotations; they do not exist. Rather, an adept and confident writer can use almost any quotation--within reason--to make his/her point as long as the focus of the essay is clear. It is only when the author doesn't really know what they want to say or how to say it that quotations become silly and irrelevant, rather than smart and integral to the larger focus of the piece.

Notice the length of discussion. As a rule of thumb--a really rough rule--you want to have your discussion be at least two, and probably closer to three times as long as the quotation you use. For example, if your quotation is about two sentences, than your discussion really should be at least four sentences in length. This doesn't mean you should count sentences, it means you can use visual, as well as linguistic cues to help you determine whether you've spent enough time talking about the idea at hand. Again, this is a guideline, not a hard and fast rule. So let the words flow before you worry about how many of them there are.

OK, so here's what the paragraph looks like when it is all put together:

> In Making Up Titles, Susan Gentry argues (or use any active descriptive verb that might work here such as explains, asserts, illustrates, suggests, defines, states, explores, challenges) some sort of an idea that should be summarized from the book. Gentry states:
>
> > In this day and age there are many quotations we may slip into our writing in order to fill space. However, rather than thinking of quotations as a way of filling space, you need to consciously consider the quotation as a bit of writing with a purpose. As a result, you need to carefully choose the quotations you use, making sure to never assume that there is one great, or best quotation out there. (74)
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quotations; they do not exist. Rather, an adept and confident writer can use almost any quotation--within reason--to make his/her point as long as the focus of the essay is clear. It is only when the author doesn't really know what they want to say or how to say that quotations become silly and irrelevant, rather than smart and integral to the larger focus of the piece.

Returning to Martyna's essay for another example, you can see, once again, a quotation choice need not be complex, or lengthy in order to be effective. The key is in how it is presented and then used in the essay:

> In Polish Songs and Dances, Ada Dziewanowska explains that, "Dancing the native dances of Poland is just one of the many ways that we become closer to our Polish heritage" (36.) Although this quotation refers to Polish culture more, it can also make people think about their own culture and what they can do to become closer to their own heritage. Since I became a member of Wici, a Polish Song and Dance Company, I have become closer to my Polish roots. I already knew about my country's history and traditions from the Polish schools I attended on Saturdays, when I was younger. Unfortunately, I really didn't know about the Polish folk dances and the clothes people wore back then. When I became a member of Wici four years ago, I felt like I was experiencing something new.

Though it may have been most evident to use the quotation as "proof" of what Martyna asserts—that there is a connection between dancing and heritage—she instead uses this quotation to move closer toward her objective: to encourage the personal connection with one's heritage. She suggests that the reader consider this quotation in a broader sense than just being about Polish culture, encouraging the reader to think about their own experience as she provides testimony of her own connection to her Polish heritage through dance.

In addition to choosing this paragraph as an example of use of a simple quotation as a way of developing discussion, this example also acknowledges the idea that secondary research can and often does guide a person's thoughts. It very well could be that Martyna came up with the idea that there is a connection between dance and Polish heritage without having first read the work by Dziewanowska. It really doesn't matter whether Martyna borrowed this idea and that it helped guide her through her research, or whether she subsequently came across an idea that simply supported her assertion after she created her focus statement. What matters is that, for whatever reason, she was able to choose and then use a quotation in a manner that did not stand as "proof" of her focus, but s a way of further developing discussion pertaining to her stated objectives, those concerning influencing the reader to think about and perhaps even act upon locating a way in which they might connect with their own heritage.

To Review:

1. Don't air drop quotations-make sure they are situated with respect to their source. Introduce them, comment on them, make connections to expand your discussion. Review the made-up example, as well as that pulled from Martyn'as paper above. It might also be helpful to look for use of secondary source quotations in the four papers provided in this textbook.

2. Don't try to jam your quotations at the end of the paper. Use them earlier, rather than later, and don't squish them together. Again, a couple well thought out, and consciously used and placed quotations are more effective than multiple, seemingly unrelated, juxtaposed ideas.
3. Use quotations as a way of setting up or discussing an example. They should lead and guide, not stand as evidence. That is, the quotations from other sources ARE NOT proof, they are ideas that reinforce YOUR assertion, your focus.
4. Look for the quotations after you've chosen your examples, but BEFORE you have drafted the paper. Have them ready to use when you need them.
5. Remember, books and articles don't say, discuss, present, etc. Authors do. Use author names to reference their work.
6. Work your discussion around cool quotations. If you find something cool and it seems related, it probably is. The challenge will be in making this relationship clear to the reader. And that's what it is a RELATIONSHIP.

Concluding in a Meaningful Way

After the long work of spending a semester, trimester, or quarter conducting ethnographic research, building your essay, making meaningful connections, using effective supporting detail from primary and secondary source material, and writing evocative prose, two words can call to you –"The End." The desire to finish, to be done, to turn in the final paper by just repeating what you said you were going to write about can be strong. Nevertheless, the conclusion to your essay is much more than an easy finish to the task.

When you have finished developing the first three sections of your essay, be prepared to articulate what it all means to you and what it all might mean for your readers. That is, once you have decided, "I am going to write about X," you need to begin to think about why you want to write about X. What is the point? Why would anyone want to know this? How can you use this observation to say something important, or powerful about our behaviors or patterns? How can we use our larger observations to suggest ways in which we might improve human existence?

OK, the notion of "improving human existence" may be a bit extreme, but just as in the final paragraphs of the Research Proposal and the Resource Review, your final rhetorical work needs to address the larger "So What?" question. As you conclude your work, you might want to think about a two-pronged structure - consider the local/personal implications and consider the global/collective implications. In essence, you will return to the beginning of your essay, the beginning of your own process, and talk a bit about what your project has meant to you, has done for you with respect to shifting your mindset. From this personal perspective you then move to consider how a global perspective might be affected by what you have found. Can your findings further explain or provide texture for understanding? Do they suggest a location of hope regarding some social issue?

These conclusions need not be earth-shattering in the sense that you propose the solution to some specific problem. Rather, ethnographic writing, in illustrating complexity, often has the effect of encouraging tolerance or increasing understanding of others, of other situations, of alternate "partial

truths." If you have a handle on how your "partial truths" have shifted and been rewritten over the course of the semester, you are on your way to suggesting ways that we can collectively consider the partiality of global, universal Truth. Your conclusion serves to reinforce the "what matters" of your writing.

Reviewing and Revising Your Essay

So, what is the difference between revising academic prose and re-presenting ethnographic writing? The short answer is, nothing really. There really isn't a difference, except in your own perspective, except in terms of the ways that you might think differently about these two activities. Students often understand the revising of academic prose as an activity in "correction," in trying to figure out what the instructor wants, in making their piece more direct, concrete, concise and formal. Honestly, there is truth to this perspective. Revision does entail working on clarity of writing, following the conventions of Edited American English, being able to directly state an argument and support that argument with identifiable evidence. You must participate in this level of revision, but you must also imagine moving beyond what you have already written to an understanding of where or why or how you can further explain your ideas. You need to strive to make your rhetorical decisions conscious, to consider why you chose the quotations you have used, the voice you present, the metaphors you create.

Writing isn't about mastery of a subject matter. We become better at writing when we practice writing. We become better at writing with supportive and earnest feedback about our writing. We become better at writing when we are comfortable with and understand the feedback that we receive.

One of the most popular strategies for soliciting that feedback and encouraging student revision of work is peer review. Despite any mythologies about the isolated, insular writing genius, most writers write in community. Academics, novelists, poets, and journalists—just to name a few—all engage in peer review of their work. Sometimes the review is self-solicited, sometimes it is required by a publisher. The fact is that peer review is a crucial aspect of the writing world and many instructors will invoke this strategy precisely because it reflects the reality of their own experience as writers. So, no matter what you write, seek a review, solicit a response, and that you revise based upon the comments you receive.

But what if the comments are stupid, you ask? What if you can't be sure that the feedback you get will be helpful or "correct." The difference between useful and pointless feedback will hinge upon you and the questions you ask of your reader(s). Only you know the goal of your piece of writing, therefore you need to make clear this goal in the form of a question. In general, it is good to provide your reader with no more than a few different questions. If you have more questions for the reader, wait to ask another set following a new draft, or provide different questions to different readers. With a few questions on which to focus, the reader can concentrate on substantive feedback and feel secure that you are looking for critique and not just looking for copyediting. Specific questions help you to consciously decide what you'd like to know and invite a reader to help you get it.

After getting feedback and seeing your work and writing again in the light other people's comments, you must spend the time re-working and re-writing. Here are some final suggestions to help you write an

essay that will engage and resonate with the reader, a piece that can be understood as ethnographic writing:

On a global level:

1. Highlight Complexity: Don't be afraid to try and explore MANY facets of your observation/focus, making sure NOT to construct an argument based stereotypical or one-dimensional logic. Instead, explain that the reality you observed and are explaining is relative to many different factors.
2. Reveal Reflexivity: Remember to include yourself as an integral element of this research project. Explain transitions YOU have made during the process of your research. You were there. You should write to acknowledge how you understand the reality of your research site. You are an authority on how you understand this site--write from that authority.

On an organizational level:

1. Create headings for different parts of your essay; write it in sections. Use subject headings to break your prose into readable bits and to allow for juxtaposition of bits of text to engage the reader. Revise in such a way that you make sure that every bit you see has a guiding idea, an explanation, an example and some idea development. The "first…second…third…." sections of your focus statement.
2. Select and use effective primary source examples that support your focus and make clear what you found meaningful and why and use quotes or paraphrases secondary sources, where appropriate, to expand your own analyses and observations.

On a sentence level:

1. Use active present-tense verbs. One of the quickest ways to make your prose appear smarter, tighter and more engaging is to edit the verbs, seeking not only to make sure that they agree (the usual sort of correctness editing of a composition course) but to scan for every time you write "is" and write in past tense. Rewrite your essay so that if you're speaking about some action, you write about it in present tense—you should always write in present tense about the ideas in an article or book. To add immediacy to the action, you not only want to write in present tense, but minimize use of the gerund ("ing" words) and the verb "to be," otherwise known as "is". To say that "John is walking," is far less active and engaging than the sentence, "John walks."
2. Edit and proofread your essay carefully. Don't let sentence level errors and spelling and punctuation mistakes ruin your beautiful paper.