

Expanded Fieldnotes 2: Focus on Ritual and Symbol

THE ASSIGNMENT

Making Detailed Observations at Your Research Site

Continue to make observations of people, place, space, behavior, conversation, activity, grouping, artifact use, etc. at your site.

Focus on Ritual and Symbol

Identify repeated behaviors and actions at your site and identify sequences of those things if you can. Think about whether these actions/behaviors/sequences are meaningful in some way. If there is meaning in the repeated behavior (ritual), explore what you think it is.

In the same way, identify possible symbols. If a symbol is a “thing that means something,” in your fieldnotes, describe how people interact with “things.” Write about what, to you, are the indicators that some of the things you observe are symbols.

- How does the behavior of people at the site center around the symbol?
- What does it mean to them?
- Do you connect with the symbol in any personal way?
- What is the larger cultural meaning?

To further explore the meaning of rituals and symbols, ask your informants (people at your site) about the significance of various behaviors and/or objects that you have noted as important. If they use words like, “meaningful,” “important,” “powerful,” in their description, use follow-up questions to get at the specifics of such importance.

- What is that meaning?
- Why is it important to them? What does it represent to you? Do you participate in these rituals?
- Why, what do they mean to you?
- How might that meaning be different for other participants at the site?

The Process

1. Visit your site again and take detailed fieldnotes (at least one hour)
2. Look specifically for details related to the Ritual and Symbol theoretical lens (see ideas on the left)
3. Write Expanded Fieldnotes 2 (word-processed, double-spaced, 3-5 pages) using your fieldnotes from the most recent visits AND incorporate a focus on ritual and symbol.
4. In your expanded fieldnotes, be sure to use different fonts, colors, or styles as you type to CODE/MARK differences in your detailed observations, *your own thoughts and feelings about what you are observing*, and **any analysis you are able to assert and any connections you can make to your secondary source materials.**

If you are not a participant, does this ritual or symbol compare to a ritual or symbol you are familiar with or does it resonate with you in some way? What is the larger cultural meaning of the ritual or symbol? In these fieldnotes, you want to continually ask, and attempt to answer, the question “Why?” Why? Why?

Step 3: Write Your Expanded Fieldnotes (3-5 pages)

Use your detailed observations and fieldnotes, including your notes that focus on ritual and symbol to write Expanded Fieldnotes 2. Turn your rough notes into a more developed piece of writing. In your Expanded Fieldnotes, be sure to use different fonts, colors, or styles as you type to CODE/MARK differences in your detailed observations, *your own thoughts and feelings about what you are observing*, and **any analysis you are able to assert and any connections you can make to your secondary source materials** (as detailed in Chapter 4 of *Engaging Communities*)

Don't worry if your observations, *thoughts and feelings* and **analysis** overlap a bit; that will happen. Focus on building your research data and providing as much detail and thought about your site as you can. There may be some repetition of observations from previous fieldnotes. If that

happens comment on whether or you not you think it is building into a pattern and what that might mean. And remember: details, details details.

Evaluation

Expanded Fieldnotes 2 will be evaluated on the extent to which you:

- write detailed observations of your research site;
- build on the information you have already written
- include your observations of and reflections on ritual and symbol at your site;
- code/mark observations, thoughts and feelings, and analysis;
- meet the minimum length requirement of 3-5 pages/750-1250 words
- are observant, thoughtful, and insightful