

Expanded Fieldnotes 3: Focus on Identity and Reflexivity

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 Identity and Reflexivity

When you are reflexive about your research, you actively think about who you are and how your mindset and worldview affect the ways in which you conduct your research. This is also the opportunity to ask questions about how you arrive at the thoughts, feelings, and analyses you have and make in the research process. Remember that all research is subjective and examine your own subjectivity. Think about what drew you to this particular project: What were your assumptions when you entered the site? How and why have those assumptions been challenged?

This reflexivity also helps you avoid making flat out

judgments because it requires you to examine how and why you arrive your conclusions and decisions. Remember that judgment is a natural tendency, and that you can use reflexivity as a tool to examine, minimize, and contextualize the judgments you make. Explain how you arrive at any assertions you need to make. If you acknowledge the struggles you have with competing or conflicting ideas and beliefs, your writing will be much stronger, and much more ethnographic. Reflect in your writing that there are many different perspectives and actively invite and explore alternate viewpoints. You are not arguing the “world according to you.”

Highlighting the complexities of human interaction through looking at yourself and the people at your research site can also lead you to the deeper connections and meaning at your site, which will resonate with your readers. This is one of the ways in which the elements of reflexivity, avoiding judgment, and being evocative

The Process

1. Visit your site again and take detailed fieldnotes (at least one hour)
2. Look specifically for details related to the Identity and Reflexivity theoretical lens (see ideas on the left)
3. Write Expanded Fieldnotes 3 (word-processed, double-spaced, 3-5 pages) using your fieldnotes from the most recent visits AND incorporate a focus on identity and reflexivity.
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.**

can interact in your writing. As you present alternative perspectives, you invite your readers to identify with people that are different from them. Remember that you are not writing the ultimate, authoritative text on your research site. Instead you are hoping to find ways to create connection between the site and your other experiences and connection between the site and the larger, even global, community.

As you enter your site with identity and reflexivity in mind, keep the following list of questions in mind:

- What are some of the markers of identity here? (i.e. symbols, clothes, body language, verbal language?)
- What do these markers “mean” in this context?
- Is the meaning something you deduced, or something you were told?
- How relevant is identity in this setting?
- How do you think you’re perceived in this site?
- What sorts of comments or actions from the informants suggest the ways in which they have chosen to “see” you and grant you an identity?
- Are you an insider, outsider, or both? Explore this as fully as you can.
- What are some of the political implications of your identity and the identity of those you’re studying? In

other words, what are the stereotypes of those you’re working with and at what points and in what situations are these stereotypes given negative connotations?

Write Your Expanded Fieldnotes (3-5 pages)

Use your detailed observations and fieldnotes, including your notes that focus on identity and reflexivity to write Expanded Fieldnotes 3. 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 3 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 identity and reflexivity 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