

## IN THE FIELD

### Approaches to Field Notes

The double-entry style notebook is useful for field notes because, as always, it encourages you to not just collect information but to reflect on it, engaging in dialectical thinking. You can use some other method if you like, just as long as you focus on two activities: collect specific observations; analyze or interpreting them.

Consider using opposing pages in your notebook, rather than the usual line down the middle of the page. You'll probably need the room.

<p><i>On the left side:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Specific observations of how people in the group interact</li><li>▪ Specific observations of individuals and what exactly they're doing</li><li>▪ Fragments of distinctive language, insider phrases, sayings, jargon</li><li>▪ Notes of overheard conversations or from interviews</li><li>▪ Specific descriptions of the place</li><li>▪ Rough sketches of the layout of the space</li><li>▪ Specific descriptions of objects used by the participants</li><li>▪ Specific observations of how group members come and go</li><li>▪ Specific observations of how group members respond to outsiders</li><li>▪ Specific observations of clothing, and other cosmetic features of group members</li><li>▪ Specific accounts of stories members tell each other</li></ul>	<p><i>On the right side:</i></p> <p>Reflect on whether you see any patterns in the data you collected on the opposing page.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Are certain behaviors repeated by group members?</li><li>▪ Do group members seem to use the space in a characteristic way?</li><li>▪ Is the language they use distinct? In what situations do they use it?</li><li>▪ Do group members seem to reproduce certain ways of interacting with one another?</li><li>▪ What are atypical situations that seem to recur?</li><li>▪ How do members learn from one another? How is knowledge passed along?</li><li>▪ What kinds of behaviors are most valued by the group? What kinds of knowledge?</li><li>▪ How do group members view outsiders?</li><li>▪ What motivates members to want to belong?</li></ul>
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## **Practice Taking Field Notes**

Choose a site—this could be a place where the people gather in the subculture you are studying, or somewhere on campus where people tend to gather (e.g., the student union, dorm lobby, library, quad, etc.), or somewhere off campus. Record field observations double-entry style (see the “Approaches to Field Notes”).

On the left side of your notebook, record specific observations. If you can overhear a conversation, try to record dialogue. Use your descriptive powers: describe exactly what people are doing and how they are doing it, describe the scene with as much detail as possible. Make lists of these details if this helps you get them down. Draw on all your senses.

After ten or so minutes observing, shift to the right-hand side of the notebook. Begin writing about what those details/observations/descriptions might be saying about why people gather there, what purposes the place seems to serve, what particular groups the place seems to attract, what behaviors the place seems to encourage.

Now visit the Companion Web site, Chapter 10, Writing Exercises, and complete Question 1 in Field Notes.

## **Practice Analyzing Artifacts of a Subculture**

For this activity you’ll focus on the artifacts that seem central to the subculture you are studying, and you will try to analyze what those artifacts reflect about the subculture.

Choose three artifacts from the subculture you are studying. Using the spaces provided at the Companion Web site, Chapter 10, Writing Exercises: Practice Analyzing Artifact, or by writing in your notebook, respond to the following questions for EACH artifact.

Explain why you chose the objects you did.

What do you already know about this object? How does that affect your interpretation of its significance in the subculture?

How is it connected to the other artifacts you’ve collected?

Think about the values this artifact reflects for this subculture. What are they?

How is this object used in the subculture? What does that tell you about its significance and the value it has for the group?

What research might you do on the object's history? uses?

Then, in the space below, finish the following sentence for each of the three artifacts you have chosen:

The three (or more) most important things this artifact tells me about this subculture are \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.