

Field notes: A General Guide

- As a part of the fieldwork experience, you should generate field notes.
 - You need structure when working in the field.
 - Designing your observations using a methodological approach, which includes good field notes habits, does this. You may not wish to take notes in the presence of the informant or you may not be able to take notes if engaged in an activity.
 - Therefore, the rule in those cases is: **Take notes as soon after as possible.**
- Barbara Hall (2001) provides some very useful information about field notes. She outlines three components of a the basic field note:
 - **Description** is where as much detail of the fieldwork experience is recorded as is possible.
 - Try to place yourself into the mindset where everything is new to you and use all your senses to describe your environment (physical and cultural). What you leave out will be forgotten.
 1. Most useful to remember: You cannot record everything; this is why narrowing down your research focus early is desirable.
 2. Further, think about the use of a quote, paraphrase, summary, sketch, or a diagram. Then think quote again.
 - **Analysis** is where you try to think like an anthropologist. I suggest you practice using the vocabulary presented in the book; also, try to use the lecture content. You may even review Chapter 3 (Heider 2004) for major theories in anthropology if you want to get deep into this (not necessary, truly, a suggestion only). In essence, this is where you try to make sense of what you see, without putting your opinions into it. **Think anthropologically.**
 - **Reflection** is the area where you can talk about the experiences as a member of your own culture. This is an excellent place to comment on what seems strange, how you personally handled an experience. It is not an opportunity to be demeaning to others' views or ways, though.
- **This is what I did when I was doing fieldwork (not an exhaustive list):**
 - The Who, What Where, When, & Why (and How):
 - Where is the field site located?
 - What is it that they do?
 - Who are the members of this subculture?
 - When do they perform the activities that distinguish them as a subculture?
 - For what purpose is this culture in place (Why are they in existence?)
 - In what manner do these persons go about completing tasks in their subculture?
 - Discuss any values and norms that have been expressed to you.
 - Are there examples of the ideal versus the real in this subculture?
 - Are there smells, colors, or other vivid experiences of the senses you want the reader to know?
 - Do you see examples of comparisons with the academic articles you read (compare and contrast)?
 - What caused you culture shock? Why did this occur and how did you handle the shock?
 - Are there specific rituals practiced?
 - Does gender make any difference within this subculture?
 - What economic concerns part of this subculture? Political concerns?
 - Is kinship associated with any of the activities?
 - Other issues/observations, and so forth.
- **What to record?**
 - Try to record quotes and paraphrases as often as is possible.
 - You should include description of body language, other non-verbal cues, and voice qualities (if applicable) or talk about the lack of these cues.
 - Sketches are also helpful.
 - Jot down comments made to you and others during the time you are in the field.
 - Write down any questions you have that are not yet answered so you may pursue these later.

- Anything and everything you might need (or think you need).
- Hand-write the field notes.
 - I have provided both a blank DAR form (optional) on my website and a typed DAR form with sample notes.
 - You may develop your own style for taking field notes. But, remember that details are so important and our memories filter our experiences.
 - Do not retype your notes (an anthropologist might, but for us that is too much work).
 - **Protect your informants**; think about what you record. [Use pseudonyms if needed, but if a permission slip is needed the legal name of the person must be provided.]

Source

Barbara L. Hall, B. L. (1999). *How to do ethnographic research: A simplified guide*. Retrieved December 12, 2001 from <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/anthro/CPIA/METHODS/>