

Field Observation & Notes Practice

Based on your research question(s), you should identify a field site. Once identified, practice gathering field data by being an “observer-as-participant.” While in the field, strive to observe and/or take part in an activity in your research setting for 15-30 minutes. During this, take notes (later, you will translate your notes into formal fieldnotes).

1. Identify your research question(s). Write it below to help keep you focused while in the field & while creating your formal fieldnotes.

2. Identify your field site. Think about things you may need to account for ahead of time (e.g., can you take notes openly while observing? Is that appropriate for your research scene?)

3. Go “into the field” and make observations. Write detailed notes while in the field (e.g., on paper/pencil, use an audio recorder or smartphone, use this worksheet, etc. Find a method that works for you and one that is suitable for your research scene).

4. Once you’ve returned from the field, turn your notes into formal fieldnotes. Try to do this within 24 hours, if not immediately. Write using as much detail as you can, record dates/times, feelings, ‘hunches’ as related to extant research/theory, etc.

Observation Protocol to Consider:

- People: Who is present? Not present? Is there a hierarchy/power dynamic? Etc.?
- Setting, scene, contextual factors
- Communication interactions, language use, nonverbals
- Your personal impressions/experiences
- How/when/where interactions take place
- (in)formality of the scene and people
- Environmental factors
- Technology use/presence
- Collect all relevant forms of ‘data’
 - Depending on your study, ‘data’ could be: your notes, informal interviews, pamphlets or brochures, pictures from your observation, drawings, material items collected from the field, etc.
 - Be sure to think about what constitutes ‘data’ in your study early on