

Fieldwork & Access for Qualitative Researchers

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TODAY



Discuss common issues when conducting qualitative fieldwork



Strategies for access to research sites



Maximizing time in the field & organization strategies



Q&A



ORS Resources

How many of
you have
ever
thought?

- *How much time should I spend “in the field”?*
- *How will I gain access to my research site?*
- *What about IRB?*
- *How do you answer these questions...?*

What is “fieldwork”?

- How do you all define this term?
- Sometimes also referred to as participant observation
 - *“a method through which researchers generate understanding and knowledge by watching, interacting, asking questions, collecting documents, making audio or video recordings, and reflecting after the fact”*
(Tracy, 2013)
- The ‘field’ is metaphorical
 - A setting or reference to a population

Negotiating Access

- Be comfortable with not being in charge
- Get to know gatekeepers
 - Formal access proposal/request
- Know the scene before you enter it
 - Consider scenes you are already a member of
- Are you “fitting in”?
 - Dress/clothing/appearance?
- Are you being authentic?

- *Can you offer participants anything for their cooperation?*
 - Vs. your access only benefitting you & your research
- There’s no right way; varies from each context & researcher
 - Typically requires a lot of legwork
 - Time consuming
 - Keep a contact log

Contact Log

Name & Role	Contact Info.	Comments	Follow-up?
Ashleigh Day, Assistant Professor UT Tyler	aday@uttyler.edu	Email sent on 2/2/22 at 2:00pm. Requesting access to site.	Send follow-up on 2/16/22

- ❖ *Accept rejection (it'll happen)*
- ❖ *Consider asking those who send rejections for another outlet/person to contact*
- ❖ *Must consider de-identified data that's stored & IRB (i.e., pseudonyms)*

Access Proposal



IRB language

Consider requesting a 'letter of support' for IRB



Possible outline for the emailed proposal:

I. Study rationale

II. Proposal—what you are requesting, for how long, your goals, etc.

III. Your experience and credentials

IV. Confidentiality, organizational protection, IRB info.

Access for Various Sites

- Consider how you would request access for:
 - Observing how dog owners interact at the public dog park
 - Observing university employees communicate with coworkers throughout the day
 - Observing end-of-life communication between hospice workers and patients
 - Observing a private Facebook group for new moms of multiples (e.g., twins, triplets)

Fieldwork in Virtual Settings

- Access must be negotiated for many virtual sites
 - Closed groups, password-protected sites, etc. are NOT public settings
 - Permission is required
- As a researcher, it's usually inadvisable to be a nondisclosed "lurker"
 - Unethical

The diagram illustrates three types of virtual group settings:

- Public:** Represented by a blue circle icon with three people. Below it is a dark blue button with a globe icon and the word "Public". The text below reads: "Anyone can see who's in the group and what they post". Below this is a white button with an eye icon and the word "Visible". The text below reads: "Anyone can find this group".
- Private (Previously Closed Group):** Represented by a blue circle icon with three people. Below it is a white button with a padlock icon and the word "Private". The text below reads: "Only members can see who's in the group and what they post". Below this is a white button with an eye icon and a lightning bolt icon, and the word "Visible". The text below reads: "Anyone can find this group". At the bottom, it says "PREVIOUSLY CLOSED GROUP".
- Private (Previously Secret Group):** Represented by a blue circle icon with three people. Below it is a white button with a padlock icon and the word "Private". The text below reads: "Only members can see who's in the group and what they post". Below this is a white button with an eye icon and a lightning bolt icon, and the word "Hidden". The text below reads: "Only members can find this group". At the bottom, it says "PREVIOUSLY SECRET GROUP".

Informed Consent

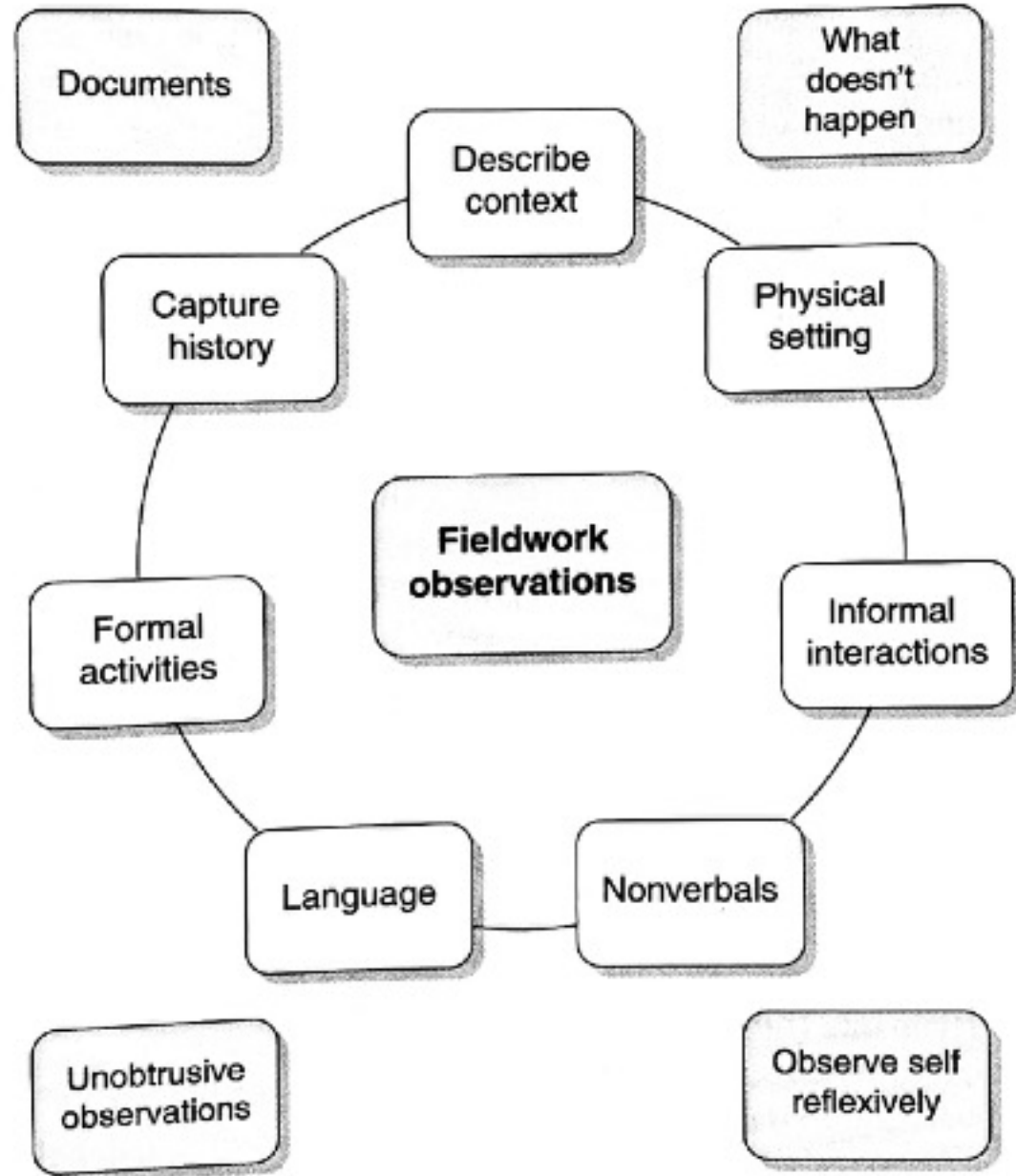
- May be waived—check with IRB always
- For non-public settings consider:
 - Briefing overviews in groups
 - Flyers/email
 - One-on-one chats
- Can feel odd to do, but is needed
- There's a finesse to it
 - *"I was hoping to shadow you today..."*
[hands person Informed Consent sheet to start that conversation]

Collection in the Field

- Participant observation
 - Complete participant
 - Participant as observer/active participant
 - Focused participant observer
 - Complete observer
- Must always weight how phenomenon is impacted from the type of observation
 - Unobtrusive vs. obtrusive observation
- Fieldnotes
 - Must consider how you'll record these in the field
 - At first, limit interpretation; Be descriptive
- Informal, unstructured interviews
- (more) Formal, structure interviews
- Artifacts, documents

EXHIBIT 6.8

Dimensions of Fieldwork



Timing – How Long?

- Account for negotiating access in your research timeline
 - Then, account for the time of actually doing fieldwork
- I aim for theoretical saturation
 - “no new information emerging”
- Also depends on how long you can spend in the field per visit
 - Method(ology), too
 - EX: most ethnographies aim for 6 months+
- *What context-specific factors might impact ‘time in the field’ for your research?*
 - Business hours
 - Rare phenomenon (e.g., observing search committee interviews)
 - Physical and/or emotional fatigue

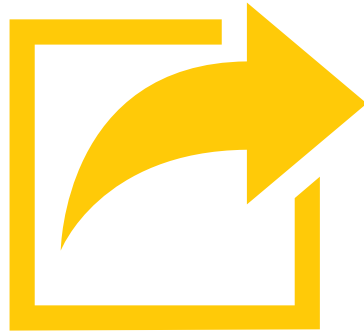


Fieldwork Resources

- “Field Observation & Notes Practice” worksheet:
https://www.uttyler.edu/research/files/ors_files/aday_field_observation_notes_12092021.pdf
- “Fieldnotes and Participant Observation” worksheet:
<https://www.uttyler.edu/research/ors-research-design-data-analysis-lab/resources/qualitative/>

Resources

- Research Design & Data Analysis Lab: <https://www.uttyler.edu/research/ors-research-design-data-analysis-lab/>
- Schedule a consultant appointment with me for qualitative questions: <https://www.uttyler.edu/research/ors-research-design-data-analysis-lab/ors-research-design-data-analysis-lab-consultants/>
- Other Consultants: Quantitative, academic writing, surveys, etc.
- Future webinars/workshops
- *(My worksheets for qualitative researchers)*



Please take the post-webinar
survey 😊



Sent via email

Other Questions?

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