

Fieldnotes

Task: First, choose a place for observation (ensure you know if you have permission, if the field is public, research ethics, IRB mandates, etc.). Also consider how you will take your fieldnotes—will you use your phone, laptop, notebook/pen, etc.? How you take notes might impact how you are perceived by others, which could impact their behavior and, thus, impact what you are researching.

Good fieldnotes 'show' the reader versus 'telling' the reader. Good fieldnotes are clear and descriptive. Good fieldnotes include analysis. The length of your fieldnotes likely depends on the stage of analysis you're in. For instance, early on in your research you might have very long fieldnotes because you are detailing every minor occurrence; however, later on in your research when you are more focused, your fieldnotes might start to shorten and become more centered on your phenomenon/a of interest.

Write a set of practice fieldnotes that represents 10–15 minutes of participant observation. These will be your 'raw records' or 'raw fieldnotes.' After your initial observation, you will want to transform your 'raw records' into formal fieldnotes. Try using the template on the next page to type up your formal fieldnotes. Typically, at the top of your fieldnotes, it is helpful to list your guiding research question(s)/foci to help keep you focused during observation.

Participant Observation Tips (Tracy, 2013)
Leave your ego at the door! Being in the field is not the time to seek identity affirmation or boast about being a researcher.
Be a good person and always be ethical (be sure to review IRB requirements!)
Listen to participants. Be mindful of the context, too.
Immerse yourself in the research scene. Oftentimes, this requires patience.
Remember that in any research scene, there are often a range of meanings and you should be open to a variety of interpretations.
Recoding what people <i>say</i> is great, but there are other sensory elements to account for as well: smell, taste, attitudes, touch/haptics, colors, shapes, space, sounds, what is absent, etc.
Participant observation and fieldwork can be draining. Prepare for this and give yourself time to recuperate, when needed.

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons.

Fieldnotes Template

Date:

Time of observation:

Location:

Guiding research question(s):

Your Notes:

Post-Observation Reflections:

Here consider the following:

- How will you turn your raw records/raw fieldnotes into *formal* fieldnotes? Will you type your formal fieldnotes?
 - If so, don't wait too long after your observation to do so. A good rule of thumb is not to wait any longer than 24-36 hours to type your formal fieldnotes. Ideally, you would type formal fieldnotes immediately after you return from the field.
- Your formal fieldnotes should be descriptive. Now is the time to expand on your raw records/raw fieldnotes and elaborate on what you observed. Write, write, and write some more.
- If applicable, note how you felt as the researcher—engage in self-reflexivity.
- Some researchers save their raw records/raw fieldnotes along with their formal fieldnotes—especially if they drew anything like maps, pictures, displays, etc.