

University Writing
Assignment: Ethnography

Course Outcomes: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3d (See syllabus for specific outcomes)

Thinking Goals:

- To become an “expert” on a subculture to which you do NOT belong.
- To analyze and understand the rituals and practices of a subculture and the effects on its members.
- To connect the overall experiences of this subculture to larger society and to your own culture.
- To understand the meaning and purpose of ethnography.

Writing Goals:

- To develop your investigative research skills, based on effective observation, interviewing, and note-taking techniques.
- To develop your descriptive writing skill (showing rather than telling) by using specific, detailed language.
- To develop your ability to organize an informational essay, including background information, characterization, research, observation, and quotes.

Reading Goals:

- To read and evaluate several ethnographic studies by various authors
- To identify specific characteristics of effective ethnographies.
- To respond to various authors’ ideas about their own observational research.

Assignment Description: Your assignment is to research a subculture with which you are unfamiliar (you do not work at the site, you are not a regular, etc.). Your goal is to become an “expert” on that culture. During your site visits, you will be interviewing “insiders,” making observations, collecting data, and learning about another group of people. You will also be making discoveries about yourself, your communication skills, your comfort level in meeting new people, your interview skills, and your growing awareness of diversity. We will read *The Cultural Experience: Ethnography in Complex Society* which will be helpful in laying out what an ethnography is, how to write one, and give multiple examples of student ethnographies.

Assignment Requirements:

1. You will submit a typed proposal that includes the following: a paragraph explaining your project, a list of your prior biases about the subculture, a list of possible obstacles to completing the project along with strategies to overcome these obstacles, a list of potential resources and/or people you might interview along with specific times, dates and places of each interview, a list of what you need to know before beginning the project (practical concerns, information on the subculture so as not to offend).

Proposal Due Date: _____

2. Make a minimum of **two site visits** (GO to the place) and take notes each time. You will receive

additional information and practice on effective observation and note-taking techniques. **Your notes and observation must be turned in with your final folder.**

3. Conduct a minimum of **three interviews of insiders** (people who are part of the subculture, not mere observers or outsiders). You will receive additional information and practice on effective interview and research techniques. You must also obtain a signed permission form from each interview subject as evidence of your interview. These should be turned in with your final folder.

The site visits and interviews should total at least 5 hours. Keep in mind this is the minimum; an excellent, even good ethnography requires ample time in observations and interviews. Keep a record of dates and times for your final folder

4. You must submit at least one photograph or some other evidence of your observations and participation with the subculture. This should be done in a way that is respectful of the subculture's beliefs and rules.

5. You **may** submit a taxonomy or paradigm within your final paper.

6. You will write two drafts of the ethnography and will receive feedback from me and from your peers. For the first draft, feedback will focus mainly on developing a focus and structuring ideas. For the second, you will receive feedback to help you with content, descriptive detail, and mechanics/usage. You will turn in a third polished draft to me at the end of the revision process with your final folder (all field notes and drafts) and a turnitin receipt.

First Draft Due Date: _____

Second Draft Due Date: _____

Final Draft and Folder Due Date: _____ (with TII receipt)

Assignment Format: The final copy should be in 12 point Times New Roman, with 1 inch margins, and double spaced. You will need to include a cover page as well in MLA format. The ethnography should be 10-12 pages in length. You will want to incorporate headings per sections of your paper. The majority of your ethnography will be written in formal third person, although at times first person writing is acceptable.

Assignment Organization:

- MLA Heading and Title
- Introduction:
 - Attention Getter
 - Bridge
 - Thesis
- Body Paragraph 1: The Study (Fieldwork/The Research/Methodology Choose a heading)
 - Describe the interview process. (Who was interviewed? How many times? Etc.)
- Body Paragraph 2: The Setting

- Describe the setting of your culture in detail. Remember to show and not tell!
- Body Paragraph 3 and On:
 - Headings and paragraphs are dependent on your topic and interviews. See sample ethnographies for ideas.
- Conclusion:
 - Restate Thesis
 - Clincher

Final Suggestion: Take advantage of the opportunity to explore a group or situation that is unfamiliar to you. Push yourself out of your comfort zone and learn something valuable about the diverse groups that surround you each day. Learn something important about yourself in the process.

Assignment Grading:

Ethnography Evaluation

Style

- _____/10 Consistent and appropriate voice throughout
- _____/20 Language used is appropriate, precise, vivid, and descriptive
- _____/5 Variety in sentence structure enhances ethnography

Organization

- _____/10 Introduction has creative/effective lead
- _____/10 Clear progression through each section/logical order/transitions/headings
- _____/10 Purpose of overall paper is clear
- _____/10 Paper stands as an organic whole
- _____/10 Powerful conclusion

Content

- _____/20 Strong description of scene, people (enough hours of observation)
- _____/20 Focus on significant/important aspects of culture
- _____/20 Analysis of culture is evident and supported
- _____/10 Personal connection and/or involvement in the culture is apparent

Mechanics/Grammar/Punctuation/Spelling

- _____/30 Paper follows standard conventions of English and has few errors.

Other

- _____/5 Picture
- _____/5 Works Cited
- _____/5 Turnitin Receipt

_____ Total points out of 200.