

Expanded Fieldnotes I: Focus on Place and Space

THE ASSIGNMENT

Making Detailed Observations at Your Research Site

Continue to make observations of people, place, space, behavior, conversation, activity, grouping, artifact use, etc. at your site.

Step 1: Focus on Place and Space

Begin by sketching a detailed map of your site. If you are focusing on a group of people, consider “mapping” relationships. Make multiple sketches and remember, it’s not artistic quality that counts, but how well the map generates deeper thoughts on your part. After sketching and compiling a site map, use the map as a springboard for writing about the place details. Include physical details about the construction of the place and about how people use the space (i.e. traffic flow) and why they seem to do what they do.

In addition to mapping your site, write detailed description. Focus and consciously pay close attention to what your place looks like, what it smells like,

what it feels like, what it sounds like, and, if possible, even what it tastes like.

Write about the emotions generated by the site and actively write about and how and why you think the site develops those emotions in you and others.

- What is the vibe/space/ atmosphere and how does it seem to be is it created?
- What is the sense of expectation created by the space?
- Do you have memories you associate with it?
- Why do people seem to go there?
- do you feel in that space? Why?

Write about anything else you notice or that seems important to you or to the community in some way. Record what people say and how they interact.

Step 2: Write Your Expanded Fieldnotes (3-5 pages)

To “expand” your fieldnotes, you will go through a process to turn your rough notes into a

The Process

1. Visit your site again and take detailed fieldnotes (at least one hour)
2. Look specifically for details related to the Place and Space theoretical lens (see ideas on the left)
3. Write Expanded Fieldnotes I (word-processed, double-spaced, 3-5 pages) using your fieldnotes from the most recent visits AND incorporate a focus on place and space.
4. In your expanded fieldnotes, be sure to use different fonts, colors, or styles as you type to CODE/MARK differences in your detailed observations, *your own thoughts and feelings about what you are observing*, and **any analysis you are able to assert and any connections you can make to your secondary source materials.**

more developed piece of writing. The result should be a very detailed description of your site, including your reflections on your thoughts and feelings at the site and your analysis of what is going on, as detailed in *Engaging Communities* Chapter 4.

As you write, try to take every descriptive sentence/phrase you have in your notes about the site and turn each one into at least 2 or 3 sentences of written description. Push yourself here to add descriptors using all five senses and to show your readers the site, not simply tell them about it. Stretch your vocabulary with this exercise. Make use of tools like Thesaurus.com to play with the language.

In your Expanded Fieldnotes, be sure to use different fonts, colors, or styles as you type to CODE/MARK differences in your detailed observations, *your own thoughts and feelings about what you are observing*, and **any analysis you are able to assert and any connections you can make to your secondary source materials** (as detailed in Chapter 4 of *Engaging Communities*)

Don't worry if your observations, *thoughts and feelings* and **analysis** overlap a bit; that will happen. Focus on building your research data and providing as much detail and thought about your site as you

can. There may be some repetition of observations from previous fieldnotes. If that happens comment on whether or you not you think it is building into a pattern and what that might mean. And remember: details, details details.

Evaluation

Expanded Fieldnotes 1 will be evaluated on the extent to which you:

- write detailed observations of your research site;
- build on the information you have already written
- include your observations of and reflections on place and space at your site;
- code/mark observations, thoughts and feelings, and analysis;
- meet the minimum length requirement of 3-5 pages/750-1250 words
- are observant, thoughtful, and insightful