

## Ethnographic Journal Assignment

Write a short ethnographic vignette based on participant-observation of a location of your choosing. This can be your neighbourhood, a workplace, a place on campus, a cultural or religious institution, etc. Choose a setting where you can remain for a few hours and observe.

As an anthropologist, you are interested in understanding social relations and how social relations shape behaviour. This means that you are not just interested in *describing* what is happening, but *extrapolating an analytical point* from your observations about what you are seeing, how and why it exists, and why it matters.

Think back to Ken Guest's definition of **culture** as a "system of knowledge, beliefs, patterns of behaviour, artifacts, and institutions that are created, learned, shared, and contested by a group of people" (2020:35). This includes shared values, norms, symbols, mental maps of reality, and structures of power, including how the setting affects people differently.

### **Step 1: Observe and take notes (keep for yourself)**

Make sure to observe everything that is happening and write notes based on your observations (you may need to do this after you leave the setting). Write down as much as you remember. Don't worry about what is significant or not just yet. Your notes can include anything from the spatial arrangement of the setting to the kinds of people you see in your setting to interactions or conversations that you hear.

### **Step 2: Write an ethnographic vignette (what you will submit to Blackboard)**

You will then type up and organize your notes into an **ethnographic narrative**. An ethnography is an anthropological mode of writing that uses participant-observation to analyze an aspect of society or culture.

#### Things to include in your ethnographic journal:

- A description of your setting, how you came to enter it (what were you doing there?)
- A detailed description of what you observed or participated in (including what others did)
- Why did you choose this setting? What is significant about it?
- Given everything you have learned about the concept of **culture** in our course, what can you tell us about the culture of your setting?
- What is the meaning or significance of what you or others did, said, thought, etc.? What were its consequences? What function or purpose did it serve?
- Thinking about the concept of **Reflexivity**, how does your identity, background, or position affect what you are seeing and how you are interpreting it? How does it

affect how others perceive you in that location or setting? Does it give you particular access or insight? Might it prevent you from seeing certain aspects of the culture that you are examining?

**Some things to keep in mind:**

- Remember to use pseudonyms for people that you know or interact with
- Since you are engaging in participant-observation and fieldwork, you are more than welcome to use “I” statements and to place yourself within the narrative

**Requirements:**

- 1,000 words
- Double-spaced, 1-inch margins
- Times New Roman 12 pt font
- Submit via Blackboard

**Rubric:**

I will be grading you on the amount of effort and thoughtfulness put in the assignment and the presence of analytical points from your observations.

**Learning goals:**

- Learn ethnographic methods (participant-observation)
- Observe and analyze the social world from a critical lens
- Understand the concept of “culture” from an anthropological perspective

**Course:** Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, Introduction to Sociology, Urban studies, social science methods courses, Other social science courses

**Size:** Small to Medium

**Format:** Writing Assignment, ethnographic assignment, observation assignment

**Tags:** writing assignments, ethnography, ethnographic methods, social sciences, small classes, medium classes, urban ethnography, urban studies, anthropology, participant-observation, sociology, introduction to cultural anthropology, culture