

Assignments for IN 5000/9000 Spring 2018

Overall information about the assignments

There are six group assignments to be submitted. The group assignments are an opportunity to practice different qualitative methods, and to reflect on them in discussions with your group. The last three assignments are iterations on writing a research proposal for a chosen research project that you imagine. It is an advantage to build on your group assignments in your research proposal. Hence, you should try to identify a topic you would like to write a research proposal about early on, and use the group assignments to explore this topic. For example: If you want to write a research proposal about fitness apps, you can do your observations in a gym and interview someone who has experience with such apps.

The group will receive oral feedback in a scheduled feedback session with Hanne Cecile.

All the assignments are mandatory. To document that all group members have participated, you will write a group log to be handed in with the final assignment. The group log will contain information about the dates of group meetings, who was present, and the content of the meetings (e.g., “conducting observation” or “writing assignment”).

Deadlines

Please write the group number and the full names of the group members at the first page of each submission. Please write group number in the e-mail subject, and submit in pdf-format to hannege@ifi.uio.no and guribv@ifi.uio.no.

All deadlines are on a Tuesday at 23:59. The dates are:

- Assignment 1: January 30
- Assignment 2: February 20
- Assignment 3: March 6

Research proposal:

- Assignment RP 1: April 3
- Assignment RP 2: April 17
- Assignment RP F: May 8

Project presentation: 15. and 16. May or
22. and 23. May

Assignment 1:

Passive observation – Observation in a public place

The purpose of this assignment is to practice observation and note taking, and to reflect on passive observation as a research method.

Go to a public setting and carry out a one-hour observation. Choose a place you think will be fun and interesting, and where information and communication technology of some kind is present (e.g., ticket machines, cell phones, computers, digital artifacts). Observe and record movements, interactions, sights, sounds, spatial arrangements, and anything else that strikes you. Be an observer only; choose a place where you can sit and take notes without bothering anyone. Examples of this sort of place are:

- Library
- Waiting room
- Airport
- Farmer's market
- Gym
- Museum
- Train station
- Tram, train, bus
- Café, canteen, fast food restaurant
- Street corner, park, outdoor gathering place (e.g., Spikersuppa, Aker Brygge)

You might already start considering the theme for your research proposals – see below).

Each group member takes notes during the observation. Write as much as you can about the setting, and take notes of what you see. If someone asks you what you are doing, tell him or her that it is an assignment in a course about field research.

Immediately after ending the observation, write up your notes in a longer, more coherent document. Do this individually. You should spend at least twice as long writing up fieldnotes as you did observing. You will be surprised at the amount of detail you can record in one hour!

Meet with the group and write up 2-3 typed pages based on the fieldnotes of all group members. The fieldnotes should include the type of setting, the date and time of your observations, why you chose this setting, and a rough map and detailed description of the setting. Further, your notes should include a description of what you saw, heard, or otherwise noticed. Pay attention to differences within the group. Did everyone notice the same? Conclude with a brief analysis: What patterns do you see? Do you see any deviations from the pattern? Are some people acting differently or being treated differently?

Assignment 2:

Observation without notes: reflecting on notes taking

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on the difference between taking notes during observation and writing up fieldnotes based on memory only.

Carry out a second round of observations without taking notes (write notes afterwards). Choose between:

- 1) Passive observation as in the first assignment
- 2) Participant observation in a setting in which you are familiar (as long as you are not compromising confidentiality and privacy of others), or
- 3) Shadowing someone in his or her routine practices for 45 minutes to 1 hour (this requires permission from the person you want to shadow). While participant observation implies interaction with your informants, shadowing implies minimalizing your influence as much as possible.

You may choose to return to the site of your previous observation assignment or choose a new site appropriate to the topic of the research proposal you will write as your final assignment. This time, observe without taking notes for 30 - 45 minutes. While last time you wrote up your fieldnotes based on notes taken while observing, this time you will write fieldnotes from memory. Think about how observing without taking notes affects what you see. If you return to the same site, think about continuities and changes in what you see when re-visiting the place.

The description of the observation should include:

Include reflections on your experience as an observer and researcher. What difficulties did you encounter? What do you see as advantages and limits of such observations? How, when, and where might you make use of passive observation, participant observation, or shadowing? How would you carry out such observations differently?

Write up your fieldnotes following the instructions for the first observation assignment (2-4 pages), and send them in pdf-format.

Assignment 3:

Interview without audio-recording: Exploring 'digital living'

The purpose of this assignment is to introduce you to interview as a research method.

Arrange an interview with someone you know, such as a fellow student, a friend, a family member, or a professional acquaintance. The theme of the interview is 'digital living'. Within this broad theme, choose a topic you find interesting, and preferably is related to the research proposal you will write as your final assignment.

In your group, prepare a list of questions you would like to ask. This is supposed to be a semi-structured interview, which means that you will prepare a list of questions but not necessarily ask all of them, or ask them in the order they appear in the list. This kind of interview should resemble a conversation, where the informant's responses will guide which questions you will ask. Keep the interview as non-directive as possible. Listening and seeking to understand the informant's perspective is key to this kind of interviews.

Do not audio record the interview. Instead, bring pen and paper, and jot down key terms and phrases during the interview. Immediately afterwards, write up a fuller description. The interview should last approximately one hour.

You have to ensure that you have the informant's informed consent before you start the interview. See guidelines at the Data Protection Official's webpage (Personvernombudet for forskning):

<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/index.html>

The submitted description of the interview should include:

Each group member is responsible for asking a couple of questions and for organizing the same part of the interview. When writing up the interview include your names, a pseudonym (not the real name) for the respondent, the gender and age, and a brief description of the setting in which the interview was conducted. Include the list of questions you prepared in advance, and write up parts of the conversation descriptively (choose a couple of examples from the interview). Conclude with your analysis of topics explored and your reflections on the interview: The interaction and dynamics between you and the person interviewed, and any other reflections you have. The document should be 3-4 pages.

Receiving and giving feedback

Hanne Cecilie and Guri both read all the assignment reports that you submit, and discuss them. Together we prepare feedback comments and questions that we believe will help you to learn and take a step forward in your next assignment. Each group has 25 minutes for feedback with Hanne Cecilie, and we encourage everyone in the group to meet. If you cannot come to the feedback session, ask the rest of the group to write notes and share the feedback with you afterwards.

During the semester, each group will give feedback to another group twice. When you prepare and give feedback to another group, look first for the good points in the other group's report and start by commenting on that. Always start with three positive comments. Look for reflections in the text about differences between the group member's observations. Look for how they describe other people and their actions, and suggest alternatives to "loaded categories" if such are used in the text to describe people.

When you give feedback to assignment 2, pay particular attention to and discuss how you experienced the difference between taking notes in the first observation and not taking notes in the second assignment. How did the different note-taking practices influence your thoughts and memory during and after the observation?

For the feedback on RP1, look for the connections between the research questions, the methods used and the methodology for the study that is suggested. Is the suggested method for data collection suitable for answering the research question? Can you suggest other fieldsites or data that might be useful to include in the other group's research proposal? Invite the group to reflect on whether they could apply another methodology (for instance action research instead of case study), and which implications this would have for their choice of research question and methods for data collection.

Assignment RP: Prepare a Research Proposal

The aim of the previous assignments is to experience different research methods and reflect on them. The aim of this assignment is to use these experiences and reflections to plan an imagined research project. The group will use the knowledge gained in the course to write a research proposal for a research project the group chooses.

- RP1 First version of research proposal: minimum 2 pages, max 5 pages.
- Feedback on the first version of the research proposal will be Tuesday April 10. **NB: You give feedback to and receive from another group.**
- RP2, revised version: minimum 5 pages, max 10 pages. Feedback Tuesday April 24 and Wednesday May 2.
- RP Final version are not to exceed 10 pages (+/- 1) including table of content and biography (excl. appendix). The research proposal should be set in Times New Roman 12, 1.5 spacing.
- Project presentation in class Tuesday and Wednesday **May 15 and 16. or May 22 and 23.**

What are you supposed to do?

It is an advantage to build on the previous assignments when you write the research proposal. Your exploration of a topic during the semester can enable you to argue why your chosen topic is interesting or relevant. You can refer to the observations and interviews to argue for choices in different sections of the research proposal. If building on the previous assignments proves difficult for some reason, you can choose a new topic. In that case, you will have to refer to relevant empirical studies done by others to support your choices of topic, case or field, and methodology. You are also welcome to conduct a mini study and design your research proposal around it.

Your topic has to be about interaction between people and information and communication technology (ICT), and it has to be suitable for exploration by qualitative methodology. You should aim to make use of three research methods. This could be interviews (individual and/or group interviews), observations (of work practices, home practices, or other activities), video/audio documentation for analysis, or analysis of documents (e.g., institutional documents, specifications, websites, or newspaper articles to be analyzed as empirical material).

Some measures to avoid “free-rider” problems will be implemented: Any problems should be communicated to the lecturer as soon as possible. During

the entire period, the group should maintain a log over attendance at group meetings and work task distribution within the group. This log should accompany the final Research Proposal as an appendix, and if there is evidence of a group member not doing a proportionate share of the job, this person will then be asked to submit an individual Research Proposal based on their own fieldwork (i.e. not using the other group members' work) within one week from 3rd May.

Searching for and referencing literature

For information about how to search for and refer to literature in academic texts, consult the website "Search and Write": <http://sokogskriv.no/en/>

Important issues when designing a research proposal

The proposal shall tell the reader:

What kind of knowledge do you seek? Which strategies will you employ to gain this knowledge?

When evaluating the proposal we will ask:

How good is the argumentation on each of these two elements, and how strong is the link between them?

Make sure to:

Use the course literature to argue for your choices.

Suggestions on how to structure your research proposals

Front-page: Title of report, names, course, year, and affiliation

Table of content: list of the sections + page numbers

1. Introduction. Give the reader a short and precise presentation of the content of your report: What is this piece of work about? Describe the motivation for your proposed study: What will you explore and why is this interesting to a larger audience? Shortly describe what you intend to accomplish with the study.

2. Position your work. Present your purpose statement: Why do you want to do the study? What do you intend to accomplish? Depending on what you plan to study, you can argue that this phenomenon has received little previous attention from researchers (a gap in the research literature), that the phenomenon is of general societal importance or interest, or that an increased understanding of this phenomenon will contribute to the work of particular groups (for instance policy makers, designers/developers, or particular organizations).

You might want to position your work in relation to existing literature. If so, do a brief literature review where you state what is the related research or relevant findings in your area of interest, and state how your research will contribute to this.

You can also draw on the four group assignments to formulate your purpose statement. Did your observations and interview raise questions you would like to explore further?

3. Research question. From the broad purpose statement, you narrow the focus to one or a few research questions to be answered. In qualitative studies, “research question” is more appropriate than “objective” (specific goals) or “hypothesis” (predictions that involve variables and statistical tests). The research question should guide data gathering. It is a key question that the researcher will ask her/himself in the observational procedure or during semi-structured interviews. Use questions starting with ‘how’ or ‘what’ questions. Questions starting with ‘why’ suggest cause and effect, for which a quantitative approach is usually more appropriate.

3. Present the case or the field. Where will you go to answer your research questions? Who and what will be included in your study? Describe the field setting in terms of where, what, who, when, how long, and why.

4. Methodology. Here you describe how you will generate empirical material to answer your research question. What kind of data will you generate, and what is your strategy for generating them?

Present which paradigm you are working within. Describe the methodology you have chosen, and the methods you plan to use. Justify your choices. Why did you choose this methodology and not another? Why are the chosen methods appropriate for generating the data you need to answer your research question? Could you have chosen differently? What would be the consequences?

5. Analysis. Describe in brief how you will analyze your data.

6. Ethical considerations. How will you protect your informants’ privacy? How will you ensure informed consent from those who participate in your study? Do your case, field site, or methods raise particular ethical concerns? How will you address them?

7. Conclusion. Write a brief summary of the text.

8. References. Alphabetic listing of all the texts referred to. For information about correct citing and referencing, see link to the website “Search and Write” mentioned above.

Appendix: Log of group work (see first page for information about this).