

First exercise - Passive Observation – in groups - submit by Sept 8th

Passive Observation - Observation in a Public Place

Go to a public setting and carry out a one-hour observation. Choose a place you think will be fun and interesting. Observe and record movements, interactions, sights, sounds, spatial arrangements, and anything else that strikes you. Be an observer only -- it should be the sort of place where you can sit and take notes without bothering anyone. Examples of this sort of place are:

- train station or major T-bane station
- public park
- outdoor gathering place, e.g. Aker Brygge
- waiting room
- post office
- airport
- market, farmer's market or other
- gym, e.g. Domus Atletika
- museum
- courtroom
- café, cantina, fast food restaurant
- bar, nightclub
- computer center

Describe as much as you can about the setting. Write down your observations on the spot, then write up longer versions immediately afterward. Do not interview anyone. If someone asks you what you are doing, tell them that it's an assignment in a course about field research.

You should spend at least twice as long writing up fieldnotes as you did observing, perhaps longer. You will be surprised at the amount of detail you can record in one hour!

Your field notes should be 2-3 typed pages and should include your name; the type of setting and the date and time of your observations; why you chose this setting; a rough map and detailed description of the setting (a verbal "snapshot"); a description of what you saw; and finally, your interpretations of what you saw. The description should be who, what, when, where -- and perhaps why, although be careful about too detailed explanations of motivations. Conclude with a brief interpretation about at least one organizing principle of the setting. What patterns do you see? What deviations from the general order do you see? Are some people acting differently or being treated differently than others?

The purpose of the exercise is to get you started in observing and notetaking, and to give you the experience of being a "passive" (non-participant) observer. You will also have initial experience in being a participant observer (next).

e-mail your fieldnotes by September 8th to Maja <majava@ifi.uio.no>

Second exercise - Interview – group assignment - submit by Sept 15th

Interview Skills: Exploring Identity

This interview exercise continues your warming up and beginning to practice your fieldwork skills. Arrange an interview with someone you know -- a friend, family member, or professional acquaintance. This should be a one-hour, intensive, non-directive interview.

The topic is identity, which the person you interview can interpret in a variety of ways, and for which you can decide how to ask the questions. Put together a list of questions to ask. You may or may not end up asking all of these questions. Keep the interview as non-directive as possible and use the time to develop the interview as a special kind of conversation, letting the person's responses regarding his or her identity guide the focus. Listening and seeking to understand the person's expression and perspective are key to such an interview.

Do not tape record the interview; rather, use this as an opportunity to jot down key terms and phrases during the interview. Immediately afterward, write up a fuller description. The description of the interview should include:

Your name; a pseudonym (not the real name) for the respondent and her/his gender, age, and occupation; a brief description of the setting in which the interview was conducted. Include your pre-prepared questions, and write up the conversation descriptively. Conclude with your reflections on the interview: the interactions and dynamics between you and the person interviewed, your analysis of topics explored, any other observations you have. 3-4 pages.

e-mail your fieldnotes by September 15th to Maja <majava@ifi.uio.no>

Third exercise: Observation without notes – group assignment – submit by Sept 22nd

Observation without taking notes (write up notes afterwards!)

Carry out a second round of observations either:

- 1) “passive” observations 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 their routine practices for 45 min. to 1 hour (this requires permission from the person you want to follow—this is a way of “seeing the world through someone’s eyes”; by quietly following someone as he/she carries out the work as normally done).

You may choose to return to the site for your observations last week or choose a new site. This time, observe without taking notes for at least 45 minutes (for an hour if you can; for absolute minimum of 30 minutes). In other words, you will write field notes from memory rather than from detailed notes taken while observing as in the first assignment. 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 and interactions there.

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 or participant observations? How would you carry out such observations differently?

As for your first observations, write up your field notes, aiming for 2-4 pages, and post them by e-mail **by September 22nd to Maja <majava@ifi.uio.no>**

Fourth exercise - Second Interview – individual assignment – submit by Sept 29th

Interview Skills: Exploring your domain(s) of interest

This second interview exercise continues your warming up and beginning to practice your fieldwork skills. Arrange an interview with someone whose work interests you regarding the domain(s) for your masters or doctoral research – a colleague, a faculty member, a professional acquaintance. Domains can follow those for your working group such as software development, participatory design, GIS, health informatics, computer supported collaborative learning, knowledge management, or a domain area more closely related to your research-in-progress.

Plan for a one-hour, intensive, exploratory interview, not to last less than 45 minutes nor more than an hour and a half. In contrast to the first (non-recorded) interview, arrange to audio record this interview and be sure that you have the person's consent for audio recording. (For example of an interview agreement see the course page).

Draft a list of four to six exploratory questions to get at understanding the person's research and/or professional experience in a domain that interests you – you can decide how to ask the questions and the person whom you interview can interpret your question in a variety of ways. You may or may not end up asking all of your questions, and the person's responses may lead you to ask different questions. Use the time to develop the interview as a special kind of conversation, listening and seeking to understand the person's experience, perspective and reflections on the domain.

Audio record this interview. (Do not video record the interview.) You will also want to jot down key terms and phrases during the interview, to note highlights and to note key words to guide you in conducting the interview. Immediately upon finishing the interview, make some notes to yourself about key words, phrases, and passages – these notes will help you focus in listening back to the interview and in summarizing it.

Listen back to the interview all the way through. Do not transcribe the interview verbatim (unless you have reasons beyond the assignment to do so!) – to transcribe an hour long interview can take 4-6 hours. Rather, create a "log" of topics to organize your notes from the interview -- identifying the flow of questions and answers but also indicating topics as they come up, highlighting important comments, key phrases and passages. You will want to transcribe selected statements as exact quotes (verbatim) – direct quotes for 3 to 5 points you feel are most important will be enough, so that you don't spend too long on the process of listening back and annotating the recorded interview.

The summary of the interview should include: Your name; a pseudonym (not the real name) for the respondent and his/her occupation; a brief reference to the setting in which the interview was conducted, your pre-prepared questions, and a description of the interview, its key points, 3-5 direct quotes, what you learned about the domain. Conclude with your reflections on the

interview and on the use of audio recording: the interactions and dynamics between yourself and the person interviewed, your analysis of topics explored, how you experienced audio recording the interview (in contrast to your non-recorded interview), how having the interview audio recorded affected your analysis of the interview, any comments about what the interview suggests for your on-going research plans, any other observations you have.

The description should be typed, 2-4 pages and posted via e-mail by **Sept 29th to Maja <majava@ifi.uio.no>**

Group Assignment: Research Proposal

Important Dates:

- a) First version of Project Proposals to be submitted by **October 13th** (minimum 2 pages, max 5 pages) by e-mail to Maja majava@ifi.uio.no
- b) Revised version submitted by **Nov 3rd** (minimum 5 pages, max 10 pages) by e-mail to Maja majava@ifi.uio.no
- c) Group Research Proposal submitted by November **21th** by e-mail to Maja majava@ifi.uio.no
- d) Presentation in class (November 24th and December 1st)

The FINAL submitted Research Proposals (on November 21th) 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.

Learning Goals: The aim for this exercise is to get experience in the various aspects of the research process: planning and carrying out the field research, as well as analyzing it, generating an interpretation and writing up the results. What are you supposed to do? You should discuss amongst yourselves relevant topics and research problem, which can be related to your interest areas. The topic you choose should include some “hybrid” phenomena, i.e. involving people and technologies, and it should give you an opportunity to experience the use of qualitative research methods. You should aim to make use of 3 methods. This could be interviews (individual and/or focus group interviews); observations (of work practices, meetings or other discussions, activities); video/audio documentation for analysis; analysis of documents (e.g. project or institutional documents), forms, reports; or information systems, websites, project or institutional documents; or press-releases, articles in newspapers etc. relating to the research subjects inquired.

Define a purpose statement and research question(s) for your study. Then sketch the research plans: who, what, where, how (methods). (Refer to “Important issues when designing a research proposal” – see below).

Depending on your topic and case, you may have to think about participation and privacy/confidentiality of participants. Perhaps you need to prepare a research agreement letter and 'consent' forms that the participants and researchers sign. (See the course page for example of a fieldwork agreement).

A project proposal, including the above points, should be submitted by **October 13th**, to be discussed, revised and resubmitted by **November 3rd**. A final Research Proposal is to be submitted by **November 21th**, and the group will present their study in class.

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 field work (i.e. not using the other group members' work) within one week from November 14th.

During fieldwork: For coordination within the group, learning from each other, and to facilitate shared analysis: adopt a shared format for documenting field notes (see "field data records" below) and try out the technique of analytic memos described below.

Analytic Memos: An analytic memo will be a summary with selected excerpts and beginning analysis of your field notes. What themes do you perceive? What anomalies leap out at you? Are there turns of phrase or vivid metaphors that are important to the people you have talked with? Did you have certain metaphors before the field research? Have your metaphors and themes changed, and how so? What overall impressions do you have? You may also wish to 'map' the information you have or otherwise include graphical representation(s).

You can write one long memo with separate sections, or a series of separate memos, addressing your observations (substantive, themes, meaning, questions explored and generated), reflections on methods (your experiences, processes, interactions with people in the field site), thoughts and questions generated for research design (what you take from the field research experience towards research design, methods, and research question formulation for your masters or doctoral thesis, your ongoing research), and theoretical questions and concerns (e.g. what is required to verify or to generalize from qualitative research findings?). This will get you started making sense of the data you have collected, and to begin to grapple with the structuring of qualitative data. Try to make your descriptions to be as thick as possible, with lots of details. When in doubt, aim for the "how" questions.

Your working group should plan a time to meet to review the collected data, discuss your individual memos and your varying analyses. You do not need to arrive at a 'unified' or common view – one of the goals of the group field research is to learn from your multiple perspectives as well as from diverse perspectives of people in the field site. But you do want to help each other by exploring each other's analyses, metaphors and so on, and by challenging speculations and any points of "jumping to conclusions" – in a critical and generous spirit.

'Analytic memo' is a technique for in-progress analysis, which helps you to make sense of data while you are doing the research. This should generate further questions to guide the rest of your fieldwork. Writing analytically helps you to think of what evidence you need to support analysis and developing an interpretation. One of the other benefits of analytic memos is to facilitate communication from field research to e.g. colleagues, advisors, or people in the research setting.

About the technique of analytic memos: Strauss, Anselm, 1987. Memos and memo writing. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 119-129. Strauss, Anselm, 1987. Integrative mechanisms: diagrams, memo sequences, writing. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 184-214.

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?

When evaluating the proposal I will ask:
How good is the argumentation on each of these two elements, and how strong is the link between them?

Content:

Introduction including:

Description of domain/problem area

Review of key literature (relevant findings in this area)

Purpose of the study (purpose statement)

Research questions

Research design and research methods: What will you do? What kind of data? How? Where (which setting)? When/how long?

As far as possible: How will you work with (analyze) the data? (analytic concepts, core theories you will use)

Are you aware of any ethical considerations and practicalities you need to think through?

Motivation = answering the question: Why is this study important?

Possible replies:

'This is a new phenomenon'

'This is under-researched'

'Previous research is ambiguous'

'We don't know enough about it'

But how to establish such propositions? Learn strategies from published research papers, and do a sound literature review:

* identify keywords (varies between databases)

* skim abstracts and use the relevant new keywords

*use the available facilities for tracing forward citations

Are you new to the field? Start with encyclopedia articles, reviews, tutorials.

Make short summaries of central articles (problem area, focus of study, case, conclusion). Use a referencing tool (e.g. EndNote, or check out:

<http://jabref.sourceforge.net/>

<http://uniwakka.sourceforge.net/HomePage>

The purpose statement

Whereas the introduction focuses on the problem leading to the study, the purpose statement establishes the direction for the research. The purpose statement tells why you want to do the study and what you intend to accomplish (the central, controlling idea of the study). Be clear: "The purpose (intent, objective) of this study is (was, will be)..." Try to make a single sentence or a paragraph: Take the "elevator test" (you should be able to

explain to someone what you are doing before you go out again from the evaluator...). Focus on a single phenomenon, concept or idea that you will explore (not about 'relationships' between two or more variables, or 'comparisons' between two or more groups). Use non-directional language and neutral words, explain how you use terms: ("A tentative definition at this time for XYZ is...") (From Creswell)

A purpose statement could for example look like this:

The purpose of this ____ (fill in: strategy of inquiry, such as ethnography, case study or other) study is (or will be) to ____ (understand? describe? develop? discover?) the ____ (central phenomenon being studied) for ____ (the participants, such as the individual, groups, organization) at ____ (research site). At this stage in the research, the ____ (central phenomenon to be studied) will be generally defined as ____ (provide a general definition). (From John W. Creswell (2003): Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2nd ed., SAGE Publications, London)

Research question

From the broad, general purpose statement, you narrow the focus to specific questions to be answered. For qualitative studies: "Research questions" is more appropriate than "objective" (specific goals) or "hypothesis" (predictions that involve variables and statistical tests). The research questions should guide data gathering, i.e. serve as "working guidelines" - key questions that the researcher will ask her/himself in the observational procedure or during open-ended interviews (Not the same as you will ask your interviewees!). Central question plus sub-questions (for example 1 central question followed by 3 sub-questions). Use 'what' or 'how' questions. ('Why' suggests cause and effect, -> quantitative). Expect research questions to evolve and change during your work

Tools for literature searches:

DUO at UiO's library pages <http://www.ub.uio.no/english/>

Contains instructions for thesis writing (templates, styles, submission)

Electronic archive: search in previous thesis (e.g. e-learning, HISP, action research)

X-port: (journals and databases)

E-journals: locate and download soft copies of the papers on the course reading list (many but not all are available, not MISQ)

Databases: choose the INSPEC database, do a search with free words and one by using the thesaurus. Combine searches to refine your results.

Other databases: ERIC (education science), PubMed (medicine), PsycInfo (psychology) and Sociological Abstracts (Sociology)

Internet resources:

Compare what you find on the ordinary Google and www.scholar.google.com

Encyclopedia Britannica (<http://search.eb.com/>), Oxford Reference (<http://www.oxfordreference.com>), and many more reference works

Resources such as Wikipedia, dictionaries (e.g. www.dictionary.com), Webopedia (<http://www.webopedia.com>)

Check out the ACM Digital Library at <http://portal.acm.org/dl.cfm> find the papers by Lynne Markus, and by Walsham and Sahay. How many have cited them later (counts only those within the 'ACM system')? Try the 'find similar articles'-feature.

IEEEExplore (<http://ieeexplore.ieee.org>)

NB!! Remember, first, to read and consider the DEPARTMENTAL GUIDELINES for written assignments:

<http://www.ifi.uio.no/studinf/skjemaer/declaration.pdf>

FIELD DATA RECORDS

Field Date & Location: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

Documentation [check all forms of observational data]

HWN: _____ Audio: _____ Video: _____

Graphics: _____ Photos: _____ Other: _____

Other people present:

Other staff interacting with person observed:

People & activities observed:

- .
- .
- .

Field notes [detailed notes]

- .
- .
- .

Comments on Core Areas of Interest:

- .
- .
- .

Comments, ideas, thoughts for future field research:

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Record created by: _____

Field Study site: _____

Computer file name: (include date in name, e.g. 29300_jg.doc)

Associated computer files, produced documents, graphic representations:

KEYWORDS:

Summary & Highlights:

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Follow up to do:

1.

2.

Further Questions, Issues, Ideas, to Explore:

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Possible implications, Interpretations, Meanings: