

Tips for Fieldwork

Collecting data in the field provides opportunities for students to develop a variety of skills.

Photos

- Remember that, generally speaking, photos should reveal useful information rather than stand up as works of art.
- Candid photos are generally more revealing than posed photos.
- Take a mix of close-ups and distant shots.
- When possible, take photos with a good light source behind you.
- Remember the Rule of Thirds. Divide your photo into thirds and focus on something interesting where the dividing lines intersect.
- Try to get at the same level as whatever you are photographing.
- Remember to check the settings to adjust for close-up or distant subjects.
- Immediately after you take photos, before you forget, record the time and location of each picture.
- Take advantage of online photo sharing sites to distribute photos to peers and others, if necessary.

Interviews

- Dress appropriately.
- Introduce yourself. Explain the purpose of the interview and that the information will be kept confidential and anonymous.
- Prepare open-ended questions that will elicit detailed responses.
- If possible, choose a location that has relevance to the questions you will be asking.
- Bring a friend to take notes and be a second set of eyes and ears.
- Talk less and listen more.
- Refrain from negative facial expressions in response to interviewee's comments.
- Show interest in what the interviewee is saying.
- Listen carefully to responses and ask follow-up questions when you feel the person has more to say.
- Wait for answers, even if it seems a bit awkward.
- When taking notes, use abbreviations for frequently used words or expressions.
- Refrain from drawing any conclusions during the interview. Wait until you can look at all the data.
- Close with a question that asks if there is anything the person would like to say that you have not asked about.

Observational Notes

- Dress appropriately for the environment, and behave courteously toward all individuals at the site.
- Ahead of time, think of the kinds of behaviors you are interested in documenting, but stay open to unanticipated events.
- If you are observing in an enclosed space, be sure the people understand what you are doing and why. In a public area, be prepared to answer questions honestly.
- Assure people that the information you collect will be kept confidential and anonymous.
- Label your notes with the date, time, location, and name of the observer.
- Begin your notes with a rough sketch of the area you are observing.
- Limit your notes to what you see or hear. Refrain from drawing conclusions about your observations until you have all your data.
- Create abbreviations ahead of time for things you expect to see.

Recordings

- Dress appropriately for the environment and behave courteously toward all individuals at the site.
- If possible, use an external microphone instead of the microphone in your recording device.
- Experiment with the placement of the recording device so you understand where it needs to be to get good audio.
- Double- and triple-check your equipment before you make a recording.
- Begin each recording with a short description of the location, date, time, and recorder.
- Be prepared to answer questions about why you are making recordings.