

## First Assignment - Passive Observation

### **Observation in a Public Place**

Go to a public setting and carry out a one-hour observation. Choose a place that 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 bus station, public park, outdoor gathering place, hospital or clinic waiting room, post office, airport, market, farmer's market, gym, museum, courtroom, café, cantina, fast food restaurant, bar, nightclub, computer center

Describe as much as you can about the setting. Jot 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 field notes 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 at least 3-4 typed pages (Times New Roman, 1 inch margins, 12 point font) 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 note taking, 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 assignment).