

Grading Field Notes

Field notes refer to the written account derived from data collected during observations and interviews. These notes are annotated by the observer's insights, thoughts, concerns and follow-up questions. The objective of field notes is to create a written record in sufficient detail so that anyone reading the field notes will have relevant data associated with the system being studied, including setting, people involved and information obtained in order to improve the system. It is important when grading field notes to keep this objective in mind.

Give students clear guidelines as to expectations for the format and content of field notes. These guidelines make it easier to determine grading criteria and apply it uniformly. The following models a set of such guidelines.

General Format:

- Type your field notes before submitting them. Write on one side only of each page.
- Include name of observer/interviewer, date and location of observation or name of person interviewed, and purpose of observation/interview in the heading of the field notes. Number the pages.
- Field notes should be divided into two sections: descriptive and reflective, by using two columns, one for the descriptive section and one for reflections related to specific parts of the descriptive section. Note: in the case of interviews, the transcribed interview goes into the descriptive section.
- Write in complete sentences. Comments should be clear and detailed.
- Field notes should be clearly organized to highlight key points.
- Use short paragraphs to highlight changes in activities or person talking.

Specific formats for both the descriptive and reflective sections should also be written using the guidelines in the earlier section. A sample of what the descriptive ones might appear below:

Format for Descriptive Section:

- Write purpose of the observation or interview.
- For interviews, include a written transcription of questions and answers. Include any observations made during the interview.
- Describe the setting in detail. Drawings of space and furniture arrangement might be included with this verbal description. The reader should be able to completely visualize the setting.

- Describe in detail the activities that took place in the setting, including the sequence of actions and behaviors.
- Describe people who took part in the activity with their actions and behaviors.
- Include dialog with exact quotes or close approximations of comments that relate directly to area of concern. Indicate who made each comment, and the circumstances under which the comment was made.
- Describe specific details, remarks and behavior, not broad general descriptions lacking specifics.
- Include meaning of what was observed from perspective of participant.
- Describe any impact your presence had on the situation being observed.
- Statements recorded in this section should be non-judgmental and should not show the observer or interviewer's biases.

Rubrics:

Rubrics are performance standards and scoring criteria. They specify what good, adequate and poor performances are. Rubrics provide reliability or consistency among grades for students with similar levels of mastery while helping to communicate competencies and level of achievement. While they can be difficult to construct, they save time in the long run and assure consistency in grading.

Sample rubric based on 4-point scale:

- 0 = missing descriptive and/or reflective section; both sections present but violates general format criteria
- 1 = includes descriptive and reflective sections; brief summary only; contains generalities rather than in-depth descriptions
- 2 = superficial discussion; lacking insights or follow-up questions to accompany adequate descriptive section
- 3 = good descriptive with some reflection, but could be more in-depth
- 4 = detailed description with thoughtful, thorough discussion raising insights and questions

(Might include sample or two of student field notes if we have a good ones)