

Student observation exercise

[CT edited: 4 January 2021]

This exercise is an introduction to fieldwork. It is not graded – however, it is an important aspect of the module and we encourage everyone to do it.

The purpose is to help you develop your skills of observation. You need to watch, listen, take notes, observing and reflecting on the interactions that take place between people, and between people and the objects and space around them. It is also a reflexive exercise – so you are also becoming aware of yourself, how you feel about being in the space, observing.

You are observing human behaviour, so this exercise is people-based. In normal times, we would ask you to do this in a public place such as a café, a market, a gallery, a train, or something similar.

However, we obviously need to adjust this to the current circumstances. So here are some options for situations in which you could observe safely and within the restrictions imposed by Covid-19:

- An online class or online group that you belong to – you could observe over the course of a few classes or gatherings.
- On your daily walk, run, cycle ride or walking the dog – observe how others use the pavement/road/park, how they relate to the environment, how they relate to others in the space, etc. You could go at the same time on a few successive days, or go to the same place at different times of day to observe if things change and who is there at different times.
- At home – observe your family or house mates. You could observe the breakfast routine over the course of a several successive days, or the dinner routine, or how different members of your household use and relate to different parts of the house/garden.
- Watching from your window – this may be a good option if you live in a city or town where you are likely to see a few people going past. Observe how they act, what they are doing as they walk along, how do they interact with others and with their environment, and so on.
- At the supermarket – only choose this option if you can manage to do this safely. You will not be able to spend time writing notes on site, so you need to remember your observations and write them down when you get home. Even in areas where shops are open, Government advice is to visit them as little as possible, so you will need to take this into consideration.

Ideally you should devote a few hours to the observation process – about 3-4 hours overall. Split this time into shorter slots, based on who/where you have chosen to observe and what restrictions you will need to work around.

In Week 1 (3rd February) we will work out the rota for the class presentations. You will each have a slot of 10 minutes in one of the classes over the course of the term – 5 minutes to present your observations, followed by 5 minutes for feedback/discussion. If you can't attend the seminars, you can instead type out your observations and send that to us.

Before Week 1 then, think about what kind of place or situation you could choose for your observation. We can provide help and guidance via the Chat Room Forum.