

## Fieldwork Essay

Description of Ideas  
Draft 1 Workshop (2 pages)  
Draft 2 Workshop (4-5 pages)  
Final Essay Due (4-5 pages)

Wednesday, January 25  
Wednesday, February 15  
Monday, February 20  
Friday, February 24

Because the focus of our class is research, you will begin the semester with a fieldwork essay. For this assignment, you will need to observe some public space in the Blacksburg area; this can be a spot on campus, a favorite hiking spot, the New River Valley mall, the Math Emporium, a favorite restaurant, etc. You will take notes (called field notes) as you observe people in these environments, and you will attach your notes to your final paper.

Beyond direct observation, you will need to choose one other form of fieldwork to explore (e.g., conducting interviews, taking a survey, or correspondence). For interviews, you will need to interview people in the place that you are observing. For a survey, you will collect responses from a group of people by developing a series of specific questions. For correspondence, you might email a person with expertise in a particular area (the owner or proprietor of the place you observe, for example).

Your fieldwork will be designed to help you answer a specific question or help you understand a phenomenon about your location. You will likely have only hunches and preliminary questions until you conduct an observation or two. At that point, you can refine your focus and decide what question to ask and answer. In 4-5 double-spaced pages, write about your place and answer your question. To effectively do this you will need to help your reader understand what your question is and why the question and the site are important. You will use the data you collected in your fieldwork as evidence to illustrate and explain your answer. That means that the reader needs to visualize the work or the place and understand how your data answers your question.

### Requirements Checklist

1. You will choose a location and develop a question to answer through your research. What are you trying to discover through your observations, interviews, surveys, and such? Why is your place used? By whom is it used? Asking yourself detailed questions will guide the formation of your thesis. Please be mindful that this assignment does need a clearly stated goal, otherwise it will not be a successful endeavor. You must have a thesis. This may function as a research question within your essay or as a thesis statement.

2. You will not only have a question that you will answer, but you will discuss why this question is important. You are analyzing a place, not merely describing it to your audience. Analyze the details of the place—the “why” and the “how.” Why does it matter? How does it function? How do people see it?
3. You will have at least two descriptive observations. (It is helpful to visit your chosen place at least twice to obtain a thorough observation of the area.)
4. Apart from your description of what you observed, you will have at least one additional form of data collection (interview, survey, correspondence).
5. You will include one visual in your essay. This could be a photo, a table or chart based on the results of surveys or interviews, or another creative approach. Whatever you choose as a visual, it must be your original work.
6. Your essay, at least 4-5 full pages in length, will adhere to MLA format: 1 inch margin, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font. You will cite your interviews, survey, or emails, as well as any outside resources that you might decide to use. If you need a refresher in MLA format and citation, please refer to the Purdue Owl website. I still use it frequently myself. <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>
7. You will also submit your field notes with your essay. This includes the notes you took during your two observation sessions and any emails, surveys, or interviews. You must transcribe any verbal interviews, so record them. Please be aware that it takes some time to accomplish transcribing these. Submitting your field notes allows me to see evidence that you did, in fact, do field work.

Please be aware that this essay takes a decent amount of time, planning, and effort. It is important that you decided early on whether or not you will conduct interviews, surveys, or email correspondences. Your time matters and so does the time of any people you will ask to contribute to this project. Plan head, a.k.a. **do not wait until the last minute to do observations and collect**