



CONDUCTING A MINI FIELD STUDY

Student Learning Objectives

- I will be able to take field notes and write reports about qualitative data.
- I will be able to understand the importance of reflexivity in sociological research.
- I will be able to further develop my skills in interpreting numerical data.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

Part 1 – Gather Background Information

Use data.census.gov to fill in the following table with the most up-to-date demographic information about your school’s ZIP code. Type the school’s ZIP code into the search box on the homepage and hit “Enter.” Then on the next screen, look at the “ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates” table. Click on the table and use the “Product” drop down box to select the 2018: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles.

Note: The data table will be labeled ZCTA5 plus the ZIP code number that is entered. The city and state names will not appear on the table.

School ZIP code: _____

Demographic Information	Data (2014-2018)
Total population	
Persons 18 years and over (percent)	
Female persons (percent)	
White alone (percent)	
Black or African-American alone (percent)	
American Indian and Alaska Native alone (percent)	
Asian alone (percent)	
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone (percent)	
Two or more races (percent)	
Hispanic or Latino (percent)	

Record any other demographic data about your school’s ZIP code that your class found relevant or interesting:

Part 2 - Describe the Place You Are Observing

1. What specific location in your school will you observe? What is the background and/or history of the school and of that specific location, if relevant? And what makes this location sociologically interesting?

To answer these questions, consider speaking with office staff or teachers who have worked at the school for a long time, looking online for old news stories about the school, reading old yearbooks or student newspaper articles, reviewing the school web site, etc. Think beyond the location you are observing to also consider the city or town and the surrounding community. (If your school is newer, focus on the history of the surrounding community or of schools in your district more generally.)

2. Now write a sociological question related to demographics that you will investigate as part of your field study.

Part 3 – Conduct Your Field Study

It's time to make observations at your assigned location. You should observe the location for 30–45 minutes and record good field notes on the Field Notes Template at the end of this activity. (You will use these notes to write a paper in the next part of the activity, so be thorough.) Remember to use pseudonyms when writing about or discussing any students or teachers you observe!

Part 4 – Write a Sociological Analysis

Write a two-page analysis of your findings from this field study, answering your sociological question from part 2. Discuss the relationship between the demographics in the data from *data.census.gov* and those from your observations at your school. Also reflect on your own social identity and how it may have affected your observations and findings.

Did you encounter any problems when you were collecting your data in the field? If so, how did you resolve them (if at all)? And how did you feel during your observation — did you notice any of your own thoughts and opinions affecting you?

Field Notes Template

Researcher Name: _____

Date: _____

Location at School: _____

Be sure to record the time (e.g., 3:30 p.m.) as well as the following information:

- Duration and exact place of observation in your location
- Aspects of the physical setting (e.g., sights, sounds, touch, and smell)
- People (e.g., Who is there? What can you accurately observe about their age, race, and sex? What are they doing?)
- Conversations (e.g., What topics do you overhear? Include direct quotes when you can.)
- Social interactions and conflicts, including norms (e.g., the “rules” for this setting, including how they are upheld and how they could differ by sex) and behaviors (e.g., people’s responses to each other)
- Your own feelings, emotions, and reactions (e.g., Do you feel awkward because someone might be staring at you?)

Time	Notes

Time	Notes