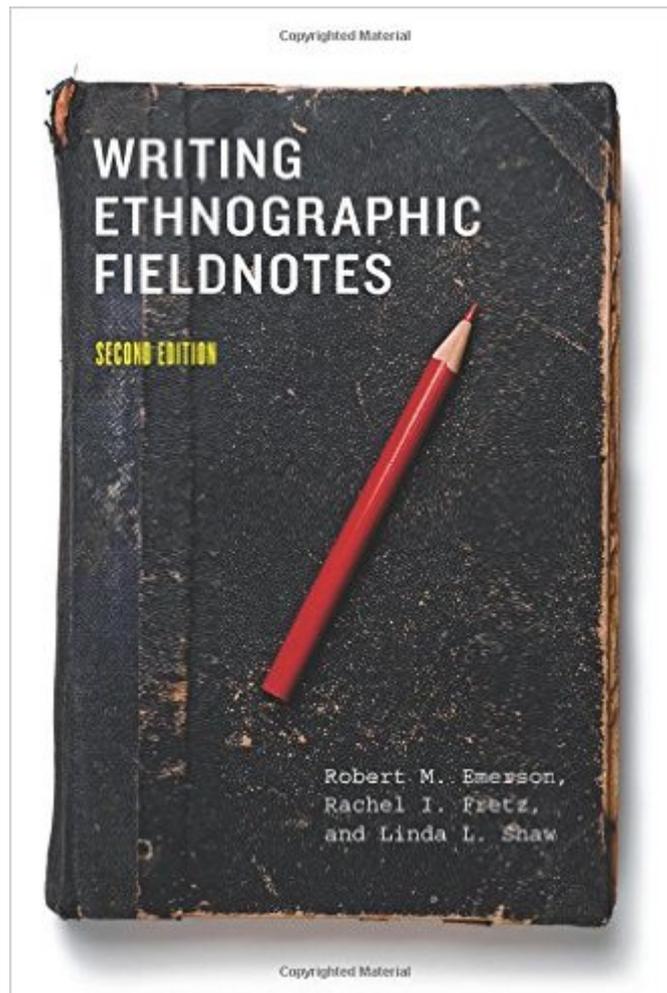


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Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Second Edition (Chicago Guides To Writing, Editing, And Publishing)



Synopsis

In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw present a series of guidelines, suggestions, and practical advice for creating useful fieldnotes in a variety of settings, demystifying a process that is often assumed to be intuitive and impossible to teach. Using actual unfinished notes as examples, the authors illustrate options for composing, reviewing, and working fieldnotes into finished texts. They discuss different organizational and descriptive strategies and show how transforming direct observations into vivid descriptions results not simply from good memory but from learning to envision scenes as written. A good ethnographer, they demonstrate, must learn to remember dialogue and movement like an actor, to see colors and shapes like a painter, and to sense moods and rhythms like a poet. This new edition reflects the extensive feedback the authors have received from students and instructors since the first edition was published in 1995. As a result, they have updated the race, class, and gender section, created new sections on coding programs and revising first drafts, and provided new examples of working notes. An essential tool for budding social scientists, the second edition of *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* will be invaluable for a new generation of researchers entering the field.

Book Information

Series: Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; 2 edition (December 5, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0226206831

ISBN-13: 978-0226206837

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars See all reviews (31 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #8,762 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #10 in Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Anthropology #11 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Research #20 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Anthropology > General

Customer Reviews

Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes was written to fill a gap in ethnographic methods training - students are seldom guided through the process of turning notes jotted down as they do observation into publishable ethnographic documents. Not laden with academic jargon, the easy flowing text makes

this book readily accessible to the undergraduate student - but the content is such that even an experienced ethnographer can benefit. True teachers, Emerson, Shaw and Fretz (UCLA faculty) show just as much of the process as they tell. Step by step, readers are walked through the process of turning initial chicken scratches jotted down on scrap paper to publishable ethnographic documents. Rarely will you find more than a page between excerpts from real fieldnotes. The authors recognize that every field situation is different and ethnographers rarely, if ever, find themselves in ideal situations for writing. Thus, they explain the tensions that constantly pull at ethnographers and also what things will become much easier as ethnographers gain experience. They discuss how to balance observing with writing, and demonstrate that how you write fieldnotes (what you emphasize, point-of-view used, quality of description, representing community members' voices) is just as important as what you write. Redundancy might be a weak point, but overall the re-explaining of things in two or three different ways serves only to make the reader experience and assimilate the process of writing fieldnotes. Readers can then naturally employ the procedures rather than constantly referring to the book as a "checklist" when doing fieldwork. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone seeking to understand the worldview and customs of another culture, or doing social research within their own culture. Even if your goal is not to do anthropology or to publish ethnographic documents, turning your experiences and observations into written text helps you to process things. Writing also helps you gain insights about the community you are working with by increasing your observational skills. You will not regret taking time to read *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw have put together not only an excellent handbook for writing ethnographic fieldnotes, but an insightful study of the practical issues confronting anyone doing interpretative writing about culture. The book's primary focus is on how to effectively take and maintain fieldnotes. They appropriately begin at the ground by discussing how to take jottings and other quick notes, providing memory cues for the later write up of complete fieldnotes. Always keeping the focus on the task of writing, while balancing that with the task of honest and rigorous reporting, they give excellent advice for how to create a clear record of your field experience. While their focus is primarily on an ethnographic style of careful observation of interactions, their ideas remain useful to those with other theoretical concerns. Because they are always keeping an eye toward the end product of a finished, written document, this book also provides an excellent resource for how to use your fieldnotes in order to write a finished ethnography. But this is not just an excellent book for ethnographic fieldworkers. Reading the book not only gave me solid ideas for my

fieldwork, but also for the task of reading and note-taking around text-based and image-based culture. Additionally, I see this as an invaluable tool for someone engaged in more journalistic research, and for those of us who teach and tutor writing.

"Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes" is the only title I have seen specifically looking at the process of how one goes about collecting and writing ethnographic data. The book begins with theoretical issues, then moves into jotting, full fieldnotes, and finally discusses how to analyze fieldnotes and write a full ethnography. In general it is an excellent treatment of the subject and provides very practical advice which is well-illustrated by samples collected by the authors and their students. The authors show a marked preference for interpretive and processual anthropology (there are frequent references to Clifford Geertz among others) so researchers and students with strong commitments to other approaches might not find it as useful as I did. If the book suffers from any shortcoming it is that at points the explanations become too wordy bogging the reader down somewhat. While this book would not be of much interest to the non-professional reader, I highly recommend it to anyone who is studying, practicing, or teaching ethnographic method. I found it very useful and practical.

I had checked out several research methodology books to find out 'how' to keep fieldnotes. I had been looking for very 'practical' and 'down to earth' reference which can offer me the real examples and approaches of fieldnotes. Although there were good research methodology books, I could hardly find the reference for 'fieldnotes'. The content of this practical and theoretical guide to fieldnotes is quite satisfactory and now I think I know how to keep my own fieldnotes. The text size, however, is so small that I got tired of reading it. On the whole, I am satisfied with this little booklet (small in size but big in quality) and I would love to recommend this book to those who are interested in writing qualitative research articles. Jimmy Lee, PhD Student, mmed, Florida State University

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