

Moving from Description to Analysis

Many times, assignments involving ethnographies and case studies will ask you to compare your observations with your working hypothesis as well as with significant theories or course themes and concepts. Remember that it is perfectly okay if you discover that your hypothesis is wrong or that your observations do not fit flawlessly with a given theory or idea. Likely, that sort of disconnect will give you the opportunity to think in interesting ways about your hypothesis, observations, and the concepts you are exploring in class.

When you move from recording your observations to writing *about* your observations, you shift from describing what you noticed to discussing the specific ways and the extent to which what you noticed might support or challenge theories and/or hypotheses. This is the move from description to analysis. The observations and descriptions that you have produced now come to serve as evidence for the claims that you make.

A. One writing task involves grouping observations to show patterns and connections, as well as points of contrast, or unusual findings. Consider formulations like the following as ways of presenting trends or placing emphasis on specific details:

In my observations, I noticed a general pattern of _____ as exemplified by _____, _____, and _____.

Each time that _____ occurred, _____.

Although I generally observed _____, _____ stood out by _____.

B. Another writing task involves making inferences, or drawing implications, from what you have observed. Consider formulations like the following as ways of suggesting possible interpretations or giving explanations for phenomena you observed:

One implication of what I observed could be _____.

One element of [insert concept/theory] involves _____. This can be seen in [insert detail from field notes].

Although I did not observe X directly / explicitly, it is implied by _____.

While it is not possible to say for certain that _____, one might reasonably surmise _____.

C. As you begin to connect your fieldwork to broader frameworks, consider formulations like the following as introductory sentences for situating observations in relation to concepts and hypotheses:

At first I thought _____, but after conducting my research, what I found is that _____.

The work of [insert scholar] hypothesizes _____. My fieldwork shows _____.

In my fieldwork, I found _____. This coincides with my [or someone else's] hypothesis in that _____. It conflicts with my [or someone else's] hypothesis in that _____.