

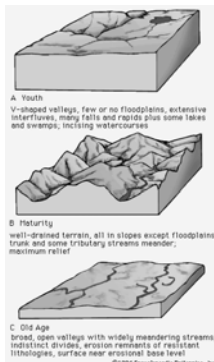
Making observations in the field

Field observations

- Chapters 9 and 14
- A technique all its own
- Used in both human and physical geography research
- Field observations used as 1) primary data collection technique, 2) pilot study, 3) secondary source or confirmation source.
- Must take good notes

Results from observation

- Develop a hypothesis about a phenomenon or environment
- Confirm a hypothesis
- Collect data
 - Quantitative: how many cars turn at an intersection
 - Qualitative: reactions of people to a feature



Why take good field notes?

- Can't remember everything
- Some times the smallest detail becomes relevant later
- Becomes your primary source of data
- May be used in court proceedings
- For example:
 - Environmental land degradation
 - Pollution
 - Destruction by you or your crew

Notes

- Field notes – record any and everything
- Complement data collection with photographs and sketches
- Write down everything - don't expect to remember what you did
- Notes may be read by others – write logically
- Legal and permanence issues:
 - Write in pen – never erase (mark out)
 - Consider a “Rite-in-rain” book

Humans and research

- As with any human-involved research – must be cognizant of cultures, traditions, and taboos
- Examples:
 - Cultures
 - Traditions
 - Taboos

Cultures, traditions, taboos

- Collecting data on a certain day (Saturday, Sunday, other religious holidays)
- Taking photographs or videos
- Shaking hands with opposite sex
- Mixing meat and dairy products

Cultures, **traditions**, taboos: Latin American Examples

- Handshakes are firm and relatively brief. Constant eye contact during a handshake is crucial in Mexico and Argentina. Men shake hands with men and women shake hands with women in some countries. In Brazil, Peru, and Mexico, men and women also shake hands, with the woman extending her hand first.
- In general, you should keep your hands above the table at all times while eating, and pass food and drink with your right hand.

<http://www.pasadenaisd.org/rayburn/Clubs/BPA/contest/Africa.html>

Cultures, traditions, **taboos**: European Examples

1. The American gesture for "OK" using a circle formed by forefinger and thumb is offensive in Germany.
2. Showing your palm to someone is offensive in Greece.
3. Keeping your hands in your pockets is rude.
4. Back-slapping is out of place in northern Europe.
5. Having your hands below the table while dining in France, Germany, and Austria is rude.

<http://www.pasadenaisd.org/rayburn/Clubs/BPA/contest/europe.html>

Cultures, traditions, taboos: African Examples

- The northern countries bordering the Mediterranean are Islamic, and you can expect that the kind of lavish generosity, indirect business discussions, expansive sense of time, and second class citizen status for women found in the Arabic countries is found here too.

<http://www.pasadenaisd.org/rayburn/Clubs/BPA/contest/Africa.html>

Cultures, traditions, taboos:

- Being overly demonstrative with another man is a taboo for men in Australia and New Zealand. And trying your hand at "G'day, mate" is more likely to result in offense than anything else.
- In Europe and Middle East: it's rude to refuse dinner invitations or any of the items proffered to you at a dinner.
- In India: Putting your hands on your hips is rude.

Problems with observing other cultures

- Pre-conceived notions: stereotypes
- Prejudice
- Hostility
- Insider vs. outsider
 - Differing responses
 - Prejudice
 - Ethical issues

Field observations

- Site selection = variables necessary to achieve result
- Sampling – need population or sample?
- Time considerations
 - How much time to observe?
 - Usually:
 - more space = less time *or*
 - less space = more time

Field observations - physical

- Usually sets a baseline – an initial starting point of something
 - For instance, watching how the water flowed through the channel after the rain event
 - Or, how long green-up took in the spring

Field observations - human

- May be one the best ways to collect data on individuals (not a population)
- Examples:
 - Behavior of people – which route is chosen between buildings
 - Actions in response to something
 - Red-light runners

Advantages and disadvantages

- Low tech
- Potentially low cost
- Very successful if plan is designed correctly and technique is best one for study
- May be very costly time wise
- Technique is restrictive on what data can be collected: may need to use in conjunction with other technique
- Can be subjective determining people's actions