

## Mandatory assignments 1-3 for IN5000/IN9000 Spring 2024

### Introduction

In this course, there are five mandatory assignments to be submitted. The first three assignments (1-3) will be carried out in groups and are an opportunity to practice different qualitative methods for data gathering, and to reflect on them in discussions with your group and course teachers. The last two assignments (4-5) are iterations on writing a research proposal. It is a possibility to build on assignments 1-3 in your research proposals. We try to combine working in groups with working with your master topic and aim to form groups of students with something in common in their master topic.

### Deadlines and feedback sessions

Assignment	Delivery	Feedback
1: Observation	Thu February 1 <sup>st</sup> , 12 noon	Thu Feb 8 <sup>th</sup>
2: Interview	Thu Feb 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 12 noon	Thu Feb 29 <sup>th</sup>
3: Reflections on qualitative research methods	Thu March 14, 12 noon	Thu 21 march
4: First draft of RP	To be decided	To be decided
5: Final draft of RP	To be decided	To be decided

This text describes the first three mandatory assignments. In the group, you can choose to relate the observations to your master projects if they are somehow similar or related. Observing or interviewing users of some technology can be relevant for many master topics. The group submits a common assignment report.

## **Assignment 1 — Observation**

The purpose of this assignment is to practice observation and note-taking, and to reflect on observation as a research method. You are free to choose which type of observation you want to conduct, i.e., passive or participant observation.

### **a) Fieldwork**

Go to a setting you agree upon (a public setting or a place relevant for your master projects) and carry out a one-hour observation. You can choose to carry out the observation together in the group or individually. You can go to any place where information and communication technology of some kind is present (e.g., ticket machines, cell phones, computers, digital artefacts). Observe and record movements, interactions, sights, sounds, spatial arrangements, and anything else that strikes you. Take notes of what you see and write as much as you can about the setting. If you take pictures take care to avoid capturing people.

Each group member takes notes during the observation. If someone asks you what you are doing, tell him or her that it is an assignment in a course about field research.

### **b) Individual reflection**

Immediately after ending the observation, write up your notes in a longer, more coherent document. Do this individually. You should spend at least twice as long writing up fieldnotes as you did observing. You will be surprised at the amount of detail you can record in one hour.

### **c) Writing it up**

Meet with the group and write up a report from the fieldnotes of all group members. The fieldnotes should include the type of setting, the date and time of your observations, why you chose this setting, and a rough map and detailed description of the setting. Further, your notes should include a description of what you saw, heard, or otherwise noticed. Pay attention to differences within the group. Did everyone notice the same? Did you interpret what you saw in the same way? Conclude with a brief analysis: What patterns do you see? Do you see any deviations from the pattern? Are some people acting differently or being treated differently?

You can structure your assignment in two sections where the first is the description and analysis and the second is a brief discussion of possible differences in the group members observations and interpretations.

### **d) Delivery**

The document should be approximately 1000 – 1500 words (between 2 and 3 pages of text) and should include minimum one reference from the curriculum.

Take care to write the group nr on the assignment document.

Submit one paper per group in email to [vetleu@ifi.uio.no](mailto:vetleu@ifi.uio.no) and [guribv@ifi.uio.no](mailto:guribv@ifi.uio.no).

Please write the group number in the subject field of the email!

To document that all group members have participated, you will write a group log to be handed in with the assignment. The group log will contain information about the dates of group meetings, who was present, and the content of the meetings (e.g., “conducting observation” or “writing assignment”).

## **Assignment 2 — Semi-structured interview**

The purpose of this assignment is to work with and reflect on interviews as a qualitative research method. You have probably conducted interviews earlier in your education as part of gaining insight in a design process. However, in this course, interviews will be more directed toward reflecting about what can be learned (or not learned) through the different data gathering methods. In other words, you will not be interviewing “a user”, but rather “an informant”/“a community member” about their life or expertise within a certain field.

### a) Fieldwork

Arrange an interview with a person you consider interesting and relevant for the group members. You can use this assignment as an opportunity to explore at least one of the directions you envision your projects might take. We encourage you to attempt to contact people relevant for your topics, however it is also fine to interview someone you know, as a fellow student, a friend, a family member, or a professional acquaintance.

However, remember that you should be able to argue for your choice of informant, so aim for them to be relevant for your topics, for example by using a technology or be knowledgeable in a specific field of research. Interviewing a “user” is different from interviewing an expert in a field. Both kinds of interview are ok for this assignment, and we invite you to argue for your choice and reflect on the differences.

The form of a semi-structured interview means that you will prepare a list of questions but not necessarily ask all of them or ask them in the order they appear in the list. Consider first what you might want to learn from this person, and based on these reflections, prepare a list of topics and questions that you would like to ask them. This kind of interview should resemble a conversation, where the informant’s responses will guide which questions you will ask. Try to keep the interview as non-directive as possible: Listening and seeking to understand the informant’s perspective is key to this kind of interview.

The interview should not be audio recorded. Instead, bring pen and paper, and jot down key terms and phrases during the interview. Each group member is responsible for asking a couple of questions and for organizing that part of the interview. The interview should last 30 - 60 minutes.

Before you start the interview, you have to ensure that you have the informant’s informed consent. See guidelines at SIKT’s webpage (Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør): <https://sikt.no/informasjon-til-deltakarane-i-forskningsprosjekt/> in English: <https://sikt.no/en/information-and-consent>.

### b) Individual reflection

Immediately after the interview, write up a fuller description. Choose one or more parts of the interview and write the conversation up descriptively. While you do this, you should also reflect on the interaction and dynamics between you, the others in the group, and the person interviewed, and any other reflections you have.

c) Write it up

Write a document that sums up the group members' interview notes and any reflections you might have about using this method. You should include a brief introduction of the theme and why you chose this person for your interview, and what you expected you might learn by talking to them. When writing up the summary of the interview together with your group include your names, a pseudonym (not the real name) for the respondent, and a brief description of the setting in which the interview was conducted. Include the list of topics and questions you prepared in advance. Choose between, and arrange the rich descriptions you wrote individually, as to best support a conclusion with an analysis of the topics explored and your reflections. Further, you should give a brief summary of this kind of interview as a research method, e.g. as what might be learned, and what cannot be learned. This might help you reflect more on what *you* learnt or did not learn.

d) Delivery

The document should be approximately 1700 words (between 3-4 pages of text) and should include minimum one reference from the curriculum. As appendices, you may add a more elaborated version of the interview guide your group have used and the group members' individual notes for feedback, but this is not required.

Take care to write the group nr and the names of the group members on top of the assignment document. Submit one paper per group in email to [guribv@ifi.uio.no](mailto:guribv@ifi.uio.no) and [vetleu@ifi.uio.no](mailto:vetleu@ifi.uio.no). Please write the group number in the subject field of the email.

To document that all group members have participated, you will write a group log to be handed in with the assignment. The group log will contain information about the dates of group meetings, who was present, and the content of the meetings (e.g., "conducting observation" or "writing assignment").

### **Assignment 3 — Reflections on qualitative research**

The purpose of this assignment is to reflect on your experiences in the course thus far and discuss it with the other group members. By using the curriculum in the discussion, you learn to connect your own experiences and reflections with the theoretical concepts of the curriculum.

#### a) Reflect

First, you should reflect on your experiences from Assignments 1 and 2 and discuss with the group. To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- Did I experience or learn anything new during the observation and interview? Either before, during or afterwards
- What did I think about interview / observation as a method earlier, and what do I think about it now?
- What have I learned about qualitative research?

#### b) Discuss

In this subtask, you should reflect critically on your role as a researcher and discuss this with the group using the curriculum.

To help you get started, you can ask yourself questions such as:

- What can I “actually” know / learn during observations/interviews, and what are assumptions I make?
- Have I experienced intersubjective understanding with the interviewee?
- What methods are appropriate for which situations?
- Other experiences and reflections

#### c) Write up

Write a document that sums up the group members’ reflections and the different experiences you may have had, using references from the curriculum.

#### d) Delivery

The document should be approximately 2000 words (around 4-5 pages of text) and include 1-3 references from the curriculum.

Take care to write the group nr and the names of the group members on top of the assignment document. Submit one paper per group in email to [guribv@ifi.uio.no](mailto:guribv@ifi.uio.no) and [vetleu@ifi.uio.no](mailto:vetleu@ifi.uio.no). Please write the group number in the subject field of the email.

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