

Exercises for INF5220/9220 Spring 2015

Overall information about the exercises

There are four group exercises and one final group assignment. The group exercises are an opportunity to practice different qualitative methods, and to reflect on them in discussions with your group. The final group assignment is to write a research proposal for an imagined research project. Building on your group exercises in your research proposal is an advantage. Hence, you should try to identify a topic you would like to write a research proposal about early on, and use the group exercises to explore this topic. For example: If you want to write a research proposal about exercise apps, you can do your observations in a gym and interview someone who has experience with such apps.

All the exercises as well as the group assignment are mandatory. To document that all group members have participated, you will write a group log to be handed in with the final assignment. The group log will contain information about the dates of group meetings, the activity of the meetings (e.g., interview or writing field notes), and who was present.

Please write the group number and the full names of the group members in each submission.

First exercise: Passive observation – Observation in a public place (submit by 13th February)

The purpose of this exercise is to practice observation and note taking, and to provide a basis for reflection about passive observation as a research method.

Go to a public setting and carry out a one-hour observation. Choose a place you think will be fun and interesting, and where information and communication technology of some kind is present (e.g., ticket machines, cell phones, computers, digital artifacts). Observe and record movements, interactions, sights, sounds, spatial arrangements, and anything else that strikes you. Be an observer only, choose a place where you can sit and take notes without bothering anyone. Examples of this sort of place are:

- Library
- Waiting room
- Airport
- Farmer's market
- Gym
- Museum
- Train station
- Tram, train, bus
- Café, canteen, fast food restaurant

- Street corner, park, outdoor gathering place (e.g., Aker bridge)

You might already start considering the field site for your research proposals (see p. 6). Each group member takes notes during the observation. Write as much as you can about the setting, and take notes of what you see. If someone asks you what you are doing, tell them that it is an assignment in a course about field research. 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!

Meet with the group and write up 2-3 typed pages of fieldnotes.

The fieldnotes should include the type of setting, and 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? Conclude with a brief interpretation about at least one organizing principle of the setting. What patterns do you see? Do you see any deviations from the pattern? Are some people acting differently or being treated differently?

E-mail your fieldnotes (pdf-format) by 13th February 23:59 pm to Hanne Cecilie (hannege@ifi.uio.no) and Guri (guribv@ifi.uio.no).

Second exercise: Interview: Exploring 'digital living' (submit by 27th February)

The purpose of this exercise is to introduce you to interview as a research method, and to provide a basis for reflection about it.

Arrange an interview with someone you know, such as a fellow student, a friend, a family member, or a professional acquaintance. The theme of the interview is 'digital living'. Within this broad theme, choose a topic you find interesting, and preferably is related to the research proposal you will write as your final assignment. In your group, prepare a list of questions you would like to ask. This is supposed to be a semi-structured interview, which 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. This kind of interview should resemble a conversation, where the informant's responses will guide which questions you will ask. Keep the interview as non-directive as possible. Listening and seeking to understand the informant's perspective is key to such an interview.

Do not tape record the interview. Instead, bring pen and paper, and jot down key terms and phrases during the interview. Immediately afterward, write up a fuller description. The interview should last approximately one hour.

You have to ensure that you have the informant's informed consent before you start the interview. See guidelines at the Data Protection Official's webpage (Personvernombudet for forskning):

<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/samtykke.html>

The submitted description of the interview should include:

Each group member is responsible for asking a couple of questions and for organizing the same part of the interview. When writing up the interview include your names, a pseudonym (not the real name) for the respondent, the gender and age, and a brief description of the setting in which the interview was conducted. Include the list of questions you prepared in advance, and write up parts of the conversation descriptively (choose a couple of examples from the interview). Conclude with your reflections on the interview: The interaction and dynamics between you and the person interviewed, your analysis of topics explored, and any other reflections you have. The document should be 3-4 pages.

E-mail your fieldnotes (pdf-format) by 27th February 23:59 pm to Hanne Cecilie (hannege@ifi.uio.no) and Guri (guribv@ifi.uio.no).

Third exercise: Observation without notes: reflecting on notes taking (submit by 13th March)

The purpose of this exercise is to reflect on the difference between taking notes during observation and writing up fieldnotes based on memory only.

Carry out a second round of observations without taking notes (write notes afterwards). Choose between:

- 1) Passive observation as in the first assignment
- 2) Participant observation in a setting in which you are familiar (as long as you are not compromising confidentiality and privacy of others), or
- 3) Shadowing someone in their routine practices for 45 min. to 1 hour (this requires permission from the person you want to follow). While participant observation implies interaction with your informants, shadowing implies minimalizing your influence as much as possible.

You may choose to return to the site for your previous observation exercise or choose a new site appropriate to the topic of the research proposal you will write as your final assignment. This time, observe without taking notes for at least 45 minutes. While last time you wrote up your fieldnotes based on notes taken while observing, this time you will write fieldnotes from memory. Think about how observing without taking notes affects what you see. If you return to the same site, think about continuities and changes in what you see when re-visiting the place.

The description of the observation should include:

Include reflections on your experience as an observer and researcher. What difficulties did you encounter? What do you see as advantages and limits of such observations? How, when, and where might you make use of passive observation, participant observation, or shadowing? How would you carry out such observations differently?

Write up your fieldnotes following the instructions for the first observation exercise (2-4 pages), and send them in pdf-format by 13th March 23:59 pm to Hanne Cecilie (hannege@ifi.uio.no) and Guri (guribv@ifi.uio.no).

Fourth exercise: Second interview: Audio-recorded expert interview (submit by 27th March)

Purpose of the exercise: In this exercise, you will practice interviewing with audio-recorder. It is also a practice in interviewing with the purpose of getting information about a specific domain.

Arrange an interview with someone who has specialized knowledge about the domain of your research topic. This can be a fellow student, a colleague, a faculty member, or a professional acquaintance.

Plan for a semi-structured, exploratory interview lasting at least 30 minutes. In contrast to the first interview, arrange to audio record this interview. Make sure you have the person's consent for audio recording. (For example of an informed consent – form see the course page.) Draft a list of four to eight exploratory questions aimed at getting an understanding of the informant's research and/or professional experience in the domain of your research topic. You may or may not end up asking all of your questions, and the person's responses may lead you to ask different questions. Try to let the interview develop as a conversation, where you focus on seeking to understand the informant's experience, perspective, and reflections on the domain.

Audio record this interview. (Do not video record the interview.) You will also want to jot down key words to guide you in conducting the interview, and terms and phrases you particularly want to remember. Immediately upon finishing the interview, make some notes to yourself about key words, phrases, and passages. These notes will help you focus when you listen to the recording and summarize it.

Listen to the audio-recorded interview. Do not transcribe the interview verbatim. Transcribing an hour-long interview can take 4-6 hours. Rather, take notes while you listen to the recording and organize the notes afterwards in thematic clusters. Transcribe selected statements as exact quotes (verbatim) for the 3 to 5 points you find to be the most important,

Pay attention to the dynamic of the interview. Is the conversation flowing well? Are there periods when the interview does not flow that well? What may be

the reason? How do the interviewers and the informant react to uncomfortable moments?

You have to ensure that you have the informant's informed consent before you start the interview. See guidelines at the Data Protection Official's webpage (Personvernombudet for forskning):

<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/samtykke.html>

The description of the interview should include:

Get together in the group and write up a summary of the interview. The summary should include: Your names, a pseudonym (not the real name) for the respondent, his/her occupation, a brief description of the setting in which the interview was conducted and the list of questions you prepared before the interview. Further, describe the interview, summarize the key points, and include 3-5 direct quotes. Summarize what you learned about the domain, and include your reflections on the topic discussed. Conclude with your reflections on the interview and the use of audio recording: the dynamics between yourself and the person interviewed, how you experienced audio recording the interview (in contrast to your non-recorded interview), how the audio recording affected your analysis of the interview, and other observations you may have.

The description should be 2-4 pages and sent by e-mail (pdf-format) by 27th March 23:59 pm to Hanne Cecilie (hannege@ifi.uio.no) and Guri (guribv@ifi.uio.no).

Final group assignment: Research proposal

Important Dates:

- First version of research proposals to be submitted by 17th April (minimum 2 pages, max 5 pages, pdf) by e-mail to Hanne Cecilie (hannege@ifi.uio.no) and Guri (guribv@ifi.uio.no).
- Revised version submitted by Thursday 30th April (minimum 5 pages, max 10 pages, pdf-format) by e-mail to Hanne Cecilie (hannege@ifi.uio.no) and Guri (guribv@ifi.uio.no).
- Final group research proposal submitted (pdf-format) by May 15th by e-mail to Hanne Cecilie (hannege@ifi.uio.no) and Guri (guribv@ifi.uio.no).
- Presentation in class 22nd May.

The FINAL submitted research proposals (on 15th May) are not to exceed 10 pages (+/- 1) including table of content and biography (excl. appendix). The research proposal should be set in Times New Roman 12, 1.5 spacing.

The assignment in short:

In this assignment, the group will use the knowledge gained in the course to write a research proposal for an imagined research project.

Learning goal:

The aim of the previous exercises is to experience different research methods and reflect on them. The aim of this assignment is to use these experiences and reflections to plan an imagined research project.

What are you supposed to do?

It is an advantage to build on the previous exercises when you write the research proposal. Your exploration of a topic over the course of the semester can enable you to argue why your chosen topic is interesting or relevant. You can refer to the observations and interviews to argue for choices in different sections of the research proposal. If building on the previous exercises proves difficult for some reason, you can choose a new topic. In that case, you will have to refer to relevant empirical studies done by others to support your choices of topic, case or field, and methodology. You are also welcome to conduct a mini study and design your research proposal around it.

Your topic has to be about interaction between people and information and communication technology (ICT), and it has to be suitable for exploration by qualitative methodology. You should aim to make use of three research methods. This could be interviews (individual and/or group interviews), observations (of work practices, home practices, or other activities), video/audio documentation for analysis, or analysis of documents (e.g.,

institutional documents, specifications, websites, or newspaper articles to be analyzed as empirical material).

Some measures to avoid “free-rider” problems will be implemented: Any problems should be communicated to the lecturer as soon as possible. During the entire period, the group should maintain a log over attendance at group meetings and work task distribution within the group. This log should accompany the final Research Proposal as an appendix, and if there is evidence of a group member not doing a proportionate share of the job, this person will then be asked to submit an individual Research Proposal based on their own fieldwork (i.e. not using the other group members’ work) within one week from 15th May.

Searching for and referencing literature

For information about how to search for literature, see the University library’s literature search guide:

<http://www.ub.uio.no/english/about/services/library-search/index.html>

For information about how to refer to literature in academic texts, see the University library’s page “Write and site”:

<http://www.ub.uio.no/english/writing-referencing/>

and University of Oslo’s rules about proper use of sources and citation:

<http://www.uio.no/english/studies/admin/examinations/cheating/index.html>

Important issues when designing a research proposal

The proposal shall tell the reader:

What kind of knowledge do you seek? Which strategies will you employ to gain this knowledge?

When evaluating the proposal we will ask:

How good is the argumentation on each of these two elements, and how strong is the link between them?

Make sure to:

Use the course literature to argue for your choices.

Suggestions on how to structure your research proposals

Front-page: Title of report, names, course, year, and affiliation

Table of content: list of the sections + page numbers

1. Introduction. Give the reader a short and precise presentation of the content of your report: What is this piece of work about? Describe the motivation for your proposed study: What will you explore and why is this

interesting to a larger audience? Shortly describe what you intend to accomplish with the study.

2. Position your work. Present your purpose statement: Why do you want to do the study? What do you intend to accomplish? Depending on what you plan to study, you can argue that this phenomenon has received little previous attention from researchers (a gap in the research literature), that the phenomenon is of general societal importance or interest, or that an increased understanding of this phenomenon will contribute to the work of particular groups (for instance policy makers, designers/developers, or particular organizations).

You might want to position your work within a review of existing literature. If so, do a brief literature review where you state what is the related research or relevant findings in your area of interest, and state how your research will contribute to this.

You can also draw on the four group exercises to formulate your purpose statement. Did your observations and interviews raise questions you would like to explore further?

3. Research question. From the broad purpose statement, you narrow the focus to one or a few research questions to be answered. In qualitative studies, "research question" is more appropriate than "objective" (specific goals) or "hypothesis" (predictions that involve variables and statistical tests). The research question should guide data gathering. It is a key question that the researcher will ask her/himself in the observational procedure or during semi-structured interviews. Use questions starting with 'how' or 'what' questions. Questions starting with 'why' suggest cause and effect, for which a quantitative approach is usually more appropriate.

3. Present the case or the field. Where will you go to answer your research questions? Who and what will be included in your study? Describe the field setting in terms of where, what, who, when, how long, and why.

4. Methodology. Here you describe how you will generate empirical material to answer your research question. What kind of data will you generate, and what is your strategy for generating them?

Present which paradigm you are working within. Describe the methodology you have chosen, and the methods you plan to use. Justify your choices. Why did you choose this methodology and not another? Why are the chosen methods appropriate for generating the data you need to answer your research question? Could you have chosen differently? What would be the consequences?

5. Analysis. Describe in brief how you will analyze your data.

6. Ethical considerations. How will you protect your informants' privacy? How will you ensure informed consent from those who participate in your

study? Do your case, field site, or methods raise particular ethical concerns? How will you address them?

7. Discussion. What do you think the contribution of your research will be? How do you think it will be interesting, and for whom?

8. Conclusion. Write a brief summary of the text.

9. References. Alphabetic listing of all the texts referred to. For information about correct citing and referencing, see link to library resources above.

Appendix: Log of group work (see first page for information about this).