

Amsterdam Business Research Institute

Ethnography

Course Manual

Academic year 2026 – 2027



Course Title	Ethnography
Coordinator(s)	Prof. Anastasia V. Sergeeva
Lecturer(s)	Prof. Anastasia V. Sergeeva
Study period	May 2027 (Period 5)
ECTS	5
Tuition	€1250 20% discount on early bird registration: €1000
Please note	This syllabus has been developed by Professor Ruthanne Huising who has been teaching the course for the past years. A few modifications have been made from the previous years' course's editions, however, the core and intellectual foundation remains the same.
Course Overview	This is an advanced course on the craft of ethnography. We will explore the process of getting into the field, gathering data, and organizing and analyzing data to identify and theorize patterns in organizational life. In the last session we will discuss publishing so that you get a sense of the end of the line. However, the focus will be on the hard work of getting to that point. This is a hands-on course which will require that you practice the main skills required of ethnographers. You will be expected to work extensively before and during the course, and complete assignments throughout the course period. Because this is a course about fieldwork, there are several assignments rather than a final paper. We want you to get your hands dirty. Why? We want you to understand what it takes to do this work, what can be gained from doing this work, and whether you would like to do this work. If you want to conduct fieldwork for your dissertation, you need to start practicing as soon as possible. Working on smaller projects or assignments allows you to learn from your mistakes in a low-risk situation. Please take each assignment seriously. In doing so you will learn so much more than by passively reading texts and offering abstract points to our discussions. Prior to each session you will try your hand at some aspect of the end-to-end research process. To do this you will need to start early on the readings and reserve time to complete the assignments. This is not a course you prepare for the day before. The readings provide instructions about how to do the assignments and work through the process. After completing the readings, make a plan for how and when you will complete the assignment. We realize that this may not be how you manage most of your course work but it simulates the

fieldworker's life. You must balance teaching, meetings, writing, reading, analysis on other projects and life outside of work with being in the field. Fieldwork is time consuming and rarely convenient. You can use data collected in the course of an ongoing research project where appropriate.

Learning Objectives

After the successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Understand their ethical responsibilities in conducting fieldwork and the processes to be used to protect the people and communities they study.
- Record rich, detailed field notes and design and conduct rich interviews.
- Code and analyze field notes and interview transcripts.
- Work from raw empirical findings to analytical interpretations to theoretical contributions
- Navigate the review and publishing process.

We are assuming you are already acquainted with the basics of social research. If not consult a foundational text, such as W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Science Research Methods*, Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* or *The Basics of Social Research* (Wadsworth), H. Russell Bernard, *Social Research Methods* (Sage), or R.A. Singleton, Jr., and Bruce C. Straits, *Approaches to Social Research* (Oxford).

For ongoing seminars, workshops, and resources related to the craft of ethnography please see the <https://www.ethnographyatelier.org/>

Course Schedule:

Week 1:

May 18 – Forum 5 (HG-1D22) 10:00 – 13:00
May 19 – Forum 4 (HG-1D12) 10:00 – 13:00
May 20 - Forum 4 (HG-1D12) 10:00 – 13:00
May 21 - Forum 4 (HG-1D12) 10:00 – 13:00

Week 2:

May 24 - Forum 4 (HG-1D12) 10:00 – 13:00
May 25- Forum 3 (HG-1D08) 10:00 – 13:00
May 26 - Novum 1 (NU—2A06) 10:00 – 13:00
May 27 - Novum 1 (NU—2A06) 10:00 – 13:00
May 28 - Novum 1 (NU—2A06) 10:00 – 13:00

Ground Rules

Class discussions are the lifeblood of this course. PhD courses operate like intensive workshop and therefore it is crucial that you come to

class having read the material, done the assignment and reflected on any gaps or challenges you experienced. This means you have to go beyond “consuming” the texts and spend time wondering about them. What assumptions, connections, arguments, etc don’t you understand? What arguments and assumptions do you take issue with? What captured you and why? What irritated you and why? How does the week’s material connect with or disconnect from your experience in the field? And so on. Make a note of these insights and ideas so that we can address them in class.

Attendance is mandatory. If you cannot make it to class because of illness or other unfortunate events, send me an email. To promote our mutual engagement and attention, we ask that you turn off your telephone and disconnect from all communication channels not related to our course. We need your full attention.

Session 1: Warrants and Ethics (assignment 0)

Charmaz, K. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *. **Chapter 1 and 2.**

Cloutier C., Langley A., Corkey K. 2026. *How to Design, Write and Publish Qualitative Research for Insight and Impact*. Edward Elgar Publishing. **Chapters 1 and 2.**

Becker, H. S. (1966). Whose side are we on? *Social Problems.*, 14, 239.

Van Maanen, J. * (1982). The Moral Fix: On the Ethics of Fieldwork, *Social Science Methods*, Volume 1: *Qualitative Social Research*. pp.115-139

*Please, note that Van Maanen’s article contains extreme violence which you may skip

Recommended Reading:

Bechky, B. A., & O'Mahony, S. (2015). 16 Leveraging Comparative Field Data for Theory Generation. *Handbook of qualitative organizational research: Innovative pathways and methods*.

Katz, J. (1997). Ethnography's warrants. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 25(4), 391-423.

O'Mahony, S., & Bechky, B. A. (2006). Stretchwork: Managing the career progression paradox in external labor markets. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(5), 918-941. (theory development example)

Silverman, D. (1989). Six Rules of Qualitative Research: A Post-Romantic Argument. *Symbolic Interaction*, 12(2), 215-230.

Session 2. Accessing, Observing, and Recording Social Life (assignment 1)

Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analyzing Social Settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company. **Chapter 3 and 4**. These chapters are boring by cover what you need to know about access.

Mears, A. (2013). Ethnography as precarious work. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 54(1), 20–34.

Ethnography's atelier: "Episode 17 - Michel Anteby: **Access as Data**", Michel discusses access. In particular, the resistance that field workers may face and how such a process may, in reality, offer invaluable insights into the social world being studied.

Recommended Reading:

Becker, H. S. (2008). *Writing for social scientists: How to start and finish your thesis, book, or article*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Kamler, B., & Thomson, P. (2014). *Helping doctoral students write: Pedagogies for supervision*. Routledge.

King, S. (2000). *On writing: A memoir of the craft*. Simon and Schuster, New York.

McPhee, J. (2017). *Draft No. 4: On the Writing Process*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

Zinsser, W. (2006). *On writing well: The classic guide to writing nonfiction*. Harper and Row, New York.

Sessions 3 and 4. Writing Field Notes (assignment 2 is an in-class assignment)

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic field notes*. University of Chicago Press. The entire book is essential and fundamental reading for ethnographers. For the course, **please read chapter 1, 2, 3, and 4**.

Recommended Reading:

Beaulieu, A. 2010. "Research Note: From Co-Location to Co-Presence: Shifts in the Use of Ethnography for the Study of Knowledge." *Social Studies of Science* 40 (3): 453–70.

Seaver, Nick. 2017. "Algorithms as Culture: Some Tactics for the Ethnography of Algorithmic Systems." *Big Data & Society* 4 (2).

Session 5. Designing Interview Guides and Conducting Interviews (assignment 3)

Weiss, R. S. (1995). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*. Simon and Schuster. Chapter **3, 4 and 5**.

Recommended Reading:

Becker, H., & Geer, B. (1957). Participant observation and interviewing: A comparison. *Human Organization*, 16(3), 28-32.

Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (1995). The active interview. *Qualitative research methods series*, 37. pp 1-17. The entire book is there for your reference.

Session 6. Analyzing Field Notes and Interview Transcripts (assignment 4)

Charmaz, K. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *. **Chapters 5 and 6.**

Locke, K., Feldman, M., & Golden-Biddle, K. (2022). Coding practices and iterativity: Beyond templates for analyzing qualitative data. *Organizational research methods*, 25(2), 262-284.

Recommended Reading:

Grodal, S., Anteby, M., & Holm, A. L. (2020). Achieving rigor in qualitative analysis: The role of active categorization in theory building. *Academy of Management Review*.

Locke, K., Feldman, M. S., & Golden-Biddle, K. (2015). Discovery, validation, and live coding. *Handbook of qualitative organizational research: Innovative pathways and methods*, 371-380.

Maxwell, J. (1992). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. *Harvard educational review*, 62(3), 279-301.

Session 7. Heuristics, Writing, and Visualization in the Analysis Process (assignment 5)

Charmaz, K. 2014. *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *. **Chapter 7.**

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., Huberman, M. A., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Chapter 5 and 7. Note that each chapter has numerous ideas. Read broadly to identify approaches that seem to suit the data and then read deeply about selected approaches.

Fundamental Texts on Analyzing Qualitative Data

Becker, H. S. (2008). *Tricks of the trade: How to think about your research while you're doing it*. University of Chicago Press.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Corbin, Juliet and Anselm Strauss. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques 3rd edition*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Glaser, Barney and Anselm Strauss. (1967). The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Aldine de Gruyter

Golden-Biddle, K., K. Locke. (2007). *Composing qualitative research*, 2nd ed. Sage, Thousand Oaks, California.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., Huberman, M. A., & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cloutier, C., & Ravasi, D. (2021). Using tables to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Strategic Organization*, 19(1), 113-133.

Session 8. Bag of Tricks - Analysis of Analyses

Before the session, a group of 3 students will be assigned a published journal article. As a group, you will analyze how the analysis in the study was performed and present your learnings in class.

Session 9: Publishing Qualitative Research

Locke, K., & Golden-Biddle, K. (1997). Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring intertextual coherence and “problematizing” in organizational studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40(5), 1023-1062.

Pratt, M. G. (2009). From the editors: For the lack of a boilerplate: Tips on writing up (and reviewing) qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5), 856-862.

Recommended Reading:

Pratt, M. G. (2008). Fitting oval pegs into round holes tensions in evaluating and publishing qualitative research in top-tier North American journals. *Organizational Research Methods*, 11(3), 481-509.

Shaw, J. (2012). Responding to Reviewers. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(6), 1261-1263.

Medawar, P. B. (1963). Is the scientific paper a fraud?

Zuckerman, Ezra (2008) Tips to Article-Writers.

[Huising, R. \(2016\). Getting Started as a Reviewer.](#)

Additional Reading

The following articles and books rely heavily on ethnographic interviews. Read or browse if interested.

You may be interested to read **the methods descriptions (methods section only)** of those sources.

BOOKS

Anteby, M. (2008). *Moral gray zones: Side productions, identity, and regulation in an aeronautic plant*. Princeton University Press.

Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, morals, and manners: The culture of the French and the American upper-middle class*. University of Chicago Press.

Swidler, A. (2013). *Talk of love: How culture matters*. University of Chicago Press.

Turco, C. (2016). *The Conversational Firm: Rethinking Bureaucracy in the Age of Social Media*. Columbia University Press. (Ethnography of organization: read all of this as highly instructional)

Orr, J. E. (1996). *Talking about machines: An ethnography of a modern job*. Cornell University Press. (Ethnography of job: read all as instructional)

Desmond, M. (2016). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. Crown. (One of the best ethnographers around. Read if interested.)

Zaloom, C. (2006). *Out of the pits: Traders and technology from Chicago to London*. University of Chicago Press. (Read if interested.)

ARTICLES

Ewick, P., & Silbey, S. (2003). Narrating Social Structure: Stories of Resistance to Legal Authority. *American Journal of Sociology*, 108(6), 1328-1372.

Rivera, L. A. (2012). Hiring as cultural matching the case of elite professional service firms. *American Sociological Review*, 77(6), 999-1022.

Turco, C. J. (2010). Cultural foundations of tokenism evidence from the leveraged buyout industry. *American Sociological Review*, 75(6), 894-913.

Viterna, J. S. (2006). Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women's Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army¹. *American Journal of Sociology*, 112(1), 1-45.

ARTICLES (methods section only)

Bechky, B. A. (2006). Gaffers, gofers, and grips: Role-based coordination in temporary organizations. *Organization Science*, 17(1), 3-21.

Huising, R. (2014). The erosion of expert control through censure episodes. *Organization Science*, 25(6), 1633-1661.

Kaplan, S. (2008). Framing contests: Strategy making under uncertainty. *Organization Science*, 19(5), 729-752.

Michel, A. (2012). Transcending socialization: A nine-year ethnography of the body's role in organizational control and knowledge workers' transformation. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 0001839212437519.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignment 0: Human Subjects Training

Please provide evidence that you have taken a research ethics training course at your university or institution. If your university or institution does not offer such training please take the online training course regarding human subjects research offered by the Canadian government (<https://tcps2core.ca/loginLinks to an external site.>). Most research institutions require that you understand basic guidelines related to conducting research involving human subjects. This is not an onerous process but requires that you think about how you interact with and protect the people and community you study. Create a new account and take the tests. This will take 60- 90 minutes. Record your thoughts about this process. Email us your certificate of completion.

Assignment 1: Learning How to Observe and Record (in-class assignment due 1 hour before the end of session 3) – 15%

To complete this assignment, you must read Emerson prior to class. Together we will spend 1 hour observing and making jottings. During this time do not check your email, fiddle with your phone, tweet, zone out, or do anything else except observe and record your observations. During the following two hours, type up your field notes. Email us your field notes and one or two photos of your jottings.

Assignment 2: Design and Conduct an Ethnographic Interview (due before session 5) – 15%

Select a topic of some interest to you and design an interview guide about that topic based on what you have learned from the readings. Draw on the readings and example documents to develop an ethnographic interview guide. Find at least one person to interview about this topic. It is fine if it is a classmate, an advisor, a friend, a relatively, etc. However, it should be someone who can speak to the topic of interest and from whom you expect to learn something interesting. Record the interview (with your interviewee's permission). When you are done, transcribe the interview. Then, listen to the interview again with your transcript in front of you, and critique your interview. Ask yourself questions like: What worked well? What might you have done better? Were there follow-up questions you should have asked? What would you do differently next time? Submit your transcript **and your critique to us.**

Assignment 3: Coding field notes and Interview transcripts (due before session 6) – 20%

We will provide a document for you to code. After completing the readings, code this interview up until at least a half of the whole text. Do this on a printed copy so that we can exchange coded scripts. The coding should require that you take several passes at the data. Submit the scanned version of the document with your coding.

Assignment 4: Writing memos and other pieces in the analysis process (due before session 7) – 20%

Based on the coding and further analysis of the data provided, write two memos with any relevant visualizations (we will discuss what this means in class). Submit your memos.

Assignment 5: Bag of Tricks (due before Session 8 and presented in class) – 15%

Your approach to analysis should reflect the data set and research question. While coding is fundamental to analysis, it is but the first step. The full analysis demands additional

creativity and thought. To guide you in this process, it is useful to have a “bag of tricks”. By this we mean, a file of papers that draw on different and exciting ways of working with data.

You will work on this assignment as a group. We will assign each group one qualitative or mixed methods paper – published in one or more of the following journals: ASQ, Organization Science, or AMJ – that employ different analytical processes that you find interesting or fruitful. Produce a 15 minute presentation in which you summarize how the analysis was done and the possibilities and constraints of such a process. Submit the slides and be prepared to present in the class.

The goal is not to explain the paper or to produce a summary of what we can all read in the methods section. The goal is figure out how they analyzed the data, moving across different sections of the paper to figure this out. Move beyond description of the analysis of each paper and be analytical, moving across the papers to see similarities and differences, advantages and disadvantages, strengths and weaknesses. We are expecting insights not summaries.