context of the broader set of relations with those in the setting. In some situations and relations, taking open jottings is clearly not advisable. In others, fieldworkers decide to take jottings but must devise their own unique means to avoid or minimize awkward interactions that may arise as a result. When deciding when and where to jot, it is rarely helpful or possible to specify in advance one "best way." Here, as in other aspects of fieldwork, a good rule of thumb is to remain open and flexible, ready to alter an approach if it adversely affects people.

Participating in Order to Write

Deciding whether or not to make jottings presupposes some sense for what to observe and write about in the first place. But in the flux of their field settings, beginning students are often hesitant and uncertain about what they should pay attention to as potential issues for writing. We have found a number of procedures to be helpful in advising students how initially to look-in-order-to-write.[11]

First, ethnographers should take note of their *initial impressions*. These impressions may include those things available to the senses—the tastes, smells, and sounds of the physical environment, the look and feel of the locale and the people in it. Such impressions may include details about the physical setting, including size, space, noise, colors, equipment, and movement, or about people in the setting, such as number, gender, race, appearance, dress, movement, comportment, and feeling tone. Recording these impressions provides a way to get started in a setting that may seem overwhelming. Entering another culture where both language and customs are incomprehensible may present particular challenges in this regard. Still, the ethnographer can begin to assimilate strange sights and sounds through writing about them.[12]

Furthermore, this record preserves these initial and often insightful impressions, for observers tend to lose sensitivity for unique qualities of a setting as these become commonplace. Researchers who are familiar with the setting they study, perhaps already having a place in that setting as workers or residents, have lost direct access to these first impressions. However, such fieldworkers can indirectly seek to recall their own first impressions by watching any newcomers to the setting, paying special attention to how they learn, adapt, and react.

Second, field researchers can focus on observing *key events or incidents*. Fieldworkers may at first have to rely on their own experience and intuition to select noteworthy incidents out of the flow of ongoing activity. Here, for example, the fieldworker may look closely at something that surprises or runs counter to her expectations, again paying attention to incidents, feeling tones, impressions, and interactions, both verbal and nonverbal.

Similarly, field researchers may use their own personal experience of events that please, shock, or even anger them to identify matters worth writing about. A fieldworker's strong reaction to a particular event may well signal that others in the setting react similarly. Or a fieldworker may experience deeply contradictory emotions—for example, simultaneously feeling deep sympathy and repulsion for what he observes in the field. These feelings may also reflect contradictory pressures experienced by those in the setting.

To use personal reactions effectively, however, requires care and reflection. Many beginning ethnographers take note of such experiences, but tend to judge the actions of people in the setting, for better or worse, by their own rather than the others' standards and values. Prejudging incidents in outsiders' terms makes it difficult to cultivate empathetic understanding and to discover what import local people give to them (see chapter 5). The field researcher should be alive to the possibility that local people, especially those with very different cultures, may respond to events in sharply contrasting ways. For example, an ethnographer in a Chokwe village may react with alarm to an unconscious man drugged by an herbal drink in a trial-for-sorcery court, only to realize that others are laughing at the spectacle because they know he will soon regain consciousness.

Yet fieldworkers should not go to the other extreme and attempt to manage strong personal reactions by denial or simply by omitting them from fieldnotes. Rather, we recommend that the ethnographer register her feelings, then step back and use this experience to increase sensitivity to the experiences of others in the setting. Are others in the setting similarly surprised, shocked, pleased, or angered by an event? If so, under what conditions do these reactions occur, and how did those affected cope with the incidents and persons involved? Whether an ethnographer is working in a foreign or familiar culture, she needs to avoid assuming that others respond as she does.

Third, field researchers should move beyond their personal reactions to an open sensitivity to what those in the setting experience and react to as "significant" or "important." The sorts of actions, interactions, and events that catch the attention of people habitually in the setting may provide clues to these concerns. The field researcher watches for the sorts of things that are meaningful to those studied. Specifically: What do they stop and watch? What do they talk and gossip about? What produces strong emotional responses for them? "Troubles" or "problems" often generate deep concern and feelings. What kinds occur in the setting? How do people in the setting understand, interpret, and deal with such troubles or problems? Such "incidents" and "troubles" should move the field researcher to jot down "who did what" and "how others reacted." Since a researcher in an unfamiliar setting often pays close attention to others' actions in order to imitate and participate, she can augment her learning by writing down what others do and how they respond. A follow-up strategy that we strongly recommend is to talk to those involved and those witnessing the incident about their impressions.

In this way, the field researcher attends not only to the activities local people engage in but also to the particular meanings they attribute to these activities. She seeks and discerns local knowledge and meanings, not so much by directly asking actors what matters to them, but more indirectly and inferentially by looking for the perspectives and concerns embedded and expressed in naturally occurring interaction. A field researcher, for example, might give close attention to evaluations and distinctions made by members in the course of their daily activities. By way of illustration, those in a work setting may regularly contrast "good" workers and "bad" workers. By noting such distinctions, the researcher learns something about what matters to those in the setting. In addition, by attending closely to how, in conversation, people apply these distinctions to particular workers, the fieldworker may learn how these reputations become resources used to find meaning.

In this sense, the ethnographer is concerned not with members' indigenous meanings simply as static categories but with how members of settings invoke those meanings in specific relations and interactions. This requires, then, not just that the ethnographer describe interactions, but that she consistently attend to "when, where, and according to whom" in shaping all fieldnote descriptions. Those in different institutional positions (e.g., supervisors and workers, staff and clients), for example, may evaluate different workers as "good" (or "bad") and may do so by invoking different evaluative criteria. Indigenous meanings, then, rarely hold across the board but rather reflect particular positions and practical concerns that need to be captured in writing fieldnotes.

When first venturing into a setting, field researchers should "cast their nets" broadly; they should observe with an eye to writing about a range of incidents and interactions. Yet forays into a setting must not be viewed as discrete, isolated occasions that have little or no bearing on what will be noted the next time. Rather, observing and writing about certain kinds of events foreshadow what will be noticed and described next. Identifying one incident as noteworthy should lead to considering what other incidents are similar and hence worth noting. As fieldwork progresses and becomes more focused on a set of issues, fieldworkers often self-consciously collect a series of incidents and interactions of the "same type" and look for regularities or patterns in them.

Even when looking for additional examples of a similar event, the field researcher is open to and indeed searches for *different forms* of that event, for *variations from or exceptions to an emerging pattern*. Beginning field researchers are often discouraged by such discoveries, fearing that exceptions to a pattern they have noted will cast doubt upon their understanding of the setting. This need not be the case, although noting differences and variations should prod the field researcher to change, elaborate, or deepen her earlier understanding of the setting. The field researcher, for example, may want to consider and explore possible causes or conditions that would account for difference or variation: Are the different actions the result of the preferences and temperaments of those involved or of their different understandings of the situation because they have different positions in the local context? Or the ethnographer may begin to question how she decided similarity and difference in the first place, perhaps coming to see how an event that initially appeared to be different is actually similar on a deeper level. In these ways, exploring what at least initially seem to be differences and variations will lead to richer, more textured descriptions and encourage more subtle, grounded analyses in a final ethnography (see chapter 7).

In summary, ethnographic attention involves balancing two different orientations. Especially on first entering the field, the researcher identifies significant characteristics gleaned from her first impressions and personal reactions. With greater participation in some local social world, however,

the ethnographer becomes more sensitive to the concerns and perspectives of those in the setting. She increasingly appreciates how people have already predescribed their world in their own terms for their own purposes and projects. A sensitive ethnographer draws upon her own reactions to identify issues of possible importance to people in the setting but privileges their "insider" descriptions and categories over her own "outsider" views.

Two Illustrations of Jottings

In order to convey how field researchers actually write and use jottings, we provide two illustrations. Both focus on scenes, observed actions, and dialogue rather than on evaluation or psychological interpretation. The two researchers approach interaction in their settings in very different ways, noting different sensory and interpretive details.

"they're not very good"

The following jotted notes focus on meeting a would-be promotor of Spanish-language rock music in a club:

> Jorge = at table doesn't introduce me to anyone
> now only speaks in Spanish
> chit chat — who's playing
> "they're not very good" — apology

These jottings preserve a number of incidents in the club, including where Jorge is seated and the fact that he has switched to Spanish after having previously spoken English. A general sequence of events is laid out: Jorge does not introduce the observer, who has come in his company; there is general conversation ("chit chat"); someone (not specified here) asks "who's playing" (presumably the name of the band is given, but is mentally marked as easily remembered and not recorded); someone (*not the field worker!*) makes an evaluative comment about the band, and the observer notes her sense that this remark was an "apology" (for having brought her to this club), thus providing interactional context for interpreting its import.

"you can call his doctor"

The following jottings concern a woman who is seeking a temporary restraining order against her two landlords, one of whom is not present in the courtroom. The landlord who is present disputes the woman's testimony that the missing landlord is "well enough to walk" and hence could have come to court:

> you can call his doctor at UCLA and
> he can verify all this
> I just don't call people on the
> telephone — courts don't operate that way —
> it has to be on paper or
> (in person)

These jottings represent a fragment of dialogue between the landlord defendant (the first two lines) and the judge (the last four lines; see chapter 3 for the full fieldnote written from this jotting). The jotting reflects an interest in the judge's insistence on legal procedure: he as judge ("courts") will not independently investigate litigants' claims; rather, litigants are responsible for presenting any evidence in the courtroom. Note that only spoken words are recorded; specific speakers are not indicated but can be identified by content or from memory. The words represent direct quotes, written down as accurately as possible when spoken; an exception occurs in the last line, where the observer missed the judge's exact words ending this sentence (because of jotting down the preceding dialogue) and inserted a paraphrase "in person" (indicated by parentheses).

Jottings as Mnemonic Devices: What Words and Phrases?

Each of the jottings in the previous illustrations is "a mnemonic word or phrase [written] to fix an observation or to recall what someone has just said" (Clifford 1990:51). As preludes to full written notes, jottings capture bits of talk and action from which the fieldworker can begin to sketch social scenes, recurring incidents, local expressions and terms, members' distinctions and accounts, dialogue among those present, and his own conversations.

Making jottings, however, is not only a writing activity; it is also a mind-set. Learning to jot down details which remain sharp and which

easily transform into vivid descriptions on the page results, in part, from envisioning scenes as written. Writing jottings that evoke memories requires learning what can be written about and how. We have found the following recommendations helpful for making jottings useful for producing vivid, evocatively descriptive fieldnotes.

First, jot down details of what you sense are key components of observed scenes or interactions. Field researchers record immediate fragments of action and talk to serve as focal points for later writing accounts of these events in as much detail as can be remembered. The field researcher studying Spanish rock music, for example, jotted that the promoter she accompanied to a club "now only speaks in Spanish" while he had spoken English in their prior, less public contacts. She also wrote down a key direct quote—"they're not very good"—along with the term "apology" to remind her of the context and meaning of this remark.

Second, avoid making statements characterizing what people do that rely on generalizations. Many novice field researchers initially tend to jot down impressionistic, opinionated words which lend themselves better to writing evaluative summaries than to composing detailed, textured descriptions. For example, it is problematic for a field researcher to characterize the way someone works as "inefficient." Such cryptic, evaluative jottings are likely to evoke only a vague memory when the fieldworker later on attempts to write a full description of the social scene. Such jottings also convey nothing of how people in the setting experience and evaluate worker performance. Similarly, jottings that a probation officer "lectures about school" and that a youth is "very compliant—always agrees" during a probation interview are overly generalized; such summary statements are not helpful for writing close descriptions of how probation officer and youth actually talked and acted during a particular encounter.

Third, jot down concrete sensory details about actions and talk. Field researchers note concrete details of everyday life which *show* rather than tell about people's behavior (see chapter 4). By incorporating such details, jottings may provide records of actual words, phrases, or dialogue that the field researcher wants to preserve in as accurate a form as possible. It is not enough, for example, to characterize an emotional outburst simply as "angry words." Rather the ethnographer should jot the actually spoken words, along with sensual details such as gestures and facial expressions suggesting that the speaker's emotional experience involved "anger."

Jotting these words should evoke recall not only of the details about what happened but also of the specific circumstances or context involved: who was present, what they said or did, what occurred immediately before and after, etc. In this way jottings may be used to reconstruct the actual order or sequence of talk, topics, or actions on some particular occasion.

Beginning ethnographers sometimes attempt to identify motives or internal states when recording observed actions. Having witnessed an angry exchange, for example, one is often tempted to focus on the source or reason for this emotional outburst, typically by imputing motive (e.g., some underlying feeling such as "insecurity") to one or both of the parties involved. Such psychologized explanations, however, highlight only one of a number of possible internal states that may accompany or contribute to the observed actions. Anger could, for example, result from frustration, fatigue, the playing out of some local power struggle, or other hidden factors; the ethnographer who simply witnesses a scene has no way of knowing which factors are involved.[13]

Field researchers do not ignore emotions; they may well note feelings such as anger, sadness, joy, pleasure, disgust, loneliness, but they do so as such emotions are expressed and attended to by those in the setting. For example, in describing the emotional consequences of routinely "having to say no" to clients coming to a HUD office in desperate need of housing, an ethnographer wrote the following:

> Laura to me, slouched down on her desk, head in hands: "Sometimes I just don't feel like helping people, you know? You have to say no so often. That's a big part of this program. It gets to you psychologically. (How?) I didn't study psychology, but it affects you" (rolling her eyes).

Here the ethnographer writes not to explain *why* this HUD worker experienced or reported these emotions (although she herself points to a feature of her work—"You have to say no so often"), but to highlight *how* she expressed her feelings. He does so not only by direct quotation in her own words but also by providing vivid details of her body posture ("slouched," "head in hands") and by noting her accenting eye movements.

When witnessing social scenes, then, the ethnographer's task is to use his own sensibilities to learn how others understand and evaluate what happened, how they assess internal states and determine psychological motivation. Useful jottings should correspondingly reflect and further this

process of writing textured, detailed descriptions of interactions rather than of individual motivation.

Fourth, jot down sensory details which you could easily forget but which you deem to be key observations about the scene. Jottings are devices intended to encourage the recall of scenes and events in the construction of some broader, fuller fieldnote account. Since jottings must later jog the memory, each field researcher must learn which kinds of details they best remember and make jottings about those features and qualities they easily forget. Thus, fieldworkers come to develop their own jotting styles reflecting their distinctive recall propensities, whether visual, kinetic, or auditory. Some focus on trying to capture evocative pieces of broader scenes, while some jot down almost exclusively dialogue; others record nonverbal expression of voice, gesture, movement; still others note visual details of color and shape. Through trial and error, field researchers learn what most helps them to recall field experiences once they sit down to write up full notes.

Jottings may serve more generally to remind the ethnographer of what was happening at a particular time, in this sense providing a marker around which to collect other remembered incidents. For example, one field researcher teaching in a Headstart Program described a series of incidents that occurred while supervising children playing in a sandbox. Included in her jottings but not in her full fieldnotes was the phrase, "Three new bags of sand were delivered to the sandbox." In discussing this scratch note later she commented: "I don't think it is so important as I would want to include it in my notes because I think it is just—I wrote it down to remind me more what the day was like, what was happening."[14]

Fifth, jottings can be used to signal general impressions and feelings, even if the fieldworker is unsure of their significance at the moment. In some cases, the ethnographer may have only a vague intuitive sense about how or why something may be important. Such feelings might signal a key element that in the future could enable the field researcher to see how incidents "fit together" in meaningful patterns. For example, at another point the ethnographer in the Headstart Program made a jotting about a student, "Nicole showing trust in me," which she decided not to write up in her full notes: "It was just an overall feeling I had throughout the day; . . . at that point when I wrote the jottings I couldn't remember an exact incident." But this jotting served as a mental note, subsequently stimulating her to appreciate (and record) the following incident as a revealing example of "children trusting teachers":

> At one point, Nicole got on the swings without her shoes on and asked me for a push. I told her that I would push her after she went and put her shoes on. Nicole paused and looked at me. I repeated my statement, telling her that I would save her swing for her while she was gone. Nicole then got off of the swing and put her shoes on. When she came back to the swing, I praised her listening skills and gave her a hug. I then gave her a push. I found this incident to be a significant accomplishment for Nicole, as usually she doesn't listen to the teachers.[15]

Having thought about whether or not to write this jotting up as full notes made this student sensitive to the issue of "trust." The jotting later acted as a stimulus to observe and write up a "concrete event" involving such "trust."

In summary, by participating in a setting with an eye to making jottings, an ethnographer experiences events as potential subjects for writing. Like any other writer, an ethnographer learns to recognize potential writing material and to see and hear it in terms of written descriptions. Learning to observe in order to make jottings thus is keyed to both the scene and to the page. Ethnographers learn to experience through the senses in anticipation of writing: to remember dialogue and movement like an actor; to see colors, shapes, textures, and spatial relations as a painter or photographer; and to sense moods, rhythms, and tone of voice like a poet. Details experienced through the senses turn into jottings with active rather than passive verbs, sensory rather than analytic adjectives, and verbatim rather than summarized dialogue.

Reflections: Writing and Ethnographic Marginality

While a primary goal of ethnography is immersion in the life-worlds and everyday experiences of a group of people, the ethnographer inevitably remains in significant ways an outsider to the worlds of those studied. Immersion is not merging; the field researcher who seeks to "get close to" others usually does not become one of these others but rather continues to be a researcher interested in and pursuing research issues, albeit in close proximity to the ordinary exigencies of life that these others experience and react to (see Bittner 1988; Emerson 1987).[16] The ethnographer, then, stays at least a partial stranger to the worlds of the studied, despite sharing in many aspects of their daily lives. The student-ethnographer working in a bookstore noted that the pull toward involvement as an insider was particularly strong and the researcher's stance difficult to maintain: