

Ethics Contract
Department of Anthropology
Gettysburg College

On Interviewing:

1. Anthropology students who are interviewing people for class assignments or honors theses must follow these guidelines, which are essentially matters of common sense and common courtesy:

- ▶ Explain that the interview is for a class project, and specify the class and professor.
- ▶ Do not put any kind of pressure on the people you are interviewing.
- ▶ Do not make them feel obligated to respond to every question.
- ▶ Remind them that they may stop the interview at any time.
- ▶ If a line of inquiry turns out to be embarrassing or uncomfortable, make sure to ask the interviewee if he or she would like to continue and give them the option of moving onto another topic.

2. If you make audio or video recordings:

- ▶ Obtain permission to record the interview before turning on the device (never record if permission is not granted).
- ▶ Turn it off immediately if requested to do so; you may ask once per session for permission to turn it on again.
- ▶ Tell the subject honestly who will be allowed to see/hear the tape and keep your word. You should not play the tape for anyone but your instructor unless identity is completely concealed.
- ▶ Tell the subject honestly what you will do with the tape when the project is finished (erase it, give it to the subject, save it for future research). If the subject does not want you to save the tape, promise him or her in writing that you will give the tape to them or to your instructor for erasure, and give a copy of this agreement to the instructor.
- ▶ You may not copy the tape without explicit permission from the subject, and any agreement you make about the original tape applies to all of its copies.

3. When you write up or discuss your results, do not use the subject's real name, do not include information that would identify the subject, and in all ways treat research subjects as you yourself would want to be treated.

On Participant-Observation:

1. In “public” spaces like malls, parks, and streets, you may engage in “pure observation” of what people are doing without consent from individuals.¹ However, be aware of these restrictions:

- ▶ you may not record observations on illegal activities.
- ▶ You may not eavesdrop on private conversations but you should only observe non-verbal communication among individuals.
- ▶ You may not follow particular individuals who walk away from the space where you are making your observations, but you must focus only on social activities that take place in a specific area.
- ▶ You should honestly respond to anyone who asks what you are doing.
- ▶ See your instructor if you are not sure that a particular setting is considered “public”

2. Certain spaces are open to groups but are not considered “public.” See the following cases:

- a) if you are working with a **closed group** (one with fixed membership, like a campus club, a support group, a class, or a faculty committee): First explain your research to the director or head of the group. If he/she approves, publicly announce your intent to observe and record people’s behaviors and conversations,

¹ As DeWalt and DeWalt (2002:18) define it, pure observation “seeks . . . to remove the researcher from the actions and behaviors so that they are unable to influence him or her.” It involves no direct questioning of informants.

then offer people the opportunity for participants to reject or question your presence at that time. Give people your email address so they can contact you privately with any concerns.

b) if you are working with an **open group** (one with fluid membership, like a church, a community group, a public program, or a party in a private residence): First explain your research to the owner of the establishment or the director of the program, and get his or her permission to do anthropological research. Although you do not need to announce your presence to attendees, you should make an effort to explain your research to people with whom you converse, particularly when you ask them questions about your research project. Those individuals who state that they do not want to be observed should not be included in the study (do not take notes on them).

c) if you are working in a **private business establishment** like a shop or a bar, you should ideally get permission from the owner before you begin conducting research. As in the case above, you do not need to obtain permission from attendees to simply observe them, but if you ask people questions you should explain your intent.

Email Donna Perry, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, to attest that you agree to adhere to the ethical standards outlined above.