

## Making Field Notes

Everyone who needs to gather original information needs to make notes. This includes reporters, waitresses, EMTs, doctors, writers, anthropologists, lawyers, scientists, and salesmen. It includes most people. Many people create forms to guide them into noting very specific details. For many scientists, part of designing an experiment is designing the note-taking form, so right information can be gathered at specified times.

### Jottings

Jottings are running records of what you observe. Write freely and lushly. Details are more important than style, so record observations and thoughts as they come, without worrying about spelling or complete sentences or punctuation. Use lots of adjectives, to record as much information as possible. There will be time later for editing.

Jottings need to be written into more formal field notes quickly, they lose most of their value. Postponing this can turn it into a dreadful task.

### Observations, Feelings, Ideas, Questions

*Observation:* Late season snowstorm, hundreds of trees damaged, trees already leafed out,

*Feeling:* Mildly depressing to see yet more snow

*Idea:* [People saved from drought by the the worst storm damage in decades.]

*Question:* [What is record latest date for snow in this location?]

### Sensory Check

What do you See? Hear? Feel? Smell? Taste?

### Try to Record People's Speech Verbatim

"Put quotation marks around verbatim statements."

'Put apostrophes around paraphrases.'

Don't put any punctuation around summaries in your own words.

*Note the speaker's tones, gestures, facial expressions, emotions, and reactions as well as what provokes these reactions. Be careful not to start recording emotional states instead of behavioral observations. Saying "He became angry" is much less useful than recording "He grimaced and slammed his fist on the table. His voice became louder."*

If everything goes well, you'll move from jottings to compete field notes to final written products, which may be reports or essays, but that might also be scripts, web pages, radio shows, short stories or poems, letters, or nonfiction books.

Whatever it is that you are trying to accomplish, making field notes is a way of taking control of your consciousness, of developing the discipline to keep the spotlight of your attention moving, hunting for details that make the moment worth remembering, so that what might matter actually makes it from your eyes and ears into your mind and from your mind into a durable record that others might use.