

During this semester you are going to be doing some anthropological fieldwork; you will be interviewing a foreign-born informant about the culture they were raised in, and will hand in a written report. You will have to find such a person to work with for the rest of the semester. You should begin by reading the section on interviewing on pages 54 & 55 of the Haviland textbook. Then locate an informant who is willing to work with you, and have them sign the form on the last page and turn it in to me before you start the recorded part of the interview.

Your informant must have been born and raised in a non-English-speaking country, in a family where English was not the first language (exceptions: you may instead use someone raised in a strict Amish home or on an American Indian reservation; you may use someone from Puerto Rico or Jamaica or French Canada. See me about these and other exceptions). Avoid using anyone who was raised in a Westernized, urban environment; in general, the more rural, the better. It is best to talk to two or three potential informants before you actually select one to interview. If you are shy about finding an informant, good sources are hospital staffs, nursing home residents (some administrators encourage such activities), people taking "English as a foreign language" at local schools, employees of ethnic restaurants, exchange students, and relatives of your friends (one strategy is to tell everyone you know that you are looking for an informant). More than ten percent of the faculty, staff, and student body at IUN are actually foreign born, as are almost ten percent of the entire NW Indiana population. If you have a informant who is a "maybe" according to these rules, check with me first.

Choosing an unfamiliar culture usually results in a better paper -- you won't assume that you understand the meanings and significance of things and behaviors and will ask more "WHY" questions. If you do wish to investigate your own ethnic background, YOU CANNOT USE your own parents, nor any relative that you ever lived with. The reason for this rule is simple: the report must be based on the interview, not on what you may have learned from your close relatives in the past (it is also true that people that you know well are less likely to take you seriously and may be easily distracted). If you yourself were born in a foreign country, you must interview someone who is not from that same country (and not born in America, either).

Every semester the interviews center around a different topic; the specific topic for this semester is **How family members used the space in their childhood home**. Space is an important part of culture; studying the use of a particular space gives information on gender roles, statuses, even religion and economics. Detailed suggested approaches for that section can be found on a later page.

Your report is to be a record of your interviews with your informant about particular events and experiences (REAL), NOT an encyclopedia-like article on another culture (IDEAL). You are to guide your informant by your questions to try to get a look at one aspect of their native culture as seen through their eyes and as they experienced it as a juvenile. Try to get specific instances that illustrate your topic. Be sure that you direct your questions to get the "real" and not just the "ideal"; get actual experiences that they had, not just general statements: for example, if the topic were clothing, statements like "in Albania all men wear skirts" are insufficient -- better to ask for descriptions of his skirt, and if he and his father actually wore skirts all the time. Also don't settle for "it's just like here"-- America has many subcultures and variations; life is very different in many details for people in rural Indiana than it is for those in urban Chicago. So repeat the question and ask for specific details,

rephrase or explain your question if needed. Your interpretations of what you discover in your interview are also desired as a part of your conclusion, especially if they comment on the concepts of REAL and IDEAL and/or EMIC and ETIC.

*The Emic perspective: the "insider's" or "native's" interpretation of or "reasons" for his or her customs/beliefs. What things mean to the members of a society. Also called "folk" perspective.*  
*The Etic perspective: the external researcher's interpretation of the same customs/beliefs. What things mean from an analytical, anthropological perspective. Also called "analytic" or "Science"*  
*The anthropologist usually takes both emic and etic interpretations into account when analyzing human society (depending on the project). – Dr. Kathleen A. Dahl*

On page 64 your textbook calls the ETIC approach by the term "materialist perspective", and the EMIC approach by the term "idealistic perspective" – which is NOT the same as IDEAL culture.

It should take two or three sessions (30 to 60 minutes each) to complete your interview after you turn in the signed permission form. Do not try to do it in one long session. You could do Part B and some of Part C in the first session. It is important to spread your interview about Part C over at least two recorded sessions because as you look over your notes after the first session, you will think of more questions, and your informant's memory will be jogged. So begin writing up the first session before you conduct the second session. Also your informant will tend to recall more after their memory has been jogged by the first session. Definitely do most of the interview face-to-face and tape record it, but additional last minute questions and clarifications can be done by phone or email. The interview must be audio recorded, and the tapes or CD's must be handed in with your written reports. Most students already own a small recorder; the digital ones or the tape ones that use music-size cassettes are much better for this than the tape ones that use micro cassettes, but any are acceptable. Students have even used cell phones and winbooks and laptops to record the audio, just be sure you can burn it to a CD or email it to me as an audio attachment. If you do not have an audio recorder, you can borrow one from the Anthropology Club. Go to the Anthropology Office in Lindenwood 214 between 8 am and 5 pm Monday thru Thursday or Friday before 2 pm; you will need to show your student ID to the secretary and leave a refundable \$20 cash deposit. But you have to supply your own tapes and batteries, and don't wait, as they only have a few to lend out.

You only have until Thursday February 4 to find an informant, have them sign the INFORMANT AGREEMENT form, and hand that in. If they refuse to sign the form, or refuse to give their address or phone number, or refuse to let you tape record the interview, you must find another informant. The successful strategy is to find two or three potential informants and talk to them all for a few minutes each; then you will likely have a choice of informants and can choose the one you feel most comfortable with. Finding a good informant will result in a better interview, and hence a better grade.

The complete interview is due on Tuesday February 23, just a month from now. I will accept late reports, but you lose points, so start right away. You MUST do the interview project to pass the course. Be sure to write down information such as the times, dates, duration, and circumstances of the interview sessions, as these are part of the scientific record of your fieldwork; I will pass out a form for you to fill out on this.

This whole project counts 20% of your grade; that is enough to make it worth putting some effort into it, but not so much that it has to be perfect for you to get an A in the course. In fact this is just a training exercise, and I do not expect professional quality interviews; I just need to see that you followed the instructions and learned something about the interview process, and about the informant's life and culture.

There are only two ways to fail this project, and since this is a required part of the course, you would fail the course too. One is to cheat: fake reports stick out like a sore thumb and are easily spotted, Copies of old interviews are also easy to spot, as the topics and instructions change from semester to semester. The other way to fail is to wait too long and never finish it. So get started. If you have a job, when the boss give you a task, you start right away.

So what are you waiting for? Go out and find an informant.

### **When in doubt, reread the instructions**

This is what we mean by an INTERVIEW:

When you have established a rapport (with your informant at ease and talking freely) ask a few basic questions (that you may have prepared in advance) then **ask additional questions as they are suggested by your informant's responses; how you respond to their answers, making a conversation out of the interview (rather than a "survey" with a predetermined list of questions) is a major factor in your grade.** In fact this is the skill I want to learn. Use the time between sessions to think up new questions based on the previous session. You must tape record all of the interviews, and be sure to check the recording by playing it back after a few minutes each session.

Be wary that your informant may be practicing *impression management* on you, subconsciously trying to portray their childhood as happy, sad, poverty-stricken, ideal, etc. If so, try to work around it.

Please, this should be fun for you and your informant; if you think of it as unpleasant work, it won't go very well; be sure to thank your informant after the last interview session.

The **written report** that you hand in (along with your notes and tapes) should be a readable report about your informant's actual childhood experiences; it should also be about the interview itself. It should NOT be an abstract article about life in another country like you might read in a travel magazine or on a website.

**The written report should have four parts, labeled A, B, C, D.**

**PART A. Begin your written report with a section that explains how you came to choose this informant.** Did you know them before, know of them, if not how did you find them and make contact. Is this person a relative? What made you decide to use this informant rather than any others that you may have considered?

**The main part of your report (the actual interview, Parts B & C) must be recorded on tape or with a digital recorder; these parts of the report should read as an interview, i.e., in question and answer form (like a magazine interview).**

**Examples of question and answer form:**

**INT:** blah blah?

or **Q:** Blah?

**INF:** blah blah blah blah

**A:** blah

or any other format that shows your actual words and the actual responses.

**Important:** I should be able to see how one answer led you to ask more questions that follow a theme that you have uncovered. (After all, I'm grading you, not your informant.) I will look carefully to see how you formulated new questions based on what you learned in the previous session. Your report can be a complete word-for-word record of what is on your tapes, but if you get too much material you may edit it down, eliminating irrelevant material in order to make it more readable, more intelligible, and more informative. But you must not put words into your informant's mouth, everything you quote them on must be word-for-word, and in original context and order.

**PART B. The first part of your actual recorded interview should be about the context of their childhood.** The first thing you need to do when you begin interviewing is to learn about the social situation that the informant was raised in. Ask about their native country, region, language, ethnic group, religion, etc., and describe the membership of the household of your informant's childhood. Then pick a point in time, like when the informant was maybe 12 years old, to talk about. Then have them talk at length (in response to your questions) about their family and home and the town or rural area they lived in. Find out things like what the house was like and who lived there; what the family members did for a living, who stayed home, the schools they attended, whether they were relatively rich or poor, etc. What you are doing is setting the background, the context for the part of the interview. This first part should be only a few pages long. Finally, pull out some blank paper and help your informant to draw a floor plan of the house or apartment at that time.

**PART C. This is the part about the use of space, in which you ask your informant about the things that actually happened in their house, and who was doing what at what times.**

Go over the list of who lived there, and label the rooms. Who slept in which rooms? Where did people eat; did they eat together in the same room always? What other activities happened in the house, where and by whom? Cooking, laundry, bathing, washing, toothbrushing, hairbrushing, housecleaning, dishwashing, recreation, television and video games, homework, income producing work? Always: who, when, and where in the house – in a way that I can picture it on the drawing.

**POSSIBLE LINES OF INQUIRY; THIS IS NOT A LIST OF QUESTIONS, BUT A SUMMARY OF POSSIBLE TOPICS YOU MIGHT INVESTIGATE IN DETAIL:**

What was the daily, weekly, seasonal variation in the use of space?

Describe a few particular events, like a holiday or an extended visit by extended family.

Have the informant help you see patterns of space and activities: males vs female, adults vs children.

Seniors? Children of different ages? For example, were the men ever in the cooking area?

Extend the study of space to the yard and surrounding neighborhood. Outdoor cooking? When, by whom? Did neighbors or relatives drop by regularly, like for coffee? Use of space for that.

Who left the house for errands, when and why? Rules about who could not use certain spaces, or restrictions about what could be done where. Did some activities more outdoors in the summer? Was the use of space changed if someone was sick? Food storage areas, like a cellar. Unused space. Outbuildings like a garage or a barn. What happened there? Shared public space, like a patio or courtyard in an apartment building. Laundry room, even a local public bathroom. Lake, pool? Religious beliefs about the house; was there a more sacred place, for praying or with icons? Did any changes in lifestyle affect the use of space? Like a relative moving in, or out. Or getting a TV. Can you get your informant to describe the use of space during a school day, or during a day off? Who spent most of their time in what rooms, doing what? Some rooms must have had multiple uses, like the kitchen for homework; talk about time scheduling and multitasking. Did most of the family ever gather together for activities: eating, watching TV, social, economic, homework? Where, when? Places that drew the family at certain times, like a fireplace or the one air conditioned room. Where were clothes stored? Was there a workshop with tools? Who used it? A hobby area? Music? The discussions in class should generate more ideas. See if you can determine if your informant's family was rich or poor, and how that might have affected the use of space.

**PART D. The final part of your written report (the conclusions) should have two brief sections (maybe one paragraph each) in paragraph form, not question and answer. Begin with a summary of, and comments on, what you have discovered.** Much of this should be about the house and activities, and how they relate to the rest of their culture: how did childhood prepare them for adulthood? Think "enculturation". The last section of the conclusion **should talk about the interview itself**: how well the sessions went, how well you think you did in getting "real" answers, what you learned about interviewing, how you would do it differently next time.

The best reports in previous years have been about 10 to 12 typewritten pages in length, but length itself is not a major factor in your grade. **Be sure to number the pages, and do not put your NAME anywhere on the paper or tapes, just use your 10 digit IU ID number**, so that I do not know whose paper I am reading. **Remember to hand in your notes and tapes and the floor plan, too. Put it all in a big mailing envelope to hand in with your ID number written on the outside.**

Obviously you can't use all of these ideas in one paper, but just as obviously you must think up your own questions as you develop a theme with your informant, following one answer with a responsive question. Remember, I am grading YOU, not your informant, and mostly on your choice of questions. Try to uncover as much as possible about the rest of the culture through your questions concerning food and the behaviors and customs associated with food. At the same time, be careful not to get TOO MUCH material (or at least don't include it all in the report). Aim your questions towards only a few aspects of culture that your informant leads you into, such as family interrelationships, kinship, sex roles, enculturation, religion, substance, politics, social structure, class systems (wealth), acculturation, etc. Again, this should be fun for you and your informant; if you think of it as unpleasant work, it won't go very well.

## **Suggestions For Conducting An Interview, courtesy of Brian Johnson, UIC Writing Center**

**Ask open-ended questions.** "Yes/no" questions only get "yes/no" answers. Example: Do NOT ask "Did you like where you lived?" instead ask "Describe where you lived; what things about it appealed to you?" **Have** follow-up / elaboration-type questions prepared.

**Don't mindlessly rattle through your questions.** Make your list of questions function more as guidelines and notes. Stay more focused on your dialogue with the informant and their responses than on your list of questions. Be flexible about what you ask; don't be afraid to make on the spot changes. If you simply mechanically follow your list of questions, your informant will feel like they are answering an impersonal questionnaire; you will also turn off your informant and you may miss valuable clues they give you about where to follow-up. Some of your best material may come from unplanned questions that occur to you because you are listening. **In sum, a good interview is a guided conversation, rather than a questionnaire.** Be prepared for some wandering and digression. This is okay; it will give the interview a more comfortable and conversational quality. But, keep it under control - don't let it last too long.

**If your informant doesn't answer your question** (in that their answer doesn't fit what you've asked), don't simply repeat the question: re-formulate it. If the informant still doesn't give the kind of answer you're looking for, then simply tell them in detail what kind of information you want.

**Save your most probing questions for last;** towards the end of the interview, you will have built up a better atmosphere for covering more personal issues. Even with people you know this still applies. But, do not probe too deeply. You may be able to draw out very personal information, but the informant will often feel taken advantage of later.

**Always project interest during the interview.** People can read insincerity and boredom more easily than you think. If your informant detects an absence of interest, it will strain the interview and destroy the extemporaneous and free quality you need to get good information.

**Never indicate disrespect or disagreement** with an informant's personal beliefs. Give a strong sense of respectful neutrality (people often find this comfortable).

**Be wary of interviewing someone who is a public figure** or who has experience with public speaking (e.g., a lawyer). Their answers are usually over-worked, guarded, and self-edited. The freshest answers come from those who haven't been interviewed much - or at all. (But some of the best interviews have come from IUN faculty as informants.)

**Dress nicely:** not too casual (because you'll lose respect) and not too formally (because you'll create a constricted atmosphere).

**It is usually best to not exceed an hour** at one sitting because it's too taxing. In fact if the two of you are not saying much after half an hour, schedule another time. An interview takes much more energy than you think.

## INFORMANT AGREEMENT FORM

Thank you for agreeing to help my student by consenting to be interviewed by that student. This statement is to assure you that this student project is confidential between yourself, the student doing the interview, and the professor who reads the report. The only purposes of this interview are to provide the student with both the experience of conducting an interview, and with the experience of seeing life in another country through your eyes. Neither I nor the university will make any use of the interview: it will not be kept, published, tabulated, nor used in any way for research. It will be returned to the student, and the student also agrees to treat this interview material as confidential. The interview will take about three or four hours to complete, which will be spread over two or three sessions after this preliminary meeting. I need to have your name, address and phone number so that I can contact you if needed for verification that these interviews took place. Your name and address will also be strictly confidential and will not be given out to anyone. If you have any questions you may call me at (219) 980-6607 (Tuesdays and Thursdays) OR (773) 929-0456 (other days and weekends); alternatively, you can email me at [Rmucci@iun.edu](mailto:Rmucci@iun.edu).

PROFESSOR BOB MUCCI  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY NORTHWEST  
Email [RMucci@iun.edu](mailto:RMucci@iun.edu)

INFORMANT'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

INFORMANT'S ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

INFORMANT'S TELEPHONE # \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTRY WHERE INFORMANT WAS BORN AND RAISED \_\_\_\_\_

AGE AT WHICH INFORMANT LEFT THAT COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_ YEAR: \_\_\_\_\_

LANGUAGE(S) SPOKEN IN INFORMANT'S CHILDHOOD HOME \_\_\_\_\_

**INFORMANT: PLEASE SIGN TO INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE READ THE ABOVE AND AGREE TO COMPLETE THE INTERVIEWS WITH THIS STUDENT**

INFORMANT'S SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

**STUDENT: PLEASE SIGN TO INDICATE THAT YOU WILL ABIDE BY THESE RULES**

STUDENT'S SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_