

Anthropological practice

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Social and Cultural Anthropology · SL

IB Diploma Programme Social and Cultural Anthropology SL (first assessed in 2019; 2017 guide). The internal assessment asks you to do anthropology yourself: **fieldwork** in a real social setting near you. At SL it is limited fieldwork (about 30 hours, 20% of the grade); at HL it is a fuller fieldwork project (about 60 hours, 25% of the grade).

In 1958 the anthropologist Clifford Geertz and his wife arrived in a village in Bali, Indonesia. For days the villagers ignored them, as if they were invisible. Then they went to watch a cockfight, which was illegal at the time. The police arrived, everyone ran, and the Geertzes ran too, hiding in a villager's courtyard and pretending to drink tea. The next morning the whole village was talking about the foreigners who had run like everyone else. From that day, people talked to them. Fieldwork depends on **rappport** (trust between the researcher and the people studied), and you cannot plan exactly when it will come.

Must-know for anthropological practice:

Area	Key content
SL tasks	observation report; extension of fieldwork; second data collection and analysis; critical reflection
HL tasks	proposal form; critical reflection; research report and reflection
methods	observation, field notes, interviews, maps and counts
ethics	informed consent, anonymity, do no harm
reflection	your position as observer; what your methods could and could not show

The parts of the task

SL (limited fieldwork, 20%)	HL (fieldwork, 25%)
1. an observation report on a short observation	1. a proposal form: setting, question, concept, methods, ethics
2. an extension of the first fieldwork	2. a critical reflection on the first fieldwork
3. a second data collection, with analysis	3. a research report and final reflection
4. a critical reflection on the practice of anthropology	

Both levels need the same skills: choose a setting and a concept, ask a focused question, select methods, collect and interpret data, consider ethics and reflect on your own position.

Choosing a setting and a question

Choose a setting you can visit several times and where you can observe people legally and safely: a school canteen, a market, a bus stop, a park where older people dance in the evening, a basketball court. Link it to one key concept, and ask a question that observation can answer.

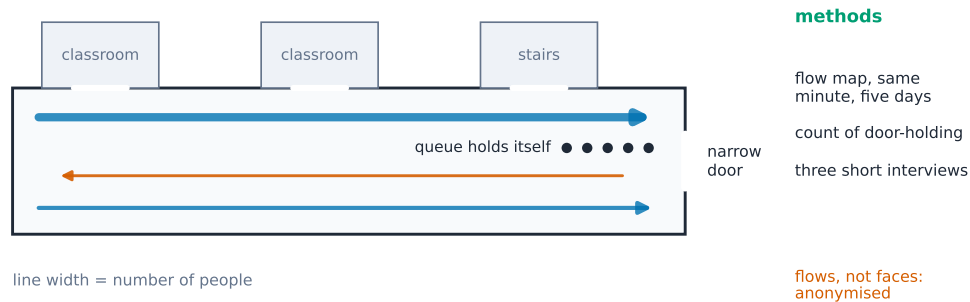
Too wide	Focused
What is Chinese culture?	How do students share space at the narrow door of the teaching building between lessons? (power, social relations)
Why do people dance?	How do the dancers in one park decide who stands at the front? (power, identity)

Methods

- **Field notes** : write what you see (who, what, where, when) separately from what you think it means.
- **Observation**: the same place at the same time on several days, so that you see patterns, not one-off events.
- **Interviews** : short, open questions ("Can you tell me about ...?"), which bring in the emic view.
- **Maps and counts**: a plan of the space with flows of people; tallies of a behaviour.

Worked fieldwork. Question: how do students share the narrow door between lessons? Methods: a flow map at the same minute on five days; a count of who holds the door for whom; three short interviews. Finding: older students pass first and

younger students wait without being told; a queue forms by itself. Concept: power (age gives priority) and social relations (an unwritten rule everyone knows).



A flow map records movements, not faces; the counts and interviews add what it cannot show.

Ethics and positionality

- **Informed consent** : tell people what you are studying and ask their permission before interviews; they can stop at any time.
- **Anonymity** : do not use real names or photographs of faces; record flows and numbers, not identities.
- **Do no harm**: do not observe private places, and do not report anything that could get a person into trouble.

Positionality means your position in the setting. At your own school you are an insider: you have easy access and understand the rules, but you may not notice things that seem normal to you, and other students may tell you what they think you want to hear. Name your position in the reflection and say how it affected your data.

The critical reflection

The reflection is where you think like an anthropologist about your own work:

- What did each method show, and what could it not show? (The flow map showed who went first; only the interviews showed *why*.)
- How did your position shape what you saw and what people said?
- What ethical choices did you make, and why?
- What would you change in a second round of fieldwork?

Checklist

- SL: four parts, 20%; HL: three parts, 25%.
- A setting you can revisit; one concept; a focused question.
- Field notes, observation, interviews, maps and counts.
- Informed consent, anonymity, do no harm; positionality.
- The worked corridor fieldwork; Geertz and rapport.
- A reflection that judges methods, position and ethics.