Anthropological practice

IB DP Social and Cultural Anthropology Anthropological practice full package

Anthropological practice

- explain what the internal assessment asks for at SL and HL;
- choose a setting you can revisit and a focused question built on one concept;
- use field notes, observation, interviews, maps and counts;

Anthropological practice (2)

- follow the ethical rules and explain your **positionality**;
- write a critical reflection on your methods, position and ethics.

The parts of the task

- 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.
- Check the conditions before using the result.

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.

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.

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.

The critical reflection

- 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?

Sources for this lesson

- International Baccalaureate, *Social and Cultural Anthropology guide* (first assessment 2019), internal assessment criteria.
- C. Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973).
- American Anthropological Association, *Principles of Professional Responsibility* (2012).
- R. Emerson, R. Fretz and L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (2nd edition, 2011).

Common errors

- Choosing a setting you can visit only once; fieldwork needs repeated visits.
- Asking a question too wide for a few hours of observation, or with no concept in it.
- Writing up only interviews; anthropology also needs what people do, not only what they say.

Common errors (2)

- Using real names or photos of faces without consent.
- Ignoring your own position as an insider or an outsider.
- Writing a reflection that only describes what you did instead of judging how your methods, position and ethics shaped the data.

Key terms

- **Fieldwork**: research carried out by spending time with people in their own setting.
- **Rapport**: trust between the researcher and the people studied.
- **Field notes**: notes written during or soon after observation, recording what was seen and heard.

Key terms (2)

- **Informed consent**: agreement to take part, given freely after being told what the research involves.
- **Anonymity**: keeping the identity of participants hidden.
- **Positionality**: how the researcher's own identity and position affect what they can see and are told.

Check yourself

- 1.
- How does the internal assessment differ between SL and HL in hours and weight? 2.
- Why did the Balinese villagers start talking to the Geertzes? 3.
- Turn "students and their phones" into a focused fieldwork question with one concept. 4.