CONDUCTING AN INFORMANT INTERVIEW

The informant interview is perhaps the most important source of data collection available to an anthropologist, who studies living cultures. While it is possible to learn a great deal about another culture by observing its ceremonies, arts and crafts, clothing styles, music, and socio-economic patterns, it is only through verbal communication with members of the culture that we can understand what such things “mean” to the culture that produces and enacts them. In this assignment you will be expected to conduct an informant interview using the guidelines indicated below. It is the intention of this assignment that you will gain an appreciation for both the techniques and complexities of anthropological fieldwork. While you might suppose that interviewing is an easy task, you will learn through this assignment that interviewing for the retrieval of pertinent information is not an easy skill to master.

The paper will require: 1) Choosing a topic to investigate. 2) Finding an informant to interview. 3) Collecting data through the interview format. 4) Analyzing the data. 5) Writing up the results. The paper should be typed and the length should be approximately 3 pages of text, plus the actual interview transcript. The due date is November 19th in discussion class.

1) **Choosing a Topic:** You will be free to select a topic of your choice. You may want to investigate what it means to be a foreign student on an American campus, the problems of being on a sports team and trying to pursue academic studies at the same time, drug abuse, crime, religion, etc. NOTE: Do not select a topic which will involve extraordinary expenditures of time or difficulty in pursuing, I am more interested in how you conduct and analyze the interview than in the topic of your investigation.

2) **Finding an Informant:** Remember, for whomever you choose to interview, that this individual is being generous by giving up her/his time. Treat such people with respect and courtesy. Do not force anyone to be an informant. Remember to always inform your informant about what is the nature and the intended use of the data. Also, always keep your informant’s identity confidential.

You cannot use an immediate relative, a close friend, a roommate, or a fellow anthropology student as your informant! Seek out the cultural/ethnic others.

3) **The Interview:** The interview session should last no longer than 30 minutes and should be conducted in a place and a time most convenient for your informant. If you use a tape recorder or other device, be prepared to submit the interview in written form.
The type of interview you will be conducting is referred to as **The Grand Tour**. Working within this format you will ask leading questions concerning your topic of investigation and record the responses of your informant. This forms the interview Transcript.

(Sample): **EGO** (you): Tell me what it is like to study in the U.S. Is it different than France?

**INFORMANT**: (His/Her reply)

**Remember**: You are after as much data as possible. Use their responses to generate further questions!

4) **Analysis of Data**: You should try to write up and organize your notes as soon as possible after the interview. This transcript will serve as the material from which you will evaluate your findings. If you were using the example given above, your data should provide clues which could lead to general statements concerning the difficulties of being a foreign student in America: perhaps differences in study habits, making friends, getting used to different customs, etc.

5) **Writing Up Your Results**: You should follow the outline below for writing your paper.

I. State your topic: What are you researching and why.
II. Briefly describe the setting in which the interview takes place. Indicate the time, what the room (or whatever) looks like, etc.
III. Provide the interview transcript. Try to be as accurate as possible.
IV. Write up a summary of your findings based upon the interview.
V. Conclusion. Be brief and concise.

Good luck!