

**LSO216 — RELIGION AND CULTURE IN CANADA**

**PROFESSOR SLATER**

# **ETHNOGRAPHIC ESSAY GUIDELINES**

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# Introduction

For this assignment, you will write an ethnographic essay based on your observations of a religious service viewed online. In an ethnographic study, the goal is to understand a particular group of people.

You will submit three things to complete this assignment:

1. Ethnographic observations (due Nov 1)  
You will make notes on an online religious service. You will use these observations to describe the service when you write your ethnographic essay.
2. Research notes (due Nov 8)  
You will make notes on reliable online sources to explain significant aspects of what you observed in the video. You will use these research notes to explain significant aspects of the service when you write your ethnographic essay.
3. Ethnographic essay (due Nov 22)  
You will use your ethnographic observations and research notes to write an essay in which you describe and explain the religious service you observed.

**NOTE:** you are NOT to do additional research when writing your essay; you will **ONLY** use your ethnographic observations and research notes to write your essay.

## Potential pitfalls to avoid:

- **You may not write about a religion that you have personal knowledge of.** One of the most frequent problems that students encounter with this assignment is that their paper is not based on observation and research but is based on their personal knowledge. Let me know if you have any questions about this.
- **You may not use information you learned from interviewing friends, family members, or others.** Your research must come entirely from reliable, online sources. Use the [CRAAP test](#).
- **Do not describe parts of the service that you cannot see in the video.**
- **Do not include your personal views about the religion or the particular service you observed.** This is not a reflection paper. Your task is to **describe and explain** as an “outsider”, but to do so from an emic perspective.
- **The subject of your essay is the service you observed.** Your task is to use secondary research to help you understand what you observed rather than to use the service observed to illustrate what you learned through research.

- **The content of your essay must correspond to your observations and research notes.** The content of your explanation must come from your research notes. Any information in your submission that is not in your research notes will be ignored. **Keep this in mind when you are preparing your observations and research notes for submission.**
- All information in your essay must be correctly cited. **If there are no in-text citations in your essay, it will not be graded, and you will receive zero for the assignment.**

**NOTES**

1. Your observation notes and research notes cannot be submitted until you have successfully completed the two academic integrity quizzes.
2. You must receive a passing grade for your observation notes and research notes before you can submit your essay. **If you do not submit acceptable observation notes and research notes, your assignment is incomplete and your essay will not be graded.**
3. Late assignments will result in a penalty of 5% per day to a maximum of five consecutive days. Assignments will not be accepted after five consecutive days unless an extension has been granted prior to the due date.

## Ethnographic Observations (2%)

### Step 1: Choose a Religious Service

Choose a religious service related to one of the religions we are studying in the course for your essay. I have included [a separate file with links to videos for you to choose from](#).

**Note:** You may not write about a religion that you have personal knowledge of.

### Step 2: Make Observations

You will use the [Ethnographic Observations Template](#) to make observations from the video you have chosen. Your task is to describe specific observations from the video. Below are instructions for filling out the template. [Here are sample observation notes](#).

#### Information about the Service

- Video reference—give the reference for the video, following [APA guidelines](#).
- Location of the service—identify the physical location as well as the website of the religious institution, if available. Be as specific as you can.
- Date of the service—This is usually not the same as the date the video was posted.
- Religious group (Religion and denomination, if applicable)—Be as specific as you can;
  - Eg. “Christian” is vague; Christian, “Roman Catholic” is specific.

## Observations

- Your observations should give an overview of what happens in the video, identifying significant transitions. **Use bold headings to identify transitions or major actions in the video.** Include the beginning and ending time with the heading.
- Make a bulleted list of observations under each heading.
- Your observations must include **at least 25 bullets in total.**
- Make a bulleted list of **at least 25** observations from the video.
- **Include a timestamp for each observation**, identifying when in the video the observation can be seen. See the [sample observation notes](#).

Here are some of the kinds of things you might take note of:

- What do you notice about the space in which the service takes place?
  - Examples: Chairs or other places to sit? How are they arranged? An altar or table? Candles? Image or other decorations? Windows?
- What do you notice about those attending the service and the person or persons who lead the service?
- What specific actions do you see? Pay attention to what happens, when it happens, and who does it
  - Examples: bowing, kneeling, raising hands, lighting candles, ringing bells, singing, playing musical instruments, dancing, eating, etc.
- If there is a sermon or speech of some kind, what is it about? What language is used?
- If there is singing, what are the songs about? What style of music? What language?

**Notes:** Only include things visible in the video.  
Describe what you observe, but do not comment on the observations.

## Step 3: Identify Research Topics

You will identify at least ten topics for further research with your observation notes. When making observations, it is good to include a lot of detail about many aspects of the service. However, for your paper, you are going to focus on the things that seem particularly interesting or significant. These will be the focus of your paper — **in your paper, you will explain the meaning and significance of specific things that you observed during the service.**

Use a numbered list to identify **at least ten** topics or questions about things you observed. For example: Are there aspects of the service that you wonder about or would like to learn more about? Are there aspects of the service that surprise you—things that are different from what you expected based on the course material?

Pay particular attention to aspects of the service that might reflect ways that social and cultural context may have shaped what happens, and pay attention to aspects of the service that might be typical of a particular movement or denomination within a religion.

## Step 4: Submit Observation Notes (Nov 1)

- Submit your Observation Notes with research topics identified by Nov 1
- Your observations must be in a Word doc.

**NOTE:** You must receive a passing grade for your observations notes before you can submit your essay. If there are problems with your observations, I will contact you; you will have **one** opportunity to resubmit your observations.

## Observation Notes Rubric

Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement	Below Expectation
Appropriate service identified accurately and specifically; at least 25 accurate observations; 10 or more strong research topics; all format guidelines followed. (8–10)	Appropriate service identified accurately and specifically; at least 25 observations (few minor errors); 10 or more good research topics; all format guidelines followed (minor errors). (7–7.5)	Appropriate service identified adequately; at least 25 observations (many minor errors); 10 or more adequate research topics; all format guidelines followed (minor errors); OR resubmission successful. (5–6.5)	Inappropriate service; inadequate identification;; less than 25 observations; many major observation errors; less than 10 appropriate research topics; major format errors; time stamp missing; level of English impedes understanding. (0–4.5)

## Research Notes (2%)

You will use reliable research sources to explain the meaning and significance of what you observed. Take careful notes as you do your research. These notes will be the basis of the explanations in your essay— **All of the information in your essay should come from your ethnographic observations and research notes.**

Follow the guidelines below carefully. You will submit notes on these sources using the [Research Notes Template](#). Here are [some sample research notes](#).

- If you use course materials (such as assigned readings), these must be included.
- You must also use **between 3 and 5 sources** that are not part of the course materials. **Choose your sources wisely—you may not use more than 5 additional sources.**
- Research must come entirely from reliable, online sources. **You may not use personal experience or information you learned from personal conversations.**
- You may not use videos as secondary research sources for this assignment.
- All sources must be in English.
- Use the [CRAAP test](#) to ensure that your sources are suitable for writing an academic essay. **Pay attention to the particular denomination or movement within a religion that the service represents. We discussed this in Week 4.**
- The URL for each source must be accurate and sources may not be behind a paywall. **If I can't access your source, I will not grade your work.**
- You must give a page or paragraph number for all information, and quotes must be in quotation marks.

## Submit Research Notes (Nov 11)

- Submit your research notes by Nov 11. Only Word documents will be accepted.

### Notes:

You must receive a passing grade for your research notes before you can submit your ethnographic essay. If there are problems with your notes, I will contact you; you will have **one** opportunity to resubmit your notes.

Your notes will not be accepted if they do not include ACCURATE links to your sources or if they are behind a paywall.

If I cannot access your sources, your assignment is incomplete and will not be graded. If you submit links after the due date, your submission will be considered late and standard late-penalties will apply (5% per day to a maximum of five consecutive days)

## Research Notes Rubric

Research notes are graded out of 10.

	Excellent (8 - 10)	Good (7 - 7.75)	Needs Improvement (5 - 6.75)	Below Expectation (0 - 4.75)
Sources and notes	Includes between 3 and 6 reliable and relevant sources	Includes between 3 and 6 reliable and relevant sources (minor errors)	Includes between 3 and 6 reliable and relevant sources (a few major errors)	Includes less than 3 or more than 6 sources; many major errors; insufficient information to write the essay.
Source Evaluation	Complete and accurate evaluation of sources	Minor errors in evaluation of sources	Minor errors in evaluation of sources	Major errors in evaluation of sources
Publication information	Complete and accurate publication information	A few minor errors in publication information	Many minor errors in publication information	Incomplete or inaccurate publication information
Format	Follows all format requirements.	A few minor format errors	Many minor format errors	Incorrect format; does not use template
Mechanics (deductions)	No errors in spelling or grammar  (no deduction)	A few minor language errors  (-0.25 to -0.75)	Many minor or a few major language errors  (-1 to - 1.5)	Many major language errors; level of English impedes understanding; academic integrity violation  (-2 to -5)

## Ethnographic Essay (35%)

**Due: Nov 22; 11:59 pm.**

**Length: 1500-2000 words, double-spaced**

You will use your observations and research notes to write an explanatory essay describing the service in chronological sequence, highlighting and explaining significant observations. Use the sections of the service identified in your observations to structure your essay. Explain at least one observation from each section.

Here are guidelines for structuring your essay.

### Paragraph 1: Introduction

- In one paragraph, briefly introduce the topic of your essay, which is describing and explaining a particular religious service—keep general comments to a minimum. Your introduction must include the following elements:
- Identify the particular service you observed — include details of the time and place that the service took place. **Cite the video!**
- Identify the religious institution and the particular religious group or denomination that this service represents.

### Paragraph 2: Overview of the service

- Give an overview of the service by briefly describing the major sections identified in your research notes. Use in-text citation to identify when each major section begins and ends.
- **Include a descriptive thesis statement.** This is an explanatory essay, not an argumentative or analytical one (See [Tips for Writing a Research Paper](#) for clarification). Instead of an argumentative thesis statement, your thesis should identify the aspects of the service that you will focus on in your essay. You should identify at least three particular aspects of the service to be explained.

### Paragraph 3: Beginning section

- Introduce the beginning section of the video. Use a citation to identify when in the video the beginning section begins and ends).
- This paragraph should include a description of the setting (where the service takes place) and the characters (leaders and/or worshippers that can be seen in the first part of the video).
- Identify at least one observation from the first section of the video to be explained in the next paragraph.
- A timestamp must be included with the citation for each observation so that the reader can easily locate the observation in the video.

### Paragraph 4: Explanation of observations from the beginning section

- Explain the meaning and significance of particular observations from the first section of the video.
- **All explanations must be supported with brief quotes from research sources.** You



may paraphrase from research sources to provide context for your quotes, but evidence for claims (your explanation) must be quoted and cited.

- Each paragraph should include at least one quotation, but quotation should not make up more than 25% of any paragraph.

### Remaining body paragraphs

- In the remaining body paragraphs, you will describe observations from the service and use your research notes to explain these observations.
- A timestamp must be included with the citation for each observation so that the reader can easily locate the observation in the video.
- All explanations must be supported with brief quotes from research sources. You may paraphrase from research sources to provide context for your quotes, but evidence for claims (your explanation) must be quoted and cited.
- Each paragraph should include at least one quotation, but quotation should not make up more than 25% of any paragraph.

### Conclusion paragraph

Your essay should have a concluding paragraph that briefly summarizes the main points of your paper.

**Notes:** Your observations must be central to your essay. Your task is to use secondary research to help you understand what you observed rather than to use the service observed to illustrate what you learned through research.

The content of your explanations must come from your research notes. Any explanation not in your research notes will be ignored.

## Essay Format

You will follow APA style in formatting your paper. This includes a properly formatted title page and reference page. Please see the [Seneca Library APA Guide](#) for a sample paper and checklist. There's also an **AskUs** chat and online citation workshops.

### Your essay should follow standard practices for academic writing:

- Use formal language — do not use contractions or colloquial expressions.
- Write in third person — do not use “I”.
- Make sure all observations, paraphrases, and quotes are properly formatted and cited according to APA guidelines. **NOTE: you are required to include the paragraph or page number when citing both paraphrases and quotations.** See [Academic Integrity](#) for details.
- Include a reference list in APA format that identifies all sources used.
  - Include the video (your primary source)
  - Include **all** secondary sources cited. Citations must include accurate links.
- **If you have questions about quoting and citing sources for this assignment, see [this Religion Citation FAQ](#).** Please let me know if your question is not answered in the FAQ.

**Note:** All information in your essay must be correctly cited. This includes events observed in the video and explanations of observations. **If there are no in-text citations in your essay, it will not be graded, and you will receive zero for the assignment.**

**Your submission will not be accepted if it does not include ACCURATE links to the sources in your reference list.** If I cannot access your sources, your assignment is incomplete and will not be graded. If you submit links after the due date, your submission will be considered late and standard late-penalties will apply (5% per day to a maximum of five consecutive days).

## Submit Essay (Nov 22)

- You will submit your essay as a Word file.
- Your assignment should be double-spaced with 1" (2.5 cm) margins.
- Submit using the link under **Assignments**

**Note:** Before submitting, check that you have properly quoted and cited, and have not violated Seneca's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) in any way. See [Academic Integrity](#) for details.

## Academic Integrity

When you submit your essay, you will be agreeing with the following statement:

By clicking on the above link, I acknowledge that this essay is my own work. I understand that copying and pasting from **any** source (e.g. class materials, the internet, or a fellow student) without correct quoting and citing will be considered plagiarism. This or any other contravention of Seneca's Academic Integrity Policy (i.e. Plagiarising, using generative artificial intelligence, Contract Cheating, Falsification, Impersonation, or submitting a previously submitted assignment) will result in the assignment being forwarded to the Academic Integrity Committee. See Seneca's [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Below are some reminders about how to maintain academic integrity in your work. They are based on [What is an Academic Integrity Offence?](#) and [Common Misconceptions](#) by Seneca's Teaching & Learning Centre. You have seen all of these before; this reminder is based on the problems I have encountered most frequently with this assignment. The following five things are all academic integrity offenses. **For examples, see [How to Avoid Plagiarism](#)**

1. **Missing In-Text Citations.** Every time you use information from a source, you must use in-text citation to identify the source. This applies to paraphrases as well as quotations. **NOTE: you are required to include the paragraph or page number when citing both paraphrases and quotations.**
2. **Misleading or Falsified Citations.** You must ONLY cite sources that you have used. Citing sources that are misleading or falsified in any way is plagiarism because you are not

giving credit to sources you actually used. It is also a form of cheating because you are trying to improve your grade by dishonesty or deception.

3. **Unidentified Sources.** Each source cited must ALSO appear in your reference list. The reference list format should match the citation format so that the reader can identify each of the sources cited.
4. **Misrepresenting Copied Words.** If you copy words from a source, you MUST put them in quotation marks to avoid plagiarism. Replacing copied words or phrases with synonyms is also plagiarism. This is true even if you reverse the order of clauses in a sentence.
5. **Using Automated Writing Tools.** Your work should be entirely your own. Using writing tools that incorporate generative AI, such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, Spinbot, Quillbot, or translation software is an academic integrity offense.

**See the next page for the grading rubric**

## Essay Rubric

	Excellent	Good	Needs Improvement	Below Expectation
Structure (5)	On-topic and well organized; service and religious tradition accurately identified; clear thesis statement; body paragraphs support thesis; includes conclusion  (4 - 5)	On-topic and organized; service and religious tradition identified (minor errors); includes thesis statement; body paragraphs support thesis (minor errors); includes conclusion  (3 - 3.75)	On-topic; some problems with organization; service and religious tradition identified (major errors); includes thesis statement; body paragraphs support thesis (major errors); includes conclusion  (2.5 - 2.75)	Assignment not on topic; disorganized; service or religious tradition not identified; no thesis; body paragraphs unclear or do not support thesis; no conclusion; insufficient length; level of English impedes understanding  (0 - 2.25)
Observation (10)	Excellent use of clear and accurate observations to support thesis; timestamp included for all observations; observations correspond to observation notes  (8 - 10)	Good use of observations to support thesis; minor errors of accuracy or clarity; timestamp included for observations; observations correspond to observation notes (minor errors)  (6 - 7.75)	Observations support thesis; many errors of accuracy or clarity; timestamp missing for some observations; observations correspond to observation notes (major errors)  (5 - 5.75)	Observations do not support thesis; inaccurate; unclear; timestamp missing for many observations; observations do not correspond to observations notes; insufficient length; level of English impedes understanding  (0 - 4.75)
Explanation (10)	Explanations are clear and accurate; excellent use of course materials and from 3 - 6 reliable and relevant research sources; corresponds to research notes  (8 - 10)	Explanations are clear and accurate (minor errors); good use of course materials and from 3 - 6 sources; minor problems with some sources; corresponds to research notes (minor errors)  (6 - 7.75)	Some errors of clarity or accuracy; course materials and from 3-6 sources used; problems with reliability or relevance of some sources; corresponds to research notes (major errors)  (5 - 5.75)	Unclear; not accurate; less than three additional sources used; sources not reliable or relevant; does not correspond to research notes; insufficient length; level of English impedes understanding  (0 - 4.75)
Mechanics /0 Note: You can only lose marks here	Spelling and grammar is flawless throughout; citation and reference list follows APA guidelines.  No deduction	Some spelling and grammar errors; citation and reference list follows APA guidelines (minor errors).  (-0.25 to -1)	Many spelling and grammar errors, but do not impede meaning; follows APA guidelines with significant errors.  (-1.25 to -2)	Significant spelling and grammar errors; level of English impedes understanding; missing citations; APA guidelines not followed; academic integrity violation.  (-2.25 to -15)