



A Zine on Ethnographic Writing

This booklet grew out of a series of small, cozy gatherings hosted by Storying Otherwise: A Hub for Creative Ethnographic Writing. These gatherings, titled "Writing Prompts," were designed to spark conversations between faculty and graduate students about the writing process.

Held over coffee, tea, and afternoon treats on the unceded territory of the Syilx Okanagan Nation, the series was intentionally intimate, informal, and thoughtfully paced. We're grateful to gather, think, and write on this land, and to learn from one another in ways that honour that responsibility.

We believe the insights shared during these sessions are simply too valuable to keep to ourselves. So we've gathered them here in zine form, hoping they'll inspire, provoke, and support your own writing journey.

Warm thanks to Dr. John Song Pae Cho, Dr. Justin Haruyama, and Dr. Laura Meek for their generosity, time, and willingness to share their trajectories with us!

1

In ethnography, your contribution will come out of your unique data. Choose the most perplexing story as a place to start. New theories come from the stuff that doesn't make sense and does not fit. And dwelling in that space of not knowing is uncomfortable.

STAY CLOSE TO YOUR
STORIES. DWELL IN THAT.

Start with op-eds and academic association online venues, for example, a 2000-word piece for an online venue related to your research.



Hacks to stay
focused on writing:

Make a spreadsheet of the journals, read their abstracts closely, make sure you are a good fit. But be ready to be rejected. Every year, aim high and get ready for lots of rejections. But think about rejections as a place to receive free peer reviews, to help you grow your piece theoretically.

1. Cold Turkey Writer is a free software program: turns your computer into a typewriter.
2. Set a word count, and then lock up the computer until you reach your target.
3. Put your phone behind multiple doors.
4. Give yourself permission to write whatever comes out.

2



"As I analyze the interviews, I develop larger analytical concepts and categories by treating these narratives as windows into broader topics that resonate beyond just gender and sexuality. For example, the struggles of Korean gay men coming out can reflect wider tensions between individualism and collectivism in Korean society. At the same time, I situate these concepts within relevant scholarship across different fields—drawing from anthropology, queer/LGBT studies, and Korean/Asian studies—to ground my work in a broader interdisciplinary context."

WHAT IS A "FIELD" AFTER ALL?

While graduate students are often taught to think of the "field" as an objective space with established boundaries and a core set of concepts, John sees it differently. He understands the field as something you perform—a way of crafting the intellectual and historical context that gives your research meaning. For John, a field is also a community: a group of scholars with whom you align yourself socially, intellectually, and politically. These are the people you encounter at specific conferences, find in particular journals, and hope to engage with as part of a broader intellectual project.



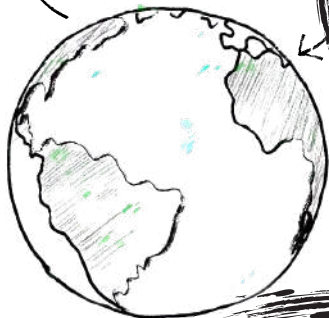
A research argument is like a Christmas tree: your argument is the core and center of attention, while other scholars' work serves as ornaments—brought into conversation with the tree, but never meant to overshadow it.



3



Ethnographic writing is an organic movement between scales—micro and macro, local and global.



WRITING IS LIKE BRAIDING, YOU TIE AND UNTIE, WRITE AND REWRITE. THE INTRODUCTION AND CONCLUSION COME AT THE END, AFTER I HAVE A PERFECT BRAID!

Laura begins her writing with a story from her ethnographic research, a story that is perplexing, surprising, confusing, striking, even incomprehensible or inexplicable. Over the course of her research, she adds more layers to the story, drawing from field data and from literature.

The next step for her is to distill the main ideas from the ethnographic data and weave them into context. What do we need to know to understand the story? What are the critical dimensions for understanding a story, socially, historically, and locally? In the final step, she elaborates her argument, looking for tensions, incongruities, and contradictions.

Citations appear at the end – at the macro level – when you explain how your story differs from existing ones. To stand out, you should position your story from a new, fresh perspective, rather than simply building on existing narratives.



Laura

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STORYING OTHERWISE

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