

If we study Japanese art, we see a man who is undoubtedly wise, philosophic and intelligent, who spends his time doing what? In studying the distance between the earth and the moon? No. In studying Bismarck's policy? No. He studies a single blade of grass.

– Vincent van Gogh, from letter to Theo van Gogh, circa 1888.

FIELD OBSERVATIONS

Revised Spring 2016

One purpose of this course is to encourage you to become a keen observer of your own environment. I am asking you to complete field observations this semester, with the following goals and objectives:

- Look at something closely.
- See that details keep emerging with continued and more diligent observation.
- See that further questions arise.
- Experience a deepened connection with the thing you observe.

Instructions:

1. Choose your subject. Find something that fits all of these criteria:

- you find it outdoors
- was not made by people
- is either currently or was once alive
- is in its natural form (for example, choose a tree trunk rather than a sheet of paper)
- is stable enough to observe for at least 15 minutes (for example, a dozing lizard rather than a lizard that immediately dashes under a rock).
- is not a pet

(Yes, lots of possibilities still remain: a leaf, a rose petal, a twig...)

Suggestions:

- Choose a part of something, rather than an entire organism. For example, examine a leaf, rather than an entire tree. Or examine a rose thorn, rather than an entire rose.
- Consider pushing your own boundaries. Find some animal scat and pull it apart, or find something decomposing.

2. Gather your materials: a pen or pencil, a sheet of paper, something to write on, and about an hour of dedicated time. This is an entirely handwritten assignment.

3. Write down your first impression of your subject, in just a few words.

4. Observe your subject closely, and record your observations in a detailed, labeled drawing. Use labels to record what you see, smell, hear, feel, and taste. Use labels for details that are difficult to draw. Use labels for approximate measurements. Think about colors, textures, movements, and associations with the nearby environment. If you need a name for something, just make it up – there is no need for reference materials in this assignment.

5. Write down lots of further questions that come to mind about your subject. Maybe aim for ten. There is no need to try to answer these questions; this exercise can be completed without any outside sources.

6. Write down your final impression of your subject, in a few words.

7. Please write clearly and label each section.

Rubric for Field Observations	
Appropriate subject choice:	
Yes -----	1
No -----	0
Evidence of close observation:	
Abundant; well-labeled, detailed drawing -----	6
Most elements addressed, but not all -----	4
Few elements addressed -----	2
Evidence of further questions	
Abundant; thoughtful, numerous -----	4
Some; minimal -----	2
Totally absent -----	0
Impressions, before and after:	
Both present -----	2
Only one present -----	1
Totally absent -----	0
Overall evidence of care:	
Obvious care, with sections labeled -----	2
Seems thrown together, or no section labels ---	1
Not legible; not graded -----	0
Commendations:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Vivid details	<input type="checkbox"/> Evocative descriptions
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent drawings	<input type="checkbox"/> Bold subject choice
Total score out of 15:	