Observations & Field Notes

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User-Research Methods VU 2017

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MOVIECLIPS.COM

Kitchen Stories (2003)

Goals

- **When** are observations useful?
- **How** to do observations?
- **How** to collect data?

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Exercise

Group Discussion

- What do you know about observation **as a method**?
- What are the **different settings** for observations?
- What are the **different roles** for researchers?
- How you would **go about** observing users?
- What **data** can be collected and how?
- What are **difficulties**?

Into the field

Gaining access

- Finding the right »level« to go through
- The door opener/sponsor
- The people you will actually work with

Entry process

- Give overview, get permissions
- Be clear on roles and on what are asking from them
- Explain the value from being able to do this research (is there anything in this for them directly?)

Into the field

Researcher stance

- Participant is the expert
- No right or wrong
- Unobtrusive, non-judgmental
- Know when to get out of the way
- Active listening
- Silences are ok

Deciding focus

Why are you doing this fieldwork?

Initial focus can be framed by:

- Your research questions
- Your client's/target audience's questions
- Your theoretical orientation

Focus can be:

- Open-ended and exploratory
  What is involved in delivering care on the ward?
- More focussed and specific
  How do doctors arrive at their diagnoses on the ward?

Deciding focus

Focus will **evolve** and **refine** as you collect data and understand more about the setting and interactions.

For example

- First very open, **exploratory** - What is there to see?
- Next more **focussed** - What is it we see?

Your focus will help you decide **what mix** of methods are best able to answer questions of interest

Deciding Approach

1. **Who** are the relevant participants and
2. **where** can I find them (field-sites)?

Purposeful sampling strategies:

- Intentionally selected to serve your question/focus
- Can be informed by a priori / emerging theory
- Not determined completely upfront, instead sequential (ie. choosing next cases based on data collection & analysis (emerging theory, open questions etc) to date

Deciding Approach

Choosing the **setting**

- Where do you position yourself?
- How do you »engage« in the settings?
- Will it be easy for me to be there?

Choosing **temporal** aspects

- When you do it?
- How long you do you observe?
- What is the impact on the organisation/participants?

Deciding Approach

Template

The purpose of the [tradition, type] study is to [understand? describe? explain?] the [central focus for the study] for [the unit of analysis: a person? processes? groups? sites?]. At this stage in the research, the [central focus being studied] will generally be defined as [a general definition of the central concept].

[Boeije, H. Analysis in Qualitative Research, Sage 2010, pp31-32]

Natural **curiosity**

Eyes & Ears

- Active watching & listening
- Information is there just waiting to be noticed
- Make notes on everything you see & hear
- Being open to seeing in new ways
- Capture details of behaviour and environment
- Describe »what's going on«

Pay attention to

- **Actions**
  What people **do** - workflows, workarounds...
- **Conversations**
  What people **say** - words and non-verbal interaction
- **Artefacts**
  What people **use** - tools and techniques
- **Spaces**
  Where people **are** - workspace, distances...
- **Relationships**
  Who people **interact with** - speak, email, roles, power

Pay attention to

Lofland & Lofland [1984:48]

- Who is she?
- What does she do?
- What do you think she meant by that?
- What are they supposed to do?
- Why did she do that?
- Why is that done?
- What happens after...?
- What would happen if...?
- What do you think about ...?
- Who is responsible if ...?

Spradley [1980:78]

- **Space**: the physical place or places
- **Actor**: the people involved
- **Activity**: a set of related acts people do
- **Object**: the physical things that are present
- **Act**: single actions that people do
- **Event**: a set of related activities that people carry out
- **Time**: the sequencing that takes place over time
- **Goal**: the things people are trying to accomplish
- **Feeling**: the emotions felt and expr.

Pay attention to

Patterns of

- use, structure, flow
- breakdowns - flow, use of tools
- disruptions from tools or work process
- work-arounds
- obtrusiveness (or transparency)
- supportive elements

Challenges

Attentional blindness

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IGQmdoK_ZfY]

Research Report

ASSOCIATION FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

The Invisible Gorilla Strikes Again: Sustained Inattentional Blindness in Expert Observers

Psychological Science
24(9) 1848–1853
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SAGE

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Abstract

Researchers have shown that people often miss the occurrence of an unexpected yet salient event if they are engaged in a different task, a phenomenon known as *inattentional blindness*. However, demonstrations of inattentional blindness have typically involved naive observers engaged in an unfamiliar task. What about expert searchers who have spent years honing their ability to detect small abnormalities in specific types of images? We asked 24 radiologists to perform a familiar lung-nodule detection task. A gorilla, 48 times the size of the average nodule, was inserted in the last case that was presented. Eighty-three percent of the radiologists did not see the gorilla. Eye tracking revealed that the majority of those who missed the gorilla looked directly at its location. Thus, even expert searchers, operating in their domain of expertise, are vulnerable to inattentional blindness.

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CIA HQ
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3:31 PM ET
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PRESIDENT TRUMP SPEAKS AT CIA HEADQUARTERS
0:14 / 1:42

REALLY pay attention

See **deeply** and pay attention, always **asking** yourself

- What am I seeing here
- Why is this happening?
- What else is going on?

Everything is potentially of interest - within reason...

Capture **anything** and **everything** and analyse and filter later when you understanding evolves.

Be **sensitive** to the setting and your own style of working.

Reflective Practice

Before going into the field brainstorm for yourself

- What are the things I **do know** about the site / topic?
- What are my **expectations** and **biases**?
- What are my **blind spots**?
- What is my **agenda**?
- What do I **want to know**?

[Adapted from Susanne Oechsner]

Data capture

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Exercise

Group Discussion - **Which Tools** to capture data?

- Video
- Audio
- Photos
- Note-taking
- Remembering...

What are the **advantages** and **disadvantages**?

Pen & Paper

+ **Reliable** - rarely have problems with equipment failure!
+ Hybrid options - Livescribe smartpen
- Can be **difficult to read** your own writing
- **Slow** to produce
- Not everybody's **style**

Digital note-taking

+ Fits into **workflow**, produces digital data
+ Auto-**correct**
+ Can be **backed up** instantly
- Battery will run out when you most need it
- Researcher hides behind laptop - **barrier**

Photo Camera

+ Images by participant and/or researcher
+ Useful for **telling a story**
+ Capturing the **look & feel**
- Can be **intrusive**
- People are wary about being photographed
- Privacy and Picture-rights

Audio

+ Less intrusive than video, can be **more readily accepted**
+ Useful for recording **long or detailed** explanations
+ Can also record **own ideas**, impressions etc
- Data **less detailed** than video
- **Time consuming** to listen, transcribe and analyse
- Can be **difficult to understand** what is being said & by whom
- Notoriously **difficult to set up** (always use backup!)

Video

+ **Rich** data, can be viewed repeatedly
+ Useful for **communicating data** to others (eg. designers, client, and with participants)
- **Time consuming** to watch, transcribe and analyse
- Will **miss action** out of view
- Overhead of setting up and managing **equipment**

Artefacts

+ Can be important data source
- Only finished state, no process
- Difficult to see who has contributed what

Sensor based

+ **Automated** data collection
+ Provides data **unavailable to own senses**
- Difficult to set up and manage
- Typically a lot of **noise** in the data
- May be **intrusive**
- Ethics and privacy

Note Taking

Talking about the propensity of the servant in the flat opposite to time her duties to coincide with the serials or film in the afternoon as she was a huge fan of films.

Tendency of channels and films to produce scenes and entire prog. abroad e.g Darsham (story/video) filmed in UAE.

17th.

On a whim I decided to try and find the cable network which my last interviews with a cable operator had brought to light. Trading under the name of Shiva Shakti they are the third network the others being CTV and of course, Siti Cable! All I had to go on was that they could be found near Chowk. I asked in a tv shop and they said it would not be possible for me to find the place. The main clue was the [illegible] vegetable market though it appears the best way of finding it is with reference to Manikaranika ghat.

A boy from a samosa shop led me first to a shop that sells 'designer' salwaar-kameez suits and the boy on duty in this shop was the

Capture

Many types Choose the most appropriate

- Writing (factual, interpretative, reflective)
- Jottings, checklists, time-series ...
- Diagrams of places, movements, who talks to who...

Distinguish between observations, quotes, impressions

Capture as much as possible ie. **no filtering**

Useful to **timestamp** notes as you go along

Debrief

DO IT!!

- fill in the gaps as soon as possible after the event
- add impressions/ideas/emerging themes
- work together and collaborative de-briefs

Bias

»When in the field, ethnographers are **already deciding what to write about**. What do they notice? What do they choose to focus attention upon? What do they subsequently recall? Of what they remember, what do they choose to document in their notes? In what detail?«

[Wolfinger 2002]

Strategies

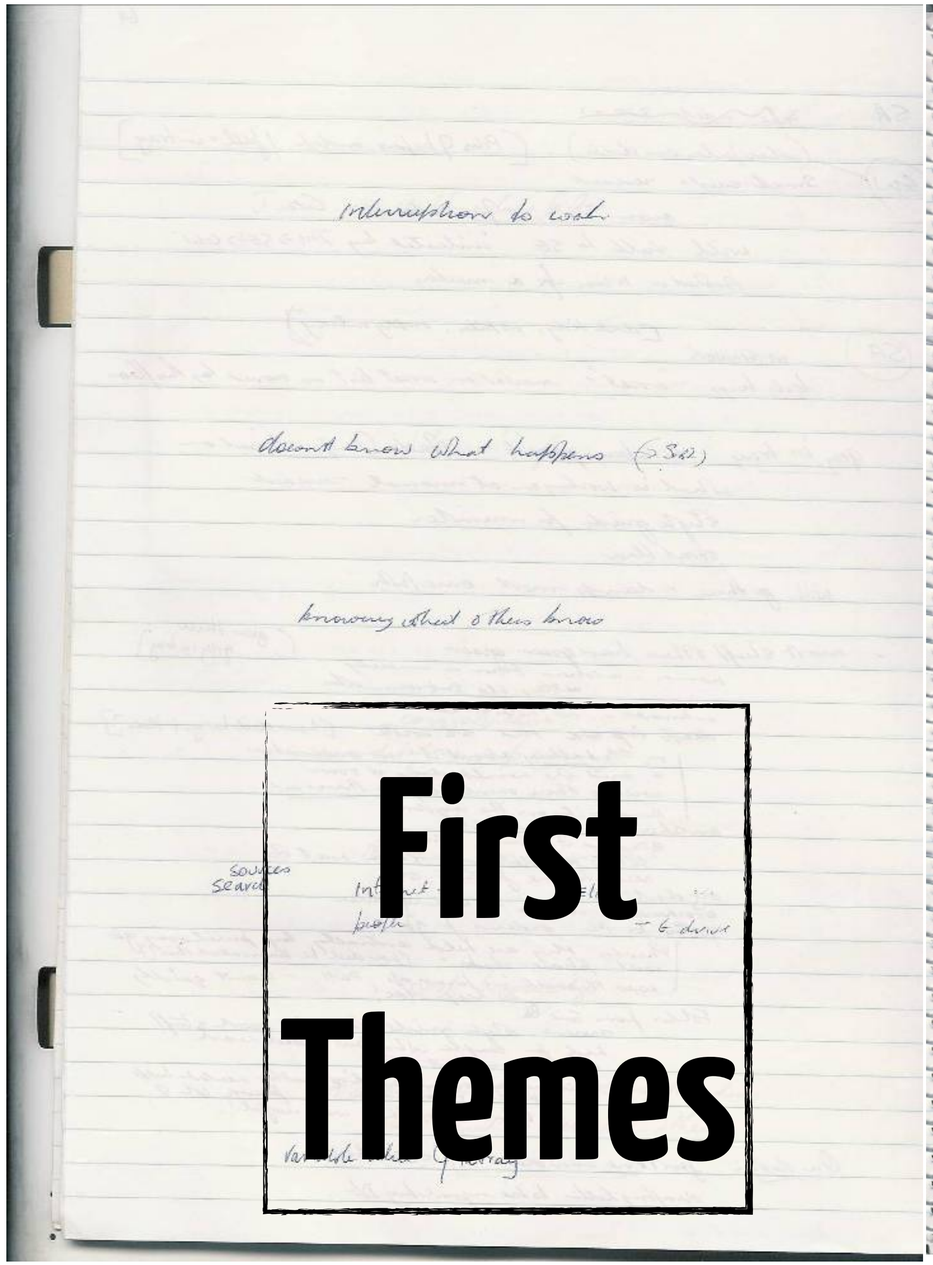
Salience hierarchy

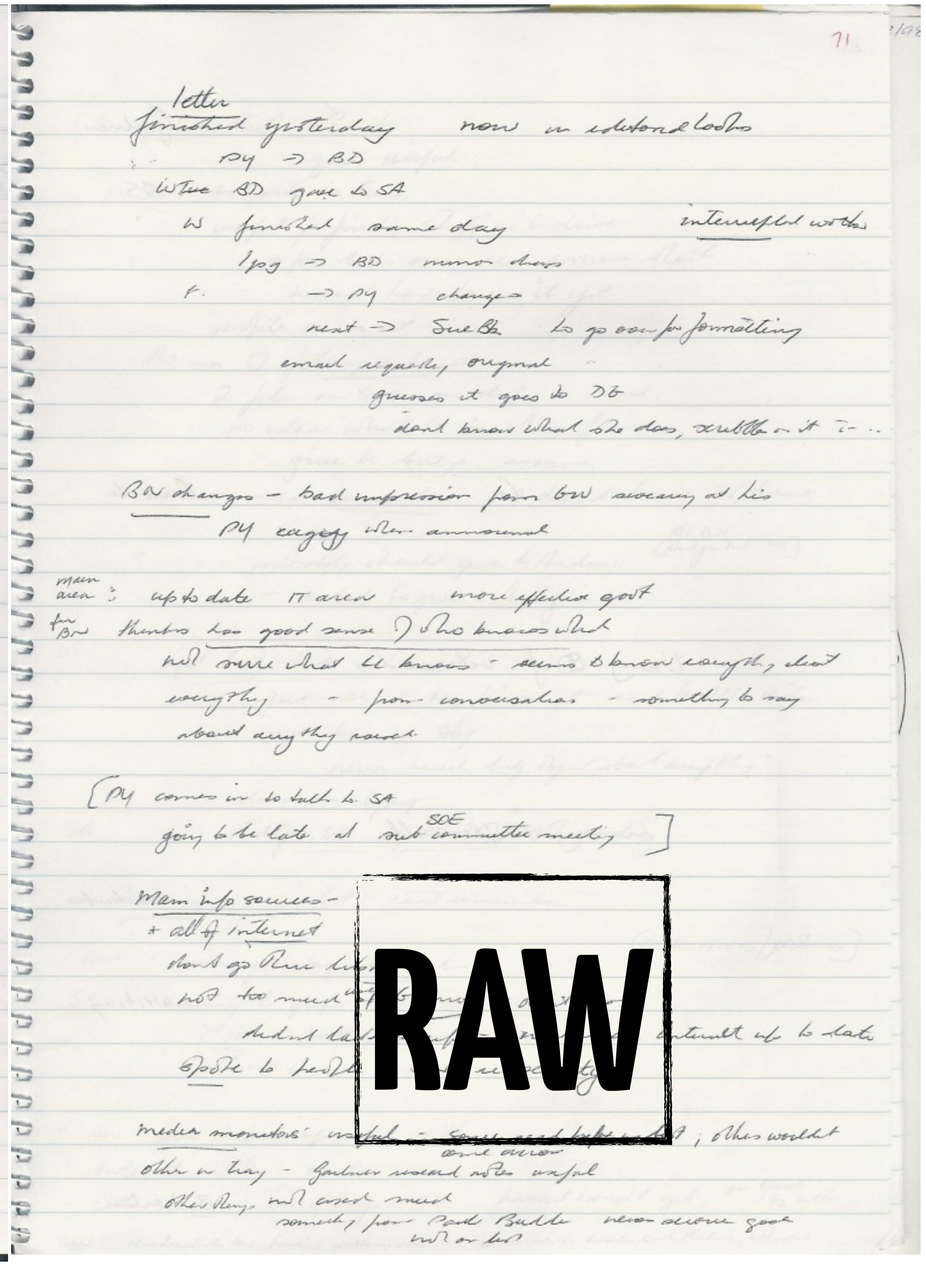
What observations struck as most noteworthy, interesting, telling?

Comprehensive strategy

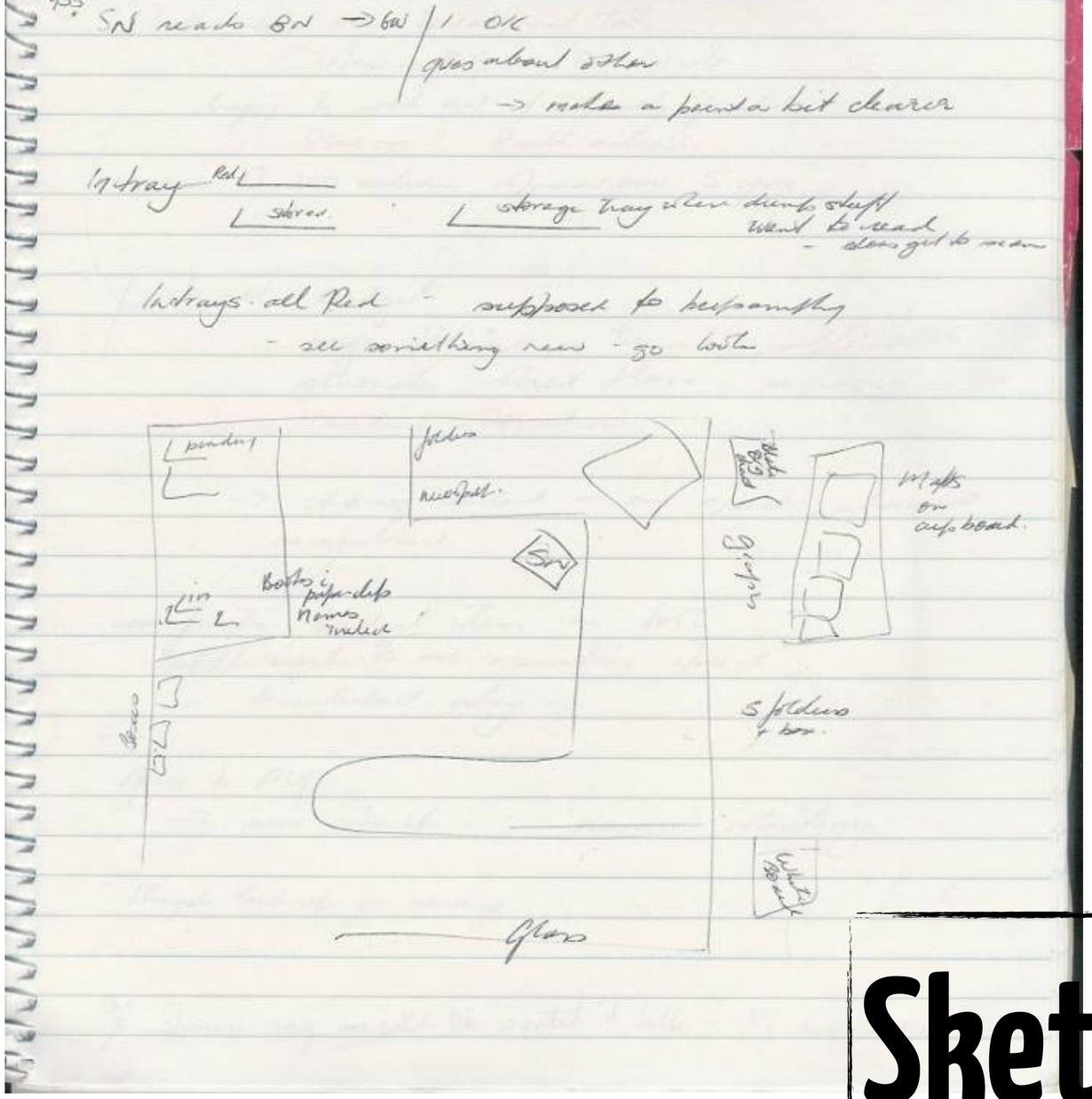
systematically & comprehensively describe everything … in the order things happen

Examples



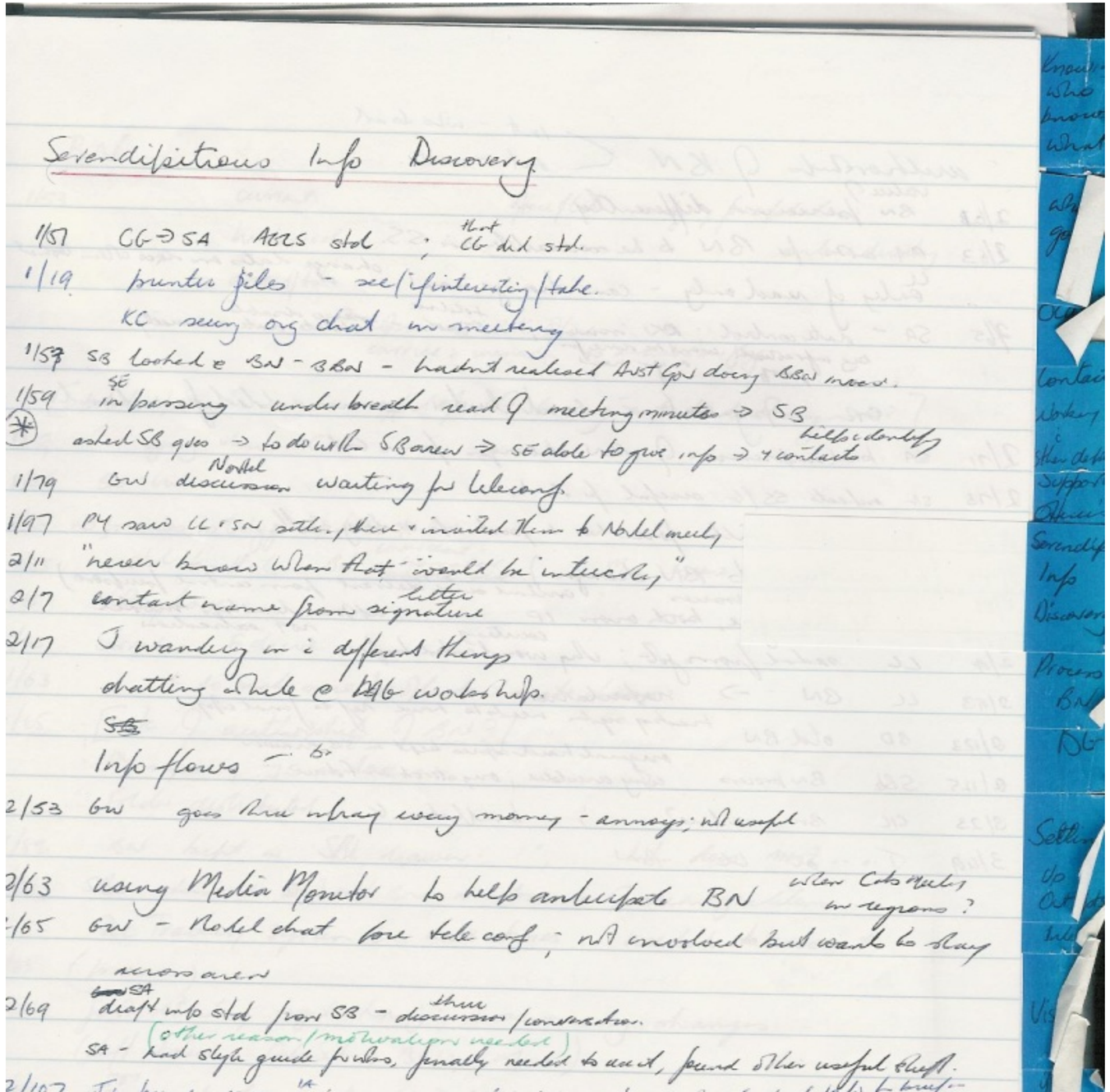


Examples



Sketches

Examples



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Memos

BOX 4.3 EXAMPLES OF MEMOS

This informant indicated in the interview that she may have been trying to kill herself. I had to convey this information to her physician and ask for a psych consult. I couldn't believe that no one else had picked up on this. Her behavior was almost too blatant. I never thought I would run into this and I don't want to break the confidentiality of the researcher/informant relationship. I hope she understood when I told her why I had to discuss this with her physician. (Stinson Kidd, 1993: 324)

This was a very difficult interview to maintain the researcher's role and not to slide helter skelter into the nurse's role for the reasons of expressing my own anger at the poor caring skills employed by so many of the care professionals (...). (Sque, 2000: 29)

Quite a lot of residents on this ward experience grief. They cry because they want to go home. They ask for help to return home. The carers react to the grief by administering medication, verbally correcting the behaviour, and ignoring the behaviour entirely. These reactions are in accordance with the care plan. The grief is defined in various ways by the care givers: as fake, as unnecessary or as part of the disease. (Basch, 1996: 52)

[Boeije, H. Analysis in Qualitative Research, Sage 2010, p71]

Tools for Note Taking

livescribe

STORE | SMARTPEN | PENCASTS | EDUCATION

home > smartpen > record and play back

RECORD AND PLAY BACK

SAVE AND SEARCH

SEND AND SHARE

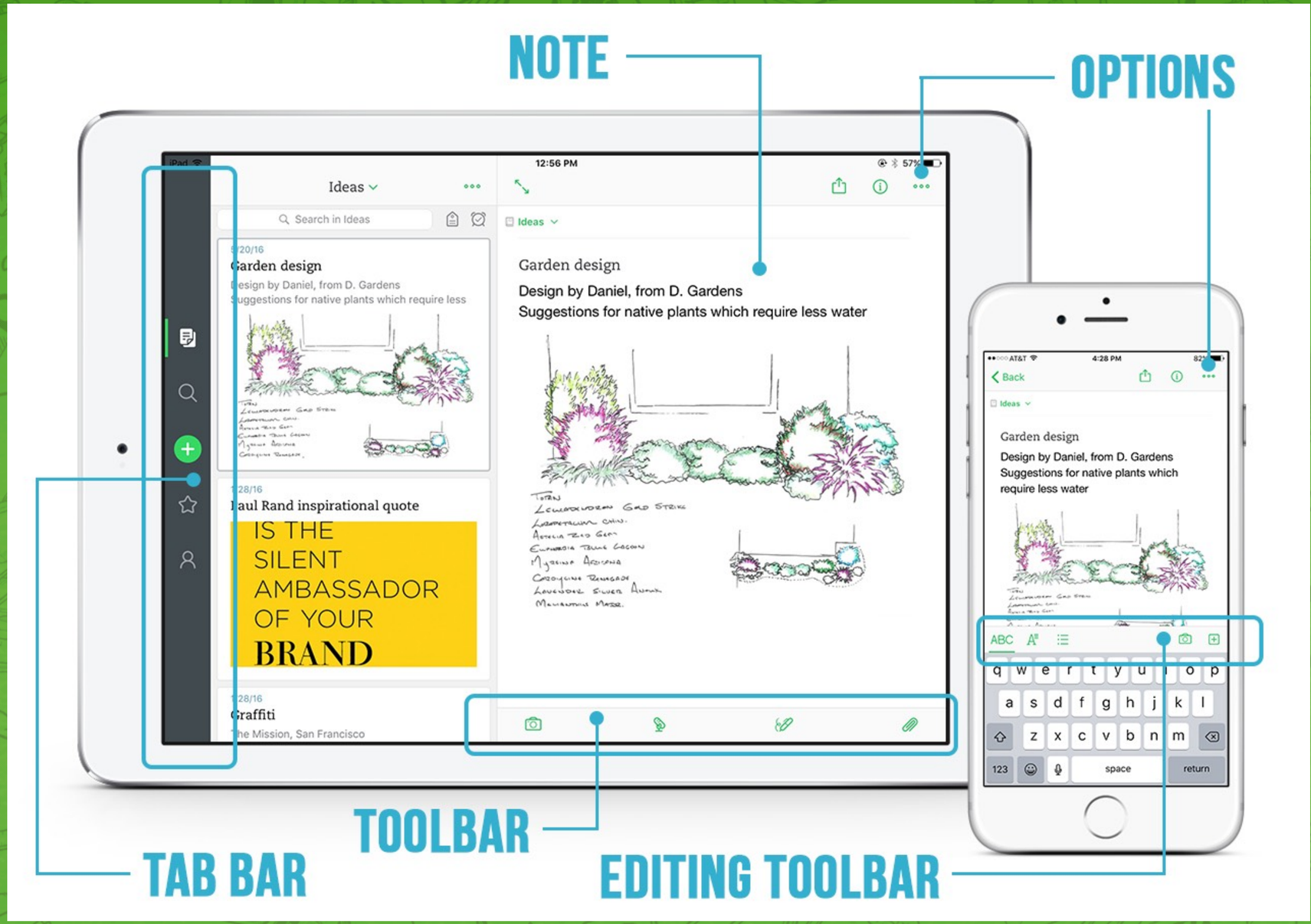
BUY NOW

REFER $

Record and Play Back

Smartpens record everything you write and hear so you'll never miss a word. Replay your meetings or lectures simply by tapping on your notes.

Evernote



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