

# Types of fieldwork

## Enquiry-led fieldwork

Enquiry-led fieldwork begins with a key question which is answerable by conducting an investigation in the field in which students collect data. They then complete the investigation by presenting and analysing the data before drawing a conclusion which attempts to answer their initial question. Based on empiricism and the scientific method, this popular form of geography fieldwork can cover a wide range of geographical skills such as data handling, cartography and critical reflection of one's methods and outcomes.

Enquiries can be excellent vehicles for pupils to look in more depth at a geographical model or concept: testing the extent to which theoretical geographical processes actually apply in the real world where multiple variables can act upon the outcome. An important element of enquiry-led fieldwork is that it takes what students already know and builds new knowledge within that topic area. This approach gives students a 'passport' into the learning experience and contextualises the new information they will find.

## Issue-led fieldwork

This branch of enquiry-based fieldwork allows students to tackle pertinent issues that affect them and their local areas. Turning away from theories and models, this type of fieldwork focusses on students grappling with challenges that are place and people specific.

The outcomes of an issue-led investigation may pave the way towards real world changes. Students may feel a greater sense of empowerment and decide to become personally involved in a local issue having investigated it as part of their geography fieldwork experience. Follow up work in the classroom may be possible, such as students making others aware of an issue or students sharing their results with a local councillor.

## Observation walks

Observation walks involve teachers touring students around a geographical feature, giving them opportunities to see how geographical concepts 'behave' in the real world. Students might be engaged with note taking or observational activities such as drawing a field sketch but for the most part they are passive learners tasked with taking in the sensory experience of a particular place.

Observation walks can be a useful first stage or introduction to other forms of fieldwork. For example, touring a field site and having the opportunity to observe it will allow students to formulate more meaningful enquiry questions and be better prepared when they begin to collect data. Observation walks can also be an excellent way of creating a case study for students and key geographical details about a place are likely to be far more memorable for students as they will have seen and interacted with them first hand.

## Semi-guided observation walks

A semi-guided observation walk allows students to take on a slightly less passive role than that seen in the observation walks. Rather than be teacher-led, these walks will involve written instructions that students follow and gives them opportunities to engage with the field site.

For example, younger pupils might carry out a scavenger hunt at a field site, with the list of 'finds' designed to get them testing a range of geographical observation skills. Older students might have a range of questions to answer at different points along a walk with each question designed to help them link geographical concepts to real world observations.

## **Narrative building fieldwork**

Narrative building fieldwork is an opportunity for students to gather data to form a descriptive picture of what a place is like. This might involve simple quantitative measures or counts of geographical features or extend to more in depth descriptive annotations on a field sketch. Narrative building fieldwork is not designed to allow students to recognise any synergies between different variables: it will more likely involve students measuring just one form of data or one factor.

As with an observation walk, older students may use narrative building fieldwork as a way of introducing themselves to a field site prior to them carrying out a more in depth enquiry. For all aged students, narrative building fieldwork can generate quantitative data that can be subsequently be used in the classroom for the development of key data handling and cartography skills.

## **Discovery fieldwork**

Discovery fieldwork takes a student-centred approach to developing an understanding of a field site and is a highly immersive experience. Students may create their own questions and let their natural curiosity guide them as they try to discover answers. Discovery fieldwork relies on students being aware of their senses and 'data' that is collected may be based on feelings rather than empirical evidence.

While activities may appear to have a lack of structure compared to other forms of fieldwork it is worth noting that by allowing students to create their own boundaries of spatial and cognitive exploration opens the experience up to all learners regardless of their age or prior geographical knowledge.