

Sample Student Paper (Model of a Well-Done Assignment)

Using the Sociological Eye in a Campus Coffee Shop

Last Thursday afternoon, I spent about twenty minutes observing the seating area in the campus coffee shop. The space was busy but not crowded—students were studying, chatting, eating, and waiting for their drinks. Although nothing unusual happened, once I started paying attention, I noticed several unwritten rules shaping how people interacted. Using my sociological eye helped me see how many small behaviors are guided by shared expectations that most of us rarely think about.

One of the clearest norms in this setting involved **personal space and seating boundaries**. When someone entered the room looking for a seat, they scanned for an empty table before considering whether to sit near someone else. Even when only one or two seats remained, students tended to leave an empty chair between themselves and a stranger. At one point, a student set her bag on the chair next to her while the rest of the table was empty. When another student approached, she quickly moved the bag and apologized. This small interaction showed that although people sometimes “claim” extra space, they also recognize that others have a right to sit and adjust their behavior to maintain politeness.

A second norm I observed involved **noise and volume**. Most students spoke quietly, even those in pairs or small groups. At one point, a group of three students started laughing loudly about something on one of their phones. Several people looked up, and one student at a nearby table put in her earbuds immediately. Without anyone saying anything directly, the group lowered their voices. This interaction suggested that minor social sanctions—glances, body language, or withdrawal—were enough to remind people of the expectation to keep noise at a moderate level.

These observations connect to two concepts from class: **impression management** and **social scripts**. In the first example, the student moving her bag acted in a way that protected her own self-presentation as a considerate person. She likely wanted to avoid appearing rude or territorial once someone else approached. According to Goffman, we try to present ourselves in ways that align with the situation, and her quick apology demonstrated awareness of how her action might be interpreted.

The second example reflects the idea of social scripts—unwritten guidelines for how we behave in particular settings. In a coffee shop, the script seems to be: keep your voice down, avoid disrupting those who are studying, and adjust your behavior if you accidentally go against these expectations. The group of students who lowered their voices were essentially returning to the shared script once they sensed they had stepped outside it.

Overall, observing this familiar place with a sociological eye helped me see how much coordination goes into ordinary interactions. No one announced the rules, but everyone seemed to understand them. People gave and interpreted subtle signals that helped maintain order without any formal authority. This assignment made me more aware of how much social life depends on unspoken agreements, and how quickly we adjust our behavior when those agreements are challenged.

Social Norms Observation Paper (2–3 pages)

Purpose

Using your **sociological eye** means noticing the patterns, expectations, and unwritten rules that guide everyday interactions. This assignment helps you practice that skill in a real setting and prepares you for future work where you'll analyze social behavior and apply course concepts to lived examples.

Task

1. Choose a public place where people interact naturally (e.g., café, library hallway, grocery store, park).
2. Spend **15–20 minutes** observing and taking brief notes on what people do, how they behave, and how they respond to each other.
3. Identify at least **two social norms** (as discussed in class) you see in the setting.
4. Describe one moment where someone clearly followed a norm, and one moment where a norm was bent or broken.
5. Connect what you observed to **two class concepts** (e.g., roles, scripts, impression management).
6. Write a **2–3 page paper** that explains:
 - The setting
 - The norms you identified
 - The examples you observed
 - How the examples connect to the two course concepts
7. Submit your paper to D2L by **Thursday at 11:59 PM**.

Criteria for Success

A strong paper will:

- Explain at least two social norms using clear examples
- Accurately connect observations to **two course concepts**
- Describe the setting briefly but clearly
- Be organized, clearly written, and 2–3 pages long
- Show use of the **sociological eye** to interpret everyday behavior