

Support units: Fieldwork

Illustration 2: A checklist for undertaking fieldwork

## A checklist for undertaking fieldwork

### 1. Identifying the fieldwork activity

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Get started well before you want to do the activity.	Begin formalising the procedures so no one is under duress to achieve the activity.	Fieldwork should be seen as a pleasure.	
Refer to the appropriate year level in the <b>Australian Curriculum: Geography</b> < <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Content-structure">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Content-structure</a> >. Identify the 'content description' to be addressed through the fieldwork.	Read the 'elaborations' relating to the selected content description and identify the 'best fit' for your school and planned fieldwork.	You need to feel comfortable with the task you identify. Fieldwork should be manageable and not stretch your capacity. Fieldwork is available everywhere.	
Refer to the Concepts for developing geographical understanding < <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Concepts-for-developing-geographical-understanding">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Concepts-for-developing-geographical-understanding</a> > in the Australian Curriculum: Geography< <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Rationale">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Rationale</a> >	Read the 'concepts' and identify the 'best fit' for your school and planned fieldwork.	You will not use all the concepts – highlight those that are easiest for students to identify.	
Refer to the <b>General capabilities</b> < <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/General-capabilities">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/General-capabilities</a> > in the <b>Australian Curriculum: Geography</b> < <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Rationale">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Rationale</a> >	Read the 'general capabilities' and identify the 'best fit' for your school and planned fieldwork.	You will not focus on all the capabilities – highlight those relevant for your reporting processes.	
Refer to the <b>Cross-curriculum priorities</b> < <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Cross-curriculum-priorities">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Cross-curriculum-priorities</a> > in the <b>Australian Curriculum: Geography</b> < <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Rationale">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Geography/Rationale</a> >	Read the 'cross-curriculum priorities' and identify the 'best fit' for your school and planned fieldwork.	You will not focus on all the priorities –highlight those relevant for your reporting processes.	

Identify the site/s that you plan to use for the fieldwork.	Visit the site/s and check thoroughly that the fieldwork you have in mind is achievable.	You should photograph sites so that in preparing the tasks to be achieved you can see the site again.	
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Based on Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) materials

You should now be able to justify the direct relevance of the need to go on fieldwork, the benefits that will be gained from the activity, and the geographical worth of the activity.

## 2. Seeking permission to undertake fieldwork – dealing with school administration

This is a loose order and will vary from school to school.

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Check with the faculty head that your idea is achievable.	Talk openly and clearly about what you want to do and where it fits the curriculum.	If you are clear and enthusiastic about the fieldwork it is easier to get others to see the benefit of your effort.	
Acquire and complete any documentation that the school requires for permitting the activity to happen.	There may be a plethora of forms, including a risk management form. Ask if you don't understand any requirements or details of a form.	A staff handbook is generally available with school procedures outlined. Get the forms, fill them out and submit them. Don't waste time and miss the next meeting that will determine whether you go or not.	
Follow through when the approval is given.	You may be required to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• name accompanying staff</li> <li>• find a specific date if not already done (ensure the day is on the school calendar)</li> <li>• identify an alternative date</li> <li>• submit detailed costs.</li> </ul>	Schools have different systems in place and you need to work closely with your specific system and not omit steps. Permission letters and forms may need to go home, medical records need to be accessed ...	
Organise specifics for the actual day well in advance.	You will need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confirm the mode of transport has been booked</li> <li>• check travel times as these eat into valuable time at the site</li> <li>• check any opening times of venues</li> <li>• confirm availability of speakers (if using).</li> </ul>	These are the fine details to check that make or break the fieldwork.	
Keep the team of teachers well-informed and enthused by the fieldwork.	Seek out the accompanying staff, chat with them, get to know them, enthuse them about the fieldwork.	Accompanying staff that are enthusiastic and 'on the same page' as you are a valuable help on the day.	
Notify everyone who will provide equipment for the day.	A First Aid Kit should be booked. Any departments that might be providing measuring tools should be accessed.	Advance notice helps to prevent last minute fuss finding the required items.	

Now that you have the approval you can't rest until you put into place the learning experiences for the activity. Your students are about to get out there and explore the world.

### 3. Planning the student activity

You want your students to inquire about the environment into which you are going and to actively engage in their learning. Start this planning two to three weeks before the event.

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Identify the purpose of the fieldwork.	You need to ask yourself if the identified purpose is geographical: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is it?</li> <li>• Why is it there?</li> <li>• How has it changed over time?</li> <li>• How does it affect people?</li> <li>• Can it be mapped?</li> </ul>	Keep the enquiry simple and ensure that the investigation can be achieved. Don't make it too complex. Don't aim too high.	
Set down an aim for the investigation.	To identify ... To investigate ... To explore ... To determine ...	Make sure the investigation can be completed in the time frame available.  If you are confident, guide your students to establish the aim. It gives them ownership of the experience.	
Set down a series of statements to be tested during the enquiry.	These statements generally derive from prior knowledge of the topic or site that you want to answer or test in the enquiry – similar to the 'hypotheses' in science practicals.	Statements are informed guesses that need to be tested. This means that sometimes the statements will be found to be invalid. This is an important part of student learning.	
Determine the data you need to collect in the enquiry.	Primary data will be collected in the field. This is the measurements, photos, drawings, responses gained by the students in the field.  Secondary data can be gathered prior to or after the fieldwork activity. This is the material that comes from forms such as books, magazines, published maps, Internet.	Ensure that the aim requires primary data as this is the point of fieldwork.  You should identify suitable secondary sources that add value to the fieldwork experience.	

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Select the method to be used to collect the data.	<p>A range of geographical skills can be applied, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• measurements</li> <li>• photography</li> <li>• field sketches</li> <li>• transects</li> <li>• questionnaires</li> <li>• interviews</li> <li>• surveys.</li> </ul> <p>Explain to students the value of sensory experiences too – look, listen, touch, smell and (perhaps) taste.</p>	<p>Your students will need to know how to operate any equipment that you take into the field – cameras, GPS, iPads. Practise with the equipment in the classroom environs, especially geographic tools such as flow metres, anemometers, pH kits. This saves time on the day and avoids frustration should students find difficulty with any of the equipment.</p> <p>Don't forget that you can borrow equipment from other subject areas, for example, science and physical education are options.</p>	
Prepare a structured/organised guide for students to use in the field.	Put the ideas together from the planning process that you have been through. Whether you are producing hard or soft copy for students to work with, it needs to be sequential for the time that you are going to be in the field. Provide spaces for students to input primary data while in the field.	<p>The organisation and success of the fieldwork is largely in your hands. The worksheet/s will take some time to prepare and need to be tested before use.</p> <p>Students can't be expected to hang onto loose sheets of paper on a windy day.</p>	
Prepare the post-fieldwork activity – this is likely to be an assessment task.	<p>Think about how you want students to present their information in response to the aim of the fieldwork.</p> <p>Devise the activity sheet and the assessment criteria.</p>	Keep the final product in mind while on your reconnaissance visit.	
Reconnaissance immediately prior to the fieldwork time.	<p>Take your worksheet/s to the site and think about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the tasks achievable?</li> <li>• Is the time frame appropriate?</li> <li>• Is the site/s still the same as on your first visit?</li> <li>• Has the site/s changed requiring amendments to the risk management form?</li> <li>• Where are the best spots for students to undertake activities?</li> </ul>	<p>You can't assume that everything will be okay. You need to go and look again to satisfy yourself.</p> <p>In particular, you can't assume that because someone did this fieldwork last year that it will be the same this year.</p>	

Now you can sit back and wait for the appointed day to get closer while watching the weather forecasts.

Do a check with administration that you are still on track to have a successful day, just in case!

#### 4. Preparing the students – the lesson prior to the fieldwork

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Check and check again – do you have all necessary permissions?	Talk to your head of faculty, talk to administration, talk to accompanying staff members.	Be pro-active and have a buzz going around the staff room that a fieldwork activity is about to happen.	
Enthuse the students – this lesson should be just a few days before the fieldwork.	Revise with students what the fieldwork is about if you initially included them in the planning stages, or spend more time discussing the details of the time if you have done all the planning.  Let them see the tasks to be undertaken in the field.	Practise any skills with equipment as a refresher or for the first time.  If you hand out hard copy fieldwork guides, collect them, as someone will turn up on the day without their copy!	
Discuss with students the criteria for assessment.	Show students the post-fieldwork activity to be completed, and the criteria that they are working towards achieving.	By having the end task in mind students know that there is work to be done while in the field.	
Set the scene as to expectations.	Remind students if they are required to bring equipment – pens, clipboards, sunscreen, hats etc. No one should go empty handed on fieldwork.  If group work is planned, then groups should be designated.  Discuss the behaviour standards expected.  Agree on the meeting point for the day to begin.	Remember the purpose is to collect data in the field – everyone must do it and record their information.  If using groups, everyone must record the data. One suggestion is that a few activities should be individually completed to ensure there are no free-loaders.	
Gathering everything together	Have you got: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• copies of activities</li> <li>• class lists</li> <li>• First Aid Kit</li> <li>• medical condition listing</li> <li>• phone</li> <li>• phone numbers of contacts relevant to fieldwork and for emergencies</li> <li>• geographic equipment</li> <li>• whistle</li> <li>• route map.</li> </ul>	These should all be beside your desk before you go home the night before.	

There should be an air of excitement and enthusiasm – discovery is about happen. Geography is all around us.

## 5. The fieldwork day

Be early to school, be organised, expect the unexpected, stay calm. With all the planning you and your students will have a great experience.

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Getting away on time.	Don't set yourself an unrealistic expectation – build in some time as someone is sure to be late.	Stay as close to schedule as possible all day – check the time regularly as you want to be able to complete all of the tasks. Students can't be rushed to collect data.	
Throughout the day check that all students are accounted for.	Designate regular times to count heads – it might be getting on a bus or a walking track intersection.	Make the accompanying staff aware that they are there to keep a look out for students. They may not be able to help with the geography but they can be your eyes and ears.	
Work with the students.	Mingle amongst the students advising and suggesting approaches to be taken. Check skills using equipment. Check that all members of a group are contributing.	You can't go along and expect the data collection to just happen. Students will need to be guided initially, but they quickly become engrossed in the activities. Enjoy working with students in a different environment – some of the students might surprise you with their perceptive comments.	
The end of the fieldwork day.	Acknowledge the great effort from the students to collect the data. Gather any resources the students have – equipment, iPads, hard copy notes etc. Complete any administrative requirements. Return borrowed equipment, First Aid kits etc.	Expect everyone to be quieter on the way back to school. It has been a busy time. Again, gather everything from the students otherwise it tends to go home and not come back. Keep smiling.	

You will probably be exhausted. Often these days are busier than those in the classroom. But you will be brimming with pride as to the achievements of the students, the confidence that they have gained in the field and the challenging questions that they raised.

A job well done! Enjoy Jean Watson's poem *It's no picnic* at the end of this document.

## 6. Reporting on the fieldwork experience

Back in the classroom it is time to make sense of the collected data. You can make or break the fieldwork by the way the reporting process is undertaken. Students' enthusiasm needs to be capitalised on. Make the presentation interesting within the capabilities of the student group and achievable within a reasonable time frame.

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Organise the data.	Have in your mind the easiest way to present the data. Be prepared for students to offer alternatives and modify your view.	Student ownership comes with their decision making – discuss why it is sometimes better to present data one way than another way.	
Collaborative tasks.	Group work on the same task tends to speed up the data processing.	Think how to overcome protracted time on data processing – class feedback, computer use, base maps provided ...	
Set time frames.	Be realistic as to how long students will take to do a task. Be aware that some students will achieve data processing with ease.	Find short cuts if necessary – don't let the processing become a burden.	
Presentation techniques.	Students should be referred to their criteria sheets – ensure that their work stays within the requirements.	Sometimes students will have gathered data or ideas beyond the task. Find a way to use this data, but make sure the assessment task meets the requirements.	

This is a busy time for everyone in the classroom. Everyone will be working on something different. As a teacher you need to be everywhere for everybody at the same time – no mean feat! The challenging questions will continue to flow and discussions need to feed into the practical reporting.

## 7. Taking action

Students have achieved a task with pride. Let them tell the world what they have discovered. Let them tell the world what they think about places and the future for places.

Task to do	How to achieve it	Comments	Done (✓)
Communicating.	Find a forum in which their ideas can be presented – to another class, to the Principal, to parents, to an invited guest.	Students have committed a great deal of time and effort into a task that they have been enthusiastic about.	
Setting up the forum.	Whoever is going to be the recipient of the student work needs to be informed of what is about to happen.	Forewarned is forearmed! If recipients have some idea of the expectation then the response will be more positive for the students.	
Structuring the presentations.	You need to give this some thought so that again it does not become a protracted event.	Some students could report for lengthy time periods – find a way to prevent lesson after lesson on the same topic!	
Reflecting on the fieldwork experience.	Undertake a class review – use personal notes where students can freely express their views.	Be prepared – not everyone will have had a great experience! Consider how you will do fieldwork differently next time.	

You and your class have completed an enquiry. You have all learnt a great deal. You are geographers!

**It's no picnic**

Geographers need their fieldwork like the deserts need the rain.  
We don our boots and parkas and set off once again.

We board the buses, count the kids, give out study guides;  
Tell the driver where to go and watch the road besides.

We hope our well-made plans will eventuate just right;  
That farms and firms and factories will still be on their site.

We've already taught our classes the fact they need to know,  
To make the fieldwork relevant and see what it can show.

We've told the little darlings what to wear and what to bring;  
We've given several classes to cover everything.

We've shown them maps and diagrams and pictures of the place,  
Stressed the relevance of it all to the exam they're going to face.

We've tried to make our colleagues see we have to leave the school,  
To go outside the classroom and teach the 'golden rule'.

That geography just can't be learnt through books and films alone –  
It really must be learnt first-hand and felt within one's bones.

Teach English without the written word? History without a date?  
Maths without a ruler? And cooking without a plate?

Chemistry without a burner? Physics without a 'scope?  
Biology without a rat? One simply could not cope!

It's just the same for 'trips' with us: fieldwork is a must,  
We know we have to go outdoors, covered in mud and dust.

And spend all day with our student friends and walk and dig and write  
Until our head is swimming; we're ready to give up the fight.

From the crack of dawn till fall of night we battle and talk and teach;  
We count, control, encourage, until we lose our speech.

There is no break in supervision, no morning tea for us –  
There is no other fool around to cope with every fuss.

We're the ones in the thick of it, up to our necks in toil.  
Responsible for everything and guilty if it should spoil.

Weary, triumphant, a zombie on legs, replete with teaching zeal,  
We stagger home and fall in bed; each muscle we can feel.

Next day we'd rather stay asleep than face a noisy class,  
But duty calls and so we rise and hope the pain will pass.

At school the kids are friendly for the first time we have known –  
Perhaps the spin-off from the trip will not be facts alone?

The staff room atmosphere is cool, but we give a little cough,  
And Chalky Brown looks up and says, 'Did you enjoy your day off?'

**Jean Watson**

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