

# Behavioural observation

## What is it?

Also known as ethnographic observation or behavioural mapping, this approach is about putting yourself in a particular location, and recording how people move about in and use that space. The objective is to gain an understanding of how that place is actually used - not how people have assumed it gets used - and then make changes to benefit the users.



## Things you need

- A target location indoors or outdoors
- Pens (different colours) and large pieces of paper (e.g. A3)
- You don't need consent forms - you are just observing, not working with participants



## Optional

- A colleague to observe at the same time and make sure everything is recorded
- A sign to inform passers-by what you're doing, e.g. 'We're doing observations to make improvements to the library'.
- Laptop or tablet to take notes

## How to do it

1. Start by drawing a map of your target space, showing its boundaries, entry and exit points, and any physical features (e.g. tables and chairs).
2. Draw lines with arrows to indicate how people move around the space. You may wish to use different colours to distinguish between routes.
3. Make notes to capture key information, including:
  - Which are the popular routes
  - How long people interact with spaces for
  - What they are doing
  - Whether they interact with each other (or with members of staff)
  - If they sit down, where they choose to sit
  - Whether they eat and drink
  - What computers, mobile devices or other technology they use
  - Any obstructions or bottlenecks
  - Anything other behaviour that stands out to you as interesting
4. There is no set length of time to observe, so stop when you feel you have recorded a sample of how people use your target area. If you have chance, you could return to the same place and observe again on a different day of the week or at another time.
5. Next, take your behavioural map or maps and look at where the lines go. These represent the most popular ways through the space you observed and this information can be used to make improvements. For example, if the majority of people using a particular workspace walk around a table but don't often use it, you could try moving that table to somewhere else. Likewise, if an area is full of desks with PCs but students are mostly using their own laptops, it's probably time to think about taking the desktop computers away.

