

Journalism 5606W

Nancy Roberts

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #2B BAR STUDY

I hope you don't have that much experience in bars, but let's say you've been in a few. Ever notice how no two bars are the same? That's what this writing assignment is all about—distinctiveness, difference, culture.

Bars are not simply places; they are cultural arenas. Typically a group of people frequents a set of bars, and by their presence give a particular atmosphere to the place. Owners sometimes decorate their bars to attract certain people. For example, a pool table and a television turned to the hockey game draws one crowd. Exposed brick walls, hanging ferns, and quiet music in the background—a clean, well-lighted place—attract another crowd. Within that cultural arena, meaningful action takes place. People meet at the end of the day to further their friendships. Some arenas are intended to attract strangers, such as bars where serious pool is played for money, or singles bars.

Your job is to discover the key elements that make your bar special. How is it decorated? What's on the jukebox? What kinds of drinks get consumed? Why are people there? Then take a look at the cultural group that frequents the place. What makes a "regular" different from someone who just walked in? How are regulars identified, or how do they identify themselves, say, to a new bartender? Listen to conversations. Interview people. Watch what happens. Your research may require that you spend hours in the place.

Finally, write a profile of this bar. The bar has a social life, a business life, a culture. It will give you good stories—stories of fights, changes in ownership, changes in the drinking crowd, bouncers, bartenders. Don't be a sociologist, but try to convey what a sociologist might know about this place in terms that we can all understand. Tell stories. Use characters, action, and dialogue. Know the background and the facts about the owners and the business. Bring the place to life.

ALTERNATIVE: You could also write about a coffeehouse, bowling alley, or other gathering place that offers similar opportunities for observation.

**DUE THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20
REWRITE DUE TUESDAY, MARCH 4**