What is ethnography? In this course we will read classic and recent ethnographic texts, as well as selections from collections that provide critical assessments of the premises of ethnographic textual production. We will also explore the presence of ethnographic writing in fields and genres that are not strictly within the discipline of anthropology, such as literature, journalism, film, memoir, travel writing, history, and cultural studies. We will ask: what distinguishes ethnography from other disciplinary traditions of writing about culture and human behavior? How have recent intellectual currents affected ethnographic writing? What are the different structural conventions, rhetorical tropes, allegorical patterns, and stylistic strategies used by authors considered to be master ethnographers?

Since we will be reading ethnographies from different theoretical and regional perspectives, students will become aware of various anthropological traditions and theories as they are expressed in the texts. The focus of the course, however, will not be on basic anthropological concepts and methods, but on anthropology as a textual form, the production of anthropological knowledge, and the changing narrative genres and literary traditions employed by ethnographers.