

Best Practices for Classroom Observations: A Guide for the Observer

Pre Observation Meeting	
<p>1. Ask questions about the class/focus of the observation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask the instructor the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you been observed before? Do you have any concerns about the observation process? ○ What do you want me to know about your class/learners before I observe? ○ What are some patterns that have emerged from recent lessons that you want me to know about before I observe? ○ I will be using a Peer Observation Checklist. Which three to four focal areas of the checklist do you want me to focus on during the lesson?
<p>2. Agree on the logistics of the observation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Arrange a convenient date and time with the instructor. Arrange to stay for the duration of the class period. <p>In-person observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan a seating arrangement that will minimize interference with the lesson. ● Describe how notes will be taken and shared. (Paper/pen is the most common. Typing on a computer can be disruptive and intimidating.) <p>Remote observations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discuss the norms for camera and microphone use. Will the observer have his/her camera on throughout class, or will he/she turn it on for an introduction and then turn it off? When is the observer expected to be muted? ● Arrange to give the observer access to remote resources or platforms used for the class (i.e., Schoology, Google Classroom, etc.). ● Ensure that the instructor shares documents and lesson tools with the observer beforehand.
<p>3. Discuss logistics for post-observation follow-up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Arrange for adequate reflection time. Plan to spend a minimum of 60 minutes to reflect on the observation before meeting with the instructor. Do not wait longer than 48 hours to meet, as it will be hard to remember the specifics of the lesson. ● Schedule the post-observation meeting during the pre-observation so the date and focus of the post-observation meeting are clear. ● If meeting virtually, turn cameras on and share your screen. ● Set a length of time for the post-observation meeting so that it doesn't go too long (maximum: 60 minutes). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reaffirm that the Peer Observation Checklist is the basis for the post-observation conversation.

Observation

- Follow the agreed-upon observation logistics.
- Observations are not opportunities for the observer to participate in the lesson. In order to objectively survey all learners' behaviors in the lesson and not change the dynamic of the classroom, do not engage learners in conversation. If there is group work, rotate to better hear what learners are saying, but do not interject or participate. Sit in a location that reduces distractions to learners and instructor.
- Record notes on evidence. (What do learners say/do/write? What does the instructor say/do/write? How do learners respond to various materials and activities? Do all learners behave the same way? Is participation equal? Who is responding to questions, leading activities, doing the work?)

Post Observation Meeting

<p>1. Follow the agreed-upon logistics for the post-observation meeting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Keep meetings focused and avoid meeting for too long. One hour or less is recommended. ● Engage the instructor in a dialogue. Allow the instructor to speak often and avoid doing most of the talking in the meeting. It is important that the instructor is actively involved in reflection throughout the meeting. ● Keep the discussion centered around the focal areas agreed upon during the pre-observation meeting. This will help the instructor who was observed to maintain “control” of the conversation and will also keep the conversation from becoming overwhelming with too many disparate thoughts.
<p>2. Always let the instructor speak first.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Start with a “warm-up” question to help make the instructor feels more comfortable and to get a sense of the instructor’s orientation to the lesson. (e.g., How did it go?) ● Ask specific questions <u>before</u> sharing. Ask questions throughout the meeting to get the instructor to reflect and engage in dialogue. (General questions do not usually work for engaging individuals in truly reflective dialogue. See suggestions below in #4 for making direct, immediate connections to evidence through questioning.)
<p>3. Pay attention to body language, tone of voice, word choice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Avoid confrontational/judgmental language. ● Encourage self-reflection and dialogue with the instructor rather than the observer acting as a judge or assessor of the lesson. ● Watch the instructor for signs of discomfort or resentment toward what the observer is saying. ● Review the CCRS Overview of Critical Friends and Critical Friends Feedback Checklists for additional support.
<p>4. Engage in dialogue from the observation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share evidence related to each of the focal areas from the peer observation checklist. ● Do not give general feedback. (The lesson went so well! Learners were very engaged.) Instead, describe the evidence collected related to learner behaviors and instructor behaviors and ask questions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ I noticed the learners did _____ when you said _____. Why do you think that happened? Or, what was the impact of that? ○ Learners were _____ during the _____ activity. What does that tell you about their learning at that moment? ○ (# of learners) completed/didn’t complete the _____ activity. How might you adapt that activity in the future? ○ I noticed that in the original lesson plan, it says _____, but you adapted it to have learners _____. Why did you make those changes? How did it impact the lesson? How do you know? ○ Your materials/instructions for the _____ activity said to _____, but learners _____. Why do you think that happened? How could you adjust the materials in the future to address that point? ○ I saw that learners _____ at the end of the lesson. What does that show about their progress toward the lesson objective?

Post Observation Meeting

5. Balance discussions around lesson strengths and areas of future focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Have the instructor focus on discussing evidence of things that were both successful and less successful in the classroom. Use the same non-evaluative language in all cases, focusing on evidence, and allow the instructor to determine for him- or herself, through that evidence, where the lesson had strengths and where it had areas for improvement.
6. Discussion wrap-up.	<p>Consider and reflect on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Does the instructor have a goal or plan for moving forward? What did he or she learn from the post-observation discussion that he or she wants to address in a future class? What specific change(s) does he or she want to make to his or her instruction related to your discussion? How will that change impact learners, and/or what is the instructor's purpose for wanting to make that change?● Encourage the instructor to write his or her goal or plan so that it has a degree of formality, rather than just saying something offhand to answer the observers' question. The goal is to encourage self-reflection with the purpose of making a change in instruction that will benefit learners.
7. Share notes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● It is not necessary to share the actual notes taken during the observation, rather write the final thoughts on evidence on the observation checklist and share the final form with the instructor.