

The Class Observation Process for Summative Evaluations of Teaching

Before the Observation

1. Observers plan for peer observation by doing the following:
 - reflect on their [specific strengths and limitations as a peer observer](#), as well as their [potential biases in peer evaluation](#),
 - review some [common pitfalls and recommendations](#) in peer evaluation, and
 - prepare an observation protocol to guide the evaluation (i.e., what traits and behaviors to evaluate, how to document the observation; see effective practices and options in the “Classroom Observation” section of the *Peer Evaluation of Teaching* [site](#)).
2. Observers review the course syllabus and relevant materials for visited class session (e.g., basic topic & plan, assigned readings, homework problems).
3. The instructor prepares observers by briefly explaining goals, context, and plans for the class period. This preparation may be via email or a pre-class conversation. (See [sample pre-observation questions](#).)

The Observation

1. The instructor informs students of the visit ahead of time, noting that the observation is for the instructor’s professional development, rather than an evaluation of the students.
2. Observers visit the predetermined class period. After being briefly introduced to students, observers do not participate. To include any pre- and post-class interactions with students, observers may arrive a few minutes early and leave a few minutes late. (*Virtual class option*: to be less intrusive for the class and more flexible for observers, synchronous virtual class sessions may be recorded for observers to view later. Students should be informed of the recording and its use.)

After the Observation

1. *Optional*: Observers meet with the instructor for a post-class conversation to share each’s initial reactions and the instructor’s choices made during class period.
2. Observers prepare a letter or report with two parts:
 - a. a brief summary of the observed session, possibly attaching the more detailed observation notes (see Option 2, Step 2 in the “Classroom Observation” section of the *Peer Evaluation of Teaching* [site](#)), and
 - b. a constructive evaluation of what was done well and what needs improvement.
3. As a courtesy, observers typically share a draft with the instructor to check for accuracy. The final letter is submitted to *both the instructor and the relevant evaluating committee*.

[Click here for a more detailed description of an effective process for peer observations.](#)