



# PEER OBSERVATION OF TEACHING: EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

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# PART I: KEY CONSIDERATIONS -

# RATIONALE, CONTEXT AND PRINCIPLES

## Introduction

As described by Chism (2007) in *Peer Review of Teaching: A Sourcebook*, peer review of teaching is “informed colleague judgment about faculty teaching for either fostering improvement or making personnel decisions” (p. 3). Peer review of teaching is a broad concept that includes an array of practices, including the assessment of [teaching dossiers](#), syllabi, assignments, student and course evaluations, personal reflections, and peer observation. Peer review of teaching is used for both summative and formative purposes.

Summative peer review of teaching is geared towards generating information needed to evaluate teaching for human resource-related purposes (e.g., tenure and promotion). As summative reviews are evaluations with a defined purpose in mind, they tend to cover broad categories, and offer a comparison to peers. Formative assessment, in the context of the peer review of teaching, refers to activities and processes that provide instructors with specific feedback that they can use to improve their teaching practice. The feedback generated from formative assessment is intended to provide instructors with robust and detailed insights into their teaching. As Chism states, formative assessment of teaching is “the basis for the development of effective teaching throughout one’s career” (p. 5).

Peer observation, for both summative and formative purposes, is an important component of the peer review of teaching. In general, collaborative peer observation of teaching is comprised of three steps:

1. **a pre-observation conference;**
2. **an in-person classroom visit** (or online observation, in the case of online courses) during which detailed observations of the instructor’s practice (including classroom environment and student interactions) are captured via a template or rubric, and through narrative notes; and,
3. **a post-observation conference** that includes both self-reflection on the part of the observee and constructive feedback from the observer (Wilkerson & Lewis, 2002, p. 75).

There are many models of peer observation, and emerging models of the observation of online courses. **The primary focus of this guide is formative peer observation of teaching at the University of Toronto, including in online courses.** The guide presents different models of peer observation and assessment that can be adapted to multiple contexts across the institution, providing tools and instruments for peer observation of teaching, and offering an overview of how to best use them.

Although focused on formative practices, the guide outlines how these processes differ from those used for summative purposes, and describes how these practices might be adapted as departments carry out summative observations of teaching for tenure and promotion purposes, as included and outlined in some U of T divisional guidelines for the assessment of teaching for tenure and promotion.



**[FORMATIVE EVALUATION IS] THE BASIS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING THROUGHOUT ONE’S CAREER.”**

(Chism, 2007, p. 5)



...A PROCESS WHEREBY A TEACHER PARTICIPATES AS AN OBSERVER IN A LESSON TAUGHT BY A COLLEAGUE FOR THE PURPOSES OF EXPLORING THE LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESS AND ENVIRONMENT AND WHERE THIS 'OBSERVATION' LEADS ON TO REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION, WITH THE UNDERPINNING LONG-TERM AIM OF IMPROVING STUDENTS' LEARNING."

(Bennett & Barp, 2008, p. 559)

## The Goals and Benefits of Peer Observation of Teaching

Peer observation of teaching in higher education has been used and evaluated both as a faculty development technique and a summative evaluation tool for several decades. Studies highlight the value of the practice as a way of foregrounding the teaching and learning process, making teaching practice visible, and improving the quality of teaching and student experiences (Fullerton, 1993; Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2004; Martin & Double, 1998; Pressick-Kilborn & te Riele, 2008). Bennett and Barp (2008) summarize the process and outcomes of peer observation as follows:

...a process whereby a teacher participates as an observer in a lesson taught by a colleague for the purposes of exploring the learning and teaching process and environment and where this 'observation' leads on to reflection and discussion, with the underpinning long-term aim of improving students' learning. (p. 559)

Martin and Double (1998) identify the six main aims of peer observation as:

- 1 improving or developing an understanding of personal approaches to curriculum delivery;
- 2 enhancing and extending teaching techniques through collaboration;
- 3 exchanging insights relating to the review of teaching performance;
- 4 expanding personal skills of self-reflection and evaluation;
- 5 developing curriculum planning skills in collaboration with peers and colleagues; and,
- 6 identifying areas in teaching practice with particular merit or in need of development.

Sullivan, Buckle, Nicky, and Atkinson (2012) further enumerate the practical benefits of peer observation, stating that the process can additionally reaffirm teaching skills, provide developmental feedback and ultimately maintain high standards in undergraduate teaching, for example. Peer observation in its collaborative approach may also play a role in contributing to strong departmental teaching climates and cultures (Smith, 2013).

## Three Models for Peer Observation

A review of the literature demonstrates that there are three basic models of peer observation of teaching usually conducted within higher education institutions. Gosling (2002) captures these models as follows: 1) an **evaluation model**, where the primary purpose is to provide summative feedback for the purposes of appraisal or quality assurance; 2) a **developmental model** where the overarching goal of observation is improving teaching and learning; and 3) the **peer review model**, where self- and mutual- reflection are emphasized, resulting in formative feedback. As described by Siddiqui et al. (2007), the "essence of the peer-review model ... is that teachers observe each other, often in a reciprocal process" (p. 297).

Several studies demonstrate how the peer review model for the observation of teaching provides faculty with opportunities for development, and improves teaching practice (Bell 2001; Hendry & Oliver, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2012). Hendry and Oliver (2012) write that "observing a colleague teach can both show the observing teachers how new strategies work and enhance their confidence to apply them in their own teaching" (p. 1), and Sullivan et al. (2012) show how the peer observation of teaching can provide "an opportunity to examine both content and delivery of individual course components so that suggestions could be made as to how these might be improved or refined" (p. 3).



Other benefits include first-hand collegial support and the growth of teaching-related collaboration (Pressick-Killborn & te Riele, 2008). Throughout the process, peer observation can act as a valuable opportunity for reflection, give insight into teaching practices, mutual professional development, and quality improvement in teaching and learning (Sullivan et al., 2012).

## Setting the Context: Experiences with In-Class Observation at the University of Toronto

In a recent [report on faculty mentoring for teaching practices](#) at the University of Toronto, the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation (CTSI) interviewed a range of faculty members who described peer observation of teaching experiences. Several faculty members interviewed described occasions in which peers from within and outside their department sought feedback on their in-class teaching. For example, a participant in a department in the Physical Sciences described a lengthy history of peer support for in-class observations that are further enhanced by including students in the formative assessment process. In their paired interview with CTSI, participants reflected on the value of this activity and support for observing one another's teaching to gain new insights on strategies, approaches, and educational technologies. A strong teaching culture in this department has opened the spaces to discuss and make public one's teaching (Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, p. 42).

As described in the broader literature, conducting an in-class observation of teaching is a highly beneficial activity (Chism, 2007). Participants in the CTSI mentoring study also recommended that this formative in-class observational feedback should ideally be viewed separately from observations that are part of formal summative tenure and promotion processes. As part of going forward for tenure or promotion, some divisions require that faculty members are observed teaching and a report on the in-class observation be provided to the review committee. Leading up to this observation, participants reported, there can be little

to no preparation for or feedback on in-class teaching. Preparation in such cases might include a formative "check-in" prior to the more formalized observation. One interview respondent shared the value in providing feedback prior to tenure and promotion processes, otherwise many new and early career faculty will only experience one in-class observation as a primarily summative and "high stakes" activity. Several faculty members shared positive experiences in engaging in formative in-class observation sessions and the post-observation debriefing meetings. In addition to their developmental purposes, these experiences can also serve as important preparation for eventual summative observations.

A group of faculty members who were observed in weekly in-class observations with a senior faculty member felt that such sessions were very helpful and formed the basis of a meaningful mentor-mentee relationship. One mentor observer recommended that this approach can "offer a bird's eye view of the course" and can also help inform the mentee about content overlap. An observee felt that including in-class observations was key to "developing one's own teaching style." Two additional participants who were mentored within this model said the formality of this frequent activity was positive and worked well (Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, p. 54).

Other key recommendations from participants included gauging what observees can handle or absorb in the first year of their appointment: "I support in-class observations but there may be too much stress or pressure on a new hire – wait for a while, while they settle. It's good to ask but don't push them – [the observee] needs a sense of trust as they feel very vulnerable." Another participant emphasized that creating a positive teaching culture that elevates interest in observing and learning from others' teaching requires a careful approach that can lead to reciprocal benefits for observer and observee:

The interest is there and depends on how it is approached. I have done these in-class observations



with a few people and time is an issue but we created a culture in that people felt comfortable and I could ask, “do you mind if I sit in today...?”...seeing what someone else does causes you to reflect on your own teaching (Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, p. 54).

Participants in the mentoring study (Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, 2016) also expressed a keen interest in documenting in-class observations to include in their tenure or promotion teaching dossiers as a means of demonstrating their efforts to become more effective instructors. However, such documentation is not always a feature of peer observation. When engaging in peer observation, participants discuss how an in-class observation might be documented in order to effectively capture instructor-student interaction in a class, as well as showcase efforts to innovate and take risks in their teaching. Observation checklists, of which we provide samples in this guide, can provide guidance ahead of observation sessions and can serve as a debriefing tool in the post-observation consultation. Strategies for moving forward can emerge from such discussions and could be included in teaching summaries for a participant’s tenure or promotion dossier (Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation, p. 54).

Peer-supported in-class observations can help create a supportive environment for new faculty who are seeking to enhance their teaching effectiveness. The *Teaching Squares* model, described in detail later in this guide, offers a supportive space to create small communities of faculty guided through a series of in-class observations that expose them to other instructors at their experience level and in a formative environment.

## Online Observation: An Emerging Context

As online and hybrid teaching becomes more common, instructors and divisions have sought ways in which to get feedback and reflect on online teaching. The online teaching context provides a valuable arena for the application of peer observation of teaching models, outside of those widely applicable to the process enumerated previously. In a study conducted by Bennett and Barp (2008) on the efficacy of peer observation

online, participants reported “added value through the unique opportunity not only to debate and discuss online experiences, but to focus on the online processes themselves within the context of implementation, to reflect on them, model best practices and observe them in colleagues.” This is corroborated in the work of Harper and Nicolson (2011), who found that for many instructors new to the online context, who have not themselves been online learners, peer observation offers them the chance to share practice and build community. Instructors benefit by gaining insight into how their colleagues teach online, gleaning information on how to adapt pedagogy and enhance their own practice.

Although many learner-centred pedagogical strategies can be applied to the online context with great success, teaching online necessarily requires different types of interactions with students and course materials. The use of learning management systems, also a feature in many face-to-face classrooms, allows observers to readily access a full archive of course material. Online learning in both its synchronous and asynchronous forms can provide observers with a perspective on a wider breadth of teaching skills, including how instructors structure assignments, deal with formative assessment, and respond to individual students. As Kell (2005) describes, online observation offers the opportunity to extend the reach of peer observation “from ‘content/stand-up performance’ and instead embrace the breadth of the ‘teaching’ role and its impact on the total learning environment” (p. 8). Indeed, as Harper and Nicolson (2013) state, as ‘effective practice’ is currently “less than fully established in online teaching, practitioners from the very inexperienced to those deemed ‘expert’ can learn from each other” (p. 273).

Bennett and Sandy (2009) comment on how the ‘archived’ nature of online learning “opens up possibilities for online tutors to work together in ways (relating to time and place) that have not been possible in the past” (p. 404). Together the observer and observee can learn about new modes of instruction, how to effectively adapt to new contexts and technologies, and how to develop new, adaptable teaching strategies. Because of the ‘newness’ of online teaching, there are huge amounts of gains that can be made in terms of teacher development



**[ONLINE OBSERVATION OFFERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO] BROADEN THE REMIT OF PEER OBSERVATION AWAY FROM ‘FROM CONTENT/STAND-UP PERFORMANCE’ AND INSTEAD EMBRACE THE BREADTH OF THE ‘TEACHING’ ROLE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE TOTAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.”**

(Kell, 2005, p. 8)

through peer observation and learning (Bennett & Sandy, 2009). Key to this is “adopting approaches which [incorporate] a sense of exploring or “researching” the nature of the online teaching/learning process itself” (p. 405).

## Peer Observation: Recommended Processes

This guide discusses three modes of peer observation that are adaptable to various contexts:



1) one-on-one observation;



2) teaching squares (comprised of four individuals), or triads; and,



3) online observation.

**We advocate a basic, three-step process for all of these models, with additional steps depending on context:**

<b>Step 1</b>	pre-observation meeting
<b>Step 2</b>	observation
<b>Step 3</b>	post-observation consultation

Widely promoted in the literature, this three-step process is comprised of a pre-observation meeting, the observation itself, and a post-observation consultation (Chism, 2007; Martin & Double, 1998; Siddiqui et al., 2007). Some models adapt this process by adding in written reflections on the part of the observee or through the interventions of a faculty developer (Yiend et al., 2014; Bell, 2001). Effective practices for these three steps are outlined later in this guide.

Time is a constraining factor for all participants in peer observations of teaching. Nonetheless, we recommend that, for maximum formative impact on teaching practice, observations be repeated at least twice in an academic year. The observations should take place in a similar context – not necessarily the same course, but in the same general discipline and instructional setting. Ideally, the observer can return to visit the instructor’s classroom over a number of years so that both can



**THIS REFLECTIVE PRACTICE “INVOLVES THE PROCESS OF TEACHING AND THE THINKING BEHIND IT, RATHER THAN SIMPLY EVALUATING THE TEACHING ITSELF. IT IS, THEREFORE, ADDRESSING THE QUESTION OF WHY AS OPPOSED TO HOW AND, MOST IMPORTANT, IT IS ABOUT LEARNING FROM THIS PROCESS.”**

(Hammersley-Fletcher, 2005, p. 214)

document and map changes and growth. When teaching is observed more than once in a similar context, the observer and observee are able to look back at the growth of the instructor’s teaching practice, see what has developed and changed, gauge the reactions of students and the efficacy of the instructor.

Studies show that the most effective peer observations in terms of engendering growth in teaching skills involve self-reflection on the part of both the observer and observee. As stated by Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005), this reflective practice “involves the process of teaching and the thinking behind it, rather than simply evaluating the teaching itself. It is, therefore, addressing the question of why as opposed to how and, most important, it is about learning from this process” (214).

Reflection is a vital part of learning, and as pointed out by Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005), “[vehicles] that can encourage and develop reflective practice are essential, and peer observation processes can form an important part of such developments” (p. 221). Bell (2001) regards reflection as “an essential skill of effective teachers” that “enables teaching practitioners to articulate the components of their work that lead to successful outcomes, thus supporting their own professional development and their ability to mentor and develop others” (p. 32). Reflection on teaching “involves the reconstruction of one’s experiences: the honest acceptance and analysis of feedback; the evaluation of one’s skills, attitudes and knowledge; and the identification and exploration of new possibilities for professional action” (Bell, 2001, p. 31). Through the peer observation of teaching, instructors and observers can develop their reflective thinking skills, thereby engaging in reciprocal, formative development.





**CRITICAL FEEDBACK MUST BE PRESENTED IN WAYS THAT ARE CONSTRUCTIVE AND WILL LEAD TO NEW UNDERSTANDINGS AND IMPROVED PRACTICE. ANY FEELING THAT JUDGEMENTS ARE BEING MADE WILL ACT TO DETRACT FROM SUCH BENEFITS, AND CALL THE WHOLE PEER OBSERVATION PROCESS INTO DISREPUTE.”**

(Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005, p. 218)

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## Feedback: A Core Element of the Observation Process

As Sullivan et al. (2012) describe, quality feedback is vital to the success of the peer observation process. According to their study, feedback should endeavour to be:

- **descriptive of behaviour rather than personality;**
- **specific and sensitive;**
- **directed towards changeable behaviour; and,**
- **timely.**

Sullivan et al. recommend that feedback also be selective, highlighting one or two areas of strength and improvement rather than overwhelming the observee with too much information.

MacKinnon (2001) endorses an approach to feedback that is systematic, supportive, educational and developmental, calling for the use of a [narrative log](#) that enumerates strengths and challenges and provides a summary that highlights strengths and possible areas for growth and improvement. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) advocate a similar model, where “Step 1 involves spending time making a considered written review, Step 2 is where strengths and weaknesses are identified and Step 3 is the summary pulling out key points for discussion” (p. 215).

Cosh (1998) argues that **feedback should consist of at least a conversation or written response that clarifies insights and comments, and through which effective practices can be broadly shared.** She writes that feedback should “encourage further self-development and [provide] suggestions for the sharing and dissemination of good practice... and, in addition, suggest possible areas of specific focus for future observation” (p. 175).

It is important to remember that those being observed through a peer observation, in both formative and summative settings, are in a vulnerable position – no matter their career stage or level of teaching experience.

Therefore, “critical feedback must be presented in ways that are constructive and will lead to new understandings and improved practice. Any feeling that judgements are being made will act to detract from such benefits, and call the whole peer observation process into disrepute” (Hammersley-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005, p. 218).

In Joellen Killion’s “The Feedback Process: Transforming Feedback for Professional Learning” (2015) she describes feedback as a “dynamic, dialogic process that uses evidence to engage a learner, internally or with a learning partner, in constructing knowledge about practice and self” (p. 13).

Killion enumerates 11 characteristics of an effective, learning-focused feedback process:

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING-FOCUSED FEEDBACK (ADAPTED FROM KILLION, 2015)</b>
<b>1. Process</b> – engaging learner in review, analysis, reflection and planning
<b>2. Criterion-based</b> – uses explicit, pre-established and known criteria
<b>3. Multiple forms &amp; sources of data/evidence</b> – Multiple sources of evidence are more constructive, concrete and less biased and subjective
<b>4. Desired</b> – feedback should be invited and welcome
<b>5. Timely</b> – proximity of the feedback to the observation influences how the observee responds
<b>6. Responsive to learner</b> – tailored to the developmental needs, perspective, context and level of expertise of the learner
<b>7. Frequent</b> – frequent and routine feedback is viewed as growth-oriented
<b>8. Future-focused</b> – guides the learner expediently towards changes in teaching practice
<b>9. Reciprocal</b> – through the feedback process, the observee helps the observer construct knowledge to build capacity, and also gives space to reflect on the observer’s own practice
<b>10. Skilful interaction</b> – clarity and precise communication increase understanding and the value of the feedback process
<b>11. Multidimensional</b> – the learner is engaged in more than one way, encouraging reflection on multiple levels

Killion clearly lays out the components of the feedback process that should be considered by both the observer(s) and observee when arranging, conducting and following up on observations. The chart below details the components in an effective, learning-focused feedback process:

### Steps of Learning-focused Feedback Process

<b>Components</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
<b>Review goal and expectations</b>	Establish or review and clarify understanding of learning goals, expectations, and criteria of success
<b>Specify indicators for success.</b>	Define what success looks like or identify which criteria will be used as a reference for assessing the effectiveness for practice
<b>Determine data.</b>	Identify what data are needed for the feedback process
<b>Collect data.</b>	Collect multiple forms of evidence from authentic practice or appropriate simulations
<b>Analyze data and evidence.</b>	Use data and evidence to analyze practice and assess it against specified criteria to identify current status in relationship to the criteria; reflect on strengths and areas for continued focus; clarify expectations or criteria for success if necessary
<b>Construct knowledge.</b>	Reflect on practice, data, and evidence from practice and analyze them to generate conclusions, generalizations, or hypotheses to apply to future practice
<b>Deconstruct knowledge.</b>	Examine variations of the newly constructed knowledge to explore its appropriateness in alternative contexts
<b>Determine next actions.</b>	Identify and prioritize next steps based on the new knowledge and support needed to apply it in subsequent practice
<b>Reflect on the feedback process.</b>	Assess the usefulness, rigor, effectiveness of the feedback process and the contributions of learning partners
<b>Integrate knowledge.</b>	Apply new learning/knowledge in subsequent actions

(Killion, 2015, p. 65)



# PART II: EFFECTIVE PROCESSES AND PRACTICES FOR PEER OBSERVATION

The process of a single peer observation, whether in a one-on-one, online or teaching squares context, takes approximately three hours (depending on the length of the class observed). As previously noted, there are three stages to peer observation: pre-observation; observation; and post-observation. Depending on the schedules of participants, there can be a break between the second and third stages, but the observer's sustained attention and engaged presence is required throughout the process. It is also recommended that feedback be given as soon as possible following the observation (Siddiqui et al., 2007).

## *Choosing an Observer*

Key to a successful observation of teaching is the relationship between the observer and the observee. As Keig (2000) describes, studies of the peer observation of teaching suggest that "colleagues who respect and trust each other can be invaluable in helping improve each other's teaching" (p. 68). When choosing an observer, the following characteristics may be considered:

1. **Knowledge of the teaching context (large classroom, online, seminar, etc.).**
2. **At least a passing familiarity with the subject area – cross-disciplinary observations can be very fruitful but an observer should understand the basic context of the class they are entering into. This context can be provided in the pre-observation meeting.**
3. **Knowledge of teaching techniques and pedagogies suitable to the teaching context.**
4. **Ability to provide constructive feedback to the observee.**

Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005) share that the observer should provide the observee with "as an objective view of the teaching session as possible, and review and reflect on that experience with the observee in a way that informs future thinking and practice" (2005, p.214). Chism (2007) recommends that effective programs of peer observations ensure that the "observed teacher and the observer [be] trusted and respected by each other;" (p. 100) underlining that feedback should be candid, yet tactful, and clear communication between the observer and observee should be fostered.

## *The Pre-observation Consultation*

Ideally, the observer and observee should meet to discuss any particular issues the observee would like to see addressed in the feedback generated through the observation. The information gathered can focus on goals, the students in the class, the activities that will be presented and the instructor's individual teaching practice and style. We provide a sample template of the pre-observation consultation form below.

Subsequently, the observer and observee should review the material that will be covered in the observed class. Understanding the key learning outcomes to be taught and the usual structure of the class will be useful. The observer can request that the observee provide in advance any material that will help guide the observer's understanding of the material presented in terms of context and level of understanding of the students, including the course syllabus, assignments and textbooks/readings.

## *Conducting the In-class Observation*

Suggested best practices for classroom visits are summarized in **Appendix B**. As well, observers should consider the general guidelines offered below while conducting the in-class observation.

1. Ensure that you arrive early to the class, checking with the instructor where they would prefer you to sit; you should ensure minimal disruption to the class's routine.
2. Observe the class, focusing on the areas covered



by the observation tool or rubric you have agreed to use, as well as any individual issues raised by the instructor in your initial meeting. Take notes.

3. Pay close attention not merely to the instructor, but also to the reactions of students. This will allow you to make observations on the engagement with course material and reactions to the instructor's personal teaching style.
4. Make note of anything the instructor does that seems particularly effective, as well as those areas in which further development of their skills would be beneficial.
5. Take some additional time to record other thoughts about the observation as soon as possible after the class concludes.
6. Be objective in your evaluation by describing observations and avoiding judgements.
7. Consider the learning environment from both the instructor and learners' perspectives.
8. Resist the urge to compare with your own teaching style, avoiding using your approach a point of reference, and focus instead on the teaching style of the instructor you are observing.

*As general guidelines, observers can look for the following general teaching behaviours:*

- **Organization** – clearly states when topics are changing; recaps previous learning and provides summary at the end; emphasizes most important points, etc.
- **Communication** – addresses students directly when talking; speaks audibly and clearly; rephrases or reframes difficult concepts, etc.
- **Report** – solicits student feedback, addresses students by name, and encourages students to build on each other's comments and questions, etc.

## **Using a Narrative Log**

We recommend the use of a narrative log, especially to those new to the peer observation of teaching. As Chism (2007) describes, a narrative log is a mainly formative tool that describes “verbal and non-verbal behaviour, emphasizing what the reviewer sees [and hears rather] than the reviewer's judgement” (p. 106). Observers can use this log to record times in the class when a behaviour (from both the students and the instructor) or activity occurs, allowing the observer and observee to review the structure, flow and timing of the class. The narrative log is very useful in guiding the post-observation consultation. Chism notes that this tool can be used to guide “the instructor's consideration of fit of actions to goals, student learning issues, alternate ways that situations could have been handled, and the like” (p. 106). The following questions are adapted from Chism (2007) and can help focus the narrative log, by being mapped on to a particular moment in time:

- ▶ What is the instructor speaking about?
- ▶ What specific comments are being made? (Student & Instructor)
- ▶ What types of questions are being asked? (Student & Instructor)
- ▶ How are classroom learning activities organized? A chart may be a useful organizational framework to answer this question.
- ▶ What is the level of student interaction?
- ▶ What teaching strategies are being used?

A sample narrative log is included in the appendices of this guide, on page 18.

## **Self-Assessment**

After the completion of the observation, and in preparation for the post-observation consultation, the observee should engage in a process of self-assessment and reflection. The observee might reflect upon what they were





thinking or feeling at key points in the lesson while performing certain tasks. The goal is to reconstruct and analyze one's teaching context and performance to identify teaching strengths and areas for improvement. Then, when the peer feedback is received, the observee can compare and contrast their self-assessment with the peer observation.

The following reflective questions can be considered when preparing a self-assessment:

### WHAT WAS

Challenging? \_\_\_\_\_

Surprising? \_\_\_\_\_

A success? \_\_\_\_\_

### WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?

### NAME ONE THING YOU WILL WORK ON – YOUR "ACTION PLAN"

Weimer, et al. (2002), provide a comprehensive self-evaluation form that instructors can use to examine their own teaching practices (p. 35).

We encourage instructors to work through a teaching inventory for more information on their teaching approaches. These inventories allow for self-reflection on personal pedagogical approaches, practices and perspectives, measuring the extent to which certain practices are employed and valued. Using such a tool provides valuable insights into teaching and prompts thinking regarding pedagogy and decisions related to it.

## ***The Post-observation Consultation***

Suggested best practices for follow-up after classroom visits are provided in **Appendix B**. The purpose of the post-observation consultation or meeting is to review the observation form in detail and discuss strategies and next steps for improvement. **Be sure that you begin your post-observation conference with the observee's own self-assessment of how the class went.** The observer should always take the lead from the observee and begin with the self-assessment.

The following steps should be taken by the **observer** to prepare for the post-observation consultation:

**STEP 1:** Complete your observation form. Note that written comments can be particularly useful to instructors, and should be as detailed as possible.

**STEP 2:** Make sure you recognize what was done well (the strengths of the instructor). Knowing how to build on existing strengths and successes is important.

**STEP 3:** If identifying areas for improvement, be specific and focus on one or two key points that are achievable in the short term and perhaps one longer term goal.

To begin the post-observation consultation, the observer asks the instructor the following global reflective question:

### ***What is your overall impression of the class?***

Then, move to more targeted questions, such as:

1. Once you finished teaching that day, what did you think went well, or what did you feel was not so successful? Why?
2. What would you do differently the next time you have to teach that class or topic? Why?
3. What did you think of the time management in the class, the students' level of participation, your own management of the course material and activities, etc.? *Here, focus on the agreed upon observation areas from the pre-observation consultation.*
4. Given what happened in this class or what has been happening in your teaching overall, is there any issue in particular for which you would like additional guidance or resources?



Give the instructor the opportunity to speak first, and share their observations and reflections, prior to the observer providing feedback. Allow the instructor to ask any questions, and then direct them to any resources you feel may be useful to them. Throughout the consultation, show empathy and provide encouragement.

### ***Providing meaningful feedback on teaching***

The literature on feedback, as outlined in previous sections of this guide, provides an overarching framework for providing meaningful feedback in order that participants meet the goals they have set for the peer observation of teaching. As Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2005) point out, feedback sessions involve both the observer and observee taking up an observation and “act as a key trigger and means of enhancing the reflective process for both parties” (p. 215). This section draws on this literature to guide peers in providing meaningful feedback.

Quality feedback for teaching:

- Is **formative** as opposed to summative (this is not to say summative feedback cannot be provided – rather, that when feedback is supplied to the observee, it should be forward-looking in nature in order to facilitate teaching improvement)
- Aims to **identify a challenge** and help formulate an improvement plan
- Focuses on **alternatives** and **options**
- Is **non-judgmental** regarding teaching performance
- Is **descriptive** rather than prescriptive

The table to the right contrasts descriptive, specific and exploratory feedback with judgmental and overly-vague feedback statements. The goal is to strive to improve one’s skill in providing descriptive feedback.

Finally, of critical importance is providing feedback through the use of effective questions that support reflection and exploration of a variety of perspectives.

**Appendix C** provides a range of examples while also outlining questions to avoid (Sharpe & Nishimura, 2017).

DESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK	PRESCRIPTIVE FEEDBACK
CONSULTATIVE FEEDBACK IS BASED ON “I” STATEMENTS. THIS FEEDBACK SHOULD BE...	INEFFECTIVE FEEDBACK IS OFTEN BASED ON “YOU” STATEMENTS. THIS FEEDBACK CAN BE...
<b>Objective</b> “I was able to follow your explanation even though I don’t know calculus.”	<b>Subjective and evaluative</b> “Your explanation was good (or bad).”
<b>Realistic and concrete</b> “I found it helpful when you showed us how to use the instruments before you asked us to set up the experiment. This gave me confidence to complete the experiment.”	<b>Idealistic and abstract</b> “You should give a pre-lab talk – they really work.”
<b>Motivating and informative suggestions</b> “I wonder about providing a different kind of example – do you think an analogy would have worked here?”	<b>Demanding and self- important</b> “You should learn to use better examples.”
<b>Clarifying and questioning</b> “I thought that ‘official’ meant bossy, but you used it as a political term. What does it mean in this context?”  Follow-up question: “Has this particular use of the term been clarified for your students?”	<b>Confusing or ambiguous (can promote resistance)</b> “Your lesson would have been better if you had included an explanation of the emergence of official sites.”

Adapted from Border, L. (2008).



## Sample Peer Observation Protocols



### 1. One-to-One Classroom Observation

The processes for one-to-one classroom observation form the basis for many of the other contexts we outline in this guide. There are two main formative frameworks for one-to-one classroom observation: **reciprocal and mentoring.**

**Reciprocal** one-to-one classroom observation takes place among instructors of the same career stage. The focus in the observation is not only the development of the instructor being observed, but self-reflection and simultaneous learning of the observer. Feedback is given through constructive dialogues that underline the mutual benefits for both peers.

When one instructor is more senior or experienced than the other, a **mentoring, developmental observation** can take place. When the senior instructor observes the less-experienced instructor, their experience and expertise can lend itself to targeted feedback on how to improve teaching. Conversely, an instructor can learn a great deal from observing a senior instructor in the classroom, which can provide an excellent opportunity for self-reflection and stimulate improvement.



### 2. Teaching Squares or Triads

Teaching Squares is a peer observation tool developed by Anne Wessely (2002) from St. Louis Community College. Teaching Squares (or triads) are a formative, structured process of observation and shared reflection, comprised of groups of four instructors, ideally from different disciplines, who observe each other's teaching. **Participants avoid evaluating their colleagues' performance, focusing instead on what they have learned about their own teaching through observing their peers.**

As described by the Centre for Teaching Excellence at the University of Waterloo, the "aim of the Teaching Squares approach is to

enhance teaching and learning through a structured process of classroom observation, reflection and discussion (leading to a plan for revitalization)" (Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo, 2014).

A basic timeline of Teaching Squares activities is as follows:

#### 1. SQUARE INTRODUCTIONS

- Meet your square to discuss expectations for the observations, agree on a rubric or template for the observation, and plan a schedule of visits.
- This time should be used to clarify what each participant's goals are for this experience, and to identify what each individual hopes to gain in terms of insight into their own teaching practice.

#### 2. EXCHANGE MATERIALS

- After confirming the observation schedule, pass on any relevant course materials to square members, e.g., course syllabi, reading lists, descriptions of planned activities, etc.

#### 3. CLASS VISITS

- Visit and observe the class of each square member, recording observations on the agreed-upon instrument or rubric.

#### 4. SELF-REFLECTION

- After the completion of all the classroom observations, look back over your notes in preparation for sharing and discussion.
- Focus on what you have learned from the observation experience.

#### 5. SQUARE SHARE

- Meet with your square to share reflections.

Adapted from the Center for Teaching and Learning at Stonehill College, *Teaching Squares Handbook* (Grooters, 2008).

The Center for Teaching and Learning at Stonehill College (2008) has identified four cornerstones that underlie the Teaching Squares approach and are critical to creating successful observations:



<p><b>1. RECIPROCITY AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY</b></p> <p>As Teaching Squares are comprised of mutual visits, participants are both observer and observed, and all share the experience of inviting others to observe their teaching. The structure of Teaching Squares is conducive to collaboration and cooperation, as the group works together to organize and administer visits and reflections.</p>	<p><b>2. SELF-REFERENTIAL REFLECTION</b></p> <p>The observations and subsequent reflection are opportunities to reflect on one's own teaching practice and what one has learned by experiencing the classrooms of colleagues and peers. Self-focused observations avoid evaluation and judgement, and contribute to the collaborative nature of the process.</p>
<p><b>3. APPRECIATION</b></p> <p>Identify the teaching strategies and practices used by colleagues to create a productive and supportive learning environment. Through the receipt of positive feedback, participants will be able to link observations back to their personal goals.</p>	<p><b>4. MUTUAL RESPECT</b></p> <p>Participants recognize that different instructional methods are required in different classrooms, and enter into the Teaching Squares process with an attitude of respect for their fellow instructors, as well as the learners.</p>
<p>We add a final cornerstone: <b>5. CONFIDENTIALITY</b></p> <p>Participants recognize that the insights gained and comments shared are to be kept between the observer and instructor, unless otherwise discussed when setting up their personal observation protocol.</p>	



### 3. Peer Observation of Online Courses

The peer observation of online courses should follow the same basic procedure as other styles of observation, with a pre-observation meeting, the observation itself, and a post-observation consultation making up the process. As with other observations, key outcomes of this process include constructive feedback regarding teaching effectiveness, and insight into the experiences of the learners in the course. As online courses are a new medium for many instructors, peer observation lends

itself well to co-learning among the mentor and mentee about effective practices in this context.

Observation of online courses can focus on six main categories:

1. Learner Support and Resources
2. Online Organization and Design
3. Instructional Design and Delivery
4. Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning
5. Innovative Teaching with Technology
6. Faculty Use of Student Feedback

Adapted from California State University, Chico, *Exemplary Online Instruction* (2016).

The California State University, Chico (2016), has developed an extensive rubric for the assessment of online instruction, available at the above link. The University of Toronto has adapted this rubric and guide to online course design to provide a 'roadmap' for instructors during the course design process, or as a self-assessment tool to assist in the revision and reworking of online courses. The [Online Course Design Guidelines](#) offer a formative, developmental assessment of online courses and lend themselves to self-assessment during the design and delivery of online courses.

In addition, University of Toronto's Online Learning Strategies has developed a Peer Review Process for their Online Learning Leadership Program, which has been adapted below (Harrison & Heikoop, 2016). The following suggested steps take a reflective and collaborative approach to reviewing online courses.

1. As the observee, provide the observer with:
  - Access to your online course
  - Copy of your syllabus
  - Any related design documents such as mind maps, or outline tables (if available/relevant to process)
  - Short list of any aspects of course for which feedback would be particularly valued
2. As the observer, use the Online Course Observation Template found on page 24 to guide your observations as you explore the design of the observee's course. Note comments in the right hand column. The final prompts allow for deeper reflection on the strengths and opportunities you observe. The observer and observee can mutually agree upon the time frame for completion of this step.
3. Meet up in person for a de-brief:
  - a. Begin with the short list of aspects of the course for which the observee requested particular feedback.



- b. Follow this with the observee's reflections on their own self-assessment regarding strengths, challenges and areas to refine.
- c. The observer may then share their observations, ask questions, explore ideas for dealing with challenges.
- d. Together, the observer and observee generate a few concrete ideas for next steps or refinements.

As with peer observation of teaching of non-online courses, the overarching aim is to gather feedback from a trusted colleague to inform your teaching practices and course design processes.

### **The Observation of Teaching for Summative Purposes**

As outlined in Part I, it is important to repeat the peer observation of teaching process if possible, for the process to have the greatest impact. This is particularly significant when using peer observation of teaching for summative purposes. We recommend the following basic process.

1. In some divisions a summative observation is required as part of the tenure/promotion process. What is most critical is that an instructor experience a formative observation of teaching prior to an observation of teaching for summative purposes (e.g., tenure or promotion).

2. As with formative observations, observations of teaching for summative purposes should ideally occur more than once in an academic cycle. Try to observe instructors at least twice for a summative report.
3. Evaluate instructors in the same general instructional context.
4. Make the summative evaluation available to the review committee as one source of evidence in assessing teaching.

Departments and divisions using the observation of teaching for summative purposes might consider the following additional guidelines, adapted from Chism (2007):

1. When information from a classroom observation is to be used summatively, particular care should be taken to assure the reliability of the observation. Guidelines for how the observer should be chosen, how many observations should occur, how long the observations should last, and what approach is used to gather and report data should be agreed upon in the department and followed consistently.
2. A set of criteria that the department determines to be important should be developed and used to focus classroom observation.
3. The approach used by the observer should permit the gathering of information that is representative of the instructor's overall teaching and reported in a format that enables it to be compared with information from other instructors.
4. The report should provide information on the process used to gather feedback and the context in which the observations took place.

As Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond (2004) describe, formative observation for development and summative processes can be linked in ways that serve the needs of both the instructor and the assessors. Hammersley-Fletcher and Orsmond state that this means:



making explicit the aspects of learning and teaching that need to be given consideration, and moving [instructors] beyond a position where they feel the process is simply about the content and mechanics of the lesson being taught. If it is the reflective process where the greatest inroads into the quality of learning and teaching are seen, then reflection needs to be emphasized for both individual lecturers and school-wide....This process can be supported through a clear structure, with emphasis placed on pre- and post-observation sessions where appropriate time and thought is allocated. (p. 502)

**Departments and divisions seeking to put in place summative programs of teaching observation should strongly consider a timeline that allows for the incorporation of formative elements as described previously in this guide.**



# PART III: TOOLS & INSTRUMENTS

## FOR OBSERVATION



PRE-  
OBSERVATION  
TEMPLATE

**INSTRUCTOR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Course Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Course Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level of Students:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Format of Course:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(i.e. large class, seminar, lab):

1. What is the content and structure of the class you will be teaching?

2. Describe your students in this class. Is there anything the observer should know about them?

3. What have students been asked to do in preparation for this class?

4. What is your goal for the lesson? What do you hope students learn or be able to do as a result?

5. What are your plans for achieving these goals?

6. What teaching methods/teaching aids will be used?

7. What has been taught in previous lessons in this course? How does this lesson fit into the course as a whole?

8. Will this class be a typical example of your teaching? If not, what will be different?

9. What would you like me to specifically focus on during the observation? (Use this question for formative reviews, in particular).

10. Is there anything else I should be aware of prior to the observation?

11. Logistics: Confirm time and place, and where the observer should sit.



## OBSERVATION SAMPLE TEMPLATES

### *Observation Sample Templates*

In-class observation can be done using a wide variety of both directed and open-ended forms of evaluation aimed at assisting peer observers in critically evaluating the teaching they have observed and identifying how their observations relate to their own experience of and goals for teaching. In the following pages we provide several forms and exemplars that offer different methods of recording an observation of teaching.

It is important to remember that these forms are simply tools. All forms should be accompanied by a narrative analysis and discussion with the instructor being observed. Departments and divisions can and should adapt these forms to their particular needs. For example, you may choose to add scaled items to the Checklist Form, or department-specific questions to the Open-Ended Form.

### The Narrative Log

Below we have included a sample narrative log that allows the observer to record the time a behaviour (both instructor and student), a technique or a reaction occurs, as well as the observer's comments or questions related to what is happening in the classroom.

OBSERVATIONS	TIME	ACTION/COMMENT
Opening/warm up – shared anecdote	2:13	A method for establishing rapport with the students.
Review of administrative details	2:15	Details provided regarding an upcoming assignment and related tutorial.
Surveyed students to see what they remembered from previous lecture	2:26	Students remembered little – what do you attribute this to?
Began lecture by sharing goals for this class	2:27	Goals provided direction for the class. How did you feel regarding the amount of time spent setting up the class?

## OBSERVATION SAMPLE TEMPLATE

### Open-Ended Form

Several days prior to the classroom visit, the instructor should provide the observer(s) with a copy of the course syllabus containing course objectives/outcomes, content, organization and assessment.

**PROCEDURE:** The observer(s) should connect with the instructor several days in advance of the visit to conduct a pre-observation meeting in order to learn the instructor's goals and outcomes for the lesson to be observed, as well as the teaching methods to be used. Discuss specific aspects of the lesson the instructor would like feedback on. Within several days after the visit, the observer(s) should meet with the instructor to discuss the observations and conclusions.

#### **OBSERVER FEEDBACK:**

- 1) Specific feedback on elements identified in the pre-observation discussion.
- 2) Describe the key goals/outcomes for the lesson.
- 3) Describe the instructor's content mastery, breadth and depth.
- 4) Describe the method(s) of instruction/assessment.
- 5) Describe the clarity and organization of the lesson.
- 6) Describe the form and the extent of student engagement.
- 7) What specific suggestions would you make to build on strengths and/or improve the teaching?

# OBSERVATION SAMPLE TEMPLATE

## Checklist (criterion- based) Form

This form focuses on description regarding agreed upon items for observation based on the pre-observation meeting. Comments may be used by the observer to explain their observation and to provide reflection and additional insight. A sample format for these comments is as follows:

**DURING DISCUSSION, THE INSTRUCTOR PAUSES AFTER ASKING QUESTIONS.**  Yes  No

**COMMENTS:** Here, the observer may include, examples, further observations and when this observation occurred.

The following categories and items represent a number of possibilities for a departmental or divisional form. Observers should select appropriate items for the observation. Not all need apply in all teaching contexts - try to avoid rigid formulas regarding what "should" be observed.

### POSSIBLE ITEMS FOR CHECKLIST FORMS

#### INSTRUCTOR ORGANIZATION

- The instructor states the relation of the class to the previous one.
- The instructor knows how to use the educational technology needed for the class.
- The instructor posts class goals or objectives on the board or a slide.
- The instructor gives specific instructional outcomes for the course.
- The instructor provides an outline of the organization of the class.
- The instructor conveys the purpose of each class activity.
- The instructor summarizes periodically and at the end of class or has the students do so.
- The instructor revisits objectives at the end of class.
- Students are made aware what preparation (readings or other assignments) they should complete prior to the next class.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

- If used, videos, websites and other resource materials have a clear purpose.
- Handouts or digital resources are appropriate in number and subject.
- The instructor gives assistance or insight into reading or using assigned texts.

#### INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

- The instructor's choice of teaching techniques is appropriate for the goals.
- During discussion, the instructor pauses after asking questions.
- The instructor acknowledges student contributions to discussion, helping students extend their responses.
- The instructor keeps discussion on track or facilitates small group discussion.
- The instructor mediates conflict or differences of opinion, and encourages students to do the same.
- The instructor demonstrates active learning techniques.

- The instructor provides explicit directions for active learning tasks.
- The instructor allows enough time to complete active learning tasks, such as collaborative work.
- The instructor specifies how active learning tasks will be evaluated.
- The timing of classroom activities considers attention spans.
- The instructor relates class to course goals, students' personal goals, or societal concerns.
- The instructor offers "real world" application.
- The instructor helps students apply theory to solve problems.

### **CONTENT KNOWLEDGE**

- The instructor's statements are accurate according to the standards of the field.
- The instructor incorporates current research in the field.
- The instructor identifies sources, perspectives, and authorities in the field.
- The instructor communicates the reasoning process behind operations or concepts.
- The instructor corrects bias in assigned materials.

### **PRESENTATION**

- The instructor can be seen and heard.
- The instructor avoids extended reading from notes or texts.
- The instructor varies lecturing with active learning techniques.
- The instructor speaks at a pace that allows students to comprehend what is said.
- The instructor uses appropriate examples, metaphors and analogies.
- The instructor uses humour appropriately.
- The instructor is enthusiastic about the subject matter.

### **RAPPORT WITH AND RESPONSIVENESS TO STUDENTS**

- The instructor addresses students by name, as possible.
- Delivery is paced to students' needs.
- The instructor provides feedback at given intervals.
- The instructor uses positive reinforcement.
- The instructor incorporates student ideas into the class.
- The instructor encourages students to build on each other's comments and ideas.

- The atmosphere of the classroom is participative.
- The instructor is available before or after class.
- The instructor pays attention to cues of boredom and confusion.
- The instructor provides students opportunity to mention problems/concerns with the class, either verbally or in writing.
- The instructor models good listening habits.
- The instructor demonstrates flexibility in responding to student concerns or interests.
- The instructor is sensitive to individual interests and abilities.

### **CLARITY**

- The instructor defines new terms or concepts.
- The instructor elaborates or repeats complex information.
- The instructor uses a variety of examples to explain content.
- The instructor makes explicit statements in order to draw student attention to certain ideas.
- The instructor pauses during explanations to allow students to ask questions.

### **INSTRUCTION IN LABORATORIES, STUDIOS OR FIELD SETTINGS**

- Experiments/exercises are well chosen and well organized.
- Procedures/techniques are clearly explained/demonstrated.
- The instructor is thoroughly familiar with experiments/exercises.
- The instructor is thoroughly familiar with equipment/tools used.
- Assistance is always available during experiments/exercises.
- Experiments/exercises are important supplements to the course.
- Experiments/exercises develop important skills.
- Experiments/exercises are of appropriate length.
- Experiments/exercises are of appropriate level of difficulty.
- Experiments/exercises help to develop confidence in the subject area.
- The instructor provides aid with interpretation of data.
- The instructor's emphasis on safety is evident.
- Criticism of procedures/techniques is constructive.
- The instructor works well with student and other parties in the setting.
- Clinical or field experiences are realistic.



## IMPACT ON LEARNING

- The instructor helps develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving ability.
- The instructor broadens student views.
- The instructor encourages the development of students' analytic ability.
- The instructor fosters respect for diverse points of view.
- The instructor helps students develop awareness of the process used to gain new knowledge.
- The instructor stimulates independent thinking.

## CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

- Instructor creates an equitable and inclusive classroom that respects gender differences, diverse ethnocultural and faith communities, family structures, student abilities/needs and differences in socioeconomic status.
- Instructor conveys the belief that all students can learn and succeed.

- Instructor conveys openness and warmth and encourages students to interact with others the same way.
- Instructor provides text, resources and learning materials in the classroom that reflects diversity of culture, ethnicity, faith, and language, and differences in socioeconomic status, physical ability and family structure.
- Instructor uses resources that present both local and global images and perspectives.
- Instructor uses technology to provide additional visual, oral, aural and/or physical supports for students who need them.
- Instructor uses instructional strategies that reflect diverse learning styles.
- Instructor uses a variety of assessment tasks so that students with different learning styles can achieve success.
- Instructor provides accommodations for students who require extra time or additional explanations.

Items are adapted from Chism (2007) and University of Minnesota Peer Review of Teaching Guide (2009).



**SECTION 1. GENERAL COURSE OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION:**

Setting the stage for learning and preparing students for successful participation in the course activities.

Does the instructor provide a thorough description of the course as well as introduce students to the course and the online format?	
Are the learner requirements such as basic technology needs and/or participation expectations described?	
Are practice use of tools and/or community building activities included to prime the students for learning?	

**SECTION 2. ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING:**

Alignment of activities and assessments with learning outcomes is evident in the course design.

Are learning outcomes communicated?	
Is there a variety of activities and assessments?	
Is there alignment of learning activities and assessments with learning outcomes?	
Are formative and summative assessment opportunities part of the design?	
Are assignments clearly described, including grading scheme or rubrics?	
Is student workload appropriate to course level and duration?	

### SECTION 3. INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN:

A clear path to learning opportunities for students is provided, including interaction with the content, their peers, and their instructor.

Are there opportunities to interact or seek guidance from the instructor?	
Are there opportunities to participate in community activities or peer-to-peer sharing?	
Is learning scaffolded, guiding students toward increasingly independent learning and/or application of relevant skills?	
Are there opportunities for student reflection on learning and/or feedback to the instructor?	

### SECTION 4. ONLINE ORGANIZATION AND DESIGN:

Instructor's design and choice of technology effectively delivers course content and supports learning processes.

Overall, is the navigation and structure of course easy for students to follow?	
Do the tools and media formats selected support the course learning outcomes?	
Are guides and protocols for use of the course tools provided?	

#### CONSIDERING THE COURSE AS A WHOLE, PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THE FOLLOWING:

- What aspects of the course do you see as strengths that will contribute to effective student engagement and learning?
- Are there any strategies or resources that you would recommend to enhance the design of this course?
- Final comments or observations?

Harrison, L., & Heikoop, W. (2016). Online Learning Strategies, University of Toronto. Some elements of these guidelines are adapted with permission from The California State University's Quality Online Learning & Teaching, [Instructor \(Self\) and Peer-Review Course Assessment Instrument](#).

**POST-OBSERVATION DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS**



SUMMARY NOTES: POST-OBSERVATION JOINT DISCUSSION		
SUCSESSES	HOW DID THE LESSON EVOLVE DIFFERENTLY THAN PLANNED?	WHAT WILL YOU DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME?
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?		OTHER?

\*\*\* See also **Appendix C** for effective questions to ask/avoid.



# APPENDIX A

## Additional Resources

Vanderbilt University – Peer Review of Teaching: <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/peer-review-of-teaching/>

Educational Researcher article by Cohen and Goldhaber's – Building a More Complete Understanding of Teacher Evaluation Using Classroom Observations: <http://edr.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/07/14/0013189X16659442.full.pdf+html>

### *One-to-One Classroom Observation*

Open Doors on Teaching: <http://teaching.utoronto.ca/ctsi-events/open-doors/>

Leicester Learning Institute – Peer Observation of Teaching Process:  
<http://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/lli/career-development/peer-observation-of-teaching-1>

Colorado State University – Peer Observation Related Links:  
<http://teaching.colostate.edu/guides/peerobservation/relatedlinks.cfm>

### *Teaching Squares*

University of Windsor – Teaching Squares: <http://tlc.apa.uoit.ca/programs/teaching-squares/>

University of Waterloo – Teaching Squares: <https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/blog/post/teaching-squares>

### *Online Observation*

California State University, Chico – Exemplary Online Instruction: <http://www.csuchico.edu/eoi/>

University of Arizona – Online Course Review Tool:  
<http://teachingprotocol.oia.arizona.edu/content/6>

Western Caroline University – Online Course Assessment Tool:  
[https://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/facultycenter\\_OCAT\\_v2.0\\_25apr07.pdf](https://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/facultycenter_OCAT_v2.0_25apr07.pdf)

### *Teaching Inventories*

Teaching Perspectives Inventory:  
<http://www.teachingperspectives.com/tpi/>

Approaches to Teaching Inventory:  
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/cladls/edudev/documents/public/approaches-to-teaching.pdf>

Teaching Practices Inventory:  
<http://www.cwsei.ubc.ca/resources/TeachingPracticesInventory.htm>

# APPENDIX B

## Suggested Best Practices for Classroom Visits

(Kachur et al., 2013)

- Sit or stand quietly in an unobtrusive place.
- Refrain from redirecting student work or behaviour (except in emergency situations).
- Have a non-evaluative state of mind. Stay focused on gathering data about student learning, that you see or elements of instruction that facilitate student learning.
- Use open, nonjudgmental body language.
- If asked a question by a student during your observation, reflect the question back to the student or instructor in order to encourage continued learning.
- Do not enter classrooms during the first or last five minutes of class.
- Most important, note only what you see—not what you don't see.
- Take notes after the classroom visit and discuss briefly as soon as possible.
- Write down exact quotes instead of paraphrasing a teacher or student.
- Refrain from talking about the classes you visit until the debriefing.
- Turn off cell phones.
- Use agreed-upon common language for describing high-quality instruction.
- Observe the classroom from the perspective of the student as a learner.
- Do not teach or assist individuals or small groups with assigned seatwork.
- Exit the classroom quietly and expeditiously.

## Suggested Best Practices for Follow-up After Classroom Visits

(Kachur et al., 2013)

- Listen to, welcome, and consider others' ideas.
- Create opportunities for and value humour and fun.
- Support emotional collegiality.
- Honour the idea that we are all here to learn and grow together.
- Avoid evaluative language and critique.
- Make comments straightforward and clear.
- Ask genuine questions that you wonder about.
- Avoid leading or multiple-choice questions.
- Do not set up the answer.
- Be clear about your intent: clarifying questions are for the person asking them (who, what when, where), and open-ended probing questions are for the person answering them (why).
- Challenge ideas, not people.
- Encourage the exchange of ideas.
- Ask for clarification if you do not understand what you observed.
- Look for positive ideas you can take away.
- Speak consistently to the observed focus and look-fors (if applicable).
- Engage in deep questioning and conversation to inspire one another.
- Ask "what if" or "I wondered" reflective questions.
- Keep student learning the central focus of all comments.

# APPENDIX C

## Types of Questions To Ask: Exploring a Variety of Perspectives

Adapted from: Sharpe, K. & Nishimura, J. (2017). When mentoring meets coaching: Shifting the stance in education. Toronto: Pearson Canada Inc.

<i>Questions that:</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Questions that:</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Support the person's agenda	<i>What do you want to focus on today? What matters most for you in this?</i>	Support forward movement and change	<i>What's possible now? What needs your immediate attention going forward? How is this going to move you forward?</i>
Expand awareness	<i>Stepping back, what do you notice? What's emerging? What else? What's missing? Where do you want to be?</i>	Generate possibilities	<i>What options have you considered? What have you not considered? Big picture, what else is possible?</i>
Are open-ended	<i>What are your assumptions here? What haven't we considered? How can I support you?</i>	Stretch and build capacity	<i>Where are you in this? What's the next level of thinking that you need to access? What's hard in this for you?</i>
Explore current conditions	<i>What do you know for sure? What questions have you been asking yourself? What feels like a challenge for you in this?</i>	Explore the learning edge (the capacity "not to know")	<i>What support do you want? Where is the stretch in this for you?</i>
Surface and challenge the person's beliefs and assumptions	<i>What belief are you operating from? What assumption are you holding?</i>	Access creativity	<i>If you could do this any way you wanted...? What if... What have you not considered?</i>
invite reflection	<i>Where were you challenged? What feedback would be most valuable for you right now? In looking back on it now, what stands out?</i>	Separate the person from the problem (Epston, 1996)	<i>How would you describe the problem, keeping yourself out of the equation? What do you know for sure about the problem?</i>
Serve the person's vision and larger purpose	<i>Where were you challenged? What feedback would be most valuable for you right now? In looking back on it now, what stands out?</i>	invite the person to generate their own questions	<i>What have we missed? And the question you want to ask yourself right now is...?</i>

## Types of Questions to Avoid

Questions That:	Examples
<b>grow out of our judgment, interpretation, or agenda for the person</b>	<i>This sounds challenging—are your students capable of doing this? What if we started with your professional development goals? I think you need to pay attention to them.</i>
<b>are in service of our curiosity rather than the person’s agenda</b>	<i>How has your [supervisor, Chair, etc.] been managing things? What on earth were the students thinking?</i>
<b>are closed</b> (often begin with verbs such as do, did, does, can, will, and are and can be answered with “yes” or “no”)	<i>Are things going any better? Do you think you are prepared? Will you be practicing regularly?</i>
<b>are leading or suggestive</b> (reflect where we think the conversation should go, rather than inviting the person to do their own work)	<i>Sounds like some change is required... Have you thought about inviting them in for a conversation? How can you get students involved immediately?</i>
<b>are intended to advise or fix</b> (can suspend the capacity building and undermine the person’s competence and confidence)	<i>How about getting someone else to lead the meeting? Clearly the lesson is a problem. What about changing the assignment?</i>
<b>are stacked</b> (several at once)	<i>How do you think it’s going to go?...Are you nervous?...What support do you need?</i>
<b>ask “Why?”</b> (should be used sparingly as they typically invite a defensive response)	<i>Why did you do that? You aren’t going to send the email? Why not? Why do you continue to let that get to you?</i>
<b>ask for unnecessary detail</b> (take up precious time and space without moving the person forward)	<i>What happened at the meeting? How did you let them know?</i>
<b>are problem-focused</b> (can be a slippery slope toward venting, justification, and details...regaining traction and forward movement can be extremely challenging)	<i>What is it about this problem that has you all fired up? What is stressing you out? How long has this been going on?</i>

## The “best” questions to ask are...

Simple Clean, and Clear	Results Oriented
Poignant and On Target	Creating Space and Perspective
Energizing and Emotive	Relationship Building
Provocative	Challenging



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