THE UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE AUSTRALIA

PEER OBSERVATION

GUIDE

Peer observation is a form of peer review in which one instructor (the observer) observes a peer (the instructor) in their teaching and provides them with feedback on their areas of strengths and areas in which there is room for growth.

This process carries with it a number of benefits.

For the Instructor, peer observation:

- Identifies areas of strength in your teaching to improve your confidence and reinforce your skills.
- Provides areas to focus on to make your teaching even more successful, thereby improving your relationship with students and contributing to their success.
- Provides you with specific and unique peer feedback that can be used in a teaching portfolio.
- Increases awareness of teaching & learning.
- Increases a sense of connection and opportunity to dialogue with colleagues.

For the Observer, peer observation:

- Reinforces your experiences and knowledge as an instructor.
- Increases your teaching repertoire and exposes you to new teaching methods.
- Illuminates issues students may be having in the course/program that you may otherwise be aware of
- Increases awareness of teaching & learning.
- Increases sense of connection and opportunity to dialogue with colleagues.

There are four steps in this process:

1. Pre-observation conversation (**Form A**)
2. Observation (**Form B**)
3. Post-observation conversation (**Form C**)
4. Post-observation action plan (**Form D**)

For more information, contact the Centre for Teaching and Learning

Centre for Teaching and Learning

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CTL CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

PRE-OBSERVATION – FORM A

Peers meet to establish and clarify the following:

- what is being observed and why - contextualise the teaching situation, including pre-requisites, number of students, their backgrounds, the content, and any other relevant topics.
- when and where the observation will take place.
- how the observation will take place.

For the Instructor: Choose a class in which the relevant aspects of your teaching will be demonstrated. It is important to indicate if you will be trying a new teaching method, or if this will be reflective of your traditional experience as an instructor.

Instructor		**Observer**
Course code	**Topic**	**Date**
Lecture / Tutorial (Circle)	**Time of class**	**Number of students**

Teaching context

Course pre-requisites	
Student background	
Content	
Format of class (balance between lecture & activities / student engagement)	
Learning outcomes	
Perceived strengths and areas for growth	
Professional development training in teaching (workshops, consultations)	

Specific aims of the observation (Instructor identified)

1	
2	
3	

PRE-OBSERVATION – FORM B

Remember that the focus of the observation is on teaching, so feedback will focus on the facilitation of learning, not just presentation/lecture skills.

For the Instructor: You should introduce the observer to students to ensure that they understand why a stranger is attending class. Reassure students that you are the one being observed, not them. If things don't go as planned, don't panic – teaching is often unpredictable. Remember that the purpose of the review is to reinforce your strengths and identify a few key areas that can be strengthened, not criticise your teaching.

For the Observer: Observe students' reactions and their level of engagement. This is also an opportunity to reflect on aspects of your own approach that are affirmed and observe new teaching strategies you could try as a result of your observation

Use the following Activity Record Indexes to help identify elements to provide feedback on

Communication Skills

Speaking clarity	Audibility (including rear of classroom)	Deliberate pacing
Appropriate language and terminology for discipline	Welcoming and friendly body language	Effective use of visual aids
Demonstrates enthusiasm for subject	Make eye contact with participants	Limited, but expressive gestures

Content and Structure

Clear and sustained focus on lesson learning outcomes	Explicit relevance and connectedness of lesson to prior and future knowledge	Demonstrate knowledge of the topic presented	Present content/activities in a logical sequence
Appropriate level of difficulty	Frequent and detailed explanations (including real life)	Use visual tools to effectively aid the presentation of content	Summary

Interaction

Invite participation / maintain interest	Activities are aligned to lesson learning outcomes	Explain instructions for activities	Create opportunities for hands-on skills development
Manage discussion / participation	Respond to and build on participants' questions and comments effectively	Assessment of students' understanding	

Observers are encouraged to utilize the following form to document their observations throughout the class. The final section should focus on aspects of the teaching that your peer can directly and immediately address. Examples may include explaining content more clearly, incorporating activities to break-up lectures, providing better feedback, posing open-ended questions to solicit deeper engagement from students, encouraging participation from all students, maximising the potential of the physical learning environment.

***IMPORTANT**: Observers should collect feedback from the perspective of a learner in the classroom. What aided your learning? What impeded your success as a learner?

Running record of observation (Freehand notes)	
Key areas of strength (Minimum two)	Key areas for growth (Maximum three)

POST-OBSERVATION CONVERSATION – FORM C

Meet as soon as possible following the observation to discuss what was seen while the experience remains fresh in the minds of both participants.

This meeting should be a conversation between colleagues, not the delivery of a judgment. As you discuss the observation, it may be useful to consider the following question to ensure that it remains a conversation: what did you learn from each other?

For the Instructor: Most people find receiving criticism difficult but positive feedback can have a dramatic effect on self-esteem and performance.

For this reason it is important to celebrate your areas of strength. When it comes time to discuss areas for growth, remember that the feedback is intended to highlight the experience of a learner in your class. It is important to take time to consider the unbiased feedback. Try to avoid justifying your methods or dismissing the observer's assessment as they may have experienced the situation in a way you were previously unaware of.

For the Observer:

Focus on things to praise, things to develop, AND on ways to improve. Bear in mind that you are not responsible to "fix" areas for growth – you're raising the issue. Receiving constructive criticism can be difficult, so it is important to deliver your feedback in a specific way. Focus on your experience as a learner in the classroom, reinforcing how your learning experience was aided or impeded ("I felt confused" or "The students appeared disengaged" rather than "You did this"). This ensures that the instructor does not feel personally attacked by the feedback.

Oftentimes instructors will want to focus on their "weaknesses" and ask to hear the areas for growth first, or rush over the areas of strength. It is essential to begin with areas of strength and elaborate on how these strengths aid student learning to ensure that the instructor understands what they do well.

Conversation structure

The following questions will likely arise as the observation is discussed:

- Is this reflective of a traditional class?
- What went well in the session? Why? How can this built upon?
- What could be improved or developed? How might this be achieved?
- Has student feedback been collected on the class recently?
- Areas in which feedback has been invited.
- Other observations, comments, questions and suggestions from either party.

POST-OBSERVATION ACTION PLAN – FORM D

Jointly write up a report of the observation, including an action plan outlining next steps. Consider swapping roles and/or completing a follow-up observation later in the semester or later in the year.

For Instructors: Discuss the process with your students during the next class so that they feel involved in your development and the development of the class.

Follow-up: Make an appointment with CTL to discuss how you can address your action plan or request a workshop or retreat for your Faculty/school/unit if there are other instructors struggling with the same issues.

Key areas of strength	Key areas for growth
1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.
Suggestions for building on strengths	Suggested areas for development
Further action	
We agree that this is a fair record of the observation: ..... Signature of Instructor ..... Signature of Observer ..... Date	