

# MAKING THE MOST OF LESSON OBSERVATIONS



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## **Task One: Reflecting on our own practice**

### **Task Aims:**

*To examine ways observers can improve the observation process.*

*To look at specifically what observers can do during the observation to obtain a fairer and more reliable perspective of the lesson.*

*To explore some of the different oral feedback models and to discuss good post-observation practice.*

**Think back to the last time you were observed and answer the questions below.**

If you have never been observed, think about the last time you carried out a lesson observation and answer the same questions about what you did?

<b>Pre-observation</b>	1. <i>What communication did you have with your observer before your lesson observation?</i>  (e.g. an exchange of emails, a pre-observation meeting)	
	2. <i>What paperwork did you need to have ready before the lesson observation?</i>  (e.g. a class profile, scheme of work)	
	3. <i>How much time did you spend preparing for your lesson observation?</i>	
	4. <i>How did you feel before your lesson observation?</i>	

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<b>During the observation</b>	<p>5. <i>How did your observer engage with you and your students when they entered the classroom?</i></p> <p>(e.g. did they introduce themselves, did they explain why they were there)</p>	
	<p>6. <i>Where did the observer sit in the classroom?</i></p>	
	<p>7. <i>What did the observer do during the observation?</i></p> <p>(e.g. sit at their desk taking notes, get up and walk around)</p>	
	<p>8. <i>How long did the observer spend in the classroom and was this how long you were expecting to spend?</i></p>	
<b>Post-observation</b>	<p>9. <i>What were you required to do (if anything) before you had your oral feedback?</i></p> <p>(e.g. complete a self-evaluation)</p>	
	<p>10. <i>How soon after the lesson observation did the oral feedback take place and where did it take place?</i></p>	
	<p>11. <i>What do you remember of the oral feedback?</i></p> <p>(e.g. the structure of the feedback session, who did most of the talking)</p>	
	<p>12. <i>When did you receive your written report and how did it compare with the oral feedback you receive?</i></p> <p>(e.g. was there anything included that was not discussed in the oral feedback?)</p>	

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## **Task Two: Learning from our lessons**

### **Task Aim:**

*To identify potential problems that can arise when conducting lesson observations and identifying ways in which they can be avoided.*

**Think about a lesson observation you have done that did not go particularly well. Make notes below on why you think it might have not gone so well and what you have learnt from that experience.**

What did not go so well and possible reasons why	What you have learnt from that experience

## **Task Three: Sharing good practice**

### **Task Aim:**

*To share ideas on good practice.*

**Now in groups decide what your top three tips would be for a person doing a lesson observation for the first time. List them below.**

1)
2)
3)

## **Task Four: Sharing feedback tips**

### **Task Aim:**

*To discuss some suggestions on giving feedback.*

**Overleaf are some suggestions on giving feedback. You may not agree with them all but skim through them and tick the ones you like, put a cross next to ones you disagree with and a question mark next to the ones you would like to know more about.**

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## Top Tips for Giving Feedback

1. Outline how you are going to carry out the observation feedback. For example, *'What I'd like to do is go through the lesson chronologically and discuss the different stages. I'd like it to be a discussion so feel free to ask me any questions at any stage. When we have finished, we'll sum up with your key strengths and the areas you would like to develop. These will be included in the action plan, which I will send you in the next two days with your written report.'*
2. There is more than one way to skin a cat and there is certainly more than one way to give feedback. Choose the approach(es) you think might be most suitable for you to communicate your key points – the most common feedback models include; the feedback sandwich, observer led, observe/teacher led, template led, thematic approach and organic. Sometimes a combination of these might work best.
3. Be aware of the pitfalls of using the feedback/praise sandwich (See 'The Feedback Sandwich is out to lunch' article) . Many teachers are familiar with this approach and when this is used for graded observations, the tendency is for the grade to be given at the end. This can result in the teacher switching off during the feedback and only paying attention to the observer when it comes to the time the grade is announced. Sometimes it is better to begin with the grade and then outline your reasons for the grade. For example, you might begin by saying *"I have awarded this lesson 'Good' because [discuss the key strengths]. It would be an 'Outstanding' lesson if [discuss the areas for improvement]."*
4. Also, remember for graded observations you are awarding a grade for the lesson you saw not the teacher so avoid making comments like *'I have given you a pass for this lesson'*; say something on the lines of *'I have awarded this lesson a pass'*. If the observation is ungraded, try to minimise your use of negative evaluative words such as *'unsatisfactory'* but at the same time make it clear if there was an area that could be improved. This could be done through questioning though sometimes you just need to tell it as it is. Instead of saying *'Your concept check questions were poor'* you could ask the teacher to comment on how effective their concept questions were or you could simply say, *'You need to have clearer concept check questions'*. Also, try to avoid having criticism and praise together as one may override the other.
5. Try to feedforward rather than feedback. Use language that suggests to teachers what they can do in the future rather than what they should have done (i.e. say what they 'could do' next time rather what they 'could have done'). For example, instead of saying *'With quite complex instructions like the ones you gave, you could have checked them before they started the task'* you could say *'With complex instructions it is a good idea to check them before the students start the task'*.
6. Try to incorporate some reflective questions. This can help the teacher see the lesson from a student's perspective. Moreover, it might encourage the teacher to reflect more on their own practice in the future. You do not want all the feedback to consist of suggestions from you. Use questions as well. Look at the examples below taken from:  
<https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/NEPPeerObsFeedbackProtocol.pdf>

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Suggestion	Question
I noticed you didn't communicate the standards or goals of the lesson to the students. Consider doing so at the beginning of class.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When and how do you address the goals of the lesson?</li> <li>• At what point in your lesson do students know the goals of the lesson?</li> </ul>
I noticed lots of paper and garbage on your floor. I recommend that you find a way to keep your room cleaner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does the garbage on the floor impact the learning environment?</li> <li>• What message do you think the garbage on the floor sends to students about their learning?</li> </ul>
As I observed student behavior, I noticed that many students were not paying attention and talking off topic. It also seemed that the directions confused students. Consider working on being clearer with your directions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students were confused about what to do. Why do you think they were confused?</li> <li>• What specifically did students not understand?</li> <li>• How could your directions <del>been</del> clearer to the students?</li> </ul>

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7. Try to invite feedback from the teacher. You can do this by asking questions like *'Do you know how you could make that activity even better?'* or *'Do you know what might help avoid the same problem arising again?'*. These questions work particularly well for many reasons. The first question tells the teacher what they were doing was 'good' and you are going to suggest a way to make it even better. The second question is looking forward rather than looking back. The problem that arose has already happened and there is little point on dwelling on it. However, be careful not to overdo the use of questions. Sometimes questions can drag out the feedback session so there will be times when it is better to tell the teacher what they need to do rather than try to elicit it from them.
  
8. Incorporate data – student names if appropriate, quotes, times etc. to support what you say. Give specific examples and do not generalise. Rather than say, 'Your instructions are not very clear at times', be more specific and say why. For example, *'Your instructions for the roleplay activity were not very clear. Six of the eight students playing the role of the hotel manager were not clear what they had to do'* is a much more specific example, which makes it clear which particular part of the lesson you were referring to and evidence to support your point. You might also use quotes; for example, *'Pawel mixed up 'hospitality' and 'hostility'. Twice he said, "Thank you for your hostility", and was not corrected.'* Also, try to jot down the time on the plan of when each stage starts and ends as this can help you when you are discussing timing (the actual time taken compared to the time assigned in the lesson plan for an activity) and pace (if the activity was rushed or was too slow).
  
9. Although discussing how the teacher's actions impacted learning can work well to highlight strengths (for example, 'It was a good idea to set time limits at different stages of the lesson as this ensured a good pace'), be careful about making negative inferences. This can result in conflict as the teacher may see this as being your opinion only. By using reflective questions, we can help direct the teacher to what may have been the cause for something not working so well.
  
10. Remember not just to focus on what happened in the lesson. Comment also on what has gone on before the lesson. This does not just include the preparation for the lesson you observed; this could include many other areas such as the way they have decorated their room or online supplementary resources the teacher has made available for their students.

<sup>1</sup> Please note the word 'have' was erroneously omitted in the original source.