

Guidelines for Providing Written Feedback Peer Classroom/Lab Observation Forms

Written and verbal feedback should contain positive reinforcement of good teaching practices as well as suggest constructive changes. These statements help both the instructor and the Personnel Committee document what the faculty member does well in the classroom/lab. When offering suggestions for modifications or changes, the wording should indicate your interest in the teacher's effectiveness in the classroom and should be sensitive to the fact that the written comments will be used in the personnel process. **Constructive feedback** for East Carolina University's peer classroom/lab observation has two purposes:

1. To help the instructor look at his or her behavior in the classroom without placing them on the defensive.
2. To provide basic information about classroom/lab behavior and activity which can be used by the Personnel Committee and the Chair in assessing, for personnel decisions, that faculty member's teaching.

The role of the observer is to collect data by observation in the classroom/lab not perform the evaluation of the faculty member's teaching for personnel decisions. Information and materials collected by peer classroom/lab observation are one among several sources of information used by the Personnel Committee and the Chair to assess the quality of the faculty member's teaching.

Be as descriptive and specific as possible when writing the "strengths" and "recommendations" portions of the peer review forms as well as the narrative portions. The observation forms should be marked and written with care. Do not use jargon or vague words. Use active voice rather than passive voice. Look at the subject, verb, and object or complement for each sentence. Those three words should convey the sense of the sentence. Be careful about the adjectives and modifying phrases which you use.

- Be descriptive (rather than evaluative) and specific (rather than general) when writing the "strengths," "recommendations," and the summary portions of the peer classroom/lab review forms. This will help those who will read your comments to gain an accurate picture of the class or lab.
- Place your comments in context. This will help both the instructor and others clearly understand your meaning. Use examples to support general statements.
- Make your comments collegial and professional.
- Phrase your comments in a positive manner whether they are compliments or suggestions for change.

- Begin the discussion and the written summary with a statement of “what went well” or the “teaching strengths.”
- Be careful when using adjectives or linking words or phrases (... but, ... on the other hand) as the latter increase the ambiguity of statements.
- Be sensitive to different teaching styles. Make recommendations appropriate for the teaching style.
- Direct your suggestions or recommendations toward behavior the teacher can do something about. Suggestions that require resources or support which are not available, that require complete revisions of courses, or major departures from the individual’s teaching style are likely to be neither helpful nor doable.
- Be balanced and unbiased in your comments and recording of what occurred.

This is an example of a descriptive chronology of a class. This is a junior/senior level social work class.

Descriptive Chronology of the Class

The class observed was about clinical interventions. There were a total of 21 students of mixed ages, gender and ethnicity. The majority were of typical college age, female and Caucasian. The class was one hour in length. The focus of this particular class was supervision.

The professor arrived on time and began the class with a few moments of open discussion, asking whether there was any unfinished business from the last class to be addressed and if there were any issues of note that had arisen since the last class. The professor then introduced the topic for the day, supervision, indicating the importance of this topic to the students by noting that in their careers they would be both supervised and supervising. The professor then asked the students to think about their own experiences with supervision, good and bad, and to discuss these with respect to what characteristics they would prefer in a supervisor. As the students relayed their experiences, the professor summarized their comments on the black board. Thus, when the students were done recounting their experiences, the professor had an extensive list on the board from which she was then able to work. The use of their personal experiences seemed to make it easier for the students to understand the more abstract notions of supervision. This process also provided them with a sense of empathy for the experience of supervision.

The professor then proceeded to clarify the similarities and differences between this broad array of supervisory experiences provided by the students and the specific experience of supervision as it tends to occur in the profession. With the broad array as a basis, the students seemed to grasp the distinction between the various types of supervision fairly easily and quickly. The professor then went into more detail about the various types of supervision that tend to occur in the profession. Strengths and weaknesses of the various types of supervision were then identified. Additionally, ways in which a supervisee could respond to the supervision were discussed.

Throughout this discussion, the professor moved freely about the room, moving from the front of the class to the side and then back to the front. When the professor made a new point, she would speak more slowly and repeat as often as needed (as seemed to be indicated by whether the students were still writing or not) in a summary fashion the main points of the comment. Questions were received whenever students had them and incorporated into the ongoing lecture.

The professor also used her own experiences to illuminate various comments. These were often somewhat amusing in nature and would elicit laughter from the class. On the other hand, some of the examples provided were very serious and clearly caused the students to think thoughtfully. By the end of the class, students were encouraged to think about the goodness of fit (my term) between the supervisor and supervisee, recognizing that each has his/her own style. Consequently, students were able to see that some combinations will work well whereas others will be quite problematic.

At the end of the class, the professor reiterated and summarized the main points of the lecture. Issues to be discussed in the next class were mentioned briefly. Class was concluded on time. Those students who had questions discussed these with the professor as the others left the classroom.