

Peer Observation and Support of Teaching

All CMJ GTAs take part in observations of teaching. The faculty and peer observation processes are intended to support all of us in our professional development as teachers and practitioners of communication and journalism. The goal of the observations is not to evaluate, but to describe and help identify our strengths as mentors and educators – qualities and skills that are applicable beyond the academic context. The process is further intended as a way to learn from each other and develop a clear and well-articulated vocabulary of/about teaching as part of your graduate program experience. *Handouts to guide the observation processes are provided following the general description below.*

** If you wish to be video recorded during an observation session, please let the Teaching Coordinator and your observers know ahead of time.* Teaching videos are helpful for your own self-reflection and are occasionally requested as part of job application materials in the academic context.

Peer Observation and Support of Teaching

The peer observation process should be considered within the time commitment expected of your teaching assistantship and counts toward TAs' required participation in a teaching community. If your TA contract specifies an expectation of 20 hours/week, you should count the time devoted to the peer observation process toward these 20 hours/week. The steps of the peer observation process are as follows:

- Groups (“teaching triads”) of 3 GTAs/each are formed, based on schedules and availability
- TAs schedule and plan observation visits **during weeks 4-5 and/or 10-11 of the semester**
- TAs conduct observations: each TA in the group is **observed by the other 2 together at least once** during the semester. **The observations:**
 - Both observing peers are provided with a timeline of the class in 5-minute increments (see below). The timelines are completed descriptively, with each observer recording what she/he sees happening in the classroom.
 - One of the peer observers completes the timeline **with focus on the observed instructor.**
 - One of the peer observers completes the timeline **with focus on the students.**
 - The observers complete observation forms (see below), during the class or shortly after.
- After each observed class, peers meet to debrief in the form of an open conversation/ dialogue rather than an evaluation. A debriefing questionnaire may be used as a guide (see below), so as to allow instructors to reflect on their goals, approaches, and experiences.
- TAs attend an all-TAs debriefing/reflective meeting in week 6 and in week 12 of the semester
- At the end of the semester, each TA submits to the Teaching Coordinator short reflective notes (see below), which may also be completed during the week 12 meeting (a google form link will be sent to ease the completion and collection of reflections).

Peer Visit Time Log

Date of classroom visit: _____ **Instructor visited:** _____

I am completing this log with a focus on (mark one): **the teacher** **the students**

Minutes	Notes:
0 – 5	
5.01 – 10	
10.01 - 15	
15.01 - 20	
20.01 - 25	
25.01 - 30	
30.01 - 35	
35.01 - 40	
40.01 - 45	
45.01 - 50	
50.01 - 55	
55.01 - 60	
60.01 - 65	
65.01 - 70	

70.01 - 75	
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Focus on Students' Engagement with Learning: Peer Visit Form
 (can be completed immediately after the visit based on the time log)

Remember: 1) Arrange your class visit ahead of time. 2) Your visit should last a minimum of 30 minutes; ideally, it should last the whole class period. 3) Remember to schedule a debriefing/feedback conversation after the visit.

Date of Visit: _____ Type of Class Visited: _____

Time Arrived: _____ Time Departed: _____

A. What are the students doing?

Amount of Time on Activity:

_____ Receiving information	_____
_____ Applying skills	_____
_____ Practicing new skills	_____
_____ Participating in collaborative activities	_____
_____ Doing homework	_____
_____ Taking test or quiz	_____
_____ Using technology (Specify: _____)	_____
_____ Viewing videos	_____
_____ Presenting information	_____
_____ Using resources other than textbook	_____

Describe a specific activity/class engagement that you observed. Describe how students seem to respond and/or participate in it:

How are students challenged to think and communicate their ideas?

What did you observe about the interactions between teacher and students? What about students' interactions with their peers?

Other Comments:

B. As you observe, what do the students demonstrate?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in subject | <input type="checkbox"/> Competency in the subject matter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Critical thinking skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to follow directions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time management skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect for others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-discipline | <input type="checkbox"/> Participation from all students |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Expression of personal opinions, ideas, and/or experiences | |

Comments:

C. As a visitor, what did you gain or learn from this visit?

Focus on Instructor's Teaching Practice: Peer Visit Form
(can be completed immediately after the visit based on the time log)

Remember: 1) Arrange your class visit ahead of time. 2) Your visit should last a minimum of 30 minutes; ideally, it should last the whole class period. 3) Remember to schedule a debriefing/feedback conversation after the visit.

Date of Visit: _____ Type of Class Visited: _____

Time Arrived: _____ Time Departed: _____

A. What is the teacher doing?

**Amount of Time
on Activity:**

_____ Providing information (e.g., lecture)	_____
_____ Guiding students in applications	_____
_____ Interacting with students (e.g., discussion)	_____
_____ Facilitating collaborative activities	_____
_____ Using technology (Specify: _____)	_____
_____ Viewing videos	_____
_____ Receiving information (e.g., students' reports)	_____
_____ Using resources other than textbook	_____
_____ Other:	_____

**Describe a specific activity/class engagement (may be lecture as well) that you observed.
Describe how the teacher introduced and facilitated it:**

How are students challenged to think and communicate their ideas?

What did you observe about the interactions between teacher and students? What about students' interactions with their peers?

Other Comments:

B. As you observe, what does the teacher demonstrate?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in subject | <input type="checkbox"/> Competency in the subject matter |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attention to critical thinking | <input type="checkbox"/> Clarity |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time management skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Respect for others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attention to collaboration in the classroom | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitating inclusive environment | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in students and their experiences | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interest in students and their knowledge | |

Comments:

C. As a visitor, what did you gain or learn from this visit?

Post-observation Peer Conversation

This debriefing/feedback meeting is part of a reflective process of developing contextually-appropriate teaching practices for both the “observed” and the “observers.” The conversation should be more of a dialogue and a mutual learning opportunity rather than an evaluation of teaching. The conversation(s) should serve as a basis for the reflective memo to be produced at the end of the semester. Peers should use the time to:

- **share and discuss their observations** (of students and the teacher) in a descriptive manner;
- **dialogue around questions that consider the unobservable;**
- **discuss and share ideas for teaching strategies and approaches.**

Below are some suggested questions to guide the debriefing conversation – the question can be asked of the “observed” and the “observers” alike:

- What were the goals (learning, community building, skills, etc.) of the observed class?
- What were the strategies used to achieve these goals?
- How was goal accomplishment assessed? How well do you think the goals were met?
- What was the central topic/content area addressed in the class?
- How were teachers and students positioned in the classroom and in relation to one another? How did teacher and students interact?
- What kinds of topics and ideas were discussed during the class? What kinds of topics and ideas would you like to be discussed in the future?
- At what points/In what ways were students asked to think?
- How does the class relate to students’ previous knowledge/experience?
- What were you most pleased about?
- What did you learn from being in this class?
- What went well? Explain.
- What suggestions/ideas do you have for teaching in the future?
- How do you prepare before entering the classroom? What is your process of teaching preparation?

“RULES” FOR PEER COACHING

(from NCSALL’s *Mentor Teacher Group Guide*: http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_b.pdf)

THE STANCE

1. We’re engaging in exploration, not criticism. We’re unraveling a mystery (teaching and learning) together, not monitoring each other.
2. An observed lesson is a shared resource; both teacher and coach should take something of value away from any discussion of it.
3. Look for, describe, and assess the practice and its results, not the person’s competence.

THE TALK

1. Describe first, discuss details later. First describe what happened, using your data. The teacher can take or leave that. Only then discuss what the results were, and only if the teacher initiates the discussion.
2. Talk specifically and concretely. (“You called on Will three times,” rather than “You tend to call on boys a lot.”)
3. Talk about things which can be changed and which are worth changing. (e.g., Ignore personal mannerisms, unless they are interfering with student learning.)
4. Remember to comment on strengths. Important learning comes from building on our strengths as well as from addressing areas of weakness.
5. Check to insure clear communication. Paraphrase a lot: “Are you saying that...?” “Let me see if I understand you...”
6. Interact. The basic human interaction skills of attending, listening, responding, and acknowledging are important for both the coach and the teacher.

PRE-OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. How can I be of help to you?
2. What specifically do you wish me to look for?
3. What specifically do you wish me to know?
4. Is there a particular student you would like me to watch?
5. What are your objectives and expectations for the lesson?
6. How long would you like me to observe?
7. When can we get together after the lesson?

POST-OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

1. How do you think the lesson went?
2. Can you recall what the students were doing that made you feel this way?
3. What do you remember about what you did or the strategies you used?
4. How does this compare with what you expected would happen?
5. What could be some reasons it happened this way?

Written Reflection Based on the Process and Experience of Peer Observation of Teaching

This is an informal, forward-oriented reflective note that focuses both on your teaching practice and on the experience of the peer observation/mentoring process. These reflective notes should be submitted to the GTA Teaching Coordinator at the end of the semester. Some questions to guide your reflection include:

- What did you learn about teaching and learning in general?
- What did you learn about your own teaching practice (goals, approaches, strengths, etc.) through the peer observation process?
- What surprised you about your teaching and/or about teaching and learning in general?
- What are some challenges you encounter in teaching and in mentoring teaching?
- Did the experience of the peer observation make you want to change something in your classroom and/or teaching practice? Explain.
- What strategies would you like to implement in the future?
- What kind of teaching support will be beneficial to you?
- What specific actions might you take toward adapting your teaching approaches and/or seeking teaching support?