# The Teaching and Learning Center logo featuring a blue tree with gold leaves and the words Teaching and Learning Center Improving Instruction through Class Observations

Improvement is reliant on good feedback. The best way to get good feedback on instructional practices is to invite someone to observe the instruction. This is most effective when the instructor provides the observer with the type of feedback the instructor would like to get. The observer and instructor should work together to select the best tool to gather information and structure the feedback.

## Prepare for an Observation

## To prepare for an observation, select the observation protocol below that matches the kind of feedback you would like to receive.  Reach out to a colleague, supervisor, or the TLC to ask for that person's time to provide you with valuable feedback.  Schedule a time to meet, so you can share the type of feedback you are looking for and the observation protocol you have chosen.  Schedule a time for the observer to come to your class or provide the observer with a recording of a class session you conducted.  It is best to go ahead and schedule a follow-up meeting to discuss the results of the observation when you schedule the class to observe.  This ensures that you can meet as close to the observation as possible.  The longer you wait to get feedback, the more the specifics will fade from both of your minds.

## Conducting an Observation

## When you have been asked to observe a colleague, it is important to provide clear feedback that the instructor can use.  This means sticking to observable facts rather than impressions of the class.  For example, saying, "You did a good job asking questions!" is not as helpful as saying, "You asked 25 questions during the class period.  I wrote them down so you can review them and decide if they are of the level and quality that you were hoping to get."  The first statement may cause the instructor to feel good momentarily but is s/he asked you to observe the class, it is likely that there was an issue that s/he wanted to address.  The second statement provides clear data that the instructor can use to evaluate the teaching and create an action plan.  Therefore, when you are conducting the observation, take notes on what you see and hear happening as factual statements. "Four students raised their hands to answer," instead of "Only a few students tried to respond" or "Good student response rate!"

## Preparation

Schedule to meet again as soon as possible to be sure the information is fresh in your mind.  This allows the instructor to ask the observer about any statements in the observation protocol.  If the instructor wants to know, "How did I do?" or "What do you think I should improve on?" it is important that there is a conversation about how we give and take feedback.  Some instructors want the unvarnished opinion of their colleagues.  Other instructors know that something too harsh will be upsetting, so they may ask the observer to couch any constructive feedback in nice terms.  They may also ask the observer to only provide one or two recommendations, so the instructor feels they have manageable chunks to work on.  A good rule of thumb for most people is for the observer to give one piece of feedback that is a strength and one piece of feedback that is an opportunity to grow. (e.g., You ask a lot of questions and are really able to engage students in answering them.  I recommend making one or two of those questions higher-level critical thinking questions.  You do such a good job of engaging students; I think you will be able to get them to chew on harder material rather easily.")

## Select the Observation Tool

Different observation tools allow observers to gather different types of data in meaningful ways. Think carefully about the goals of the observation, and select the appropriate tool.

### Double Entry Narrative Form

If you will join a class and give your peer general observations and notes, the [Double Entry Narrative Form](https://calbaptist.edu/teaching-learning-center/teaching/teaching-resources/Double%20Entry%20Narrative%20Form.pdf) is a good one to use.  In the left-hand column, note what you see and hear happening in the class.  In the far-left column, put the time that those events happened, so you can refer to specific times later. Then, jot down your thoughts or questions about what happened in the right-hand column.  The purpose of this form is to separate what we see and hear from our interpretations.  This will result in more focused and useful feedback for the instructor being observed.

### Student Engagement Form

Primarily designed for observations of discussion-based or lecture-based classes, this form tracks the number and type of responses from the students.  This form is especially useful for instructors who would like to know more about who is responding and how often.  Data from this form can be used to reflect on engagement techniques and strategies.

### Group Dynamics Observation Form

For classes that engage in group work quite a bit, such as small/large-group discussions, lab work, and hands-on applications, the [Group Dynamics Observation Form](https://calbaptist.edu/teaching-learning-center/teaching/teaching-resources/Group%20Dynamics%20Observation%20Form.pdf) gives useful information about how well those groups are working.  This is important information for the instructor to use to reflect on the structure provided for the activity, coaching that may need to happen with groups or individuals, professional dispositions that are displayed in group work, and whether the group work is furthering the educational aims the instructor intended.

### Time Use Form and Minute-by-Minute Chart

### Sometimes it feels like the time in class just slips away from us.  These are two observation forms that track what is happening in class - what is the instructor (teacher) doing and what are the students doing?

Data from these forms can be used to reflect on the use of time in class and the degree to which students are actively or passively involved in the class. Instructors can analyze their class structure to determine what should stay the same and what should change to increase time-on-task and active learning in the classroom.

The [Time Use Observation Form](https://calbaptist.edu/teaching-learning-center/teaching/teaching-resources/Time%20Use%20Observation%20Form.pdf) has pre-determined student actions and teacher actions.  The observer checks off what is happening every two minutes to provide a set of data.

The [Minute-by-Minute chart](https://calbaptist.edu/teaching-learning-center/teaching/teaching-resources/TimeUse_MinutebyMinute.pdf)asks the observer to track student and teacher behaviors every minute.  Unlike the previous form, there are no pre-determined behaviors, so the observer writes what s/he sees and hears.  This form can be modified to be every two or three minutes. Additionally, the observer might not write every minute, but may record significant behaviors in the correct line to indicate where it was in the class session the behavior occurred.

### Question Observation Form

Analyzing the questions that we ask, how much time we provide students to think, and how we engage students in discussing possible answers is a critical part of analyzing our teaching techniques.  The [Questions Observation Form](https://calbaptist.edu/teaching-learning-center/teaching/teaching-resources/Questions%20Observation%20Form.pdf) asks observers to catalog the type of question asked (Convergent or Divergent), the amount of wait time provided (time between the question being asked and the students responding), and responses from the student.  The form ends with some thought-provoking questions that can help instructors reflect on their teaching.  For more information about the types of questions and the different purposes for questioning, check out this [blog post](https://blogs.calbaptist.edu/cbutlc/2021/10/15/questioning-types-arent-all-questions-the-same/) from our TLC blog.