



OBSERVATION AND NOTE TAKING BEST PRACTICES

Observations and notes are critical when coaching and providing feedback to teachers. They help a coach gain insight into a teacher’s habits and skill sets, a class’s personality and needs, and student learning. Taking observation notes that include specific details helps a coach identify where a teacher needs support, helps a teacher gain a different perspective of their classroom, and shows progress over time.

School administrators and instructional coaches often observe multiple classrooms on the same day. Taking detailed notes helps keep track of what they saw and supports them in providing personalized support to teachers. Each coach needs to organize their observation notes in a way that works best for them. Below are some best practices for observing and taking notes to consider when getting organized. These best practices help ensure that a coach obtains a holistic view of a teacher and their class and remembers the even the smallest details.

Best practice	Why?	Example(s)
Observe at different times and days of the week	Observing at different times helps to capture a holistic understanding of a teacher and a class. This strategy helps to see a teacher instruct different content or kids and helps pull out trends that occur in multiple different instances, rather than in the same class or subject.	On Monday at 10am, I watch Ms. Smith’s 2nd grade math class, but on Tuesday I go to her class at 1:15 to see science class. In both classes I notice that she doesn’t give enough wait time before sharing the correct answer.
Allow yourself time to watch, listen and process Don’t feel compelled to type/write the whole time. Give yourself moments to reflect when needed!	Processing and reflecting provides an observer with time to capture their own ideas, brainstorm possible next steps, and enjoy the teaching and learning happening in front of them!	After taking notes for 5 minutes, you sit back and watch students read to a partner. You think about what the teacher could be doing and how to guide him to pair students differently. You record a few ideas in the “next step” column in your note tracker.
Be as inconspicuous and least disruptive as possible Teachers and students should do their best to ignore a coach. Coaches should avoid redirecting students and engaging in the class.	Coaches want to observe the most realistic classroom situation possible in order to gain a true understanding of what happens. To make this happen, students and teachers need to forget that an administrator is present and be their true selves. Additionally, coaching should never get in the way of teaching and learning, so minimizing disruptions is critical.	Don’t knock on the door before entering a classroom Sit in the back of the room Respond with “we can talk about that later” if someone tries to engage in a conversation
Be specific in including quantifiable data Include times, ratios, counts, etc. whenever possible.	Specific, quantifiable data helps to put an observation in context. It helps a coach determine how large an issue is, identify trends over time, prioritize, and see progress.	8 of 12 students have correct answer 7 hands up 6/7 pairs discussing 11:02 T: what do I do next?



<p>Record teacher and student actions. Use student names when possible. <i>Teacher actions and responding student actions</i></p>	<p>Providing specifics about teacher and student actions helps the coach recall a specific moment when planning a meeting, provides context when talking with a teacher, and helps a teacher remember their actions and words more clearly. This increases effectiveness of coaching meetings, as there are specific teachable moments, rather than generalizations.</p>	<p>T: will the answer be positive or negative S: negative T: why S: because a negative times a positive is a negative</p>
<p>Leave emotion and judgment out Notes should be factual and not include a coach's opinions or feelings.</p>	<p>Factual notes that document all actions provide a snapshot into a specific aspect of a classroom to help a coach avoid avoid any biases that may exist. These notes also support coaches and teachers in reflecting on actual events without any judgement or opinions mixed in.</p>	<p><i>Too much time spent on teacher discussion, not enough time on student practice.</i> VS. <i>Students spent 45 of 55 minutes listening to the teacher. Students spent 10 minutes practicing independently.</i></p>
<p>Focus your notes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Directly aligned to an action step [Know the evidence you're looking for!] - Based on a hunch you want to confirm or refute - Specific element you want to see/learn more about <p><i>Sometimes you don't have anything specific you "need" to observe. That's ok! In those situations, go into the classroom and give yourself a few minutes to watch before selecting a focus area!</i></p>	<p>It is hard to capture every part of a classroom. Focusing on one area helps a coach record detailed notes about that aspect, rather than general notes on multiple aspects of a classroom. This strategy makes notes more helpful when planning a coaching meeting and provides specific feedback for teachers.</p>	<p><i>Observe rotations. [evidence=teacher signals, students move silently and in an organized manner, under 30 seconds]</i></p> <p><i>I think this teacher calls on the same 5 kids during whole group instruction (Find evidence to confirm or refute).</i></p> <p><i>I want to observe the student practice in this classroom.</i></p> <p><i>I want to observe the teacher to student talk ratio in this classroom.</i></p>
<p>Allow yourself time to watch, listen and process Don't feel compelled to type/write the whole time. Give yourself moments to reflect when needed!</p>	<p>Processing and reflecting provides an observer with time to capture their own ideas, brainstorm possible next steps, and enjoy the teaching and learning happening in front of them!</p>	<p>After taking notes for 5 minutes, you sit back and watch students read to a partner. You think about what the teacher could be doing and how to guide him to pair students differently. You record a few ideas in the "next step" column in your note tracker.</p>