

Peer-to-Peer Observation Tips for Psychology GTAs

Adapted from Stephanie Rohdieck's Consultation Tips Sheet, The Ohio State University Center for the Advancement of Teaching (UCAT) for Psychology GTAs completing the Psychology Teaching Certificate

AS THE OBSERVER:

- Your primary goal should be to gain experience and perspective. Use the observation as an opportunity to expand your own teaching literacy. This is an opportunity for you to learn how others approach teaching so you can improve, so think about what works in the class you attend and how you might incorporate some of these ideas or strategies in your own teaching.
- Understand where the instructor and class are in terms of goals and needs; work from your peer's ideas, expectations, and agenda rather than from your own; arrange a pre-observation conference to gain perspective prior to the observation so you'll know what is planned and why.
- Approach the visit as an interested observer, not as a researcher gathering data; you'll end up searching for problems and likely find them! Instead go with your reactions as a student. If you were a student in this course, what would your take on it be?
- Observing a peer's teaching is generative, not evaluative. Your goal is to generate comments about your visit. Use "I" statements along with observation and inquiry verbs like *noticed*, *saw*, *wondered* when talking with your peer about his/her class. You don't have to say that what you observed was "good" or "bad" so avoid using words like *must*, *should*, *need to*, or *ought to*.
- If you are wondering what to look for during the class observation, feel free to use one or more of these questions as guides:
 - What did you like about this particular class and/or instructor's teaching style?
 - Did you learn anything in the pre-observation conference that impacted your reaction/response to this class?
 - Do you have further questions for this instructor after observing his/her class?
 - When did you feel most engaged during class? When did students seem to be most engaged?
 - What if anything surprised you the most?
 - **What positively impacted student learning in the class you observed, and what might you incorporate into your own teaching?**

AS THE INSTRUCTOR BEING OBSERVED:

- Think about this experience as collaborative. You and the colleague observing you are partners in a process of learning about teaching. Remember that the observer is learning from this experience, not giving you feedback (unless, of course, you request it).
- If you are interested in receiving feedback, ask for it in advance. Give your observer some direction in terms of specific aspects of the class on which to focus and comment.
- It's natural to feel nervous when being observed, but remember that this is not evaluative. Your peer is in your classroom to learn from you. Let him/her know why you do what you do in the class observed and use this as an opportunity for reflection on your own strategies as a teacher.
- Take some time after the observation to talk through how the class went with your observer and share your perspective on what worked, what you will do in subsequent classes, and what if anything you might change the next time you teach that class.

TIPS FOR YOUR WRITE-UP

During the observation, take detailed notes. Using those notes, write up an observation summary as soon as possible after attending the observation to ensure you capture as much relevant detail as possible (ideally, within 24-48 hours).

For purposes of the teaching certificate, you should provide observation summaries for at least two peer observations and one faculty observation. Below are some suggested points to include in your observation write-up.

Background on the class context:

- Who was the instructor observed? How many times has this instructor taught this course, and what other courses has s/he taught?
- What are the characteristics of the course observed? Is this a class in the “core” of the major or is it an elective? Is this a General Education (GE) course? What are the course goals or learning objectives?
- What are the characteristics of the students who typically enroll in this course? Is this course primarily intended for Psych majors or another population?

Details about the class observed:

- Describe the class and lesson observed. What content was presented during this class meeting?
- How was the class meeting organized?
- What was the balance of breadth (amount of content covered) to depth (amount of detail)?
- What teaching strategies were used?
- What examples/supplements/resources were used, and how did this impact clarity of the material?
- What were the instructor’s strengths with respect to presentation skills?
- What was the level of instructor-student rapport?
- Describe the level of student interest and participation.
- Describe the amount of interaction between the instructor and students during class.

Reflection and application to your own teaching

- What did you find to be particularly effective about the instruction observed?
- What was consistent with your preferred teaching style, and what was different?
- What might you consider doing differently in your own class as a result of this observation?
- What specific aspects of the class inform your own plans for teaching?