

# TEACHING ASSISTANT TEACHING OBSERVATION FRAMEWORK

This process provides teaching assistants the opportunity to reflect on their teaching, to receive formative and timely feedback from their supervisors, and to document their growth as instructors.

This document provides a framework for providing TAs with formative feedback on teaching via observations. The goals are (1) to ensure TAs have adequate support in completing their teaching assignments, (2) to provide coaching and a space for reflective dialogue about teaching, and (3) to set growth goals for teaching.

<b>Graduate Student</b>	
<b>Supervisor</b>	
<b>Course, Semester, Year</b>	

## Schedule

Action	Recommended Timeline	Scheduled Date	Completed
<b>TA and supervisor meet to schedule observation schedule and discuss pre-semester reflection</b>	First week of semester		
<b>TA completes pre-observation reflection and sends to supervisor</b>	One week prior to observed lesson		
<b>Observation</b>	Around mid-semester		
<b>Supervisor fills out lesson observation</b>	During observed lesson		
<b>TA completes post-lesson reflection</b>	Within two days of the observed lesson		
<b>TA and supervisor meet to discuss observation with joint reflection</b>	Within one week of the observed lesson		
<b>TA completes end-of-semester reflection</b>	Close to end of semester		

# **PRE-SEMESTER REFLECTION**

1. What is your goal for teaching this semester? Goals might be to try at least one new-to-you learning activity, learn all your students' names, or gather feedback from your students at least once before the end of the semester.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What are the rationale and goals of the course you will be teaching? Have you taken similar courses in the past?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What supports do you need to help you be successful in teaching this course?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. What role will you play as a TA, and what are the tasks that you will be doing?

# TA PRE-OBSERVATION REFLECTION

1. What is the main point you hope students will take away from this lesson?
2. How can you plan your lesson to be inclusive (so that all students can fully participate), including accommodations for students with disabilities?
3. What activities will you include in your lesson? Why did you choose these activities?
4. How will you know whether or not your students have understood the main point(s) of the lesson?
5. What challenges do you anticipate facing when teaching this lesson? What actions can you take to limit these challenges?

# SUPERVISOR LESSON OBSERVATION

<b>Date</b>	
<b>Main lesson goals (and how did you know?)</b>	

General Observation Questions. See appendices for more specific lenses for observation.

- Describe the academic setting (lecture/lab, class size, student characteristics, learning environment, etc.).
- Describe how the instructor and students begin and end the class.
- Describe learning activities that take place during the class.
- Describe instructional tools and/or teaching strategies that the instructor uses.
- What do you notice about classroom management?
- What do you observe that you'd like to incorporate into your classes?

<b>Activity Description</b>	<b>Observations/Questions</b>

*NB: Productive feedback for teaching observations tends to avoid evaluative terms like good and bad and instead focus on actions in the classroom and their results.*

# TA POST-LESSON REFLECTION

1. What went well during the lesson?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you think you met the goals you outlined in your pre-class reflection? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What challenges did you face during the lesson? How did you address those challenges?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Do you think all of your students were able to fully participate in the lesson, including students with SDS accommodations?

# TA AND SUPERVISOR JOINT REFLECTION

1. What were the main strengths of this lesson? How can the instructor build on these strengths?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What were 1-2 challenges in the lesson, and how might the instructor have addressed them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are 1-2 specific areas in which the instructor would like to improve their teaching? What are some strategies for these areas, including one concrete thing the instructor will try this semester?

# TA END OF SEMESTER REFLECTION

1. Did you meet the goal(s) that you set for yourself at the beginning of the semester? If not, what were the main obstacles? What can you try to do going forward?
2. How do you think you grew as a teacher this semester?
3. What changes did you make or teaching strategies did you try in response to your supervisor's midsemester observation feedback?
4. What is a new goal you have for your teaching?

# APPENDIX: POSSIBLE OBSERVATION LENSES

## Engagement

- When do the students seem most engaged in the material? When do they seem the least engaged?
- How do I know the students are engaged?
- What specifically is going on when engagement is happening? What are the students doing? What is the instructor doing?
- How is the class organized and paced? How does this affect student engagement?
- What are the patterns of conversation? Who holds the “conversational ball”? Is it student-to-student, student-to-instructor, the same students again and again?
- How does the instructor use verbal and non-verbal communication?

## Content

- What do the students already know about the content of today’s class?
- Are the students curious about the content? How is the content made relevant to the students? How is this done explicitly? How is it done implicitly?
- How do the students know what’s important in today’s class? What activities or practices do the teacher or students undertake to make what matters most evident?
- What happens to help students learn the material? What are the various approaches used to convey the content?
- Did students get it? How do I know? How do students know? How does the instructor know?

## Diversity

- How would diversity be described in this classroom—what are the visible classroom demographics?
- How are differences in learners accommodated? What are the activities or approaches applied here that might help different learners?
- Is there anything about the content of today’s class that reflects a diversity of perspectives and/or identities?
- What are the different approaches that are used to make the classroom an inclusive place? How are different students encouraged to participate?
- What else is noteworthy in terms of diversity and inclusion in this setting?



### Instructional Strategies

- What are the different instructional strategies used in this class (presentation/lecture, discussion, etc.)?
- Do some strategies seem to work better for the students than others? Why is this the case? What seems to make the difference here?
- How does the teacher use classroom media (digital technologies, slides, video, music, etc.) and/or space?
- Are there any seemingly unexpected moments in the class? How are they handled?
- Are questions used as a teaching strategy? If so, what kinds of questions does the teacher ask, and when? How are the students involved in asking and answering questions? How is the instructor involved in asking and answering questions?
- Are small groups used in the class? If so, when and how are they implemented? What impact do they appear to have on student learning?
- Which instructional strategies seem more engaging for the students? Which strategies allow them to participate in higher order thinking (such as self-reflection, application, critical thinking)?

### Classroom Climate

- What is the mood before class begins? During class? After class?
- How is the classroom arranged physically and how does this influence teaching and learning?
- What kind of rapport exists between teacher and student(s) or among students?
- What kinds of things does the instructor do to address the environment in this class?
- What are the students doing to contribute to the classroom environment?
- How might other aspects of the course (such as the syllabus) influence what is happening during the session you observed?

*Borrowed from Northern Virginia Community College Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Stonehill College Center for Teaching and Learning, and University of Calgary Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning.*

# TEACHING RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

- TAs can come to the [Center for Teaching](#) with any teaching-related question, concern, or need. CfT provides services including workshops, consultations, classroom observations, job document workshopping, and more. All CfT services are free, voluntary, and confidential.
- The [Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning \(CIRTL\)](#), housed in the Grad College, is committed to improving undergraduate education by improving graduate student and post-doc teaching. As organizational members in a national network, UIowa graduate students automatically have access to a wide range of free and online programming through CIRTL related to teaching and have the opportunity to complete three different levels of certification. Hint: Completing this observation process earns you the first level; email [grad-cirtl@uiowa.edu](mailto:grad-cirtl@uiowa.edu) to find out how to claim this certification.
- The College of Education offers multiple [certificates related to teaching](#). These certificates, which help participants do deep dives on teaching through coursework and practicum studies, are easy to fit into your graduate program of study and can make you more competitive for the academic job market.