Guide to Writing the Peer Observation Letter

About Writing Letters based on Peer Teaching Observations

- Formative assessments (observations for faculty development) can be informal, edited versions of the evaluation form.
- Summative assessments (observations for evaluation at key points in a faculty member’s career) should follow principles for good letters of recommendation:
  - Use unit criteria as appropriate to clarify shared criteria for the recommendation and evaluation.
  - Support any claims with detailed evidence and/or examples from the syllabus, course materials, or observation session.
  - Use the terminology of the unit criteria and/or the teaching observation rubric to maintain shared vocabulary and to communicate common evaluation criteria. For instance, if the rubric describes certain observed teaching practices as exemplary, refer to them in that way in your letter as well.
  - Highlight what is present and avoid speculation about what is not. Keep comments of praise or suggestions for improvement specific and tied to observable actions. Avoid praise or criticism of effort, work, personal attributes, or ambiguously vague or general qualities.
  - Avoid comparisons to what you or someone else might have done to teach the materials and focus on whether or not the faculty member was effective in meeting his or her stated goals for the session.
  - If you identified and discussed significant areas for improvement, briefly describe the action plan for professional development in teaching.

Letter of Teaching Observation

Recommended Structure of Summative Letter for Review and Promotion Files, adapted from the Yale University *Peer Observation of Teaching Guidelines: A Sourcebook for the International Liberal Arts Context*

1. Basic Information
   a. Name of Faculty Member, Observer, Course Title
   b. Date of Pre-Observation Conversation
   c. Date of Classroom Observation(s)
   d. Date of Post-Observation Conversation
   e. Number of students enrolled in the course
   f. Is this the faculty member’s first time teaching the course?
   g. Is this a Common Curriculum Course?
2. Description of Learning Goals and Teaching Strategies
   a. Describe the class and relevant context (e.g. common curriculum v. advanced course, team or solo taught, first time teaching, etc.).
   b. Summarize the instructor’s stated goals for the class.
   c. Describe the classroom activities (e.g. active learning approach, problem-based learning, student presentations, discussions with structure).

3. Describe Achievements of Faculty Member’s Goals and Areas of Alignment with Good Practices in Higher Education
   a. In your own observation, how effectively did the instructor achieve the stated goals?
   b. In which areas did the observation identify evidence of exemplary teaching? Provide specific examples.
   c. What evidence showed the professor is achieving their core learning objectives?
   d. What evidence showed the professor is using effective and inclusive pedagogical practices?

4. Describe Any Less Than Successful Teaching Strategies and Any Concerns re: Learning Outcomes
   a. What was less effective? Provide specific examples.
   b. What evidence showed the professor is not achieving their core learning objectives as fully as possible?
   c. What evidence showed the professor is not using effective and inclusive pedagogical practices as fully as possible?
   d. Describe any areas for innovation or improvement that you discussed with the faculty member and which they are considering implementing in the future.

5. Conclusions and Overall Assessment

Note: Sample peer observation letters are available in the Appendix of the Yale University Peer Observation of Teaching Guidelines.