

A Guide For Peer to Peer Course Observation

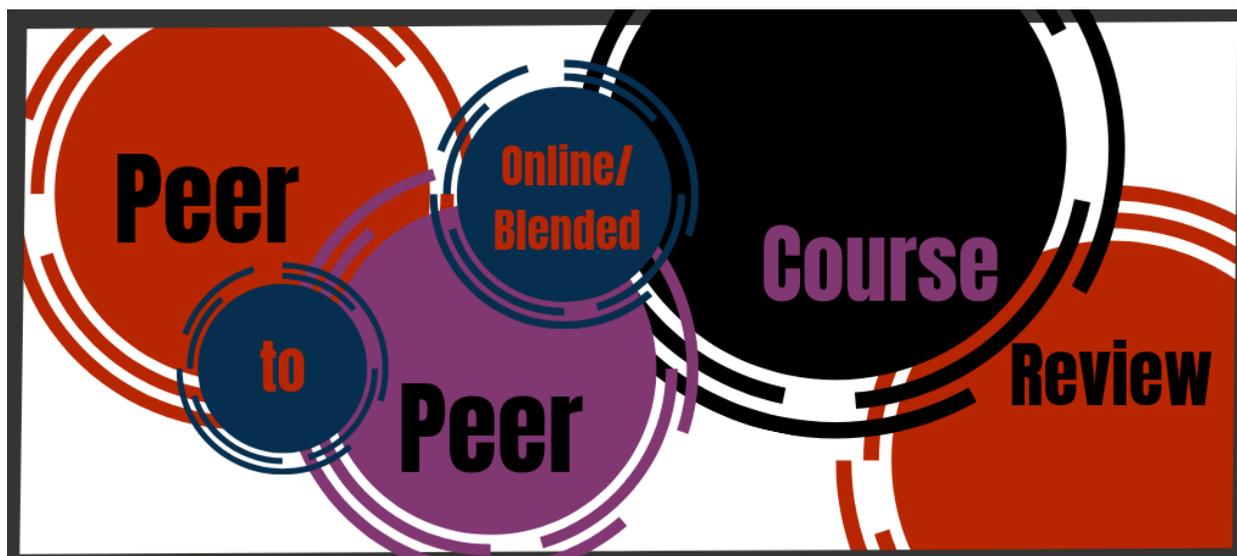


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Observation v. Evaluation

Observation is different from evaluation. Evaluation is focused on scores. Review is about **feedback and reflection**. This guide is specifically focused on supporting collaborative and collegial conversation around high quality online or blended teaching and learning. The observation process is meant to identify what is going 'well' as much as 'opportunities' for growth. As with any professional practice, course design and facilitation is iterative, and observation helps identify 'next' steps.

Peer Review Form: Online or Blended Courses

CSUCI has an *Online Teaching and Learning Policy*, which includes key areas of consideration for peer observation. We used that policy, together with the CSU Quality Learning and Teaching



(QLT) Rubric, to develop a heuristic for voluntary self or peer observation. Below is a suggested form to support your efforts for either self or peer **observation**. To maintain consistency, this Peer Review Form includes criteria from [CSUCI's Online Teaching and Learning Policy](#). Additionally, related criteria from the [Quality Learning and Teaching \(QLT\) Rubric](#) have been noted. QLT is one rubric used by the CSU to identify high quality online, blended, and flipped courses.

- [Preview the Peer Observation Form: Online or Blended Courses](#)
- [Make an Editable Copy of the Peer Review Form: Online or Blended Courses](#)

Step One: Set a Common Goal

Reviews can be conducted for several purposes. Locating evidence and writing comments can be time intensive and it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Establishing a goal for the observation will help you stay focused and minimize attention to distractors.

Tips for setting a Review Goal (to be done by the course creator/instructor):

- Determine if you are seeking to make revisions OR identify strengths that you want to replicate
- Review student feedback and SRT Results to inform your focus
- Reflect on your own impressions of your course (What went well? What would you like to change?)
- Review categories in the Peer Review Form: Online Blended Courses. Depending on the focus of your observation and the timeframe, you can apply the entire form or select specific section(s) and/or criteria that align with your goal.
- Communicate your goal with your peer observer during your pre-observation conversation

Example Review Goal:

- Identify ways that I can make my course more organized (navigation) and consistent (module structure).
- Identify 4 areas of strength and 4 actionable areas for improvement.
- Increase/improve student posts and interaction with their peers in discussions

Pre-Review Conversation

A great deal of decision making and variables influence a course's design. To better understand the course development story, it is a good idea to have a brief discussion (10-15 minutes) with the course instructor. Below are some questions you might want to ask:

- How long have you been teaching this course online/blended?
- Have you taught this course Face-To-Face or in another format? If so, for how long?



- How long did you have to prepare this online/blended course?
- How many students are in the course?
- How long does this course last?
- Is there a required textbook for this course?
- Can you give me a course tour?
- Does/did this course include any synchronous or real time interaction (i.e. Zoom sessions, Chat sessions, etc)? If so, please tell me more about how you used these sessions.
- Tell me about strengths or successes you experienced teaching this course.
- Tell me about any challenges you encountered while teaching this course.
- What is your goal for this course observation? Is there a specific area you would like me to focus?
- What would be most helpful for me to include in my feedback?
- Is there anything else you'd like me to know about this course?

Step Two: Add Reviewer to a Course...

If a faculty colleague is going to observation a course, that person needs to be added with the Teaching Assistant (TA) role to the course in *CI Learn*. To add an observer to a course, **the Instructor of Record** needs to do the following:

- Send an email to tinnovations@csuci.edu with the email title, "Peer Review of [Course Number and Name (e.g., EDSS 540 Literacy in the Content Areas)]".
- In your email, include the course number, title, academic term (e.g., spring 2019), and a direct link to that course in *CI Learn*. *Also include the first/last name and email address of the faculty observer, and indicate that you would like this person added to your course with a TA role for the purpose of peer observation.*

Example Email:

Please add Lorna Gonzalez (lorna.gonzalez@csuci.edu) as a TA to my spring 2019 course, EDSS 540 Literacy in the Content Areas (<--insert hotlink) so that she may conduct a peer observation. Thank you.

Step Three: Conduct the Review

Getting started with the observation

Before you take notes, fill out a peer observation form, etc., we recommend that you first get acclimated with the course. Here are a few suggestions:



- Preview the course by clicking on navigation links (e.g., *Modules*, *Syllabus*, buttons on the home page, etc.).
- Mentally note any navigation issues or concerns
- Mentally note positives that stand out to you
- Approach your initial visit to the course site as a ‘new student.’ What will you look for? What do you want to know? Can you find those things?
- Look at Module Layout/structure
- Notice patterns/consistent structure

Completing the Peer Review Form:

Now that you have gotten your initial impressions of the course, you are ready to conduct your peer observation. Examine the portion(s) of the peer observation form that are relevant to your colleague’s desired feedback. During your pre observation conversation, it may be helpful to look at the peer observation form together and identify specific criteria for observation.

Documenting Evidence

To get started, it is recommended you first locate evidence of a specific criterion within the course. Listing specific evidence helps the course instructor contextualize your feedback and locate where this criteria is met within the course. Indicating the location of evidence can greatly expedite any revision/redesign efforts.

Writing Tips:

- **List** any evidence that addresses the criteria. Even if evidence is limited, it is helpful to know what the observer was able to find.
- **Provide a location** and identifying information (i.e., title of page, discussion, assignment, reading, etc.)

Example:

- *In the Start Here Module, the Meet Your Instructor Page includes a welcome video and clearly lists all ways she can be contacted.*
- *In Module 3, the Discussion on Digital Literacy gives students the option to link a resource of their choice and provide an explanation in either writing or video/audio recording.*
- **If evidence is recurring**, provide a location and identifying information. Then note where this structure/instance is repeated.

Example:

- *In Module 1, students are given videos, readings, and a 3 minute explanatory video from the instructor related to the module topic and discussion prompt. Students are asked to add to the module content by adding a research article, web resource, or video in the discussion forum. Students are tasked with observing sources added by at least 2 peers and to make connections between*



the required module content and the student curated content. This structure is repeated in Modules 3, 6, 9, and 12.

- **If evidence is implied, but not viewable** (i.e. a synchronous Zoom session, class meeting at a museum, live chat session), include the location and identifying information regarding where the evidence is implied. Consider using stems such as *It appears ... Based on the directions in ... After reading the announcement ...*

Examples:

- *It appears from the Module 4 VoiceThread prompt, STEM in image and voice, students visited a children’s museum during a two-week period and reflected on the experience through sharing an image and reflecting in voice or video on an exhibit that connected with a STEM teaching method and chemistry topic from Modules 1-3.*
- *Based on the Announcement posted on September 3rd, several students attended the optional Zoom Course orientation meeting and the video was shared with students via their Canvas Inbox.*
- **If evidence is limited**, state the location and describe what is provided. In your suggestions/modifications you can expand on additional strategies for further development.

Example:

- **Evidence:** *The course syllabus makes reference to required readings,*
- **Suggestion:** *Consider clarifying where students should locate these readings or if the readings are part of a required text.*
- **Evidence:** *The module overviews include reading assignments with pages listed. For example, in the Module 1 overview in the To Do List, ‘required reading - pp 13-45’*
- **Suggestion:** *Consider including the name of the text or article where pages 13-45 are located. (i.e. Chapter 1 of the textbook, pp 13-45 only)*

Is it a ‘Yes,’ ‘Sometimes’ or ‘No’?

Once evidence is identified, it is easier to decide how to indicate a final yes, no, or sometimes. Remember, the purpose of the observation is feedback, so the evidence you list and the Modification/Feedback you provide will contextualize your selection. **The goal is good feedback, marking ‘yes’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘no’ is secondary.** Below are some things to consider when deciding between Yes and No:



Course Overview					
A successful online learning experience begins with an introduction to the course essentials. The class should clearly convey what students will learn, how they will learn it, and who they will learn with.					
	YES	Some-times	NO	EVIDENCE FROM THE COURSE	MODIFICATIONS/PEER SUGGESTIONS
Clearly guides students to the "start" area of the course (QLT 1.1, 4.3)	X				

When to mark YES:

- If ample evidence is present and easy to find
- If most of the criteria is met, but you feel a portion is limited or missing, consider marking it YES. In your suggestions, provide feedback on how this could be strengthened.

When to mark SOMETIMES:

- If one strong instance is located, but not repeated throughout the course
- If evidence is limited or does not satisfy most of the criteria. In your suggestions you can explain your scoring and provide additional suggestions.

When to mark NO:

- If no evidence can be located
- If you cannot locate evidence **within 5-minutes**, students cannot either. If evidence is obscure or difficult to find communicate this in your feedback.

Constructive Modification Recommendations and Suggestions

Writing and receiving feedback is challenging for both the observer and instructor. Remember, the purpose of observation is to help each other in a collective effort to support student success. Below are tips to help write **specific** feedback that is **supportive**, honest, and course (not personally) focused.

Tips for Constructive Comments:

Begin with a positive. Notice what IS evident!

- State the asset the item provides to students, course design, or facilitation
- Positives can include opportunities for interaction, humanized elements, navigational benefit, visually appealing, clear alignment with module or course objectives, fully accessible, interesting content, etc.
 - *The discussion provides an opportunity for students to interact with peers and instructor. The instructor is present in the discussion, replying to multiple student posts.*



In the Modification/Suggestion Column, be constructive NOT critical.

- Avoid any language/pronouns that direct critique at the person instead of the course (i.e., you).
- When noting areas for modification, keep your comments focused on facts you can observe. State what you see or don't see.
- Look to terms used in the criteria to help specify your language
- Pose questions instead of identifying what is 'not' there. Providing questions can support reflection without sounding critical.
- Begin suggestions with terms such as 'consider' or 'perhaps.' Avoid using phrases like 'you should'.
- If possible, provide an example.

Examples:

- **Avoid comments like,** *“Your directions in the discussion are unclear. You do not specify due dates and your prompt is too general. You do not tell students what you expect to see in their posts. You should have students cite module sources to support their reasoning. In the directions for replies, you should give students a list of items or points to include or address.”*
- **Aim for comments like,** *“Consider adding specific due dates in addition to days. The prompt appears very open ended or general. Should students reference content included in the module? Is there an expectation of length or structure? Will students share resources beyond the course content? What should student’s address in their replies to peers? Consider asking students to cite one or two resources from the module that informed their thinking, or invite students to locate an additional resource that relates to the module content, and explain why they have selected it for inclusion. Perhaps adding two or three talking points to the reply directions will help students focus responses and provide greater detail/analysis. For example, “Identify one point you agree with, and one point that you don’t. Provide either a reference to content from this module or your own research to support why you disagree and explain how this resource supports your thinking.”*

Example of Constructive Feedback

Facilitation and Instruction	An approachable, present online instructor plays a critical role in student engagement, motivation, and success. The instructor also plays a key role in fostering a sense of community in the class				
Criteria	YES	Some-times	NO	EVIDENCE FROM THE COURSE	MODIFICATIONS/PEER SUGGESTIONS



<p>Active and meaningful instructor participation in course activities (Discussion Board, VoiceThread, etc)</p>			<p>X</p>	<p>There are several opportunities for students to interact with each other. In Module 1 students use VoiceThread to introduce themselves and share a learning goal for the course. In each Module, students interact either in a VoiceThread or Discussion.</p>	<p>While students reply to one another, instructor participation is evident in the grade book and grading comments to individual students, but participation is not seen within the discussion forum or the VoiceThreads.</p> <p>Consider moving positive comments and explanatory feedback out of the gradebook and placing them in the discussion forum or recording them in VoiceThread. Of course, any 'negative' feedback should be kept private and the gradebook would be the best place to do this. By participating where all students can see instructor commentary, more students can benefit from clarification and additional examples. It is also an opportunity to direct students to strong and/or compelling posts by their peers or ask additional questions to spur deeper thinking. For example, "Jane raises an interesting point about _____. This is in contrast with what _____ says about _____. Based on your response, how can you make a case that both Jane and _____ are correct?"</p>
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What if I get Stuck?

- Reference the QLT Rubric.** The related QLT criteria are listed at the end of each criteria in the observation document. Review the [QLT Rubric](#) and read the example(s) included with each criteria.



- **Skip it and move on!** By looking at other criteria, your view of the course may change, and this can clarify your thinking. A second look later may be all you need.
- **Write your comments first.** If you cannot decide if it is a YES or NO, write your commentary. This may help you pick between the two. Remember, this process is about feedback NOT evaluation! YES or NO helps the instructor identify areas for focus.
- **Read your comments out loud.** If you can't decide if your language sounds critical or constructive, read your comments out loud. If you still cannot decide, it is a good idea to revisit the guidelines for constructive comments, and try writing again!
- **Talk with your peer!** These are not formal evaluations! This is about feedback and good conversation around course quality. Talking about specific criteria may inform you and your peer's thinking about course design.
- **Plan a Real Time Conversation.** Meet in person, talk by phone, or Zoom. You and your peer are supporting each other. Perhaps planning a 'mid observation' conversation would benefit you both. During this conversation address areas where you feel 'unsure' or would like more clarification. Remember, this is about good collegial conversations that lead to better courses - not scores!

