

### Overview

The following guide was developed to assist with your class visits. The intentions of class visits are for faculty to learn from each other about what they are currently doing well and help them troubleshoot areas that are a challenge. In addition, the visited instructor may request feedback on specific aspects of his or her teaching.

When visiting, keep in mind the following general principles:

- **Be patient.** Those being visited need time to adjust to the idea and the process.
- **Do no harm.** Visits can be anxiety producing and difficult for both observer and the observed.
- **Be tough on the issues, but gentle on the person.**
- **Focus on specific teaching behaviors.**
- **Build on strengths.** First, identify what went well and only then offer feedback on opportunities for improvement.
- **Provide feedback in a timely and thoughtful manner.** Meet in person with the instructor you visited soon after the class. You may wish to follow up the in-person feedback with written comments.

### Things to Avoid

It is common to have difficulty keeping an open mind about teaching styles and methods different from one's own. One should be very cautious about using absolute statements such as 'you should never use overhead transparencies that way,' or 'case studies should only be conducted this way.' Our task as visitors is to ascertain whether the method being used seems effective, not whether it conforms to notions of teaching derived from our own experience. There are many ways to be effective.

## **Things to do during class**

1. **Arrive early.** Note the physical arrangement of the room, student to-student interactions, what happens when the instructor arrives, and interactions before class between instructor and students. Listening to students before class often gives clues to their expectations and attitudes concerning the class and instruction.
2. **Although it will depend on why you are visiting, try to record as much as you can on the pedagogies and teaching approaches the instructor uses.**
3. **Record both verbal and non-verbal behavior,** emphasizing what happened rather than interpretations of events. “Student looking at clock 9:30, 9:34, 9:38” is preferable to “student appears anxious for class to end,” or “Instructor talking to board 9-9:15” rather than “instructor mannerism is distracting.”
4. **Record your impressions of or questions about the teaching**
5. **Wear a watch when observing a class.** Every few minutes note the time in the margin so that the class structure can be put in context.
6. **Stay for the entire class session.** If you must leave, make sure the instructor knows beforehand.
7. **Observe from a position that is minimally distracting to students and to the instructor.**
8. **Don’t intervene in the teaching during the observation,** except by explicit prior agreement with the instructor.

## **Providing Feedback to the Instructor**

Feedback is more likely to be embraced and acted upon when the recipient perceives it as constructive and non-threatening. Therefore, provide feedback that is descriptive and specific; focus on the behavior rather than on the person, and focus on behavior that a person can change. Also, acknowledge the person’s strengths and their efforts to improve.

In sum, helpful, constructive feedback is characterized by:

1. **Positive phrasing** — provides a positive framework for the message.
2. **Concreteness** — is grounded in specific, observable behavior.
3. **Action-orientation** — gives the individual a specific plan of action to follow.
4. **Focus** — provides feedback on behavior that the individual can change.

The examples below exemplify various aspects of constructive feedback.

1. ‘The time and energy you devoted to the preparation of the class discussion questions is clearly well-received by the students; they do the work and are clearly interested in the subject. This is a definite plus. However, you might find that many of the detailed, fact based questions that you asked in class might be given to the students ahead of time to self-test their comprehension, and emphasize higher-order, integrating questions in class discussion. This tactic would allow you to delve more deeply into the issues with the students.’
2. ‘The case study discussion seemed to be very productive and most of the students participated with meaningful comments and good answers to your questions. Unfortunately, there didn’t seem to be enough time for closure, and I sensed that the students needed to have some resolution of at least the major issues in the case, especially since their mid-term is coming up soon. Since you are trying to keep to your schedule, it is probably impractical to resume the discussion in the next class, but one solution might be to prepare a handout to tie up some of the loose ends that you can give to the students next time.’
3. ‘Your opening points of the lecture were very interesting and I could see how they were related to the day’s topic, but during the lecture the students seemed a bit confused about the connections. Perhaps you could write these points on the board or prepare them ahead of time on an overhead transparency so you could refer to them again during the remainder of the lecture.’

You might also want to take notes on particular areas. Here are some examples to consider:

The instructor established the relevance of information

Instructor clearly communicated expectations for the session (e.g., stated learning objectives)

Instructor spoke audibly and clearly

The session was well paced

Distracting mannerisms or expressions were NOT apparent

Instructor communicated concepts effectively

The instructor phrased questions clearly

The instructor positively restated student questions or comments for the benefit of the class

The instructor listened and responded effectively to student comments and questions

Where applicable, links to and coordination with other courses are specified

The instructor encouraged student questions and discussion

The instructor encouraged students to answer difficult questions

The instructor provided positive feedback for student discussion

The instructor was courteous and respectful when interacting with students (i.e., acted in a professional manner)

The instructor creates a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning.

The instructor treats students impartially and respectfully

The instructor provided positive feedback for student discussion and questions

The instructor reacts to student professional behavior issues appropriately

The instructor demonstrates flexibility in responding to student concerns or interests