How to Complete an Observation Summary

The pace of documenting an observation is often quite fast. Therefore, once an observation concludes it is important that the observer review the notes, filling in omitted details and clarifying any abbreviations used. Then an Observation Summary should be completed. This summary includes the following elements.

**Moment in teaching and learning cycle**

Observations occur at different places in the teaching and learning cycle. Observers should focus on the most important ideas that are being taught in the lesson observed. Observers should decide where in the cycle most of the instruction occurs and circle that choice.

- **Introduction**: A lesson or session that focuses on providing students with an overview of a project, background to forthcoming work, or directions and arrangements that give them the foundation for moving forward.
- **Practice**: A lesson that concentrates on skills and techniques, or sections of a work focused on increasing students’ quality and understanding.
- **Development of Original Work**: A lesson or section that focuses on students’ own investigations, experiments or projects.
- **Critique or Revision**: A lesson or session that focuses on taking developed investigations or projects to a final level of polish for presentation.
- **Final Presentation or Exhibition**: This may include in-class and informal presentations as well as larger scale events.

**Summary of lesson activities**

Then five or six sentences are written to describe 1) the materials or works used in the lesson, 2) the key skills and techniques that students were learning, 3) the big ideas presented during the lesson, 4) the creative choices in which students were engaged in making, and 5) who was actively involved in the lesson. It may be helpful to segment the lesson before completing this section of the Observation Summary.
Segmenting the lesson

When the observation is finished, the observer looks back over the Running Record and divides the lesson into logical segments based on the activities that occurred. Most 45-60 minute lessons will have four to six segments. Segments may include such activities as attendance and paperwork, warm-up or introductory class remarks, explanation of the assignment for the day, the actual activities in which students were involved, and cleanup.

A new segment occurs when the activity changes. Events that last less than two minutes can probably be included as part of the next activity unless the content is clearly different. For example, one activity may end before the instructor gives directions for the next activity. The directions can be included in the segment that contains the activity.

This segmentation is important because quality judgments will be made for the individual portions of the lesson, as well as assigning an overall quality rating. The full analysis of this data will also involve looking to see whether particular types of segments are more or less effective.