



GUIDE TO PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

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INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE

Peer Review of Teaching is one of a number of methods or techniques that can be used to gather evidence about one's teaching. Other sources of evidence that can be critically examined to enhance teaching include self-reflection and student feedback (Brookfield, 1995). Such evidence, from a variety of sources, is key to continuous quality improvement in teaching, and documented proof that self improvement is taken seriously by you.

This resource provides information, advice and a variety of tools to assist you to carry out a peer review of your teaching, or to support a colleague by providing peer review.

It should be emphasised that peer and self review of teaching is not a 'once off' activity—long term engagement with the process is necessary if real benefit and improvement in teaching and learning is to result.

PEER REVIEW OF TEACHING

What is Peer Review of Teaching?

Peer Review of Teaching occurs where you invite a colleague or other peer to comment on or review your teaching. Peer Review of Teaching can be done in pairs or small teams.

Just as teaching involves activities both within and outside the “classroom”, peer review of teaching can involve the provision of feedback on a range of activities.

You might invite a colleague to into your on-campus or online “classroom” to observe and provide feedback. Or, you might ask for feedback on other aspects of your approach to teaching and learning, such as unit documentation, planning and mapping, teaching resources, assessment, etc.

Peer Review of Teaching can be used for developmental, formative purposes to improve teaching. It can also be used as a source of evidence about teaching performance for use in various decision-making processes such when applying for promotion, awards or a new academic position.

What can be reviewed?

Teaching performance has many facets, any of which could be the focus of Peer Review of Teaching, including:

- the development of the curriculum, including intended learning outcomes, syllabus, alignment of course and unit learning outcomes, choice of resources and readings
- development of teaching resources
- development of learning activities
- ‘classroom’ performance
- facilitation of student interactions and discussions
- the development and marking of assessment tasks
- the provision of feedback to students, both summative and formative
- clinical, laboratory and field work
- the counselling of students
- the supervision of graduate students

Why engage in Peer Review of Teaching?

There are many reasons for engaging in Peer Review of Teaching, including benefits for teachers, student learning, and the institution:

- It helps to ensure quality in teaching.
- The process is collegial and supportive, and should lead to improved teaching practice.
- It facilitates the dissemination and sharing of expertise concerning teaching and learning within the University by drawing on the strengths of experienced staff.
- It assists staff members to build and maintain a teaching record or portfolio.
- It increases opportunities for scholarly and collegial discussion about teaching.

Process of Peer Review of Teaching

1. Preparation
 - Determine your aims/goals
 - Find a peer
2. Initial meeting with your peer
3. Observation / review of documents
4. Feedback
5. Reflection, reporting and improvement
 - reflect on the feedback received
 - plan for action in response to the feedback. What changes will you make to your practice, approach or documents?
 - as appropriate: follow-up meeting with performance manager or course coordinator and/or use of peer review report for applications.

Who can be your 'peer'?

The following table from the University of Melbourne¹ describes some approaches to identifying an appropriate partner for your peer review:

By its very nature, peer review of teaching draws upon individuals' different – and sometimes quite diverse – perspectives and experiences. This is an inherent strength of peer review, and therefore there is no single rule for what constitutes an appropriate reviewer. Some peer review of teaching programs match individuals with two partners of different type, such as a departmental colleague and someone else from a very different discipline, seeking to capitalise on the different benefits involved. The following are some of the possibilities:

Peer	Advantages	Possible disadvantages
Colleague in the same discipline	Will have experience in teaching the same, or related, concepts. May be able to comment of the currency and accuracy of information ('content').	Focus on content may distract from the fundamentals, including the effect of the teaching on students.
Colleague in the same department	As for disciplinary colleague, with the added advantage of encouraging an open culture of discussion about teaching in the department, between colleagues.	Focus on content may distract from fundamentals, including the effect of the teaching on students.
Colleague from 'distant' discipline (e.g. arts with science; engineering with performing arts)	Potential for exposure to 'novel' teaching approaches. Reviewer likely to avoid distraction of specifics of the content and instead focus on the core aspects and effects of the teaching.	Reviewer may need more background information in order to understand the context of the subject and class.

¹ Harris, 2010, cited in Farrell, 2011

Peer	Advantages	Possible disadvantages
Colleague experienced in university teaching	More likely to understand the 'practical realities' of teaching. Likely to have direct experience of various teaching strategies (although experience is neither necessary nor sufficient for effective peer feedback).	A large difference in 'seniority' can be a challenge to open and collegial feedback (although it need not be).
Colleague involved in teaching similar 'class types' (e.g. large classes; graduate level; clinical teaching)	Most likely to be able to share experiences and strategies.	
Colleague teaching in the same unit/course	If teaching in the same course, is aware of the overall course objectives. If teaching in the same unit, knows the student cohort and the specific role of the particular class in the overall unit design. Benefits for coordination – making connections between topics, and avoiding repetition – in team taught units.	Even more than with 'disciplinary colleague', reviewer can be distracted by the specifics of the content. Limits opportunities for introducing new ideas and strategies.

GUIDELINES

Example proformas are provided in this guide for peer review of classroom teaching. For support and guidance regarding documentary reviews of teaching, please contact the Tasmanian Institute of Learning and Teaching.

Peer review of classroom teaching involves a peer/reviewer/colleague or colleagues visiting your classroom to observe your actual teaching performance. It should be stressed, however, that this by itself will provide only one part of the required evidence of overall teaching performance:

- first, as we saw in an earlier section, teaching covers a much broader scope of activities than performance in the classroom alone.
- second, observation of just one performance may not be a good guide of overall classroom performance.

Nevertheless, many teachers interested in reviewing their teaching will wish to include peer review of classroom performance in the repertoire of evaluative approaches.

The following advice is framed in terms of the single reviewer, but is equally applicable to a larger review team.

Process of Peer Review

Step 1

Choose a colleague you feel comfortable with and whom you know to be a respected teacher. Ensure that they are familiar with the guidelines for reviewers. If you intend to use the results of peer review as evidence of good teaching, then you would tend to choose someone whose status and reputation was known within the university.

Step 2

Invite them to observe your teaching.

Note: you can nominate a specific time and place, or you can indicate your timetable and ask your colleague to choose when to attend your class. The latter makes it harder for you, but the experience for your colleague may well be more authentic, as in the former situation you may find yourself presenting more self-consciously than normally.

Step 3

- Schedule a meeting with them before any observation takes place.
- Be clear between you about what the purpose is of the peer review.
- Discuss the issue of written feedback – do you want it?
- Decide what aspects of teaching you wish to have feedback about in your classroom. You have many options here; e.g.:
 - You can ask your colleague to respond as a student in your classroom (“What was it like to be a learner in that lecture?”).

- You can ask for feedback on specific techniques; e.g. clarity of explanation, ability to involve students actively.
- You can ask for overall perceptions; e.g. was it clear to the observer where you were going? Could you be heard? Were you projecting interest in the topic?
- You can ask for the observer's perceptions of students' response; e.g. were they restless? Were they taking notes? Were they talking among themselves?
- You can ask the observer to use a standard checklist for observing a lecture, tutorial, laboratory, clinic, or a checklist you have drawn up yourself. (You would do better to use the former if you intend to present the outcomes as evidence of good teaching.)

Step 4

Schedule a meeting with your colleague *after* the observation has taken place.

- Before you meet, take time to think about the teaching session, and note down issues you wish to raise with your observer colleague. At the meeting you will be given the courtesy of first comment on your teaching session. It may help to organise your thoughts about it by considering how you would answer the following:
 - What did I do well?
 - What could have been done better?
 - What were the biggest problems in that class?
 - What will I resolve to do differently in my next teaching session/ next time I teach this topic?
- Ask for the feedback you agreed on—remember that you are in control, but also remember that the more trust there is between you and the reviewer, and the more open you are about your teaching, then the more valuable will be the outcomes as a developmental exercise for you.
- Decide if you would like to repeat the exercise in the future—if so, negotiate a time for this with your colleague.

Step 5

After the meeting make a record of the talk with your colleague, listing important points and actions you intend to take as a result of the observation. Lodge this in your Teaching Record, together with the reviewer's written feedback and the results of the checklist, if used.

If you have received written feedback, consider whether you need to write a comment as an attachment. You might like to use the Peer Review of Teaching Action Proforma provided for this purpose.

Guidelines for Reviewers

Academic staff who have agreed to act as reviewers for Peer Review of Teaching will need to prepare themselves for this task and the following guidelines are designed to assist you in this task.

Being a Peer Reviewer:

1. Determine if you have the time available to provide a peer review of teaching. Undertaking peer review will involve, at the least: a pre-meeting, review/observation, preparation of feedback/report, and a post-meeting.
2. If yes, then set up a pre-meeting, where the following should be agreed between yourself and the reviewee:
 - What is the purpose of the peer review?
 - What aspects of the teaching does the reviewee want observed/reviewed?
 - What format will the feedback/report take? For example, will you use a standard checklist/schedule?
 - What form of written feedback does the reviewee want?
 - If observing a scheduled activity, will you and the reviewee agree on a specific time/date, or will you choose from the reviewee's timetable? (i.e. will he/she know you will be there in advance, or not, understanding that when the review does take place, students need also to be informed of what is occurring?)
 - Agree a time for a post-meeting, preferably within a few days of an observation or soon after a review. Feedback will be most effective if provided soon after the event.
3. At the post-meeting:
 - Choose a private venue (e.g., where neither colleagues nor students will come and join you spontaneously.)
 - Invite the reviewee to self-evaluate before you give feedback; remember feedback techniques.
 - Discuss your observations and impressions of the class, remembering that the reviewee has made him/herself vulnerable.
 - Invite the reviewee to visit your class if this would be appreciated.

Feedback techniques

You will want feedback to be a positive learning experience for your reviewee, to be actively sought and used effectively by him or her. The following comments refer to some basic techniques for creating a climate where the reviewee is receptive to your feedback.

- Give the reviewee first option to comment on their performance/ documents/ teaching artefacts, before you make a comment; for example, “How do you think you went with that?”
- Most people brave enough to invite feedback want honest feedback, and no one is perfect. However, constructive criticism is better received if you first comment on some of the positive aspects of your peer’s teaching.
- Describe the activity or outcome, not the person; for example, not that “you were unfeeling” but rather what you saw happen and what the consequences were.
- Be as specific as possible; for example, not “that was a rather poor performance” but rather say what it was that made it poor.
- Only comment on what the reviewee can do something about.
- Try to sandwich your feedback by ending the feedback on something positive. Many people are more critical and harsh about their own teaching than a reviewer, and it can be good to reinforce what the individual is already doing well.

EXAMPLE PROFORMAS

Lecture Observation Schedule (Formative)

Lecturer:

Class:

Observer:

Date of observation:

Area of focus	Aspects done well	Aspects that could be improved upon	Suggested action(s)
Rapport, & engagement with students			
Structure, pacing and variety of the lecture (e.g., clear beginning, wrap up, clear segments, varying activities/strategies)			

Use of supporting resources/visual aids (overheads, PowerPoint, student handouts etc.)			
General presentation skills (voice, written/board work, movement etc.)			
Steps to monitor/check student learning			
Generation of interest (e.g., through relevant/topical examples, scenarios etc.)			

Management of the audience (handling questions, disruptions, in- lecture activities, time in/time out, etc.)			
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Tutorial Observation Schedule (Formative)

Tutor : _____ Observer: _____ Date of observation: / / _____
 Class: _____

Area of focus	Aspects done well	Aspects that could be improved upon	Suggested action(s)
Rapport, interaction, & engagement with students (use of names etc.)			

<p>Management/leadership of tute activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarity of task descriptions & purpose • individual/group management & involvement 			
<p>Facilitating discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning technique (enabling questions) • Handling/responding to student questions & answers • Spreading discussion around 			
<p>Use of teaching aids</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whiteboard work etc. • Overheads • other 			
<p>Structure of the tutorial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relating to other elements of the teaching program (lectures etc.) • Variety & value of activities; approaches, strategies 			

Use/suitability/quality of student worksheets/handouts			
Clarity of explanations (e.g. use of analogies, illustrations, examples)			
<p>General encouragement of learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree to which students are challenged and extended • Telegraphing of tutor's own interest and excitement in the subject 			

Videoconference Observation Schedule (Formative)

Leader : _____ Observer: _____ Date of observation: / / _____

Class: _____

Area of focus	Aspects done well	Aspects that could be improved	Suggested action(s)
Interaction with students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening; rapport • Engagement with all sites • Questioning technique (enabling) • Student activities • General level of interactivity/dialogue 			
Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student handouts/worksheets • Session/lesson planning (e.g. clear objectives; choice of activities; timing; integration with pre- & post-session activities) 			

<p>Technical facility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camera setting • Operation of document camera • General keypad/ipad operation 			
<p>Presentation on camera</p> <p>Eye contact; movement; clothing; voice; camera shots; general demeanour</p>			
<p>Session/lesson delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pace/coverage • Clarity of instructions • Coordination/management of student activities • Variety (visual; balance of activities) 			

Laboratory/Field Work Observation Schedule (Formative)

Leader/demonstrator : _____ Observer: _____

Date of observation: / / __

Class: _____

Area of focus	Aspects done well	Aspects that could be improved upon	Suggested action(s)
Rapport/engagement with student group (proactive/reactive?)			
Management/leadership activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of task descriptions, procedures, purpose • Individual/group management & involvement • Intervention practice 			

<p>Questioning techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing questions • Handling/responding to student queries 			
<p>Use of teaching aids</p> <p>Whiteboard; overhead.; other etc.</p>			
<p>Demonstration skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation technique • Showing use of equipment/procedures etc. 			

Clinical Observation Schedule (Formative)

Clinical teacher : _____ Observer: _____ Date of observation: / / ____

Class/session: _____

Area of focus	Aspects done well	Aspects that could be improved upon	Suggested action(s)
Engagement with students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the presence of patients • In the absence of patients (tone; individual/group engagement) 			
Facilitating links between practice and theory			

<p>Questioning technique</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framing questions • Handling student queries 			
<p>Management/leadership of clinical session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing/debriefing • Management during the session 			
<p>Demonstration/explanation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation technique • Demonstration of procedures etc. 			

Online Teaching Observation Schedule (Formative)

Lecturer/Unit Coordinator : _____ Observer: _____
 Date interval: / / - / / _____ Unit: _____

Date of observation: / / or

[This observation is limited to interactions between the teaching staff member(s) and the student group using online communications tools – Discussion board, Chat, and/or Email.]

Note: The consent of all students will be required before communication can be monitored by the reviewer.

Area of focus	Aspects done well	Aspects that could be improved upon	Suggested action(s)
Overall management/leadership of online discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure/framework provided (along topic/functional lines) • Time management (opening, closure) • Group management (public, private, assignment of roles within groups etc.) 			

<p>Moderation of discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning • Responding • Promoting participation • Intervention practice (including timeliness) • ‘closure’ 			
<p>Rapport/engagement with students (Language; tone; inter-personal)</p>			

Lecture Observation Schedule (Summative)

Lecturer: _____ Observer: _____

Date of observation: _____

Unit: _____ Year: ___ Size of class: _____

Observer/ reviewers are free to use any form of scoring they wish, in consultation with the lecturer/reviewee. It is suggested that an appropriate one might be:

3—well done

2—done in an average way

1—not done well

NA—not applicable/ not observed

1. *Introduction and orientation*

Purpose, objectives of this lecture explained

Relationship to previous material explained

Place in the unit content explained

2. *Knowledge*

Seems to know subject matter

Clarity of explanations/ demonstrations

Lecture has overall logic/ sequence/ rational development

3. *Getting students involved*

Asks questions, waits for/ expects an answer

Asks rhetorical questions as part of discourse

Requires students to discuss an issue

Engages in report-back on result of small group discussion

Invites questions and waits

4. *Attitude*

Projects enthusiasm for the subject matter

Takes deliberate steps to interest students in material

Projects accessibility, available to enquirers after lecture

Deals with disruptive students appropriately

5. *Technique*

Uses audio/visual material; e.g. PowerPoint, in a way which is helpful to students

Varies the presentation

Signals transition points in the lecture

Emphasises important points

Clearly differentiates principles, examples and applications

Maintains eye contact/ looks at audience

Speaks clearly

Maintains an appropriate pace

Makes regular comprehension checks

Writes clearly

Provides support material where appropriate

6. *Conclusion and recapitulation*

Recapitulates at conclusion

Asks for questions

Deals with questions

Flags next lecture

Uses minute paper

Finishes on time

Further comments on this lecture:

Tutorial Observation Schedule (Summative)

Tutor: _____

Observer: _____

Date of observation: _____

Unit: _____ Year: __ Size of class: _____

Observer/ reviewers are free to use any form of scoring they wish, in consultation with the tutor/reviewee. It is suggested that an appropriate one might be:

3—well done

2—done in an average way

1—not done well

NA—not applicable/ not observed

1. Punctuality

Arrives on time

Students arrive within five minutes

2. Attitude

Acknowledges student arrivals

Addresses students by name

Projects interest in students

Projects interest in subject

3. Group leadership

Makes task clear at beginning

Encourages discussion

Does not dominate discussion

Asks enabling questions

Invites questions from students

Responds to student questions appropriately

Challenges students

Concludes session by recap, review etc

Seems comfortable as group leader

Delegates responsibility for leadership where appropriate

Treats students with respect

Knowledge

Good grasp of material

Responds effectively to student questions

4. Technique

Ability to explain matters (e.g. through use of analogies, examples etc)

Uses teaching aids effectively

Further comments on this tutorial:

Laboratory Observation Schedule (Summative)

Demonstrator: _____

Observer: _____

Unit: _____ Year: _____

Date of observation: _____

Observer/ reviewers are free to use any form of scoring they wish, in consultation with the demonstrator/reviewee. It is suggested that an appropriate one might be:

3—well done

2—done in an average way 1—not done well

NA—not applicable/ not observed

1. Does the demonstrator ensure that students know what is expected/ required of them at the beginning of the lab session?
2. Are safety and other procedural issues referred to by the demonstrator?
3. Does the demonstrator cope appropriately with student questions?
4. Does the demonstrator encourage student questions?
5. Does the demonstrator encourage student cooperation?
6. Does the demonstrator explain terminology and procedures clearly?
7. If material/ machinery is involved, does the demonstrator manipulate it confidently?
8. Does the demonstrator project enthusiasm for/ interest in the laboratory task?
9. Is the demonstrator knowledgeable in the laboratory session content?

Further comments on this laboratory session observation:

Clinical Observation Schedule (Summative)

Clinical teacher: _____

Venue: _____

Observer/ reviewer: _____

Date: _____

Observer/ reviewers are free to use any form of scoring they wish, in consultation with the clinical teacher/reviewee. It is suggested that an appropriate one might be:

3—well done

2—done in an average way 1—not done well

NA—not applicable/ not observed

Does the clinical teacher:

1. treat students with respect
 - in front of patients?
 - away from patients?
2. provide a good role model of a clinician?
3. actively help students to make connections and gain understanding?
4. ask enabling questions of students?
5. demonstrate excellent knowledge in the area?
6. pay attention to the learning of all the students in the group?
7. conduct adequate debriefing after clinical work?

Further comments on this clinical session:

Peer Review of Teaching Action Proforma

Type of review (lecture, tutorial etc.):

Date of review:

Reviewer(s):

Comments on feedback from reviewer(s)

Action(s) to be taken

Reflection on action(s) taken

Date: _/_____/_____

REFERENCES AND LINKS

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http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/resources_teach/feedback/docs/Peer_review_guide_web.pdf