**Peer Observation for Online Teaching**

**Prepared by Malcolm Keating, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Yale-NUS College**

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**Goals in Observing Online Contexts**

When observing classes taught online, either in whole or in part, there are different aspects of teaching, in comparison to teaching in a physical classroom context, to which the observer will want to attend. In addition to observation of the class time (lectures and seminars), an observer will want to look at the way that the instructor uses a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Canvas, and/or other online tools. The purpose of this is to help the instructor reflect on their use of these tools in relationship to their pedagogical goals. An observer need not be an expert in learning technology in order to report on how the tools are being implemented.

Online classes may be fully online (**remote**) or a **hybrid**, where some students meet in person and others join in through conference call software such as Zoom. They may be **synchronous**, in which students and instructor meet (virtually or physically) at the same time, or they may be **asynchronous**, in which students and instructor interact primarily through shared documents, discussion boards, and chats. In the suggested practices below, sometimes observations will differ based on these characteristics.

**What to Observe in Online Contexts**

The following eight good practices (Gleason & Sanger, “[What We Observe](https://www.yale-nus.edu.sg/academics/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2022/01/Peer-Observation-Booklet-web-version.pdf#page=11)”)[[1]](#footnote-1) are the same for teaching online or in person. However, the kind of evidence observers will look for may vary depending on the classroom context. For each set of practices, this guide identifies questions observers can use to guide their evaluation. These questions are not comprehensive, and may not apply to every classroom.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Clarity, Structure, and Format
2. Student Engagement & Participation
3. Accessibility and Responsiveness to Student Learning Needs
4. Inclusivity and Responsiveness to Diverse Cultural Contexts
5. Teaching Strategies and Instructional Technique
6. Professor’s Accessibility and Interpersonal Style
7. Achievement of Broad Yale-NUS Learning Goals
8. Overall Successes and Areas for Improvement or Experimentation

**Clarity, Structure, and Format**

1. If the instructor is using a single course platform, are student learning goals easily found?
2. If they are using multiple platforms, is it clear to the students how they are integrated into their learning and why they are being used?
3. Are students able to easily access all of the course materials online, such as their assignments, due dates, instructions, and so on?
4. In a synchronous context, does the instructor refer to online course materials (such as Canvas courses, discussion boards, etc.)?
5. Is the course structure reflected in the online materials, such as Canvas? Can students easily identify where they are in the course (which unit, which questions, which problems etc.)?
6. Are there any “dead links” or missing materials? Are there any redundancies which might cause confusion (assignments listed in two places)?

**Student Engagement & Participation**

1. For hybrid synchronous classes: are students in the classroom and online actively engaged with one another? Does the instructor make explicit attempts to ensure they can do so?
2. For online synchronous classes: are students actively engaged even when not speaking? What kind of strategies does the instructor use to keep them engaged (break out rooms, “fishbowl” discussions, collaborative group documents, students managing the Zoom chat, etc.)?
3. For asynchronous classes: are students participating regularly and throughout the week or are they “clustering” their contributions just before the deadline? How does the instructor encourage participation?
4. In general: are there any technical challenges the students or instructor face? What strategies are they using, and what might they do differently? Are there backup plans for technological issues?

**Accessibility and Responsiveness to Student Learning Needs**

1. If possible, visit the instructional platform (LMS etc) from a variety of devices: laptop running different operating systems, a tablet, a mobile phone. Is it easily accessed on each?
2. Does the instructor provide links or guides to help students with new technology?
3. Are there different modalities available for the lessons, such as closed captioning along with a video lecture, or written materials along with a podcast/audio lesson?
4. For hybrid and online synchronous classes, what avenue do students have to give feedback to the instructor? Can online students use chat or a direct messaging system? Is the instructor pausing to check in, using technology like Zoom polls or Poll Everywhere?

**Inclusivity and Responsiveness to Diverse Cultural Contexts**

1. In addition to cultural contexts such as race, gender, ethnicity, etc., students have different experiences and comfort with technology. Do you notice any differences among students in this regard, and does the instructor acknowledge/account for it?

**Teaching Strategies and Instructional Technique**

1. What kinds of materials does the instructor provide (a) asynchronously and (b) synchronously? Do they share lecture slides or an audio/video lecture in class or before class? Do they share their screen in real time?
2. Are these materials integrated together? Are students able to access them?
3. Do students share materials? How—are they using a shared screen, file-sharing, etc.?

**Professor’s Accessibility and Interpersonal Style**

1. For online synchronous teaching: is the instructor audible? Visible? Are they seated or standing, and how does this impact classroom atmosphere virtually: such as student ability to engage with the instructor and instructor ability to attend to students.
2. For hybrid synchronous teaching: in addition to attending to instructor’s physical presence, consider how this presence is interpreted by students in the physical classroom and in the virtual one. Is there a different impact on them? Are both sets of students able to engage with the instructor?
3. For asynchronous teaching: how does the instructor convey their personal presence, command of the material, enthusiasm, and etc. through writing and other means? Are they intervening in online discussion boards? Are they sharing video/audio? How are they enabling students to have access to them when they have questions?

**Achievement of Broad Yale-NUS Learning Goals**

See existing guidelines.

**Overall Successes and Areas for Improvement or Experimentation**

See existing guidelines.

1. Gleason, N. Sanger, C.S. (2018).“Peer Observation of Teaching Guidelines: A Sourcebook for the International Liberal Arts Context Yale-NUS College. Centre for Teaching and Learning. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Questions are adapted from Harrison, L., & Heikoop, W. (2016). Online Learning Strategies, University of Toronto and California State University (2019). Quality Online Learning & Teaching, Instructor (Self) and Peer-Review Course Assessment Instrument. California State University. URL: http://courseredesign.csuprojects.org/wp/qualityassurance/qlt-informal-review/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)