

“Double-entry” Observation Notes

Some people find it helpful to organize their observation notes by dividing them into *descriptions* and *reflections*. The description can reflect the instructor’s actions, students’ reactions, and the content being conveyed, while your reflections can track your own reactions to what’s happening in class. Reflections can be recorded both during class and afterwards. Marking down the time as you go can also help you get a sense of how long particular segments of the class take.

Notes such as these can be usefully paired with a discussion “map.” The following is an example of someone observing a colleague in the hopes of getting some inspiration for his own teaching – so his reflections are focused on how he might adapt what he sees for his own classroom.

Time	Description of what’s happening	Personal reflections
11:25	Instructor greets Ss as they come in. One S asks a question about the homework – Instructor says she’ll address that in class. An agenda has already been written up on the board.	I like the easy rapport with students – seems organized with agenda already on board. Impressed that she held off on answering Ss question – I think I sometimes jump in too quickly with an answer.
11:30	Instructor closes door and says “reading quiz!” – Ss put away books and get out paper. Instructor reads through 5 questions, waits about 90 seconds between each. Invites Ss to suggest “bonus” question – S7 speaks up immediately. Ss laugh.	Ss seem to know what’s coming – these quizzes must be a regular thing. Interesting to let the Ss help write the quiz – what happens if someone suggests a bad question? But they sure like it.
11:36	couple Ss come in late – don’t get out paper, just sit there Instructor reads through questions one more time and then after a minute calls “time!” and Ss pass up papers.	ok, definitely looks like a regular thing – and they already know they don’t get to do the quiz if they’re late. She must be really clear about her expectations. I wonder how Ss feel about that . . . they don’t look frustrated. Might be an interesting thing to try.
11:40	Instructor points to agenda and elaborates on what they’re doing that day. Asks if there’s anything else she should include.	I get why an agenda is helpful, but as a student I used to feel that too detailed an agenda hampered spontaneity in a class, so I resist them now. Though a lot of that depends on how strict the Instructor sticks to it. I like that she asks for input – I should do more of that.