

## Observation Techniques Overview\*

Focus	Technique
Student involvement	Verbal flow At task Sampling Overview/scripting Tally marks
Individualized instruction	Class traffic Sampling Overview/scripting Tally marks
Levels of student thinking	Selective verbatim Overview/scripting Tally marks
Teacher talk/behavior	Selective verbatim Overview/scripting Tally marks
Classroom climate	Verbal flow Selective verbatim At task Sampling Overview/scripting Tally marks

\*Stanulis, R. & Markle, B. (2006). ASSIST Beginning Teacher Project, Michigan State University.

## Overview and Scripting

When using the overview method, write down everything that transpires in the classroom. For scripting, write down everything that is said in the classroom. These observation techniques are useful for gathering information on most focus areas. It is difficult, however, to record everything. Use shorthand notations and do not worry about connecting events. Remember to write down only facts, not judgments.

- Create a seating map of the classroom and number the students. Use the numbers to refer to which student is speaking.
- T = teacher
- Use quotation marks or capital letters to denote actual quotes. Paraphrase others comments and actions.

### *Example*

Observation Notes:

SCRIPTING Teacher: Tom V. Lesson: Geometry Date: 3/4/04 Observer: Amy L.  
Begin 10:35. Children are sitting in desks with teacher at front of room

T: WHO REMEMBERS WHAT WE DISCUSSED YESTERDAY IN MATH?

3: WE WERE TALKING ABOUT SHAPES...GEO...mumbles an incoherent word.

14: GEOMETRY!

T: YES, WE STARTED TALKING ABOUT GEOMETRY. (Taps lightly on 4's desk to get his attention) AMY, CAN YOU TELL US ANYTHING MORE ABOUT WHAT WE DISCUSSED YESTERDAY?

7: (Looking in desk) Asks the teacher to repeat the question. Teacher repeats. WE TALKED ABOUT DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF SHAPES.

T: WHAT DO YOU MEAN DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS OF SHAPES?

### **Analysis Suggestions**

Since as much of the action and/or conversation as possible is noted, the focus of analysis will depend upon the individual lesson, the chosen focus, and what stands out as relevant or important.

*Link to recording data format*

## Selective verbatim

This technique is a form of scripting, however the focus is narrower. Record everything that is said within a certain category or focus area.

Categories of teacher talk	Categories of student talk
Questions	Questions
Responses to questions	Responses to questions
Responses to statements	Responses to statements
Directions or assignments	Student initiated statements
Information statements	
Reward and praise statements	
Criticisms and constructive feedback	
Management statements	

### Example

Observation Notes:

TEACHER QUESTIONS Teacher: Ann K. Lesson: Penguins Date: 5/14/04 Observer: Dan B.

Children and teacher are sitting on rug in a circle

Time   Question

1:15   WHAT DO YOU THINK PENGUINS EAT? DO THEY EAT WHAT WE EAT?  
1:17   DOES ANYONE HAVE A DIFFERENT IDEA?  
1:18   ANYONE ELSE?  
1:20   WHY DO YOU THINK PENGUINS WOULD EAT BIRDS?  
1:21   ARE PENGUINS BIRDS?  
1:22   WHY DO YOU THINK PENGUINS WOULD EAT FISH?  
1:26   SHOULD WE READ A LITTLE FROM THIS BOOK TO FIND OUT WHAT  
PENGUINS DO EAT?

### Analysis Suggestions:

- Examine number of open vs. closed questions
- Examine cognitive level of questions
- Examine the number of probing and follow-up questions
- Examine the use of multiple questions at one time

*Link to recording data format*

## Verbal flow

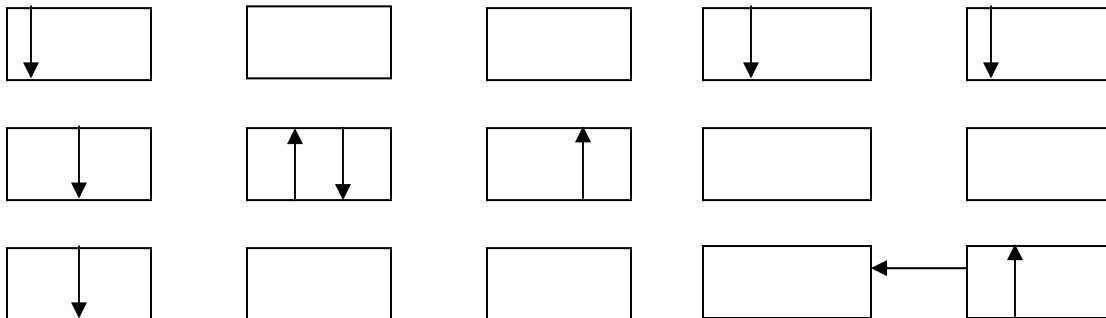
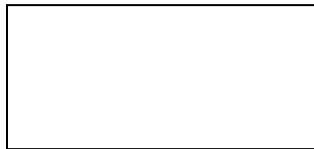
This technique is similar to selective verbatim, which focuses on the content of verbal communication. Verbal flow, however, identifies the initiators and recipients of the verbal communication. The same categories or focus areas can be used.

- Create a seating map of the classroom using boxes to represent the teacher and students.
- When the teacher makes a comment or asks a question to the whole class indicate with an arrow from the teacher box.
- When the teacher speaks specifically to a student indicate with a downward arrow in that student's box.
- When the student speaks to the teacher or the whole class indicate with an upward arrow in that student's box.
- When a student speaks to another student indicate with an arrow between the two students' boxes noting the direction.
- Use notches on the arrows to keep track of the number of comments or questions.

## Example

Observation Notes:

QUESTIONS Teacher: Sue K. Lesson: Civil War Date: 1/11/04 Observer: Nia P.  
Begin 1:15 Students are at desks. Teacher wanders.



## Analysis Suggestions:

- Does the teacher question or call on students sitting in particular seats?
- Does the teacher question or call on particular individuals or a particular gender?
- Do particular students ask more questions or direct comments to the teacher? To other students?

## At Task

This technique provides data on individual students' engagement levels. It is important for the teacher being observed to explain what he or she considers to be on-task behavior.

- Create a seating map of the classroom using boxes to represent each student
- Create a legend to represent various behaviors (*For example:*)
  - A = At task
  - B = Stalling
  - C = Schoolwork other than requested
  - D = Out of seat
  - E = Talking to others
- Systematically examine each student's behavior for a few seconds and record his or her behavior accordingly in the appropriate box
- Repeat the observations of each student every three to four minutes and record appropriately

### Example

Observation Notes:

AT TASK Teacher: Liz P. Lesson: Journal writing Date: 2/2/04 Observer: Laura Z.  
Begin 9:20. Students working at desk while teacher conferences one on one at her desk.



AAAA	ADDA	EEAA	AADA	BBAA
BBBB	ABBA	BBEE	AAAA	CCCC
AAAD	EEEE	DDEE	AAAE	AAAA

### Analysis Suggestions:

- Examine individual student's level of engagement
- Examine the general level of engagement across activities or time periods

## Sampling

Similar to the at task technique, this method requires coding at regular intervals. The focus can be on either the teacher or student(s).

- Create a legend to represent various behaviors (*For example:*)
  - P = presenting
  - O = observing
  - M = Managing
  - H = Helping or consoling
  - I = Individualizing instruction
- Observe the focus individual's behavior at regular intervals and record

## Example

Observation Notes:

TEACHER BEHAVIOR SAMPLING Teacher: Julie J. Lesson: Magnets Date: 3/3/04

Observer: Rachel E. Children at desks. Teacher at front of room.

<u>Time</u>	<u>Behavior</u>
1:00	P
1:04	P
1:08	P
1:12	M
1:16	M
1:20	H
1:24	H
1:28	M
1:32	I
1:36	I

## Analysis Suggestions:

- Examine patterns in teacher or student behavior
- Examine time spent exhibiting different types of behavior

## Class Traffic

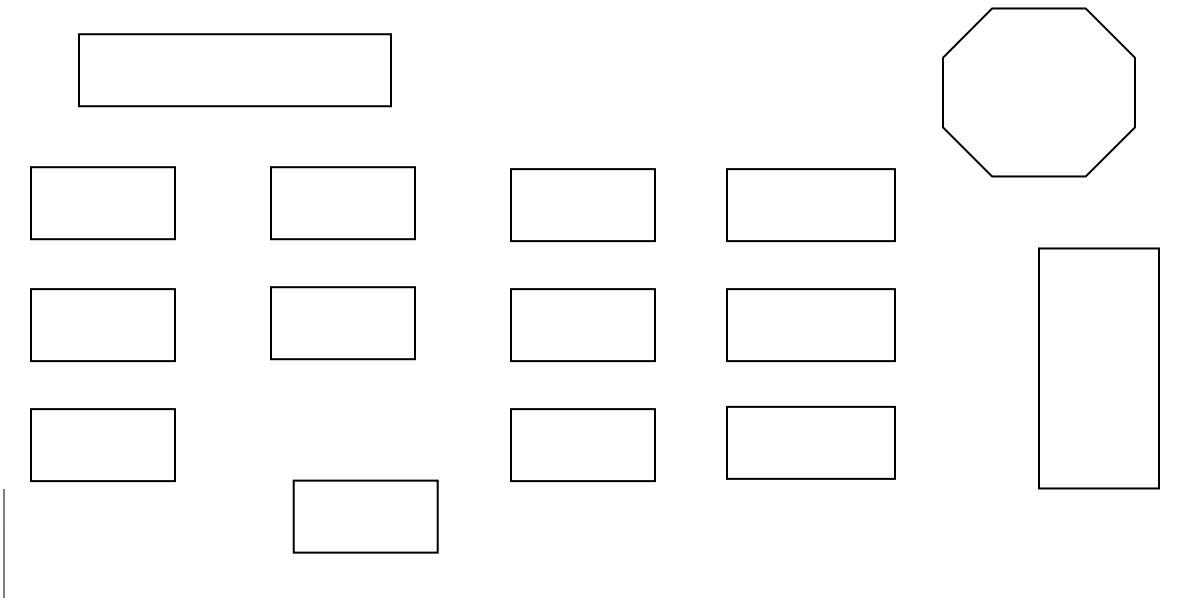
Record the movement patterns of the teacher and/or 1 or 2 students. You can record just the physical movements or also the type/reason for the movements.

- Create a map of the classroom
- Create a legend to describe the types of movements (if desired)
  - \_\_\_ Teacher movement
  - Directed student movement
  - +++ Non-directed but purposeful student movement
  - === Non-directed and non-purposeful student movement

### Example

Observation Notes:

CLASS TRAFFIC Teacher: Lori K. Lesson: SSR Date: 3/15/04 Observer: Barb J.  
Begin 12:20.



### Analysis Suggestions:

- Examine teacher's movement around classroom
- Examine individual students' movement around and in and out of classroom
- Examine locations in the classroom that get high and low amounts of traffic

## Tally Marks

Tally marks can be used to record many different types of information. Although you do not record the actual words or actions, totals and percentages of different types of behaviors can be informative.

- Select the general area of focus (*for example:*)
  - Students called on by teacher
  - Participating students
  - Types of questions asked by the teacher
  - Interactions with students initiated by teacher
  - Interactions with teacher initiated by students
  - Teacher praise statements
  - Teacher management statements
  - Children called on with or without hands raised
- Create relevant sub-categories for focus area if desired (*For example:*)
  - *Types of questions*
  - *Types of interactions*
  - *Gender*
  - *Use of specific words*
- Record tally marks and compute percentages if applicable

### *Example*

Observation Notes:

TEACHER QUESTIONS AND GENDER Teacher: Mary K. Lesson: Economics  
Date: 5/6/04 Observer: Jim B. Children at desks. Teacher wanders. Begin: 2:15

	Boys	Girls
Factual questions	IIII II	III
Clarification questions	II	
Explanation questions	III	IIII III
Opinion questions	I	I
Application questions	IIII	IIII

### **Analysis Suggestions:**

Analysis depends upon the focus and sub-categories chosen. Information can be examined according to individuals, gender, seat location or other variables.

Primary Reference:

Acheson, K., & Gall, M. (1992). *Techniques in the clinical supervision of teachers* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.



**Tally marks recording data format**  
**Example: Student Participation**

Teacher:	Lesson:	Date:
Observer:	Time Begin:	Time End:
<b>Types of student participation</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>
Called on: hand raised		
Called on: no hand raised		
Self-initiated: hand raised		
Self-initiated: no hand raised		
Totals:		