Critical Teaching Behaviors

CTB Teaching Observation Overview

Critical Teaching Behaviors (CTB) Framework

Evidence-based	The Critical Teaching Behaviors (CTB) framework synthesizes research on teaching in higher education into six categories of evidence-based instructor behaviors proven effective in increasing student learning gains and retention.
Focused on observable behaviors & strategies	A focus on **observable behaviors and strategies** allows instructors and observers to identify concrete areas of strengths and need for improvement in course delivery and design.
Promotes shared language & expectations	Faculty, staff, and administrators may choose to use the CTB framework as the foundation for a **common language** to showcase, discuss, and evaluate good teaching.

How to use the CTB Teaching Observation Worksheet

The worksheet provides an overview of the six categories of Critical Teaching Behaviors and lists select examples of concrete instructor actions in each category.

- **Strategies listed in each category are intended to provide examples rather than serve as an exhaustive list**; observers will likely identify other strategies that can serve as evidence of achievement in the six Critical Teaching Behaviors.
- **It is not expected that instructors demonstrate all strategies listed in every single class.** However, it is important that behaviors from most, if not all, categories are present in the class period observed and that they are well integrated into the outcomes and flow of the class.
- In addition to feedback from others, **the process of critical self-reflection can lead to improved teaching.** To encourage this behavior, the worksheet is designed to serve as a conversation starter between colleagues that considers both the observer's notes from the classroom and the instructor's reflections on the class observed.
- Teaching Observations are an important source of data for evaluating effective teaching; however, **documentation of teaching quality should be comprehensively based on multiple sources of data.**

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Recommended Peer Observations Process

Recommendations for the observer:

- **Prior to observation**: Ask the instructor to share their course syllabus and complete a reflection on the course (see template below) and review their notes. Be familiar with the CTB categories and possible strategies in each area.
- **During the observation**: Take notes on what is happening in the classroom. Consider bringing a copy of the CTB observation form to prompt your note taking.
    - How is the instructor presenting information?
    - Are students engaged in learning? Are they attentive?
    - What do the instructor's and students' behaviors indicate about the learning environment in this course? How does the environment feel?
    - How does the instructor use technology?
    - How do class structure and activities support each other and prepare students to perform desired tasks?
    - How does the instructor know students achieved the learning outcomes for the lesson (assessment)?
    - Jot down any questions you want to ask the instructor – what additional information do you need?
- **After the observation:** Review your notes and write comments on each of the CTB categories. Be sure to note CTB categories in which the instructor demonstrates particular strength as well as categories for potential growth. Schedule a meeting with your colleague to discuss the observation.

Recommendations for the instructor:

- **Prior to the observation:** Share a copy of your syllabus and your reflection on the course (see below) with the observer as well as any additional materials you would like your observer to have (i.e. lesson plan, student worksheets, etc.). Review the CTB categories and strategies in each area.
- **During the observation:** Relax! Teach the class as you would normally to ensure a realistic observation.
- **After the observation:** Reflect on how the class went – What went well? What would you do differently in the future? Write reflective comments for each of the CTB categories.

Follow-Up Discussion

- Allow time for both instructor and observer to share their thoughts on the class period observed. Address any questions that emerged.
- Discuss a professional development plan based on both the strength and improvement areas. Determine 2-5 concrete action steps; these may include ideas for relevant professional development options, ideas for strategies to incorporate in future classes, recommendations for strategies to continue using, etc.
- Observer should update worksheet based on the discussion and share a final version with the instructor. The instructor may choose to include the observation worksheet in their portfolio as one component towards documenting effective teaching.

Notes on Evaluative Observations

- For Evaluative Observations it is especially important to use **common standards and expectations** to increase the fairness of reviews; the CTB framework provides such a tool to define these.
- When using the CTB framework for evaluative purposes, we recommend following the same observation process outlined above to ensure that instructors have a chance to self-assess, receive feedback, and reflect on appropriate professional development goals to promote growth.
- The final report of an evaluative observation will likely emphasize the summary report of observed strengths and weaknesses more heavily than specific observations and instructor reflections to increase its readability for an audience beyond the instructor and observer.

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CRITICAL TEACHING BEHAVIORS

Categories and Definitions	Specific, observable instructor behaviors	How can I document critical teaching behaviors in this category?
Align Instructors who align components of learning experiences start with clearly defined learning outcomes. Teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks, and feedback build on each other to support student progress towards these outcomes.	• Seek feedback from faculty development staff on alignment of course component • Define learning outcomes at course, module, lesson, and assignment levels • Draw connections between course components and communicate to students • Connect course outcomes to program/department outcomes and accreditation standards as applicable	• Course and/or Curriculum map • Course materials and assignments that explicitly show alignment across course components • Test blueprints • Learning outcomes at course, module, lesson, and assignment levels
Integrate Technology Instructors who integrate technology responsibly use tools to provide access to high quality instructional materials and accessible, engaging learning opportunities beyond traditional barriers of place and time.	• Consult with instructional designers to develop online course materials • Create course media using lightboard, Kaltura, or other available campus technologies • Attend technology training • Select technology tools appropriate to learning outcomes • Limit technology tools used • Evaluate technology tools for accessibility and privacy • Use LMS provided by institution • Prioritize LMS tools over other technology tools • Evaluate cost/ benefit of using tech tools • Use responsive design (for use of materials on different size screens)	• Syllabus (i.e. accessibility statement, statement on technology integration) • Assignment instructions/ prompts • Instructor-created tutorials • Instructor-created web content [text, video, audio, etc.] • Course map/ lesson plan • Student feedback • Teaching observations and reviews (peers, CTE, QM, etc.) • Online courses/ modules •
Include Instructors who create an inclusive learning environment plan for student diversity by utilizing accessibility standards when designing and delivering content. They cultivate an atmosphere in which students experience a sense of belonging conducive to emotional well-being for learning	• Incorporate varied instructional strategies • Design instruction based on Universal Design for Learning principles • Use people-first language • Create and share accessible digital content • Provide support for students with disabilities • Select course materials representing a range of diverse voices • Conduct classroom discussions with respect for all students and viewpoints • Structure classroom discussions to promote equity in speaking time for all students • Respond to students and encourage professional relationships (including office hours, open door policy, etc.) • Mentor students • Model appreciation and respect for diversity in all modes of communication • Demonstrate consideration for student well-being • Co-create governing classroom policies with student input	• Diversity statement • Course map/ lesson plan • Instructor-created digital materials • Syllabus (accessibility statement, inclusive language, content/ material choices, communication policy/ office hours, multiple means of contact) • Teaching Philosophy Statement • Discussion and active listening guidelines • Discussion roles/activities • Teaching awards or recognition related to diversity • Student feedback • Teaching observation • Mentorship agreement and products of mentorship • Documentation of student job placement/ internship

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Categories and Definitions	Specific, observable instructor behaviors	How can I document critical teaching behaviors in this category?
Engage Instructors who engage students purposefully select research-based techniques to ensure that students actively participate in the learning process and take responsibility for their intellectual development.	• Engage students using one or more of the following strategies: discussion, active learning, collaborative projects, metacognitive activities, reflection prompts, service learning, lab work, etc. • Establish and maintain social presence in online course components • Ensure participation of all students • Plan and facilitate adaptive learning experiences • Connect students with campus and learning support resources • Use examples, anecdotes, and autobiographical illustrations in explaining difficult concepts • Express genuine concern for helping students learn • Collect just-in-time feedback on student learning • Create opportunities for students to ask questions • Relate course content to real-world, relevant examples • Appropriately chunk lecture material • *Facilitate integration of knowledge by encouraging students to make connections between course material and other courses* • Encourage student ownership of learning • Encourage civic engagement of students • Engage in disciplinary scholarship, creative projects, and professionalization	• Student feedback (mid-term and/or SRI) • Teaching Observations (by peers and/or CTE) • Activity instructions/ prompts • Lesson plan • Online module • Transcript of online discussion board • Teaching awards • Check-in emails to update or congratulate students on progress • Assignment instructions/ prompts • Powerpoint slides • Student work samples • Video recording of classroom teaching/ video lecture
Assess Instructors who integrate assessment into their teaching develop and facilitate transparent, meaningful assessment tasks to provide students with timely feedback on their learning and measure achievement of learning outcomes. They regularly review data to improve instruction.	• Schedule regular summative assessments • Embed formative assessments in lesson plans • Provide timely feedback to students • Create opportunity for students to self-assess progress • Define purpose, criteria, and task for assessments • Provide a range of assessment tasks to make relevant to a variety of student interests • Assign scaffolded tasks	• Prompts/ instructions for formative and summative assignments • Example feedback to students • Student work samples • Student data demonstrating achievement of learning outcomes • Rubrics/ Grading criteria • Course calendar (distribution and variety of assessments over the course of the term) • Syllabus (grading policies, turn around time, grade distribution)
Reflect Instructors who reflect regularly gather feedback on their teaching from self-assessment, students, and peers to identify opportunities for growth. They pursue improvements to their instruction through professional development and research activities.	• Journal to reflect on classroom experience • Consult with professional development staff to enhance teaching methods • Analyze student feedback (mid-term and end-of-term) • Review student performance data • Conduct a SoTL project • Attend professional development events dedicated to teaching • Invite feedback on teaching from students and colleagues	• Teaching Philosophy Statement • SoTL paper/presentation/award/fellowship • CTE badges/certificates/workshop transcript • Teaching presentations / workshops • Student feedback (SGID/SRIs) • Written reflections • Observation • Professional development plan

Critical Teaching Behaviors

Teaching Observation Instructor Worksheet

Prior to the scheduled observation, answer the following questions and share this sheet with the observer along with a copy of your course syllabus and calendar.

Course Title:	
Location and Time:	
Students enrolled:	
Learning Outcomes for lesson observed:	
Course Overview ● How many times have you taught this course? ● How has it evolved over time? ● What are you particularly happy with? ● What would you change and why?	
Professional Growth ● What teaching-related professional development have you engaged in? ● How has professional development impacted the way you teach?	
Requests Do you have specific questions for the observer (i.e. request for feedback on specific activities or classroom interactions)?	
Materials attached Attach a copy of your syllabus and other relevant course materials.	

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Teaching Observation Summary

Faculty observed: Students attending:

Course/Date/Time: Consultant:

At the initiative of the instructor, the consultant conducted this classroom observation. This report is based on the consultant's review of course materials provided by the instructor (ex: syllabus, assessments, lesson plans, etc.), observations during the class period, and points raised during the debrief with the instructor.

Instructions for faculty use: To promote reflective practice and assist in the creation of professional development narratives, faculty should complete the "Faculty Reflection" column after the observation and before the debrief consultation. Be sure to share these reflections with your consultant.

Critical Teaching Behaviors* Categories and Definitions	**Instructor Reflection** Narrative examples and evidence of behaviors. To be completed by faculty AFTER the observation and BEFORE the debrief consultation.	**Observer Notes** Narrative examples and evidence of behaviors
Align: Instructors who align components of learning experiences start with clearly defined learning outcomes. Teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks, and feedback build on each other to support student progress towards these outcomes.		
❑ Aligns course content, assessments, and learning activities with course outcomes ❑ States course outcomes in syllabus and defines student learning outcomes for each class meeting ❑ Communicates course and classroom organization through syllabus, policies, and course calendar ❑ Uses class time effectively and efficiently ❑ Reviews relevant prior knowledge and makes connections between lesson content and other learning in course ❑ Presents content and engages students at multiple, appropriate Bloom's levels ❑ Summarizes important concepts by referring back to LO's (or prompts students to do so) ❑ Conveys the purpose of each class activity or assignment		

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Integrate Technology: Instructors who integrate technology responsibly use tools to provide access to high quality instructional materials and accessible, engaging learning opportunities beyond traditional barriers of place and time.		
❑ Designs and maintains online course materials to ensure they are well organized and accessible to students ❑ Ensures ADA compliance of materials and tools used ❑ Selects technology to enhance student learning ❑ Operates technology effectively and efficiently ❑ Presents information on board/screen in organized, legible matter ❑ Trains students to use instructional technology and provides support ❑ Uses LMS and/or publisher content ❑ Makes effective use of online and face-to-face spaces to deliver learning experiences		
Include: Instructors who create an inclusive learning environment plan for student diversity by utilizing accessibility standards when designing and delivering content. They cultivate an atmosphere in which students experience a sense of belonging conducive to emotional well-being for learning.		
❑ Makes time to be available to students and cultivates approachable persona ❑ Explains content with examples, demonstrations, visual aides, anecdotes from personal & student experiences, etc. ❑ Treats students respectfully, for example, by using names and adhering to stated policies ❑ Invites student questions, examples, and experiences and listens carefully when students speak ❑ Models and promotes respectful interactions in the classroom ❑ Selects course materials that represent diversity of sources, perspectives, and authorities in field of study ❑ Attends to student comprehension or confusion ❑ Recognizes diversity of student needs and circumstances		

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Engage: Instructors who engage students purposefully select research-based techniques to ensure that students actively participate in the learning process and take responsibility for their intellectual development.		
❑ Shows enthusiasm for course material and clarifies relevance and importance by relating material to practical applications ❑ Incorporates current research in the field ❑ Moves about room and maintains eye contact with students ❑ Speaks clearly and varies tone to emphasize important material and maintain interest ❑ Generates participation by asking questions, allowing appropriate wait time for responses, posing probing questions, and responding encouragingly ❑ Includes active learning strategies ❑ Provides clear guidelines for class activities ❑ Stimulates discipline-specific critical thinking		
Assess: Instructors who integrate assessment into their teaching develop and facilitate transparent, meaningful, assessment tasks to provide students with timely feedback on their learning and measure achievement of learning outcomes. They regularly review data to improve instruction.		
❑ Provides explicit outcomes and directions for tasks ❑ Clearly communicates how tasks will be evaluated through grading policies and rubrics ❑ Selects appropriate formative and summative assessment tools ❑ Assesses student performance regularly and/or provides opportunities for self-assessment to gauge understanding ❑ Designs course assignments to scaffold student learning ❑ Returns assignments and assessments in a timely matter ❑ Provides constructive feedback on student work ❑ Includes assessment and grading policies in syllabus		

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Reflect: Instructors who reflect regularly gather feedback on their teaching from self-assessment, students, and peers to identify opportunities for growth. They pursue improvements to their instruction through professional development and research activities.

Observer Summary Comments on Strengths and Areas for Improvement

List strengths and suggestions for growth. Note categories in which the instructor demonstrates strengths or on which the instructor might focus for improvement.

Instructor Reflection

How many times have you taught this course? How has it evolved over time? How have you incorporated ideas from teaching related professional development?

Professional Development Plan

Based on observations, reflections, and the follow-up conversation, what steps do you plan to take to enhance teaching strengths and address areas for improvement? What professional development options are available to you (i.e. CTLE programs, Teaching conferences, etc.)? What other resources might you take advantage of (i.e. conversations with peers, student mid-term feedback, recent publications on teaching, etc.)

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* This worksheet is based on the Critical Teaching Behaviors (CTB) framework, which provides a set of observable, evidence-based instructor actions proven effective in increasing student learning gains and retention. The report provides an overview of the six categories of Critical Teaching Behaviors and lists select examples of concrete instructor actions in each category. This is not an exhaustive list of behaviors; feedback on strategies observed—including unlisted strategies—demonstrating one of the six Critical Teaching Behaviors will be noted in written comments.

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