

Use of this specific tool is not required by USC administration; it is intended as an example of best practices. Schools and departments may choose to create their own tool, edit this tool in any way that makes it a better fit, or use this tool as it is.

CET Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist

The CET Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist provides performance descriptions for four tiers of classroom instructional practices. The first, second, and third tiers include a progression of recommended teaching practices. The substandard tier includes items that are contrary to best practices and/or USC policies. The checklist can be used for two purposes. It can be used as a developmental tool to provide faculty formative feedback to enhance their teaching, showing progression over multiple observations. It can also be used as an evaluative tool to document evidence of teaching performance for promotion, tenure, or continuing appointment.

This checklist was developed to include recommended practices that can be implemented within a wide variety of teaching models, both traditional and innovative; it is editable so that schools may add or delete items to customize it to their needs. Checklist items are observable actions and behaviors of the instructor (observable during a single visited class session), not the behaviors of students.

Schools could determine how many criteria in each tier should be met in order to qualify for the various levels of advancement in the school. For example, a school could decide that for promotion from assistant to associate professor a faculty member should have none of the items checked in the Substandard Tier and all of the items checked in Tier 1.

Recommended Observer Characteristics

- Observes a minimum of one class session. Two observations are recommended.
- Is familiar with the course learning objectives listed in the syllabus.
- Understands the content of the course well enough to evaluate effectiveness of instruction in that topic.
- Has been trained by CET or by a CET Faculty Fellow to use the checklist.

Instructions for Use

- Mark as present all checklist items observed during the class.

Each dimension in the checklist measures one or more criteria in [USC's Definition of Excellence in Teaching](#)* and those criteria are noted next to the dimension name. The practices in Tiers 1, 2, and 3 are supported through training provided by CET's faculty institutes.

* If that link doesn't work, copy/paste this URL: <http://cet.usc.edu/about/usc-definition-of-excellence-in-teaching/#:~:text=The%20University%20of%20Southern%20California,in%20a%20rapidly%20changing%20world>

Not Included in the Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist

- Evaluation of course design, which is addressed in a separate Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist.
- Aspects of teaching that cannot be observed.

Best practices that are specific to certain fields, class types (e.g., labs, studios, clinics), or instructional styles.

DIMENSION	SUBSTANDARD TIER	TIER 1	TIER 2	TIER 3
<p><u>*USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching</u> criteria measured by each dimension are noted. (See URL above.)</p>	Performing Below Minimum USC Teaching Policy Standard	Performing at Minimum USC Teaching Policy Standard	Performing at Proficient Level of Teaching Standard at USC	Performing at Excellence Level of Teaching Standard at USC
CLASS ORGANIZATION				
<p>Instructional plan 5a, 5b*</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor changes the established class session plan without prior notification to students.	<input type="checkbox"/> The class session demonstrates clear signs of planning and organization, and follows a logical flow.	<input type="checkbox"/> The class session includes instruction and formative assessment ¹ to assess student learning for that class session.	<input type="checkbox"/> The class session includes instruction, formative assessment, and reflection components.
<p>Communication of clear learning goals for the class session 6a*</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor communicates no learning goals for the class session and/or each lesson activity. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor communicates inappropriate or unrealistic learning goals for the class session and/or each lesson activity.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor clearly identifies realistic learning goals for the class session.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor clearly connects the learning goals for the class session to the course learning objectives.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor clearly identifies the learning goals for each instructional activity, and connects them to the course learning objectives ² .
<p>Time management 5c, 5d*</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Room and/or technology issues occur during class that could have been addressed before the start of class.	<input type="checkbox"/> The class session starts and ends on time. <input type="checkbox"/> Planned sections of the class session are well-timed. <input type="checkbox"/> Little or no time spent on non-instructional activities. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor prepares the room and relevant technology before the start of class.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor utilizes and references educational technology for passive learning activities ³ outside of class to support effective use of in-class time.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor maximizes in-class time, using active learning or applications ⁴ rather than passive learning. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor clearly indicates time limits for all student activities.
<p>Comments:</p>				

¹ Assignments intended to help students evaluate their mastery of a skill or learning objective and provide information to the instructor on student progress.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT				
Classroom climate 1b, 1c, 2e, 2f, 3a, 4e*	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor raises students' stress or anxiety by using discriminatory, dismissive, or other abusive language. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor minimizes students' struggle with material. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor discourages student input. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor violates confidentiality by publicly revealing students with accommodations. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor ignores disruptive student behaviors.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor consistently uses verbal and body language that is responsive to students' stress or anxiety. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor encourages student participation. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor treats all students equitably. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor is responsive to students' different educational backgrounds and learning needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor has established classroom norms that foster a positive and inclusive environment. ⁵ <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor encourages interaction between students.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor uses practices that increase students' motivation and foster a growth mindset. ⁶
Presentation form 1a, 1b*	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor uses inappropriate or offensive gestures and/or speech. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor displays a negative attitude in tone and/or content.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor volume, pace, and diction allow observer to follow the class session. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor faces students when speaking.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor incorporates appropriate eye contact and effective non-verbal communication (e.g., hand gestures). <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor avoids distracting mannerisms or speech patterns, such as filler words and nervous habits.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor is engaging, responsive, and constructive in both tone and content of their speech.

² See the CET resource [A Clear Guide to Writing Learning Objectives](#).

³ When students receive information from the instructor.

⁴ Activities in which students practice course concepts during class.

⁵ For examples of such norms, please see the CET resource [A Menu of Discussion Norms](#).

⁶ A perspective that abilities can be developed through persistence and effort; failure is a necessary step toward mastery.

Presentation substance 4a, 4d, 3e*	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor does not use, or uses inappropriate, visual support for presentation and/or examples/illustrations.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor provides visual support for verbal presentation and uses concrete examples/illustrations to clarify content.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor cites sources for content discussed.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor follows accessibility best practices by verbally describing and/or captioning any images used in presentation.
Comments:				
INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT				
Knowledge of subject 4a*	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor does not appear to understand course content.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor's factual statements are consistent with current knowledge in the field. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor correctly answers questions about course-level content.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor answers questions confidently, clearly, and simply.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor ties current content to topics or knowledge from the profession and/or more advanced courses.
Discipline-specific language 1e*	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor does not use, or incorrectly uses, discipline-specific and/or academic language.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor uses discipline-specific and academic language.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor explains use of discipline-specific terms.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor facilitates the use of discipline-specific language by students.

Contextual relevance and transferability 3c, 4c*	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor teaches content devoid of real-world scenarios and/or examples. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor assumes unrealistic skill level of students in the class.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor provides real-world applications of class session content. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor explicitly builds on prior student knowledge.	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor has students provide real-world examples of class content or apply content to real-world scenarios.	<input type="checkbox"/> Where appropriate, instructor uses examples where their discipline converges with other disciplines in addressing challenges. <input type="checkbox"/> Where appropriate, instructor addresses “ wicked problems ” identified by USC on a local, national, or global level.
Comments:				
STUDENT ENGAGEMENT				
Appropriate content or level 1c, 2a, 2b, 3a*	<input type="checkbox"/> Class content is too easy or difficult for student knowledge level. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor does not encourage higher-order thinking ⁷ .	<input type="checkbox"/> Class content appropriately challenges students. <input type="checkbox"/> Class content promotes mastery of course learning objectives. ⁸	<input type="checkbox"/> Instructor engages students in higher-order thinking skills during class.	<input type="checkbox"/> The instructor spends the majority of class time leading students in higher-order thinking activities.

⁷ Analysis, critical thinking, evaluation, problem solving, etc.

⁸ See the CET resource [Writing Learning Objectives](#).

<p>Active learning 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 3d, 4b*</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor uses no active-learning⁹ exercises. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor has unrealistic expectations for active-learning exercises. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor uses inappropriate or offensive active-learning exercises. Instructor uses active-learning exercises that are not accessible to everyone in the class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Class session contains at least one active-learning exercise to apply course content. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor monitors and manages active-learning exercises. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor uses active-learning exercises after no more than 30 consecutive minutes of lecture. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor ensures that all students are on-task. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor is responsive to student engagement¹⁰ and adjusts strategy accordingly. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor facilitates student-led explanations and/or discussions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor uses active-learning exercises after no more than 15 consecutive minutes of lecture. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor requires students to submit or present in-class work by end of class. <input type="checkbox"/> Where appropriate, instructor leverages student use of electronic technology to facilitate active learning.
<p>Formative assessment/feedback 1b, 2f, 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d*</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor violates FERPA by publicly sharing student grades. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor provides non-constructive and/or discouraging feedback. <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor compares student work to an ambiguous or unrealistic standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor provides students constructive and encouraging feedback on how to improve their comprehension or performance in class. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor provides information to students about their performance on class activities compared to a pre-established standard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instructor leads students in structured reflection on class learning activities.
<p>Comments:</p>				

⁹ Activities in which students practice course concepts during class.

¹⁰ Active participation in an activity in which students are practicing course concepts.

Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist

CONTEXT

Record pertinent characteristics of the course, student population, and physical environment. Examples: enrollment, student demographics, classroom type (stadium, small conference room, etc.), class meeting time, and general education status.

Context: