

A Teacher's Guide To Understanding Observation Feedback

In episode 13 of the [Year One podcast](#), we hear Miss Jenna MacNulty's unfiltered thoughts on her first surprise teaching observation. Now, let's get real about observation comments.

Reading Between the Lines

What is your evaluator really saying in their written feedback? Here are seven common examples of post-observation feedback and insights into what the evaluator's carefully chosen words really mean.

Example 1: Student Engagement

What they said: *"I've noticed that some students seem disengaged during your lessons. Perhaps you could explore strategies to increase student engagement and participation."*

What they meant: Your lesson wasn't successful at holding student attention. Consider integrating engagement-boosting activities that get students talking, moving, or otherwise more present. Don't stress too much, though—this happens to all of us!

Example 2: Classroom Management

What they said: *"It appears that classroom management is a challenge for you. In our next meeting, let's work together to develop a positive behavior management plan."*

What they meant: Your classroom rules are either unclear or not consistently implemented, causing you to play whack-a-mole (metaphorically!) with behavior issues as they arise. This can veer your lesson off-course and frustrate students who are following the rules. This is something all teachers—even veterans—struggle with, so don't get too discouraged. Your department chair, co-teachers, grade-level team, or evaluator may have some helpful pointers!

Example 3: Learning Objectives

What they said: *"Your lesson plans could benefit from clearer learning objectives and more explicit connections to students' prior knowledge."*

What they meant: Your students aren't sure why they're learning what they're learning. An easy first step is to ensure that your objectives or "I can" statements are written or posted in the same place every day. But plan on going one step further: when you introduce the learning objective each day, explicitly state how it relates to prior learning students have completed. When in doubt, use the sentence starter, "This concept is important because..."



Keep in mind: You will never get a perfect score on an evaluation or only glowing feedback from an observation. Administrators are taught to comb through evaluation criteria and identify opportunities for growth—even for veteran teachers. If you aren't "exceeding expectations" on every criterion, just remember: neither is anyone else!

Example 4: Digital Technology

What they said: “You could improve your use of instructional technology. Perhaps you could explore options to enhance your digital teaching skills.”

What they meant: Your slide deck (if you had one) didn’t enhance your lesson in any meaningful way. There are so many awesome tech tools out there, so make a plan to try one that will help boost your students’ engagement. Look into gamification tools or **uses for AI** that will help enhance your teaching instead of detracting from it.

Pro tip: After you’ve received feedback from an observation or evaluation, act FAST! Read your feedback and identify the categories or standards that you need to improve. Then create an action plan (maybe with the help of a GenAI chatbot) and write how you plan to address those growth areas. Upload the document and any supporting evidence (revised lesson plans, new syllabi, new drafts of classroom rules, screenshots of your seating chart, etc.) to your school or district’s evaluation portal so your evaluator can see you’re taking concrete steps to address their feedback.



Example 5: Timely Feedback

What they said: “Consider providing more timely feedback to students, as it helps them better understand their strengths and areas for improvement.”

What they meant: You’re taking too long to grade. This is a challenge for all teachers, and it’s understandable if you’re getting discouraged by this task. Look into automating grading for homework assignments (via Google Forms or other platforms) and/or formative assessments. Leverage AI to help you grade writing by inputting your rubric and asking it to suggest key look-fors as you work through your grading pile.

Example 6: Parent Communication

What they said: “Your communication with parents is essential. What concerns do you have about establishing teacher-family communication?”

What they meant: You seem scared of parents, and they aren’t hearing from you enough! Parent communication can be really challenging, and it’s important to establish positive relationships with parents before you have to have tough conversations. Try to send at least one positive parent communication per day—even if it’s a sentence or two passing on something positive you noticed about their student in class. This will help boost your confidence and strengthen relationships so when those tough conversations come around, they’ll be a lot easier to handle.

Example 7: Teaching Transitions

What they said: “You can create a more organized classroom by developing more structured transitions.”

What they meant: Students seem unsure of when you’re stopping one activity, discussion, or concept and beginning the next. This leads to a sense of disorganization, with students wondering why they’re feeling so lost all of a sudden. By implementing a check-in, using a cue (like asking them to get out notebooks or navigate to a webpage), or clearly stating that it’s time to start something else, you can effectively keep students from getting confused and disengaged.



Remember: If you have any difficulty deciding your next steps or creating an action plan to address feedback, ask your evaluator if they can help you identify a teacher in your building you could observe. You’ll impress your evaluator with your initiative and get some great teaching tips while you’re at it!

Need more ideas to help address evaluator feedback? Learn effective teaching strategies, tips, and tricks from master practitioners at this year’s

The National Institutes, our popular summer professional learning events!