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# **A guide for peer evaluators of teaching**

## Acknowledgement

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Peer Evaluation Home Page: [http://www.flinders.edu.au/teaching/quality/evaluation/peer-review/peer-review\\_home.cfm](http://www.flinders.edu.au/teaching/quality/evaluation/peer-review/peer-review_home.cfm)

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## Introduction

This guide is designed to help you through the peer evaluation process. Flinders University uses nominated and trained peer evaluators to undertake the formative peer review process; this guide is intended to be used primarily by staff trained as formal peer evaluators. It should be read in conjunction with the other resources available on the website, especially 'Peer Evaluation: Policy into Practice'.

*The University acknowledges peer evaluation as a useful source of information that can be used to improve and enhance the quality of the whole teaching and learning cycle and which provides developmental benefits as a learning opportunity for evaluators as well as those being evaluated.*

Flinders University Policy on the Evaluation, Monitoring and Review of Academic Programs and Teaching

You may be called upon to evaluate colleagues whom you do not know, who teach outside your discipline area, or who teach in contexts and in ways that you are unfamiliar with. Even in these cases, you will be able to make a valuable contribution to improving student learning by guiding conversations about the teaching issues that really matter and staying focused on peer evaluation as a formative, collegial process that benefits your development as well as your colleagues.

This guide is divided into four sections:

1. Laying the foundations
2. Evaluating teaching
3. Giving feedback
4. Preparing the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes

Each section also includes some tips for helping to make the process run smoothly and to put all participants at ease. These are marked by the following symbol:

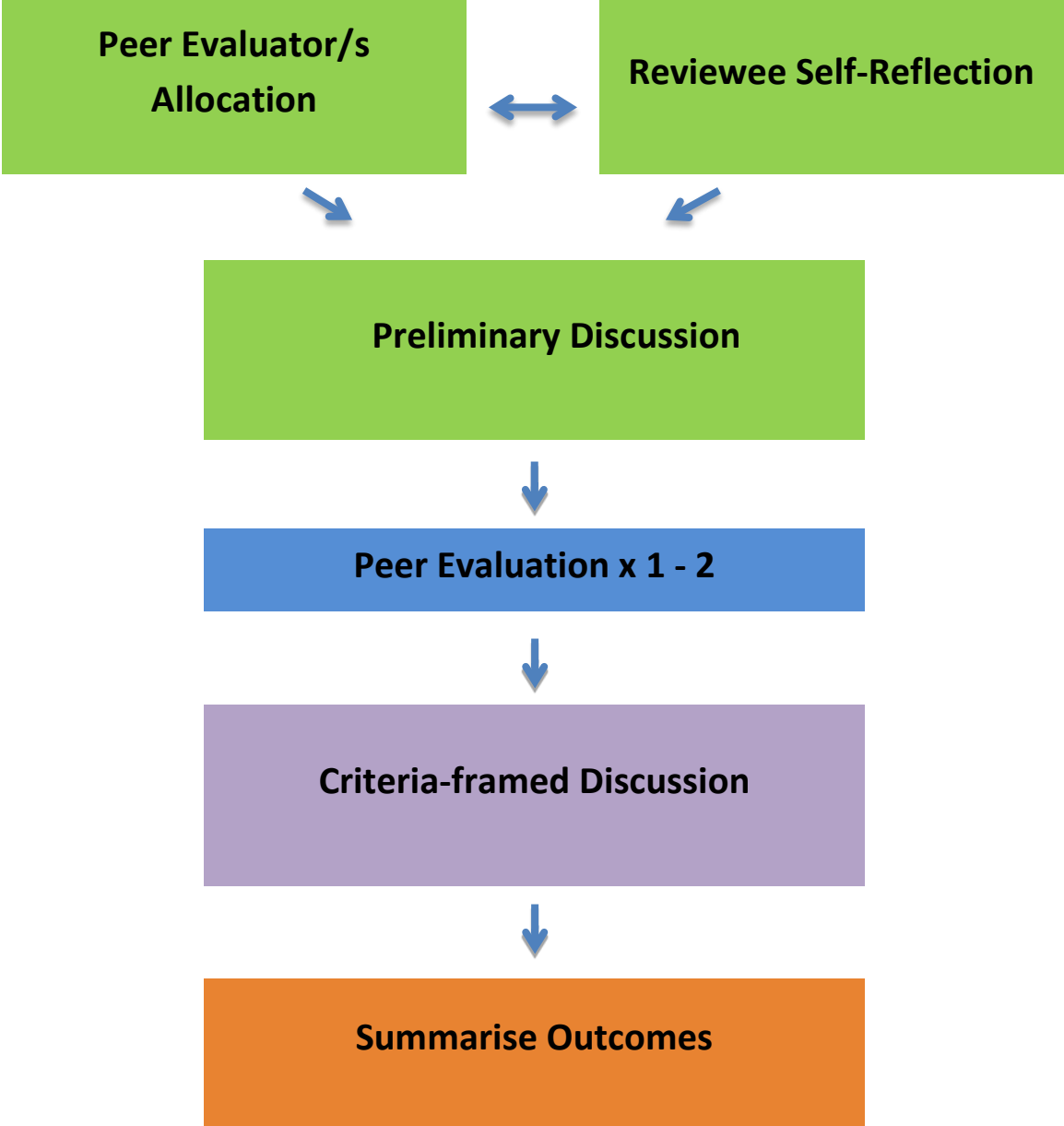


If you have any questions about the peer evaluation process or this guide, you are welcome to contact one of the staff in the Centre for University Teaching.

## The peer evaluation process

Figure 1 provides an outline of the peer evaluation process. Each section of this guide explains this process in more detail and an expanded version of the flowchart is available on the Peer Evaluation Website ([Peer Evaluation: Policy into practice flowchart](#)).

Figure 1: Peer evaluation process



## Teaching quality at Flinders

At Flinders, quality teaching is intended to:

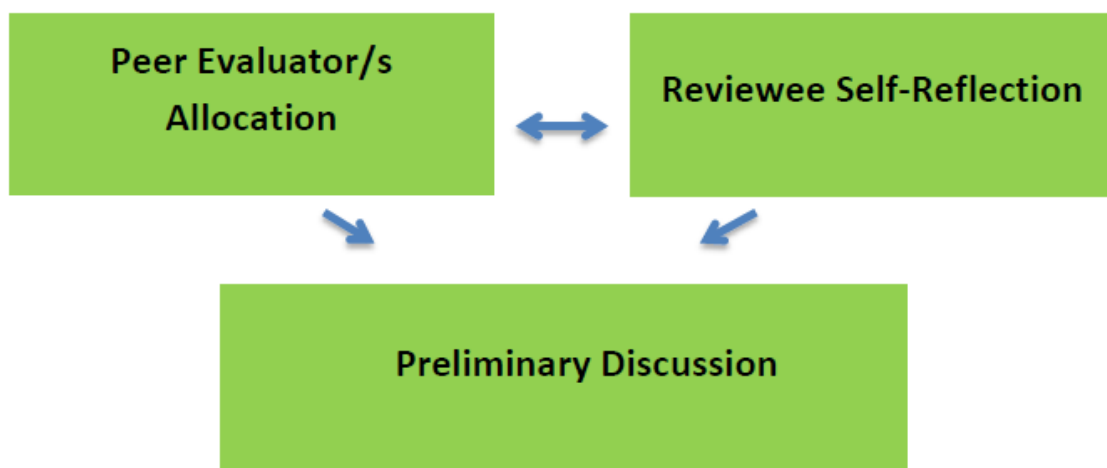
- be learning-focussed;
- engage students in the development of their understanding;
- reflect the teaching context as well as the diverse needs of learners;
- be informed by research-derived knowledge of the subject being taught and the teaching methodology being employed;
- be regularly evaluated in terms of both content and delivery, leading to reflection and redevelopment;
- be planned, drawing on informed judgement derived from the teacher's knowledge and experience; and
- be designed to produce graduates with a sound comprehension of the curriculum and who have acquired the relevant Flinders Graduate Qualities.

Flinders University Teaching and Learning Plan 2011-2014

### 1. Laying the foundations

Preparation is crucial. This lays the foundations for meaningful peer evaluation. Only staff who have been trained in peer evaluation and who have been assigned to the pool of evaluators can act as evaluators. If you are the staff member's supervisor, you **CANNOT** act as their peer evaluator. If your training was a while ago, please check the resources on the website before starting the evaluation as this material is regularly updated. In particular, check 'Peer Evaluation: Policy into Practice' and make sure you are familiar with all the steps.

#### The preliminary discussion



The evaluator/s contact the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated to discuss planning the evaluation process. Note that you will need to allow some time for the staff member being evaluated to conduct a self-evaluation and to think about what they would like the peer evaluation to focus on.

### **Agenda**

- i. Evaluation activities – the person being evaluated will outline one or two activities they would like evaluated and the aspect(s) they would like you to consider in undertaking the evaluation.
- ii. Agreed criteria – all participants will agree the criteria by which to conduct the evaluation; this will occur by negotiation. The criteria should represent the views of all participants.
- iii. Dates – all participants agree the dates of the evaluation activities and any meeting(s).
- iv. Observation strategies – the participants discuss strategies to manage the impact of the presence of the evaluator/s on the students and class dynamics (N.B. this is more of an issue for small classes than large ones).



#### ***The following tips may help the pre-observation process:***

- Let them get to know you – when evaluating the teaching of someone you have not had much (or anything) to do with in the past, it is helpful to explain a bit about your background.
- Encourage collegiality – in all of your communications with the person being evaluated, maintain a positive, collegial atmosphere that emphasises the formative nature of this peer evaluation. You are there to support, not judge.
- Respect choices – the person being evaluated chooses the activity/ies (which must include one active teaching session). Even if you think they should be proposing other activities, don't worry, as all activities will provide opportunities for meaningful discussions about learning and teaching issues. The conversations about one teaching activity could easily have impacts on other activities, now or later, through increased awareness and understanding.
- Understand the context – understand the context that the person being evaluated is operating within. What year level is the topic, is it core/elective, is it small/large student numbers, do they teach alone or in a teaching team, is it online/face-to-face/blended, how is the teaching resourced, does the person have control over their teaching or have they been told what to do, and so on? Context matters in teaching so understanding their situation will help you to conduct a relevant peer evaluation.
- Clarify terminology – other sections of this guide provide labels for some activities (e.g. lecture, tutorial, clinical supervision). However, the meanings of these labels are changeable. If you and the person being evaluated are using labels differently then clarify your mutual understanding but don't get stuck on debating terminology. It is student learning that is the focus of good teaching.

## Teaching activities

There are many different teaching activities that the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated may select. These can include lectures, tutorials, lab demonstrations, instruction manuals, assessment, online teaching, field trip and so on. However, the activities must include:

**a. one teaching session**

You must include one teaching session (e.g. lecture, tutorial, practical, workshop, supervision meeting, interactive online forum and so on). The teaching session must be accessible to peer evaluator/s (i.e. time, location).

And where a second activity is to be evaluated:

**b. one additional teaching session or activity or artefact**

The second activity may be another teaching session or a teaching activity (e.g. an aspect of topic coordination, feedback systems, curriculum design, student support mechanisms and so on) or an artefact (e.g. topic handbook, statement of assessment methods, FLO site, assignment instructions, rubric and so on).

Where a teaching artefact is chosen for the second evaluation (e.g. an online lecture, manual, topic handbook and so on), it is worth clarifying initially that this is an appropriate and relevant teaching activity to choose. The person being evaluated must have been the primary author of the artefact; otherwise you are evaluating someone else's work.

Evaluation of artefacts tends to take a significant amount more time than evaluation of a 'live' teaching activity for all participants. A greater amount of contextual and background information usually needs to be provided by the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated and this then also means a greater amount of time is needed by peer evaluators to read and make sense of the information and 'do' the evaluation. This may also, by default, entail a de facto evaluation of the entire curriculum which is not always desirable or achievable in the context of a formative peer evaluation.

Ultimately it is up to the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated to make the final decision on the teaching activity/ies. So if an artefact is chosen for the second teaching activity, this decision should be respected and the conversation could focus on the most expedient method of undertaking this evaluation so it is not too time-consuming for anyone.

## Keystone questions

Each teaching activity has a keystone and if the keystone is not in place, then it all falls down. The first big question helps you to focus attention and discussion on the core issues before moving on to details or nuances. These are the kinds of questions that experienced educators want to talk about and novices need to talk about. They also get to the purpose of a particular teaching activity. Some keystone questions are listed in Table 1 (next page) for each type of teaching activity.

The table also contains suggestions for which observation form to use for each activity type and you may end up using a combination, depending on the activities being evaluated. The purpose of the



observation forms is to prompt you to focus on important aspects of teaching and to record comments that will inform your post-observation discussion. You should agree the format of the observation form initially with the person being evaluated. This will help all of you to clarify what the focus of the evaluation will be and will give the person being evaluated the tools for self-evaluation. It is not necessary to use the forms but by all means make use of them if it is helpful.

**Table 1: Keystone questions**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Keystone question</b>	<b>Suggested Observation Record</b>
Lecture	<i>How does the lecturer value-add to the material?</i>	Lecture Observation Record
Practical	<i>How does the teaching drive the students to think about what they're doing and not just go through the motions?</i>	Practical Observation Record
Discussion-based tutorial	<i>How is the collective knowledge and experience of the group of students harnessed to improve the learning for all?</i>	Discussion-based Tutorial Observation Record
Individual study tutorial	<i>How are the individual learning needs of the students addressed?</i>	Individual Study Tutorial Observation Record
Research supervision	<i>How is the supervisor guiding the student from dependence to independence?</i>	Research Supervision Observation Record
Workshop	<i>How is the facilitator optimising whole class, small group, and individual contributions to provide learning for all?</i>	Workshop Observation Record
Independent project	<i>How is the student provided with feedback so that she or he can track her or his learning progress?</i>	Independent Project Observation Record
Curriculum design	<i>How do the components fit together in a structured, scaffolded way so that students going through the steps will achieve the learning outcomes?</i>	Curriculum Design Observation Record
Assessment	<i>What evidence does the assessment provide that the students have achieved the learning outcomes?</i>	Assessment Observation Record
Clinical supervision	<i>How do they encourage/support evidence-based practice within a flexible delivery format for their students (i.e. allowing for each student's personal counselling style rather than a "my way or the highway" approach)?</i>	Clinical Supervision Observation Record
Written instructions to students (e.g. manuals)	<i>Are the instructions unambiguous?</i>	Written Instructions to Students Observation Record
Resources (e.g. readings)	<i>How do the resources relate to the learning objectives?</i>	Resources Observation Record
Online learning	<i>Is the course well-designed and easy to</i>	Online Teaching Observation

design	<i>navigate?</i>	Record
Online delivery	<i>How does the instructor foster a supportive and engaging learning environment?</i>	Online Teaching Observation Record
Teaching team communication (e.g. topic coordination, supporting sessional staff)	<i>How does the leader communicate the context of the teaching activity to the teaching staff involved?</i>	Teaching Team Communication Observation Record
Work-integrated learning placement supervision (i.e. the supervision provided by the host)	<i>How does your supervision help ensure that students learn from their experience and make the link between theory and practice?</i>	Work-integrated Learning Placement Supervision Observation Record
Work-integrated learning management (i.e. the coordination of a WIL program)	<i>Are your WIL programs designed to help ensure that students learn from their experience and make the link between theory and practice?</i>	Work-integrated Learning Management Observation Record

Choose the appropriate Observation Record form. Ensure the criteria selected by the staff member being evaluated are included on the form. Each form is already populated with some suggested criteria, including the keystone question. However, these can be altered and other criteria added in.

Suggested criteria that could be reviewed for each teaching activity are included at the bottom of the form. Remember that only 2 – 4 criteria are suggested for each teaching activity to keep the process meaningful. You do not need to use any of the criteria suggested (including the keystone question) if it does not suit the teaching activity selected or the staff member’s area of focus. Change the form to include whatever is relevant for that teaching activity.

Evaluator/s undertake the evaluation activity keeping relevant notes on the form (N.B. this form remains the property of each individual evaluator and is confidential). The staff member undertaking the peer review process should also be encouraged to undertake a self-evaluation using the same form. This can be discussed afterwards and can provide a useful basis for starting the feedback discussion.

## 2. Evaluating teaching

### Peer Evaluation x 1 - 2

The single greatest focus when evaluating teaching is, “**Does this lead to student learning?**” If you aren’t sure, consider the following:

- How do you know they are learning?
- Are the students engaged?
- What are they doing?
- What questions are they asking?

You will need to reflect on multiple ways of teaching that may be relevant to the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated. Some key practices associated with improving student learning are that the teaching:

#### 1. Encourages Contact between Students and Faculty

Frequent student-faculty contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement. This may be achieved through online communication and peer support. It is especially important during the important first year of study.

#### 2. Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation among Students

Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one's own ideas and responding to others' reactions sharpens thinking and deepens understanding.

#### 3. Encourages Active Learning

Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorising pre-packaged assignments, and completing online quizzes. Students need opportunities to talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives. They must make sense of what they learn for themselves. This does not necessarily mean more class time, much of this sort of activity can happen outside the class but it needs to be encouraged and valued by the academic staff.

#### 4. Gives Prompt Feedback

Knowing what you know and don't know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. When getting started, students need help in assessing existing

knowledge and competence. In classes, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during their course, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.

#### 5. Emphasises Time on Task

Time plus energy equals learning. There is no substitute for time on task. Learning to use one's time well is critical for students and professionals alike. Students need help in learning effective time management. Allocating realistic amounts of time means effective learning for students and effective teaching for faculty.

#### 6. Communicates High Expectations

Expect more and you will get more. High expectations are important for everyone - for the poorly prepared, for those unwilling to exert themselves and for the bright and well-motivated. Expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers and institutions hold high expectations for themselves and make extra efforts.

#### 7. Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

There are many roads to learning. People bring different talents and styles of learning to university. Brilliant students in the seminar room may be all thumbs in the lab or art studio. Students rich in hands-on experience may not do as well with theory. Students need the opportunity to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them. Once they gain confidence it is possible to encourage them to take risks and learn in new ways that are more challenging.

(Developed and up-dated from Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, 1989)



***The following tips may help the evaluation process:***

- Remain focussed – try to stay on task. Focus on the criteria chosen by the staff member being evaluated. You may find yourself inspired by the teaching activity you see and you may take some notes for yourself but ensure that you are primarily concentrating on making notes on the criteria the staff member has asked to be evaluated upon.
- Be objective – there will likely be aspects done both well and less well during the evaluation that relate to the criteria chosen. Noting down aspects done well allows those done less well to be discussed more easily. However, if you do notice other notable aspects which are outside the scope of the criteria, it is appropriate to note them down to discuss.
- Avoid participating – it can be tempting to become a part of the teaching activity, particularly when groups are small or if you are familiar with the content. However, some staff are likely to feel uncertain or anxious about the peer evaluation process and your participation, comments or interjections during the teaching activity may prove a distraction to their teaching and create unnecessary anxiety during the evaluation process.

### 3. Giving feedback

It is important to give feedback that will be used to enhance student learning (including how to develop the agreed Summary of Evaluation Outcomes). This is done after the observation of the teaching session (or other activity). Ideally this should occur within a week or so to avoid unnecessary stress and delay for the staff member being evaluated. Feedback will recognise that teaching is a subjective and complex process. It can involve what you see, hear, read or feel in the teaching situation. As such it can be challenging and requires high level interpersonal skills.

#### Working in partnership

You are working in partnership with the staff member being evaluated, and possibly also with a second peer evaluator. Peer evaluators may find it helpful to have some discussion between themselves prior to the meeting with the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated to clarify feedback to be given or work out any disagreements. You may find yourself working in partnership with someone who is a different academic level than you (e.g. Level A and Level C) and/or who works in quite a different area or in a very different way than you. This has the potential to lead to differences in opinion and challenges in reaching agreement.



***The following tips may help the partnership process:***

- Remain focussed – this process is being undertaken primarily for the benefit of the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated. Focussing on that common goal may help you all work together more easily.
- Be respectful – you will all have valid opinions and maintaining mutual respect will help avoid unnecessary conflict.
- Share the lead – if there are two peer evaluators, you may find one of you is a natural ‘leader’ in this process. If this is you. Be prepared to share the lead and allow your partner to benefit from helping to lead this process.
- Stay positive – with each other! Remaining positive and constructive with each other will help the process run more smoothly for everyone.
- Reach agreement – it will be important for the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated to have coherent feedback on the process. If you are working with a second peer evaluator, it is fine if you both disagree but aim to reach agreement on the main criteria being evaluated in order to be able to provide constructive and usable feedback.

## Criteria-framed discussion

### Criteria-framed Discussion

This should happen as soon as possible after observation of the teaching session has occurred. If there is more than one teaching activity, there should ideally be a separate discussion for each activity, in order to do each justice. The discussion will involve giving feedback, discussing and exploring issues on the teaching activity observation, based on the criteria initially chosen to frame the evaluation. Where there is a second evaluation, this discussion will also involve development of the overall Summary of Evaluation Outcomes; otherwise this is also done at the first feedback meeting.

#### **Agenda**

- i. Context discussion – the staff member being evaluated is given the opportunity to discuss and explain: their approach to and beliefs about teaching, methodologies used and why, constraints on teaching caused by decisions beyond their control and any experimental or trial approaches used including any attendant risks.
- ii. Self-evaluation discussion – the staff member being evaluated discusses their self-evaluation of the teaching activity.
- iii. Feedback given – evaluator/s provide constructive, useful feedback. Explore issues around learning and teaching that may have arisen during the teaching session.

At the criteria-framed discussion:

- iv. Notes taken – some notes on the feedback given should be kept so that the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated has a record of the feedback given (this does NOT need to be the formal Summary of Evaluation Outcomes). This will allow the staff member to reflect on the discussion at a later stage and where necessary, implement any changes to their teaching that may have been discussed. If some record of the discussion is not kept, the opportunity for reflection and learning by the staff member is likely to be lost.
- v. Agreed summary – all participants discuss and agree on the content of the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes and decide who will write it. This is finalised and emailed to the Supervisor and cced to all participants. If the supervisor is not the Dean, then an email is sent to the Dean by the evaluators stating that the evaluation has occurred.

It is important that the place for undertaking the criteria-framed discussion be neutral, private and a place that is comfortable for both the evaluator/s and the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated. The feedback provided is confidential and disclosure, beyond what is included in the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes is up to the staff member being evaluated.

Being a peer evaluator can seem like a big responsibility and the staff member being evaluated is putting a great deal of trust in you. Remaining open about alternative approaches to teaching and being supportive are important to the process being meaningful for all participants.



***The following tips may help the feedback process:***

- Be positive – research shows the most effective way for feedback to be accepted and acted upon is to precede it with a number of positive comments as well as finding the overall positives of the activity. This is not to diminish the value of constructive commentary but an overwhelming amount of what may be easily construed as negative feedback is likely to be too overwhelming to take on board in any meaningful way.
- Avoid “but” – give positive feedback and avoid adding on a qualification with “but ...”.
- Remain respectful and empathetic – the most effective feedback leading to behaviour change occurs when the person giving the feedback is supportive, respectful and empathetic.
- Be specific – discuss specifically what you observed as well as your opinion about why it was done well or poorly.
- Give constructive feedback – only provide feedback on things the staff member being reviewed can do something about. Avoid negative feedback as this is rarely helpful.
- Use open questioning – this is especially effective when the staff member being evaluated cannot understand the point you are trying to make (e.g. “Tell me what happens when you...”).
- Remain evidence-based – stick to your notes and only feedback on the notes you made during the session. Be descriptive about exactly what you saw, heard, read or felt and how that relates to the criteria being evaluated.

## 4. Preparing the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes

### Summarise Outcomes

After the feedback and discussion/s are completed, all participants discuss and write the agreed Summary of Evaluation Outcomes. This is a summary of outcomes of the discussions from both teaching activity evaluations (where applicable), as agreed by the peer evaluator/s and the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated. The Summary is more than just an indication that a peer evaluation took place. Its main purpose is to summarise the direction and outcomes of the discussion/s between all participants across both peer evaluations and it should be a reflection on the overall process, rather than a judgment.



***The following tips may help the Summary development process:***

- Remain inclusive – the discussion should be friendly and include all participants in the process.
- Be considerate – consider the needs of the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated and also take what they considered to be their strengths and weaknesses into consideration.
- Keep on-task – only address those criteria agreed upon at the pre-observation meeting.
- Consider having the staff member being evaluated to write the first draft.

This can be done in whatever way suits the participants. For example:

1. All participants may contribute to the Summary and it is drafted at the time of the criteria-framed discussion.
2. The staff member whose teaching is being evaluated may prepare a draft and forward to the peer evaluator/s for further editing and final confirmation.
3. Peer evaluators may prepare the Summary together and forward to the staff member whose teaching is being evaluated for editing/comment.

(Note: where peer evaluators disagree on the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes, they should discuss the matter amongst themselves to reach an agreed position before the Summary is prepared).



After all participants have agreed on the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes, it is then signed and forwarded to the staff member's supervisor and copied to all participants. The Summary remains confidential except where the staff member chooses otherwise.

## **5. Further information**

If you have any questions about this guide or about the peer evaluation process, you are welcome to contact the Centre for University Teaching.

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