Preparing for peer evaluation:

a guide for staff whose teaching is being evaluated

Acknowledgement

The development of this resource has used information drawn from a number of sources and the author wishes to acknowledge the following sources as reference or resource material:

- Chickering, A & Gamson, Z 1989, 'Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education', *Biochemical Education*, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 140-141.
- Flinders University 2012, *Evaluation, Monitoring and Review of Academic Programs and Teaching*, viewed 8 April 2015, <http://www.flinders.edu.au/ppmanual/teaching-course-management/eval-monitoring-review-academic-programs.cfm>
- Harris, K, Farrell, K, Bell, M, Devlin, M & James, R 2008. *Peer Review of Teaching in Australian Higher Education: A handbook to support institutions in developing effective policies and practices*. The University of Melbourne, Melbourne.
- McKenzie, J and Parker, N 2011. *Peer review in online and blended learning environments*. Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Sydney.
- Quality Matters^{TM} Program 2011, *Quality Matters Rubric Standards 2011 – 2013 edition with Assigned Points Values*, MarylandOnline, Inc. viewed 12 June 2012, <http://www.qmprogram.org>

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Introduction

This guide has been developed to support you through the peer evaluation process. 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.

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

You may be evaluated by one or two colleagues whom you do not know, including those who may teach outside your specific discipline area and in contexts and ways that you are unfamiliar with. However, this is designed to be a supportive and collegial, formative process for improving student learning. You and your peer evaluator/s can benefit from this process and further develop teaching quality through collegial discussion and exchange of ideas. (Note: your peer evaluator should never be your supervisor.)

This guide is divided into seven sections or steps:

1. Self-evaluate
2. Choose feedback
3. Choose teaching activities

> Steps 1 – 3 can be done in any order, as needed

4. Preliminary discussion
5. Evaluation
6. Criteria-framed discussion
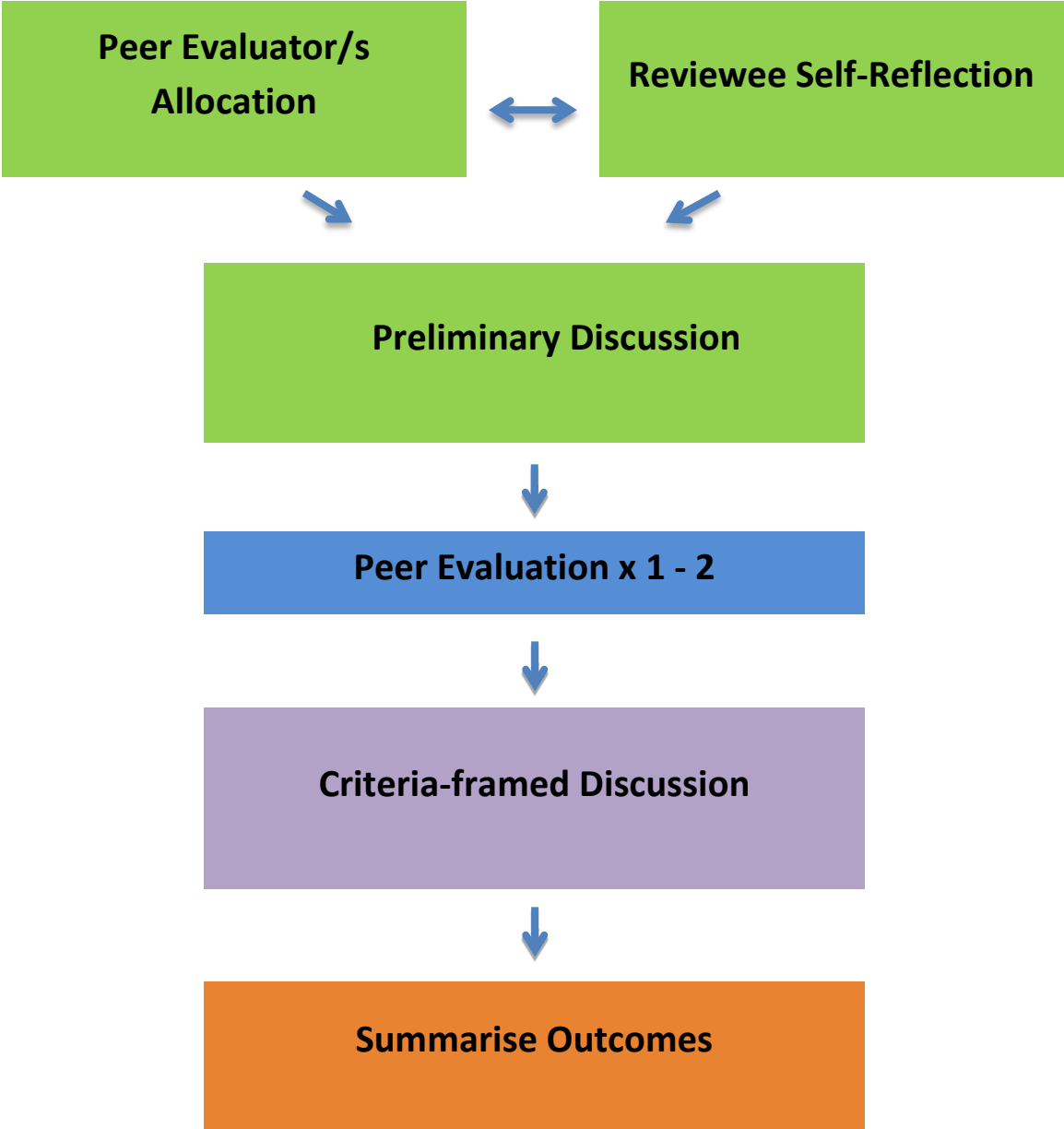7. Preparing the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes.

Steps 1 – 3 DO NOT need to be done in sequential order. Some people may find it easier to first identify which teaching activity/ies they wish to have evaluated and decide criteria for evaluation from there. Others may prefer to identify areas of their own teaching to focus on and choose an appropriate teaching activity based on this. There is no right or wrong way and the sequence provide in Steps 1 – 3 is intended as a guide only.

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.

Figure 1: Peer evaluation process

Peer Evaluator/s Allocation	↔	Reviewee Self-Reflection

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Preliminary Discussion

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Peer Evaluation x 1 - 2

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Criteria-framed Discussion

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Summarise Outcomes

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. Self-evaluate

Step 1: Think about your teaching and your students' learning.

You might find it helpful to think about your strengths, achievements, constraints and any difficulties you have faced with your teaching. Make some notes below.

The following tips may help the self-evaluation process:

- Be honest – is there an area of your own teaching you think you could improve on?
- Consider your students – is there an area of their learning that has been challenging? Think about your teaching in this area; a peer review may help overcome some obstacles in student learning in this area.
- Analyse achievements – has there been an area of your teaching you have been working on that you would like some further feedback on?
- Contemplate your environment – has your teaching been undertaken with any constraints or difficulties that have made teaching challenging for you? How?

List your:	
Strengths	
Achievements	
Constraints	
Difficulties	

2. Choose feedback

Step 2: Which aspect(s) of your teaching would you like feedback about?

You are more likely to obtain feedback you can actually use if you focus on only 2-4 areas for consideration. This section may help you to identify areas or specific criteria to choose. Alternately, you may like to consider the teaching activity/ies first and then choose the areas to focus on.

Identifying focus areas for peer evaluation

The single greatest focus when evaluating teaching is, **"Does this lead to student learning?"** Some key practices associated with improving student learning are:

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)

Are any of these areas you may wish to get feedback on?

The following tips may help this decision process:

- Brainstorm a list of your teaching activities – this may help if you are having difficulty deciding which areas to focus on.
- Choose from your notes in Step 1 – what areas might you want to look at across those teaching activities.
- Condense your list – make a decision about which specific areas you want to focus on.
- Consider the criteria provided – each Observation Record form has some suggested criteria to consider for that activity as well as some other relevant ones. This may help you to focus your decision.
- Visit the Peer evaluation web page – to see the different Observation Record forms for ideas.

Focus area	Why have you chosen this area?
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

3. Choose teaching activities

Step 3: Select at least one teaching activity for evaluation.

The activities you choose should provide an opportunity to address the focus areas or specific criteria identified in Steps 1 and 2 above. Note that some activities will provide better opportunities to focus on certain aspects than others.

    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 evaluators (i.e. time, location).

And where you choose for a second activity 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).

The two activities may be related or unrelated, and may be close together in time or separated. Here are some examples but please do not feel constrained by these – your evaluation should address your needs.

- Example 1: One type of teaching activity over time
  - Activity 1: Lecture week 2
  - Activity 2: Lecture week 10 (opportunity to apply the intermediate feedback).
- Example 2: A teaching session and its related tutorial
  - Activity 1: Lecture week 2
  - Activity 2: Tutorial week 2.
- Example 3: Two unrelated activities
  - Activity 1: Demonstration of a laboratory class in topic A
  - Activity 2: Design of assessment exercises in topic B.

Teaching artefacts (for a second activity)

The range of teaching activities that can be chosen from is broad and artefacts may seem like a simpler option, especially when scheduling times is challenging (or even when undertaking the process seems too challenging). However, where a teaching artefact is chosen for the second evaluation (e.g. an online lecture, manual, topic handbook and so on), it is worth being quite certain that this is the most appropriate and relevant teaching activity to choose.

Evaluation of artefacts tends to take a significant amount more time than evaluation of a 'live' teaching session for all participants. A greater amount of contextual and background information usually needs to be provided by you, which takes up more time. This then also means a greater amount of time is needed by peer evaluator/s 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 you to make the final decision on the teaching activity. So if an artefact is chosen, the conversation at the pre-observation meeting could focus on the most expedient method of undertaking this evaluation so it is not too time-consuming for anyone.

The following tips may help the selection process:

- Consider your students – is there an area of their learning that has been challenging? Is there a teaching activity related to this you could use?
- Analyse strengths/difficulties – is there an area of your teaching you would like some further feedback on? Step 1 may help with this.
- Contemplate your environment – do you teach with any constraints or difficulties that make student learning or teaching challenging? Would you like to have that activity evaluated to help with making changes?

Observation Record forms

Visit the Peer evaluation web page to select the appropriate Observation Record form for your teaching activities. This is not mandatory but can be helpful in guiding thinking around the teaching activity. If the appropriate form is not there, contact the Centre for University Teaching, who will be able to assist. The table below outlines possible teaching activities and the relevant Observation Record form.

| Activity	Suggested Observation Record
Lecture	Lecture Observation Record
Lab practical	Practical Observation Record
Fieldwork	Practical Observation Record
Discussion-based tutorial	Discussion-based Tutorial Observation Record
Individual study tutorial	Individual Study Tutorial Observation Record

Research supervision	Research Supervision Observation Record
Workshop	Workshop Observation Record
Independent project	Independent Project Observation Record
Curriculum design	Curriculum Design Observation Record
Assessment	Assessment Observation Record
Clinical supervision	Clinical Supervision Observation Record
Written instructions to students (e.g. manuals)	Written Instructions to Students Observation Record
Resources (e.g. readings)	Resources Observation Record
Online learning design	Online Teaching Observation Record
Online delivery	Online Teaching Observation Record
Placement supervision	Work-integrated Learning Placement Supervision Observation Record
Teaching team communication (e.g. topic coordination, supporting sessional staff)	Teaching Team Communication Observation Record
Work-integrated learning supervision (i.e. the supervision provided by the host)	Work-integrated Learning Placement Supervision Observation Record
Work-integrated learning management (i.e. the coordination of a WIL program)	Work-integrated Learning Management Observation Record

Evaluation criteria

When you have chosen your teaching activity/ies, look at the areas you wanted to focus on (i.e. from Step 2, if completed) and include these, or specific relevant criteria on the appropriate Observation Record forms. You may find the ones suggested on the forms are suitable or you may wish to change them. Other relevant criteria are listed on the bottom of each form or you may wish to construct your own.

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.

4. Preliminary discussion
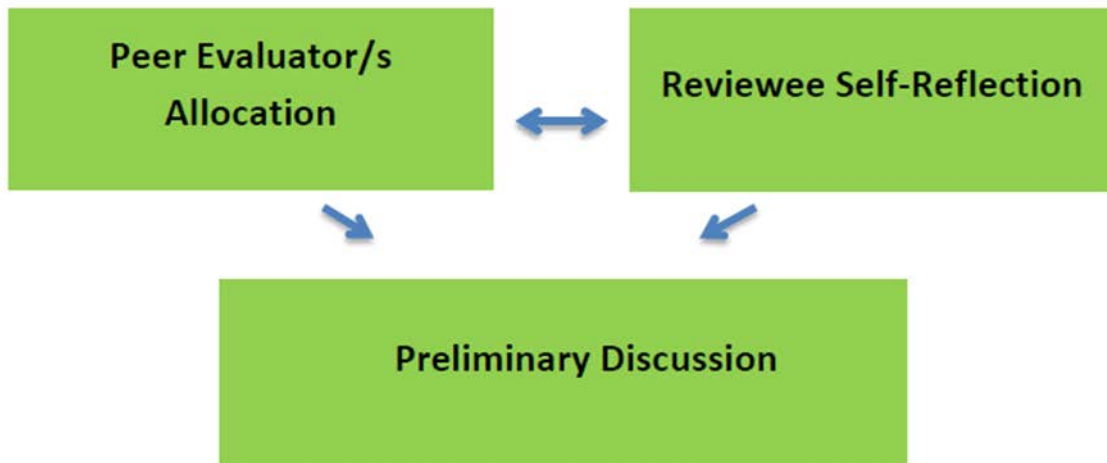
Step 4: Preliminary discussion.

You will be contacted by your peer evaluator/s to a time to discuss the evaluation and to plan the process. Some time is allowed to conduct your own self-evaluation (Step 1) and decide upon activities.

Agenda

i.   Evaluation activities – you outline the one or two teaching activities you would like some feedback on and the aspect(s) to be taken into consideration for the two activities.

ii.   Agreed criteria – all participants will agree the criteria by which to conduct the evaluations; 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 evaluators on the students and class dynamics (N.B. this is more of an issue for small classes than large ones).

Your peer evaluator/s will be able to perform their role better if you give them some background information about the teaching situation. You may also need to provide them with some course materials. At the preliminary discussion, you will need to explain to your peer evaluator/s:

- The context that you teach within. What year level is the topic, is it core/elective, is it small/large student numbers, do you teach alone or in a teaching team, is it online/face-to-

face/blended, how is the teaching resourced, do you have control over your teaching or have you been told what to do and so on?

- What aspects of your teaching would you like feedback on?
- What are your reasons for choosing the particular teaching activity/ies? How will these activities enable you to get feedback on the aspects you have identified?
- What outcomes do you want your students to achieve from the chosen teaching activity/ies?

Having agreed all of the criteria, you may like to complete a self-assessment using the same observation form as the evaluators, and bring it to the preliminary discussion for discussion and comparison.

The following tips may help the pre-observation process:

- Provide background – when meeting your peer evaluator/s (with whom you may not have 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 your evaluator/s, remember this process is intended to be formative and to help you. Your peer evaluator/s are there to support you, not judge.

- Support your choices – you choose the teaching activity/ies. If your peer evaluators propose different teaching activities, be open to discussing why they feel a different choice is preferable. It may be that the activity you have chosen involves an excessive amount of time for evaluating (e.g. as with some artefacts) and this is unmanageable for your all involved. However, the choice of teaching activity is ultimately yours so be clear about justification of your choice if necessary (e.g. in the context of your teaching or the students' learning).

- Explain context – explain the context you operate within. What year level is the topic, is it core/elective, is it small/large student numbers, do you teach alone or in a teaching team, is it online/face-to-face/blended, how is the teaching resourced, do you have control over your teaching or have you been told what to do, and so on? Context matters in teaching so explaining your situation will help encourage a relevant peer evaluation.

- Clarify terminology – teaching activities can have different labels (e.g. lecture, tutorial, clinical supervision). However, the meanings of these labels are changeable. If you and your peer evaluators 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.

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5. Evaluation

Peer Evaluation x 1 - 2

Step 5: Evaluation.

Your peer evaluator/s undertake the evaluation of the teaching activity/ies keeping relevant notes (on the Observation Record form if desired). You should undertake a self-evaluation using the same forms. Your own evaluation of the activity is most important and is likely to guide the discussion later on. Your peer evaluator/s will want to know your thoughts and reflections on the teaching activity and this will form a significant part of the conversation.

The following tips may help the observation process:

- Prepare students – your students will appreciate being forewarned that the observation is going to happen and also having your peer/s introduced to them as a courtesy to all involved.
- Remain focussed – try to say on task. Focus on your teaching activity not the peer evaluator/s.
- Avoid evaluator participation – it can be tempting to involve your peer evaluator/s in the teaching activity, particularly when groups are small or if they are familiar with the content. However, this may lead to changes in your teaching, discomfort or anxiety among peer evaluator/s or students.
- Don't stress – remember this is a learning-focussed, formative peer evaluation. Your peer/s are there to observe you, not judge you.

6. Criteria-framed discussion

Step 6: Criteria-framed discussion.

For many people, the most significant benefit to peer evaluation is the sharing of ideas during the discussion afterwards. This also provides an opportunity to have confirmation that there are a variety of approaches to learning and teaching and receiving confirmation of this can be very validating.

This discussion should happen as soon as is practicable after the teaching has been observed. 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 discussing feedback and exploring issues on the teaching activity 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.

The following tips may help your feedback process:

- Be open – the spirit in which the feedback is being given is collegial and intended to assist you in your own development and refinement of teaching skills.
- Listen carefully – try to avoid interrupting unnecessarily to contradict during the conversation. Listen to the comments being made and consider them.
- Engage actively – really engage with the conversation, clarify any points you aren't clear about with your peer evaluator/s if needed. For example: "You said the students weren't really engaged with the topic material. Can you give me an example?" or "You said that you thought that worked really well. Can you tell me why you thought it did?"
- Question thoughtfully – ensure feedback you are being given, and the discussion being had is constructive. If it isn't you should feel comfortable to question and ask for ideas. For example: "You said that that this didn't work at all. Can you suggest how I might have approached it differently?" or "That suggestion really wouldn't work in the context within which I teach. What other strategies do you think I could consider?"

7. 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 <u>both</u> teaching activity evaluations (where applicable), as agreed by you and your peer evaluator/s. 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:

- Encourage inclusiveness – the discussion should be friendly and all participants are included in the process, especially you.
- Expect consideration – your assessment of your own strengths and weaknesses should be taken into consideration as well as your own reflections on the teaching activities.
- Keep on-task – only address those criteria agreed upon at the pre-observation meeting.
- Consider if you are comfortable writing the first draft yourself.

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. You can prepare a draft and forward to the peer reviewers for confirmation.
3. Peer evaluator/s may prepare the Summary together and forward to you for editing/comment.

After all participants have agreed on the Summary of Evaluation Outcomes, it is then signed and forwarded to your supervisor and cced to all participants. If your supervisor is not the Dean of School, they will also receive a copy. The Summary remains confidential except where you choose otherwise.

8. 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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