

Sample Peer Review Letter based on the R.I.S.E. Observation of Instruction forms

The following letter is an example of how a colleague might prepare a summary of a peer review of a course based on the R.I.S.E Live Peer Observation of Instruction form, which could also be adapted to the R.I.S.E. Web Peer Observation of Instruction form.

Before preparing a summary, we recommend that the instructor and the peer reviewer have already completed the steps outlined in both forms, principally,

Before Observation:

- The instructor being observed should provide a brief overview of the course and/or any specific modules of components being reviewed. It is recommended that they offer 1-2 specific areas in which they are seeking feedback.
- Both the observer and the instructor being observed should review the activities on the **R.I.S.E. Web** or **R.I.S.E. Live Observation of Instruction** forms to reflect on how instructors may demonstrate the R.I.S.E. core values in either live or asynchronous instruction.

During Observation:

- The observer should use the template on the **R.I.S.E. Web** or **R.I.S.E. Live Observation of Instruction** forms to record observations. The observer can use the first box in either form to record their general observations of either the live class session including an overview of what occurred, or record general observations of course/content being reviewed asynchronously as well as document any questions they may want to ask the instructor. . Subsequently, the observer can utilize the boxes devoted to each of the R.I.S.E. values to document their observations related to how the course demonstrated that value.

After Observation:

- The observer should finalize their notes **R.I.S.E. Web** or **R.I.S.E. Live Observation of Instruction** form and schedule a "post-observation debrief" meeting with the instructor.
- During the debrief meeting, the observer will share their notes on the template and discuss the observation with the instructor. The last box of the template, "Next Steps", should be completed collaboratively by the observer and the instructor during the post-observation debrief.
- Subsequently, the peer observer can utilize the observation form and the next steps identified to craft a formal letter, such as the one that follows, documenting the observation.

Moreover, we remind instructors and peer reviewers that the list of observable activities on the R.I.S.E. Observation of Instruction forms is neither exhaustive nor definitive. Some activities that represent the R.I.S.E. values may not be on the list, others that do appear may apply to more than one category or may not be applicable to all disciplines at all levels. There is no presumption that there is an optimal or required number of activities demonstrated to achieve effectiveness.

Peer Course Review
LING 2110G: Introduction to Language
Fall 2023
Instructor: Dr. Abel Smith

This letter provides a summary of a peer-review of Dr. Abel Smith's Introduction to Language course, taught during the Fall 2023 semester. I completed my observation of the class on October 1, 2023, and Dr. Smith and I met on Zoom on October 15, 2023, to discuss the course. I used the R.I.S.E. Live Peer Observation of Instruction form to guide my review of the course. My summative review is presented here, additional detail regarding my observations is documented on the attached R.I.S.E. Live form.

Dr. Smith's course is taught in a face-to-face format, meeting twice a week for 75-minutes per session. Prior to my observation, Dr. Smith described the course as follows:

An introduction to the science of language that provides students with a foundation of knowledge about the functions of language (what and how we communicate), the features of different systems of language (e.g. syntax, morphology, phonetics), as well as broader areas of linguistic interest (e.g. language variation, psycholinguistics, child language acquisition, second language acquisition).

He noted that typical class activities included brief lectures followed by group problem solving activities and discussions.

Applying the R.I.S.E. Live Peer Observation of Instruction form, I will address 2-3 representative activities from each category that represent Dr. Smith's teaching effectiveness. Please note that these activities are not the only ones observed, rather, they are the ones that I have chosen to highlight for this review.

With respect to the quality of **Responsive** (*adapts to changing contexts and learner needs*), I observed that Dr. Smith opened the class session asking students if they had any questions about content they'd covered in class previously, in the pre-class readings, or in the homework. He responded to student questions patiently and professionally. Once student questions had been answered, he provided a brief lecture that included examples of real-life applications of the information being discussed, for example, how linguistics informs speech recognition software employed in many devices as well as AI. He invited students to share their experiences of successes, failures and surprises of machines interacting with humans.

With respect to **Informed** (*uses high quality research and professional standards to guide course design and instruction*), I observed Dr. Smith provide an overview of the class session at the beginning of his lecture, outlining the goals for the session and the activities that the class would be engaged in. He connected the lesson to the overall goals of the particular module they were in. As he lectured, Dr. Smith paused at specific junctures to check students' comprehension and see if they had questions. In his responses to their questions he added to the material he had prepared by offering additional examples from his own professional experience and expertise. The slides he used during his lecture were provided to students in pdf form on their Canvas site prior to the lecture to allow students to take their own notes as he spoke.

Regarding the value of **Supportive** (*provides a safe environment that values all learner identities and cultivates meaningful relationships*), it was readily observable that Dr. Smith had an easy rapport with the

students in the class, interacting with them informally prior to the beginning of class and calling upon them by name as he responded to their questions. Students showed no hesitation in asking questions or responding to the questions he posed to them during the class session. They also readily engaged in conversations with their groups in the activities he provided. As students worked on their in-class activities, he ensured all groups were progressing productively, offering additional ideas for groups to consider as well as targeted guidance for groups that were struggling. The activities were designed to allow students to examine the principles of syntax while providing insight from their own personal experiences and perspectives.

Several aspects of the class session I observed reflected the value of *Engaged* (*actively involves learners and provides opportunities for reflection, growth, and application*). Dr. Smith provided learners with a brief lecture that not only highlighted his knowledge and expertise, but also his enthusiasm for the topic. Students were provided the opportunity to ask questions prior to, during and after the lecture to confirm their understanding of the concepts. The problem-solving activities students engaged in were designed to solidify their understanding and built on students' knowledge progressively allowing them to notice patterns in data provided, identify the meaning in the patterns they observed, and apply their knowledge to novel data to confirm their hypotheses. Dr. Smith provided additional resources in his lecture and online, inviting students to explore more on the topic independently if they wished.

Dr. Smith expressed a wish to get an outsider's perspective on "whether or not the activities in class were allowing students to reinforce their understanding of the topics." During our meeting we brainstormed about additional strategies Dr. Smith could apply to add to students' learning of the materials. In particular, we discussed active learning techniques such as posing the question that you want students to consider in the group activity at the beginning of the session so they will be reflecting on the question throughout the lesson. Rather than only perform comprehension checks, Dr. Smith might also consider calling upon students during the lesson asking for their explanations of concepts under review and/or asking their insight on the day's topic. Similarly, Dr. Smith could reduce the groups to pairs of students in the hands-on exercises to provide greater responsibility for participation on individual students. Dr. Smith indicated he would experiment with applying new forms of active learning and comprehension checks..

In sum, through my course observation Dr. Abel Smith provided evidence that he is conscientiously engaged in providing course experiences that reflect the R.I.S.E. Core Values of Effective Teaching in both his design and delivery of the course materials.

Sincerely,

[Name of Observer]

[Title of Observer]