

# CET Asynchronous online teaching observation checklist

## Introduction

The CET Asynchronous Online Teaching Observation Checklist provides performance descriptions for three tiers of online instructional practices, reflecting a progression of recommended teaching practices.

* Tier 1: Performing at Minimum USC Teaching Policy Standard.
* Tier 2: Performing at Proficient Level of Teaching Standard at USC.
* Tier 3: Performing at Excellence Level of Teaching Standard at USC.

The checklist 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, 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.

## Not included in the Synchronous Online Classroom Teaching Observation Checklist

* Evaluation of course design, which is addressed in a separate Asynchronous Online Course Design Syllabus Review Checklist.
* Aspects of teaching that cannot be observed in the online environment.
* Best practices that are specific to certain fields, class types or instructional styles.

## Recommended observer characteristics

* Requests access to the course to be observed.
* Observes a minimum of one completed online module/unit (one that students have completed and for which the instructor has provided feedback). Observation of two separate completed online module/units is 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

Check off all items observed during the class.

Each dimension in the checklist measures one or more criteria in USC’s Definition of Excellence in Teaching. USC Definition of Excellence in Teaching criteria measured by each dimension are noted by the index of the criteria in the definition; for example, 5a.

### Class organization

#### Instructional plan

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 5a, 5b.

* The module/unit instructional plan demonstrates clear signs of planning and organization and follows a logical flow (Tier 1).
* Module/unit instructional plan includes due dates and assignment descriptions (Tier 1).
* The class session includes student interaction with peers, content, and instructor (Tier 2).
* The module/unit instructional plan includes instruction, formative assessment, and reflection components (Tier 3).
* Each assignment description has an accompanying rubric (Tier 3).

Note: Formative assessment refers to assignments intended to help students evaluate their mastery of a skill or learning objective and provide information to the instructor on student progress. These are usually assignments that are weighted less heavily toward the overall course grade.

#### Communication of clear learning objectives for the module/unit

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criterion 6a.

* Instructor clearly identifies realistic learning objectives for the module/unit (Tier 1).
* Instructor clearly connects the learning objectives for the module/unit to the course learning objectives (Tier 2).
* Instructor clearly identifies the learning objectives for the module/unit and connects them to the course learning objectives (Tier 3).

#### Course environment and technology

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 5c, 5d.

* Course tools are used that allow the student to complete the required activity (Tier 1).
* Course tools promote learner engagement (Tier 2).
* Instructor selects appropriate and varied course tools for activities, communication, and assessments (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Learning environment

#### Course climate

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1b, 1c, 2e, 2f, 3a, 4e.

* Instructor is responsive to students’ stress or anxiety (Tier 1).
* Instructor encourages student participation (Tier 1).
* Instructor treats all students equally (Tier 1).
* Instructor is responsive to students’ different educational backgrounds and learning needs (Tier 1).
* Instructor has established course norms that foster a positive and inclusive environment (Tier 2).
* Instructor encourages interaction between students (Tier 2).
* Instructor uses practices that increase students’ motivation and foster a growth mindset (Tier 3).

Note: The growth mindset is the perspective that abilities can be developed through persistence and effort; failure is a necessary step toward mastery.

#### Communication

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1a, 1b.

* Instructor provides clear and complete instructions for all assignments and activities (Tier 1).
* Instructor participates in and manages communication (Tier 2).
* Instructor frequently provides communication that promotes the stated learning objectives (Tier 3).

#### Content

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 4a, 4d, 3e.

* Instructor provides a variety of multimedia content (Tier 1).
* Instructor uses concrete examples/illustrations to clarify content (Tier 1).
* Instructor cites sources for content (Tier 2).
* Instructor provides transcripts and/or captions for all auditory media, including both audio and video resources (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Instructional content

#### Knowledge of subject

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criterion 4a.

* Instructor’s factual statements are consistent with current knowledge in the field (Tier 1).
* Instructor correctly answers questions about course-level content (Tier 1).
* Instructor answers questions confidently, clearly, and simply (Tier 2).
* Instructor ties current content to topics or knowledge from the profession and/or more advanced courses (Tier 3).

#### Discipline-specific language

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criterion 1e.

* Instructor uses discipline-specific and academic language (Tier 1).
* Instructor explains use of discipline-specific terms (Tier 2).
* Instructor facilitates the use of discipline-specific language by students (Tier 3).

#### Contextual relevance and transferability

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 3c, 4c.

* Instructor provides real-world applications of module/unit content (Tier 1).
* Instructor explicitly builds on prior student knowledge (Tier 1).
* Instructor has students provide real-world examples of class content or apply content to real-world scenarios (Tier 2).
* Where appropriate, instructor uses examples where their discipline converges with other disciplines (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Student engagement

#### Appropriate content or level

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1c, 2a, 2b, 3a.

* Module/unit content appropriately challenges students (Tier 1).
* Module/unit content promotes mastery of course learning objectives (Tier 1).
* Instructor engages students in higher-order thinking skills (Tier 2).
* A majority of the module/unit’s activities engage higher-order thinking (Tier 3).

Note: Higher-order thinking involves analysis, critical thinking, evaluation, problem solving, etc.

#### Active learning

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 3d, 4b.

* Module/unit includes at least one active-learning exercise to apply course content, resulting in a graded student work product (Tier 1).
* Instructor facilitates student-led explanations and/or discussions (Tier 2).
* Where appropriate, instructor leverages student use of electronic technology to facilitate active learning (Tier 3).

Note: Student engagement refers to active participation in an activity in which students are practicing course concepts.

#### Formative assessment/feedback

Aligns with Excellence in Teaching criteria 1b, 2f, 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d.

* Instructor provides students constructive and encouraging feedback on how to improve their performance (Tier 1).
* Instructor provides information to students about their performance on module/unit activities compared to a pre-established standard (Tier 2).
* Instructor leads students in structured reflection on learning activities (Tier 3).

Observer comments:

### Context

Record pertinent characteristics of the course, student population, and environment. Examples: enrollment, student demographics, course LMS, and general-education status.