

<https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/educators/starting-school/>

Making observations

Why observe the student?

As an educator, making observations of student behaviours is an important step in building your knowledge of the student and establishing a positive relationship with them. Planning time for observations is good practice, and observations can be conducted by you or in collaboration with other professionals supporting the education and care of the student. When observations are made and recorded regularly and consistently, they offer valuable information to inform successful practice.

Making observations:

- offers valuable information about the student's strengths and abilities
- enhances knowledge of suitable supports for the student
- develops understanding of the student's emerging skills
- illuminates the events and student's needs that are driving behaviours, such as stimming or hand flapping
- monitors social interactions with peers
- informs personalised planning
- creates a sound basis for a constructive discussion with the student's family and other professionals.

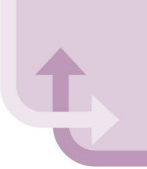


Observing students' formal and informal interactions is a powerful source of information for educators.

When and how can you make and record observations?

Observations are most effective when they build a profile of student interactions in a range of environments, and in formally structured and unstructured activities. You should take advantage of every opportunity to observe the student interacting with peers and familiar adults during a range of planned and unplanned learning activities and events.

Making and recording observations can be a manageable and effective method for collecting information if it is planned thoughtfully. Observation sessions can be informal, targeted and short. Consider their use – there is little point in making a long video recording if you do not have



the time to review it. To make this process easy and accurate, you can use a variety of tools such as:

- digital or print observation guides
- audio/video recording devices
- photos of activities
- students' artefacts
- students' drawings.

Before recording digital images, check your school's policies regarding recording, usage and storage of digital images of students.

What can you draw from your observations?

Educators can use consistent and accurate observation records as evidence for developing student learning and behavioural profiles.

Drawing on your knowledge of student development and behavioural expectations in school, you can develop student learning profiles targeted to your students' needs. Your observations can form a basis for attributing student characteristics to differences requiring further attention from an expert team. In addition, you can draw on these observations in your communication with school leaders and allied health professionals to seek input on suitable additional learning or behavioural supports for your students.

As an educator, you cannot make a diagnosis. You can share your observations with families to help them in seeking further support from other professionals or a diagnostic team.

Good observations are really, really important because there is no point in having a meeting with a parent if you haven't got [any documented] observations and all of a sudden you're having a conversation and the parent might say, 'Well, what are you talking about? Give me an example.'

— Rachel Scheuboeck, Manager, Inclusive Practice, Special Education Resource Unit, Department of Education South Australia

Observation guide

An observation guide is a tool to organise your information and to help when discussing your observations with the student and their family. Your school or system may have their own tools for recording student observations, or you may wish to use the [Observation guide](#) [PDF]. Consult your school leadership regarding policies that determine what information can be shared or distributed. The guide is arranged in topics to help you consider the supports you could put in place for the student. All students are different, and the topics and questions are simply organisers. Complete only those sections you need to guide your discussions.

You can use this guide in your conversation with families to discuss the behaviours that can be prioritised as teaching goals, and which supports might be appropriate for achieving these goals.