

Suggestions for Volunteer Observations and Feedback

Setting Expectations

The expectations that you set for your volunteers can make a big difference for your program. Think of volunteers as unpaid staff. Inform them that you will be conducting observations and giving them additional support so that they can become better tutors. You can also set the expectation that volunteers will continue to obtain additional training. They will follow your lead.

You may have concerns that volunteers will not appreciate these expectations. Volunteers want to make a difference and they want to know if they are “doing it right.” They know that observations, feedback and training will help them to help students.

What to Watch for During the Observation

Focus your observation feedback on a few key items that will help the volunteer the most. You might **choose** from the following:

- Following the stages of a lesson plan
 - I do it: The teacher explains and demonstrates
 - We do it: Students practice new language with extra support from the teacher, classmates, or a worksheet
 - You do it: Students practice new language independently
- Giving directions—watch for demonstrating instead of explaining
- Keeping the lesson focused on a few objectives
 - Introduce only 6 to 10 new words
 - Stay with the intent of the curriculum
- Transitions
 - From one activity to another
 - From group work to pair work or individual work
- Giving students ample opportunities to practice new language
- Focused error correction
- Minimizing teacher talk—keep explanations and examples simple and brief
- Creating a welcoming and engaging classroom environment

Feedback Language

One of the hardest parts of doing observations is giving the actual feedback. Make your feedback specific by referring to the actions that the volunteer did and then discuss the results of those actions. Here are a couple examples:

You had the students read a text about flu shots. This is important information, but the curriculum today was a lesson about job search skills. Tomorrow their tutor will expect the students to have practiced reading job ads and next week the students will take a test that includes questions about job search skills. It is important to teach the curriculum so that students will be prepared for the next lesson and the test.

You didn't do the guessing game because the students had difficult understanding the directions. Helping students to understand directions can be quite challenging. Next time you can demonstrate the directions by playing the game while most of the students watch. Ask a higher level student to help you. You can start doing whatever you want the students to do while they observe you and then you won't have to do so much explaining.

Don't forget to include some positive feedback. Follow the same model of saying a specific action the volunteer did and the results of that action.

Asking Manuel to explain refund to the rest of the class was great because Manuel had the opportunity to practice explaining and the students who were absent yesterday got a quick review of something that was covered in class yesterday.

I can see that you have a great relationship with your students. All of them felt very comfortable asking you questions and it was great to see so many smiles.

Possible Homework Assignments

After you have given feedback to the volunteer, choose an action that will help the volunteer improve his/her tutoring. After a couple weeks check back with the volunteer and see how the homework is going.

Here are some possible homework assignments:

- Write down the explanations that you will use for vocabulary words before you teach class.
- Practice the same language that is on a worksheet in two additional ways that are not described on the worksheet.
- Whenever possible, ask the students to say something instead of saying it for them.
- Follow the stages of a lesson: I Do It, We Do It, and then You Do It.