

Intensive English Institute University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Guidelines for Non-supervisory Classroom Observations *

The Intensive English Institute (IEI) welcomes observers to its classrooms for the purposes of research, instruction, and teacher training. Faculty, students, and sponsors are welcome and encouraged to visit IEI classes. At the same time, we cultivate a classroom environment which is most conducive to English language study, and the presence of too many guests/visitors may be at times distracting for both students and teachers. It is therefore important to regulate the number of visitors to a given class during a specific semester.

We ask that guest observers follow the guidelines outlined below:

Before the Observation

- Visitors should arrange for the observation well in advance of the day they would like to visit the class.
- It is important to do the observation as scheduled if all possible. Visitors who cannot attend the class as planned should notify the teacher as far in advance of the class as possible.
- Visitors should explain to the classroom teacher that his or her name will not be used in any discussions with other people. Visitors should let a visited teacher know that their policy is to keep any direct references to teachers, in either formal or informal settings, anonymous.

In the Classroom

- Visitors should arrive in the class a few minutes ahead of time and stay for the full 50 minutes that the class is in session.
- In the classroom, the visitor should try to be as unobtrusive as possible. If possible, s/he should try to “blend into the woodwork.”
- If a student in the class asks the visitor a direct question (e.g., What are you doing here? Are you a teacher, too?), the visitor should answer as briefly as possible. The visitor should not monopolize classroom time. Because the visitor is not a regular member of the class, visitors should not initiate or pursue conversations unnecessarily.
- The visitor should participate in classroom activities only if this is initially suggested and encouraged by the classroom teacher directly. In this regard, a general rule of thumb is for the visitor to wait for an unsolicited cue from the classroom teacher before participating.
- A visitor who is taking written notes or collecting information in some other way should do this as unobtrusively as possible. The visitor must make sure that the teacher and students are comfortable with any procedures s/he may follow for data collection (e.g., audio or video taping).

- When the class has ended it is a courtesy for visitors to briefly thank the teacher in person (ideally, before leaving the classroom) for the opportunity to observe.

After the Observation

- It is imperative for visitors to keep any impressions they have of a visited teacher's style, effectiveness, or personal demeanor to themselves. These impressions should remain private and confidential.
- At times, discussions and collaborations between a visitor/observer and a classroom teacher are appropriate and useful. In fact, teachers often expect and even request feedback from classroom visitors. Some teachers may be offended if an observer leaves and does not make any effort to follow up the observation. However, long and detailed discussion of the observation should be pursued only if they are initially suggested and encouraged by the classroom teacher.
- If a visitor meets with a classroom teacher after observing, it should be remembered that even well-intentioned feedback to classroom teachers often misfires. For this reason, visitors should monitor carefully and keep in check the natural inclination to offer advice. Unless visitors are observing in the capacity of a professionally trained supervisor, their role is not to assist, evaluate, or judge.

*The section above is adapted by Bouton and Chinitz from John Levis adaptation of John M. Murphy (1992). *Etiquette for the Nonsupervisory Observation of L2 Classrooms.* In *Foreign Language Annals* 25 (3): 215-225.