



## **TEAM Observation Considerations Early Grades (Pre-K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade)**

An early-grades (Pre-K-2<sup>nd</sup> grade) classroom allows an observer the opportunity to gather evidence of instructional practice in a setting where students' work may look or sound different than a classroom with students from higher grade levels. Strong instructional practice leads to improved student outcomes, and early grades classes are no exception.

Effective early learning environments provide a balance between teacher-directed and child-directed learning experiences with significant time spent in learning centers and interacting with high-quality materials and resources.

Early grades classrooms should include:

- A print-rich learning environment that provides opportunities for children to explore their writing and foundational skills, making corrections as needed.
- Materials included in learning centers and around the room should invite higher levels of engagement, problem solving, discovery, and creativity.
- Students are encouraged to take ownership and responsibility for their learning through displayed learning center charts, wall displays, established routines, and accessible independent student work.

Early grades teachers facilitate the development of practical thinking skills and competencies connected to learning, such as the ability to persevere, resolve conflicts, understand and regulate emotions and focus to engage. Vocabulary is intentionally taught by introducing and incorporating new words into meaningful activities (e.g., self and parallel talk, story dictation, and interactive read aloud) and providing opportunities for students to hear and use words in multiple contexts.

Young learners must first experience concepts before they can think abstractly about them. Teachers in early grades provide opportunities for creative thinking where students create, design, imagine, and suppose. Creative thinking is promoted through opportunities to authentically represent ideas and learning (as opposed to worksheets, which limit desired levels of creative thinking). Learning centers provide children significant time to exercise creativity. Opportunities for research-based thinking, where students explore and review a variety of ideas, models, and solutions to problems are designed by the teacher. Research-based thinking in early grades is emerging and supported with access to explore high-quality materials and texts that represent various ideas, models, and solutions to problems. Numerous opportunities are provided for children to role play scenarios or story plots, which help children experience and think about problems from different perspectives. Interactive read-aloud of high-quality text allows children to explore multiple viewpoints. This practice also develops knowledge on topics to ensure students have the background information needed to comprehend various informational and literary texts.

Students in the early grades are developing the ability to reason, rationalize, predict, and think abstractly. The teacher plays an essential role in modeling various ways to solve problems. The teacher provides guidance and assistance with feedback given (e.g., Try turning it another way. Why do you think this is not working? What else could you do?) to help children explore possible solutions. Feedback loops include back-and-forth (serve-and-return) exchanges to encourage children to generate ideas and to persist in problem-solving. The teacher should also provide opportunities to engage in student talk to discuss and challenge ideas using talking structures like partner share and turn and talk strategies.

Evaluators should carefully consider how they align the rigor and appropriateness of questions for younger students to the rubric's expectations. Additionally, evaluators should note that written feedback may include pictures or symbols instead of words in early childhood education. Evidence of higher-order thinking, problem solving, and mastery may look different than it would in classroom settings with older students due to the necessary teacher support provided for early learners. Teachers should have high expectations for students to work with grade-level texts while providing scaffolds to allow students to access grade-level material regardless of their instructional level.

Through the collaborative process of observation, feedback, and support, every teacher can see areas to improve student learning, and every observer can support a rigorous vision of excellent instruction throughout a school. While this document focuses on specific connections in early grades, the approach to using the TEAM rubric remains the same for any content area.

In this document you will find information on:

- [Observer Considerations: Pre-Conference](#)
- [Teacher Considerations: Pre-Conference](#)
- [Observer Considerations: Evidence Collection](#)
- [Observer Considerations: Preparing for the Post-Conference and Using the Performance Level Guide](#)

### Observer Considerations: Pre-Conference

The educator’s lesson plan should serve as the foundation for the pre-conference. Using the planning and environment rubrics to guide pre-conference questions helps focus the conversation on student outcomes and provides evidence for instructional practice. Educators should be encouraged to discuss the components of the plan and how that plan supports successful student outcomes. Observers should consider the pre-conference the first stage of collecting evidence of instructional practice.

Possible Pre-Conference Question on Instructional Practice	Planning or Environment Rubric Connection	Instructional Rubric Connection
How do you plan instruction that addresses the individualized needs of the student while meeting the requirements of state standards? What might I see in this lesson that is designed specifically to support your early grades students?	Planning- Instructional Plans	Standards and Objectives Motivating Students Presenting Instructional Content Lesson Structure and Pacing Activities and Materials Grouping Students Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students
In an early grade classroom, student work is often an oral response. In what ways have you planned for students to demonstrate mastery of the skills in this lesson and how do you capture data on each student? What techniques do you plan to use to actively engage all students in this learning?	Planning- Student Work Planning-Assessment	Motivating Students Presenting Instructional Content Activities and Materials Questioning Academic Feedback Teacher Content Knowledge Thinking Problem Solving
What are some techniques you use to establish, maintain, and reinforce a respectful, encouraging, and supportive class environment?	Environment-Expectations Environment-Managing Student Behavior Environment-Environment Environment-Respectful Culture	Motivating Students Lesson Structure and Pacing Questioning Academic Feedback Grouping Students Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students

### Teacher Considerations: Pre-Conference

During a pre-conference, teachers in early grades should be prepared to share the lesson alignment to content level standards, the reasoning behind the plans for instruction, the location of the lesson within the greater unit, and how the success of the lesson will be measured. Teachers in early grades have an

obligation to become familiar with the TEAM rubric, so they can articulate the connections between their instructional practice and the standards for which they are responsible.

Considerations for Lesson Plans	Rubric Connections
Alignment and Rigor of Content and Standards	Instructional Plans Assessment Standards and Objectives Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students
Instructional Plan	Student Work Lesson Structure and Pacing Questioning Activities and Materials Teacher Content Knowledge Assessment
Instructional Technique	Managing Student Behavior Environment Expectations Motivating Students Presenting Instructional Content Grouping Questioning Academic Feedback Presenting Instructional Content Teacher Knowledge of Students
Differentiation	Teacher Content Knowledge Teacher Knowledge of Students Questioning Grouping Academic Feedback Expectations Respectful Culture
Student Engagement	Student Work Lesson Structure and Pacing Questioning Academic Feedback Teacher Knowledge of Students Thinking Problem Solving

**Observer Considerations: Evidence Collection**

Evidence for performance levels may come from pre-conference conversations, classroom observation, or conversations with the teacher after the observation but prior to the post-conference. In all cases, the observer should seek to understand the teacher’s approach to instruction and, more importantly, the students’ responses to the instructional practices implemented during instruction. Observers should gather evidence on how the teacher is moving students toward mastery of the lesson objective.

Indicator	Possible Evidence
Instructional Plans	Pre-conference notes should provide evidence on how the teacher aligns and sequences student activities to the standards. Notes should reflect how the teacher articulates what students know coming into the lesson and the support planned for learners at different levels in mastery of the skill. Observers should note how the teacher plans small group instruction based on data to differentiate learning. High expectations for each student are evident and the activities, student work, and thinking types included support grade level standards.
Student Work	In addition to evidence gathered in the pre-conference, observers should seek insight into the planned student work, which in early grades classes may be drawing or dictation instead of writing. Capture evidence of how independently and accurately students are engaging with learning centers. Collect evidence of how effectively the teacher provides opportunities for students to share their thinking and problem solving with both the teacher and one another.
Assessment	In addition to evidence gathered in the pre-conference, observers should capture the ways students can demonstrate mastery of a given skill through the student work/assessments. Capture student work samples, which might be best collected via pictures or video. Note how the teacher captures data from assessments to provide information about what students know and can do. Capture evidence of student knowledge and encoding skills through writing tasks, which may be represented as oral tasks, guided practice, or writing in response to text.
Expectations	Collect evidence that the physical environment is child-centered and intentionally organized to reflect developmental domains and academic standards for learning and the individual needs, interests, and cultures of the children. Note how effectively the materials included within each learning center support moving students to mastery of the standards. Seek evidence of a print-rich learning environment that provides opportunities for students to explore their writing and foundational skills throughout the day. Capture evidence on techniques the teacher uses to encourage students to learn from mistakes. Note how effectively the teacher models learning from one’s mistakes. Capture evidence on how effectively the teacher has created learning opportunities where all students can experience success.
Managing Student Behavior	Note if clear guidelines and expectations for student behavior can be found visually in the classroom. Collect evidence of how students are held accountable for their behavior and how well they monitor their behavior

	based on the guidelines set by the teacher, which may be a visible behavior chart with reward and consequences labeled.
Environment	Look for evidence that students know how their space may be used for individual and group work. Note how efficiently students engage with learning centers and in their groups. Capture evidence, possible in picture form, of directions and labels at centers.
Respectful Culture	Capture evidence that student interactions within small and large group learning settings are socially appropriate. Collect evidence of students' respect for the teacher and each other through the type of interactions between members of the classroom.
Standards and Objectives	Seek evidence of specific, measurable, child-friendly goals for each learning activity. During the pre-conference discussion on how the learning center activities are aligned to the standard and logically sequenced to promote development of the students' conceptual understanding of the skill. Collect evidence of mastery in the student work, both oral and written. Evidence may include drawing or dictation and/or writing and should be directly related to a grade level standard goal.
Motivating Students	Seek evidence of student engagement through student opportunities to discuss during peer collaboration, whole group discussions, and opportunities given to ask questions about the content they are learning. Note when the teacher reinforces and rewards students for their effort to complete student work or during discussions.
Presenting Instructional Content	Take note of the visuals used in the lesson to provide students with a deeper understanding of the skill. Evidence can be found in classroom charts and teacher modeling of student work expectations. Note how the teacher models her thinking and provides students with an opportunity to model their thinking. Capture evidence that students know what to do when they go to learning centers, complete their work, or small group activities.
Lesson Structure and Pacing	Collect evidence of a clear beginning, middle and end for the lesson. Note if the teacher provides an opportunity for students to reflect on their learning, which may be in the form of a drawing, oral responses, or writing.
Activities and Materials	Look for evidence that the activities and materials used in the lesson are aligned to the standard for the lesson. Note how effectively students engage with independent activities, partner work, group activity, or learning center as instructed. Note the purposeful opportunities provided for students to turn and talk to one another about their learning and that these opportunities are clearly related to the end goal of the lesson.
Questioning	Capture question and answer sessions between teacher and students, as well as between students, as evidence of the question types that are being used. Note if questions are asked individually as well as in a group setting. Take note of the method for calling on students to answer questions. Capture how well the teacher implements a protocol for calling on a variety of students to check for understanding and promote engagement. Observe how effectively

	the teacher uses data collected during question-and-answer sessions to adjust instruction, clarify information, build on knowledge, and better understand how students are progressing to the lesson's goal. Capture evidence of teacher wait time.
Academic Feedback	Collect evidence of how well the teacher provides students with feedback on their work during small groups, whole group, and through individual conversations. Note the type, frequency, and usefulness of feedback given both orally and/or with a visual that is written on the student work. Seek evidence for how students give feedback to one another. Note how consistently students are encouraged to correct mistakes.
Grouping Students	Capture evidence of purposeful, data driven grouping of students throughout the lesson that maximize the students' understanding of the skill. Note if all students are held accountable to complete the student work in the group. Seek evidence that students know the expectations for the group time whether it is whole group, small group, or individual work.
Teacher Content Knowledge	Note how effectively the teacher employs various instructional strategies to teach the skill in the lesson. Collect evidence of how the teacher and students make connections to past learning and or concepts. Observe how the teacher uses and builds on lessons throughout the unit.
Teacher Knowledge of Students	Look for evidence of the teacher using data to guide student work and group compositions. Note how effectively the teacher provides opportunities for all students to be successful.
Thinking	Capture evidence of how frequently the teacher provides opportunities for students to think during the lesson. Note what types of thinking the teacher is modeling for students and how effectively the teacher is providing them with experiences to apply the various thinking types through conversation, learning centers, and grouping arrangements. Note how well the teacher monitors students' thinking to ensure that they understand what they are learning, are attending to critical details, and are aware of the learning strategies that they are using and why. During learning centers, capture evidence of how effectively the teacher engages with students to monitor their thinking and help them make connections to learning. While reading a text, note how effectively the teacher monitors children's understanding and attention to key details by pausing at key moments and questioning students.
Problem Solving	Collect evidence of what types of problem-solving students are engaged in during activities. Evidence may include the type of questions students are asking, conversations among peers or with the teacher, or visual representations of ideas through pictures.

### Observer Considerations: Preparing for the Post-Conference and Using the Performance Level Guide

After the observation, observers should ask clarifying questions as needed **prior** to the post-conference. These questions might happen immediately after the observation or occur later after reviewing evidence notes. Questions might include:

- How were the small groups created for this lesson and how often do they change?
- How do you communicate expectations for mastery with students of various levels?
- How do you determine mastery of the skill taught in this lesson?
- How do you collect data throughout the lesson on individual student progress?

Observers should **always** analyze student work after every lesson in any classroom. For an early grades class, this analysis might involve reviewing pictures or videos from the lesson. Each standard is observable and measurable and therefore can be assessed. Consider:

- Do the activities in which students were engaged assess the standard being taught?
- To what extent does student work provide evidence of individual mastery of objectives?
- To what extent does the student work require thinking and/or problem solving?
- How does the educator use the data from student work to inform future lessons?
- How does the teacher capture data on the progression of each student?

Observers should use the performance level guide and appropriate general educator rubric to support alignment of evidence (coding) to scores. Each performance level has nuanced differences, described below. This guide helps identify the expertise with which practice is implemented. Note that both consistency and impact are considered when determining performance level.

### Performance Level Guide

<b>1</b>	<b>Significantly Below Expectations:</b> A teacher at this level has <b>limited knowledge</b> of the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric and <b>struggles</b> to implement them. The teacher has <b>little to no impact on student outcomes</b> .
<b>2</b>	<b>Below Expectations:</b> A teacher at this level demonstrates <b>some knowledge</b> of the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric but implements them <b>Inconsistently</b> . The teacher’s <b>impact on student outcomes is below expectations</b> .
<b>3</b>	<b>At Expectations:</b> A teacher at this level <b>understands and implements most</b> of the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric. The teacher’s <b>impact on student outcomes meets all expectations</b> .
<b>4</b>	<b>Above Expectations:</b> A teacher at this level <b>comprehends</b> the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric and implements them <b>skillfully and consistently</b> . The teacher makes a <b>strong impact on student outcomes</b> .
<b>5</b>	<b>Significantly Above Expectations:</b> A teacher at this level <b>exemplifies</b> the instructional skills, knowledge, and responsibilities described in the rubric and implements them <b>adeptly and without fail</b> . The teacher <b>meets ambitious teaching and learning goals and makes a significant Impact on student outcomes</b> . Performance at this level should be considered a <b>model of exemplary teaching</b> .

After evidence gathered throughout the observation process has been coded and scored, the observer will **design the post-conference**. This conference should focus on three things:

- Identified areas of reinforcement and refinement.
- Resources for the teacher to use as they hone their refinement area practice.



- A follow-up plan for the leader to support teacher progress and success.

More detailed support for post-conferences may be found in the [Teacher Evaluation Handbook](#).

With additional questions, please contact [TEAM.Questions@tn.gov](mailto:TEAM.Questions@tn.gov).