



## Direct Observation

### What is a Direct Observation?

Direct Observation assessment is exactly as the name suggested – the assessors observe the students performing the assessment and see if they have the ability to perform it properly. Practical skills particularly clinical related areas often use direct observation to assess students. Group work such as problem based learning may sometimes use direct observation to judge a student's input. Observation assessment is only effective when it follows a systematic plan to help both the assessor and the student focus on what needed to be observed and recorded. An oral assessment is often used as a follow-up assessment to supplement any questions. Sometimes, there is no effective alternative to direct observation.

### Structure of Direct Observation Assessment

The structure of an observation assessment greatly depends on the discipline in which the assessment takes place, it also depends on whether the assessor is observing the entire work or only part of the work. In general, the assessor will observe for 5 -10 minutes, make a field note to help with the feedback and grading. This maybe followed by an interview/oral assessment.

	Declarative	<b>CHARACTERISTICS</b>
Y	Functioning	
	Take Time to Set	
Y	Take Time to Answer	
Y	Take Time to Correct	
Y	Take Time to provide Feedback	
	Suitable for Large Class	
	Can substitute with Computers	
	Passive	
Y	Active	
Y	Process Oriented Method	
Y	Product Oriented Method	

**P = Possibly    Y =Yes**

### Advantages of Direct Observation Assessment

- Observation may sometimes be the only assessment method possible.
- There can be no plagiarism or false reports.
- It is a great way to assess practical skills.

### Disadvantages of Direct Observation Assessment

- Direct observation does not assess the higher-order levels of learning outcomes, and is often not adequate for a full assessment; oral questioning or other supplementary assessments may be required.



- Direct observation assessment requires a lot of time to assess and to prepare thus, it is an expensive way of assessing.
- The presence of the observer can change student's performance as being watched can be intimidating for many students. Furthermore, the dynamics of the observation room may change as the observer/assessor enters. It is often debatable whether the observer/assessor should be visible or hidden. So where, who and how the observation is being assessed are all factors which may affect a good observation assessment.
- There is no anonymity in Direct Observation.
- To ensure high efficiency and reliability, clear grading standards for all parties are essential. However, grading criteria for observation assessment can be trivial to design and develop.
- Immediate feedback is useful, but sometimes that is difficult due to time constraints.
- Practical work is usually ephemeral and dissenting views may later be contested if notes or recordings are not documented clearly.
- It can sometimes be subjective.

### How to design a good Direct Observation Assessment?

1. Ensure students know what the objectives of the observation assessment are.
2. Provide students the time period, location, guidelines, requirements, assessment criteria and if there are items that are not to be included. Students should also be aware of who is going to assess them – tutor, peers and/or self? And if peers or themselves are going to assess, would the weightings be the same as the tutor's assessment?
3. Prepare a structured marking sheet for all assessors.
4. Feedback is very important for a good observation assessment.

### Marking Rubrics

As direct observation is usually assessed on practical type of work, below is a sample rubric for a direct observation assessment in laboratory. As mentioned before, the Marking Rubrics changes depending whether the assessor is observing the entire work or only part of the work.

(From Recipe for Success, accessed 05 July 2008

[http://myt4l.com/index.php?v=pl&page\\_ac=view&type=tools&tool=rubricmaker](http://myt4l.com/index.php?v=pl&page_ac=view&type=tools&tool=rubricmaker))

MARKING RUBRICS	Excellent	Proficient	Average	Poor
<b>Lab Work-Purpose:</b> Defines goal of experiment	Used clear, accurate language to restate question or problem in student's own words. Provided examples of similar experiments.	Used proper vocabulary to state question or problem.	Stated question or problem using incorrect vocabulary. Did not state problem in student's own words.	Did not state question or problem.
<b>Lab Work-Hypothesis:</b> Prediction between	Obvious connection between the problem and predicted	Hypothesis and problem were clearly connected. Hypothesis	No connection between hypothesis and experiment. No	Hypothesis was missing or was unrelated to the



experiment and results	outcome. Provided references showing that hypothesis refutes or defends established knowledge. Variables were identified and classified as dependent and independent.	refuted or defended established knowledge. Variables were identified and classified as dependent and independent.	clear way to prove or disprove hypothesis by performing experiment. Variables were not completely described or were incorrectly classified as dependent or independent.	experiment. Did not mention dependent and independent variables.
<b>Lab Work-Materials and Equipment:</b> List of materials used	Made complete list of materials used. Explained why materials were chosen.	Made complete list of materials used. Showed information about size and units of measurement.	Did not list one or two items used. Did not show details about items used.	List of materials was missing or showed only a few of the materials used.
<b>Lab Work-Methods:</b> Description of process and setup	Setup was documented completely. Method was also documented completely and accurately, making experiment easy to reproduce.	Setup included descriptive text and diagrams were provided if appropriate. Experiment can be reproduced using the steps provided.	Description was general or did not include diagrams. Procedure was missing multiple steps. Information provided is not sufficient to replicate experiment.	Setup was not described or documented. Step-by-step procedure was missing or inadequate.
<b>Lab Work-Data Quality:</b> Accurate measurement and labeling	All data was complete and accurately labeled. Data sampled at appropriate intervals as defined in Methods section of lab report.	All data was complete and accurately labeled. Data was sampled at appropriate intervals.	Data was incomplete. Some data was not labeled using appropriate units of measure. Data sampling intervals inadequate to support hypothesis.	Included little or no relevant data. Data was not labeled using appropriate units of measure. Data sampling intervals were random or inadequate.
<b>Lab Work-Data Analysis:</b> Student analyzed data and identified trends	Identified and described trends and made appropriate conclusions based on the data. Used statistical techniques to identify and disregard flawed data. Showed calculations.	Identified valid trends and made appropriate conclusions based on the data. Documented calculations made during data analysis.	Only identified obvious trends or found trends not fully supported by the data.	Trends were missing or were not supported by the data collected. Obvious trends were overlooked.
<b>Lab Work-Safety:</b> Follows rules and uses good judgment	Followed all safety rules and wrote about safety in lab report.	Followed all safety rules.	Did not follow all safety rules.	Did not follow safety rules and caused a dangerous situation.
<b>Lab Work-Conclusion:</b> Summarizes findings and compares actual results with expected results	Restated problem and hypothesis. Justified design and methods of experiment. Findings were discussed in detail. Conclusions directly address hypothesis. Statements and conclusions were	Problem was restated. Statements and conclusions were based on the data collected. Showed a strong relationship between conclusions and hypothesis.	Problem was restated. Conclusions were simplistic. No clear relationship between conclusions and hypothesis.	Original problem was not restated. Findings were not summarized. Conclusions were not relevant to hypothesis.



	supported by the data.		
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## Web References and Resources

### Direct Observation Assessment

- Recipe for Success, Accessed: 05 July 2008  
<http://myt4l.com>
- IMAGES, Improving Measurement and Geometry in Elementary Schools, Accessed: 05 July 2008  
<http://images.rbs.org/assessment/observation.shtml>
- Practical Observation Techniques, The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan, Accessed: 05 July 2008  
[http://www.practicalprof.ab.ca/observation\\_feedback/practical\\_observation\\_techniques.html](http://www.practicalprof.ab.ca/observation_feedback/practical_observation_techniques.html)
- Atherton, J. S.(2005). Teaching and Learning: Assessment: direct observation, Accessed: 5 July 2008  
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- Direct observation, Eindhoven, University of Technology, Accessed: 5 July 2008  
<http://www.idemployee.id.tue.nl/g.w.m.rauterberg/lecturenotes/UFTdirectobservation.pdf>
- Direct Observations, Toolpack Consulting, Accessed: 05 July 2008  
<http://www.toolpack.com/d/observations.html>

### Tips for Students

- Park University, CETL  
<http://www.park.edu/cetl/quicktips/>

## To Reference these pages

### Copy and paste the text below:

Chan C.(2009) *Assessment: Direct Observation*, Assessment Resources@HKU, University of Hong Kong  
[<http://ar.cetl.hku.hk>]: Available: Accessed: DATE