

Observation

Booklet 1

How to develop good observational skills



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Introduction – Booklet 1

In this booklet you will find:

- sections to read;
- activities to complete.

As you work through the booklet, you should discuss with your teacher or trainer:

- your thoughts about the activities;
- new words and terms for your glossary;
- your self-assessment in the **How did I do?** section.

By completing this booklet, you will learn:

- why you need to observe children;
- how to record objective observations.

What is an observation?

An observation is a true account of an actual event. This should be recorded in a detailed and factual way using a variety of observational methods.

Why do I need to observe?

You need to observe in order to:

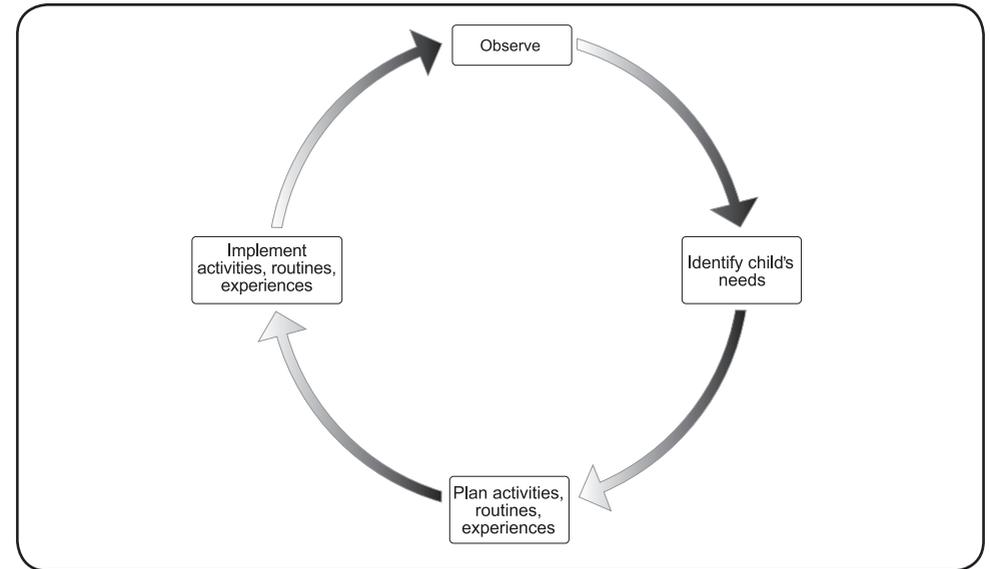
- give a true and accurate account of a stage of development;
- plan appropriate activities and experiences.

Effective observation is a complex skill essential for working in a variety of settings. It involves the **objective** and **ordered** collection of **factual** information. In other words, you should deliberately set out to observe and collect certain kinds of information about a child or children.

You should take care not to include your own opinions. You are not required to make judgements about what you see or hear. You may find it very demanding to observe and describe the facts about things such as the way children behave and the language they use. You will need to develop the skills to do this, so that you can plan more effectively for the needs and development of a particular child or group of children. By observing them, you come to know and understand their individual needs.

You may already be familiar with this model of the planning cycle and its importance in your work as early years practitioners. The model shows you one way to observe effectively.

Each task in the planning cycle affects the next stage. You should keep track of what happens to help you plan for the next stage.



What do I need to observe?

In your work as an early years practitioner, you need to gain the knowledge and skills to observe the following areas of development:

Physical development

- height and weight
- gross motor skills, for example, running
- fine motor skills, for example, fine finger movements
- care of self, for example, dressing and washing

Intellectual development

- writing, drawing, reading
- using imagination
- imitating and exploring
- making connections
- thinking and reasoning

Cultural and religious needs

- understanding social roles
- being aware of cultural differences
- respecting one's own culture and the culture of others

Language development

- making sounds and words
- listening and responding
- labelling and matching
- enjoying stories and songs.

Emotional development

- growing sense of self
- able to show own feelings
- able to consider consequences of own actions on others
- understanding right and wrong

Social development

- sensitive to the needs of others
- able to interact with others
- playing alone or cooperatively
- taking turns and sharing

Booklet 1 identifies different areas of development. You need to break them down into finer aspects of learning and development if your observations are to be effective. For example, the *Foundation Stage Profile Handbook*, DFEE, 2000, QCA, identifies and describes six areas of learning.

Here is an example from the *Foundation Stage Profile Handbook*:

The six areas of learning and development are:

- personal, social and emotional development;
- communication, language and literacy;
- mathematical development;
- knowledge and understanding of the world;
- physical development;
- creative development.

One example of an area of learning is: **personal, social and emotional development.**

This is broken down into the following broad areas:

- Dispositions and attitudes (relationships with others, habits and tendencies, favoured routines).
- Social development.
- Emotional development.

Here are some examples of dispositions and attitudes from personal, social and emotional development:

- Shows an interest in classroom activities through observation and play (the child shows curiosity, by displaying a brief interest in activities, by watching or listening for a short time or by joining in, sometimes with adult support).
- Dresses, undresses and manages own personal hygiene with adult support (with support the child is able to dress and undress for outdoor or physical activities). Displays high levels of involvement in self-chosen activities (through a widening range of activities the child shows high levels of involvement, for example, becoming involved in a chosen activity, which she/he perseveres to complete. If interrupted, she/he would be keen to return to the activity).

(Source: Sure Start – *Foundation Stage Profile Handbook*, DFEE, 2000, QCA)

Here is an example from *Birth to Three Matters*:

Birth to Three Matters identifies the following areas of learning and development:

- Strong child.
- A skilful communicator.
- A competent learner.
- A healthy child.

A strong child

This is then broken down into:

- me, myself and I;
- being acknowledged and affirmed;
- developing self-assurance;
- having a sense of belonging.

Here is an example from *me, myself and I*:

- Growing awareness of self.
- Realising she/he is separate and different from others.
- Recognising personal characteristics and preferences.
- Finding out what she/he can do.

(Source: Sure Start – *Birth to Three Matters*)

You could also use the development areas in

National Curriculum – Key Stage One (for 6–8-year-olds).



What does 'objective' mean?

When two people are observing a child, they will sometimes interpret a child's behaviour in different ways. For example, a child might push her dinner plate away and put her head in her hands.

The two statements in the drawing on the previous page are **subjective**. They are personal opinions of how the observer thinks the child is feeling.

When you are observing children, try to be **objective**. This means that you record the facts and the detail of what you see or hear and not what you think is happening.

This is an example of an objective statement:

The child looked at her dinner plate and pushed it away. She put her right elbow on the table, resting her face on her hand.

You may have further examples from your own experiences.

Now test your understanding: Activity 1a

Complete the following sentences:

An **objective** statement should include _____

A **subjective** statement would include _____

Activity 1b

Read the following statements and then write in the right-hand column whether the statements are subjective or objective.

1	Susan and Binodini were playing on the carpet with a box of building blocks. Claire pointed to a circle they had made and said to Susan, "That looks like a roundabout".	
2	Takis said, "No, I am not allowed to eat meat and I shall not eat this".	
3	Cheung enjoys playing with counters and making shapes.	
4	Emily did not want to come to school.	
5	Susan and Binodini played well together.	
6	Raoul kept making noises and yawning while the other children on the table were writing in their books.	
7	Takis is fussy about food today.	
8	Raoul kept distracting other children from their work.	
9	Chueng collected all the red counters and made them into a round shape. He then collected all the blue counters and made them into a square shape. He then collected all the yellow counters and arranged them in a wavy line.	
10	Emily was sobbing and held her mother's hand tightly.	

Now check your answers.

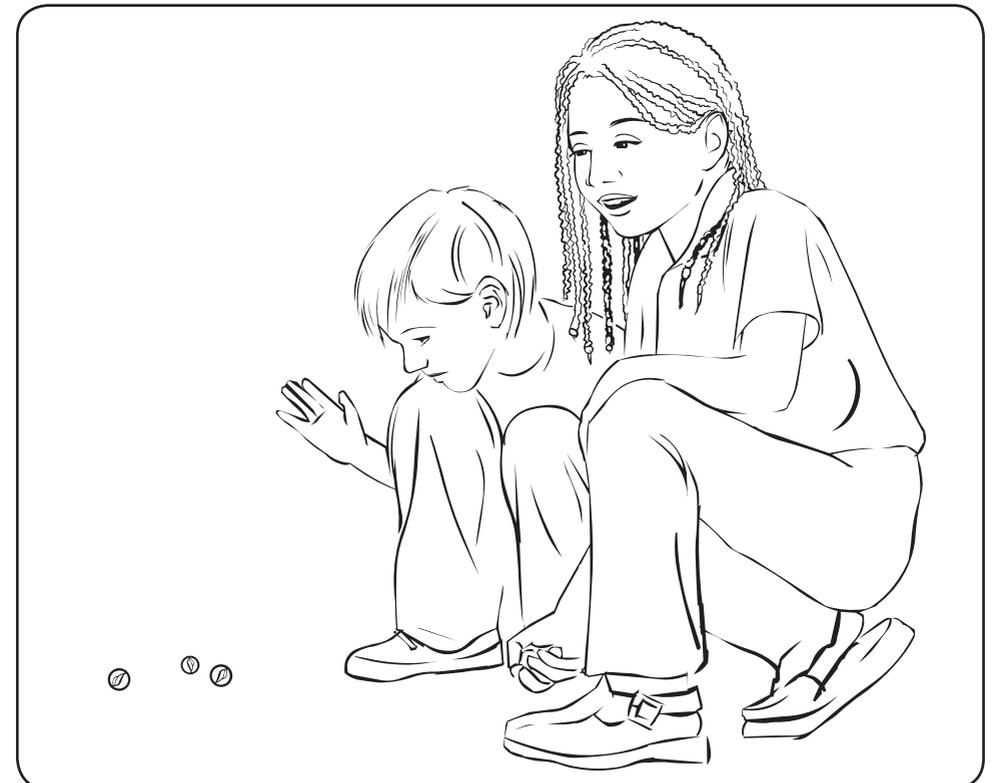
Either

- (a) discuss them with another learner; or
- (b) check them with your teacher or trainer.

Now practise the skills of recording objective observations.

Activity 2

Look at the drawing below and write on a separate piece of paper an objective description of what you see.



Activity 3a

For learners working in groups

Observing a colleague

- Work in groups of three.
- Decide who will complete a jigsaw or build with bricks (the 'learner').
- The other two members of the group should observe the 'learner' doing the activity and carefully describe his/her actions.

What to record

Write down in **detail** what you see

- Start with a description of what is happening.
- State which hand is used.
- Describe what the other hand is used for.
- Note where the learner starts the task.
- Record how she/he continues with the task.
- Include whether she/he talks or makes noises while working.
- Record what is said or what noises are made.
- Describe what is done at the end of the task.

Now, with your colleagues, look at your written observation and make a list of:

- things that were the same in the records;
- things that were different in the records;
- statements that were not objective.

Activity 3b

For learners working alone

- Choose an activity that you, a colleague, or friend do nearly every day. This could be something such as cleaning teeth, getting children into a car, making a bed or using a mobile phone.

What to record

Start with a description of the setting, for example, 'The bathroom at 6.30 a.m'.

Record in **detail** the sequence of events, for example:

- Which hand is used to open the toothpaste?
- In which hand is the toothbrush?
- Is a beaker of water used or is the tap left running?
- How are the teeth cleaned – from top to bottom, or side to side, or both?
- Are there any noises, for example, humming, as the teeth are cleaned?
- What happens at the end of the task?
- Anything else?

Another example might be watching someone using a mobile phone even if you cannot hear what is being said.

You could observe:

- in which hand they hold the phone;
- how rapidly their lips move when speaking;
- for how long they listen;
- for how long they speak;
- how they use their hands;
- whether they pace up and down or move around.

Write your objective observation for activity 3a or b on a separate sheet.

Activity 3c

Recording speech

This activity will give you an opportunity to practise your listening skills.

Select a 5-minute section from a news or documentary programme on the radio or television.

What to record

- Record the time of the broadcast, the broadcast channel and the name of the newsreader or journalist.
- The topic or item of the news or programme.
- Record the key facts reported in that time.
- Record any detail of how the voice is used to emphasise key points.

Activity 4

Video clip activity

Your teacher/trainer will show a video clip of a child observation sequence. This activity will give you an opportunity to practise your observation skills.

Using the skills that you have developed during previous activities, write a detailed account of what you observe.

Activity 5

Reviewing your learning

Complete the following sentences or phrases using your own words. Try to do this from memory.

1. An objective observation will record_____. It will not include the observer's _____ because these are _____.
2. It is important to observe children objectively because:

Glossary (words and terms to remember)

Start to build your own glossary of terms that are new to you or that you have come to understand in a new way:

objective _____

subjective _____

assumption _____

factual _____

disposition _____

attitude _____

transcribed _____

verbatim _____

Activity 6

Learner evaluation

How did I do?

Well done! You have now completed Booklet 1.

Now spend a few minutes thinking about how you did and answer the questions below. Try to give examples when you make a comment. Then discuss your responses with your teacher or trainer.

What have I learnt so far?

What areas do I need to concentrate on?

What help do I need? Where will I get this help?

When will I take action on this?

What skills do I need to practise and develop in the workplace?