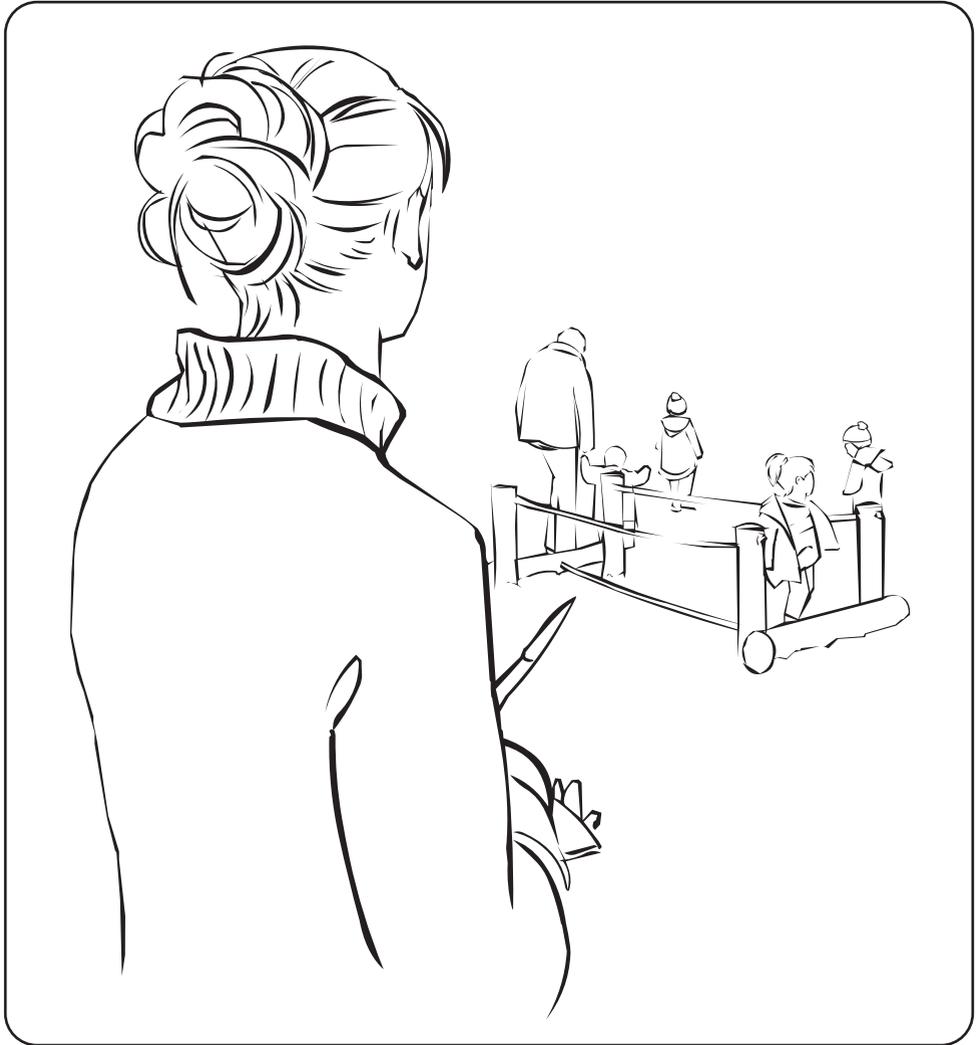


# Observation

## Booklet 3

How to choose methods of observation



This is Booklet 3 in a series of seven booklets.

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## **Introduction – Booklet 3**

### **In this booklet you will find:**

- sections to read;
- suggestions about how to plan and record your observation;
- 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:**

- the various methods that you can use to observe children;
- the advantages and disadvantages of the methods;
- when to use each method.

## Points to consider when observing children

Before you even consider observing, you must remember the rights of children and parents/carers. Permission must always be sought before commencing an observation.

When considering the rights of children and parents/carers:

- remember that every child is unique;
- gain any necessary permission;
- keep parents/carers informed and involved;
- be clear about your aim;
- work only in the best interests of the child;
- choose an appropriate method of observation;
- use the findings to plan future activities;
- aim to gain a holistic overview of the child.

### REMEMBER

**It is essential to maintain confidentiality**

## Ways of observing children

It is important to remember that, when you observe a child, you will not only be using your eyes, but all your senses.

## Activity 1

Think of an observation when you might have to use:

- listening;
- questioning;
- watching.

It is important that you know about the different methods you can use to observe children. As an early years practitioner, you are responsible for many aspects of a child's development, and it is important that you choose the most appropriate method for the observation that you plan to carry out. For example, if you are observing a child's ability to pronounce words clearly, you will need to find ways of listening carefully. This may seem like common sense, but it is not always easy. Experienced observers sometimes struggle to find the right observation method.

You can observe children as they go about their activities or you can set up an activity to discover more about a particular area of development for an individual child or children.

**Here are some methods you can use:**

**Checklist** – The child's development is checked against a list of specific 'milestones' that should be reached at a certain stage.

**Graphs and charts** – These are quick and easy to collate, but they can only provide general information.

**Written narrative: naturalistic or structured recording:**

**Naturalistic** – a factual description of what you see and hear that is occurring naturally.

**Structured** – a factual account that describes what a child is doing in a pre-set activity.

**Focus child** – The focus is on one child for a specific amount of time. You use pre-coded categories to record what you see.

**Time sample** – The recording of information at regular intervals throughout a session.

**Event sample** – The noting of specific types of behaviour or events over a period of time.

**Diary/longitudinal study** – These are separate observations done over a period of weeks or months.

## Activity 2

Selecting appropriate methods for an observation:

What method of observation could be used for each of the following aims? Select the most appropriate method and give the reasons for your choice.

Aim	Method	Reason
1. To observe the fine manipulative skills of a three-year-old child during a cutting and sticking activity.		
2. To observe the concentration span of a small group of children during a free play session in the nursery.		
3. To observe the listening skills of a five-year-old child during a storytelling session in school.		

4. To observe the social development of a four-year-old child during a free play session.		
5. To assess the physical skills of a two-year-old child in relation to the norms.		
6. To observe the behaviour of a three-year-old child throughout the morning in the nursery.		
7. To observe the writing skills of a six-year-old child.		
8. To observe the behaviour of a small group of seven-year-old children in the school playground.		
9. To observe the gross motor skills of a two-year-old child in the park.		
10. To observe a one-year-old child communicating with the carer in the childminder's home.		

## Activity 3

### Self-assessment quiz

Quiz on methods

- Q1. What do you call an observation where you observe for a short time?
- Q2. Name three ways to record observations.

- Q3. What do you call an observation of a child engaged in a pre-set task?
- Q4. What do you call an observation that focuses on one child and uses a code?
- Q5. What do you call an observation done over a long period of time?
- Q6. What do you call an observation that freely describes a child's activities?
- Q7. What does a checklist focus on?
- Q8. What do you call an observation where you record information at regular intervals?
- Q9. What do you call an observation that notes specific incidents?
- Q10. How many different types of methods are listed?

### **The six steps to remember when observing a child or children.**

If you always follow these six steps, your observations will be more successful.

Steps 1–4 are about collecting the information.

#### **Step 1**

You should choose an area of development and decide on an aim. You should always have a clear aim in mind as this will help you with the next step. For example, you may choose to observe a child's social development and observe them at lunchtime to note social interaction.

#### **Step 2**

Select an activity where you have to look and listen carefully. Choose one child to observe.

#### **Step 3**

Use your recording sheet to collect the information that you need about the child. Remember the importance of confidentiality and permission, and how it applies to this activity.

#### **Step 4**

Observe the child for at least 10-15 minutes. Note down what the child does and says, and with whom she or he interacts. Note down if adults are present, their role (if known), how the child interacts with them and how they interact with the child.

Steps 5 and 6 are about writing up /recording your observation.

#### **Step 5**

Read through your notes and highlight:

- activities that you observed and noted and the area of development to which they relate;
- items of speech that you have recorded that are significant and illustrate an area of development.

You may find that you have collected information about an aspect of development that you had not aimed to observe. Highlight this in a different colour.

#### **Step 6**

Write up your notes in accordance with the following:

- always write in the present tense;
- describe objectively exactly what the child was doing;
- describe interaction with any other child or an adult;
- describe body language in factual terms;
- do not interpret the body language;
- clearly describe what actually happened in the order that you saw it;
- take care with spelling and punctuation;
- review what you have written and revise it if you are unhappy with any aspect of the record.

Now is a good time for you to develop and practise the six steps that have to be followed when you do a real-life observation.

## Activity 4

As you work through this activity, you will need to refer to the six steps on the previous pages.

### (a) For learners who can make use of the video (child observation sequences) that accompanies these booklets

Choose one of the sections of the video. Watch the video and make notes on what you see the child(ren) doing. You may have to develop a shorthand, using symbols and abbreviations, rather like texting language, to help you write quickly. This will be your rapid writing code. It should be written up in good English when you write your observation record.

### (b) For learners who are unable to use the video

Find an opportunity to make an observation. Ensure that you get permission to do this from your workplace supervisor. You may have to develop a shorthand, using symbols and abbreviations, rather like texting language, to help you write quickly. This will be your rapid writing code. It should be written up in good English when you write your observation record.

- Observe the child for a maximum of 10 minutes.
- Make yourself as unobtrusive as possible.
- Do not make eye contact.
- Look as if you are concentrating on what you are writing and not on the child.

#### You should:

- be objective;
- write in the present tense;
- write about things in the order that you see them.

#### Write down:

- what the child is doing;
- how the child is doing it;
- who the child is with;
- what the child is saying.

#### Checklist for observing

1. Check you have the necessary permission from your supervisor.
2. Plan carefully, thinking about what you want to gain from this observation – have a clear aim.
3. Choose an appropriate method of observation.
4. Have a pad with a firm cover for writing on.
5. Have a good supply of pens or pencils.
6. Have a watch to monitor the time, recording the start and end times.
7. Make yourself as unobtrusive as possible – sit or stand at a distance.
8. Do not make eye contact with the child you are observing.
9. Look as if you are concentrating on your writing and not on the child.
10. Record events in a logical order, using your 'shorthand'.
11. Write up the observation at the earliest opportunity while events are clearly in your mind.
12. Remember to identify areas of development, devising your own colour code and provide a key.
13. Link observation to appropriate theorists.
14. Date and sign before handing in by the set date.

## Activity 5

### Glossary (words and terms to remember)

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

closed data      pre-coded checklist      Hawthorne effect

## Activity 6

### Learner evaluation

#### How did I do?

**Well done! You have now completed Booklet 3.**

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?