

Texas Classroom Teachers Association



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TCTA's T-TESS Video Tools

The Observation Cycle: Pre-Conference; Observation; Post-Conference

PART 2: Pre-Conference

Notes

The links in this background information take the reader to the state's T-TESS website: Teach for Texas, www.teachfortexas.org. Teach for Texas resources include training manuals, guidebooks, rubrics, videos, templates, documents, subject matter modules, and other resources that explain the components of the T-TESS process.

This background material does not constitute legal advice or create an attorney-client relationship. TCTA provides this for information purposes only. TCTA members with questions about this information may call the TCTA Legal Department to speak with a staff attorney.

For more on T-TESS, go to www.tcta.org/t-tess

Expanded Transcript

I'm Dohn Larson, Director of Legal Services for Texas Classroom Teachers Association.

Welcome to this TCTA T-TESS video tool.

Over the next few days, the TCTA Legal Department will take a multi-part look at the observation cycle: pre-conference, observation, post-conference. Today, we start with the anatomy of the pre-conference.

When

The Commissioner's rules require pre-conferences prior to scheduled appraisals starting in the second year of T-TESS. Many districts that implement T-TESS with fidelity may have pre-conferences this year. At TEA's T-TESS website: www.teachfortexas.org, the state recommends that a preconference take place two-three days before an observation. Again, according to the rules, pre-conferences should take place before scheduled observation starting in the second year of T-TESS appraisal. 19 TAC § 150.1003(b)(3).

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter150/ch150aa.html>

Some districts may not require pre-conferences, probably to help appraisers save the time that it takes to prepare for and conduct a 15-20 minute preconference. Pre-conferences may take some time, but districts should not overlook their value.

Why

An effective T-TESS preconference sets the stage for observation. According to the “Appraiser Training Guide” used in appraiser training, during a pre-conference appraisers and teachers mutually discuss relationships among planning, instruction, learning environment and student outcomes. TEA’s October 2016 “T-TESS TIPS” suggests that “the ultimate goal is to better understand how a teacher plans, not just what a single lesson plan entails.”

https://gallery.mailchimp.com/ed964fedaf6bdf598df09cca6/files/T_TESS_Tips_October_2016.pdf?mc_cid=8ede0fe90b&mc_eid=6f800c0dea.

The “Implementation Guidebook,” https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Guides/T-TESS_Implementation_Guidebook.pdf, describes a teacher’s input during a pre-conference:

Teachers may find it helpful to orient the observer to his or her classroom, students, routines, expectations, and plans for the lesson. Topics that might be addressed include unique circumstances, classrooms content pacing, student goals and expectations, or even challenges students may be experiencing with the current content standards.

Teachers can also point out anticipated student behavior challenges.

The Process “How”

The pre-conference features collaboration between an appraiser and teacher with an appraiser guiding the conference through questions and then listening as the teacher explains the lesson. An appraiser may also talk about the goal setting. Appraisers who have taken Advancing Educational Leadership (AEL) and/or the certification training, have watched videos of pre-conferences. Teachers can see the same or similar videos at www.teachfortexas.org.

https://teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Articulate/Teachers_Observation_Cycle/Pre-conference/TTESS_Pre-Conference_Module/presentation.html.

The Teach for Texas module “Appraiser Support with Pre-Conferences,” segment 5, https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Articulate/Teachers_Observation_Cycle/Pre-conference/Pre-conference_Module/presentation.html, describes the appraiser’s role.

The pre-conference leader/appraiser is responsible for setting the tone and leading the conference through probes and questions which elicit teacher thinking to refine and clarify the planning process prior to the lesson.

In its pre-conference module for appraisers, “Pre-Conferences,” segment 12, https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Articulate/Teachers_Observation_Cycle/Pre-conference/Pre-Conference_And_TTESS/presentation.html, Teach for Texas suggests:

The conference should allow for the teacher to articulate how instruction and the learning environment will be addressed.

There is a genuine intent [on the appraiser’s part] to listen, paraphrase, and question in a manner that validates and supports the teacher.

Teach for Texas lists desired appraiser attributes, in segment 13, that produce effective pre-conferences. The list includes: trust, rapport, honesty, professionalism, honoring the time, teacher talk, and intent to support and grow teachers.

Preparing for a Pre-Conference

If an appraiser implements T-TESS with fidelity, a teacher can prepare for the pre-conference by tracking appraiser training.

The training suggests that before meeting with a teacher to discuss an upcoming lesson, an appraiser may review a teacher's goal setting plan, prior observations, and other data. Teachers can review the same information.

Appraisers have a number of online sources to help them prepare for pre-conferences. Teachers have access to the same sources. We have pointed out many of them previously.

Now let's turn our focus to one aspect of the state's training, specifically, the sample questions available from Teach for Texas that appraisers can ask during conferences. They are worth checking out.

First, the questions track the rubric and T-TESS expectations; they give teachers another way of understanding how the state (and appraisers) perceive T-TESS as an instructional and growth tool. Second, the state trained appraisers to use open-ended questions to enable a collaborative, growth-oriented conversation during a pre-conference; i.e., to ask questions that promote reflection on instructional practices that serve the T-TESS goal of growth for both teachers and appraisers. Finally, for those that find such meetings problematic, it may help to have an idea about the kinds of questions an appraiser might ask.

A document entitled "Sample T-TESS Pre-Observation Conference Protocol" appears at segment 20 of the Teach for Texas pre-conference module "Clinical Supervision."

https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Articulate/Teachers_Observation_Cycle/Pre-conference/TTESS_Pre-Conference_Module/presentation.html. An appraiser familiar with this document may ask questions such as:

1. What objectives will be addressed in the lesson?
2. What do you expect the students to know and be able to do after the lesson?
3. Where is this lesson in the context of your unit plan?
4. What are the prerequisite skills that the students have to know in order to be successful in this lesson?
5. Briefly describe the varied learning needs of students in this class, including those with disabilities and English Language Learners, and how you plan and prepare to meet their needs.
6. How will you differentiate your instruction in order to address a variety of learning styles?
7. Are there any particular grouping structures in place? If so, how will you hold students accountable for group work?
8. How will you assess whether or not students met the objectives for the lesson?

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9. Is there anything in particular you want me to be observing with regard to your areas of reinforcement and refinement?
10. What are your plans for lesson closure and reflection?
11. Are there any other special circumstances that I should be aware of before the announced observation?
12. Is there anything else you would like to discuss before the observation?

Many other documents and modules include questions appraisers might ask that relate directly to T-TESS dimensions. Teachers can find them at Teach for Texas. Three examples follow.

The document “T-TESS Appraiser Sample Conferencing Questions” has 36 questions for Domain I and questions covering all four domains.

https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Evaluation_Process/T-TESS_Appraiser_Sample_Conferencing_Questions.pdf.

The “Appraiser Training Handbook,” https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Guides/T-TESS_Appraiser_Handbook.pdf, has questions throughout. For example, page 27 identifies questions addressed to Dimension 1.1, Standards and Alignment:

- How do you decide on the standards/objectives you will teach?
- How do you decide on the method you will use to communicate the standards/objectives to students?
- Why is it important to display the standard/objective for a lesson?
- How do you design activities, materials and assessments that are logically sequenced?
- How do your activities, materials and assessments integrate and reinforce concepts from other disciplines?
- Why is it important to reference that display throughout the lesson?
- How do you communicate your expectations to the students?
- How do you know that your lesson goals are measurable?
- How will you obtain evidence that most students have demonstrated mastery of the objective?

And then there’s the “Teacher Handbook,” that explains the rubric, focusing on the aspirational goals in Accomplished https://www.teachfortexas.org/Resource_Files/Guides/T-TESS_Teacher_Handbook.pdf. The following questions appear at page 13 and relate lesson alignment and teaching practices.

1. How are the standards studied and understood both vertically and horizontally?
2. Why is aligning the lesson objectives to the standards important?
3. Which standards seem the most difficult for students to master? Why do you think students are having difficulty mastering those in particular?
4. Which sub-objectives need to be taught for students to master specific standards?
5. What was the connection between the students’ mastery of the learning objective and the lesson plan?
6. How do lesson structure and pacing contribute to effective teaching and learning?
7. How did you choose the activities, materials, and assessments included in this lesson plan?

8. How did you accommodate students' individual interests and needs?
9. How are technology standards addressed and included in lesson design and delivery to maximize learning?

In the "Teacher Handbook" questions that relate to Dimension 1.2 include:

1. Which instructional strategies will best address the student data needs and standards being taught?
2. How will we collect data and feedback to assess how the strategies are implemented and the impact the strategies are having on student performance?
3. What specific data do we have or need to collect that will inform us about the impact?
4. When strategies are working, why is this true? When they are not working, why not?
5. Which strategies are yielding the highest results? Why?

The Short Version

If a teacher has little time to prepare for a pre-conference, the Teach for Texas document "Sample T-TESS Pre-Observation Conference Protocol" summarizes a pre-conference.

During the pre-conference, the teacher being observed engages in a coaching conversation with the observer. As part of this conversation, the observer asks questions about the lesson plan, grouping structures, classroom configuration, specific students, etc. The teacher provides background information, including the makeup of the students in the class; the context of this lesson in the larger unit plan; assessment information; extenuating circumstances; and evidence of planning with the rubrics. In the pre-conference meeting, teachers are provided with specific support for improvement when possible.

In other words, a teacher can prepare for a pre-conference by being familiar with the T-TESS rubric and demonstrate and explain the teacher's knowledge of how the planned lesson fits into the curriculum, the procedural and academic structure of the lesson, and how the teacher will address the needs of diverse students during instruction and in groups.