

3-12 ELA OBSERVATION COACHING TOOL



ELA Observation Coaching Tools

This is one of three observation coaching tools to support K-12 literacy instruction:

K-2 Foundational Skills	K-2 ELA (Knowledge)	3-12 ELA
Can be used to observe instruction specific to foundational skills, including instruction on print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency. Though the tool is labeled for K-2, it may also be used to foundational skills blocks in later elementary grades.	Can be used to observe ELA instruction in grades K-2 that is <i>not</i> specific to foundational skills. Often, this is referred to as the “knowledge block”, where students read, talk about, and write about grade-appropriate texts that build knowledge.	Can be used to observe any ELA instruction in grades 3-12 where students read, talk about, and write about grade-appropriate texts that build knowledge.

About the Tool

The KSDE 3-12 ELA Observation Coaching Tool illustrates the most important elements of quality ELA instruction as articulated in the [Vision for Quality Instruction in 3-12 ELA](#). It provides a common language to articulate what quality ELA instruction looks like in practice for each focus area and is made up of:

- **Focus Areas:** Core components, or elements, of quality instruction as defined by the vision
- **Indicators:** Brief descriptions of observable teacher actions that are most significant for the focus area (indicators are not exhaustive)
- **Look-Fors:** Student and teacher actions that can provide evidence for the indicator

This tool can be used in a variety of ways to support coaching, peer observations, and professional learning.

Please note that it is non-evaluative and should not be used for formal teacher evaluation. For recommended uses, refer to the Observation Coaching Tools Guidance document.

Best Practices

Observations should be no shorter than 10 minutes, though a minimum of **15-20 minutes** is recommended. Note that you may not observe evidence for all indicators in a single observation. Consider observing at different parts of the lesson to gather information across indicators. Many look-fors describe what students are doing or thinking; these should only be marked when there is evidence that a clear majority of students (over 70%) are participating in the identified action.

Use the note-taking templates to make note of the lesson’s topic and objectives, target standard(s), number of students and curricular materials being used (if any). Take [low-inference notes](#) to reduce the influence of assumptions, opinions, and judgment on your ratings.

Additional Learning

For additional learning on content-specific terms and concepts embedded in the observation coaching tool, utilize the [ELA Standards Alignment Toolkit](#). For more information, contact Mary Lonker, English Language Arts Program Manager, at mary.lonker@ksde.gov.

Kansas leads the world in the success of each student.

Focus 1: Foundational Skills

- 1A. The teacher employs a structured literacy approach to instruction, explicitly modeling new skills and sequencing the lesson to systematically progress in difficulty.
- 1B. The teacher provides individualized support and interventions to readers struggling with decoding and fluency.

Focus 2: Complex Texts

- 2A. The teacher anchors the lesson on text(s) that are at or above grade-level, based on both qualitative and quantitative measures of text complexity.
- 2B. The teacher poses appropriately scaffolded questions and tasks that attend to the text's specific qualitative features, such as vocabulary, structure, and key words or phrases.
- 2C. The teacher determines and scaffolds the mode of student engagement with the text—such as read aloud, partner reading, or independent reading—based on the complexity of the text.

Focus 3: Knowledge-Building

- 3A. The teacher pairs texts or uses multiple sources to support comprehension and expand knowledge.
- 3B. The teacher builds students' knowledge through strategic vocabulary instruction on both domain-specific and Tiers 1-2 words or phrases that are integral to understanding the text.

Focus 4: Close Reading

- 4A. The teacher encourages students to engage in multiple, purposeful readings of the text—beginning with a baseline understanding and progressing to key aspects such as vocabulary, structure, or complex ideas—to deepen comprehension and build insight.
- 4B. The teacher asks carefully sequenced, text-dependent, and text-specific questions that focus on the text's meaning, guiding students to analyze, interpret, and deepen their comprehension of key ideas.
- 4C. The teacher expects students to use relevant details from the text to demonstrate understanding and/or support their ideas.

Focus 5: Writing & Discourse

- 5A. The teacher provides multiple opportunities for students to talk about what they are reading.
- 5B. The teacher provides multiple opportunities for students to write about what they are reading.

LESSON CONTEXT			
Teacher:	Date/Time:	Grade/Subj:	# of Students:
Materials: ☐ Teacher-Created ☐ Adopted (name below)	Learning Target:	Standard(s) & Text(s):	

Focus 1: FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS	
Indicator	Look Fors
1A. The teacher employs a structured literacy approach to instruction, explicitly modeling new skills and sequencing the lesson to systematically progress in difficulty.	☐ <i>The teacher demonstrates the new skill with think-alouds and visual supports before student practice.</i> ☐ <i>Students replicate thinking to engage with complex thinking.</i> ☐ <i>Activities are sequenced to progress in complexity.</i>
1B. Differentiated supports are used systematically in classroom instruction for grade-level content.	☐ <i>All learners are expected to engage with grade-level material with appropriate support.</i> ☐ <i>Visuals, sentence starters, and/or audio tools are available and actively used to access grade-level text.</i> ☐ <i>Small-group or one-on-one support is provided in response to data.</i> ☐ <i>The teacher checks for understanding frequently and adapts instruction or support immediately.</i> ☐ <i>Scaffolds are applied strategically, reduced as proficiency increases, and removed according to a clear plan for independence.</i>
Direct Observation Notes	

Focus 2: COMPLEX TEXTS	
Indicator	Look Fors
2A. Lessons are anchored with text that is at or above grade level.	☐ <i>The teacher anchors the lesson on text(s) that are at or above grade-level, based on both qualitative and quantitative measures of text complexity.</i> ☐ <i>Important portions of the text are reread to encourage deeper understanding and analysis.</i>
2B. Appropriate scaffolds are incorporated into the lesson that enable students to navigate the text's specific qualitative features.	☐ <i>Scaffolds (visuals, sentence starters, audio supports) are intentionally integrated to address challenging vocabulary and text structure.</i> ☐ <i>Learners annotate key ideas and evidence to track understanding and support deeper thinking as they work through complex concepts in the text.</i> ☐ <i>Supports highlight and reinforce key words or phrases critical for comprehension.</i> ☐ <i>Scaffolds are aligned to the text's qualitative features, enabling access without oversimplifying content.</i> ☐ <i>The teacher explains the purpose of close reading strategies and models how to use them effectively.</i>
2C. Modes of engagement with the text—such as read aloud, partner reading, or independent reading—are selected and supported to match the complexity of the text.	☐ <i>Students participate in the selected reading mode and make intentional choices about how to navigate complex text, such as pausing to clarify vocabulary, asking questions, or using context clues to support understanding.</i>
Direct Observation Notes	

Focus 3: KNOWLEDGE-BUILDING	
Indicator	Look Fors
3A. Paired texts or multiple sources are used to support comprehension and expand knowledge.	☐ <i>Students read various texts or paired text(s) to increase background knowledge and comprehension.</i> ☐ <i>Students make comparisons between texts to find important key points and details.</i> ☐ <i>Students make text based connections.</i>
3B. The teacher builds students' knowledge through strategic vocabulary instruction on both domain-specific and Tiers 1-3 words or phrases that are integral to understanding the text.	☐ <i>The teacher gives explicit instruction on key words, phrases, or context needed for comprehension.</i> ☐ <i>Students use strategies to clarify Tier 2 or Tier 3 vocabulary, such as:</i> ☐ <i>Morphology (prefixes, suffixes, roots)</i> ☐ <i>Context Clues (surrounding text, examples)</i> ☐ <i>The teacher uses explicit strategies to ensure students understand figurative language and its meaning.</i>
Direct Observation Notes	

Focus 4: CLOSE READING

Indicator	Look Fors
4A. The teacher leads students in multiple, purposeful readings of the text—beginning with a baseline understanding and progressing to key aspects such as vocabulary, structure, or complex ideas—to deepen comprehension and build insight.	☐ <i>Students' understanding grows with each reading and discussion.</i> ☐ <i>Students are given a clear purpose for re-reading text, such as:</i> ☐ <i>Structure</i> ☐ <i>Vocabulary</i> ☐ <i>Key Ideas, details, and/or evidence</i>
4B. The teacher asks carefully sequenced, text-dependent, and text-specific questions that focus on the text's meaning, guiding students to analyze, interpret, and deepen their comprehension of key ideas.	☐ <i>The teacher directs time and attention to rereading the most critical parts of the text multiple times to deepen understanding.</i> ☐ <i>The teacher strategically sequences questioning and scaffolds questions to a deeper depth of knowledge to build students' understanding of the text.</i> ☐ <i>Students directly refer to the text to identify explicit or implicit details that demonstrate comprehension.</i> ☐ <i>Students apply close reading techniques—such as annotating, questioning, and analyzing—to identify strong, relevant ideas and details.</i>
4C. The teacher expects students to use relevant details from the text to demonstrate understanding and/or support their ideas.	☐ <i>Students provide clear, well-developed ideas supported by text evidence, using the approaches and level of detail indicated by their grade-level standards.</i> ☐ <i>Students provide relevant and key details from the text as evidence of their understanding.</i>

Direct Observation Notes

Focus 5: WRITING AND DISCOURSE	
Indicator	Look Fors
5A. The teacher designs various and engaging activities to give students multiple opportunities to discuss and ask questions about each other's thinking.	☐ Students are given multiple opportunities to discuss and ask questions about each other's thinking to improve their understanding about the text. ☐ Strategic opportunities are given for equal discourse in a classroom. ☐ Students use evidence in their conversations.
5B. The teacher provides multiple opportunities for students to write about what they are reading.	☐ Students have varied opportunities to write formally and informally about a text. ☐ Students write daily using or referencing a text based document.
Direct Observation Notes	