FEEDBACK FAST-TRACK FORMULA:

HOW TO WRITE EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK TO TEACHERS IN HALF THE TIME

CONDUCTING WALKTHROUGHS

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Conducting walkthroughs is a great way to collect baseline data, coach teachers on their progress, and assess how teachers are progressing towards the goals.

The following document provides you with step-by-step instructions for how to conduct a walkthrough either alone or with a team.

Conducting Walkthroughs

A walkthrough is a structured process for gathering data. It provides a specific snapshot of classroom instruction. Walkthroughs are kept separate from teacher evaluations.

GUIDELINES FOR ADMINISTRATIVE WALKABOUTS

The purpose of the walkabouts is to improve communication about teaching and learning. In walkabouts, administrators gather information about classroom instruction, across the school and within specific classrooms, and provide specific non-evaluative feedback to teachers. To be effective, the walkabouts need to be conducted on a regular schedule — either daily or at least three times a week — and the administrator should visit and provide feedback to each teacher at least once a week. (NOTE: In schools in which assistant principals have responsibility for supervising teachers, they should conduct weekly walkabouts so that all teachers are visited weekly).

- Administrators notify teachers about the focus of the walkabout in advance. The focus can extend over a week, month, or year, and can be the same schoolwide or vary for grade levels or departments.
- Administrators visit classrooms for about 5 minutes to gather evidence of what students are learning by speaking with a few students and by examining student work, the room environment, and instruction, before moving on to the next classroom.
- Administrators provide feedback to each teacher. Feedback should include *strengths* ("I was impressed by…"), *questions* ("I wonder about …"), and, when appropriate, *next steps* ("Can I bring some teachers to see how you …" or "I would like to talk with you about …"). Feedback, while always necessary, can be delivered in different ways —notes left in classrooms or mailboxes, emails, or one legged interviews (see description of one legged interviews).

Purpose

- Improve communication about teaching and learning
- Gathering baseline information for the planning process
- Monitoring progress towards implementation of an action plan
- Focusing and celebrating successes in a specific area
- High-lighting areas that will need further improvement
- Self-assessment by individuals or groups

Types

Administrative Walkthroughs: Short classroom visits conducted by a single administrator designed to gather a quick snapshot of individual classroom practice and offer specific, non-evaluative feedback as well as to develop a broader picture of classroom practice over time.

Collegial Walkthroughs: Short classroom visits conducted by a team of teachers to gather a data around a focus question.

Stakeholder Walkthroughs: Short classroom visits conducted by a team of stakeholders (i.e. school administration, staff, central office or district personnel, parents, partner organizations, and students) to gather information related to specific school progress goals.

PROCESS FOR LEADERSHIP WALKTHROUGHS

I. Before the Walkthrough

The key to making walkthroughs work is to first make teachers comfortable with the idea that someone will be visiting their classrooms. Teachers will be skeptical at first. Ease their discomfort by making the process as transparent as possible.

1. Announce ahead of time that you will be visiting classrooms. Share with teachers that your visits will not be tied with the formal observation process.
2. Develop an area of focus ahead of time. Will you look for classroom management techniques, levels of rigor, questioning strategies, evidence of effective planning, etc.? Because your visit will be brief, select one or two discrete teaching skills tied to your school's target or goals for the year and only observe for these during your visit.
3. Decide what group you will focus on. Will you look at a particular department, grade level, team of teachers, or will you look for trends across the school?
4. Decide how you will collect this data, use the data you collect and how you will communicate it to the faculty.
5. Share your focus with teachers and the data collection tool you will be using. Explain how you will use the data you collect. Answer any questions they may have.
6. Decide which teachers you will be visiting. At the beginning, you may want to warn teachers ahead of time. After teachers are used to seeing you in the classroom, you can just stop by unannounced.
7. Make sure that you have copies of your data collection tool for each classroom you visit.
8. Decide how you will follow up with teachers after your walkthrough. Share this information with teachers as well.

II. During the Walkthrough

1. Classroom visits should last 5-7 minutes each.
2. During the visit, record on the capture sheet any data you notice that relates to the focus question. Pay attention to three areas as it relates to the focus question:
    - room environment
    - student behavior
    - teacher behavior
3. If it will not cause a disruption, talk to some of the students. Ask them what they are doing and why. Look to see that students understand what is being asked of them and how the activity relates to the posted objective of the class.
4. Record your observations on the capture sheet.

III. After the Walkthrough

1. Review your notes and look for trends both for the individual teacher and for the department, grade level, team, or school-wide. What implications does the data have for your own leadership and for the progress the teachers are making towards individual and school goals?
2. Determine how you will act on the data you have collected. Will you only follow up with teachers individually or will you share the general trends you have noticed with a larger group of teachers, your supervisor, or other specialists in the building?
3. Make sure that each teacher receives some feedback from your visit. Most walkthrough feedback should be brief and non-evaluative. Its purpose is to share data and set the stage for one of the strategic conversations. It could be in the form of a brief email or note or you can follow up verbally in a quick casual conversation later that day but do follow up shortly after your visit.
4. If a teacher requires more follow-up, schedule a time within three days to follow up with the teacher and develop a strategic conversation plan.
5. Schedule your next walkthrough.

More Guidelines

- Walkthroughs should be frequent in order for them to be effective. Plan to visit at least three classrooms per walkthrough and conduct at least one walkthrough per week (two to three if you are an administrator).
- Walkthroughs are designed to be short. Do not stay in the classroom longer than seven minutes. Otherwise you have moved into an informal observation.
- Walkthroughs work best when they have a specific focus. Although you can use walkthroughs more generally and simply visit classrooms to gather overall impressions, they are most helpful when there is a specific teaching behavior or set of behaviors you are observing.

PROCESS FOR COLLEGIAL AND STAKEHOLDER WALKTHROUGHS

Walkthroughs have three parts:

1. Pre-walkthrough Meeting (15-30 mins): All walkthrough participants convene to discuss the purpose of the walkthrough, the focus question, and the walkthrough process.
2. Classroom Visits (5 to7minute): Short visits to multiple classrooms to gather evidence on student learning related to the purpose.
3. Debriefing Session (45 mins to 1 hour): All walkthrough participants reconvene to share and examine data, reach agreement on the implications of the data, and plan next steps.

Preparing for the Walkthrough

The key to making walkthroughs work is to first make teachers comfortable with the idea that someone will be visiting their classrooms.

Prior to the scheduled walkthrough (two to five days in advance), the walkthrough team develops a focus question that clearly frames what observers should notice and shares the focus question with the faculty. It is also helpful to share with the faculty the capture sheets team members will be using during the walkthrough in order to make the process transparent and to make the teachers being observed as comfortable as possible.

Because classroom sizes vary and in order to limit the disruption to the classroom, walkthrough teams should be comprised of no more than five persons. Teams can be comprised of teachers from the same grade level, the same subject area, or from multiple grade levels and subject areas depending on the focus question and the purpose of the walkthrough.

The Pre-walkthrough Meeting

Prior to conducting the walkthrough, all walkthrough observers should convene to discuss the focus question and review the walkthrough procedures. This discussion should not last longer than 15 minutes and is designed to ensure that everyone understands the focus question, the purpose of the walkthrough, and the code of conduct rather than to engage in philosophical conversations about instruction. Once everyone is aware of the procedures, hand out clipboards with team schedules and walkthrough templates, establish a time to reconvene, and allow teams a few minutes to organize. Then dismiss teams to conduct their classroom visits.

Classroom Visits

Each classroom visit should last between five and seven minutes. During the visit, pay attention to three areas as it relates to the focus question:

- room environment
- student behavior
- teacher behavior

Observers may ask questions of the students, provided that the students are working in such a way that the question is not a distraction.
Following each classroom visit, the observation team should spend between three and five minutes outside the classroom finishing their notes and briefly discussing what they have seen and heard as it relates to the focus question. This debrief is non-judgmental. It is intended to serve as a shared reflection of what the team has just experienced in the classroom.

Debriefing Meeting

Once all the walkthrough teams have completed their classroom visits, there are several options available for debriefing the data they have collected.

One option is to gather the teams together in the original room to discuss their findings. Begin the discussion by reviewing the ground rules and group norms. Then ask teams to share the data they collected and discuss. Allow at least 30 minutes for this discussion. After the discussion, determine what implications the data has for team members in terms of their own instructional practice, school goals, and professional development. Use these implications to determine next steps and then decide how the data will be shared with the rest of the faculty.

Another option is to conduct a “fish bowl” with the entire faculty where the observers sit in a circle and discuss what they have just seen while the entire faculty observes. During this protocol, observers share the evidence found during their classroom visits but keep individual teachers and subject areas anonymous to ensure integrity of the process and build trust among the participants. After a brief discussion among the observers, faculty members are invited to ask and respond to clarifying questions regarding the evidence. Next, the walkthrough team offers probing questions (questions designed to push the thinking in a specific direction). These questions are designed for deeper reflection and not for immediate response or defense. After listening to the feedback and considering the evidence, the principal and faculty discuss next steps, including setting goals and designing next steps for professional development.

WALKTHROUGH STEPS

Preparing for the Walkthrough

1. Decide on walkthrough focus and communicate it ahead of time.
2. Decide how you will use the data you collect and how you will communicate it to the faculty.
3. Decide who will participate in the walkthrough both as an observer and as a classroom being observed. Put participants in teams of two to five people each based on their role in the school and the focus question.
4. Select a location for the pre- and post- meeting. Be sure that it is large enough for all team members to sit comfortably in a circle.
5. Establish a walkthrough schedule. Allow at least 30 minutes for the pre-meeting, five to seven minutes per classroom visit with three to five minutes in between each visit, and at least 45 minutes for the debriefing. Decide which teams will visit which classrooms and in what order. Publish this schedule to participants at least two days prior to the walkthrough.
6. Gather materials. Make copies of the walkthrough templates, the walkthrough guidelines, the schedule, and a map of the school, and place these on clipboards for each participant.
7. Send reminders to participants one day in advance.

Before the Walkthrough

1. Start the pre-meeting by reviewing the purpose of the walkthrough.
2. Review the guidelines for classroom visits and answer any questions.
3. Allow teams to meet together briefly to identify a time-keeper and to cover any logistics.
4. Announce the time all team members are expected to return.
5. Dismiss teams.

Classroom Visits

1. Teams visit classrooms according to the schedule provided.
2. Prior to entering each classroom, the time keeper should announce at what time the team will need to leave the classroom.
3. Classroom visits should last five to seven minutes each.
4. During the visit, team members record on the capture sheet any data they notice that relates to the focus question. Team members should observe the classroom environment, the students, and the teacher for data.
5. When the time keeper signals that it is time to leave, team members quietly leave the classroom and convene in the hall. They quickly jot down any notes, and quietly discuss any initial impressions they have. Discussions should be brief, center around the focus question, and be conducted out of earshot of the classroom or other teachers and students. These discussions should also last no more than five minutes.
6. Team members move to the next classroom and repeat the process.
7. When team members have visited the last classroom OR when the time for classroom observations is up, team members reconvene at the designated location for the debriefing meeting.

After the Walkthrough

1. Begin the discussion by reviewing the ground rules and group norms.
2. Read the focus question for the group and allow group members to respond with evidence they collected from the classroom.
3. After 20 minutes or so, shift the conversation from an examination of the evidence to the implications the evidence has on the focus question and on teaching and learning school wide.
4. Determine next steps.
5. Finish the conversation by summarizing the key points raised in the discussion.
6. Collect all data sheets.
7. Thank the group and dismiss.
8. Disseminate the data to the faculty.

Benefits

- Allows school leadership team opportunities to reflect on the state of instruction school-wide.
- Provides data on the effectiveness of professional development offerings.
- Helps share effective practice
- Reinforces attention to a focus on instruction and learning in the school's improvement plan.
- Supplements other data about school and student performance.
- Stimulates collegial conversation about teaching and learning by asking questions about what evidence is and isn't observed.
- Allows teachers and leaders to learn from other participants' observations, questions, experiences, and perspectives.
- Provides continuous feedback.

Other Uses

- Take new teachers on walkthroughs as a way to help them focus on a particular teaching skill by observing other teachers practicing this skill.
- Take grade levels on walkthroughs to observe what students learn prior to coming to their grade or what students will be facing once they leave their grade. This is a great strategy for creating vertical teams.
- Take departments on walkthroughs as a way of helping them discuss the implications of what they are teaching on other subjects. This is a great way to promote interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Take veteran teachers on walkthroughs as a way to foster reflective conversations and to plan mentoring opportunities.
- Take your administrative team or your leadership team on a walkthrough as a way to calibrate observations.
- Conduct a walkthrough of a sister or feeder school or invite a neighboring or feeder school to conduct a walkthrough of your campus in order to share ideas, gain outside feedback, and get another perspective on your school.
- Take community stakeholders such as partner organizations and parent groups on a walkthrough to help them understand the work you do and to gain perspective on the challenges you are facing. It is a great way to initiate learning-focus dialogue and to secure buy-in from these stakeholders.

- Take student groups on a walkthrough to help them collect data and provide their perspective on teaching and learning.

GUIDELINES FOR A COLLEGIAL WALK THROUGH

A collegial walk through is an organized non-evaluative visit by teams through a school to examine teaching and learning. A collegial walk through provides an opportunity to do the following:

- Reflect on the state of instruction school-wide.
- Collect data on the effectiveness of professional development offerings.
- Examine and share effective practice
- Focus on instruction and learning in the school's improvement plan.
- Supplement other data about school and student performance.
- Stimulate collegial conversation about teaching and learning by asking questions about what evidence is and isn't observed.
- Learn from other participants' observations, questions, experiences, and perspectives.
- Provide continuous feedback.

Please keep the following guidelines in mind:

Before the Walkthrough

- The purpose of the pre-walkthrough discussion is to clarify the purpose of the walkthrough and to organize the logistics. Save any other observations for the post-walkthrough discussion.
- When your team meets, make sure that you have all your materials: A walkthrough schedule, a map of the school, enough capture sheets for each classroom you are scheduled to visit, clipboards, and pens.
- Determine which team member will be the time keeper. The time keeper's job is to keep the team on schedule by making sure that each classroom visit lasts no longer than seven minutes. Establish a silent signal the time keeper will use to notify the group that it is time to leave.

During the Walkthrough

- Be careful to cause as little disruption as possible as you enter the classroom. Stand in the back of the classroom or to one side, or if there are enough seats available, slip into an empty seat nearby.
- Spend five to seven minutes in each classroom and up to five minutes in the hall immediately afterward writing your notes and having preliminary conversations following each classroom visit. Be careful not to disrupt classes (or the teachers) by discussing your observations within range of others.
- During your visit, gather evidence of what students are learning by speaking with a few students and by examining student work, the room environment, and instruction.
- It is okay to talk to students if they are working independently or in small groups. You can ask them to explain what they are working on, what the objective is for the assignment, or to show you their work. Do not ask students evaluative questions and do not talk to students at all if doing so will disrupt the classroom.

- Jot down notes of your observations in the classroom. Remember not to use names.
- While you may notice other things happening in the classroom, only record data that is specific to the focus question.
- Depending on the focus question, all parts of the school (i.e., the school's entrance and hallways) may contain evidence and should be considered as part of the walk through.
- Refrain from providing feedback directly to teachers. Principals and leadership teams are in a better position to provide feedback.
- When the time keeper gives the signal, quietly leave the classroom and gather in the hall. Briefly jot down any notes, share your initial reactions (outside of earshot of course) and decide what classroom to visit next.

After the Walkthrough

- The primary purpose of the debriefing session is to provide the principal/school staff with data on the focus. Therefore, you will discuss your observations, provide specific evidence, and question one another.
- Keep your comments non-evaluative. Remember that your observations provide only a glimpse of the school or a teacher. Walkthroughs are most useful in raising questions rather than drawing conclusions (such as "I would like to know more about ...," or "I wonder whether...," rather than "Teacher x relies on direct instruction too much").
- Do not use specific teacher names or subjects during the discussion.
- Refer to your capture sheet and the evidence you have collected to support any assertions you make about teaching and learning or the focus question.
- Team members should provide advice on ways to improve teaching and learning, based on their perspective and experience.