



Observing Foundational Skills

Coaching Guide

How to use this tool

This document is designed for use with an aligned and systematic foundational skills curriculum (FS-Criteria 1A).

Aligned with the **Foundational Skills Classroom Observation Tool** indicators, this guide contains look-fors and guiding questions to support coaches as they observe classroom instruction, identify trends, and prepare for next steps in coaching and training. Coaches can highlight the specific guiding questions they want to focus on with teachers during post-observation conversations.

You can find this same tool with a notes section instead of guiding questions, which can be used as an additional resource during a classroom observation, [here](#).

Criteria 1: Systematic and Explicit Approach

Criteria 1 indicator	Coaching look-fors	Guiding questions for teacher planning
1A: The teacher is using a systematic, explicit program for foundational skills instruction that is research informed.	<p>Is the teacher using a systematic, explicit program for foundational skills instruction?</p> <p>Does instruction incorporate research-informed components that are necessary for supporting every student in reaching reading proficiency (e.g., phonological awareness, in-/out-of-context</p>	<i>No guiding questions needed.</i>



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	practice with phonics/word recognition, fluency, and related comprehension experiences)?	
<p>1B: The lesson from the systematic, explicit program is enacted with integrity.</p>	<p>Does the teacher leverage curricular materials (e.g., scripted lesson plans, anchor charts, letter/sound cards, vocabulary cards with images, task sheets, decodable readers provided by the curriculum, multilingual resources) for whole-group and small-group instruction?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are the focus skills for this lesson? How do this lesson and the approach to this lesson impact student performance on the end-of-unit assessments? ● Have you read through and prepared the lesson in its entirety? ● Are you familiar with all associated lesson materials and taskwork? ● Are you at a place with the lesson that you can facilitate such that instruction is adequately paced and you can move through each component, referring to the script only as needed? ● How will materials be organized to ensure that all students can access them easily when needed without losing instructional time?
<p>1C: When and if appropriate, complementary materials enhance purpose-driven instruction for students.</p>	<p>If additional complementary resources are used, do they reinforce and/or provide access to the curriculum based on students' needs (e.g., sound and/or word cards in another language, handwriting support materials)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do the complementary materials you added within the lesson enhance instruction and/or access to the curriculum for individual and/or groups of students? How so? ● Do the complementary materials detract from the lesson focus in any way? If so, how does this impact instruction and/or student practice around the targeted skills? What adjustments need to be made to strengthen the instructional experience for students?



Criteria 2: Quality Instruction

Criteria 2 indicator	Coaching look-fors	Guiding questions for teacher planning
<p>2A: The teacher provides explicit and accurate foundational skills instruction, modeling explanations, visuals, and/or examples.</p>	<p>Is instruction explicit, accurate, and accessible to every student? For example, does the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share objectives and lesson purpose with students? • model content-specific tasks accurately, including pronunciation of sounds (phonemes), articulation gestures, blending, segmenting, and letter formation? • use visual aids that every student can access clearly (e.g., examples of words with the target sound/sound pattern, articulation gestures chart)? • make connections to students' primary languages, including English language dialects and varieties? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you know how to pronounce each of the sounds correctly and make any associated hand gestures for segmenting or blending of words? • How will you ensure that your visual aids and models can be clearly seen by all of your students? • Are you comfortable explaining all of the models within the lesson using the language/visuals/gestures from the curriculum? Are there any special notes that you need to record in your script to help you remember? • Is there a portion of the lesson that might be particularly challenging for students? Are there additional supports or scaffolds that might be needed to ensure that ALL students understand and engage in the lesson? • Is there a part of the lesson when it will be important to provide an example or model using students' primary languages (e.g., with a sound that is articulated in the same or similar way)?
<p>2B: The teacher provides opportunities for every student to practice the newly acquired skills in a variety of ways both out of and in context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out of context: Students are engaged in tasks such as letter 	<p>Does the teacher provide opportunities for students to practice targeted skill(s) both out of and in context in a variety of ways (e.g., oral, manipulative, and written practice with targeted skills)?</p> <p>For example, are students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using letter tiles to create words with the targeted skill followed by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the most important practice opportunities in this lesson? • How will you support each student practicing in a productive way? • Are there planned opportunities both within and after the lesson for students to practice the newly acquired skills both out of and in context? • Are there any enhancements that you may need to add for students to remain engaged or for students who



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<p>tile work, games, puzzles, music, movement, worksheets, or other discrete oral or written tasks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In context: Students are engaged in tasks within the context of phonetically controlled text. <p>Students are engaged in the practice opportunities provided.</p>	<p>decoding words on a task sheet or in a decodable reader?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> formatting letters in the air, with a dry erase marker, or with a crayon or pencil on a task sheet? reading a decodable aligned to the targeted skill? 	<p>need additional support to access and complete the taskwork?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If a decodable is part of the lesson, how will students interact with the decodable text both within and after the lesson?
<p>2C: The pacing of instruction and student practice opportunities is adequate and appropriate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there appropriate pacing of instruction within the skills and the task(s)? Do students have sufficient time to practice targeted skills through reading, writing, speaking, and/or listening? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the suggested times provided by the curriculum for each component of the lesson? How does this align with the time that you have designated for foundational skills instruction? How will this impact your planning and pacing? How will you ensure that you stay on pace? How will you pace the lesson to ensure the right balance of time for students to both receive instruction and apply their new learning? Based on your knowledge of your students, are there components in the lesson where additional time may be



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<p>2D: The teacher looks for and expects precision in student responses and work and provides precise coaching and feedback during the lesson.</p>	<p>Does the teacher provide on-the-spot feedback, corrections, and mid-lesson adjustments based on student performance (e.g., if students voice an incorrect sound for a phoneme, the teacher models the correct sound) and/or confirm students' answers?</p> <p>Common areas to look for precision are oral sound production, letter/sound ID, letter formation, encoding of sounds, and decoding.</p>	<p>needed? Less time? If so, what adjustments need to be made to the plan?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will you ensure that you are able to monitor student work, respond accordingly, and adjust instruction for individual students or the whole class as needed? • How will you provide feedback to students as they engage in the work of the lesson?
<p>2E: The teacher has established a safe community for learning where students feel comfortable taking risks and interacting with the teacher and their peers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the teacher encourage all students as they engage in grade-level standards/targeted skills? • Do students appear eager to participate in class discussion and task work? • Do students seem comfortable as they communicate with the teacher and their peers (e.g., are students eager to try new things such as reading a decodable, volunteering to segment a word, forming letters or words on a white board)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What moves will you make to build community with your students—both between yourself and students and between students and their classmates? • What moves will you make to ensure that ALL students feel comfortable, supported, and unafraid to engage in things that are hard during the lesson? • How will you make sure that you provide encouragement to and interact with each member of your class in some way?



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<p>2F: Students from historically marginalized communities consistently receive supportive feedback that affirms their abilities and potential as readers and writers.</p>	<p>Does the teacher provide supportive feedback that affirms students’ abilities and potential as readers and writers? For example, do adults in the classroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use asset-based language toward and about students (e.g., “Student can’t do ‘X’ yet”; “We are all readers and writers”)? • describe students’ primary language as an asset (e.g., “Being multilingual is a superpower”)? • implement procedures and routines that support restorative practices? • normalizes mistakes, speaking about them as an integral part of the learning process? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of feedback do you plan to provide that encourages students as they engage in the learning and practice? • How can you leverage student strengths in their feedback and ensure that they know it is OK to make mistakes and to keep trying should errors arise in their work?
<p>2G: The teacher provides opportunities to support comprehension and language development (both oral and written) connected to foundational skills instruction.</p>	<p>Does the teacher strategically build comprehension and student use of selected words presented?</p> <p>For example, during oral and/or written practice, does the teacher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe, show images of, and/or act out new vocabulary? • support students in using new vocabulary in sentences? 	<p>Where in the lesson is there an opportunity to add in vocabulary and/or comprehension support? How might you add that in a way that still keeps the lesson focused on the targeted skills?</p>



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● prompt students to answer and discuss comprehension questions? ● highlight new words that students are learning to read in decodable texts? 	

Criteria 3: Data-Driven Instruction

Criteria 3 indicator	Coaching look-fors	Guiding questions
<p>3A: The teacher records evidence of student progress toward mastery of the lesson’s targeted skill(s).</p> <p><i>Targeted skills include the primary focus of the lesson and the prerequisite knowledge and skills that are needed to meaningfully engage in the grade-level content.</i></p>	<p>Does the teacher record evidence of students’ progress toward mastery of the targeted skill(s)?</p> <p>Does the teacher record notes on students’ auditory, oral, and/or written responses while they are responding to direct instruction and engaging in practice opportunities?</p> <p>Examples of how the data might be collected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher observation and/or anecdotal record systems ● Notes/checklists ● Assessment forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What data collection system(s) will be used to monitor how students are progressing with the new skill(s) over the course of the lesson (e.g., anecdotal records, exit tickets, checklists, photos)? ● How will the data be organized so that the individual progress of students can be easily identified and used to make plans for small-group instruction and individual student needs? ● How will this data be shared with families/caregivers as needed?



Criteria 3 indicator	Coaching look-fors	Guiding questions
<p>3B: The teacher uses data collected within and across lessons to inform the student instructional experience.</p>	<p>Is there evidence that scaffolds have been put in place to help student(s) access grade-level content or that scaffolds have been removed based on students' demonstrated mastery?</p> <p>Is there evidence those scaffolds were put in place or removed based on data collected within and across lessons?</p> <p>For example, do teachers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• strategically call on students who need additional practice around a lesson skill?• write a sound pattern symbol beneath targeted words in a decodable reader?• write additional tracing opportunities onto a letter formation task page for a student who has a demonstrated need for more support in forming the letters correctly?• remove practice with Elkonin boxes because students have demonstrated accurate decoding or spelling of a digraph?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will you use the data collected to drive next steps in whole-group instruction, small-group instruction, and independent work?• What scaffolds or supports do you need to build into the lesson/materials for individuals or groups of students based on data collected prior to this lesson?



Student Mastery

Student mastery indicator	Coaching look-fors	Guiding questions teacher during planning
<p>Every student demonstrates progress toward mastery of the targeted skills of the lesson.</p>	<p>Does every student demonstrate progress toward mastery of the targeted skills of the lesson? For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does every student use phonetic spellings in writing?• Does every student demonstrate the ability to read the decodable text(s) from the lesson?• Do multilingual learners demonstrate increased consistency in articulating sounds that are absent in their primary language(s)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will you know if your students mastered the lesson content?• How will student progress be recorded and used to drive both whole-group and small-group instructional moves in future lessons?• How will this data be shared with families/caregivers as needed?