Preparing for Pre-Observation Conferences

Teachers,

The planning and reflection conferences are opportunities for you to take the reins and show your best self as a teacher and a learner. You are in control of these conferences. This guide aims to help you be proactive in these conferences knowing what is expected so that you use the time well. You can come to them, prepared and ready to show your effective treatment of Domains 1 and 4, and of any of the components that weren’t evident during the observation. Domains 1 and 4 are a bit of a gift—a way for you, as a teacher to shine. They also enable the other domains. That is, to do Domains 2 and 3 well, you need to rely on the work that Domains 1 and 4 showcase. Although New York City gives Domains 2 and 3 significantly more weight than Domains 1 and 4 showcase, the Framework itself does not weight the domains.

A few tips:

- You don’t have to wait for the right question to talk about something you know needs to be displayed. Anyone who has gone on a job interview knows that you come ready to show what you know, not waiting for the question that allows you to do that. Of course, you want to display conversation skills enough to not jump on the first question and pour everything out but if the observer has not asked about something, then you can still find ways to bring it up. Try using prompts, such as: “Can I add on,” “This reminds me of something else I do,” “When I was researching... in order to teach this, I read/learned/heard/....” “This is important for me because my data suggests that...”

- To prepare, bring a stack of artifacts to show and to talk about. Here are pointers about those artifacts:
  - Choose them strategically so that you create a coherent, fleshed-out story of the teaching that the observer will witness. So, if the observer will watch you teach argument writing, choose three checklists from the argument on-demand, perhaps a low/medium and high, and then be sure to bring prior student work from those same three kids as well as the results of the class session. Be able to talk about how your teaching supports each (as representative of the class.)
  - Show some way in which you get your mental arms around the whole of your data. This probably means that you have some way to categorize your data (your kids) that shows that you have digested the data. For example, you may have a list of kids who struggle with elaboration and another list of kids who struggle with structure. Again, be able to talk about how your assessments in teaching are supportive of each group.
  - Know that any child you mention, or that emerges as a player in the drama of your lesson, is apt to be someone the observer asks about, so be ready for follow up questions about that child.
  - Bring artifacts that show your modifications based on the IEPs of your class.
  - Bring artifacts to the post-observation that show you teach components not covered in the observed lesson.
  - Bring artifacts that show your teaching transfers to disciplines that were not observed, as in showing how social studies uses the argument work you taught in writing/reading.
  - Bring professional books and materials that show the intellectual context for your teaching (i.e. a marked up curricular calendar, books, notes from PD).
  - Bring a log of your professional learning activities.
  - Bring your lesson plan.
Your stance/feeling about your kids matters. Show genuine warmth and respect for your students. If you complain about the constitution of your class, about a learner’s problem, about the time lost because the specials teacher was late last week, that negative energy will do you no good and it will leak out over the entire conference. In fact your entire mindset is key. Just as with a job interview, a positive mindset will show and reflect well on you. So, if you have just gotten bad news from a doctor or had a major fight with your husband, don’t let that spill into the conference. If all else fails reschedule.

Try to schedule your formal observation in the middle of a unit, or towards the end of it. Your observer will see more evidence of student progress and students taking charge over their own learning at that point, and everything will be more layered if your lesson is not when you are just rolling something out for the first time. If the observation is scheduled for the beginning of the unit when you know you will be doing a lot of foundational work to set up for later independence, make sure to explain this fact in the pre-conference and to let the observer know how you intend for students to be in the driver’s seat soon. Also, if the observation is early in a lesson, it becomes especially important to refer to prior learning, showing that you help students to transfer what they learned earlier to this new(ish) work.

Observations need to include more than a minilesson. A minilesson is just one part of the larger workshop. Even if you need to make the minilesson into a micro-lesson for the sake of the observation, it is important to follow the minilesson with independent work so that you can confer, or lead a small group or support a club/partnership and so your observer gets a sense of the larger workshop. (You may alternatively consider doing a read aloud and whole class conversation in which case you may want to preface this with a brief teaching point.) If this is a formal observation, you do have time to teach a very quick minilesson (probably don’t try to put whole-class discussion into it, as this will prolong the minilesson—the turn and talk in the Active Engagement can help, but mostly you’ll get to discussion better in the rest of the workshop). You’ll probably follow the minilesson with a small group (usually right on the carpet after the minilesson with kids you determine need some help getting started), followed by a conference, another quick small group, and a closing. The closing (if it harkens back to the teaching point) will then reveal the shape of your larger lesson and give you a chance to do a quick dip-stick assessment.
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<th>Question Type: Early questions about your students</th>
<th>Component(s) you can likely address when answering this type of question</th>
<th>You’re going to want to get across that you:</th>
<th>Use the interview as a chance to show evidence of your work:</th>
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<td>Can you tell me about your students, including your students with special needs?</td>
<td>1b. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students 1f. Designing Student Assessments (depending on how you answer) 4b. Maintaining Accurate Records (depending on how you answer) 4c. Communicating with Families (depending on how you answer)</td>
<td>- have systems in place for learning about/tracking your students’ skills, knowledge, interests (1b, 1f, 4b) - draw your information about students from several sources (1b, 4c) - have sought out information about your students’ cultural heritages (1b, 4c) - know your students’ IEPs (1b) - above all, later in this discussion, be able to show how you use much of the knowledge you convey here to tailor your curricular decisions and teaching methods (1b, 1c, 1e) - have assessment methods that engage students in collecting information about and assessing their work (1b, 1f) - eventually you will need to show that you have a way to assess progress in the priorities in the lesson (1f). - eventually you will need to show that you maintain high expectations and believe that work pays off. (1b, 2b)</td>
<td>You can pull out a few “getting to know you” surveys that you sent home to families at the start of the year or over the summer and show that you have worked to get other perspectives on your students from the start If this is writing workshop, show students’ on-demand writing, bring checklists they’ve filled out in which they self-assess and set goals, and ideally, bring evidence of the way you collect that information across your class so you can see patterns of student need that then lead to curricular choices. If this is a reading workshop, be ready to show your running records and your performance assessments for individuals, your way of consolidating them and determining which of your students are levels 1,2,3,4 in relation to grade-level expectations. If you use your knowledge of the levels (bands) of text difficulty to cue your work (Consider starting with giving a brief picture of the class dynamic as a whole, then moving into discussing groups of students and individuals.) “I’ve got such a great bunch this year. They’re so passionate/so curious/such hard workers/so kind to each other (some feature of this particular class’ dynamic which stands out to you). I have ___ students who have IEPs. ___ of those students are classified as having _____ and they are pulled to get SETSS ____a week. My other two, ____ and ____...one is...(aim to tuck in information about individual students not just groups)...and she works with ____ (speech therapist/guidance counselor, etc). In addition, ____ of those students are considered ELLs. They see ____ (ESL teacher) ____a week.”</td>
<td>(Consider starting with giving a brief picture of the class dynamic as a whole, then moving into discussing groups of students and individuals.) “I’ve got such a great bunch this year. They’re so passionate/so curious/such hard workers/so kind to each other (some feature of this particular class’ dynamic which stands out to you). I have ___ students who have IEPs. ___ of those students are classified as having _____ and they are pulled to get SETSS ____a week. My other two, ____ and ____...one is...(aim to tuck in information about individual students not just groups)...and she works with ____ (speech therapist/guidance counselor, etc). In addition, ____ of those students are considered ELLs. They see ____ (ESL teacher) ____a week.”</td>
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with students, show this.

Plan to show formative assessment data related to the skill you will be teaching (ie. Inference) and students’ self-evaluations on rubrics aligned to learning progressions for the skill you are teaching.

reached out to the literacy coach to problem solve, etc.)

“When I looked across these checklists, I saw that two-thirds of my students need help with elaboration, especially with...I also located a few other students who could help these students with this.”

I know I’ve got 3 readers who aren’t reading at grade level because of their fluency—they read so slowly that their comprehension falls apart. Their scores on the running records were below grade level and in follow-up assessments, I found this is a problem. So, I’ve given each of them a practice book a little below their level to read for 10 minutes a day to just work on fluency and I’ve...”

“In my records, beside these names I have a tiny list of priorities—see, for these readers in the RST band, I’ve reminded myself of ways the texts they are reading become more complex: ‘unusual setting; sub-plots, confusing parts that become clear later; subordinate characters; point of view may change. That sets me up to teach new challenges their texts are apt to pose.”

“Right now the bulk of my class is scoring at the...level which is lower than I’d like, but I am confident that if I...they’ll be able to...”
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<td>Question about how this lesson fits into the broader curriculum</td>
<td>1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy</td>
<td>- ensure that your lessons reflect important concepts in the discipline and in the CCSS (1a) - are conscious of interdisciplinary connections, and show an awareness of the power of teaching for transfer (1a) - call on strategies taught in other parts of the curriculum, to reinforce these skills and provide opportunities for transfer (1a) - are knowledgeable about reading and writing methods (1a) - draw on a knowledge of a wide range of pedagogical approaches (UDL, Fountas and Pinnell levels, TCRWP, Hattie, Tough) (1a, 1d)</td>
<td>Bring a marked up, well-read, curriculum calendar/UoS book/Curriculum Map Bring the curriculum map you rely on, that includes the length of the unit in real time, essential questions, CCSS addressed, and assessments that track progress/ modifications for kids with IEPs/major sequence of bends in the unit and teaching points Books or articles that you have been reading, or notes on those texts, or a reading list of recent texts (though referring to professional readings is sufficient) Particular pages or charts or exemplars from professional books</td>
<td>(Pull out map of the unit) “Right now we are in a unit on ___________. The bigger goals of that unit are for my students to ___________ (refer to essential questions and to the skills that your assessment will assess.)/This is a unit designed to get students to understand…..Many of the ideas come from the TCRWP’s research in accelerating students’ levels of..., and also ......I’ve seen success with...and I’ve just finished reading...so I’ve brought in some of that work as well. Today’s lesson (and perhaps the next few lessons) will focus on helping students to understand and become more proficient at… This will help support students in meeting Standards ____ of the (refer to Curricular Calendar or UoS book to see relevant standards). After this lesson, depending on what the students’ work shows, we’ll move into...”</td>
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<td>Question Type: Question about how this lesson matches your students’ needs</td>
<td>Component(s) you can likely address when answering this type of question</td>
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<td>How does this lesson fit into the sequence of learning for this class?</td>
<td>1a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy</td>
<td>- are aware of the intended student learning (the skills, concepts, or habits of mind being developed) or the larger goals of this unit (1a)</td>
<td>Plan to show formative assessment data related to the skill you will be teaching (ie. inferring complex character traits from subtle details) and students’ self-evaluations on rubrics aligned to learning progressions for the skill you are teaching.</td>
<td>“When I assessed the students, I found that many of them demonstrated that they needed _____ (refer back to where they are on the trajectory of related work—the data about where students are in on-demand writing, running records, and/or in the learning progression that tracks the major work of the unit.) So far, I’ve taught them how to...and to....and I’m realize what holds them back is they need next to...so now in this lesson they will build on that work in order to _______. That will move them toward meeting Standard ___. After that, depending on how well they have seemed to grasp this concept, they’ll start to...”</td>
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<td>How does this lesson fit with and respond to your data?</td>
<td>1b. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</td>
<td>- are thinking about how/why the lesson’s content is appropriate to the students’ learning needs and prior knowledge and skills, as reflected, at least partly, in data (1a, 1b, 1c, 1f)</td>
<td>Conferring notes</td>
<td>“In this small group, I’ve researched some of the highest level readers in this class, and I’ve thought about the kinds of text complexity they face in their books. Today, therefore, I’ll work with them on...”</td>
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<td>How will you collect data during this lesson?</td>
<td>1c. Setting Instructional Outcomes</td>
<td>- your analysis of on-demand writing or reading responses/running records/formative assessments influences your teaching (1a, 1b, 1c)</td>
<td>Reading notebooks or post-its, and how they show signs of intellectual growth</td>
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<td>1f. Designing Student Assessments (use for planning)</td>
<td>- are conscious of how this lesson fits into an ongoing learning progression (are aware of the prerequisite knowledge students need to have before this lesson; skill development that will come after this lesson) (1a, 1b)</td>
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<td>4b. Maintaining Accurate Records (depending on how you answer)</td>
<td>- are planning to collect a variety of data so that all students can show their learning (1b, 1c, 1f)</td>
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<td>Question Type: Questions which ask about intended outcomes</td>
<td>Component(s) you can likely address when answering this type of question</td>
<td>You’re going to want to get across that you:</td>
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<td><strong>1c. Setting Instructional Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>- understand the intended student learning (the skills, concepts, habits of mind being developed) (1a, 1b, 1c) - understand the difficulties, misunderstandings, or misconceptions students might have about this content (1a, 1b) - know when/how you will assess to see if these outcomes have been met, either today, or if the learning goal stretches over time, in the near future (1c, 1f, 4b) - have considered the learning outcomes for each student (1c, 1b, 1f)</td>
<td>Plan to show formative assessment data related to the skill you will be teaching (ie. inferring complex character traits from subtle details) and students’ self-evaluations on rubrics aligned to learning progressions for the skill you are teaching. Conferring notes</td>
<td>“This lesson is setting students up to have a repertoire of ...strategies when they write/read .... I don’t expect that every student will use the same strategy today; but I do expect that every student will get stronger at ... I want students to understand that when they ..., they have to ... in order to.... I’ve found that often times, students just keep ... instead of ... and I want to help them understand...and learn to....”</td>
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<td><strong>1b. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</strong></td>
<td>4b. Maintaining Accurate Records (depending on how you answer)</td>
<td>Plan to show and explain any tool(s) and methods you intend to use for assessment</td>
<td>“I also have some additional learning goals for individual students for this lesson. For example, I have a stamina goal for ____. We’ve been working to get him to read more pages – a greater volume, and thus a stronger rate as well. You’ll see that he has been keeping track of how often he’s been in the ‘reading zone’ each day, which for him has been between 40-50 pages of reading across home and school. So far, he’s been reading for 30 minutes and is at page 20, so he’s going to make his goal today, which will help him with his goal of getting more reading done, improving his rate, and moving up levels.”</td>
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<td>1f. Designing Student Assessments (depending on how you answer)</td>
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<th>Question Type:</th>
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| Questions which ask about the design for the lesson | - understand what theories of teaching and learning support this lesson design (1a)  
- have considered how each activity will promote rigorous thinking (1b, 1c, 1e)  
- have carefully considered and can articulate how the students will be grouped for learning and how the grouping is related to the lesson content (1b, 1c, 1d, 1e)  
- have considered how these instructional strategies/learning activities are appropriate to the lesson goals (1a, 1c, 1d, 1e)  
- have considered how you will model/explain clear expectations for the students’ learning (1c, 1e)  
- have considered how (if appropriate to this lesson) accountable student talk and collaboration will be encouraged in an atmosphere of mutual respect and expert feedback (1c, 1e)  
- have made sure that the lesson has enough access points that all students can engage in rigorous learning (1c, 1b, 1e, 1a)  
- have considered a few ways to connect the students with the new learning, keeping in mind some common interests (1b, 1a, 1c) | Your lesson plan as you discuss the learning activities and work students do  
Materials you will use in your lesson and small groups; materials you expect to use in conferring  
Sheets that show how you have created groups/partnerships  
Conferring notes and how they have informed some possible pathways you have in mind for the students with whom you will confer today | “The whole class can benefit from learning...so I’m going to ...right at the start to get students engaged in thinking about.... Then I’ll model ... but keep them involved in thinking along with me then I’ll give them a chance to ... (show the materials). I also have a chart of ... up in the room and I’ve made smaller copies for anyone who wants one during the lesson or during the workshop. When students go off, they’ll work individually on...and I will be conferring with ___ and also pulling ___small group(s). I’ve already thought about some possible pathways the conferences might take based on my data (explain and show notes) but I’ll also be researching current work to make sure my teaching aligns with students’ needs. The small group will...for this purpose...At the end of the workshop, we’ll have a share where students will meet in partnerships to...Partnerships will be based on...” |
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<tr>
<th>Question Type: Questions which ask about how each child will be able to access the curriculum</th>
<th>Component(s) you can likely address when answering this type of question</th>
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<td><strong>1c. Setting Instructional Outcomes</strong></td>
<td>- have considered how each student will be doing work which is rigorous for that student and how assistance will be provided to individual students (student in need of extra support, as well as those in need of an extra challenge) (1b, 1c, 1d, 1e)</td>
<td>Conferring notes and how they have informed ways in which you ensure that all students can access the curriculum</td>
<td><strong>“Well, first, every child is working on his/her own individual goals that he/she set...”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1d. Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources</strong></td>
<td>- have made sure that the lesson has enough access points that all students can engage in rigorous instruction</td>
<td>Sheets that show how you have created groups/partnerships</td>
<td><strong>“I have an exemplar piece of... available to anyone who would like to use it. I expect that ... might be difficult for my ELLs, especially ____, so yesterday I pulled a small group and previewed ... I’ll be pulling a small group later to... Also, I have one student ____ , who has been working on...and today....”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1b. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students</strong></td>
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<td>IEP goals</td>
<td><strong>“You’ll see ____ student(s) typing on a laptop/sitting on a ball/working at the listening center/holding a.../using a ...and this is to support...” (This should relate to what you said at the start about the makeup of your class). “I plan to help the student move toward more independence by...”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>1e. Designing Coherent Instruction</strong></td>
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<td><strong>“You’ll see that this group of particularly strong writers is using a different checklist to assess their work, as their on-demand writing showed they were ready to tackle new challenges in opinion/argument writing. They also have an extra exemplar to serve as a mentor text, and today you’ll see them studying that mentor...”</strong></td>
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<td>Question Type: Questions which asks about assessment of learning outcomes</td>
<td>Component(s) you can likely address when answering this type of question</td>
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| How and when will you know whether the students have learned what you intend? | 1c. Setting Instructional Outcomes | - have considered how students will make their thinking and learning public (1f, 1c)  
- have considered how student learning will be assessed by the teacher and by the students themselves (1f, 1c)  
- have considered how student accomplishment will be recognized (1f) | Any assessment tools you have created for the lesson  
Any system for analyzing student work you will use following this lesson | “I’m going to collect their work from today (writing pieces/post it left on corner of desk/stop and jot, etc.) and sort it by...Then I’ll pull small groups tomorrow and the next day based on the work. I am going to give you copies of the work and my notes analyzing them by tomorrow so you can see my next steps for the students based on my assessment of how today’s work goes.” |
| How will students demonstrate that they are becoming stronger at...? | 1f. Designing Student Assessments | | | “I don’t expect all students to meet the learning outcome by the end of today. I collect work about three times a week to make small groups and check how the class is doing, in general. I use the checklist for this year and next year to help me analyze the work (show the checklist). I also look at each table’s notebooks/folders once a week. So those are all times I’ll be gathering evidence of their progress in this area. So by ____ , I’ll have seen every student’s work and will have assessed...” |
| What feedback are students getting and what is it based on? | | | | “Students publish three times across this unit, so I’ll expect that I’ll see ... (among other qualities) getting stronger each publishing and by the third piece, I’m expecting the majority of students will be exceeding ____ grade standards in this area. Between publishings, I...” |
| How are students self-assessing? | | | | “And the students use the checklists to...” |
**Question about how this lesson connects to your own goals**

What have you been working on in your teaching and how will this particular lesson help me to see that growth?

| 4a. Reflecting on Teaching | - ways you have worked on your goal (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- workshops/classes/professional development you have attended to help you work toward your goal (4e, 1d)  
- peer observations you have done (4e, 1d)  
- work you have done with your staff developer (4a, 4e) | Evidence in the form of student work or anecdotal notes that shows your growth  
Former notes/reflections from observations  
Professional text you have read to work on your goal | “Since my last observation, I have really been focused on... I have visited/talked to the literacy coach/asked my staff developer/read/went to this workshop/started an inquiry team/started a professional book club...I know that I have made progress in this goal because... (name what you have seen in the students’ work/conversation/actions). During today’s lesson, I’ll be very conscious about... Today, I’d also like to research...” |

| 4e. Growing and Developing Professionally  
1d. Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources (the teacher’s knowledge of resources for extending one’s professional skill) | - ways you have worked on your goal (especially if you do not get a question like the previous one) (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- workshops/classes you have attended to help you work on your goal (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- peer observations you have done (4e, 1d)  
- work you have done with your staff developer (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- what you still want to improve in your practice (4a, 4e, 1d) | Evidence in the form of student work or anecdotal notes that shows your growth  
Former notes/reflections from observations  
Professional text you have read to work on your goal | “Even though I feel I’ve made progress in these ways..., I would still like to get stronger at .... I would appreciate if you could especially watch...(i.e. my flexibility and responsiveness during the conference/how well I get all students to be engaged in the whole class conversation/how well I am responsive to each individual in the small group, the pacing of my conferences, etc.). I’d love your advice about...” |

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**Questions which asks if there is anything you want observer to watch for**

Is there anything that you would like me to specifically observe during the lesson?

| 4a. Reflecting on Teaching | - ways you have worked on your goal (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- workshops/classes/professional development you have attended to help you work toward your goal (4e, 1d)  
- peer observations you have done (4e, 1d)  
- work you have done with your staff developer (4a, 4e) | Evidence in the form of student work or anecdotal notes that shows your growth  
Former notes/reflections from observations  
Professional text you have read to work on your goal | “Since my last observation, I have really been focused on... I have visited/talked to the literacy coach/asked my staff developer/read/went to this workshop/started an inquiry team/started a professional book club...I know that I have made progress in this goal because... (name what you have seen in the students’ work/conversation/actions). During today’s lesson, I’ll be very conscious about... Today, I’d also like to research...” |

| 4e. Growing and Developing Professionally (receptivity to feedback)  
1d. Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources (the teacher’s knowledge of resources for extending one’s professional skill) (depending on how you answer) | - ways you have worked on your goal (especially if you do not get a question like the previous one) (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- workshops/classes you have attended to help you work on your goal (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- peer observations you have done (4e, 1d)  
- work you have done with your staff developer (4a, 4e, 1d)  
- what you still want to improve in your practice (4a, 4e, 1d) | Evidence in the form of student work or anecdotal notes that shows your growth  
Former notes/reflections from observations  
Professional text you have read to work on your goal | “Even though I feel I’ve made progress in these ways..., I would still like to get stronger at .... I would appreciate if you could especially watch...(i.e. my flexibility and responsiveness during the conference/how well I get all students to be engaged in the whole class conversation/how well I am responsive to each individual in the small group, the pacing of my conferences, etc.). I’d love your advice about...” |