

PMA Quick Observation Card

The whole observation discipline on two pages, plus a tally sheet you can print and use today.

For teachers, support staff, practitioners, managers, parents and students.
Free resource · 2026

Scope, use and limits

A free two-page reference card carrying the essential rules of behavioural observation: define before you watch, record the environment before the behaviour, and keep description and interpretation in separate columns.

What this resource is for

- Writing a usable operational definition in four lines.
- Recording neutrally in real time.
- Catching your own inferences before they enter the record.

What this resource is not for

- Diagnosing, assessing or classifying any person.
- Replacing professional assessment, treatment, supervision or emergency care.
- Producing scores, thresholds or severity ratings.
- Use during a crisis or where there is any risk of harm.

PROFESSIONAL AND LEGAL BOUNDARY

This resource is an educational and professional documentation aid published by PMA Science University. It is not a diagnostic instrument, a psychometric test, or a substitute for assessment, treatment, supervision, or emergency care by a qualified professional.

Nothing in this resource assigns a diagnosis, produces a clinical score, or establishes a clinical threshold. Observation records and self-reflection entries describe what was seen or experienced. They do not classify a person.

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If you are supporting someone who may be at risk of harm, stop using this resource and contact local emergency services or a crisis line immediately.

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Contents

CONTENTS

The card
Before you watch
While you watch
Rewrite these on sight
Quick tally sheet

The card

Keep this beside you while observing. It fits the whole discipline onto two pages: define before you watch, describe before you conclude, and never let an interpretation sit in the column where a description belongs.

Before you watch — four lines

- **Label.** A short neutral name for the behaviour.
- **Includes.** What counts. Be generous with examples.
- **Excludes.** The near-misses that do not count. Never skip this line.
- **Onset and offset.** When an instance begins, when it ends, and how long a pause must last before it counts as a second instance.

While you watch

- Record the environment before the behaviour: place, time, activity, people, noise, light.
- Timestamp every entry. Never reconstruct at the end of the day.
- Description only. If a sentence contains a motive, a mood or a trait, it is an inference.
- Break after 20 minutes. Accuracy falls measurably beyond that.
- Note whether the person knew they were being observed.

Rewrite these on sight

If you wrote	Write instead
Was aggressive	Pushed the chair away with both hands; it fell over
Refused	Remained seated when the group stood; did not respond to two spoken invitations
Was anxious	Tapped pen 20–30 times per minute; asked "how long left?" four times
Always does this	Occurred in 4 of the last 5 sessions
Much better today	Two instances today; daily mean over the previous five days was seven

THREE THINGS A SINGLE SESSION CANNOT TELL YOU

Whether this is typical. Whether anything caused it. Whether anything has improved.

Five sessions, across three days, in two settings, before you describe anything as a pattern.

Quick tally sheet

Behaviour label · includes · excludes · onset and offset

One row per 5-minute block

Block	Tally	Count	What was happening immediately before

Total count / observed minutes / rate per minute

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