

Breaking It All Down

Name: _____ Date: _____

Observations are our way of viewing the world. Each and every day we use our five senses to make observations about the world. But the world we live in is increasingly complex and so we tend to, even if we do not know it, focus on particular items to the exclusion of all others. This handout will describe four primary foci and what the source of our information is.

Observations: Focus

In order to be able to understand the information that is in front of us, our brain prioritizes and chooses to focus on one item or a series of connected items. For example, if you are watching a sporting event, you may be focused on what is happening at the center of the action, but miss the action away from there. Or maybe you go to a store and pay attention to one rack with your favorite food and do not notice another rack. There are four foci that we are going to focus on for the internship program. They are:

Location – In this focus, the observer is noticing specific details about the location of the observation. For instance, if you were observing at your internship site, you may notice the room layout and how everything flows together. Location observations are important for knowing where things are, how things interact with their surroundings, and how you can navigate space.

Person(s) – This focus spends most of its time on a person or persons who are at the center of the observer's attention. For instance, if you were at your site and your advisor and mentor were talking, you might be taking notice of their conversation and following their discussion. Person observations can give you information about relationships, feelings or emotions, and thoughts.

Situation/Context – In this focus, the observer is noticing everything that is happening in a given situation. For instance, if your site had a fire drill, you may notice people turning out lights and locking doors on their way out of the building. This type of observation can be very important for understanding how to act in a given scenario and how roles are filled.

Process/Procedure – Focus on the process or procedure spends time understanding how something happens. For instance, if at your site your supervisor shows you how to do something while you observe, you have done a process observation. This type of observation can be powerful when you need to know how to perform a process on your own.

Sources of Information: The Five Senses

You may not realize it, but you gain information from all five senses all of the time. Your brain tends to not focus on the senses that are feeding it the same information over and over. Therefore, it tends to ignore the "flavor" of your mouth if you are not chewing anything. The five senses are of course, taste, touch, sound, sight, and smell. When making observations try to be aware of what senses you are using to make your observations. This could impact your observations.