Types of Observations

The type of observation you conduct will depend on what you want to know. You may have a "guiding question" in mind which will help you determine which type of observation you want to conduct.

Type of Observation	Best Used For	Example
Anecdotal records are notes/ information about one specific event or behavior. Anecdotal records should be objective, factual, and followed up with supportive information.	*Collecting information on a specific event or behavior *Most any situation can use this form of observation. The observer determines the events, timeliness of the record, and the richness of detail.	A written description of how a child was observed engaging in play with another child
Developmental checklists are observations of a specific list of items, skills, or behaviors. Checklists generally require a response of *yes*, *no*, or *sometimes* and can be completed during the observation period or later.	*Collecting concrete, specific information quickly *Recording information about the child's skills or development from recent memory *Documenting changes or development of specific skills or behaviors over time. *Evaluating when a child reaches specific milestones	A checklist of developmental milestones for a 36-month-old child
Running records are written while watching a child; they are brief and continuous records of everything that happens during a specified period of time (often 15 to 30 minutes).	*Situations requiring detail and specific information *Creating a detailed record of a child's activity	A written record of everything a child does and says from 9:00 until 9:30 with times indicated
Time and event samples record a specific behavior at regular intervals over a period of time or during a particular event.	*Observing and documenting the frequency of a behavior over time or during an event *Understanding why or when a behavior occurs	How many times a child initiates play in a 30-minute period
Work samples with descriptive notes document development and learning with concrete examples produced by the child.	*Documenting and sharing a child's progress and learning *Adding information about how/when a child created something	A collection of self-portraits over the course of a year