



Advice for Associate Teachers Regarding Practicum Evaluations and Reference Letters

In your role as an Associate Teacher (AT), you will be required to evaluate Teacher Candidates (TC), who by definition are Associate Members of OSSTF while attending teacher training at an Ontario Faculty of Education (Bylaw 2.1.3.1.1). Your TC may also ask you to provide a reference letter following their practicum placement. The following advice for ATs applies to both TC practicum evaluations and reference letters:

- Keep evaluations and references kind, honest, and balanced;
- Avoid exaggerating either positively or negatively: be objective and factual;
- Keep notes of discussions with, advice for, and warnings given to your TC throughout the practicum;
- When a negative evaluation or reference is contemplated or necessary, know and follow OSSTF's adverse reporting bylaw 2.2.3.1.2, found under 2.2.3, Duties of Members to Other Members;
- Keep a copy of what you write and submit to faculties or employers on the TC's behalf, and provide the Teacher Candidate with a copy as well;
- Seek Federation advice if experiencing difficulties with a TC, Faculty, or crafting a negative, yet supportive evaluation.

In summary, both practicum evaluations and reference letters carry weight with employers. It is in everyone's best interest to be fair, honest, and constructive with teacher candidates during their time in your classroom. With guidance, your TC will in most cases warrant a positive evaluation. In those cases where they do not make the grade, whether or not there have been improvements, ATs should document their efforts to assist the teacher candidate and be candid with their TC about what will be included in evaluations and/or reference letters.

Practicum Reports/Evaluations

You will be required to evaluate your Teacher Candidate's performance. It is the policy of the Ontario Teachers' Federation that Associate Teachers be involved in both the formative and summative evaluation of teacher candidates (OTF Policy 4.5.14). Your expectations of a Teacher Candidate should not be the same as the expectations one would have of an experienced teacher; this will likely be especially true of the first or early practicum sessions of the school year. Teacher Candidates will require mentoring and support to help them to improve their practice throughout the practicum.

You will need to schedule sufficient conferencing time. Best practices for Associate Teacher interaction with the Teacher Candidate throughout the practicum include:

- timely and constructive appraisal;
- anecdotal feedback;
- formative and summative assessment;
- next steps for growth;
- honest and candid evaluation.

It is essential that you consult the documentation from the Faculty of Education for the protocols, timelines, and forms required pertaining to evaluation of the Teacher Candidate. If the Teacher Candidate is struggling, remember that it is your role to be a supportive mentor to help him/her improve. If the Teacher Candidate is unwilling to accept your advice or unable to improve, make early contact with the Faculty of Education according to the protocol that the Faculty has outlined for Associate Teachers.

An Associate Teacher's role includes formative assessments as you provide constructive feedback throughout the practicum and providing a written summative evaluation or practicum report at the conclusion of a placement. Provide clear, honest communication throughout the practicum regarding strengths and areas to work on prior to a final evaluation. Also be aware of Faculty of Education reporting timelines, guidelines and expectations. This becomes particularly important when a TC is experiencing difficulty: this should not be a surprise to either the TC or the Faculty at the end of a practicum. For more information, see *Advice for Associate Teachers*, found under 'Services' > 'Teachers' in MyOSSTF.

Reference Letters

As a general practice, do not offer to write a reference letter for a TC, but consider agreeing to write a reference letter if asked, and you can be honest with the TC about what it will contain.

ATs are encouraged to provide an authentic and appropriate response when asked to provide a reference: be clear about whether or not you can give a strong, positive recommendation or not, and why. You can provide a negative reference if the information is job-related, truthful, and sticks to objective facts rather than personal opinion. In such a case, it is in no one's best interest to write or receive such a reference letter.

If not comfortable providing a positive reference letter, encourage the TC to find another reference. If pressed to provide one anyway, let them know what you are going to include in the letter and suggest that they do not want your reference letter. Employers often ask for practicum reports or evaluations, so you have already provided insight into the TCs suitability for employment as a teacher: a reference letter may be redundant.