

Observation Notation



Objective

Students will use observational skills to create a data set and learn how observing animal behavior helps with animal husbandry and training.

Materials

- An animal to observe (at home, school, or a local zoo or aquarium)
- copies of *Observation Notation* worksheet per student or group

Background

Ethology is the scientific study of an animal's behavior in the wild. It is easier to observe and record behavior than to interpret it. When studying animal behavior, observers must take care not to be anthropomorphic — to mistakenly connect humanlike characteristics to animals. Although humans and animals share some traits, we have no way of knowing for sure why an animal is doing something.

Direct observation is an important and useful tool when caring for animals. Team members take time every day to observe and record each animal's behavior and appetite. Unusual changes in an animal's behavior often are the first indication of the need for medical attention.

Behavior observation also helps trainers develop training practices. Trainers base animal performances on behaviors that animals frequently exhibit. Developing a performance requires observation and accurate records of animal behavior.

Action

1. Have students choose an animal to observe, either at home or in the classroom. This animal must be readily observable and at least a little active. (If animals are not available, this activity can be modified for your SeaWorld Field Trip. Another great option is the SeaWorld Animal Cams at SeaWorldParks.com)
2. Students will use the *Observation Notation* worksheet to record animal behaviors. If preferred, they may work in small groups. They should observe an animal in time blocks of at least 15 minutes, up to five times each day. Behaviors to record on the worksheet would include: sleeping, walking, running, eating, interacting (with another animal or a human), jumping, or any other observable behavior. They should also record the time they began each block of observation.
3. After observing an animal for a week, have students summarize their observations and present results using charts. Discuss responses to the "Discussion" questions as a class.

Observation Notation



Name _____

The animal I am observing is _____.

Data – Record your observation in the chart below. Include the time and the observed behavior (sleeping, eating, resting, moving slowly or fast, interacting with another animal or human, etc.).

Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Results – After totaling the amount of time you observed your animal displaying each behavior, create a chart (pie, bar, etc.) displaying your results.

Discussion – Answer the following questions on another sheet of paper.

What did your animal spend the most time doing?

What are the advantages to spending more time on a certain behavior?

Did you observe behavior that would be considered “unusual” for this animal? Why do you think that happened?

Based on what you have learned about animal behavior and training, how would you go about modifying this animal’s behavior patterns?