

Tool Audit: What Is This Tool Actually Doing?

A protocol for examining how an assignment, rubric, observation form, coaching protocol, checklist, or other tool shapes learning, authority, and agency.

Tools are not neutral.

Every tool directs attention. It signals what counts, whose thinking matters, what kinds of responses are expected, and how authority circulates. A tool can support inquiry and agency—or unintentionally reduce professional learning to compliance.

Choose one tool to examine

Tool / protocol / assignment / form:

Who uses it? Who is affected by it?

Purpose

What is this tool intended to help people learn, notice, decide, or do?

Attention

What does the tool make highly visible? What does it direct users to notice?

Silence

What important features of practice are difficult to see because the tool does not ask about them?

Authority

Who defines quality? Who asks the questions? Who gets to interpret what happened?

Agency

Does the tool invite users to generate explanations, questions, or next steps – or mainly respond to someone else's categories?

Values

What conception of good teaching, learning, mentoring, or supervision is embedded in the tool?

Relationship

How might the tool position the people using it: evaluator/evaluated, expert/novice, collaborator/inquirer, monitor/complier?

Equity

Whose experiences, ways of knowing, or contextual realities are centered? Who may be constrained or misread by the structure?

Affect

How might the tool make users feel: curious, supported, exposed, rushed, compliant, defensive, agentic?

Adaptability

Can the tool respond to context, or does it assume one version of practice fits everywhere?

Redesign test

If the tool currently emphasizes...	What might a growth-oriented alternative emphasize?
Compliance	Interpretation and professional judgment
Completion	Learning and revision
Evaluator authority	Shared sense-making
Fixed categories	Context-sensitive noticing
Correct answers	Reasoned possibilities
Monitoring	Self-assessment and inquiry

One revision I would make

Design question

If someone used this tool exactly as written, what kind of teacher or teacher educator would it help them become?

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