

Gemba Walk Observation A3 Guide



Lean
Construction
Institute

Transforming Design and Construction

The Gemba Walk Observation A3 is a tool for capturing what you observe, hear, and learn—whether you’re walking a jobsite, reviewing design coordination in a conference room, or shadowing a workflow in the office. The goal is to support shared understanding, identify improvement opportunities, and reflect together.

BEFORE THE WALK: SET YOUR INTENTION

Use the **Header Section** to align your walk team and prepare others:

- ▶ **Clarify the purpose** — What do you want to learn? What’s in scope—and what’s not?
- ▶ **Identify the people and processes** — Who will you observe? What activity are you focusing on?
- ▶ **Select the setting** — Project, Design, or Office

Section 1: Gemba Walk Purpose *(What Is Being Observed & Why?)*

Plan before the walk. In this section, define the specific process or activity you plan to observe and why you are observing it.

- ▶ Be as clear and focused as possible about the purpose. For example: “Observe the concrete pouring process to identify delays affecting schedule compliance.”

A well-scoped purpose ensures the walk stays on track and that team members understand the goal upfront.

Section 2: Current State *(Pre-Walk Expectations)*

Complete prior to the walk. Capture your understanding of the current process before going to Gemba.

- ▶ Describe how you believe the process operates, what “good” looks like, and what forms of waste, problems, or wastes you expect to find.
- ▶ Write down all your assumptions about the work:
 - Note the standard procedure that should be followed.
 - List the resources used.
 - Identify any known points of pain.
- ▶ Writing out these assumptions serves two purposes:
 - It clarifies what you think is happening.
 - It sets the stage for learning by highlighting assumptions you can later confirm or challenge.



Remember to keep an open mind, don’t assume everything is being done exactly according to the official standard, schedule or without waste or that each worker performs the task identically.

Section 3: Observations *(During the Walk)*

Document during the Gemba Walk. In this section, record **what you observe in real time** at Gemba.

- ▶ Include details of where the observation takes place and what is happening.
- ▶ Describe the steps, conditions, delays, or waste observed.
- ▶ Be objective and factual – write what you see and hear, not what you think should be happening.
- ▶ Stay focused on the process, not the people.
- ▶ Make sure your notes align with the purpose defined in Section 1.

It's important not to intervene or attempt to fix issues on the spot. Even if you notice a problem, resist the urge to correct it immediately, remember that improvement happens **after** analysis and reflection, not during the walk itself.

Section 4: Questions & What Did I Learn *(Post-Walk Reflection)*

Complete immediately after the walk. Once the observation is over, take time to reflect on what you saw and list any **open-ended questions** that arose.

- ▶ Use these questions to engage your team and understand the process better:
 - “Why does task X need approval before moving forward?”
 - “What causes the delay in material delivery?”
- ▶ Open-ended questions (who, what, where, when, why, how) encourage detailed answers.
- ▶ Note the responses and insights you gain from these questions.
- ▶ Document what you learned:
 - Did things go as expected, or were there surprises?
 - Write down those explanations and any root causes identified

By asking questions with a genuine desire to learn, you create a dialogue with the workers, the people who know the work best, and you discover why things are the way they are.

Section 5: What Actions Will Be Taken? *(After the Walk)*

Determine in the debrief. After gathering observations and insights, convene with your team to decide on **the next steps**. This section lists the concrete actions that will be taken because of the Gemba Walk.

REVIEW PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- ▶ Start by reviewing the problems or improvement opportunities uncovered.
- ▶ For each issue, agree on an action plan.

ACTION PLANS:

- ▶ Actions could include quick fixes (e.g., removing clutter causing motion waste), longer-term solutions (e.g., updating procedures, providing training, or rebalancing workload), or additional analysis if the root cause isn't fully understood yet.
- ▶ Assign responsibilities and due dates to each action to ensure accountability.

PRIORITY AND FOCUS:

- ▶ Prioritizing actions based on impact and feasibility.
- ▶ Focus on changes that address the root causes of the issues, not just the symptoms.

You are entering the “Do” and “Act” phases of Plan-Do-Check-Act: implementing improvements. Clearly outlining “what will be done, by whom, and by when,” this section turns your observations into tangible improvements.

Section 6: Follow-Up (*Sustain and Check*)

Plan your next steps and follow-up checks. The final section of the A3 is about **sustaining improvement and verifying results**. After actions are implemented, it’s critical to circle back and see if they had the intended effect.

- ▶ Outline here how and when you will follow up. This might include scheduling a return visit to Gemba soon to observe the process again under the new changes.
- ▶ Metrics and indicators can be tracked (for example, monitor that cycle time or defect rate to see if it improved), but nothing substitutes for seeing it with your own eyes on site.
- ▶ Also, even if no immediate action was taken from this walk, you should still **communicate and follow up** with the team involved.

Check back to ensure improvements stick and show the team that their input led to action.

No matter the setting, the A3 helps teams reflect together, stay grounded in purpose, and learn from the real experience of doing the work.



Additional Resources

SCAN TO VIEW SUPPORTING RESOURCES

Gemba Walks Lean Topic



Gemba Walk eLearning Course



Publication: *Gemba Walks*
by Jim Womack



Contact Us

