

When you set up activities, do your students sometimes look confused? This lesson will help you sort this out.

Task 1 – Simon’s instructions

Simon is teaching a group of pre intermediate students.

Simon: ‘So what I would like you to do is this. First of all, I’d like you to imagine you’re a waiter. Well, that’s student A. If you were the waiter what would you do? And student B if you were the customer what would you say? Oh that’s right, guys, you’ll all need to look at the menu. Actually you both will. OK, so you do that and talk together. All right? OK, so what do you have to do?’

Students: [silence]



Write answers to the questions below.

- Do you think Simon’s instructions are clear and easy to understand?
- Can you improve Simon’s instructions? Rewrite them on a piece of paper.
- What grammar and vocabulary changes did you make to Simon’s instructions?

Then check the answer key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

a. No, they are likely to be difficult for pre intermediate level learners. Simon realises at the end he needs to check his instructions and this is a positive thing. However, his way of checking is asking students to repeat the whole instruction sequence and this is difficult.

b. There are many possible ways of rewriting Simon’s instructions. The following example would be easier for students to understand:

Simon: OK, student A – you are all waiters. Student B – you are all customers. So who are the waiters? [the A’s raise their hands] And who are the customers? [the Bs raise their hands] Great! All the waiters and all the customers read the menu. Customers - think about what you are going to say. Waiters, think about what you will reply. Now, what will you do first, read the menu or speak?

Task 1 Feedback (cont'd)

c. The example in answer b has no grammar and vocabulary associated with an imaginary situation. For example, *if you were the waiter ...*, *...imagine ...* It also has no unnecessary polite language *I'd like you to ...* and it has no redundancies such as *I mean...*, *actually...*, *guys...*

Key Skill

When teachers can give clear instructions, learners feel more secure in the lesson. It also means learners can begin tasks more quickly, which increases time for learning.

Task 2 – Hints for giving clear instructions



Look at each pair of sentences and choose the one that is **TRUE**.

Sentences

- a) You should use polite language otherwise students will get offended.

b) You should use simple language so the instructions are clear.
- a) You shouldn't do a demonstration because it takes far too much time.

b) You should do a demonstration so students can see the activity in action.
- a) You should use questions to check key aspects of the instructions.

b) You should use questions to check all aspects of the instructions.
- a) You should hold up worksheets when giving instructions so that students look at you.

b) You should hand out worksheets and then give instructions so students can read what they have to do.
- a) You shouldn't use gesture as this will distract students from what you are saying.

b) You should use gesture because visual information can support what you are saying.
- a) You should never use the OHP (overhead projector) to help you give instructions because it is awkward and it is really a bit like cheating if you do.

b) You could sometimes use an OHP to help you give instructions because you can show a transparency of a worksheet clearly to your learners.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

It is helpful for students if teachers plan their instructions. Good instructions use simple language and are often supported by clear gestures or demonstrations. The whiteboard or OHP may also be used to help give instructions. Remember to ask questions to check your students have understood the instructions correctly.

Task 3 – Getting instructions in the right order



Put the teacher actions a – f in the left-hand column in the correct order 1-6, so that you create a clear and logical instruction sequence.

Teacher actions	Order [1- 6]
a. give instructions	
b. hand out the work sheet	
c. hold up the work sheet	
d. gesture the interaction pattern to be used (e.g. work in pairs)	
e. get the students' attention	
f. check the instructions	

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

In class, before you begin giving your instructions, ensure that all the students are looking at and listening to you. It's important not give out the worksheet too early otherwise you will lose your students attention. Only give out the worksheet once you have finished giving and checking your instructions.

Task 4 – Checking instructions



Each number below 1 – 6 is a learning activity. After each activity, there are 2 questions a) and b) that could be used to check the instructions. One question is effective, but the other is not. Choose the question that you think is most effective.

<u>Learning activities</u>	<u>Questions to check instructions</u>
1. role play	a) Are you going to write or speak together? b) Who speaks first?
2. mingle	a) Do you ask your partner or other students? b) Do you mingle around?
3. gist reading	a) Are you going to read or listen? b) How much time have you got?
4. information gap activity	a) Are you going to show your sheet to each other? b) So what are you going to talk about?
5. gap fill	a) Are you going to fill in the gap? b) Do you use only one word or more than one word?
6. dictation	a) How many times will I read the text? b) Who is going to write down the words?

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Think about the last time you gave instructions for a more complicated activity, for example, a mingle activity or a split reading and feedback task. Did it go well? Did your students begin the task promptly? Why or why not?

Make a list of ideas and record these in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

If you are interested in finding out if your instructions are effective, you can record yourself during the lesson and transcribe your instruction sequences. It is interesting to note what language you use and whether you can improve this or not.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 90 to 92 of *Learning Teaching (2nd edition)* by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on giving instructions.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook series, relating to this topic:

- **Unit 2 a) Teacher language:** Learn how teachers can use language in the classroom that is clear and natural.
- **Unit 2 b) Questioning techniques:** Learn how teachers can effectively use questions not only to check instructions, but also to check learning.

Answer Key

**Task 2 – Feedback**

1. b) You should use simple language so the instructions are clear. - **TRUE**

Comment: *If you are too polite, you may end up using complicated language that is difficult to understand.*

2. b) You should do a demonstration so students can see the activity in action. - **TRUE**

Comment: *Doing an example is a very concrete way of giving instructions.*

3. a) You should use questions to check key aspects of the instructions. - **TRUE**

Comment: *If part of your instructions are obvious, for example, “work in pairs”, then it is not necessary to check this aspect of the activity. Check aspects that are more confusing for students.*

4. a) You should hold up worksheets when giving instructions so that students look at you. - **TRUE**

Comment: *If you give out worksheets too soon, students start reading them and stop listening to your instructions.*

5. b) You should use gesture because it is visual information that supports what you are saying. – **TRUE**

Comment: *Any visual information you can add is always useful for students.*

6. b) You could use an OHP to help you give instructions sometimes because you can show a transparency of a worksheet clearly to your learners. – **TRUE**

Comment: *Showing students a worksheet on an OHP can make the instructions clearer. It also means that students look at you and listen to you when you give the instructions.*

Task 3 – Feedback

1. e

2. c

3. a

4. d

5. f

6. b

Task 4 – Feedback

1. role play b) Who speaks first?

Comment: *The first question is obvious. The second question is useful because students often don't know who should begin a conversation in a role play and this question is a good reminder.*

2. mingle a) Do you ask your partner or other students?

Comment: *The word ‘mingle’ may not be understood by some students. The language in question a) is clearer.*

3. gist reading b) How much time have you got?

Comment: *The first question is too obvious. Question b) reminds students that they should read quickly for gist as they have a time limit.*

4. information gap activity a) Are you going to show your sheet to each other?

Comment: *Question b) is too open-ended. Question a) checks a key aspect of information gap activities.*

5. gap fill b) Do you use only one word or more than one word?

Comment: *Question a) is too obvious. Question b) can be an important instruction to check for a gap fill task as some of these tasks restrict the choice to one word.*

6. dictation a) How many times will I read the text?

Comment: *Question b) is too obvious. However, it is useful to remind students of the number of times you will read a dictation text.*