

Instructional Clarity 101: Practical Tips for Teachers

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1. Imagine you're talking to a scatterbrained and forgetful 4-year-old

- Catch your students' attention
- Speak in short and simple sentences
- Cut out useless bits of information
- Put yourself in your students' shoes when you're teaching

Version A: So, what I'd like to ask you to do is turn to page 24 in your books and look at the first, sorry, the second task, please. We're going to read a text and you have to answer a number of questions, which are below the text. I'd like you to do this alone for now but later we will check the answers together.

Version B: We're going to read a text about cars. Open your books to page 24. [Wait until everybody's looking at the correct page.] Look at Task 1. [Point at Task 1.] Read the text and answer the questions. Work alone for now.

2. Record yourself in class, then reenact the task following your exact words

We tend to believe that everything we say is perfectly clear and everyone can follow our lead.

3. Plan your instructions in advance by following these 6 steps

1. *Grabbing attention* – What are you going to say or do to make everyone focus on you?
2. *Group setup* – Start by saying if they are going to work in pairs, groups or by themselves. It makes the following steps easier if you rearrange them at this point.
3. *Task step by step* – Speak in short sentences and pause after each step if necessary.
4. *Demoing or chesting* – To help those students who might be shy to ask for clarification, demo the activity or show where they can find the task in the book or on the worksheet (this is called chesting).
5. *Time limit* – How much time are they going to get?
6. *ICQs* – Check understanding with so-called instruction checking questions that are specific and short. Such as: "Are you going to work in pairs or individually?", "Which task are we working on?", "Can you show your partner your picture?"

4. Act quickly and don't panic if something goes wrong

Monitor closely what your students are doing and be ready to act quickly if someone's not doing things right-clarify right away

Conclusion

Even though we think they should come naturally, our instructions can overcomplicate even the simplest task. But getting better at giving instructions is actually quite simple if we can get ourselves to calm down, slow down, and communicate clearly.

