

ELEMENT 8

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PROVIDING ACCURATE INSTRUCTIONS IN MATERIALS DESIGN

Objective

To distinguish the concept of an instructions and its types.

Instructions

According to the Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary (n.d), an instruction is defined as the act of teaching someone how to do something. For Huitt (2003), an instruction is one of many teacher behaviors that play a significant role in students' learning, along with planning and management. Therefore, an instruction has to do with lesson delivery, which refers to guiding the learners in the learning process (Ochoma, 2015). In this sense, Efebo (2005) mentioned that an instruction has to do with all the activities, that is interactions, which take place between the teacher, student, and content in the teaching/learning process. At the end of the interaction, students can demonstrate that learning has taken place. Hence, an instruction can be considered as the act of helping people learn by means of providing detailed directions to be followed.

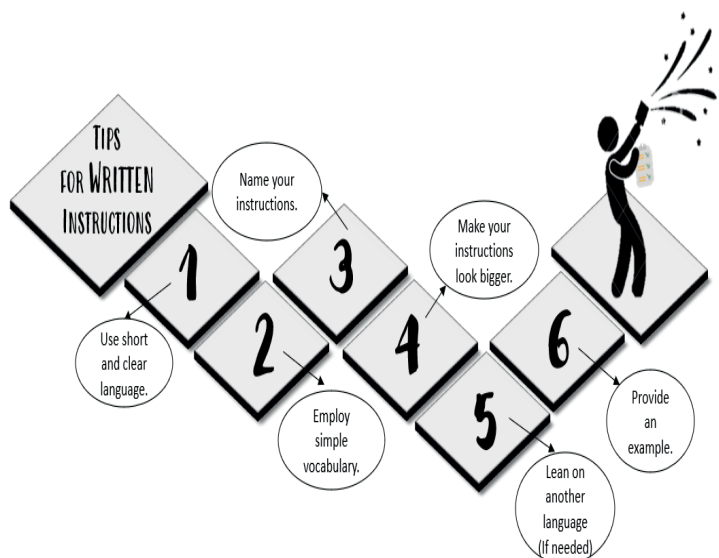
When it comes to educational settings, giving instructions is a crucial step in students' learning process and should be short and clear. We consider that giving concise instructions is fundamental, so learners will know how to follow those directions correctly. In our teaching experiences, we may have faced difficult situations where we have been unsure of what to do because of incomprehensible instructions. Because of this, we highlight the importance of getting straight to the point when providing instructions in any educational context.

Oral instructions are not the same as written ones. Imagine two different scenarios. The first one is when you face a context where students can only have access to written instructions through workshops, worksheets, modules, etc. The other one is when you as a teacher have the possibility of providing good use of materials, such as posters, flashcards, or slides. We have provided some tips below for you to consider when giving written or oral instructions.

Written Instructions

Tips when giving instructions

As the main purpose of this book is to provide a guide to design materials for EFL classrooms, written instructions play a crucial aspect to consider. Writing demands time, corrections, feedback, proof-reading, etc.; however, designing materials is “not a race, but rather a peaceful journey to be savoured each point along the path, each step of the route to be travelled” (Núñez & Téllez, 2009, p. 184). In this sense, we have designed the following path for you to walk through when designing your written instructions.



One of the biggest flaws we have found regarding written instructions is the starting point. Even though we know how complex it is to start writing, using short and clear language when giving written instructions is the key. When giving written instructions, it is fundamental to go straight to the point with short, clear, and concise language. You should transmit your instructions as brief as possible avoiding different ways that might confuse your learners, such as any kind of overloading or repetition.

Use short and clear language

1

Depending on the context, employing simple vocabulary when giving written instructions is crucial in providing an eloquent message. This second step on your path has to do with the use of uncomplicated words for your learners. Vocabulary is central to English language teaching; that

Employ simple vocabulary

2

is why, writing simple vocabulary when providing your instructions might increase the chances of your students receiving the message. Try to use true cognates, if possible.

Having the possibility to name your instructions through cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers, letters, and/or bullets is our third tip for you to tread when establishing your written instructions correctly, visually speaking. Organization plays a fundamental part when providing written instructions. Here, you will have to double check the way you are presenting your written instructions to your students.

For a moment, pretend you are a student and think about the way they will visually perceive those instructions. This will help you write your instructions better.

Name your
instructions

3

This fourth tip is connected to our previous one. After choosing one way to name your instructions, the following step is to make them look bigger. This tip will help you get your learners' attention and, consequently, help them focus on what you want them to develop.

Make your
instructions look bigger

4

This fifth tip is optional depending on your context. You can continue to the next one if necessary. However, if you find yourself in a situation where you need to provide written instructions in another language, this tip might help you out. Our advice to you when giving written instructions in another language is to stay true to the language you want your students to learn and have their native language as a reference point only. This means that the language they are learning ought to be the first thing they see on the paper (Follow tip #4). The language they have acquired already (their mother tongue) might be in the background to double check in case of any misunderstanding. Depending on your style, you can make the text look different by reducing the size, changing the font, or simply using italics.

Lean on another
language (if needed)

5

Finally, you have come to our last but not least tip. You will find that written instructions must always be connected to a visual example to follow. When learners see what they need to develop through an example at the end of the instruction, they are more likely to carry out the activity successfully. In such a way, we recommend that you place yourself in your students' shoes.

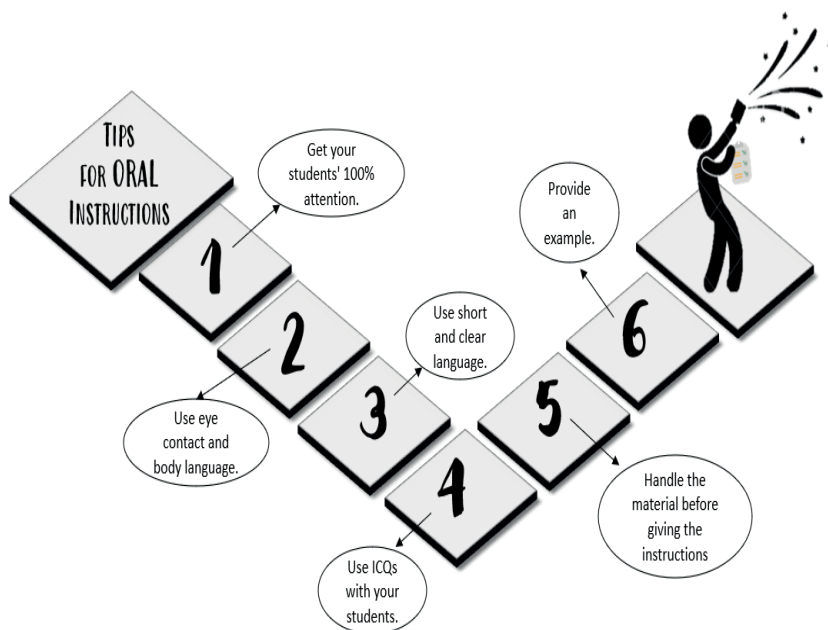
Provide
an example

6

Propose an example that shows them the path you want them to take. By doing so, your students' learning styles are put into practice.

Oral Instructions

Unlike written instructions, oral instructions have a different functionality. Oral instructions intend to communicate a verbal message, but they can be misinterpreted due to flaws when giving instructions. Often, teachers bring classroom materials like slides, posters, maps, and pictures that need complementary oral instructions. If clear instructions are not provided, then the materials would lose effectivity. Therefore, we have designed the following path for you to think about when giving oral instructions.



1

Get your students' 100% attention

The first thing you need to do when giving your students oral instructions is to get their full attention. This does not mean that no one is listening or that students' will not get the information from their peers. However, we can make sure that everybody is paying attention before starting. Otherwise, you may have to repeat what you already said many times. One recommendation we can give you is to try to use tip #2.

This tip is helpful in getting your students' attention before giving oral instructions, as well as maintaining the flow of the class. Eye contact and body language are necessary in showing your students that you are 100% attentive to every single detail in your class. When we talk about eye contact, we basically mean your eyes ought to be on your students the whole time. You need to be attentive to those who are following your ideas and those who are not. Also, body language is linked to the above mentioned since your students will connect your movements with the oral instructions. These movements, which can be intrinsic, are key to catching your students' attention and reinforce your message.

2

Use eye contact and body language

3

Use short and clear language

Similar to written instructions, short and clear language is fundamental when giving oral instructions. This third tip is concerned with giving a straightforward message and being concise and direct in order to avoid overloading or repetition in your instructions. Sometimes confusion occurs when you try to clarify your first instruction in a second, third, or more attempt. We may end up diverting the message because we did not use short and clear language to begin with. In this regard, we recommend following the next tip to know what to do if this situation happens to you.

ICQs stand for Instruction Checking Questions, and they are a vital aspect for you to consider when giving oral instructions. ICQs help teachers verify students' understanding by checking if your students understand what you have just told them to do. In this sense, you could ask ICQs to one or two students in to verify if you were misunderstood before letting them start the activity.

4 Use ICQs with your students

5 Hand out the material before giving the instructions

One of the biggest difficulties pre-service teachers face when teaching is to get students' attention and avoid repetitions when giving oral instructions. Now that you have stepped onto our fifth tip, you can reflect about those times when you have made the mistake of handing out materials while giving instructions, or worse, after giving instructions. Our tip here is to hand out the material before giving instructions and after going through all the aforementioned tips this path has. In this sense, you will ensure that your students are not distracted, and you will avoid repeating the same instructions all over again. Additionally, we recommend making sure you are not the only one who is guiding the oral instructions aloud. You can assign students to follow the reading and, if necessary, go back to tip #4. Do not hesitate in doing so!

Like the written instructions, proving an example at the end is essential when giving oral instructions. Since the message you will transmit is spoken, the example must be executed in the same way. Consequently, we recommend executing that example from your role as a teacher. Sometimes we ask one student to come up to the board to show the class how to develop your activity. However, this can intimidate the student and result in further misunderstandings. That is why we encourage you to be a guide in providing the final oral instructions through example. You can also make sure the example appears on paper as a model look at during the activity.

6 Provide an example

1. Find the mistakes in the following instructions. Correct and rewrite the instructions in the lines below. You can check the example. Lastly, compare your answers with a classmate.

E.g.

X

Complete the following paragraph with a suitable word, remember there are not correct answers, just let your imagination flow.

The following paragraph is about the history of the automobile. Try to complete the paragraph with the verbs used in the exercise before.



- 2. Improve the two following WRITTEN instructions.**

X

A. Based on what you have learned so far, during the last three weeks after vacations, meet with at least half of your classmates, and read the stories. Think about pros and cons and share your thoughts.

[illegible]

X

B. Write about your life.

✓

3. Improve the two following ORAL instructions.

X

C. Now, you will make a group of three people each and will perform a situation that will be given. For this activity, you need to use the vocabulary you have learned in the previous classes about the past simple.

✓

X

D. Open page 42-43 from your English workbook and develop exercises 1, 3 and 5 on your own. Don't forget to use a pencil in case you need to erase.

✓

