

GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

Giving clear instructions that people can easily understand is a useful and important skill. For example, you may have to give instructions to:

- A new staff member about how to do a particular job
- A new customer or a group of visitors
- A class that you are teaching
- A group of people you are organising to do a particular task or project
- People who need to evacuate your building or facility

All instructions need to be simple, clear and easy to follow – people's lives may depend on them understanding them.

TIPS FOR GIVING INSTRUCTIONS THAT WORK

1. **Find out who your audience is.** Knowing a bit about your audience will help you think about how best to give your instructions.
2. **Find out what people already know** – they may have some starting knowledge already.
3. **Set the scene.** Tell your audience what you are going to be talking about before you start giving the actual instructions. Explain **why** it is important to know what you are going to be describing.
4. **Use simple language.** You may understand technical terms that you use every day in your job, but your audience may not. If you do have to use technical language, explain what it means.
5. **Speak slowly and clearly.** Check that everyone can hear you. Use an interesting tone of voice. Vary your tone from time to time. Find out if anyone has a hearing or vision problem that would get in the way of their understanding.
6. **Follow a logical sequence.** Give your instructions in the right order. 'First....., then....., and lastly,' People can only do one step at a time.



7. **Check for understanding.** Stop often to check that people understand.
8. **Encourage questions.** Pause often for questions. People often don't want to seem 'dumb' or think that they are the only person who doesn't understand. If you say something like 'I'm sure someone has a question or two about this step...' you are giving people the OK to ask.
9. **Be patient.** Just because you know how to do something doesn't mean that other people will 'get it' quickly. Don't rush through each step.
10. **Show people what to do, don't just explain.** Or ask one of your audience to demonstrate what you have been explaining, so you know they understand. Think about the different ways people learn – some prefer to watch rather than listen.
11. **Use visual aids** such as maps, diagrams, posters, PowerPoint slides etc to help explain what you are talking about.
13. **Follow up with a handout** for the audience to take away, covering what you have said. But don't hand it out until the end, otherwise they may read instead of listening to or watching you.
14. **Give a summary at the end** that goes back over the main points of your instructions.
15. **Ask for feedback** when you have finished, to make sure that every single person is clear about what they have to do.

LEARN FROM EACH EXPERIENCE

Each time you give instructions you have a chance to check that they work. Either your audience will be able to follow what you have told them, or they won't. If they can't do what you asked, find out why.

Maybe you talked too fast. Maybe you didn't ask if they really understood. Maybe you didn't give them instructions in the correct order. Whatever didn't work can be improved on.

Giving instructions is something you learn to do by doing it often and checking out the results. Like everything in your job, practice makes perfect!

EXAMPLE

Jen has a new pump class starting today. She is a bit nervous as she has only been at this gym for 2 weeks and all the participants will be new to her. Jen makes sure she is well prepared by checking who will be in the class and how many participants there are.

When everyone is ready Jen explains exactly what the class will do today. She first runs through each move by demonstrating it, and asks for questions after each move. She asks how many people have been to a similar class before. She checks that everyone can hear, that everyone can understand her language and that the music is not too loud while they get their instructions.

Once everyone is clear about what to do, Jen cranks up the music and they get under way!

KEY POINTS

- All instructions should be simple, clear and easy to follow.
- Find out what people already know and build on that.
- Explain why people need to know what you are telling them.
- Speak clearly and slowly and in plain English.
- If people in your audience do not have English as their first language, check often that they can understand you.
- Use open questions to encourage people to ask about things they do not understand. Open questions start with How...? What...? Where...? When...? Why...?
- Give your audience a chance to practise what you are explaining.
- Be patient.
- Use the same rules if you are giving instructions on the phone, over an intercom, on a two-way radio and so on.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

Demonstrate Show

Handout Brochure, checklist, written information

Instructions Orders, commands, directions, advice

Logical Sensible, commonsense, realistic

Summary Outline, review, synopsis

Technical Specialised, related to a particular type of work

Think of the times that might have to give instructions, or have given instructions in the past. This can either be to one person or a group of people.

Now that you have read the tips in this Info Sheet, use this space to write down all the things you want to remember to help you improve your skills for giving instructions next time.



This fact sheet will be useful when you are being assessed for:

Unit Standard 1312 Give oral instructions in the workplace (Level 3, 3 credits), or any time you have to give instructions to a person or group of people.

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