

Teaching Tip: Giving and Checking Instructions

“Okay. Now we are going to play a game that we played last year with the cards. What you have to do is go over there—but hold on Barb. Please come back. I wasn’t finished and you should get into groups. Stop. I’ll tell you what your groups are so don’t get into your own groups because I want you to make new friends. Anne, please listen. And so, you will play the game until I tell you to stop. It is like euchre, only you don’t have a partner and trump is always clubs unless you are going alone. And if you don’t know how to play ask me in a minute and I will help you. Don’t talk except if it is your turn. Okay. Good. So, go over there and get into groups. No, wait. I will tell you the groups. Okay. Go.”

Is it funny because it’s true? This is how most of us give instructions. Then we wonder why students aren’t motivated to do the task. We blame their distraction or confusion on their unruliness, rather than identifying the base problem: instructions that are too wordy and complicated to follow!

TASK: Identify the key instructions above. Omit all unnecessary words. Rewrite the instructions with as few words as possible. Check FEEDBACK 1 (PAGE 249).