

# Why do students often mess up tasks?

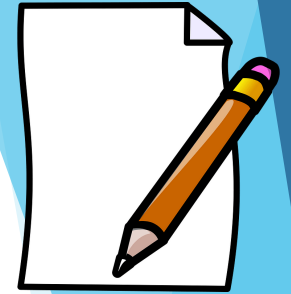
Rachel Appleby, NYESZE 2023



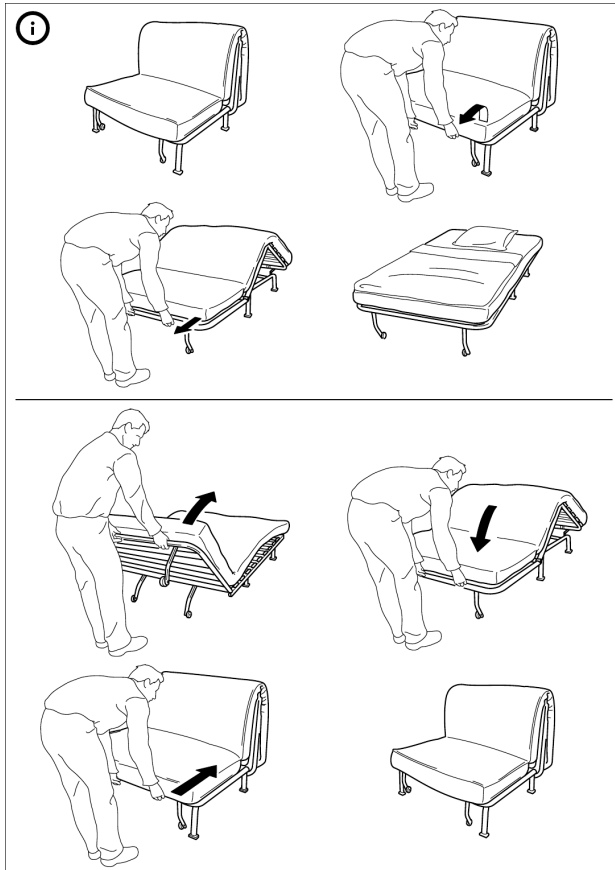
# A task for you

1. Draw a cloud.
2. Draw legs.
3. Draw a circle for a head.

What have you got?



\* Remember to state the aim! \*



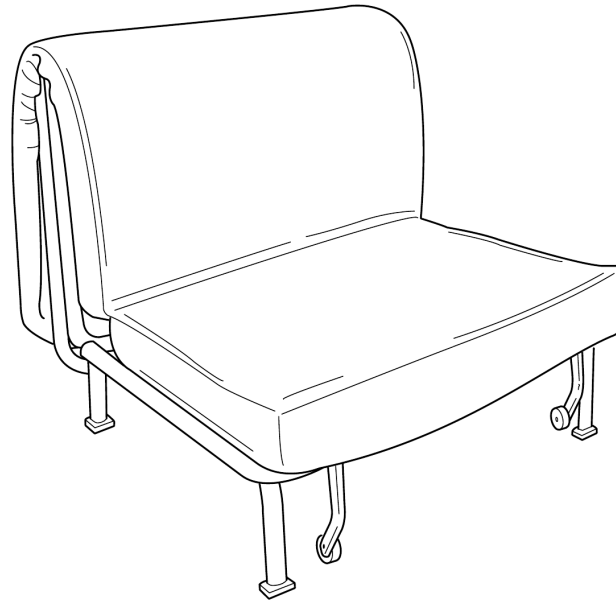
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# LYCKSELE



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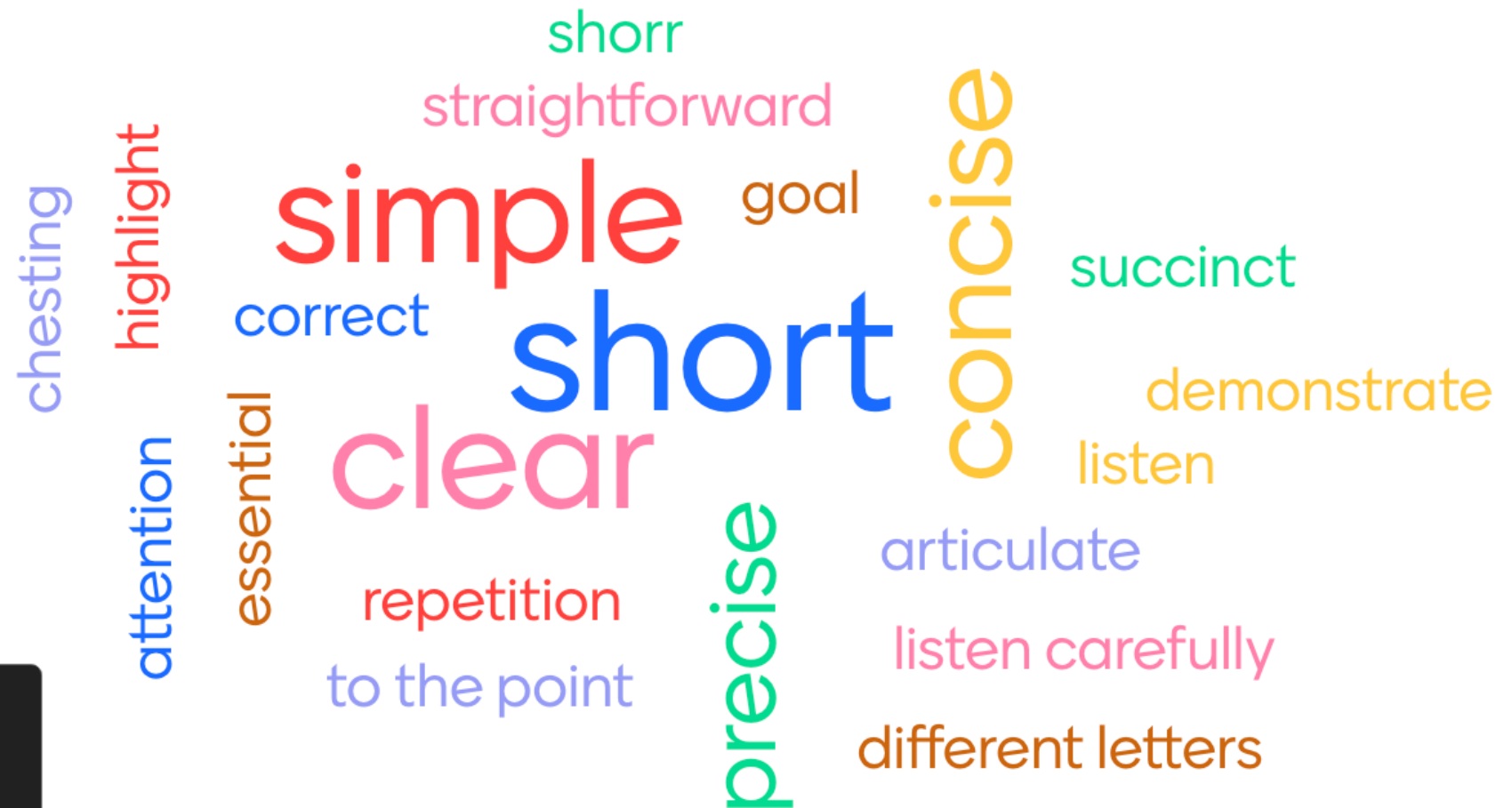


\* Get rid of student distractions! \*

What's the problem here?



# Giving instructions: What comes to mind?



A word cloud of terms related to giving instructions. The words are arranged in a circular pattern around the center. The words include: simple, short, clear, concise, precise, articulate, listen carefully, different letters, demonstrate, listen, succinct, goal, straightforward, shorr, correct, repetition, to the point, essential, attention, highlight, and chesting. The words are in various colors and orientations.

shorr  
straightforward  
goal  
simple  
correct  
short  
clear  
concise  
succinct  
demonstrate  
listen  
articulate  
listen carefully  
different letters  
precise  
to the point  
repetition  
essential  
attention  
highlight  
chesting



GO TO  
**menti.com**

ENTER THE CODE

# Problems with “bad instructions”

I often feel demotivated [and] I am willing to put less effort into the task.

... students start to lose interest in the subject.

I feel like I am just wasting my time on trying to figure out what the teacher actually wanted.

# Problems with “bad instructions”

“The problem is, the lecturer might think the instructions are clear to themselves without consulting with the students. We are left to interpret what they might have meant.

# Outline of session

- ▶ Why instructions are important
- ▶ How we can help our students:
  - ▶ Grading language
  - ▶ Using L1
  - ▶ Strategies: before class, during and after
  - ▶ Differentiation
- ▶ Checking instructions
- ▶ Online instructions



# Grading language

1. **Ungraded** ‘So, could you please ... what I wanted you to do was to talk together to do the exercise in pairs ... so get together with a partner, could you ... and it’s on page 22 ... so, OK, when you’ve sorted out your pair, make a start on what you’ve got to do, and jot down the answers.’

2. **Graded** ‘OK Everyone. I want you to get into pairs, please. Turn to page 22, and do exercise B. Talk together to agree the answers.’

3. **Highly graded** ‘Get into pairs.’ [*Waits for students to do it.*]

‘Page 22’ [*Waits for students to do it.*]

‘Exercise B. Work together.’ [*Uses a gesture to indicate ‘pairs’.*]

# Using L1

## Sandwiching L1 and L2

Teacher gives instructions in English, repeats them in L1, and finally says them again immediately in L2.

## Code-switching

*(using both languages to deliver the instructions)*


Code-switching is when the teacher wants to use a phrase or a word which students would not understand, and **adds or replaces** it with L1 translation



> Philip Kerr L1

# Strategies: *(see handout)*

## Things to do BEFORE you go into class

- *Plan your instructions*
- *Be clear about the aim of the task*
- ***(g) Script your instructions*** 
- *Order your instructions (logically)*
- ***(a) Check your instructions with a colleague***
- ***(d) Have handouts ready***

# Strategies:

Things to think about IMMEDIATELY BEFORE or WHEN giving your instructions

Using your VOICE:

- *Tone: be friendly & polite 😊*
- *Diction: be clear*
- *(h) Speed: slower than classroom 'chat'*
- *(j) Volume: loud enough, but not too loud*

# Strategies:

Things to think about IMMEDIATELY BEFORE or WHEN giving your instructions

Procedure:

- *(b) Get your students' attention*
- *Make sure students can see you (see your lips!)*
- *(c) Give a (brief) overview of the task*
- *Go step by step*
- *(i) Use 'please'*
- *Show (e.g. page number)*
- *Demonstrate (show how the activity works)*
- *(f) (Repeat) / paraphrase*

# Strategies:

Things to think about IMMEDIATELY AFTER you have given your instructions, or AFTER CLASS:

- *Check students understand (use Instruction Checking Questions: 'ICQs')*
- *Monitor, to see if students are on task*
- *(e) Reflect: what could you do better?*

Anything else for these lists?



> Choose 3 to try on Monday!

# Good instructions matter because ...

- ▶ learners need to know what to do
- ▶ good instructions help build trust and rapport, and inspire confidence
- ▶ Ss will feel more comfortable
- ▶ the class will run more smoothly and efficiently



**STT is increased!**  
(Student Talking Time)

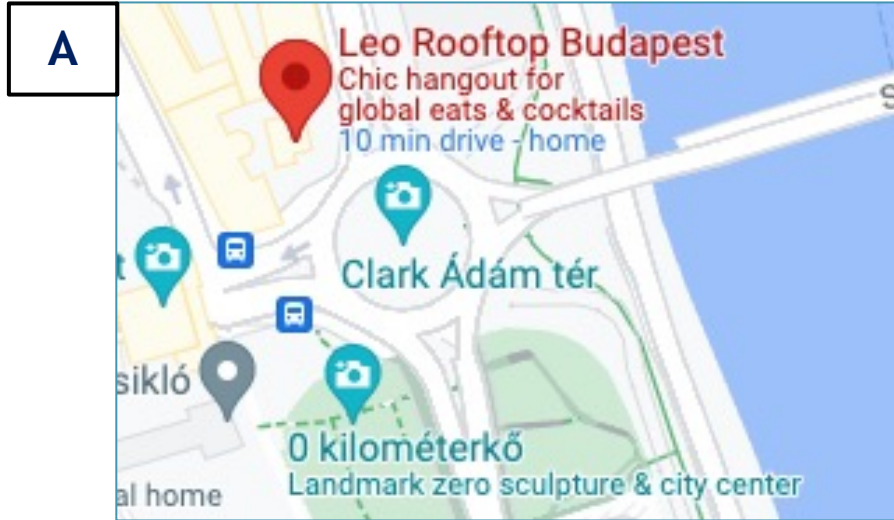
# Differentiation

To get there,  
would you like ...

- A. to have a map
- B. to have audio navigation
- C. to have the address
- D. to have written instructions on how to get there from [e.g. your house]
- E. to be taken
- F. ...?



# Differentiation



C

1 Clark Ádám tér  
1013 Budapest

D

From the metro, ... [...]  
Then turn left, ...  
and then ...

A blue pen is shown writing on a white notepad. The notepad has a folded corner and is placed next to the text in block D.

E

I'll pick you up -  
I'll take you!

# Differentiation

What about your  
students'  
preferences?

Have you  
asked them?

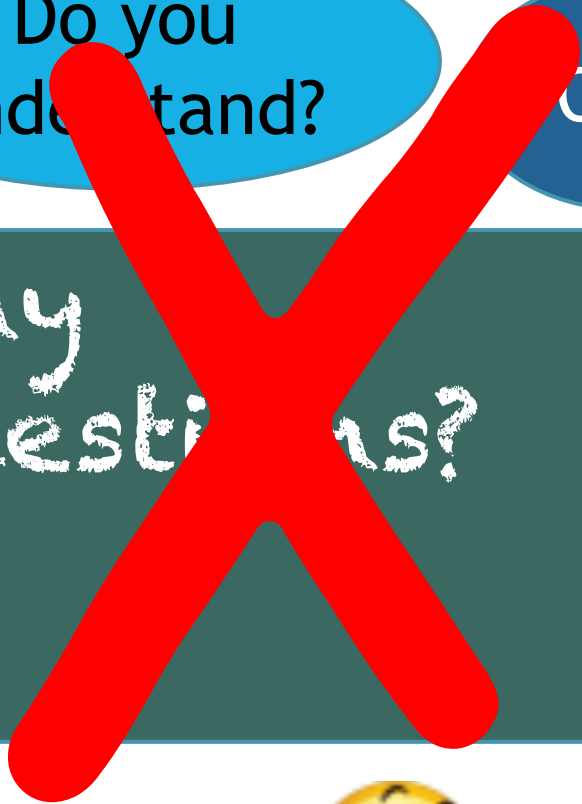


# Checking instructions

Do you  
understand?

OK ?

Any  
questions?



- ▶ Students understand
- ▶ Ss are too shy to say they don't understand
- ▶ Ss think they understand

# Checking instructions: “special questions”

Are they difficult questions?	<i>NO</i>
Do they have long answers?	<i>NO</i>
Do they check the <u>language</u> of the task?	<i>NO</i>
Do they check <u>how to do</u> the task?	<i>YES</i>
Will they make sure the students understand the task?	<i>YES</i>

# Checking instructions

## Instruction Checking Questions (“ICQs”) ...

- ▶ ... are simple questions
- ▶ ... require a 1- or 2-word answer only
- ▶ ... focus on what could go wrong (not on language)
- ▶ ... are used to check students understand the task

# Checking instructions

With a partner (1'):

Are these questions OK? What else could you ask?

a. What do you have to write?

b. Are you writing verbs or nouns?

c. When is the homework due?

d. What page is it on?

e. Are you working alone or in pairs?

f. How many minutes do you have?

?

# Instructions Checking Questions (ICQ)

What questions could you use with this task?

Task:

Fill in each gap below with one word from the text you've just read.

Can you use any word? [No]

Can you use only words from the text? [Yes]

Just 1 word? Or 2-3 words? [1 word]

# Online instructions



What (if anything) do you do differently online, when giving instructions?



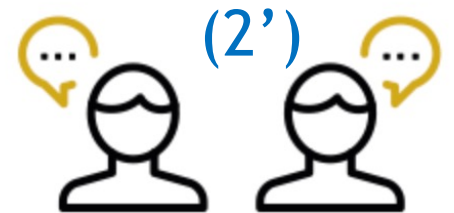
## [Sample online task]

- ▶ **Situation:** Organising a conference
- ▶ In your group,
  - ▶ *Elect a scribe (to take notes)*
  - ▶ *Elect a spokesperson (to feedback afterwards)*
- ▶ What will the conference theme be?
- ▶ Where / when will it take place?
- ▶ You have 8'.

What would you say?

When? (before or after screen instructions?)

Anything else?

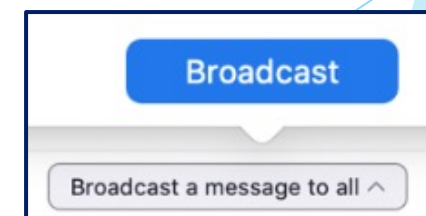
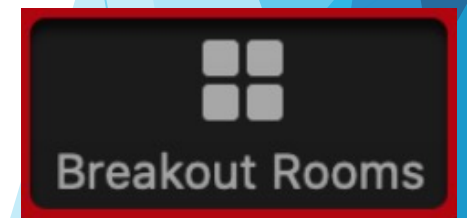
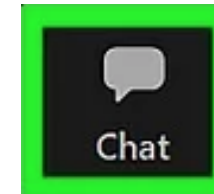
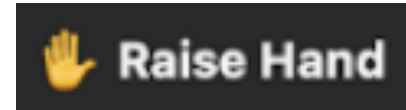


# Online instructions

1. Get students' attention.
2. Introduce the task.
3. Say your instructions.
4. Show them on screen.
5. Write instructions in the chatbox.
6. Post them again in individual break-out rooms.
7. AND:

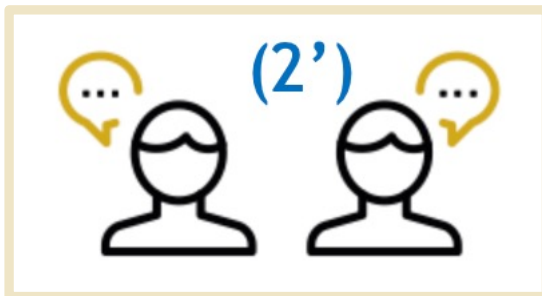
Send a 1' notification message:

▶ [e.g.] "Rooms closing in 1 minute"



# Online instructions

Extra guidance:  
using 'banners'



Speak!

Breakout rooms 5'

Individual work 3'

**Feedback**

**Reflection ....**

to the chat box!



## [Sample online task]

Breakout rooms 8'

- ▶ **Situation:** Organising a conference
- ▶ In your group,
  - ▶ *Elect a scribe (to take notes)*
  - ▶ *Elect a spokesperson (to feedback afterwards)*
- ▶ What will the conference theme be?
- ▶ Where / when will it take place?
- ▶ You have 8'.

# Positive outcomes

With good instructions, we have every intention of paying attention.

For me, detailed instructions, and, if possible, written down because then they not likely to be open to interpretation.

It's actually all about the instructions and clear communication, which are essential for great outcomes.



High-  
quality  
materials

+

Great  
instructions

=

Efficient  
Learning

# Outline of session

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  - ▶ Strategies: before, during and after
  - ▶ Differentiation
- ▶ Checking instructions
- ▶ Instructions online



.... and finally:



# Sources:



- ▶ Rabbit: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lD5w-5xoTqA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lD5w-5xoTqA)
- ▶ Cartoon: <https://ruinmyweek.com/funny/funny-bad-instructions>
- ▶ Sandwich: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ct-l00UqmyY&t=117s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ct-l00UqmyY&t=117s)
- ▶ Kerr, P. (2014). *Translation and Own-language Activities*, CUP.
- ▶ Scrivener, J. (1998). *Learning Teaching*, Macmillan.
- ▶ Scrivener, J. (2012). *Classroom Management Techniques*, CUP.

Why do students often  
mess up tasks?



> My students are **GREAT** at tasks!

Rachel Appleby, NYESZE, May 2023

# Instructions matter! How to get them right

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