

Direction Following Can Be Challenging for Anyone  
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As a professor I often gave an assignment to develop directions for a mundane activity, like putting on a t-shirt, eating soup from a spoon, or brushing teeth. Those who responded with 'put the shirt over your head' didn't give enough detail, while those who listed 20 steps were too detailed. There must be a happy medium. Successful direction presenting and following is more difficult than one may think. Please read on. Be sure to:

- have the full attention of the recipient before giving directions.
- be nearby, not across the room.
- limit distractions, such as loud sounds or lots of visual activity.
- remember some people need to fidget, draw, mold clay, etc. to stay focused.
- keep directions short and clear - not too wordy.
- repeat longer directions in shorter phrases, slowly, and sometimes twice.
- have recipient repeat the direction back before doing.
- use language that the recipient understands - familiar and appropriate.
- wait quietly for follow through of the direction.
- make the goal reasonable, attainable and desirable.
- provide a simple reminder, such as: "stop -- look -- and listen!"
- make following directions fun, especially while practicing the skill. Make it a game. E.g., "The first one there gets a piece of chocolate."
- work toward a goal in smaller chunks, if compliance is tricky. Reward for following one step, then two. It may be challenging at first.
- always keep in mind that learning a new skill will take time.
- always be patient.

Further fun suggestions:

- Present directions in an 'if. . .then' format. E.g., "If you put the blocks away, then you can have a popsicle." Or state the reward first – "You can have a popsicle, after you put the blocks away."
- Take turns or work together to follow a direction toward a goal. E.g., "I'll put a block in the box, now it's your turn. My turn, your turn. Hey, look! We're done!"
- Model stopping, thinking, then choosing. Quietly narrate your actions, then guide the recipient to use the same process.
- Practice red light-green light (stop and go games) to help gain control of actions.

*Keep in mind that following directions  
fosters responsibility and  
ultimately promotes independence.*

