

SAD PEACH: The Steps to Giving Effective Instructions in English

by **CLAIRE LEE**

Have you ever finished giving directions for an activity and been met with confused stares? Or, as you walked around during the activity, you realized that students had no idea what they were supposed to be doing? How do you make sure that your students understand the instructions you give in your class?

First and foremost, teachers must have a clear understanding of the activity and its purposes. Having an understanding includes considering possible outcomes, options, and challenges your students may face. If you don't have a firm grasp of how the activity will be run, you can't expect your students to, either.

Once you have a clear understanding of the activity, it is important to decide how you will convey the instructions to students. Pre-planned instructions are key to teaching effectively (El Kemma 2019). Understanding directions in a foreign language can be challenging for students. Not only does being confused about an activity frustrate learners, but it can also waste valuable class time.

In order to give clear directions, you can use the acronym SAD PEACH, which serves as a checklist for giving directions for any classroom activity. I developed this acronym after seeing another teacher-trainer's presentation and while working with pre-service teachers in Vietnam (Snow 2019).

These steps work with all age groups and levels.

Here are the steps of SAD PEACH and an example of how to give directions for a Tic-Tac-Toe (also known as Knots and Crosses) activity, with a vocabulary twist:

- 1. Set up:** Make sure you have set up and prepared all of the materials required for the activity. Will students need worksheets? Markers? Blank paper? This step includes being prepared mentally for what will happen during the activity and how you plan on explaining it (El Kemma 2019). See Sowell (2017) for more ideas about how to prepare.

Let's use the example of the Tic-Tac-Toe activity. Imagine you are teaching vocabulary and a sentence structure related to animals and their habitats, such as "A cow lives on a farm" and "A fish lives in the ocean." To prepare, you need paper with a large Tic-Tac-Toe grid, with vocabulary items for review written in the spaces. You should also have pens or pencils in case students do not have anything to write and draw with. Alternatively, you can draw or project the same grid on the board and add the sentence frame. It might look like this:

A(n) (animal) lives in/on a/an/the (place).

fish	monkey	bird
dog	frog	lion
snake	cow	zebra

- 2. Attention:** Getting the attention of students is essential before giving any instructions; otherwise, you will end up repeating yourself (Scrivener 2011). Examples of attention-getting techniques include hand-raising, clapping to a beat, and call-and-response. These should be used regularly so that students learn your attention-getting method.

One way that I get the attention of students is to raise my hand, and when students see my hand raised, they become quiet and raise their hands as well. Eventually, all students should be quietly watching me with their hands raised. This is a technique that should be taught to students beforehand so they understand that the hand-raising signal means that they should quietly raise their own hands. I use this signal consistently in my classes.

- 3. Display:** Displaying materials means showing students the materials (paper or digital) as well as posting written directions (Languages International 2009). Using visuals can support students' understanding of the activity (El Kemma 2019). However, it is best to avoid handing out materials or assigning groups until you have finished giving instructions; otherwise, students will

get distracted or start the worksheet without listening.

In this case, I would bring attention to the large projected (or drawn) Tic-Tac-Toe grid and sentence frame that were shown in Step 1.

- 4. Purpose:** Letting students know the purpose of the activity can help them understand what is expected of them and what the final product should look like. Will they be giving a presentation? Writing a paragraph? Start with the end in mind.

I would begin by explaining to students, "You will be playing Tic-Tac-Toe with a partner. You will practice speaking and using the vocabulary you have studied. The goal of the game is to get three in a row." I would indicate on the board what getting three in a row looks like (vertically, horizontally, or diagonally).

fish	monkey	bird
dog	frog	lion
snake	cow	zebra

- 5. Explain:** Directions should be given in simple and clear language (Languages International 2009; El Kemma 2019). Too much teacher-talk time can lose the attention of students. Use body language, gestures, and facial expressions to develop greater understanding (Scrivener 2011). You can learn more about how to use total physical response, often called TPR, for giving directions in Sowell (2017).

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The explanation would then continue:

— “One person will mark with X, and the other will mark with O.” (*Draw an X and an O on the board to show students.*) “O will go first.”

— “Choose a word and use it in the sentence ‘A(n) (animal) lives in/ on a/ an/ the (place).’” (*Point to the words in the spaces and to the sentence frame.*)

— “For example, suppose I am O. If I choose the word *frog*, I would say, ‘A frog lives in the jungle.’” (*Point to the sentence frame on the board while saying the sentence.*) “Then I would draw an O in the ‘frog’ space.” (*Circle the “frog” space.*)

— “You and your partner will take turns until one of you can get three of your marks in a row.” (*Use hand motions to point to yourself and then to an imaginary partner.*)

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- 6. Act out:** Acting out or modeling the activity helps students understand what they will be doing. You should

not include the entire class (that is simply starting the activity!). Your demonstration should match the actual activity as closely as possible. If students will be standing in a circle during the activity, ask a few students—and your co-teacher or teaching assistant, if you have one—to stand in a circle with you for the demonstration. This is also an opportunity to show a model or examples of completed work (Scrivener 2011).

For Tic-Tac-Toe, I would ask a student or my co-teacher to come to the front of the room and demonstrate with the grid on the board. I would choose a word and form a sentence by using that word in the sentence frame; then I would use my marker (or chalk, if the grid is drawn on a blackboard) to draw an O in the space with that word, as described in Step 5. My partner would choose a word in a different space, make a sentence using that word, and draw an X in that space. We would continue until one of us has three in a row.

- 7. Check:** Checking for understanding is essential, but it must be done properly. Have you ever asked, “Do you understand?” Usually, students will simply nod even if they do not understand the instructions. Rather, asking instruction-check questions (ICQs) is a great way to see if students really understand what they are to do (Cooley 2015). ICQs are close-ended questions about key parts of the directions. These can be yes/no questions (e.g., “Do you work in pairs?”) or questions that offer two options (e.g., “Do you have three minutes or five minutes to write?”).

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For the Tic-Tac-Toe activity, I would ask:

– “Do you take turns?” (Yes.)

– “Do you say only the vocabulary word, or do you say a sentence that uses the vocabulary word?” (*You say a sentence—bonus points if the students can say the sentence frame that they are to use.*)

– “How do you win?” (*Get three in a row.*)

- 8. Hand out materials and assign groups:** The last step is to hand out any materials and assign groups if students will be working together. While some may suggest doing this beforehand, I prefer to assign groups at the end because students may get distracted with the knowledge of who their partners or group members are (Sowell 2017).

For our example Tic-Tac-Toe activity, you would now assign pairs and hand out the papers with the grids—or have students draw their own grids. Here, I might ask students to pair with a neighbor, although you might have your own favorite pairing-off techniques.

I have used SAD PEACH with numerous English language classes of all ages and have taught a version of it during teacher-training workshops in Vietnam and Japan. The acronym can be used as a simple step-by-step process to help your students understand your instructions for an activity the first time around. (For more on how to give effective instructions, read Sowell [2017] in *English Teaching Forum*.)

To prevent your students from being “SAD” after you give instructions, follow these steps for happy teachers and students!

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