



**Pre-employment skills**

# **Following instructions at work**

Version 1.2



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### Following instructions at work

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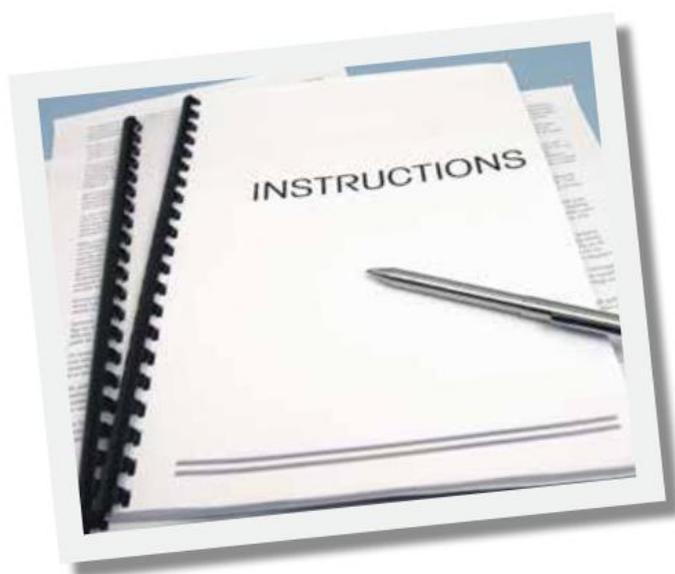
# Following instructions

An instruction tells you how to do something. You follow instructions every day. You may read instructions or a person may give you an instruction.

In the morning, you may follow instructions for making breakfast. The instructions may be on a box of oats, or in a manual that tells you how to use your toaster.

On your way to work or study you follow instructions. Maybe you see instructions for how to buy a train ticket. If you drive, you will follow the road rules, which tell you how to drive safely.

At work, your supervisor or boss will give you instructions on what to do and how to do it. You will need to follow these instructions to do your job well. You must also follow safety instructions to make sure you don't hurt yourself at work.



# Step-by-step instructions

Most instructions have steps. This way, you know the order in which they should be completed. The steps must be in the right order. If the steps are in the wrong order things will go wrong. If you miss a step in the instructions things will go wrong.

## Activity 1

1. Choose a task you do often; for example, making a cup of coffee or using an ATM. Pretend you are giving instructions to someone on how to do that task. Write down the list of steps to do the task.

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2. Now go back over your list. Check that your list is in the right order. Does it make sense? Make changes, if necessary.

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[Click to complete Activity 1](#)

# Verbal instructions at work

You must follow instructions at work. You may be told what to do by the person you are with or over the telephone. When a person tells you instructions face-to-face or on the phone, these are called verbal instructions. Verbal means spoken.

It is a good idea to write verbal instructions down. When you have a lot of things to do you can easily forget something. Break the instructions into steps. Tick each step when you have done it. Consider the following story.



## Story

Josh works for a panel beating shop. Mr Barry, the boss, is sick one day. He rings Josh and gives him these instructions:

‘Call Mrs Jones in the morning. Ask her to bring her car in on Monday. Then call the paint factory. Order the paint for her car. Look up the book on my desk. It says what colour we need. Go and get the paint after work today. At lunchtime, tell Costa to get the car ready to paint.’

Josh listened very carefully. He also wrote down what Mr Barry was saying. There were a lot of things to do. Some things had to be done before other things.

## Activity 2

In the story, Josh had five things to do. List the five steps in order. Start with Josh's first step.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

To understand verbal instructions, you need to be a good listener.

[Click to complete Activity 2](#)

# Listening

To follow instructions well, you need to listen. This means concentrating on what the other person is saying. You listen to find out the meaning of what is being said.

Listening is an important skill. Friendships depend on people listening to each other. Learning at school depends on listening to your teachers and trainers. At work, listening is very important. Workers must listen carefully when they are told how to do a job or use a piece of equipment. In some jobs, not listening may lead to accidents.

## Activity 3

1. How can you tell when someone is listening to you?

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2. How do you know when someone is not listening to you?

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[Click to complete Activity 3](#)

## The purpose of listening

There are three main reasons for listening:

- Having conversations
- Getting information
- Getting instructions

Here is some more information.

Reason for listening	What it means
Having conversations	Talking with friends, classmates, workmates and family is an important type of listening. You may make plans together, or share ideas and opinions. This is probably the type of listening you do the most every day.
Getting information	You may call a TAFE to get information about a course. You may be sitting on a tram and listening to information announced by the driver.  You may listen to the TV to get information about how well your football team is playing in a match. You may listen to the radio to find out what the weather is going to be like if you want to go surfing.
Getting instructions	Your trainer may give you instructions about how to apply for a job. A friend may instruct you how to get to a meeting place. If you are young, your parent may give you instructions about what time to get home at night!

## How to be a good listener

It is important to have good listening skills. If you do, it will help in all areas of your life. Here are some things to do to be a good listener.

What to do	What this means
Be prepared to listen	If someone is about to give you some information, get ready to listen. This means you need to stop thinking about what you are doing. You may need to take your earphones out, or turn to face the person. To listen properly you should focus on the person who is speaking.
Watch the speaker	Keep eye contact with the person speaking to you. This means you should look the person in the eyes. This helps you to concentrate, listen well and understand what the speaker is saying. It also helps you to understand how they feel.
Pay attention	Don't try to listen to someone and do something else at the same time. You should stop what you are doing and give the speaker your full attention. Otherwise they may feel that you are not listening to them.
Listen for key words	When you are listening to instructions or passing on messages, listen for key words. This helps you remember what you have heard. For example, if you are at work, your supervisor may tell you how to do a job. You may need to write notes to remind yourself. Or your teacher or trainer may give you a lot of information in class. Don't write down every word. Just list the main things or the key words to remember.
Ask questions	Asking questions shows you are listening. It also shows you are interested in what the person is saying. You may ask, 'Do you mean ...?' or 'What did you do then?' If you are asked to do a job at work, ask questions to make sure you know exactly what you must do.

What to do	What this means
Listen to the tone of voice	<p>The tone of a person's voice is how their voice sounds. Listening to someone's tone of voice can tell you how they are feeling; for example, angry, pleased, excited, grumpy or upset. The tone may be high or low, harsh or gentle. For example, if you are excited, your voice might go higher than usual.</p>
Use verbal and nonverbal signals	<p>Verbal signals are the sounds or words you say that show you are listening. They include saying, 'Mmm', 'That's interesting', 'I see' or 'Uh-huh'.</p> <p>Think how important it is to hear these signals when you are talking to someone on the telephone. If you don't hear them respond, you may think they are not listening or that the phone has been cut off.</p> <p>Nonverbal signals include nodding or shaking your head, smiling or frowning. These signals also show that you are listening and that you understand how the person speaking is feeling.</p>

## Activity 4

What questions could you ask if you had this conversation with a friend?

Read one line at a time. Then, write in your question before you read the next part of the conversation.

Friend: I had a terrible day yesterday!

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Friend: I lost my mobile phone.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Friend: I think I left it on the train. I called the lost property office.

You: \_\_\_\_\_

Friend: They said no-one had handed a phone in.

[Click to complete Activity 4](#)

## Bad listening habits

Now you know many ways to improve your listening. Here are some bad listening habits you should avoid, as they will stop you from listening well.

Bad habit	What it means
<p data-bbox="316 542 555 577"><b>Being distracted</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="628 555 1241 674">Being distracted by the things around you is a bad habit. If something else gets your attention you may stop listening.</p> <p data-bbox="628 703 1313 987">For example, imagine you are sitting in a classroom, listening to your teacher. You look out the window and see a crowd of people marching by holding flags. You start to wonder where they are going and what they are doing. You are no longer listening to what the teacher is saying.</p>
<p data-bbox="323 1012 547 1086"><b>Interrupting the speaker</b></p> 	<p data-bbox="628 1021 1313 1346">Interrupting someone when they are speaking is a bad habit. If you want to ask the person speaking a question about what they are saying, that's okay, but you should wait for a pause in the conversation and then ask. Never interrupt someone to change the subject. This shows that you are not interested in what they are saying.</p> <p data-bbox="628 1375 1294 1659">Being interrupted by your mobile phone is also a bad habit. It is polite to ask the person who is speaking to you if they mind you answering the phone, although it depends on the situation. For example, if you are at work, your employer would not be pleased if you interrupted them to answer your phone!</p>

### Thinking about what to say



Many people have the bad habit of thinking about what they want to say next, instead of listening to the person talking. People often do this when they are having conversations. You should focus on the conversation you are having. If you are only thinking about what to say next, you may miss something important the person is saying.

# Written instructions at work

Many instructions at home and work are written down. Look at these instructions on a bottle of oven cleaner.

You may be given written instructions at work in a note or email, or you may have to work out the steps yourself.

Many workplaces have written rules. These instructions are called procedures. All workers must follow these important rules. The procedures could be about how to use a machine, safety or what to do in a fire.

Procedures are often displayed on a big notice on the wall.

Here are two examples of procedures.



## Procedure in case of a fire

1. Take your bag (or phone, wallet and keys).
2. Go to the nearest exit.
3. Walk down the stairs.
4. Don't run.
5. Meet outside the café.

## Procedure for using the photocopier

1. Turn on the main switch.
2. Put what you are copying face down on the intake tray.
3. Set the number of copies you want to print.
4. Press the COPY button.

## Story

Back at the panel beaters, Josh's boss has been off sick for a few days. He sends Josh these instructions in an email:

Josh, please be at work by 8 am on Friday. Unlock the office. Turn on the computer, the photocopier and the printer. Call Mr Tan. Tell him his car is ready. Write out the invoice (the bill) for Mr Tan. Be sure to clean the car windows before Mr Tan comes. Answer the phone for me today.

## Activity 5

Read the story again, then complete this task.

Josh has many things to do, so he wrote himself a list like this:

1. Get to work by 8 am on Friday
2. Unlock the office.
3. Turn on the computer and printer.
4. Call Mr Tan to tell him the car is ready.
5. Write the invoice for Mr Tan.
6. Answer the phone all day.

What did he forget on his list?

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[Click to complete Activity 5](#)

## Follow instructions on time

Make sure you know when to follow instructions. Some things must be done straight away. Other things can be done at any time – don't forget to do them though. Keep a list to tick off when things are done. This will help you.



## Ask questions

Perhaps you don't know when something must be done or how to do something. For example, at the panel beaters, Josh had never written an invoice before. He should ask if he doesn't know.

Always ask questions at work when you don't understand instructions. Asking is better than making mistakes. Ask your boss, your supervisor, or another worker. Always ask and listen carefully to the answer. No-one minds being asked for help.

## What you have learnt

Put a ✓ in the box when you have learnt these things.

- An instruction tells you how to do something. You follow instructions every day.
- Most instructions have steps. This way, you know the order in which they should be completed.
- Instructions may be verbal or written.
- It is a good idea to write verbal instructions down.
- To follow instructions well, you need to listen. This means concentrating on what the other person is saying.
- The three main reasons for listening are:
  - having conversations
  - getting information
  - getting instructions.
- You can improve your listening by:
  - being prepared to listen
  - watching the speaker
  - paying attention
  - listening for key words
  - asking questions
  - listening to tone of voice
  - using verbal and nonverbal signals.
- Bad listening habits include:
  - being distracted by things around you
  - interrupting the speaker
  - thinking about what you want to say next.
- Many workplaces have written rules. These instructions are called procedures. All workers must follow these important rules.
- Make sure you know when to follow instructions. Some things must be done straight away. Other things can be done at any time.
- Always ask questions at work when you don't understand instructions. Asking is better than making mistakes.

## Check your learning

### Task 1

Choose a situation when you were listening to someone yesterday.

1. Who were you listening to?

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2. What was the speaker talking about?

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3. Why were you listening (what was the purpose)?

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4. How did you show that you were listening to the person speaking?

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5. Write down a few of the key words or phrases that the speaker used.

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# Answers

## Answers to activities

### Activity 1

#### Answer to Question 1

Answers will vary depending on the task. Here is an example response for making a cup of coffee.

1. Fill the kettle with water and boil it.
2. Gather a mug, spoon, instant coffee, milk and sugar.
3. Place one teaspoon of instant coffee in the mug.
4. Add sugar (if you want it).
5. Fill the mug with boiling water, leaving enough room for milk (if you want it).
6. Add milk (if you want it).
7. Stir the coffee with the spoon and enjoy!

#### Answer to Question 2

No written answer is required here.

### Activity 2

1. Call Mrs Jones to ask her to bring her car in on Monday.
2. Look at the book on the desk to find out what paint colour to order.
3. Call the paint factory and order the paint.
4. At lunchtime, tell Costa to get the car ready to paint.
5. Collect the paint after work.

### Activity 3

#### Answer to Question 1

The person will be looking at you (maintaining eye contact), and responding to what you are saying.

#### Answer to Question 2

They will not be looking at you; they may look away or start doing something else.

### Activity 4

Answers will vary. Here is an example answer:

Friend: I had a terrible day yesterday!

You: What happened?

Friend: I lost my mobile phone.

You: Oh no! Do you know where?

Friend: I think I left it on the train. I called the lost property office.

You: Did they have it?

Friend: They said no-one had handed a phone in.

### Activity 5

Josh forgot to turn on the photocopier and to clean Mr Tan's car windows.

## Answers to check your learning

### Task 1

#### Answer to Question 1

Here is an example answer.

I was listening to my friend.

#### Answer to Question 2

My friend was telling me about a car accident she saw.

#### Answer to Question 3

My friend wanted to share the information. It seemed important to her, so I listened carefully.

#### Answer to Question 4

I maintained eye contact, made verbal responses and asked her questions.

#### Answer to Question 5

Car accident, loud noise, tree, ambulance, speeding.

### Task 2

#### Answer

Unlock the office at 8 am.

Turn on all the lights.

Check the answering machine and write down any messages.

Turn off the answering machine.

Put the messages taken on the right person's desk.

Make three photocopies of the pages on the manager's chair – urgent.

Put the photocopies on the manager's desk.

Call Mr Jones and tell him the manager will be 30 minutes late for their 10.30 meeting.