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34. GROUP MANAGEMENT

How to give clear instructions to students in distance communication

CONTEXT

When working online, participants may find it harder to understand how to carry out an activity or perform a task assigned by the teacher/group leader. Due to less immediacy in the interaction, they may have difficulty asking for details and clarifications, running the risk of not being able to complete the proposed activity or doing so correctly.

THEORETICAL BASIS

Giving proper and clear instructions during the session is even more important in distance communication than in a classroom setting because the participants cannot always ask for advice from the person sitting next to them if they do not understand the instructions. The text format and/or the video should be made accessible to participants during the entire lesson so that it can be revisited when needed. Being able to successfully carry out an assigned task is fundamental for both group management and motivation.

ACTIVITY IN A NUTSHELL

Assignment and delivery of a task, with a final check on the understanding of the instructions provided.

When you want to understand if the instructions for carrying out an activity are clear and effective, the simplest thing to do is to try to assign a task requiring participants to follow some basic rules, and check at the end that they have managed to complete it according to the expectations of the teacher/group leader.

Activity/Solutions

CONTACT TYPE

Online/hybrid

TIME NEEDED

35-55 minutes

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

5-15

ACTIVITY TYPE

Individual/group work

TARGET GROUP

- Adult learners
- Senior learners

VARIATION OF THE ACTIVITY

The activity is easily adaptable to any kind of lesson and target group.

Goal

- To make the instructions clear and accessible to all.
- To enable ease in asking for clarification.

How to prepare

- Choose the type of task to submit to the participants (e.g. documentation on a theme/solution to a problem/analysis and observations of a material provided, such as a poster or newspaper article).
- Write instructions on carrying out the task (work phases, structure of the document to be produced, sources to consult, type of presentation – oral or written (text + any images, slides). The instructions must respect the characteristics of the “regulatory text”:
 - a) Completeness of the necessary data – text and any images
 - b) Brevity – limit yourself to essential information
 - c) Order – break down the task into steps
 - d) Lexical clarity – use terms that are unambiguous and suitable for your target group (e.g. if you are giving instructions to a group of seniors, avoid technical acronyms such as URL, but use the term web page address, or wireless network instead of WI-FI).
- For more complex tasks, prepare a model as an example.

Activity step by step

1. Introduce the task to the group, specifying its purpose.
2. Advise the participants that the instructions for carrying out the task will be read and explained only once, together with the presentation of the written text, which will remain available to the group in a shared folder or in the chat.
3. Read and comment on the instructions.
4. Establish, in agreement with the group, the execution time and delivery method (e. g. via chat, email, shared folder).
5. Give indications on how to formulate any questions for clarification (e.g. “formulate your questions in writing, referring to the specific point, and post them on the Zoom chat”, e.g. “ask only one question at a time”).
6. Make sure that all the participants have carried out the task and submitted it.
7. In the following session (or, if it is a very simple task, immediately after delivery), discuss the results with the participants with reference to understanding the instructions.