English Grammar: Giving Instructions

We use the imperative form to give orders or directions in English.

"Eat your vegetables!"
"Turn left and go straight on."

(For more information, see our **grammar page**.)

We can also use the imperative form to give a warning or advice, and (if you use "please") to make a request.

"Practise English for ten minutes a day!"
"Be careful!"
"Please take a seat."

To make the imperative, use the infinitive of the verb without 'to':

"**Come** here!"
"**Sit** down!"

To make a negative imperative, put "do not" or "don't" before the verb. (Don't is more informal than "do not".)

"**Don't** go!"
"**Do not** walk on the grass."

Giving instructions

You often see the imperative form in instruction manuals or when someone tells you how to do something.

There are often "sequencing" words to show the steps in the process. For example, "firstly", "secondly" and "finally".

Simple instructions to replace a light bulb

Firstly, turn off the electricity.

Secondly, remove the light bulb.

Then, screw in the new light bulb.

Finally, turn the electricity on and switch on the light.

You can also say "after that" instead of "then" and "first" / "second" instead of "firstly"

and "secondly".

Giving extra help

When you give instructions, you can help the other person with extra information and advice.

Remember: turn off the electricity before touching any cables.

Be careful not to … (touch any live wires)

Try to … (see if the lightbulb is broken or just loose)

Try not to … (touch the lightbulb with your hands)

You need to … (check the wattage of the lightbulb first)

It's important to … (make sure the electricity is off)

It helps to … (wait for the lightbulb to cool down before you remove it)

Be sure to … (turn off the electricity before you you touch the lightbulb)

Always … (wear gloves when you touch a lightbulb)

Never … (touch a socket with wet hands)

Useful verbs for instructions

Turn on / switch on = activate power or electricity: "First, turn on the PC."

Turn off / switch off = deactivate power or electricity: "Turn off the lights when you leave."

Take off / remove = detach something from another thing: "Remove the plastic before you put the meal in the microwave."

Take out = take one thing out from another thing: "Take the television out of the box."

Attach / connect = put two things together: "Connect the wires."

Check / make sure = be sure about something: "Check that the light is on."

Proceed / continue: "Continue to stir until the mixture is thick."

Plug in = connect to the electricity: "Plug the modem in."

Put back / replace: "Replace the cover after changing the battery."