Presenting Instruction/Modeling Activities

The phrase "presenting instruction" means a lot of things to a lot of teachers, and how to present instruction is certainly the subject of some debate. For many traditionalists, presenting instruction means giving a lecture or presentation. However, in today's world, and in the world of the communicative classroom, presenting instruction can represent much more. Besides lecture-based instruction, teachers in today's world might present instruction as a problem to be solved (problem-based curriculum) or as a case study or live experience (experiential curriculum). Information might be presented online or without the use of a teacher initially, as is the case in some flipped or blended learning environments. Regardless of the activities employed, presenting instruction represents an initial contact learners have with new material. That initial contact is generally enhanced by the teacher in some ways. For example, a teacher might employ a number of visual aids, repeat key information, provide clear board work with examples, and so forth. A teacher might also use the instructional period as an opportunity to tease out questions and comments from the learners, creating a critical thinking environment that provides a chance for the teacher to elaborate, clarify, and improve learners' initial understanding.

Next to instruction is modeling, which refers to the use of clear illustrations and examples for learners. Modeling activities, in their basic conception, require a teacher to demonstrate or show the task that the students will be asked to produce in the future. Thus, modeling activities involve either a live teacher demonstration of the future task or some previously created model from outside the classroom (past student work, a teacher-prepared sample). When teachers are interested in having students perform a difficult writing or speaking assignment, a model with clear steps is imperative. Some comprehension-based theorists have demonstrated that good models lead to noticing of features in daily language input, and thus are prerequisite for learning to occur.

1. Teacher Talk

Teacher talk is not so much an activity as it is a variety of skills that, in some sense, refer to the craft of instruction itself. Teacher talk refers to the ways in which a teacher involves students through the use of repetition, reduced linguistic forms (especially for basic students), enunciation and pacing, changes in tone, the use of body language, signpost expressions, and other techniques that deliberately modify and/or simplify communication. In general, when you present language instruction, think about key words you may need to modify or define, key phrases to repeat and write on the board, and ideas to elaborate or clarify. Teacher talk is a skill that often involves having an intuitive feel for what students will likely respond to and struggle with, so teacher talk is an activity that comes more naturally with deliberate planning.

Repetition: Repeat key ideas. Place them on the board. Define the most difficult words.

Reduced Linguistic Forms: Look at your instruction and identify difficult phrases and concepts. Find synonyms or simplistic phrasing to replace or amend these difficult phrases and concepts.

Enunciation and pacing, changes in tone: Speak clearly, and vary your rate of speech. Words and phrases that are particularly important or complex are given more time. Do not speak monotone, but vary your tone to match the material (engaging, probing, inquisitive, delightful, serious, etc).

Use of body language: use your body to convey different ideas such as a change of topic, a difficult point, a visually interesting phrase, an action, and so forth.

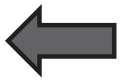
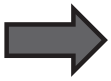
Signpost expressions: Use clear signal words to help students recognize shifts in organizational patterns. First, second, third, finally, but…

2. Story and Metaphor

The use of story and metaphor can work very well in language instruction. That said, stories and metaphors can be particularly problematic if they are not clearly presented. When used correctly, these techniques are especially effective in helping students recall information, and are also effective at eliciting a response or an emotional reaction from learners.

Imagine that a teacher wishes to give instruction on the simple past, present, and future tenses. This teacher especially wants to demonstrate their characteristic differences. This creative teacher might, therefore, invent a story, one about Mr. Past, Mr. Present, and Mr. Future. The teacher might demonstrate that they are all similar in some ways (they all love verbs) and share a story about how each man behaves when he sees a "cute little verb" on the side of the road while out for a ride (verbs are represented by cute little animals). Mr. Past owns an old truck, Mr. Present has a shiny new sports car, and Mr. Future has a futuristic-looking motorcycle that can fly. The teacher might explain that while each man picks up the verb, each does something different. Mr. Past, for example, takes every verb he picks up on the road and puts two shoes on the verb's feet, *size e and d*, and then puts each verb in the *back* of his truck. Mr. Present also loves to pick up verbs while driving, but he puts them beside him in his convertible and shows them off to everyone as he passes. He doesn't put shoes on a verb, unless Mr. He or Ms. She is traveling with him, in which case he lets Mr. He or Ms. She put a *size s* shoe on the verb. Mr. Future, on the other hand, when he picks up a verb he hangs it in front of the wheel (will) of his motorcycle like it is an ornament. Mr. Future always hopes that his girlfriend notices the verb when he gets home. For Mr. Future, the verb is always placed in front of the wheel (will).

This is a silly story, no doubt, and one that might need some visual aids and some diagrams to make it work, but it is one that students are likely to remember. Again, be careful, all metaphors and stories go wrong when investigated too closely, but storytelling and metaphors are no doubt a creative way to make curriculum stick in learner's minds.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Verb Tenses
Tell us WHEN an action is taking place. There are three simple verb tenses:</th></tr>
<tr><td>Past
An action that already took place</td><td>Present
An action that is happening right now</td><td>Future
An action that is going to happen</td></tr>
<tr><td>  </td><td>  </td><td>  </td></tr>
<tr><td>Usually, you add –ed to the end of the verb

I walked to the store.
He walked to the store.
She walked to the store.
  </td><td>You add –s to the verb for he, she, and it.

I walk to the store.
He walks to the store.
She walks to the store.
  </td><td>You add will before the verb.

I will walk to the store.
He will walk to the store.
She will walk to the store.
  </td></tr>
</table>

3. Acronyms (as mnemonic devices)

When instructing students, it is common to use acronyms as a mnemonic device, especially when giving lists of information that can be easily memorized through a simple word or sentence. The word or sentence for the acronym is often unusual, which aids in memory recall. For example, the 7 conjunctions in English are often referred to with the word (or invented word) FANBOYS:

F	A	N	B	O	Y	S
o	n	o	u	r	e	o
r	d	r	t		t	

Acronyms can be also used for vocabulary lists:

Example: My Very Excited Mother Just Served Us Nine Pies (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto)

To aid in difficult spelling:

Example for the word RHYTHM: Rhythm Helps Your Two Hips Move

And to elucidate grammatical rules:

Example: I before E except after C, or when sounding like A as in *neighbor* and *weigh*