ESOL – Imperatives

This companion document covers the same learning as the interactive session, but in a different way so as to be more accessible for learners with sight impairments. Because of this, it does not follow a slide structure.

Welcome

Welcome to this session on imperatives.

By the end of this session, you will:

* Know what an imperative is
* Understand the difference between positive and negative imperatives

What is an imperative?

Imperatives are used to give instructions. They tell people what to do.

An imperative starts with the infinitive form of a verb without ‘to’. Also, there is no subject in the sentence. The implied subject is ‘you’.

For example:

Sit down.

This sentence starts with the verb sit.

There is no subject – the sentence doesn’t say who is being told to sit down.

Positive and negative instructions.

A positive instruction is when we tell someone what to do. For a positive instruction, start the sentence with the verb.

For example:

1. Be quiet!
2. Put the vase on the table.

We can add please to a sentence to make it more polite.

For example:

1. Please be quiet.
2. Put the vase on the table please.

A negative instruction is when we tell someone not to do something. For a negative instruction, start the sentence with ‘do not’ or ‘don’t’, followed by the verb.

For example:

1. Don’t run in the house.
2. Do not be late for the meeting.

Ordering instructions

Imperatives are used to give instructions.

Common places you will find imperatives used are:

* Recipes
* Instructions – for example, assembly instructions

We use words to show the order that things must be done, such as:

First, second, third, etc.

Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, etc.

For example, the instructions for painting a wall may look like this:

How to paint a wall:

Step 1. Fill any cracks or holes in the wall.

Step 2. Rub the walls down with sandpaper.

Step 3. Clean the wall with sugar soap.

Step 4. Cover the skirting board with masking tape.

Step 5. Paint the wall.

Each step is numbered, and each instruction starts with a verb.

Understanding instructions in practise

See the recipe below for chocolate crispy cakes.

What is the first thing you must do when following this recipe?

Chocolate crispy cakes:

Ingredients:

* 60g unsalted butter
* 3 tbsp golden syrup
* 100g chocolate
* 90g cornflakes

Instructions:

1. Melt the chocolate in a bowl over a saucepan of simmering water.
2. Add the butter and stir until melted.
3. Add the golden syrup and stir.
4. Add the cornflakes to the chocolate mix and stir.
5. Spoon in to 12 bun cases.
6. Leave to cool.

The first thing you must do is **melt the chocolate.** We know this because it is the first thing in the list, at step number one.

Imperatives on signs

A common place you will find imperatives is on signs.

For example, a road sign may indicate, ‘reduce speed now’.

This is a positive instruction, telling drivers what to do.

You might find imperatives on signs in a park, an airport, or anywhere where instruction could be given. For example, in a park you are likely to find a sign indicating ‘place all rubbish in bins provided’. This sign is giving a positive instruction.

Knowledge checks

Test your knowledge on the questions below.

Question 1:

Is the following sentence a positive or negative imperative?

“Don’t wait for me.”

Answer: This is a negative imperative.

Question 2:

Is the following sentence a positive or negative imperative?

“Please pass me the salt.”

Answer: This is a positive imperative.

Question 3:

Looking at the instructions for chocolate crispy cakes (shown below), what is the third step of the recipe?

Instructions:

1. Melt the chocolate in a bowl over a saucepan of simmering water.
2. Add the butter and stir until melted.
3. Add the golden syrup and stir.
4. Add the cornflakes to the chocolate mix and stir.
5. Spoon in to 12 bun cases.
6. Leave to cool.

Answer: The correct answer is 3, ‘add the golden syrup and stir’.

Summary

Well done. You have completed this session on imperatives.

You should now:

* Know what an imperative is
* Understand the difference between positive and negative imperatives

If you have any questions about anything covered in this session, please speak to your tutor for more help.