



TriMetrix®HD Following Directions

Following Directions

The ability to effectively hear, understand, and follow directions or instructions; the willingness to postpone making personal decisions or taking action until you have openly listened to what you are being asked to do.

Why is this skill important?

People with good skills in Following Directions will tend to complete tasks with less direct supervision than people who are less capable of Following Directions— depending on the quality of the instructions they are given, of course. This is less an indication of their ability to understand or comprehend instructions, and is more a sign of their willingness to adhere to the instructions as they were given... regardless of their personal opinions about how they think the task should be accomplished.

People who do not follow directions may have difficulty completing tasks according to the directions. Again, this is less an indication that they do not intellectually understand the instructions being given, but rather that they simply feel they can make adequate decisions and successfully accomplish the task on their own, without the need for additional input. They will have a tendency to discount outside instructions and rely on their own innate abilities... regardless of competency level.

Why would you want to be good at Following Directions? There are several reasons:

1. The pre-established methods of handling things have been designed for maximum efficiency or to accommodate requirements that you aren't aware of.
2. Doing things exactly as you were asked to do them shows that you pay attention and are respectful of authority.
3. Following directions to the letter now may earn you the right to make independent decisions later.
4. If you second-guess directions given to you by other people, you may be perceived as arrogant or condescending.

No one is suggesting that you should never make suggestions for improvement, ask for clarification of instructions, or choose your own way of doing something. It isn't necessarily BETTER to always follow directions, nor is it always BAD to choose your own path. The point is to learn when directions are being given for a reason and when it isn't appropriate to challenge them—then, to follow through on assignments by completing them as directed within the allotted timeframe.

What are skills associated with Following Directions?

Someone who has mastered skills associated with Following Directions:

- Has good listening and reading comprehension skills.
- Keeps his or her own opinions in check until he/she understands what is being asked and why.
- Is able to work independently on tasks that require specific steps to complete.
- Is open-minded and flexible about ways to accomplish required tasks.
- Doesn't assume that he/she knows better than the person who is giving directions or instructions.

How do you develop your own skills in Following Directions?

- Listen carefully when you are given directions verbally.
- Write down any directions or instructions you are given verbally.
- Read carefully when you are given directions in writing.
- Make a written checklist of key directions to ensure you perform them.
- Realize that structures have been put in place for business reasons—sometimes instructions help you follow important regulations, structures, or chains of command.
- Recognize that, while your thoughts are valuable, other people's are too. Listen openly to other people's recommendations.
- Don't just pick certain steps to follow—follow them all, in the order they were given.
- Don't add steps that are not part of the original directions you were given.
- If you do see steps that need adding or altering, get approval from the proper source.
- If you have been given directions for a complex project, make sure you plan to accomplish each step—work the tasks into your daily schedule so you don't get behind.
- Enlist a friend or manager to audit your activities if you have difficulty following directions—ask them to double-check your work.

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Activities

Activity 1: Introspection

Give the following questions careful thought. Be sure to be honest with yourself and seek to understand yourself better.

1. Is it difficult for you to follow directions?
2. Why? Is it because you are impatient?
3. Is it because you think you can do things better?
4. Or is it for some other reason?
5. What can you do about changing or modifying your thoughts about following directions?

Activity 2: Learning from the Past

Give two examples of times that you didn't follow directions you were given.

For each example, answer the following questions:

1. What made you challenge the stated/written directions?
2. What did you do differently from the directions?
3. What was the result?
4. What were other people's reactions?
5. Why should you have followed the directions?

Pretend you are giving a set of directions to someone else. Choose something that you do every day, and write a set of instructions to explain to someone else how to do the task. Choose something not too difficult, but not too easy, something that requires about 10-15 steps to complete. Be sure to include all the relevant steps!

- Now, ask a friend or mentor to follow your instructions to complete the task.
- What did they do right?
- What did they do wrong?
- Did they follow your directions?
- Did they get to the same result you expected even without using your directions?

