

# Introducing your Practice Activities

Think of this handout as your cheat sheet for giving clear and concise instructions for your practical activities. In an online course, students go through the course on their own, and they can't quickly ask the instructor for help. So if you want students to complete your activities, you need to make the instructions for them really clear. That's why we're here to help.

**When introducing your activity, you have two options:**

- ▶ You can give video instructions
- ▶ You can give written instructions and attach them to the relevant lecture via PDF

Ideally you'll do both, so students get excited about the project and have all the information they need to be successful. In this resource we'll share some best practices for written and video instructions.

## Best Practices for Written Instructions

**If you just want to do written instructions, you should include:**

- ▶ Goal of the activity
- ▶ Time needed to complete
- ▶ If there's any material or preparation needed
- ▶ Description of the exercise and what students should submit
- ▶ Self-evaluation or feedback for students

The written instructions should be included in either a text lecture, or in a PDF resource attached to a video lecture. If they are attached to a video lecture, we recommend including some information in the video around how to access the assignment, which we'll cover below.

## Best Practices for Video Instructions

We've experienced more student engagement in activities when instructors create video instructions to their activity. When creating video instructions, you have to think about what to say, as well as what to show.

### What To Say

When you're introducing an activity, you'll want to be very mindful of how you're introducing it. Your job is to get students excited!

**Take this sample audio transcript from an instructor who is teaching a course on Photoshop:**

*"So ummm so now I'm going to introduce an exercise to you. Let's see....so this exercise is pretty easy, so don't feel intimidated. So let me show you on Photoshop over here, let's see.... So you can see that this tool...you can move it around....make it bigger or smaller...it's used to crop photos. So now for this activity, I want you to use the cropper tool, and you know, just play around with it, just crop out something you don't want. Just pause the lecture video here, and try it out, and come back and see how I do it, okay?"*

That was a lot of words--about 30 seconds worth of talking, to be exact. However, if you place yourself in the student's shoes, it's not really clear what you should be doing. What do you crop in the photo? How do you know if you're doing a good job? What will actually motivate me to stop the video to do this exercise, instead of just watching the video all the way through? Also, notice the number of filler words like "so", "ummm" or "let's see" that crowd out the main content of your directions.

**To make your verbal directions crisp and clear, follow this quick 5-step process:**

- ▶ Write your directions in bullet points (or write a script)
- ▶ Edit your script (to shorten your sentences)
- ▶ Give yourself a time limit
- ▶ Shoot your video
- ▶ Critique your video (e.g. cut out filler words), then reshoot

**Using this process, your final script for the Photoshop course might look like this:**

*"Now it's time for your first exercise in this course! This activity should take you about 10 minutes and by the end of it, you will be able to confidently crop your images.*

*For this activity, we'll be using the cropper tool, which is on the top left corner of your toolbar. To crop a photo, click on the tool, drag your mouse, and click again to resize your image.*

***Now it's your turn! This activity has two parts:***

- 1. Crop out the tree in this photo.*
- 2. Then crop out the dog on the bottom. When you're done, your photo should look something like this (image). I'll do a walkthrough of the answer in our next lecture. Stay tuned!"*

Once you've internalized this process, you'll be a master in giving clear and concise instructions without batting an eye!

### What To Show

Clear and concise directions don't just stop with what you say; what you show on the screen in your video lectures is also key to keeping your students engaged and excited about your project.

Many students need to both **hear** and **see** instructions in order to understand an activity.

**To improve your directions, add the visual components listed below:**

- 1.** Change your **lecture titles** to include the word "ACTIVITY". This makes the activities in your course more prominent for your students--and for any students who are debating whether or not to purchase your course.
- 2.** Include a **text slide** when introducing practice activities with the following information:
  - ▶ The name of the exercise
  - ▶ Musical interlude
  - ▶ Bullet point list of directions
  - ▶ Estimated time to complete the activity and needed material
- 3.** Provide your **answers** or a walk-through of the exercise in a separate lecture (don't ask students to pause the lecture to do the activity. Chances are, they'll just continue watching and not get their hands dirty!)

Going back to our Photoshop example here are some visual components we would use:

### Title Slide



### Slide with Instructions:

### Use the cropper tool to

Crop out the tree

Crop out the dog

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Total time: 3 minutes

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Hint: Tool is on the top left of the toolbar

Making your activities more prominent in this way will help students transition from simply watching and listening to your videos to actively participating in your exercises. Keeping your answers in a separate lecture will also compel your students to try out an activity-- instead of "cheating" and watching you go over the answers a few seconds later.