

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

Recipes for Learning

TALE Academy 
MODULE 3 - SESSION 7





NOTE: If you have not completed Module 3 – Session 4, we recommend that you do so before engaging in this session. In that session, we explain the origins and value of high-leverage practices (HLPs) in special education. Explicit instruction is one of 22 HLPs.

“I can’t cook”

In 2013, a research and marketing firm surveyed 1,087 people across the United States about their cooking habits. **Twenty-eight percent of the respondents said they didn’t know how to cook. That’s 1 in 4 adults!** A decade later, after the Internet had blown up with recipes and cooking tutorials, a new survey found that 56% of Americans mess up “easy-to-make” dishes and, of those, 59% feel embarrassed about not being able to cook certain foods the right way.

What is the first step in learning to cook? Reading a recipe.



But as we learned during the pandemic, reading a recipe gets you only so far. A quick Google search of “Cooking fails during COVID” yields more than 47 million hits, including pages upon pages of Pinterest posts comparing the expected outcome of a cooking or baking project with the (typically very sad) reality, including breads that refused to rise and muffins that looked like “coral you’d find at the bottom of the ocean.”

Learning to cook (or bake) may begin with reading a recipe, but if you don’t know what “fold in the cheese” means or how to preheat an oven, you are likely going to end up with a less-than-stellar result. Learning how to cook isn’t as simple as having a great recipe. Students who attend culinary arts schools spend hundreds of hours immersed in kitchens where teachers and mentors provide hands-on instruction. It can take years to replicate a complicated dish perfectly, and even longer for a chef to make the dish their own through customization.


Learning to do something completely independent of any support from experts and peers is a nearly impossible task. When we teach a student to read, we don’t put a book in front of them and say, “Good luck!” And yet, approximately 32 million adults (50%) in the United States can’t read a book at an eighth-grade level. What would it take to help those readers move to advanced levels? The answer we explore in this session is **explicit instruction, one of the 22 high-leverage practices (HLPs) for teaching students with disabilities (SWDs).**

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION: RECIPES FOR LEARNING

Many explanations compare explicit instruction to the composition of a recipe.

Consider this explanation in The Advocate:

Have you ever attempted to follow a new recipe, only to identify that a step is missing or unclear? Or maybe the directions had too much info for your brain to process. The same thing can happen when your learners learn something new. Some learners can make inferences to figure out the next steps or to work through ambiguity. But for learners who learn and think differently, one unclear direction or having too many things to remember can be a deal-breaker.



The Advocate (a terrific source to keep abreast of education trends, issues, and futures) expanded on its original analogy to a recipe in a follow-up article that looked at how to implement explicit instruction in the classroom.

While explicit instruction begins with well-developed instructions (recipes), this is only the beginning. Let's continue the cooking analogy and move through the steps necessary to bake explicit instruction into your instructional plan.

DESCRIPTION

Whether through photos or descriptions filled with adjectives that equate with "delicious," all good recipes begin by enticing the cook by the promise of a perfect outcome. In the case of explicit instruction, let's use the definition provided by the CEEDAR Center in their list of high-leverage practices for special education:

Teachers make content, skills, and concepts explicit by showing and telling students what to do or think while solving problems, enacting strategies, completing tasks, and classifying concepts. Teachers use explicit instruction when students are learning new material and complex concepts and skills. They strategically choose examples and non-examples and language to facilitate student understanding, anticipate common misconceptions, highlight essential content, and remove distracting information. They model and scaffold steps or processes needed to understand content and concepts, apply skills, and complete tasks successfully and independently.

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION: RECIPES FOR LEARNING



INGREDIENTS

Anita L. Archer and Charles A. Hughes outlined the foundations of explicit instruction in 16 elements, or what we will call the ingredients for explicit instruction. **If you don't recognize any of these ingredients, click on the link to access information about it!**

The 16 Elements of Explicit Instruction

1

A focus on critical content

2

Logically sequenced skills

3

Complex skills and strategies broken into smaller units, or chunks

4

Organized and focused lessons

5

Opening statement of the lesson's goals and your expectations

6

Review of prior skills and knowledge before beginning instruction

7

Step-by-step demonstrations or modeling

8

Clear and concise language

9

Examples and non-examples

10

Guided and supported practice

11

Frequent opportunities to respond

12

Progress monitoring

13

Immediate, affirmative, and corrective feedback

14

Briskly paced lessons

15

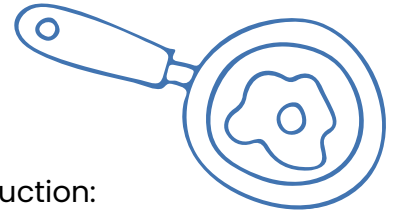
Techniques to help students organize knowledge

16

Distributed and cumulative practice

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION: RECIPES FOR LEARNING

STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS



[Understood.org](https://www.understood.org) breaks down the explicit instructional method into six fundamental steps that teachers can take in order to deliver explicit instruction:



Identify a clear, specific objective. “Name what you expect students to learn by the end of the lesson. Make sure that this objective builds on prior learning.”



Break the information into chunks. “Take the skill, concept, or information and break it down into manageable, sequential chunks.”



Model with clear explanations. “Explain or demonstrate the skill in the same way students will practice it. Use language that is clear, concise, and consistent. Focus on the most critical parts of the content you are teaching.”



Verbalize the thinking process. “As you are modeling, do a think-aloud of what’s going on in your mind.”



Provide practice opportunities. “During guided practice, you might work through several problems as a class and...correct errors as they occur...Once students are successful..., move on to independent practice...After independent practice, do a cumulative review of both old and newly learned skills and knowledge.”



Give feedback. “As your students engage in guided and independent practice, give them immediate and actionable feedback.”

THE MASTERPIECE

If you use all of the ingredients and follow the step-by-step directions above, you will be on the path of producing explicit instruction in your classroom!



From Recipe to Masterpiece

If your implementation of explicit instruction isn't an immediate masterpiece, don't worry. It doesn't mean that you "can't cook." All it means is that you need more practice and, likely, access to some new resources. As explained on [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org), explicit instruction is a “systemic and engaging instructional delivery method.” Modeling, think-alouds, guided practice, chunking, feedback, and all the other ingredients require a teacher trained and practiced in the techniques so that they know how much, when, and how to include them in the mix for real-life classes.



A NEW TWIST ON THE OLD RECIPE:

In this session, you will have an opportunity to explore and try out explicit instruction, but not just your ordinary explicit instruction. We encourage you to use the new tools, resources, and opportunities provided by multiple teaching environments and modalities to cook up your own recipe for explicit instruction.

Here are a few tips to get you started.

Explicit Instruction Made Portable

Use a blended learning platform or learning management system to organize learning pathways.

Some school districts provide teachers with access to a single learning management system (LMS) such as Canvas, Edmodo, Blackboard, Kahoot!, or Moodle, to name just a few. Whether using an LMS provided by your school or district or using a lighter blended learning platform such as Google Classroom, organizing your lessons digitally is essential to implement explicit instruction across learning environments.

Consider using a learning pathway model in which you can chunk and sequence learning, as well as provide for learner variability and choice. You are experiencing this approach currently, as the TALE Academy curriculum is organized around learning pathways.



Give lessons a name that includes the learning objective.

When you create a learning pathway on your LMS or blended learning platform, you will typically be prompted to give every element a unique name. When adding a new lesson, consider using the learning objective within the name (e.g., “classifying numbers up to 20 as even or odd” might be the name of a lesson for second-grade math students). When adding a chunk within a lesson, consider using a name that can help a student understand and remember the content knowledge and skills covered (e.g., “The End is the Answer!” may be the name of a guided practice chunk in which students learn that odd numbers are 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9, whereas even numbers are 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10). This strategy of intentional naming is common in textbooks; adapt it to help students follow your unique curriculum!

Provide a learning map

that students can access easily at any point in a lesson to check where they are in their learning pathway. Learning maps help students link the current lesson to prior learning and see the bigger picture. You can use interactive graphic organizers to create the learning map. These tools support visual and spatial thinking; when linked to audio files, they also support auditory learning.

Use specific digital tools, but organize them for access through the learning pathway.

There are tens of thousands of apps and resources online that can help you provide learning choices for students, but moving students to those apps can cause challenges. If you use hyperlinks within a learning pathway, students can simply click for access. Note, consider setting your hyperlinks so that they open a new tab/window. That way, if your students get lost (e.g., wander off from the assigned YouTube link to watch music videos), all they have to do is close the new window to return to their learning pathway. Another solution is to use embed codes that draw the content into the learning platform.

A NEW TWIST ON THE OLD RECIPE:

Explicit Instruction Made Portable

Record modeling videos for students to stream through the learning pathway.

You can set up a smartphone on a tripod to record yourself modeling a tactile task or skill, turn a PowerPoint into a video presentation, use screen capture to record yourself modeling a learning process (e.g., addition, subtraction), and much more. There are plenty of free online tools teachers can use to be innovative when creating modeling videos.

Include the think-aloud protocol when creating modeling videos.

Not only does this provide a second modality for learning (visual + auditory), it also allows your students to learn thought processing.

Include closed captions when creating modeling videos.

Closed captions increase accessibility for learners by providing another modality within videos. There are plenty of free online tools to assist you in generating closed captions. Just be sure to proofread and use software that allows you to edit, as the artificial intelligence that generates subtitles and closed captions isn't perfect yet!

Use digital collaboration tools for group practice.

Even if groups are meeting in person, consider linking them to digital collaboration tools, as well. This allows for continuity of learning outside instructional time and builds in portability if you choose or need to shift across learning environments. It also allows for learner variability, as some students may collaborate more effectively with digital tools than with face-to-face strategies. Use the HLP flexible grouping to guide the formation of groups, whether they are working together face-to-face, remote, or hybrid. (See Session 5 in this module for more on flexible grouping.)

Embed links to instructions in breakout rooms, discussion boards, and other apps.

When students engage in group or independent practice, we know that it is the easiest time to lose them. During your planning work, write up explicit instructions for the practice activity that you can provide as a link within the learning spaces being utilized (e.g., in the chat section of a Zoom room). When possible, provide the instructions in multiple modalities to allow for learner variability.

Select digital tools that support feedback loops.

When selecting apps and resources, consider how they support you in giving live/immediate and actionable feedback to your students. Tools such as Nearpod, Quizlet, and Peardeck can be integrated into the learning pathway at critical junctures to check for understanding to guide self-assessment and help you know which students need additional feedback and support.



Let's Get Cooking!

We've given you a few ideas to get started. As you explore how to use explicit learning in your classrooms, try to keep in mind the concept of portability so that you will be able to use this HLP across learning environments.

The choice board and activities in this session will help you refine your explicit instruction practice across in-person, remote, and hybrid settings.

*Enjoy your learning.
And bon appétit!*



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About Us

The TALE Academy

The TALE Academy is a series of virtual learning experiences available to all New York State educators and offers a rich array of resources on topics related to teaching across learning environments (TALE). The TALE Academy is built upon the work New York State educators carried out during emergency remote teaching (ERT) throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and extends it toward the future. TALE invites educators to think beyond online learning to consider a broader perspective on teaching and learning that encompasses teaching across multiple environments (in-person, remote, and hybrid).

The Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE) Project

The TALE Academy is part of a broader New York State Education Department (NYSED) initiative known as Teaching in Remote/Hybrid Learning Environments (TRLE). In July 2020, NYSED was awarded funding through the United States Department of Education's Education Stabilization Fund-Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant to implement TRLE – a three-year project to build the capacity of teachers and educational leaders to effectively implement remote/hybrid learning for all students. Launched in the depths of the pandemic, the first phase of the TRLE project focused on getting resources to the field through partnerships with Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and school districts across the state. The second phase, which began in February 2022, focused on aggregating lessons learned and emerging teaching and learning strategies to address a broader field of practice: teaching across learning environments.

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