

7-Step Directions

What is it?

A seven-question framework that helps students complete their assignments more successfully by clarifying instructions, expectations, and what-to-do-when-stuck strategies before they start working

What are the benefits of using this tool?

When students fail to complete their assignments (or complete them properly), we often assume that a lack of effort, ability, or readiness is to blame. In many cases, however, students fail for an entirely different reason—they fail because they're unclear about what they've been asked to do or how to do it. This tool prevents these kinds of failures from happening and increases time-on-task by clarifying instructions up front. It also prepares students to be more self-directed and successful on future assignments by making them aware of the kinds of questions they should ask themselves before beginning *any* assigned task.

What are the basic steps?

1. Ask yourself the following questions before giving students a homework or classwork assignment:
 - WHAT is the assigned task?
 - WHO should perform the task? Some students? All students? Pairs of students? Teams?
 - WHEN should students start the task? And how long do they have to complete it?
 - HOW should students go about completing the task? What steps are involved?
 - What should students do if they need HELP? What strategies should they try?
 - What should students do AFTER they complete the task?
 - What CRITERIA will you use to evaluate students' work?
2. Record your answers on a 7-Step Directions template (p. 13), or write the questions and answers on the board.
3. Review your answers with students before they begin working on the assigned task. Use the “see it and say it” technique to make this review more effective:
 - See it:* Let students see the questions and answers. Depending on what you did in Step 2, this will entail distributing copies of your completed template or calling students' attention to the board.
 - Say it:* Go through the questions one at a time. Have students say what the assignment entails by asking them to read the answers aloud or explain the answers in their own words. Address any questions that students have before moving on.
4. Prepare students for future success by teaching them to seek out answers to the 7-Step Directions questions before they begin working on *any* assigned task. Explain that having these answers can help them complete their tasks more successfully.

How is this tool used in the classroom?

- ✓ To provide clear directions for classroom tasks
- ✓ To help students complete assigned tasks more efficiently and successfully
- ✓ To keep the flow of classroom activities moving smoothly

EXAMPLE: A sixth-grade mathematics teacher regularly uses the 7-Step Directions framework to introduce her students' homework assignments. The template that she completed for one of these assignments is shown below.

1) WHAT	Work on tonight's homework assignment: problems 1-10 on p. 45 of your text.
2) WHO	Students who have finished their classwork
3) WHEN	Start working as soon as you finish your classwork. Stop working two minutes before the bell rings so that you have time to pack up your things.
4) HOW	Work on your own or with a partner. Before you begin, review what we've learned about equivalence and applying the properties of operations to generate equivalent expressions. Check your class notes as well as your text.
5) HELP	"Ask three before me."
6) AFTER	Reflect on the assignment. Were the problems hard? Easy? Medium? Why do you think so? Record your thoughts and feelings in your Learning Log, and be prepared to share them in class tomorrow.
7) CRITERIA	Problem sets will be evaluated for completeness and accuracy. All work should be shown.

SOURCE: Adapted from *Tools for Thoughtful Assessment* (p. 45), by A. L. Boutz, H. F. Silver, J. W. Jackson, and M. J. Perini, 2012, Franklin Lakes, NJ: Thoughtful Education Press. © 2012 by Silver Strong & Associates. Adapted with permission.

Teacher Talk

- ➔ Teachers who use this tool on a regular basis often leave the seven prompts on the board so they can simply fill in the answers when introducing each new assignment.
- ➔ If students need help completing an assigned task, you may want to refer them to the "ask three before me" rule. This rule, which states that they should ask three people (e.g., classmates, parents, school librarian) for help before asking you, teaches students to become more self-sufficient. It also promotes collaboration and builds interpersonal skills by encouraging students to seek help from others.
- ➔ Help students work more efficiently by encouraging them to think about the resources and supplies that assigned tasks require and gather those resources and supplies before they start working.

7-Step Directions

1) WHAT	
2) WHO	
3) WHEN	
4) HOW	
5) HELP	
6) AFTER	
7) CRITERIA	

