

Giving Directions: Part 1

The “When I Say Go” Procedure

When giving students verbal directions, follow these 4 steps to get and keep their attention.

1. **Provide a “trigger” or “cue” word** that you use consistently. For example, if you always give directions by saying *“When I say go...”* then students know that when they hear that phrase directions are going to follow. They also know that they don’t move until the cue word is said. In this case, the cue word is “go.” Until then, they just sit and listen.
2. **Give the directions clearly and concisely**, modeling it when possible, limiting the steps to 3-4. *“When I say Go you will take out your math book, a paper and a pencil and open to page 37.”*
3. **Check for understanding** by having students repeat the directions to each other or back to you in some form. For example, *“When I say Go you will take out your math book, a paper and a pencil and open to page 37. Okay, when I say go what 3 things will you take out? (call on a random students to answer.) And then what page will you turn to? (call on random student to answer). **Note:** Don’t take volunteers when checking for understanding. Students who volunteer already know what the directions are. They are not the ones who need to repeat it. Or, have students turn to a partner and tell their partner what the directions are. Then ask for questions and answer any that come up.*
4. **Pull the trigger.** Say the cue word, *“Ready and Go!”* and watch the magic happen.



Tip From the Trenches When introducing a cue or trigger word for the first time, expect students to move before you say it. As with all new procedures, this one must be introduced, taught and practiced before it becomes second nature. Initially, if students begin to grab their books or get up before you say the cue word, just stop them. Have them return to seated listening position. Remind them to wait for the cue word. Then start the directions again from the beginning.

Variation Use a call and response trigger. For example, when I say “pineapple” you will get up from the carpet, walk silently to your table and sit in polite position. Pineapple!” Then students respond with a previously taught response word like “coconut” before they move.

Find out More Check out page 127 in the 2nd edition of our book “Conscious Classroom Management” for more information about the “When I Say Go..” procedure.
