

BBC Learning English

How to ...

Asking for and giving directions



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Jackie: Hello, welcome to BBC Learning English dot com. I'm Jackie Dalton. Today's programme is all about giving and understanding directions. Our reporter Helen is new to London and has been out asking people for directions to various different places. We'll take a look at some of the key phrases that come up as she tries to find her way around. Let's start with a simple one.

Examples

Can you tell me how to get to the nearest toilet, please?

To the nearest toilet? Yes, you just go down the stairs here, **turn right** and it's just **on your right**.

Jackie: Nice and easy. 'Turn right' or 'turn left' – a simple way of telling people in which direction they should go. And if you want to describe the position of a particular place in relation to the person you can say it's 'on your right', or 'on your left'. Let's listen to that clip once more.

Examples

Can you tell me how to get to the nearest toilet, please?

To the nearest toilet? Yes, you just go down the stairs here, **turn right** and it's just **on your right**.

Jackie: Now listen out for a slightly different way of telling someone to turn left or right.

Examples

Can I ask you how to get to the nearest bus stop please?

Just go straight to the bottom there, just take a left turn, **take a left turn** – and that's it, yeah, it's just round the corner.

Jackie: That's another way of telling someone to go in a particular direction – earlier we heard the phrase 'turn right' or 'turn left', you could also say 'take a left' or 'take a left turn'.

A word that's already come up five times is 'just'. Listen to how it's used.

Examples

You **just** go down the stairs here, turn right and it's **just** on your right.

Just go straight to the bottom there, **just** take a left turn, take a left turn – and that's it, yeah, it's **just** round the corner.

Jackie: 'Just' is a sort of filler and a way of suggesting that what the person has to do isn't difficult: 'Just go down the stairs' somehow sounds easier than 'Go down the stairs'. Listen again:

Examples

You **just** go down the stairs here, turn right and it's **just** on your right.

Just go straight to the bottom there, **just** take a left turn, take a left turn – and that's it, yeah, it's **just** round the corner.

Jackie: One thing that can be confusing when it comes to directions is the use of the word 'right'. Listen to this clip – the word 'right' is used in three different ways.

Examples

Do you know how to get to Covent Garden?

Yeah, yeah, you just go...at the end of the street, go left and then **go right** and take the second right around the Aldwych theatre, **go right up there**, then go left and Covent Garden Market will just **be right in** front you – you just walk down...

Jackie: Let's break that down.

Examples

go left and then **go right**

Jackie: simple enough – 'go right' means the same as 'turn right' or 'take a right'. What about here?

Examples

around the Aldwych theatre, go right up there

Jackie: 'Go right up there' could be interpreted in two different ways and even a native English speaker could get confused here. The man could have meant 'turn right', or he could have meant 'go all the way up there'. 'Go right up there' - 'go all the way up there'. We say things like 'go right to the end of the road' to mean 'go all the way to the end of the road' – very different from taking a right turn. A clue is often in the prepositions. If you're telling someone to turn, it often comes with the preposition 'at'. For example, 'Go right at the main road'. Whereas the preposition 'up' – 'Go right up the main road' – tends to mean go all the way up the main road. If you're not sure, just ask. So that's two different uses of 'right'. What about the third?

Examples

and Covent Garden Market will just **be right in** front you

Jackie: 'Covent Garden will just be right in front of you'. He could also have said 'Covent Garden will be directly in front of you' or 'immediately in front of you' – it's not far away. 'Right in front of you' in this context means 'it's not far

away'. Let's listen to the next set of directions. Listen out for an expression in this clip which means 'it's very easy to see'.

Examples

I was wondering if I could ask you how to get to the nearest tube station?

Err, you could use Holborn tube station, which is straight down Oxford street, turn right and keep going up Kingsway and **you won't miss it**, it's on the right.

Jackie: Did you spot the expression? 'You won't miss it' is a nice way of saying 'it's very easy to see'. Now listen to the beginning of this sentence.

Examples

keep going up Kingsway and you won't miss it, it's on the right.

Jackie: 'Keep going' is a good way of telling someone they will have to walk or drive for a while before they get to a certain point.

Let's end with a couple of questions to check you've understood some of today's language.

Which is correct: 'The building is at your right' or 'The building is on your right'?

The second is correct – we use the preposition 'on'. 'The building is on your right.'

Which of these would be a correct way of telling someone to turn left: 'Take a left' or 'Have a left'?

The first one is correct. 'Have a left' doesn't make sense – 'Take a left' is fine.

Which of these phrases means turn right: 'Go right to the end of the road' or 'Go right at the end of the road'?

The second one, with the preposition 'at' means turn right. 'Go right up the road' usually means go all the way up the road.

That's all for now, but keep practising your English with our quizzes, games and programmes on BBC Learning English dot com.