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**Promoting Comprehensible Input and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and  
Storytelling Methods in Foreign Language Classes**

by

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### **Abstract**

This project addresses the need for easy to use and follow resources for foreign language teachers who are interested in switching their traditional textbook based classes to Comprehensible Input and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling method based classes. The purpose of this project is to provide foreign language teachers with a unit of lesson plans to use Comprehensible Input and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling methods in their classrooms for the semester of their first year using these methods for a level 1 foreign language middle-high school class. The project consists of a website that includes a 16-week pacing guide unit of lessons along with examples of how to complete these activities and where to access more of these resources. This project is significant because it will allow teachers of foreign language who have been intrigued by Comprehensible Input and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling methods to feel more comfortable abandoning traditional textbook based classes and help their student successfully acquire the targeted language.

**KEYWORDS:** Comprehensible Input, Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling, acquire, foreign language, targeted language, pacing guide

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## Chapter 1: Definition of Problem

Language research theorist, Stephen Krashen (1981), defines “learning” a foreign language as the “product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge ‘about’ the language, which is less important than ‘acquisition’ of a language” (p. 10). He defines “acquisition” of a language as “the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language” (p. 10). Acquiring a second language requires meaningful and comprehensible interaction via natural communication. Acquisition of a language can be instructed via two methods that go hand in hand with each other called Comprehensible Input (CI) and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). TPRS is a method in which students are taught the targeted language in context, making it comprehensible for students. The targeted language is taught through stories and everyday conversations using comprehensible input (CI). CI is making the content understandable to the recipient of the content such as pointing to the English translation written on the board while saying the word in the targeted language so the definition is clear. Students who acquire language via CI and TPRS methods are able to comprehend simple conversations and are able to produce appropriate responses.

Students in second language classrooms are taught the second language using textbooks which include content about grammar, conjugation charts and memorization of vocabulary. The problem with this teaching method is that students are learning about the language instead of acquiring the language. Slavic & Plante (2017) write:

When students interact with a book or computer program to learn a language, only a very small percentage of students demonstrate gains. Even in those few students, the gains

reflect mere learning and memorization, not real acquisition. Students trained in this old way exhibit spoken and written language that is stilted, labored and inauthentic. (3)

Stephen Krashen (1981) explains the difference between “learning” a language and “acquiring” a language. He defines learning a language as the “product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge ‘about’ the language” (p 10). When students acquire a second language, they repeat the process of which they acquired their first language. This can be done through meaningful and comprehensible interaction via natural communication. Teachers of second languages can have students acquire languages using the teaching methods Comprehensible Input (CI) and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS).

### **Purpose of project**

During my first year of teaching foreign language, I taught Spanish following a textbook. I taught the grammar rules, conjugation charts, memorization of vocabulary lists as a main emphasis just as the textbook told me to do so. I realized that my students were not able to apply those instructional methods of the language into comprehending or producing the targeted language. I was teaching my first-year students a language, I wanted them to learn Spanish instead of acquiring Spanish. After my first year of teaching concluded, I recall feeling disappointed at the amount of Spanish my students could produce.

In my second year of teaching, I transferred to another school which required language teachers to use the teaching methods CI and TPRS. After concluding just one month of teaching using CI and TPRS during my second year of teaching Spanish level 1, I noticed that my second-year students were able to produce more Spanish than those students whom I taught during my whole first year. The problem was that because CI and TPRS methods are not as traditional as

language textbooks, I was having difficulties structuring my curriculum. CI and TPRS methods are methods that can be applied to any content in no specific order of content. As a new CI and TPRS teacher I both wanted and needed some structure as to what to teach my students so I could feel confident that my students were acquiring the language.

While the resources are unlimited for those teachers who have become recent abandoners of textbooks and new users of CI and TPRS, the resources are not organized in a pacing guide making it difficult for a new CI and TPRS teacher to know where to start and what they should be teaching. The purpose of this project is to provide foreign language teachers with a unit of lesson plans to use CI and TPRS methods in their classrooms for the semester of their first year using these methods for a level 1 foreign language middle-high school class.

### **Preview of Literature**

The focus of this literature review explores how CI and TPRS became methods of instruction, the effectiveness of CI and TPRS methods and how students beyond the high school classroom perform with CI and TPRS instruction.

### **Preview of Methodology**

This project was created to be used as resource for foreign language teachers who are interested in switching their traditional textbook based classes to TPRS and CI. This project is in the form of a website with units broken down into categories such as Total Physical Response(TPR), One Word Image (OWI), Short Stories and Miscellaneous Activities. This website includes a pacing guide along with examples of how to complete these activities and where to access more of these resources. The information gathered in the website is from my own experiences as well as other colleagues in my department who teach level 1 classes.

### **Significance of Project**

This project is significant to teachers of foreign language who have been intrigued by CI and TPRS methods but have been hesitant to stray away from traditional textbook instruction. The goal of this project is for teachers to have a structured pacing guide and resources similar to those that textbooks provide in order for teachers to feel more comfortable making the switch to CI and TPRS methods. This project is also significant to students because they will be able to acquire a second language.

### **Summary of Chapter**

This chapter introduced the use of CI and TPRS methods in foreign language classes. While there are many resources available for teachers to use while using these methods, the resources are not organized as pacing guides with the content embedded into them therefore making it difficult for first users of CI and TPRS to feel comfortable. This project addresses the need for easy to use and follow CI and TPRS material for teachers who are wanting to use these methods in their classes.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This is a review of literature focuses on the topics of using comprehensible input and teaching proficiency through reading and storytelling methods to second language learners. This review explores how CI and TPRS became methods of instruction. The methods are fairly new as they were developed when teachers used other methods and kept developing them to come up with the end product of CI and TPRS. Due to the novelty of the methods, CI and TPRS are not the most common used teaching method when teaching a second language to students. Teachers of CI and TPRS have tested the theory of language acquisition and have conducted studies in which students who were tested on their second language scored higher when taught using TPRS methods. That is the second focus of this literature review. The third focus of the literature review is on students beyond the high school classroom such as those in college and adult schools. The articles in this review were chosen based on their relevance to the topic of this professional development project.

### **Language Acquisition and TPRS**

According to Ray & Seely (1998), before TPRS methods were introduced in the classroom, Professor James J. Asher of San Jose State University introduced his approach to teaching language as Total Physical Response (TPR). This teaching approach is the coordination of language with physical movement. Students are taught specific words with a specific movement. By listening to multiple repetitions of each word with each movement, the brain begins to associate them together and helps remember it. Blaine Ray, a language teacher, tried TPR in his classroom and noticed that students became proficient at commands followed by actions but became bored of commands and would lose interest in the subject. After reading

Professor Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell's (1983) work *The Natural Approach*, Ray then adapted the TPR method by speaking the language in a comprehensible way to his classes. This became known as CI. His students began to internalize the language and over time acquire the grammar.

When students acquire a second language, it is a similar process to when a child develops the ability to learn their first language. (Krashen, 1982). When a child learns to say the word "ball" in their first language, usually the object is present and the word is being repeated multiple times. Parents say the word ball slowly for the child to hear all the sounds, they point to it and they use it with other grammatical structures. For example, the big blue ball. While the intention of the parent might just be to teach the word ball to the child, it is also addressing word tense order by using the adjectives before the nouns. Using the word "the" in the statement is demonstrating the use of articles. The child is also picking up adjectives that describe physical appearance such as color and size with the words big and blue. After a child hears the same words being used with the same object, it will eventually make a connection from the words to the object. Eventually the child will also be able to produce the words when referring to the object. This process is all subconscious. Students should acquire a second language just like they did with their first language.

Krashen (1997) explained in his book *Foreign Language Education The Easy Way* that TPR was not a complete method to teaching language. He suggested ways to supply comprehensible input for beginners such as the use of background knowledge and pictures in storytelling. Krashen also explained that students acquire language when they understand the message. Due to language not being a conscious process, students understand the message being presented to them in a second language when it contains aspects of the language that they are

developmentally ready to acquire. Ray developed the Classroom Fluency Model in which he states that the teacher must make the class comprehensible to the students, provide frequent repetition of the targeted material, keep the class interesting and include oral interaction about students and topics of interest. (Ray & Seely, 1998). The combination of Asher's, Krashen's, and Ray's work became into what today is known as TPRS. All their methods are combined in a successful TPRS classroom.

### **TPRS Students Score Higher**

Students who are taught a second language through TPRS methods have proven to score higher on language assessments than those students who were taught with other teaching methods that were not TPRS. An empirical study was performed by Watson (2009), in which students of two different high schools were taught beginning Spanish by the same teacher. One class was taught with TPRS methods, while the other one was taught using more traditional methods. After taking a written final exam with questions on listening, vocabulary, grammar, reading and comprehension as well as a district oral exam, the TPRS students performed higher than the traditional method students in the two exams. Dziedzic (2012) compared four high school Spanish level 1 classes, two being taught using TPRS methods and the other two with traditional methods. 65 of those students took the Denver Public School Proficiency Assessment. The TPRS and the traditional students scored equally well in the listening and reading sections, however the TPRS students scored higher in the writing and speaking sections.

The results of these findings are not limited to students at the high school level, they apply to college level students as well as adult students. Oliver (2012) compared final scores of college students in beginning level 1 Spanish classes, TPRS vs traditional methods. The TPRS

students significantly outperformed the traditional class in grammar, reading and writing. Robert & Thomas (2014) tested adult students at the Center for Accelerated Language Acquisition via the National Spanish Exam after taking 22 hours of instruction with TPRS methods. They compared their results on the exam to those of high school students who took approximately 180 hours of traditional method instruction. The TPRS adult students scored higher than the high school students even though they had received significantly less time of instruction.

Other than TPRS producing higher scores than traditional methods, using the TPRS method in a classroom is also beneficial when the classroom does not have an abundance of resources. TPRS focuses on material that comes from the students' input such as their ideas for characters and plots for stories as well as student interests. In a study, Varguez (2009) compared four high school classes, two TPRS classes and two traditional classes. Within the TPRS classes, one was socioeconomically disadvantaged and had a teacher who had less experience. The students took the University of the State of New York's standardized Second Language Proficiency Examination. The socioeconomically disadvantaged class scored the same as the other classes not letting socioeconomic status be a factor in their academic success.

### **Summary of Chapter**

From analyzing these sources, one may conclude that all the sources point to CI and TPRS methods being the most beneficial teaching methods when teaching second language. However, many of the results presented also mention that CI and TPRS students score just as high as those students taught using other methods. The gap in the research still remains specifically in regards to properly applying grammar and more advanced language.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

“Language acquisition is not a conscious process. It is something that happens when one understands messages” (Ray & Seely, 2012, p. 7) The literature explains how CI and TPRS methods work concurrently with the acquisition of language and its success in classrooms. Based on the literature, it is in the best interest of foreign language learners and their educators to have more resources on CI and TPRS methods to use as their instruction. The purpose of this project is to provide foreign language teachers with an easily accessible unit of lesson plans to use CI and TPRS methods in their classrooms for the semester of their first year using these methods for a level 1 foreign language middle-high school class.

#### **Design**

The purpose of this project is to provide foreign language teachers with an easily accessible unit of lesson plans. Therefore, technology was chosen as the mean of presenting and distributing the project to educators. The format of this project is purposely a website as “the widespread use of digital resources has brought significant changes in reading practice and behavior as people spend more time reading online” (Liu, 2012, p.85). According to Liu (2012), there are many advantages of digital reading that are “traditionally absent in the print environment such as interactivity, nonlinearity, immediacy of accessing information, and the convergence of text, images, audio and video” (p. 86-87). The website was developed using WIX, which is an online tool intended to create professional websites free of charge. This online tool can reproduce text, images, videos, links and downloadable documents which are all included in the project. WIX also allows the websites to have tabs, which makes the material easy to navigate.

The pages of the website are structured with examples and overviews of the CI and TPRS

activity such as videos of how it is intended to be carried out or written suggestions and then instructions for the activity. The purpose of this is for teachers first to understand and get an idea of the activity and then be able to follow the specific instructions for the activity. The CI and TPRS images and videos included in this project were chosen specifically for the clarity and effectiveness of representing the activity.

### **Intended Audience and Setting**

The project website is intended for educators of level 1 foreign language students at the middle or high school level. While this project specifically targets those educators who are new to CI and TPRS and need or want some structure, it can be used by those more seasoned CI and TPRS teachers as a resource as well. The website is available for those teachers who want to use CI and TPRS methods in their classroom but have not been professionally trained. The website material uses examples and materials where the targeted language is Spanish and the first language is English, but the languages can be adapted by the educator to fit their need.

### **Instruments**

Some of the instruments used in this project were collected from other existing CI and TPRS resources while other instruments were created by me and compiled onto one website to create the easily accessible unit of lesson plans. Some of the instruments such as the 16 week pacing guide and the TPR Unit were created by me based on what I personally use in my level 1 Spanish class.

### **Procedures and Evaluation of Process**

When designing this project, I used my own experience as a new CI and TPRS teacher to guide the desired end product. I recalled the struggle I faced as a novice CI and TPRS teacher when searching for resources as I toggled through infinite websites and print material in order to

have enough lessons to get through one semester. Based on my struggle, I created the website in which I compiled the resources I use for my first semester into one location. The materials placed on the websites are all a result of multiple professional development events that I attended. The videos are of respected CI and TPRS pioneers who set an expectation through their demonstrations of how the activities should be carried out. I selected the easiest to follow and most effective activities to create the unit lesson plans from the past three years of my own teaching experience using CI and TPRS in my classroom. For example, the first unit is TPR. Doing TPR as the first unit in the pacing guide allows for both the teacher and students to be slowly introduced to the CI and TPRS methods. By focusing on commands, students nor teachers have to worry about grammar or any other aspect of the targeted language besides semantics.

### **Summary of Chapter**

The purpose of this project is to provide foreign language teachers with an easily accessible unit of lesson plans to use CI and TPRS methods in their classrooms for the semester of their first year using these methods for a level 1 foreign language middle-high school class. The website intends to help those first-year CI and TPRS teachers to have some structure in their lesson plans as well as guidance with the activities. These resources will help teachers help their students acquire a second language instead of learning it.

### **Chapter 4: Project**

This project addresses the need to provide foreign language teachers with a unit of lesson plans to use CI and TPRS methods in their classrooms for the 16-week semester of their first year using these methods for a level 1 foreign language Spanish middle-high school class. The project designed is a website for teachers who are new to CI and TPRS and want need some structure to implement those methods in their classes. The goal of this website is to give teachers a starting foundation while they get accustomed to using the CI and TPRS methods in their class. This website includes a home page on the first tab to introduce teachers to the website. The second tab provides teachers a 16-week pacing guide with brief instructions of daily activities. The website also provides detailed instructions, example videos and resources such as downloadable documents and links for the activities on the pacing guide. These instructions are found on tab 3 for the TPR unit, tab 4 for the OWI, tab 5 for Short Stories and tab 6 for Miscellaneous Activities/ Resources.

The following is the URL for the website:

<https://edithvega91.wixsite.com/citprsteachresource>

#### **Tab 1: Home**

The Home page is a description of the purpose of the website. It gives an overview of what Comprehensible Input and Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Story Telling are.

#### **Tab 2: Pacing Guide**

The Pacing Guide tab includes a description of how the 16-week pacing guide is broken down into units and divided into weeks and days. The tab also includes images of the pacing guide as well as an editable pacing guide icon to download. The pacing guide is intended to be

used for structure so teachers know what to do throughout each unit while giving them the flexibility to choose their desired content.

### **Tab 3: TPR**

The tab TPR explains the first unit, Total Physical Response, of the pacing guide. The tab explains how teachers should perform the activity. The tab includes a list of words that are to be used during the unit and a unit assessment. The tab also has an icon to download an editable unit assessment. During TPR, the teacher is choosing 4 words a day to teach the students, one at a time. These words are said in the targeted language as commands. The teacher says the words and models the action. Students are to attentively listen and watch as the command is being dictated and then complete the command. When the students are familiar with one command, words can then be commanded together. This is repeated for the class period until the end with the four words. The teacher then instructs students to take notes by adding the words that were used during the commands that day in the targeted language with the meaning in the students' L1. When all the words have been introduced and practiced, students can then dictate commands to each other in partners, small groups and to the whole class in the targeted language. The unit ends with a written assessment of the commands. This assessment can also be given verbally to students.

### **Tab 4: OWI**

The OWI tab explains the second unit, One Word Image, of the 16-week pacing guide. This tab has a YouTube video of TPRS educator, Tina Hargaden, modeling a OWI activity in her class. The page then includes a resource from TPRS promoter and researcher Ben Slavic on how to carry out the activity with a class on days 1 and 2 of the week. The OWI unit begins by the teacher asking suggestions from the class to create a character that is not alive and never has had

any life therefore only objects can be used. When the class decides on an object for the character, the teacher then writes the name of the object in the targeted language on the board. The students will then decide details about the object; quantity, size, color, intelligence level, rich or poor, mean or kind, hair color, eye color, other physical characteristics, mood, location, time and superpower. These details will be decided one at a time and when the class can agree, the teacher then writes the detail of the object in the targeted language on the board. Every time a detail is decided, the teacher repeats the characteristics of the character in the targeted language therefore becoming a story.

By day 3, the character should be complete. There is a text on the page that explains what and how to carry out the remainder of the week for that unit once the OWI is complete. On day 3, students tell the teacher the details of the characters using as much as the targeted language as possible. While students retell the details, the teacher writes it down on the whiteboard in complete sentences/paragraph form. When the character story is complete, teacher will ask students to translate any sentence they can while the teacher writes down the correct translation underneath each word. Teacher and students will then take turns translating together. Students will then draw and color the character they created on a full sheet of printing paper

On day 4, teacher will put up the typed story on the projector in the targeted language for students to copy. Instruct students to skip lines on their paper. When all students are done copying in the targeted language, students will form two groups; group A and group B. Each student in group A will be paired with a student from group B. Student will then participate in volleyball translation (student from group A reads one sentence in the targeted language, student from group B then translates that sentence and reads next. Student A will repeat the process until

the whole story has been verbally translated.) After students have translated the story 5 times, students can now write down the translation in their L1 on the lines they skipped.

On day 5, teacher is to give a comprehension quiz on the OWI character that was created that week to check for comprehension. After the quiz, teachers can choose a miscellaneous activity to take part in for the remainder of the class period.

### **Tab 5: Short Stories**

The Short Stories tab explains the third and fourth unit of the 16-week pacing guide. The page includes a YouTube video demonstration of TPRS educator, Blaine Ray, modeling how to tell short stories using the TPRS method. There is also a resource text breaking down the story telling into three steps. The page then includes instructions for how to conduct unit 3, Scripted Short Stories, and separate instructions for conducting unit 4, Class Created Short Stories. Unit 3 also includes a link as to where to access a book that provides the scripted short stories.

#### **Scripted Stories**

The first 4 weeks of the short stories unit is spent telling students scripted short stories. These stories are already prewritten with the structures prechosen. Day one is dedicated to teaching the structures, telling the story and practice translating it as a class. Teacher will have the structures on the board in both the targeted language and students' L1, students will copy it onto their notes. Teacher will then tell the scripted story in the targeted language using as many scaffoldings as possible such as pointing to words on the board, objects and using hand movements. Teacher will stop often to check for comprehension of the story. When the story is done being told, teacher will then post the typed story on the projector and practice the translation with the class.

On day 2, students will be given a copy of the scripted story. Students will participate in volleyball translation as they did in the OWI activity. After 5 rounds of translating the scripted story, the class will come together again to clear up any misconceptions on semantics. The students will then translate the story on paper to their L1.

Scripted Stories take two class periods meaning two stories can be covered a week. On the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the week, assign a short comprehension quiz on either or both of the scripted short stories to check for comprehension. After the quiz, teachers can choose a miscellaneous activity to take part in for the remainder of the class period.

### **Class Short Stories**

The process for creating a short story is similar to the OWI activity except that now the class creates a plot instead of a character. The class can decide to use characters from previous OWI characters, celebrities or anything they can agree on. Day 1 and Day 2 should be dedicated to creating the plot of the story.

On day 3, students tell the teacher the details of the plot of the story using as much as the targeted language as possible. While students retell the details, the teacher writes it down on the whiteboard in complete sentences/paragraph form. When the story is complete, teacher will ask students to translate any sentence they can while the teacher writes down the correct translation underneath each word. Teacher and students will then take turns translating together. As each word is said, teacher points to it on the board. After the story is verbally translated a few times, students will then draw and color the story they created on a full sheet of printing paper divided into 6 story squares.

On day 4, teacher will put up the typed story on the projector in the targeted language for students to copy. Instruct students to skip lines on their paper. When all students are done copying in the targeted language, students will then take part in volleyball translation. After students have translated the story 5 times, students can now write down the translation in their L1 on the lines they skipped.

On day 5, teacher is to give a comprehension quiz on the class story that was created that week to check for comprehension. After the quiz, teachers can choose a miscellaneous activity to take part in for the remainder of the class period.

#### **Tab 6: Misc Act/ Resources**

The Misc Act/ Resources page is designated to explain to educators about the Miscellaneous Activity that is on the pacing guide on the 5<sup>th</sup> day during units 2 through four. Fridays after quizzes have been administered, teachers should participate in a miscellaneous activity with the students. These activities should take no longer than one class period and should be enjoyable for the class. These activities can be songs, games or even watching shows as long as it is conducted in the targeted language and presented in a comprehensible way. The page then includes resources of TPRS educators and websites for teachers to find the miscellaneous activities that they want to imply on those days.

### **Chapter 5: Project Recommendations**

There is a need for teachers to have a structured pacing guide and resources similar to those that textbooks provide in order for teachers to feel more comfortable making the switch to CI and TPRS methods. The purpose of this project was to provide foreign language teachers with a unit of lesson plans to use CI and TPRS methods in their classrooms for the semester of their first year using these methods for a level 1 foreign language middle-high school class. This project was designed to address the need for easy to use and follow CI and TPRS material for teachers who are wanting to use these methods in their classes. The website provides foreign language teachers with an easily accessible unit of structured lesson plans that are CI and TPRS driven.

#### **Lessons Learned**

This project gave me the opportunity to study the topic of language acquisition more in depth. Through this research, I was able to understand the difference between learning a language and acquiring a language and the effect on language learners. I was also able to understand how CI and TPRS methods developed and the effectiveness of these methods in classrooms.

When creating the project, I was able to reflect on my own practice. I reviewed the curriculum I use in my class and decided what activities were effective with my specific population of students. Even though I previously loosely followed a curriculum as such, I had never put it into a set pacing guide. By having a pacing guide, I can now make sure that my classes are on track for the first semester.

### **Recommendations for Implementation**

This project will help share beginning practices with teachers who are new to CI and TPRS as well as other educators who are new to the language profession. Not only are CI and TPRS methods effective in language acquisition but they are also inexpensive. Once an educator feels comfortable practicing the CI and TPRS methods, they can be applied to any topic when teaching language. This gives teachers the freedom to choose to talk about topics they feel passionate about or are relevant to their students such as pop culture, celebrities, sports or food.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While this project is meant to be used as a resource for newly transitioned CI and TPRS teachers, a limitation of this project can be that teachers are not comfortable carrying out the activities in the pacing guide. This limitation can be addressed if teachers attended professional development workshops on how to run an effective CI and TPRS classroom. There is more to these methods than just the curriculum. Through CI and TPRS professional developments, teachers can learn classroom management skills, grading and other resources for content.

### **Conclusion**

The way a second language is acquired is reflective of how the first language was acquired. Language acquisition does not happen through textbooks, worksheets or grammar rules; it happens when the message is understood. Foreign language teachers can make the message understood by using CI and TPRS methods when teaching students a second language. In order for teachers to use these methods in their classrooms, there has to be easily accessible resources in order for them to feel comfortable making the transition. The purpose of this project was to provide foreign language teachers with a unit of lesson plans to use CI and TPRS methods in

their classrooms for the semester of their first year using these methods for a level 1 foreign language middle-high school class.

### Resources

Ben Slavic <https://www.benslavic.com/Posters/one-word-image-instructions.pdf>

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