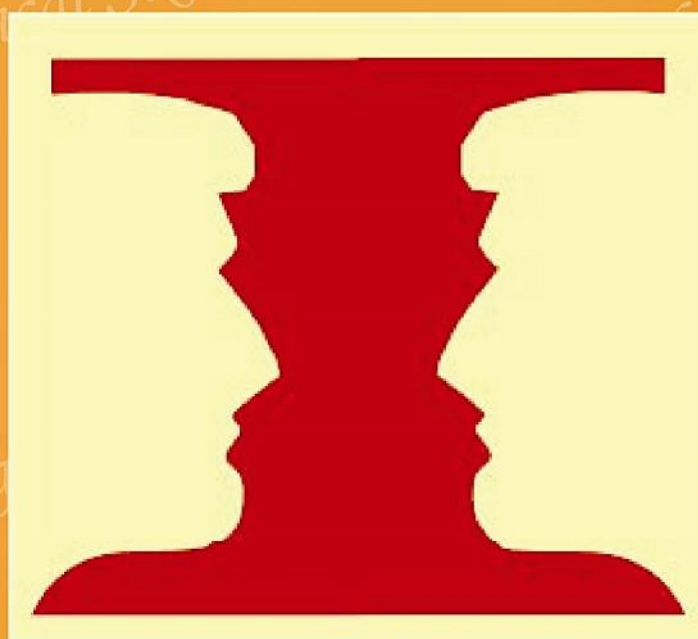


# Psychological Skills for Open Distance Learning



**Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education  
Indira Gandhi National Open University  
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi - 110 068**



**STRIDE HANDBOOK**

**Psychological Skills in Open  
Distance Learning  
Environment**

Prabir Biswas, Ph.D. (Psychology)



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# STRIDE HANDBOOK

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## FOREWORD

Starting from correspondence courses, a few decades ago, teaching and learning through non-conventional and non-traditional modes, have undergone very dynamic and effective changes to improve the quality of education through these new systems. These emerging systems and trends are quite open, flexible and widely accessible to large target groups of learners. In view of these unique and distinctive features of these systems, they are now identified as the open and distance learning systems (ODL). It is now very well realized and understood that for effective and successful handling of the ODL systems, very well trained faculty and other professionals, and distance educators are all required to work together. The system has gained considerable importance and acceptance to attract significantly large number of learners seeking education and training through the ODL systems. It is in this background that the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), which was set up in the year 1985 has already emerged as one of the largest universities in the world to day. A more recent realization of the effectiveness of the ODL systems is in its being uniquely capable of handling programmes for training of trainers and learners specially those related to empowerment and awareness programmes involving substantially large groups of trainers and learners. Never before, we had witnessed such a great impact of any technology than that of the contemporary developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the system of education. It is becoming very apparent that in recent years the ODL has very well and meaningfully absorbed the ICT for the betterment of the system, to make it more cost effective and accessible so as to bring in equity in education.

The ODL has been growing at a very fast rate and massive human resource trained in the Open and Distance Learning System is required to handle the system efficiently. Keeping in view the above requirements of man power development, the Division of Distance Education of IGNOU prepared 7 Handbooks on 7 themes in 1989 to meet the above requirements of the ODL System. The Division of Distance Education grew into the Staff Training and Research Institution of Distance Education (STRIDE) in the year 1993 and 10 Handbooks on different themes of ODL have already been brought out. These Handbooks have found to be very useful for the teachers, administrators and other functionaries of the ODL. As of today, the STRIDE has successfully revised the 7 Handbooks and has also added 3 more Handbooks on 3 different themes relevant to emerging trends in ODL. I appreciate the efforts made by STRIDE and hope that the Handbooks will be immensely useful for different functionaries of the ODL System in the country and abroad.

**(H.P.Dikshit)**  
**Vice-Chancellor**  
**IGNOU**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Ramesh, aged 40, an employee in an open and distance teaching- learning institute can't concentrate on his tasks for a considerable period of time.

Tuski, aged 27, personal assistant to the Director of a School in an open university likes to speak too much. She goes on talking and gives little attention to other's words.

Amir, aged 45, a newly appointed teacher in an open and distance teaching learning institute often suffers from headaches, chest pain, anxiety and so on. He has to develop 16 units of a course within 2 months, which seems to be very difficult for him.

Karishma, aged 38, a distant learner complains of being forgetful. She can't remember the names of different open universities in the world, forgets important dates, contents and so on. She needs to improve her memory functions.

Arjun, aged 30, a part-time staff at study centre, of an open university complains of pressure at work. He sometimes faces problems in dealing with learners who are agitated due to some reasons or other. He faces problems in working with the coordinator also. In some cases he does not find any solution.

Dr. Rakesh, aged 45, in-charge of a regional centre of an open university often faces conflicts while taking decisions due to disagreement with other officers at the centre.

Nilima, aged 28, a tutor often faces problems while communicating with her students in the tutorial/counselling sessions.

All the cases mentioned above reveal that the person concerned does not have the required skills necessary for better performance and adjustment. Ramesh needs to improve his attention skills, Tuski has to improve her listening skills, Amir should learn how to cope with stress, Karishma should use some memory improvement strategies, Arjun should learn to face difficult and stressful situations, and how to solve various problems, Dr. Rakesh should learn the process of settling disagreements with other officers and Nilima should improve her communication skills in tutorial/counselling sessions. All these skills are psychological in nature and related to the science of behaviour.

There is no dearth of materials about psychology and psychological skills. The application of those psychological skills in distance teaching learning environment is a new area that requires more attention. In this handbook, we would like to point out some psychological skills necessary in an open distance learning (ODL) environment.

In the first section of this handbook, we have discussed attention and listening skills. These skills are necessary for every individual. When should we learn these skills? We think we should learn these skills when we are in the school. As a student in the

school if we learn these skills, we may utilize these during our college, professional, academic or a business life later. As a staff member of any distance teaching-learning institute we should learn these skills. In an ODL environment, communication takes place through various media like print, telephone, radio, video, computer and so on. There is scope for face-to-face interaction also. Good attention and listening skills are important for effective communication.

In the second section, we have discussed some strategies for improving the likelihood of remembering information. The distance teachers/course writers may use some principles for developing self-learning materials and can guide the learners so that they can remember the content, specifically the content that is difficult to memorise. The learner can select strategies according to their need and apply them for improving memory functions.

In the third section, we have discussed communication skills needed by the tutor/counsellor in an ODL environment. The tutor/counsellor needs skills to conduct face-to-face tutorials, tutorials through e-mail, telephone, radio, teleconferencing and so on. The tutor/counsellor, mainly the newly appointed tutor/counsellor, may find the section useful.

In the fourth section, we have discussed stress/anxiety. Today world is full of stressors. Everyone may feel stress/anxiety in some situation or other. While working or learning in an ODL environment sometimes you may feel stress/anxiety. What is stress? How to cope with it? Can relaxation help in coping with stress? How to relax? These are some of the important psychological issues we have discussed in this section.

In the fifth section, we have discussed problem solving. Almost every working situation we hear to the word 'problem'. What is a problem? Are all the problems genuine? How to solve a serious or complex problem? These are some of the issues we have discussed in this section.

In the sixth section, we have discussed another common phenomenon we experience in a work environment, i.e. disagreement and/or conflict. Is there any difference between disagreement and conflict? What are the sources of conflict? How do people try to solve disagreements or conflicts in work environments?

Through out the handbook we have given some examples from open and distance teaching - learning environments. We have used some sketch/line drawings for better understanding of the concepts and to make the handbook interesting. We have suggested some activities. You may perform these activities with your colleagues, friends and relatives.

Those working with an open university or a distance teaching learning institute and learners may find this handbook useful. We shall be happy to receive feedback from the readers or users of this handbook for further modifications.



## SECTION I

# Attention and Listening Skills

Let us begin here.

Please see the sketch below:



A teacher is delivering a lecture. There are some listeners. All the listeners are not attentive to the content of the lecture. One listener is attentive to the teacher's gesture and mannerism. He is not focusing to the content. One listener is distracted by the room temperature. One listener is appreciating a point. Another one is taking notes.

This is not an uncommon situation. Often we may observe this. Be it a classroom lecture, a conference presentation, or a public meeting, you will observe a considerable percentage of listeners are not attentive to the content of the lecture. This is because many people do not have good attention and listening skills.

Our intention here is to discuss how to develop attention and listening skills which are very important for effective communication between the teacher and the learner.

## Objectives

After working with this section you would be able to

- ☞ Discuss the process of improving attention/concentration;
- ☞ Select, suggest and practice attention training;
- ☞ Describe the process of developing good listening skills;
- ☞ Discuss the factors that affect the listening process;
- ☞ Train yourself as a good listener.

## What is attention?

Attention is one of the most important primary mental functions of a human being. Attention is the ability that helps one to concentrate mentally a particular object, incident, content, etc., and observe the same carefully. Without attention there may be no activity, be it academic or non-academic.

Many things at a time stimulate our sensory receptors. But all are not transformed into mental representation. We select one or two objects and ignore others. This is necessary for adaptive behavior. If we can't select and attend to a particular object, then our mind may be distracted by a number of uninvited stimuli (sound, light, smell, etc.) around us.

## Improving attention/concentration

Memory and Yoder (1988) present a six-part guide to improving attention/concentration.

### i. Insure understanding:

- Read or listen to instructions and directions carefully.
- Know the expectations that must be met.
- Seek clarification from the instructor/trainer if necessary.
- Do not begin a task until all instructions and objectives are fully understood.

### ii. Maintain interest in the subject matter:

- Develop interest in the topic/course/program by talking with other learners/colleagues who enjoyed the topic/course/program, by reading handbooks, articles, by watching video programs related to the subject, or by previewing the material to find points of interest to you.

**iii. Have a purpose:**

- Relate the task to specific goals.
- Consider a target such as completion date, a level of quality, a level of improvement, or a grade.

**iv. Maintain a pattern of attention:**

- Be aware of good and bad concentration habits (see box 1.1 and 1.2).

**v. Transform good procedures into habits:**

- Document the use of concentration strategies.
- Always work in your designated (study) area that is free from distractions.
- Work/study at similar times everyday to develop a routine.

**vi. Reward productivity:**

- Treat yourself to a reward when you practice good concentration habits. You may watch a TV serial, go for a walk, drink tea or cold drinks and so on.

**Box 1.1**

**Poor Concentration Habits**

Some poor concentration habits that you must change in order to improve concentration:

- You always shift your attention to a different activity because of inability to concentrate on the task at hand;
- You start a task suddenly without understanding its objectives, methods and direction;
- You choose a place to study or to complete a task with known disturbances;
- You argue unnecessarily with the friends, relatives, superior or other colleagues;
- You spend time in daydream about the task without scheduling time to perform it.

### Box 1.2

#### Conditions Necessary for Good Concentration.

You should

- i. Keep yourself healthy (physically and mentally);
- ii. Eliminate external and internal distractions;
- iii. Avoid anxiety about the task;
- iv. Relax;
- v. Understand clearly the objectives, purpose, instruction of the task at hand;
- vi. Make a list of the tasks you will have to do now and the others later; and
- vii. Avoid daydreaming.

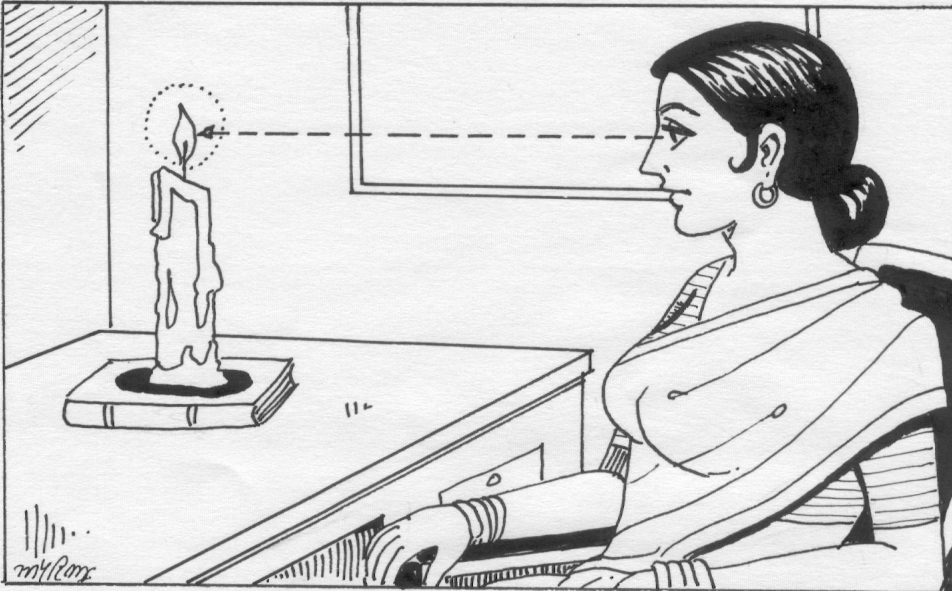
#### Some attention training strategies

There are various methods of attention training (Herrman, Raybeck and Gutman, 1996). Here we have discussed few strategies that many people found useful.

- I. a. Select a room (preferably your study room or bed room). Sit on a chair comfortably. Keep a wall clock one meter away from you. Listen to the sound as the pendulum swings constantly. Try to concentrate to that sound only. Your attention will fluctuate every few seconds. Do not worry. Fluctuation is a general characteristic of attention. You may not listen to the sound for few seconds, but again you will listen to it. Continue to listen the sound for 10 minutes. Relax.



b. Select a semi-dark room. Keep a lighted candle on a table. Sit on a chair few meters away from the candle. Look at it for 10 minutes continuously. Relax.



These methods will help you to increase your ability to sustain attention. You should practice these for a minimum of 3 months.

II. Select a quiet place. Take some study material (text book, self-learning unit, story book, news paper and so on). Switch on your radio or audio cassette player. Listen to any music and read the study material. Continue doing these two things for 10 minutes. Relax.



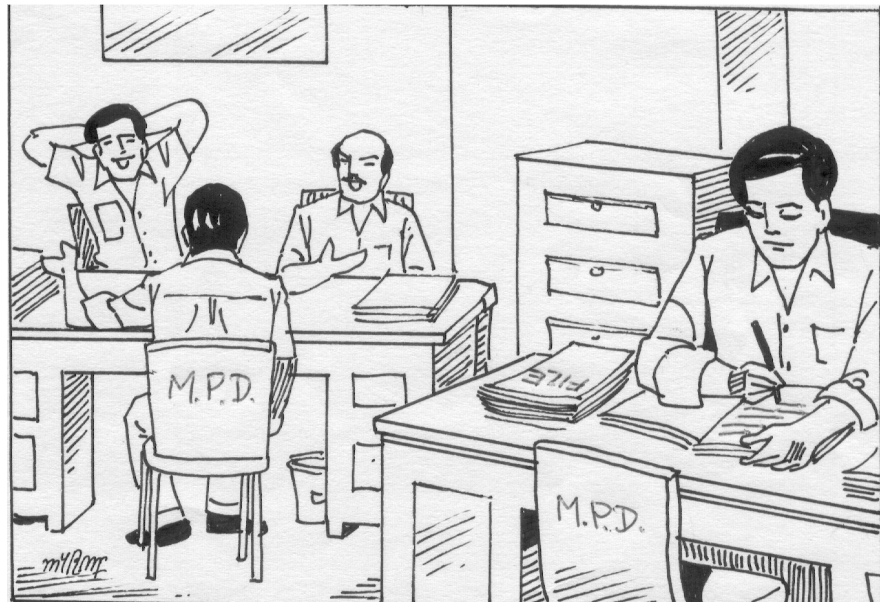
This method will help you to increase your ability to divide attention. If you practice for 3 months, you will be able to do two things simultaneously without any problems.

You may select other activities also.

- III. Switch on your TV. Watch a serial (a drama). Try to concentrate on details (visual images) while listening to the sound. For example, you are watching a scene: a drawing room of a rich man, two people are sitting in the drawing room and discussing something. The drawing room is well decorated and well furnished. While listening to their voices you find out the small decorative pieces in the drawing room, see the color combination, novel and interesting architectures, table lamps, curtains and so on. Relax.

This method will help you to increase your ability to detect details.

- IV. Select a place full of distractions. Select some interesting study material. Start reading the material in that distractive environment. You may not be able to concentrate at the beginning. But try to concentrate. If your attention fluctuates often, do not worry. Continue reading for 10-15 minutes. Relax.



This method will help you to increase your ability to resist distractions.

Your work place may be full of distractions. Do not leave the place.  
Practice to increase your ability to resist distractions.

### Activity 1.1



#### How quickly our attention fluctuates: an experiment

Get a stopwatch. See the picture on the cover page of this handbook. What picture is it? Fix your eyes on the red portion of the picture. Switch on the stopwatch. You may think it a vase. After few seconds your attention will fluctuate and your eyes will be fixed on the yellow portion of the picture. Switch off the stopwatch. You may see human face. There are two human faces. Again your attention will fluctuate after few seconds and you will see the vase. It will continue. You can measure the timing with stopwatch. Generally, in average, after every 6-7 seconds your attention will fluctuate. When our attention fluctuates from one object to another and does not come back to the previous content or object, it is called *shifting of attention*. It may happen if there is a distraction.

### Sustaining attention of the distance learner

A distance teacher must know how to sustain attention of the students. There are several factors or components that may be considered while developing the study materials and during tutoring as well. Some of the factors are:

#### *Need and interest*

While selecting the *subject matter* you must think about the need and interest of the student. Examples, diagrams, charts, self-check exercises, activities etc. should create interest in the distant learners.

#### *Presentation style*

Keeping the distance learner's characteristics in mind, select the presentation style. You may select any new style for presentation. *Novelty* in presentation helps to increase and/or sustain attention. So, always think about *innovation*. Innovate new formats and try out their effectiveness. Here, we would like to mention language also: Always use simple, conversational and friendly language in your materials.

*Presenting information according to importance*

You should know how to distinguish between more important and less important information. The various kinds of information you provide through study materials or in a tutorial may not have similar importance. You may select some *key words* to indicate the importance of some information e.g.” *In sum*”, “*In fine*”, “*In conclusion*”, “*The most important aspect*”, *In addition to this*”, “*Moreover*”, “*However*”, “*By and large*”, “*Most interesting features*” and so on. You may *change your voice* while speaking, or use *different font, size of the letter and even color* while presenting through print. Another way to show importance is to *repeat* the words/points. You should use charts, diagrams, tables, graphs, illustrations etc. in relation to more important content and/or information.

*Duration of presentation*

If you want that your student should focus on the content, be careful about the *length* of your topic. If it is too long, the student may be distracted after sometime. Be brief and to the point.

*Motivation*

Motivation for learning is affected by interest in the subject matter as well as by the quality of presentation. *External and internal characteristics* of the booklet/study materials help to sustain motivation. Motivation is also affected by the *past performance* of the student. While selecting activities, self-check exercises etc., you should be very careful. Ask for simple exercises and activities at the beginning and slowly go for more complex ones. Provide hints, if necessary.

**Activity 1.2**



- You may add more factors or components that you feel are important for sustaining the attention of the distance learner.

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- Select any unit from any self-learning course material and examine how many factors or components are present (according to your judgment) in that unit.

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### What is listening?

Listening refers to applying oneself to hearing something – voice, sound, music and so on. Listening is more than hearing the words/sentences. It includes understanding and accepting the message and feeling of a person with whom we are communicating. One must pay attention in order to listen effectively. Listening is very much an active process of selecting and interpreting information from auditory and visual clues. (Richards, 1983; Rubin, 1995). Listening is perceived to be crucial for communication in open and distance education system – with regard to tutoring, academic counselling, orientation programme and workshops for staff development, managerial competency, effectiveness of relationships between senior officers and subordinates and so on.

#### Activity 1.3



Do you think good listening helps in better communication? If your answer is 'yes', then in what ways does it help in better communication?

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Check your answer with the points given below:

- Good listening fosters more a meaningful relationship between the communicator and listener (teacher/tutor and learner, colleagues in ODL environment);

- It shows that as a listener you accept and understand the communicator's views and ideas;
- It helps to proceed towards more important and/or serious topics for discussion;
- When the communicator sees that the listener listens attentively, s/he can express his/her inner feelings and emotions freely;

### **Basic processes while listening**

There are several basic processes at work while listening (Brown, 1994; Dunkel, 1986). These processes may occur simultaneously or in rapid succession. The listener may not perform these steps consciously all the time.

- i) The listener determines a reason for listening;
- ii) S/he takes the speech from the communicator and deposits an image of it in the *short-term* memory (see second section of this handbook);
- iii) S/he attempts to organise the information by identifying the type of speech event (conversation, lecture, radio or television advertisement etc.) and the function of the message (request, inform, persuade and so on);
- iv) S/he predicts information expected to be included in the message;
- v) S/he recalls background information (schematic) to help interpret the message;
- vi) S/he assigns a meaning to the message;
- vii) S/he checks that the message has been understood;
- viii) S/he determines the information to be held in *long-term memory* (see second section of this handbook);
- ix) S/he deletes the original form of the message that had been received in short-term memory.

*Each of these steps influences the techniques and activities a distance teacher might choose to incorporate into the study materials (print, audio, video etc.) in order to assist learners in learning to listen as well as listening to learn.*

### **Factors that affect the listening process**

There are various factors that affect the listening process. These are: The listener, the speaker, the content of the message, and any visual support that accompanies the message (Brown and Yule, 1983).

## The Listener

The listener is an active participant. His physical and psychological health plays an important role in listening. If the listener does not have good physical and mental condition he may lose attention. The listener's interest in a topic is also matters. Interest help increase the listener's comprehension. His previous knowledge may facilitate understanding of the topic. The listener may tune out of the topic that is not of interest.

Do you rate yourself as a good listener? Probably you have never thought about this. Let us discuss some of the strategies the listener may follow. You may rate yourself afterwards.

- i. *Look at the speaker:* you should look at the person who is speaking to you. Your eyes should pick up the non-verbal signals that the speaker sends out when s/he speaks. By looking at the speaker, your eyes will also complete the eye contact that speakers try to make. If you take notes while listening, sometimes you should look towards the listener as eye contact keeps you involved in the words of the speaker.
- ii. *Focus:* If you attend to a lecture, (face to face, video programme or a teleconferencing session), you should focus on the content of the lecture, not to the delivery mode of the speaker. If you start counting how many times the speaker says 'yes', or 'OK' or 'right' while speaking or adjust his spectacles or clothes you are not focusing on the topic. You shouldn't look at the mannerisms or gestures of the speaker (see the sketch in the first page of this section). These will distract you from the content.
- iii. *Emotional involvement:* If you are too emotionally involved with the speaker, you may not listen accurately. Too much anger, anxiety, fear, excitement etc. do not allow you to hear what is actually said. While listening, always try to remain relaxed and keep an open mind.
- iv. *Distractions:* When you listen to some speaker, there may be some distractions. There may be hundred stimuli in the environment and all of your sense organs may receive those continuously. Someone may create sounds, and there may be some bad smell, room temperature may be very hot or cold, or you may feel hungry and start chewing some chocolates. You should solve the problem yourself to

concentrate more towards the content and speaker's voice, not to other stimuli.

- v. *Staying active mentally*: While listening to a lecture or presentation by a teacher or trainer you ask yourself some questions. "What the speaker actually wants to convey?" "How does it help me in getting solution to my problem?"
- vi. *Use the time between tasks*: We can think faster than a person speaks. Some persons speak very slowly, some fast, but your thinking may be faster than a person speaks. So, use the time between speaking of that person whom you are listening to. Ask some questions as mentioned in the previous paragraph which will help to keep your mind occupied and focused on the lecture. You may listen, think, write at the same time, but you need some practice to do that.
- vii. *React to the speaker*: While listening (face to face) you should react to the speaker by sending out non-verbal signals. Your face must give the range of emotions to indicate that you are following the words of the speaker. By nodding your head you may better concentrate on what the person is saying. You may react using receptive language. You have seen many people while listening to others making use of this language. Use words and phrases like "I see", "really", "yes", "OK", etc. that follow and encourage the speaker to continue.
- viii. *Change your body position*: If you find that you are drifting away during a listening session, change your body position and concentrate using some of the basic strategies discussed above.

***Learn to listen with empathy and open mind.***

**Listening and empathy**: It is listening so intently and identifying so closely that you experience the other person's situation, thought and emotion.

**The speaker**

The speaker's personality, his/her behavior, attitude, language, presentation style, etc. are very important. If the speaker uses colloquial language and the listener has less ability to comprehend them, the communication may

fail. A speaker's rate of speech may be too fast, average or too slow. A speaker may use some words repeatedly for rephrasing, e.g. "I mean", "what I want to say", etc. If the listener is aware of his/her speech habits, he/she may comprehend the content easily.

### **Content**

Content is very important. Content that is familiar is easier to comprehend. Content that is unfamiliar but interesting is also easier to comprehend. Content with unfamiliar vocabulary is difficult to comprehend.

### **Visual support**

Visual support such as video, pictures, cartoons, diagrams, charts, gestures, facial expressions, can increase comprehension.

*In open and distance education system we use several types of visual supports for greater comprehension during communications, be it face-to-face, through television, teleconferencing and so on. We should use these visual supports such a way that the learner should be able to correctly interpret these visuals.*

Perhaps, you follow all or some of the strategies discussed above while listening. If you think you were not aware of those strategies or you were aware but couldn't follow due to lack of skills, you may try to develop those listening skills. In the next few paragraphs, I shall discuss some activities that may help you to develop listening skills.

### **Activities for developing listening skills**

There are various activities to choose for developing listening skills. Lund (1990) has categorised these activities according to the following responses that can be observed as comprehend checks:

- i. Doing: You may respond physically such as in total physical response;
- ii. Choosing: You may select from alternatives such as pictures, objects, texts, or actions;
- iii. Transferring: you may transform the message such as drawing a route on map, or filling in a chart;
- iv. Answering: you may answer questions about the text;
- v. Condensing: you may take note or make an outline;

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- vi. Extending: you may go beyond the text by continuing the story or solving a problem;
- vii. Duplicating: you may simply repeat or translate the message;
- viii. Modeling: you may perform a similar tasks, e.g. give instruction to colleague/friend after listening to a speaker or;
- ix. Conversing: you may take active part in a face-to-face conversation.

*If you are a distance teacher or course writer you may build a listening component into self- learning material used in open and distance education system based on these activity response types. This would be a challenge.*

**Activity 1.4**



Select any working day in a week. Try to reach in your working place at 9:30 a.m. Observe the activities of any colleague for 3 hours. Note down separately how much time s/he is spending in various activities like reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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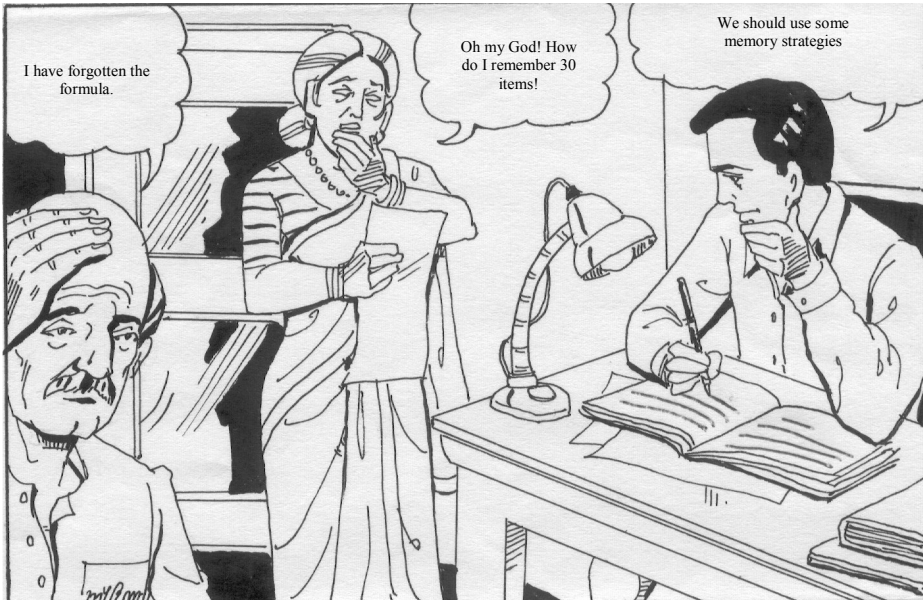
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## SECTION II

# Using Memory Strategies



### Objectives

After working with this section, you would be able to:

- ☞ List different components of memory;
- ☞ Discuss causes of forgetting;
- ☞ Explain various strategies for improving the likelihood or remembering information;
- ☞ Discuss some memory principles and their use for developing self-learning material for the distance learners.

### Components of Memory

Memory is one of the most important primary mental functions of human being. Memory is the ongoing mental process of retaining and recalling knowledge of experiences.

There are three components of memory: (i) sensory memory, (ii) short-term memory and (iii) long-term memory. Information from the environment is picked up through our senses, sensory memory holds the information for a very short period of time (less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  second for vision; about 3 seconds for

hearing), after which time it may be lost unless it is stored in short-term memory. Short-term memory (also called working memory) holds information temporarily (initially around 10-20 seconds, after maintenance rehearsal up to 20 minutes), and it is passed on to long-term memory which involves relatively permanent storage of information. The model of information processing system illustrates the relationships between sensory, short-term and long-term memory. ( Please see figure1). There are four processes by which information is passed through one memory type to another: i) attention, ii) rehearsal, iii) encoding and iv) retrieval.

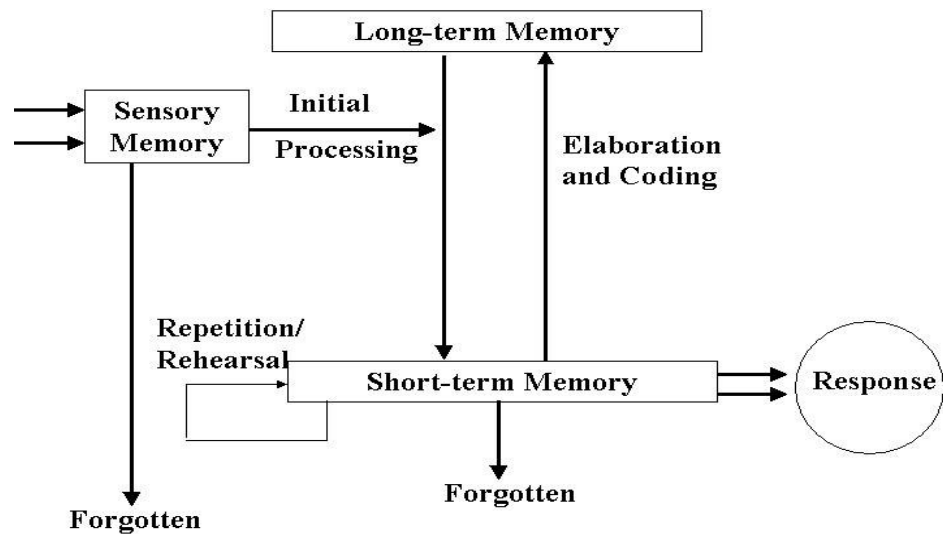


Fig. 1 Information processing model

**Source:** Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) Human Memory: A proposed system and its control processes. In K Spence & J Spence (Eds) *the psychology of learning and motivation: Advances in research and theory* (vol. 2) New York: Academic Press.

The ability to pay *attention* is very important because it is the process by which information is moved from sensory to short-term memory.

*Rehearsal* means doing something or working with the new information. One must maintain attention while rehearsing.

*Encoding* is the process of linking new information to existing knowledge. Thus, the new information is transferred from short-term to long-term memory.

*Retrieval* is the process of moving information from long-term to short-term memory.



The memory system is located in the brain and the brain stem (at the top of the spinal cord). Different portions of the brain perform different memory functions. Memory functions are affected by the state or condition of the brain.

## Forgetting

Forgetting involves the *inability to recall* something registered in long-term memory.

It is a common phenomenon. Every one of us forgets something. But why do we forget?

There are various causes.

Main causes of forgetting are:

- i) Decay in brain cells due to illness, accident, drinking alcohol, taking psychotropic drugs, age and so on, which erodes the memory trace physiologically.
- ii) More recent memory trace may help to erase the old memory trace. If you learn two poems without much time gap in between, the second poem may help to erase the memory trace of the first poem.
- iii) Inattention to memory trace, i.e. not rehearsing the trace in some intervals may erase the trace. If you get a new telephone number of your friend and do not use the number for a long time, you may forget it. But if you ring him/her once or twice a week, you will not forget his/her telephone number.
- iv) Deliberate/unconscious suppression of memory trace helps in forgetfulness. If you do not want to remember some unpleasant events happened in your life, you may forget it deliberately or unconsciously.

### Activity 2.1



Test your colleague's memory span, i.e. how many numbers/digits s/he can remember after one reading/hearing.

Step 1: Prepare a list using random digits as items for recall. Below is an example.

861

4203

57419

631485

2970538

35197264

402195738

Step 2: Read the 1<sup>st</sup> row, (in this case 861), tell your colleague to repeat the same. If s/he can repeat correctly, read the 2<sup>nd</sup> row, (4203), in this way continue until your colleague fails to repeat correctly. If s/he fails then present another row of same length, and tell him to repeat. If s/he fails, stop the test. Say, in this case your colleague has failed to repeat the 6<sup>th</sup> row i.e. 35197264. Then present another row of the same length (91243758). If s/he fails, stop the test. You will stop after two consecutive failures of the same length of digits. If there is only one failure continue the test and present the next row.

Step 3: Prepare another list.

Step 4: Read the 1<sup>st</sup> row and tell your colleague to repeat backward. For example, if you say 861, your colleague will say 168. Similarly, if you say 4203, your colleague will say 3024. Continue until your colleague fails in two consecutive rows as described above.

If your colleague can repeat 7 forward and 5 backward correctly, you may say his/her memory span is average.

### Improving memory

There are various strategies to improve the likelihood of remembering information, e.g. memory manipulations, association strategies, clustering strategies and so on. You may use the combinations of these strategies also.

You may improve your memory ability through memory manipulation. For this you need to manipulate different conditions in order to address different

memory tasks: physical and mental state social context, external aids and so on.

Your state of mind can affect the functions of the brain. It can affect the registration and recall process of memory system. It can affect your ability to concentrate.

## **Some psychological factors**

### *Anxiety/Stress*

Too much and too little anxiety/stress can affect memory functions. Too much anxiety/stress can make you vulnerable to illness (physical and mental) and too little anxiety/stress can make you relax. You should control your anxiety/stress to a particular level for better performance. There is no need to try to eliminate anxiety totally. It is not possible always.

### *Attitude*

Attitude is very important. It can affect attention and motivation. Attitude towards the content can either enhance or impair memory process. You should have positive attitudes towards the content you want to attend and remember.

### *Mood*

Several times you may have to listen to this sentence, “Mr. X is very moody”. Our mood often fluctuates. An extremely positive or negative mood may impair memory process. Both the states may alter brain chemistry.

### *Relaxation*

Relaxation helps to reduce anxiety/stress. It enhances memory functions. There are various ways of relaxation. You may see section IV for detail discussion on relaxation techniques.

### *Attention training*

Attention training may help increase memory capacity. For detail discussion on attention training you may see section I of this handbook.

## Some strategies

Here, I shall discuss some memory strategies. These are based on strategies described by Herrmann, Raybeck and Gutman, (1996). We have added new examples to suit our purpose.

### Elaboration strategies

Elaboration strategies are the easiest to use. There are several examples of elaboration that are commonly used in teaching-learning process. As a distance educator you must be aware about these strategies. While using these strategies you need to combine additional information with the information you like to remember. The additional information provides a code that enhances remembering.

### Mnemonics

The word mnemonic refers to using an aid to improve memory. The strategy is used to encode and retrieve lists of information. Generally, some *cue words or sentences* are used in this strategy.

Let us see how the strategy works.

This strategy was developed by Nagel, Schumaker and Deshler.

How to form a cue word?

- (i) You may use the beginning letters of words in the list and make a word that is easy to remember.

### For example

Following are the names of 9 open universities in India. If you want to form mnemonic cue words to encode and retrieve these names you may use the following cue words.

*Name of the Open University*

Indira Gandhi National Open University

Ambedkar Open University

Kota Open University

Nalanda Open University

Yashwantrao Open University  
Bhoj Open University  
Karnataka Open University  
Netaji Subhas Open University  
Rajarshi Tandon Open University

### Cue Words

KANBYR INK (This has been prepared taking the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of each university).

You may change the order of the list to form the cue word. In the present example, I have not followed the order as given in the list.

According to my order

KANBYR INK

Kota/Karnata open university comes first. Then, come Ambedkar, Nalanda/Netaji, Bhoj, Yashwantrao, Rajarshi Tandon, Indira Gandhi, Netaji/Nalanda, Karnataka/Kota.

**Example** of a classic math mnemonic: FOIL.

This cue word stands for the steps in multiplying two binomials: multiply the *first* terms, then multiply the *out* terms, then multiply the *inner* terms, and finally multiply the *last* terms.

You may form cue phrases or sentences also.

**For example**, if you want to remember the name of the following schools of an open university: Health Sciences, Management studies, Humanities, Sciences, Computer and Information Sciences, Social Sciences, Engineering and Technology, you may form the following cue sentence.

### Cue Sentence

*Hi Mom Hope Savitri Came Sunday Evening.* (This sentence has been prepared taking the first letter of each school.)

If you want to remember the planets in the solar system in sequence:  
Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto.  
You may use a cue sentence.

*My Very Elegant Mother Just Served Us Nine Pastries.*

Another classic example of math mnemonics: *Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally.*

This cue phrase helps in remembering the order of operations: Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, and Subtraction.

### **Manipulation through poems or limericks**

When was IGNOU established?

It was in 1985.

If you want to remember the year you may make a poem, e.g. “*IGNOU takes a long drive in Nineteen hundred eighty five*”.

Probably, the best known example of this manipulation is to remember the number of days in each month through the following poems/limericks.

*“Thirty days hath September,  
April, June and November,  
When short February comes, all the rest have 31,  
Except February which has 28,  
Till leap year makes it 29”.*

Another well known example:

This is to remember the date when Columbus reached the New World.

*“Columbus sailed the ocean blue,  
in fourteen hundred and ninety- two”.*

How to remember the spelling of words with “ie” and “ei”

*“I before E  
Except after C  
As when sounded like A  
As in neighbor and weigh”*  
(Words: easier, retrieval)

## Image Elaborations

This may take different forms.

- a) *Color manipulations*: It involves picturing the item to be remembered in one color against a background of a different color. For example, if you want that your student remembers the structure and location of cerebrum inside the brain, draw it in red color against a yellow background.
- b) *Building/House Manipulation*: If you want that your students remember a list of items, tell them to imagine a familiar building (may be their own house, school, college, office/university building and so on) and place one item from the list in each of the rooms.

## Finding Association

Association strategies may be used to remember any new information. The association occurs because the new information is tied to a piece of prior information or to a less difficult information. The association enhances the strength of memory that traces and provides a solid structure for retrieval.

Some of the strategies described above like mnemonics – rhymes, poems, etc. are association strategies. There are some more.

### *Similarities*

This strategy involves finding points of similarity between two things that must be associated and remembered. If you want that your students remember specific details or concepts, you may use this strategy. This strategy is applicable to all the subjects.

For using this strategy you will have to be creative.

To remember that thalamus relays sensory information to the cerebrum and hypothalamus helps regulate body functions, you may associate the first letter of important words. Thalamus relays sensory information ('T' and 'S') while hypothalamus helps regulate body functions ('h' and 'b').

For looking similarities among the items, you may think about the followings:

- a. similar letters
- b. similar colors
- c. similar sounds
- d. alphabetical ordering
- e. number of letters in the items, and so on.

#### *Use of diagrams*

You may use different diagrams to sketch the relationship of items to be remembered.

#### *Make sequence*

You should arrange items in logical order. You may get various information about an incident which you will have to present verbally or in writing. If you arrange the information following a logical sequence, you may recall the whole incident whenever you need.

#### *Link present and past event*

You may relate the present (new) information or content with your previous experiences. For example, if you listen to a lecture on online learning environment, you may relate the information with your experiences you had gained during the last month's workshop.

#### *Phonetic relations*

You may find out similarities in sound between two items to be remembered. For example, the Mizo words for 'Egg' and 'Water' sound similar 'Artui' and 'Tui'.

#### *Remembering names*

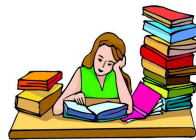
If you associate name of a person whom you just met with other words or actions, you may remember his/her name easily. If you make your memory task more intentional, you may improve performance of your memory.



*Repetition*

- i. Whenever you meet an important person or read the name of an important person which you want to remember, repeat the name aloud as you greet the person. Say for example, you have met Captain John Cook. To remember the name you may say yourself “Hello Captain Jon Cook, I am glad to meet you”. Repeat the name few times in your mind, or greet him few times as above.
- ii. Mentally make a picture associating the name. For example, a white-dressed cook with a cap on head.

**Box 2.1: Notes for the course writer**



As a course writer, when you provide some information that may be difficult to remember by the learner, you may provide some cue words/sentences. You may suggest some other strategies also as discussed in this section or you may have learned from other sources. You may provide your cue at the end of the unit or at the end of a section.

*Remembering names of a group by all the group members*

If you are a tutor and want that all 40 students in your new tutorial sessions learn the names of their peers in a single sitting, how do you go for that. There may be various strategies. Here is one.

*Step I*

Tell the students to sit in the chair forming a circle.

*Step II*

Each student will introduce himself/herself with his/her first name.

*Step III*

Ist student repeat his/her name.

2<sup>nd</sup> student repeat his/her name and also the 1<sup>st</sup> student's name.

3<sup>rd</sup> student repeat his/her name and also the 2<sup>nd</sup> student's name.  
In this way each student performs.

*Step IV*

Each student repeats the names of the student sitting his/her left and right side.

*Step V*

Each student is asked to repeat his/her name and all the names of his/her peer groups.

**Clustering strategies**

These strategies involve categorising items to be remembered according to common characteristics.

*Categories:*

If you want to remember lists of information, you may use this strategy. You will have to find out the common factors to make the list easier to remember. You may follow these steps:

- a. make a list of the names of the people, place, concepts to be remembered;
- b. study the list carefully and look for the similarities. You may find similarities in various ways: like places, things, dates, people, animals, colors, shapes and so on.
- c. You may break the list into smaller lists according to the similarities noted.

Let us take **an example**.

There are 25 items to remember. Parimal, Banana, Shirt, Spoon, Cow, Orange, Ratan, Cap, Tiger, Cup, Lion, Sudhir, Apple, Table, Lamp, Anil, Plate, Mango, Sweater, Jacket, Karishma, Monkey, Deer, Cooker, Grapes.

If you want to remember these items as it is, it will be very difficult. You may place them in different categories according to the types of terms:

- *Fruits*: Banana, Orange, Apple, Mango, Grapes.
- *People*: Parimal, Ratan, Sudhir, Anil, Karishma.
- *Dress*: Shirt, Cap, Sweater, Jacket.
- *Animal*: Cow, Tiger, Lion, Monkey, Deer.
- *Material* (Household): Spoon, Cup, Table, Lamp, Cooker.

### *Categories using alphabet*

You may categorize the items using alphabet(s) also.

Let us consider the above list again.

See how many items starts with alphabet “A”, then “B”, “C” and so on.

A: Anil, Apple

B: Banana

C: Cow, Cap, Cup, Cooker

D: Dear, and so on.

### *Ordering alphabets*

This is another way of clustering information. If there is a list of information, you may rearrange the items according to alphabetical order.

For example, you have to remember the names of the distance education institutions in the world as given below.

Hong Kong Open University

Bangladesh Open University

Deakin University, Australia

Allama Iqbal Open University

Central Radio and Television University

All-Quds Open University

Korea National Open University

Athabasca University

Chulalongkarn University

Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Open University

Monash University, Australia

Fern Universitat

University of South Africa, South Africa

**Psychological Skills in  
Open Distance Learning  
Environment**

National Open University of China  
Indira Gandhi National Open University  
Athena University (virtual online university) Canada  
Kota Open University  
Universitas Terbuka  
Murdoch University, Australia  
National Extension College, U.K.  
University of Air  
Netherlands Open University  
Open University of Israel, Israel  
Payame Noor University  
Russia Open University  
University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa  
Shanghai Television University, China  
Open University of Sri Lanka  
Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University  
Tanzania Open University  
U.K. Open University  
Universidad Estatala Distancia  
Universidad Nacional de Education a Distancia  
Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University  
University of Southern Queensland, Australia

If you rearrange this list according to alphabetical order it will look like this:

A-B

Allama Iqbal Open University  
All-Quds Open University  
Athabasca University  
Athena University (virtual online university) Canada  
Bangladesh Open University

C-D

Central Radio and Television University  
Chulalongkarn University  
Deakin University, Australia  
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University

F-I

Fern Universitat  
Hong Kong Open University  
Indira Gandhi National Open University

K-N

Korea National Open University

Kota Open University

Monash University Australia

Murdoch University, Australia

National Extension College, U.K.

National Open University of China

Netherlands Open University

O-S

Open University of Israel, Israel

Open University of Sri Lanka

Payame Noor University

Russia Open University

Shanghai Television University, China

Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University

T-Y

Tanzania Open University

University of Air

U.K. Open University

Universidad Estatala Distancia

Universidad Nacional de Education a Distancia

Universitas Terbuka

University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa

University of South Africa, South Africa

University of Southern Queensland, Australia

Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University

Then you see the 2/3letter combination e.g.

A-B, C-D, F-I, K-N, O-S, T- Y (as shown above).

These re-groups help to break up the alphabetised list and reduce the chances of forgetting the listed items.

### **Retention Manipulation**

We forget different types of information at different rates (Herrmann, Raybeck, and Gufman, 1993). Say for example, if you learn a new language, you may forget some percentage after few days. If you hear about

an incident, you may also forget some percentage of it after a few days. But the rate of forgetting may vary.

The best strategy to avoid forgetting is to review the content periodically.

At the beginning you should review the material with smaller intervals. This will help you to recall the material at a considerably higher level of accuracy. Later you may review it less frequently.

You must take sufficient rest and/or relax after each review.

**Some memory principles and their use for developing self-learning material for distance learners**

<b>Principles</b>	<b>Use for developing self-learning materials</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the distance learner affective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may use some words, signs, symbol to indicate that you are going to begin. (e.g. “Let us begin”, picture of a house, start your journey from there and so on).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the learner to recall the previous relevant learning material</li> </ul>	<p>You may highlight the relevant previously learnt material. You may use a box for this purpose.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlight the important information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may mention the objectives of the present lesson. You may use light colors to highlight the content, or italics, box or any other style that you think appropriate.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present content in an organized manner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You should start with simple and known content and proceed towards difficult, complex and unknown one, specifically when you present a new material.</li> <li>• You may present your content in chronological sequence or one topic after another. You may use flow chart, problem-centered approach and spiral approach. (One topic is repeated over and over again as the course develops each time at a more complex level).</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you present 4-5 concepts in one lesson, you must follow the logical sequence.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guide the learners to categorise related information/content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may present information/content in categories (please see page 34-45)</li> <li>• You may use other memory strategies for learners' benefits.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide scope for elaboration, illustration and experiment on new material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may associate new material with already known material.</li> <li>• You may highlight similarities and differences among various concepts with examples.</li> <li>• You may use photographs, graphs, tables, maps, diagrams, charts, cartoons etc. for illustrations.</li> <li>• Provide activities, exercises, suggestion for experiments and so on.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide scope for repetition of learning material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may repeat the important points. You may present summary, use different font, letter size, color, shading, sign and symbol, box and so on.</li> <li>• You may repeat the most important points of previously learned material (concepts and skills) after every 2-3 lessons.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide scope for practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You may use different methods for giving practice to the learners. You must be innovative. You should not repeat similar question format, problem and task.</li> <li>• You may allow and guide the learners to create problems and allow them to practice.</li> </ul>

## SECTION III

# Communication Skills for Tutor/ Academic Counsellor



### Objectives

After working with this section, you would be able to:

- ☞ List the important skills and qualities of a good tutor/counsellor in an open university;
- ☞ Discuss the strategies that may be followed in face-to-face tutorial sessions, tutoring through e-mail and radio.

### Tutoring/academic counselling (face-to-face)

Tutorial and/or academic counseling is a very important part of student support services in open and distance learning system. Face to face tutorial support is, of course, the most expensive form of student support. In many situation, this is the only form of support available for the distance students. So, always, the open learning institutes search for good tutors/counsellors for this activity. Generally, in old institutes the number of programmes are



many and the number of students is large, so there is a need to appoint a large number of tutors/counsellors for providing quality support to the students.

In this section, let us point out some of the important skills and qualities of a good tutor/counsellor.

- i. As a tutor/counsellor you should develop good writing and speaking skills. You will be given fixed time for tutoring/counselling to a group of students. Within this time limit you will have to share a large amount of information/content with the students. Secondly, you will have to evaluate assignments and write teaching type comments on the assignment response sheets. This is a continuous and time bound activity of a tutor/counsellor in ODL system.
- ii. You will have to be very cautious about your attitude and behavior in the tutorials/counselling sessions. You treat your students the way s/he wants to be treated.
- iii. As a tutor/counsellor you should be very honest.
- iv. You should be flexible. You may prepare yourself for a particular session (theory discussion or practical demonstration), but you may need to change your plan or approach considering the need of the students.
- v. There is a need to be very patient. Your students may ask you various types of questions, may argue or pass any comments. At any point of time during the session you should not lose your patience.
- vi. Your students are all adults. So, treat them as adults.
- vii. You should express your thoughts, feelings in direct and honest way. You should respect your needs and feelings and also the needs and feelings of your students.
- viii. You should follow the rules and regulations of the university/institute and tell your students to follow the same.
- ix. You should be firm in your suggestions and decisions.
- x. If you think that you are wrong, admit this in the tutorial session. There is no harm in admitting a fault.
- xi. Encourage your students to bring the study materials in the sessions. Encourage them to read the study material before they come to the tutorial sessions.
- xii. You must go through all the study materials with which the students are working.

- xiii. You should establish a good tutor-student relationship. Do not forget that you are a tutor/counsellor and a friend too.
- xiv. You should use constructive criticism. Avoid negative criticism.
- xv. Let the students know what you expect from them.
- xvi. Always encourage them to take part in discussion. Encourage conversation. Keep some time for discussion and interaction.
- xvii. Always be punctual, and tell your students to be punctual.
- xviii. Tutor/counsel your students during scheduled session only. Do not fix any time on your own.
- xix. Do not pay more attention to one or two students than the others. You should give proper attention to all in a tutorial or counselling session.
- xx. You should be a good listener. You need to develop good listening skills. Please see section I for a discussion on listening skills.

### *Introductory speech in a tutorial session*

How important is your introductory speech to your learner? In our opinion this is very important. Your first meeting with the students at tutorial is the most crucial moment, as you may meet a group of heterogeneous students who have various kinds of needs that are different from the conventional students. How do you start your introductory lecture? Would you start casually? Would you invite your students to join you? Would you give your students a clear idea about the tutorials first? Would you start with a famous quotation? Would you start with an illustration or example? Would you start with a story or poem? Would you start with some news? Would you start with a question and/or asking for arguments? How long should be the introductory speech? Is there any need to give introductory lecture before every tutorial session?

You may think about your student life. As a student you had answered several thousand questions. In every answer you had kept one/two paragraph(s) for the introduction. Probably you had created some strategies, e.g. begin with a quotation, general statement, example and so on. But you did not follow the same strategy in every case. A single strategy is not applicable for every answer.

Here, you should follow the same principle. You may begin your introductory speech with a question, with a general statement, with an example, with a story, with an illustration, with any quotation and so on. This should properly fit in your situation, more specifically for that very day's tutorial.

You should keep in mind that you would have to establish a tutor-student relationship with the students. So, the beginning part (specifically the first session) is very important. This will help you to give a proper shape to this relation.

You should follow different strategies for the introduction at every tutorial session.

### *Content*

- i) First you should know your students. What do the students want from you? Once you know this, you should know the level of their understanding and what content you want to include.
- ii) Prepare yourself for every tutorial. Never go to the tutorial without preparation. Prepare an outline of your presentation. After a brief presentation, sum up the content. Ask questions and inspire the students for interaction.
- iii) Your presentation should be focused on the students' needs. Never try to impress the students with your knowledge. Many tutors do have this tendency!
- iv) You should communicate effectively only that content which is needed for the students.
- v) Maintain eye contact with the students.
- vi) Show your interest in all the students. Do not be selective.
- vii) You should dress appropriately. Your dress should not be the cause of distraction.
- viii) Restrict your movement and gestures.
- ix) Speak in firm and clear voice.
- x) Use good quality audio-visual aids wherever necessary.

### *Ending the session*

- i) Do not end your session abruptly.
- ii) Summarise the whole discussion.
- iii) Create interest for the next tutorial/counselling session.
- iv) Suggest interesting activities.

### **Tutoring through e-mail**



In many universities and distance learning institutes the tutors are using e-mail for tutoring. You, as a tutor may need to use e-mail in the near future. You may keep the following points in your mind while using e-mail for tutoring.

- i. First go through the question or message sent by the distance learner attentively.
- ii. Analyse the need of the learner.
- iii. Prepare your message/suggestion/guidance on the basis of his/her need.
- iv. It should be clear, concise, direct and useful.
- v. You make small paragraphs. First convey thanks to the learners. In one paragraph discuss the text/content. In another paragraph mention the action to be taken by the learners (suggestion/guidance). In the next paragraph highlight the main points (sum up). At the end invite the learner to communicate again.
- vi. Do not criticise your learner unnecessarily. Only use constructive criticism.
- vii. Use very simple language, and short sentences.
- viii. Type your message following the rules of English grammar. Do not use small letters only. Many people have the habit of typing in small letters only. Use capital and small letters both.
- ix. You must go through your message/suggestion again after typing. Check the spelling, grammatical errors, etc. and then send.
- x. Save the draft.

### **Tutoring through radio**



Tutoring through radio in ODL environment is known method. As a tutor you may get a call for tutoring through radio. There is a fixed timing for radio tutoring. Generally, one hour is kept for one session.

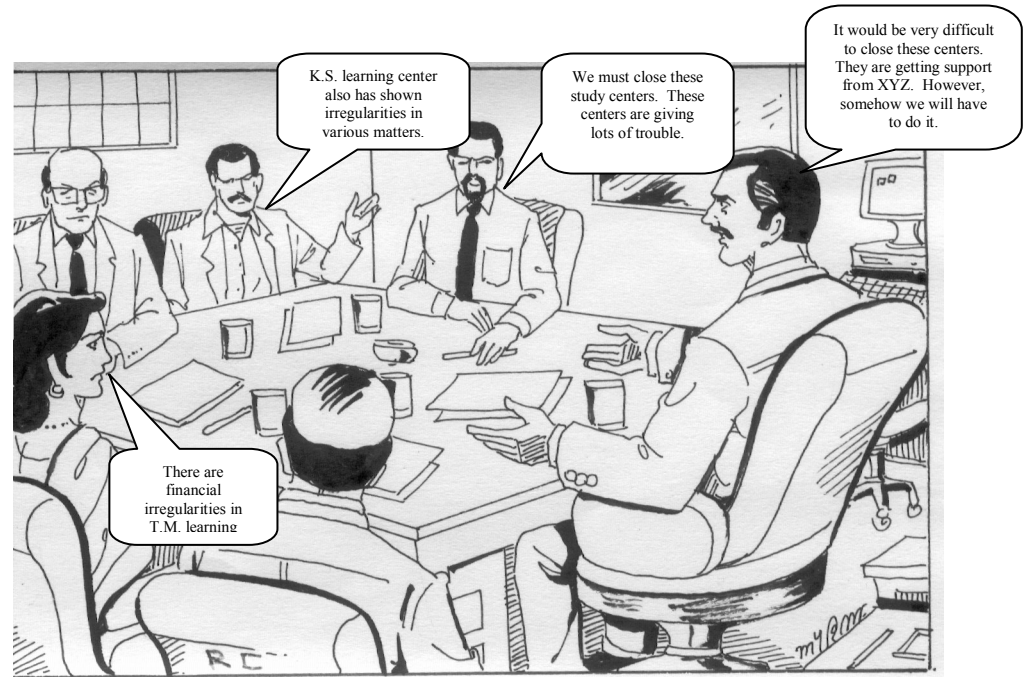
If you are suggested to present a lecture first and then invite questions from the learners/participants, you should keep only 16 minutes for the presentation.

Keep 3 minutes for the introduction, 10 minutes for the content/main body, and 3 minutes for summing up.

- First collect information about your learners – their characteristics, needs and so on. Try to know approximately how many may attend your presentation.
- Decide the central theme of your presentation. Prepare your theme keeping the purpose of your lecture in mind. You may want to convey some information, you may want to clarify some points, you may want to motivate the learners through your presentation and so on.
- You should include maximum 4-5 point in your presentation.
- You should prepare an interesting introduction and a useful conclusion or summary.
- If you are new to this situation, practice your presentation sitting in a quiet room.
- As you can't see your learner and your learner also can't see you, there is need to make a mental connection between you and the learner. The learner will switch on the radio and you will start your lecture. This is not enough. Say some words to get the attention of the learners.
- Use simple language.
- Address the learner directly as if you are talking to him face-to-face.
- Speak in clear and firm voice.
- Engage your learners in making notes of the important points and taking some future actions.
- Use examples.
- Invite your learners to interact with you.
- If you can't follow the questions, tell his/her to repeat it.
- Be brief while responding to these question.
- Encourage him to ask more questions.

## SECTION IV

# Skills For Coping With Stress



### Objectives

After working with this section, you would be able to:

- ☞ List the symptoms of stress;
- ☞ List the stressors in your workplace and beyond;
- ☞ Describe the skills/strategies for coping with stress;
- ☞ Describe and practice the relaxation skills for coping with stress.

### What is stress?

The word stress is derived from the Latin word *stringere*, meaning *to draw tight* (Arnold, Robertson and Cooper, 1991).

Stress is anything that puts demands upon our body and mind to cope, adjust, change or accommodate to the demand. You may experience stress from an ongoing, routine and chosen activity like long hours of continuous work in the work place. But it is often

associated with an intense reaction to an event in our lives that can be unpleasant. Anytime in your life you may perceive a threat either physically or psychologically. A threat can cause a strain within your self. You may face a situation that may be dangerous, painful or unfair. You may be concerned of not being able to cope with it successfully.



## **Stress in workplace and beyond**

The present world is full of stressors. From early morning to midnight everywhere you may feel stress. Stress is like day and night temperature – it goes up and down. It can lead to various kinds of illness. It can even lead to suicide or death. Different people may become stressed out for different reasons, but most of them have some common stressors in their life. One of the important stressors is the workplace. Around 8 hours in a day you need to spend in your workplace.

You may work in a situation that you do not like. You may have a superior whom you do not like. Your superior may give some deadline for work that you can't finish. There may be a lot of noise, poor illumination, improper seating arrangement, lack of basic facilities like toilet, drinking water, food, etc., destructive criticism, jealousy amongst the colleagues, politics, and so on.

Researchers have identified five major categories of work stress. These categories are: (a) factors intrinsic to the job, (b) role in the organisation, (c) relationships at work, (d) career development, (e) organisational structure and climate (Cooper, Cooper and Eaker, 1988). Here we shall mention some factors under each category that may be related to ODL environment.

### **Factors intrinsic to the job**

- **Physical surroundings**

Your physical surroundings e.g., lighting, noise, smell and all kinds of stimuli that may stimulate your senses all the times can affect your overall mental state. The physical design of the workplace can be a potential source of stress. Poorly designed building, poor communication networks between different buildings, etc. may be the reasons of stress (Arnold et al., 1991).

- **Long hours**

The long working hours may take a toll on employees' health. It is now commonly recognised that beyond 40 hours a week, time spent working is increasingly unproductive (Arnold et al., 1991).

Open and distance education system you may need to work 8-12 hrs in a day throughout the year. You may take examples from some open universities in your country including IGNOU. There are some divisions where the employee work for 7 days in a week. As an example, you may study the nature of work at regional centres of IGNOU (see box 4.1).

- **New technology**



Any one working in ODL environment needs to adapt continually to new technology and way of working, otherwise s/he may suffer from stress.

**Box 4.1**

**Important activities of a regional centre of IGNOU**

The regional centre has to perform academic, administrative and promotional activities. Throughout the year the centre remains busy in admission, monitoring the activities of study centres, work centres, programme centres/special study centres, (may be more than 20 centres under one regional centre), maintaining student records, selection, appointment and orientation of academic counsellors, monitoring of academic counselling and assignments evaluation, maintenance of library services, monitoring tele-learning centres (some cases), maintenance of service records, financial management of the regional centres, purchase and maintenance of furniture and equipment, maintenance of library records, preparation of budgetary estimates, monitoring entrance and term-end examinations, publicity of the university, establishing regular contacts with various institutions and voluntary organisations, organising and coordinating phone-in-radio counselling, teleconferencing, and so on.



## Role in the organisation

- **Role ambiguity**

Role ambiguity arises when individuals do not have a clear picture about their work objectives, their superiors' and colleagues' expectation of them, and the scope and responsibilities of their job (Arnold et al., 1991). A wide range of events like the first appointment, a transfer, a new director, a change in the structure of the existing division/school, etc. may create role ambiguity (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980).

- **Role conflict**

Role conflict arises when an employee is torn by conflicting job demands or by doing things s/he does not really want to do, or things which the employee does not believe are the part of the job (Arnold et al., 1991). Conflict situations can act as a stressor upon the employee involved. Researches have indicated that role conflict leads to reduced job satisfaction and higher level of anxiety, it can also lead to cardiovascular ill health, such as elevated blood pressure and abnormal blood chemistry (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980).

- **Responsibility**

In ODL environment, you have two main types of responsibility: (a) for staffs and learners and (b) for things such as equipment, buildings and so on. If you are responsible for the staffs and the learners you may require to spend more time interacting with others, attending meetings, tutorials, workshops, teleconferencing, attending to meet the deadlines for completing the works and so on. Responsibility for people in work environment has been found to be particularly stressful (Arnold et al., 1991).

## Relationships at work

Learning to live with other people is one of the most stressful aspects of life (Selye, 1974).

- **Relationships with superiors/subordinates**

Problems of emotional disability often result when the relationship between a subordinate and a superior is psychologically unhealthy for one reason or other (Buck, 1972; Arnold et al., 1991).

- **Relationships with colleagues**

Most of us spend around 40 hours in a week in the work environment. The relationships among colleagues can provide valuable support or conversely, can be a strong source of stress. Stress can arise from the competition and personality conflicts, usually, described as “office politics” (Arnold et al., 1991).

### **Career development**

The process of being evaluated and appraised may be a stressful experience for many of us. Performance appraisals can be anxiety provoking, for both the individual being examined and the person doing the judging and appraising (Arnold et al., 1991).

### **Organisational structure and climate**

Many a times you have come across people who complain that they lack adequate opportunities to participate in organisational activities, and when you feel their behavior it is unduly restricted and are not included in consultations. Organisational structure and climate can present threats to an individual’s sense of freedom and autonomy.

#### **Activity 4.1**

Visit a regional centre of IGNOU and talk to few staffs. Find out the nature of stress/anxiety they may suffer from while performing their tasks.

#### *Stressors beyond work place*

You may make a list of hundreds stressors in our daily life, like traffic on the road, costs of vegetables, petrol and other necessary things needed for daily life, electric bills, telephone bills, child’s school fees, social

obligations and so on. Sometimes you may find a common stressor all over/some parts of the world, e.g. Sever Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), war and so on.

## **Effect of stress**

Stress can affect your body and mind in different ways. For common stress symptoms (Arnold et al., 1991) see box 4.2

<b>Box 4.2 Common Stress Symptoms</b>	
Headaches	Anxiety
Lack of appetite	Indigestion
Forgetfulness	Tendency to sweat for no good reason
Frequent anger and frustration	Constant tiredness
Lack of interest in life	Nervous twitches
A feeling of being failure	Nail biting
Difficulty in making decisions	Cramps or muscle spasms
Loss of sense of humor	Nausea
Difficulty in concentrating	Breathlessness without exertion
An intense fear of being alone	Inability to sit
Feeling of neglect	High blood pressure
Inability to finish work	Constant irritability with people
Dread of the future	Fainting spells
Constant fear of disease	Feeling unable to cope
<b>Note:</b> This is not a complete list. There are other symptoms of stress. These symptoms mentioned above may have other causes also which may involve some disease process.	

Research has shown that when we perceive a threat (distress response), our mind triggers a number of different changes in our body that prepare us to either flight the danger or face the situation. During stress/anxiety heart rate/pulse rate, breathing, muscle tension, sweat gland activity (Biswas, 1990; Biswas, 1991; Biswas and Chattopadhyay, 1980; Chattopadhyay & Biswas, 1983) increase. Blood is directed toward our large muscles in preparation for fight or flight and away from extremities and digestive system. As a result our hands and feet may get cold, and you may experience discomfort in your stomach. Adrenalin and other hormones are

released into our blood stream that dramatically reduce digestion, reproduction growth, tissue repair, and immune system functions. (Thiele,2002).

### **When would you may suffer more from stress?**

We have mentioned some situations below. You may prepare a list from your experience.

- If you are physically or mentally unhealthy.
- If you possess negative self-image and have lack of confidence in your abilities. For example, if you do not have confidence while driving a new car, on the busy road, you may suffer from stress.
- If you dislike your work, study, teacher, instructor/trainer, superior, colleague, working environment and so on.
- If you have poor performance on exams in school, college and at university level, and want to sit for a departmental examination for promotion in your work place.
- If you realise that you are inadequately prepared for a task, e.g. for taking a training session, or tutoring and academic counselling session, appearing in test, addressing a meeting, checking assignments, developing study materials/audio visual programme and so on.
- If you are overwhelmed by the amount of information to be learnt (for exam, for lecture and so on).
- If you are unable to locate your important materials before any presentation, e.g., in a training session, conference and so on.
- If you face technological problems before and during any presentation (e.g. in a national or international seminars)
- If you do not maintain schedule for work, and are very disorganised.
- If you arrive late to work on important meetings etc. and can't follow the proceedings.
- If you behave badly with your colleagues. Your colleague may be junior to you by position in the work place, but may be senior by age.

### **The relaxation response**

All over the world several people practice relaxation for managing stress. If you practice relaxation you will be able to bring about a set of conditions in your body that is just the opposite of fight and flight response. This response is called relaxation response. The threat (distress) in a human being triggers the sympathetic nervous system which causes increase in the

heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, muscle tension and so on. The relaxation response triggers the parasympathetic nervous system that causes decrease in above mentioned physiological functions (see figure 2).

This response can be brought forward through practicing many different coping skills. The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems counteract each other in the human body. Usually, one of these two systems is in control at any time. Therefore, the symptoms you have when you are in a distress, can be reduced by consciously deciding to bring about the relaxation response through one or more coping skills as described below. If you regularly practice these relaxation strategies you will be able to manage your stress comfortably.

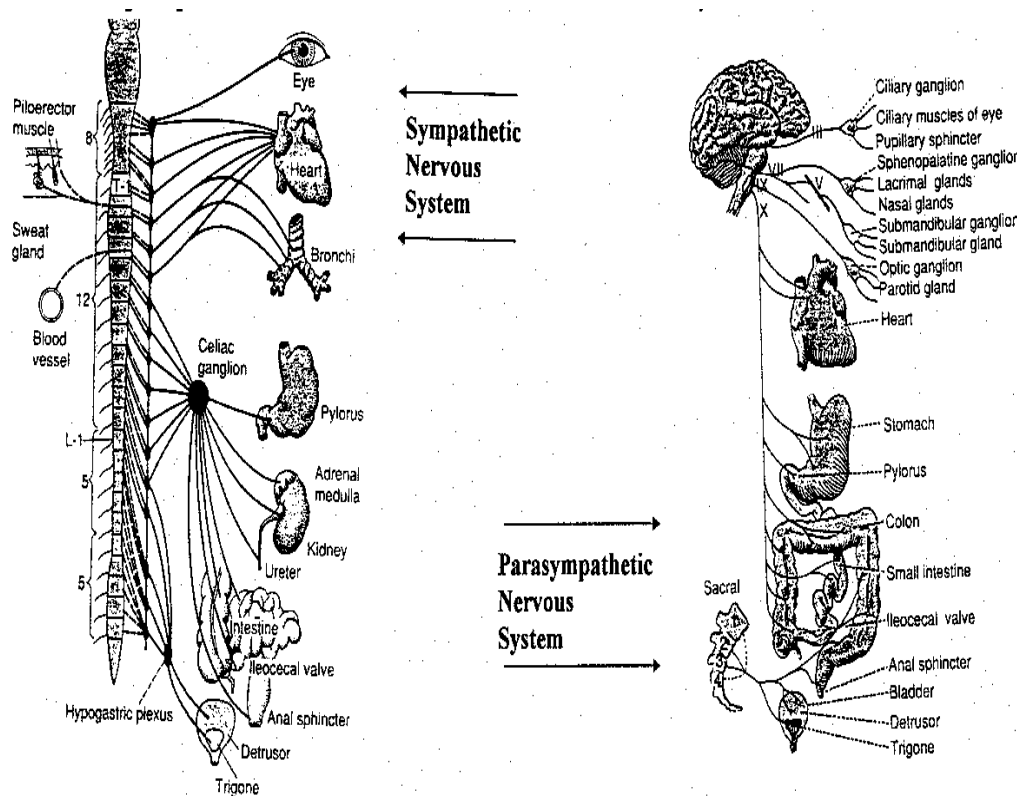


Figure 2: Sympathetic Nervous System and Parasympathetic Nervous System

## How to cope with stress

Here, we shall discuss some self-help strategies to cope with stress.

1. *Coping Attitude:* You may not be able to change all of the problems you face in your life time, but you must have a coping attitude to your problems. This will help you to focus on the choices available to you

and solve the problems. There may be various solutions to any problem. Always attempt with positive frame of mind to solve your problems. You should face your problems. It will create greater awareness and improve your life.



2. *Concentrate on the present:* You might have thought of several tasks to complete within a period of time. You should concentrate on your present task. Accept the things as they are now. Do not increase your mental burdens by thinking about the past. Think about the future goals only to the extent that you can help to shape them. You should not think too much about the future that you can not control.
3. *Take up one task at a time:* You may face more than one task at a time. Do not try to complete them together. You should look at them individually. If you are under stress, even small amount of work can be too much to handle. Focus on one task only, and complete that. Always keep this in mind that stress is situational and temporary. For example: before going for summer vacation, you will have to develop 1 unit of a course, revise 1 unit, complete your paper for presentation in a conference and develop one video programme. You have only two months in your hand. You may focus on developing the units first, then go for revision, than take up video programme and lastly finish your paper.
4. *Make a list of your tasks:* Make a list of your daily, weekly or monthly tasks. Make categories: work place, home and others. Categorise the

tasks according to the importance: very urgent, urgent, not so urgent.  
Complete the tasks one by one.

5. *Respect your thinking and feelings:* You should respect your own thinking and feelings. Your own thinking and feelings may help guide you and motivate to bring solutions to your worries/problems. Your thinking will guide you to behave, and how to act on your feelings.
6. *Fix a professional goal:* You should fix a professional goal and strive for the same. If the goal is a big one, proceed step by step.
7. *Do not take hasty decision:* Once you have decided what you want to solve a problem, act firmly. You should not take any hasty decision for solving any problem.
8. *Engage yourself in social activities and recreation:* You should occupy yourself (body and mind) as much as possible. You should set aside time for social activities, fun and recreation. You may try to explore new and interesting activities. You may go for a walk or read an interesting book. During lunch hours play carom, chess, etc. with your colleagues. Organise sports and cultural activities.
9. *Do not blame any one:* You should not blame and hold grudges against other people for your worry. Some people may be responsible for your anxiety/problem but a sense of frustration and hostility will accomplish nothing. It will further disturb your mind.
10. *Practice relaxation:* You should devote some time (20-30 minutes) everyday for practicing relaxation. There are various techniques (see below), choose one that fits you and practice. Relaxation will help you to reduce stress and change your life style.
11. *Stick to your daily routine:* It is very important to prepare a daily routine and stick to that as closely as possible during crisis. You should go to the office/university, do your job, take familiar meals, share your feelings and experience with your colleagues as you do on other days. During any stress a familiar pattern of behavior and familiar environment will help to bring a sense of security and you will be able to overcome the stress quickly.
12. *Attend to physical symptoms:* Physical symptoms such as headaches, muscle pain, stomach irritation, high blood pressure, or any other symptoms as listed in Box 4.1, may be signs of stress.
13. *Talk to someone you like:* You may feel embarrassed about discussing your problems/worries with others, but it is always better to talk to someone you like. You may share your thoughts and feelings to your family members, teacher, colleague, specially trained counsellor,

friends, relatives and others whom you trust. You must remember that social support is very helpful during crises.

14. *Ask for help:* If you can't control your body and mind, you should ask for help to any expert or more experienced person than you.



Whatever position you hold in the society, these strategies will help you to avoid stress. You may differ in some respects. Say for example, as a teacher in open and distance education system you can manage comfortably more than one task at a time. You do not face any problem. If you are able to handle more than one task at a time, it is very good. But if you can't, then follow the strategy. Consider only one task at a time. It will help you to overcome the situation easily.

After these general self-help strategies we would like to discuss some specific relaxation skills.

### **Relaxation skills**

Many researchers have used relaxation procedures to study their effects on stress or anxiety related physiological changes in human body. Relaxation procedures are, generally, been modeled after Jacobson (1938) or Wolpe (1958). Some have used procedures described by Benson (1975).

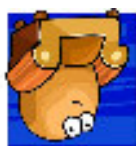
Jacobson (1938) had developed relaxation procedures primarily to treat anxiety-related disorders. Benson, Beary and Carol (1974) observed that progressive muscle relaxation, hypnotic relaxation, many forms of



meditation shared several properties: the person assumes a passive frame of mind in a relaxing position, repeats a simple phrase and breaths in a deep, regular manner. They suggested that this technique elicits the so-called relaxation response, which tends to reduce central nervous system sympathetic activity, which in turn, reduces peripheral sympathetic activity. They noted that a number of studies have demonstrated that these techniques elicit physiological changes like decreased muscle tone, and blood pressure. Heart rate, skin conductance, which are consistent with decreased sympathetic activity (Bellack, Hersen and Kazdin, 1985).

There are various relaxation skills or coping skills. In this section we shall discuss some of them which you can practice, if necessary.

### **Relaxation skills (1)**



If you want to get benefit from this relaxation you will have to learn how to tense and relax different specific muscle groups throughout your body. This technique will help you become more aware of the tension you may carry in your muscles. If you have any injuries, pain or illness in your skeletal-muscular system, you should not practice this technique. Throughout the session you will have to tense a specific muscle group for few seconds and then relax that muscle group for a few seconds as described below. You must feel the unpleasantness in the muscle group while you make them tense, and feel pleasantness while making them relax. You may practice this sitting in a chair.

#### *Step I*

Tighten hard your right fist and feel the tension build (hold for 5 seconds). Now release the fist slowly. Let your hand go limp and feel the relaxation. (wait for 15 seconds). Tighten your left fist and feel the tension (hold for 5 seconds). Now release the fist slowly. Let your hand go limp completely and feel the relaxation. (wait for 15 seconds).

#### *Step II*

Bend your right arm, tighten hard your fist and biceps. Hold it tight for 5 seconds and feel the tension in your arm. Now release the tension and let your arm hand loose for 15 seconds; feel the relaxation.

Next bend your left arm, tighten hard your fist and biceps. Hold it tight for 5 seconds and feel the tension in your right arm. Now release the tension and let your arm hang loose for 15 seconds, feel the relaxation in your left arm.

*Step III*

Straighten your right arm until it feels stiff as the triceps tightens (hold for 5 seconds). Now release the tension and let the arm hang loose (wait for 15 seconds). Next straighten your left arm until it feels stiff (hold for 5 seconds) then release the tension and let the arm hang loose (wait for 15 seconds).

*Step IV*

Sit straight in your chair, and arch your back. Bring your shoulder blades back and together (hold for 5 seconds). Now release the shoulder muscles (wait for 15 seconds).

*Step V*

Wrinkle your forehead, feel the tension for 5 seconds. Now release the muscles; feel the relaxation (wait for 15 seconds).

*Step VI*

Close your eyes tight; feel the pressure mount for 5 seconds. Now open your eyes and release the pain (wait for 15 seconds). If you wear contact lens, you must remove these before this practice.

*Step VII*

Clinch your teeth and feel the pressure in your jaws (hold for 5 seconds). Now release your teeth and feel the relaxation (wait for 15 seconds).

*Step VIII*

Press your tongue with the upper part of your mouth for 5 seconds. Release the pressure and relax for 15 seconds.

*Step IX*

Press your lips together for 15 seconds. Release and feel the relaxation (15 seconds).

*Step X*

Press your head backward without any headrest and fix your eyesight toward the ceiling. Hold on for 5 seconds and feel the tension. Comeback to normal position and feel the relaxation (15 seconds).

*Step XI*

Take a deep breath and hold the breath tight in your lungs (5 second). Now release the breath slowly and feel the relaxation (15 second)

*Step XII*

Tighten your stomach muscles. You may such in your stomach and try to reach your spinal cord. Hold for 5 seconds. Release the tension wait for 15 seconds.

*Step XIII*

Straighten your legs and tighten your thighs, feel the tension. Hold for 5 seconds. Now let your legs loose and feel the relaxation (wait for 15 seconds).

*Step XIV*

Keep your feet on the ground and point your toes upward. Notice the tension in your calves (5 seconds). Release your muscles and feel relaxed (15 seconds).

*Step XV*

Now keep your eyes closed and relax your whole body. Wait for one minute.

### Relaxation skills (2)



You may practice this relaxation technique sitting in a chair, sofa, or lying down in a comfortable position

- Take a deep breath slowly and allow your abdomen to extend and your chest remain relatively still. Pause for 2 seconds and then exhale slowly.
- There is no need to force all the air out of your lungs.
- Take six breaths following the above mentioned steps.
- Then take six normal breaths.
- After one minute take six more deep breaths.
- Then again take six normal breaths.
- Again after one minute take six deep breaths.
- Then take six normal breaths.

At the beginning you may practice this 2 times a day. You can practice this technique wherever you like; in your home, workplace (during break), and so on. You can do it alone. You can practice this technique before you perform any activity which you think is stressful like taking any counselling session, training session, attending meeting with the superiors, presenting paper in international conference, facing student unrest and so on.

### Relaxation Skills (3)

You can use your imagination for relaxation. When you watch an interesting movie or a serial in TV at your house, you may observe that you are completely attentive to the story, action, dance scene, visuals and so on. For the time being you may forget your surroundings, your work and even your physical posture and discomfort. Sometimes, you may feel sorry, experience tears in your eyes or become sad or happy. Why does it happen? Because your emotions are totally influenced by what you hear and see in the movie or serial. Nobody has threatened you, but when you see your hero/heroine is threatened; you also feel threatened. You trigger your anxiety and fear only by perceiving and thinking. If you are anxiety prone, you may feel anxiety even before the anxious events take place.

As you become anxious only by thinking that anxious events may take place, you can focus consciously on relaxing scenes (imagination) and experience a pleasant feeling and relaxation in your mind. You may practice the following steps to learn the skill.

### *Step I*

First you think of a scene from your memory that is most pleasant to you. You have experienced many pleasant events in your life. Select any event. For example, if you have visited any beautiful garden and were excited seeing it, you may think about it, or if you have visited a beautiful hill town, a palace, sea beach, a museum, monument and liked it very much you may think about it. After selecting the event or a particular scene you mentally prepare a description of that scene.

*A garden scene may be like this.*

“I am entering into a garden. The garden is full of variety flowers, red, yellow, blue, purple, pink and so on. I am crossing the plants one after another and getting pleasant smell of different flowers. The sun- light is soft and pleasant. I feel gentle breeze. I sit on a bench. I see beautiful butterflies all over the garden. Few children are playing in one corner. I take a chocolate from my small bag. I enjoy eating a chocolate while sitting inside this beautiful garden. I feel this is the most beautiful day in my life. I can sit here and enjoy the scenery for a long time”.

### *Step II*

Find a quiet place, sit on a comfortable chair or lie down on a bed or sofa. Close your eyes and take three deep breaths. Then imagine the pleasant scene. Imagine one part, e.g. you are entering into the garden (imagine for 8-10 seconds). Then go to another part, e.g. you are looking towards many beautiful flowers while crossing the plants (imagine for 8-10 seconds). In this way imagine part by part and complete imagining the whole scene. Open your eyes.

You may practice this two times a day.

### *Step III*

Practice with other pleasant scene. When you become efficient in using this skill for relaxation, you may do it during your lunch break in the office also. It will take only few minutes, but will keep you relaxed for the whole day.

Prepare more “scenes” and imagine one scene everyday while relaxing.

## **Relaxation Skills (4)**

This technique is based on the principle of hypnotism. Hypnotic state is a changed condition of human consciousness. This state is different from sleep and wake state. In this state concentration capacity and suggestibility may increase.

You may learn it easily and can practice for your benefit.

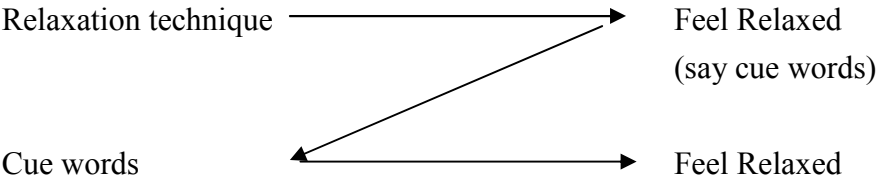
Sit on a comfortable chair or lie down on a sofa. Take three deep breaths. Fix your eyes on a point on the wall in your room. Start counting 100 to 0 backward. Tell yourself, 'when I shall reach 30 my eyes will be closed and I feel relaxed'. Go on counting and repeat the sentence three times. When you reach 30, close your eyes. Then tell yourself, 'now I shall relax, nothing will disturb me. Now I shall not listen to any sound, I shall not think anything, only I shall relax'. Then concentrate on your eyes and think that your eyes are tightly closed. No one can open it. Even you also can't open it. Concentrate on your respiration. Feel it. This should be very deep and slow. Think at this point of time your blood pressure, heart rate, pulse rate every thing is normal. Then start feeling relaxation in every part of your body. Feel your forehead, head, eyes, face, lips, jaws, hands, shoulders, central part of your body, legs every thing is relaxed. Feel and enjoy this relaxation for a few minutes. Say to yourself, 'I am fully relaxed now. My whole body is relaxed. My respiration is normal, heart rate, blood pressure and all other physiological functions are normal'. You think that slowly you are entering into a deep sleep. You feel your legs are heavy. You have no wish to move your legs. Similarly, think about your hands, you will feel that your hands are heavy too. You will feel your whole body is heavy. Even if you try you can't move your body. You think about it and it will happen. Stay in this position for 5 minutes. Enjoy the feelings. After that if you want you can imagine any pleasant scene as discussed in previous page. Whole process will take around 15 minutes. Then you will have to come out of the relaxation state. For that count slowly 30 to 100 forward. Tell yourself, 'when I shall reach 100 I shall open my eyes and come to the normal state. But the feelings of relaxation which I enjoyed will remain within me'. When you finish counting, open your eyes and get up slowly.

**Relaxation Skills (5)**

If you follow any of these relaxation techniques described above for about 20-30 days, you may feel relaxed through out the day. When you feel so, then, practice this technique.

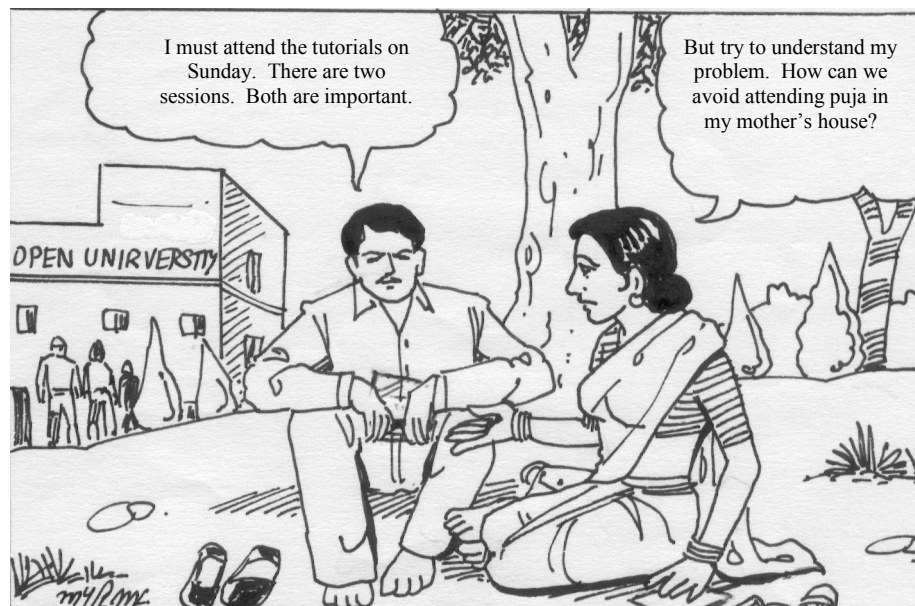
Choose a cue word that you will use to relax more promptly. You can use any word, e.g. *God, Allah, Om, Jai Guru, relax, calm* and so on. You can use different cue also like close your fist and say relax; look at a picture (landscape); press your left hand fingers with the right hand, touch your forehead with your finger and say relax, etc.

After you become relaxed using any one of the strategies discussed above, say the cue word repeatedly. You practice this for a few days, then you will feel, only the cue word will begin to elicit the relaxation response. This is based on a learning principle called classical conditioning. Psychologists say if you associate one experience with another in time, one experience will begin to elicit the same response as the other (Hill, 1985). Here, your cue word will bring relaxation response by itself. There will be no need to follow the whole relaxation techniques.



## SECTION V

### Skills for Solving Problems



Almost everyday you may face or listen to a ‘*problem*’ in working environment. Either you think or let your colleagues talk about a problem. In ODL environment you may experience various kinds of problems as a learner, as a teacher, as an administrator, as a media producer, as a tutor/counsellor, as a coordinator, as a personal assistant, as a clerical assistant and so on. In any working environment problem exists. We should not deny it. Rather we should accept it and should take good decisions to solve it.

#### Objectives

After working with this section, you would be able to:

- ☞ Define the term problem.
- ☞ List some skills to solve a problem;
- ☞ Discuss some ways to solve a problem.

#### What is a problem?

According to Oxford dictionary a problem is (i) doubtful or difficult (matter requiring a solution); (ii) something hard to understand or accomplish;



(iii) an enquiry starting from given conditions to investigate or demonstrate a fact, result or a law; (iv) puzzle or a question for solution and so on.

The first definition is more appropriate in work environment.

### **Solving problems: some skills**

You need some skills to solve a problem specifically if the problem is a complex one.

You should

- be attentive to the problem,
- listen to others,
- use your intelligence,
- be open and flexible,
- be patient,
- be calm/relaxed,
- have positive attitude,
- be cooperative,
- be ready to execute decisions

### **Solving problems: some ways**

There are various ways to solve a problem. Let us discuss a simple way to solve a complex problem.

1. You may have observed that some people perceive a situation as a problem situation that may not be perceived by others. You may have also perceived that some people have a tendency to find out a problem in almost every matter, exaggerate while presenting to others. Similarly, some have a tendency to minimize the problem. The nature of any problem depends upon the perception of the person who reports it. What you should do?

Whenever you face or hear about a problem, first you ask yourself “Is it a genuine problem?” Most of the cases you may see there is no problem at all. It is just a typical situation. There may not be any need to think and spend time on it.

2. If you cannot decide yourself whether it is a genuine problem or not, you may ask your colleague or a friend and decide together.
3. If you decide that a problem exists, then decide whether you want to solve it or not. You need positive attitude to solve the problem. If you want to solve it, decide whether you have time to solve it. If you have time, decide whether you want to solve it alone or need to take help from other colleague.
4. There is a need to understand the problem. Is it a serious and complex one or an ordinary one? A complex problem should be tackled in a different way.
5. After understanding the nature of the problem you may think about the possible solutions. You should always keep in your mind that there is more than one solution for most of the problems we face in a particular situation. Say for example, you are facing problems with your immediate superior in working environment. Whenever, you prepare and submit any proposal that is turned down by your superior. Due to the difference of opinion, s/he dislikes you and you feel embarrassed. You cannot work freely and happily. Your progress in work is hampered. It may create serious problems in getting promotion. There may be more than one solution for this problem. If you do not find any immediate solution you may gather ideas from experienced people you know, your colleagues, friends and so on. You must be familiar with the word 'brainstorming'. You may arrange for a brainstorming session with your colleagues and collect ideas from them. Many ideas may come up. Do not cancel any idea or accept any one. Think about all the ideas. Take your time. But do not think about the problem always. Think about the ideas you have got from other people in different times, for example, while going for a morning or evening walk, while taking bath and so on. If you get any new idea, think about it also. Always think rationally. Think and think again. Collect more information and select 2/3 ideas from all the ideas you have collected from others and your own thoughts.
6. If you select 2/3 ideas or alternatives, then take them one by one and examine the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative. As an example you may take the above- mentioned problem. If you have a problem with your immediate superior, you may think of asking for a

transfer to the other region or division, you may complain against him to the highest authority or you may ask your superior to arrange for a meeting between you and him to discuss the problem over a cup of tea. Take the ideas one by one. Think if you are transferred to other region or division, what kind of facilities you may get, what new problems you may have to face and so on. If you decide to complain against him, what benefit you expect from this, what further problem you may face in the near future and so on. If you ask for a meeting what may the outcome. You should think about the best and the worst outcome of each choice. Do you think you would be able to handle the worst outcome of each choice? Think again. Build your confidence. Do not make any hasty or impulsive decision. Seeing the outcome of your choice you may be happy, sad, agitated, relaxed, ashamed, proud and so on. Your choice may be a logical one, but you may not be able to bear the outcome. You should give proper attention to your feelings and need. You should think about your future, prosperity, everything.

**Box 5.1**

**Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is a technique for generating ideas. This technique was developed by Osborn (1957). He argued that if a group of people agree that the more ideas they think of the better, and that group members will be encouraged, not ridiculed, for producing even bizarre ideas, then the average person can think up twice as many ideas in a group than they could on their own.

7. After giving thought in all the aspects in each alternative, you may select the best alternative. One way is to follow the elimination process. You take up one idea, recognise why it will not work, and eliminate. Then go for another idea and eliminate. Lastly select one, which you think the best. You may discuss at with some reliable person before taking the final decision.

Some people like to assign weight (score) to every advantage and disadvantage of each idea. You should consider your physic, mind, family, society, work environment, time, energy money and other

aspects for giving weight. Some cases one decision may completely change your life.

For all kinds of problems there is no need to search for a solution following the above mentioned process. Most of the problems you may face in ODL environment, are simple and ordinary problems. You may select any solution that seem to be reasonable and may think about other alternatives later. For example, as a distance learner you may face this problem. After receiving your grade card you may see your assignment marks have not been reflected in the grade card. So, your result is incomplete. In this case you may take the first reasonable step to solve it, i.e. to go to the study centre where you had submitted your assignments and got the evaluated assignments back, request the coordinator to send a signed copy of your marks to the respective division of the university for inclusion.

Again, you may see that your term-end exam results have not been reflected in your grade card due to non-submission of fees for the semester. In this case you may conduct the respective regional centre and ask them to send the related document to the respective division as you had submitted your fees to the regional centre. But if this does not solve your problem, then contact the respective division at the Hqs. Still if you have the problem then contact the in-charge support service centre or office of the pro-vice chancellor and last the office of the vice-chancellor.

Many aspects of our decision- making are unconscious (Adams, 1986). We select some procedures for solution but we can't explain why we have selected those. After few days we may discover that the process was wrong. To take a better decision you should know the system first. If you are not aware about the system (here read the open university system), you may take a wrong decision towards solving a problem. Collect information that will give you more options. Keep yourself active and flexible.

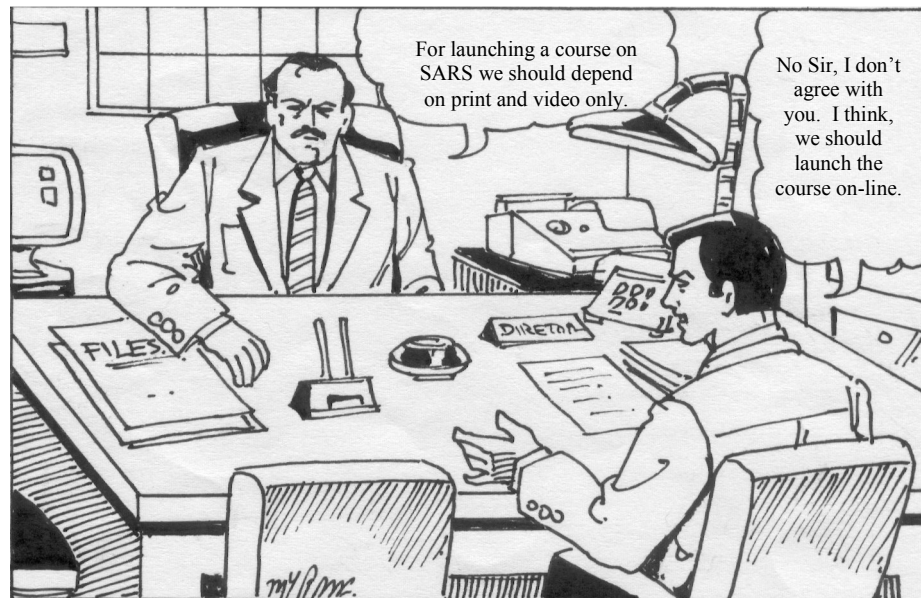
8. After taking the final decision you must prepare a detailed plan for execution. You may face a new problem during execution of your plan. You should think beforehand how to tackle that. You should evaluate your plan during execution. If there is something wrong and if there is a scope, you change your plan immediately.

**Activity 5.1**

Take interview from a teacher, an administrator, a learner, an academic counsellor, a study centre coordinator and find out the nature of problems they face in their office activities and how they solve these problems.

## SECTION VI

# Skills for Settling Disagreement and Conflict




ODL environment provides enough scope for disagreement. Disagreement is common in any work environment. Sometimes disagreement leads to conflict. Disagreement, generally, means holding a different opinion (Oxford dictionary). One person may disagree with another's opinion by saying some words, by showing some gestures and so on. In this case, his behavior is quite normal. When situation becomes threatening (some shows anger, unhappiness, can't restrict himself to normal behavior) due to disagreement, you may say there is a conflict between the persons involved. The word 'conflict' has come from the Latin word *conflictus* means 'striking together'. According to Oxford dictionary conflict means (i) a state of opposition or hostilities; (ii) a fight or struggle; (iii) the clashing of opposed principles, etc.

Disagreement and/or conflict are common in an environment where people often interact with each other and there is a lot of scope for innovation (like ODL environment).

### Objectives

After working with this section, you would be able to:

- ☞ Define what is conflict;
- ☞ Describe behavioral pattern during conflict;

 Discuss ways to solve conflict.

### **Activity 6.1**

Please make a note.

How many times during the last one month you had difference of opinion with your colleagues/friends or superiors?

How many times did you become angry?

Did you try to solve the conflict?

If yes, what was the result?

### **Behaviour pattern during conflict**

You may have observed various types of behaviour (mainly the overt behaviour) of your friends, colleagues or superiors during a conflict. You may consider the following examples.

Mr S. Kumar remains very calm and quiet in work environment. Whenever he disagrees with any colleague's opinion with respect to a decision, he keeps quiet. He does not want to prove his point.

Ms. Kanika withdraws herself from the situation whenever she has any disagreement with any colleague and stops discussing the matter further.

Mr. Ramesh becomes very angry and starts shouting towards the person with whom he has the conflict.

Mrs. Kanchan starts criticising the person's decision loudly and tries to seek attention of other colleagues in the office/university whenever she has any disagreement or conflict.

Mr. Jain does not say anything, even denies the fact that there was/is a conflict ever.

Ms. Lara accepts that there is a conflict. She takes necessary steps (invites for discussion, requests for giving more thoughts, asks for comments from others and so on) to resolve the conflict.

### **Sources of conflict in work environment**

When we define open learning we talk about flexibility. Yes, the system is flexible one. But how flexible are the persons who are running the system. If everyone is flexible, there will be less conflict.

*Let us take an example.*

We have to launch a course on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) through distance method. A division of an open university has been given the full responsibility. The In-charge of the division and the course coordinator are the key persons. They will have to give complete shape to the project. It is quite normal that these two persons have different thinking, perception, attitude, expectations and so on. While making decisions in various matter related to this course there may be difference of opinion. Two persons may think two different methods for launching the course. The in-charge may want the following the media mix: *print (100%) supplemented by audio and video*. The coordinator may want to design the course *online*. He may not be interested in print. If they are *rigid* or *inflexible* there may be a conflict. Here accepting one method means sacrificing the other. So, one has to be flexible. So, flexibility is very much needed in this situation to avoid any type of conflict.

Let us assume that the in-charge has agreed to the proposal of the course coordinator. The course will be designed online. Two more faculty members have been selected to contribute to the course development. The in-charge has allotted 2 months time to develop the course. He thinks as an in-charge, he should take all other major decisions related to the course development. But the course coordinator and faculty members think they should take the decisions as they are expert in this field. They find it difficult to complete the project within 2 months. Again, there will be a disagreement or conflict. So, *decision* should be taken judiciously to avoid conflict.

After one month , if the incharge thinks that the performance of the faculty is not upto the mark, he may replace one or two faculty members from the team. Often it is seen that the *level of performance* in work situation creates conflict.

Let us examine another situation. A Regional Director may be very happy with an Assistant Regional Director in an open university as he looks after all the important works of the Regional Centre in his absence. If the Assistant Regional Director gets an appointment as a lecturer in a school



and want to join the same without any delay a conflict may arise between the two. The Regional Director may become unhappy as he thinks he will face a lot of problems, if the Assistant Regional Director leaves the centre. He may not be interested to release him until he gets a suitable person in his place. So, *sudden change* in routine activity in the work environment may cause conflict.

You may have observed many conflicts over a power struggle, to prove superiority, to prove “I am right, you are wrong”, being based with someone and so on.

### **How can we settle disagreement or conflict?**

As we mentioned earlier, disagreement or conflict in a work environment is common. So, disagreement or conflict do not mean the end of relationship. We should take proper steps to settle it. Before you take some steps to settle any conflict, you may clear few things.

Whether there is any need to settle the conflict. If there is need then think whether both the parties are willing to cooperate. Whether you have enough time to spend for it. Then decide what outcome do you expect. Do you want to win? Do you want both the party win? Do you want both to lose? Generally, in conflict situation people want to win as much as possible. But in academic matters everybody should be innovative and try to settle the disagreement or conflict in such a way that both the parties win.

Different people have different ways to settle a conflict. Let us consider the following behavioural manifestations during conflict.

- Mr. Raghavan seems to be very unhappy and depressed while working in his office. Mr. Sen asked him, “Do you have any problem Mr. Raghavan?”. Mr. Raghavan answers, “No, no, I am fine. Thank you.”

If you enquire answers, you may find that Mr Raghavan has a conflict with regard to a serious matter with his colleague. But he denies the conflict.

- Mr Rao often gets angry in the office and start blaming others – “I want to do this workshop, but due to your interruption I can’t do it properly.” “You are ignoring my position.” And so on.

Some people blame others for any disagreement or conflict.

- Ms Sukanya has a disagreement with her colleague. She says “I know he does not agree with me. But I can’t convince him, so leave it, I do not want to invite any unnecessary tension.”
- Some persons do not want to solve the disagreement or conflict or fight for the right.
- Mr Roy is very calm and quiet. In response to a conflict he says, “I am ready to compromise. But do you think he will agree for a compromise? We should sit together and search for a suitable solution.”
- Some people can control their anxiety, anger and always are ready for a suitable solution (both party get benefit).

In a work environment we should follow a method that can help to settle any disagreement or conflict in such a way that we can build strong relationships among the colleagues and can establish a model for others. The following tips may be of help:

1. You should be very calm and relaxed, though it is not very easy to relax when you have some conflict. But if you agree to a fair settlement of the conflict, then you must keep your cool. Do not become manipulative. Be honest and open.
2. Sit with the person with whom you have a disagreement or conflict. Discuss your view points and his also. Point out the similarities between the two approaches. There may a disagreement with regard to a decision, but there may be some similarities in both the opinions. Solutions may be built on those similarities (content, method, approach and so on). You should forget the dissimilarities.
3. Do not feel you are superior or inferior. Think both are equal. Both are government servants. Both have right to take decisions Both have capabilities. Both should work together. Trust each other. Talk over a cup of tea.
4. Start the discussion. You should listen to others and try to understand his/her views, needs, expectations, problems and so on. Express through your speech, gesture, behaviour that you are open and willing to find a fair solution.
5. If you want more information from the other person/party ask for it. Give him time to provide information, if needed. You should also

- provide all information you have. Never blame others for any point of disagreement.
6. Make a list of the points of disagreement. Analyse the earlier steps you had taken to solve the issues. Try to understand the exact point of disagreement.
  7. Repeat the point of agreement during discussion. Think about various solutions for disagreement. Be innovative.
  8. If needed, collect more information from various sources. You may talk to an experienced person, other colleague, your friend and so on. Put all the concrete evidences to convince the other person. Highlight those points only which you think are the best arguments.
  9. It is difficult to find out an ideal solution. Do not stick to your idea only. You may think your idea is the best. But it is not true always. Consider other persons need and expectation. Try to integrate both the plans and proposals and make a fresh one. Try to prepare the best alternative taking idea from both the plans. Never criticise other plans or proposals. Discuss thoroughly how the new plan will help you and the other person/party both. Make a list how both the persons/parties will be benefited from this.

**Box 6.1**

How decisions are made in the workplace, and how they might be improved, is crucial to enhance the performance of organisations and even national economies.

*Arnold, Robertson and Cooper, 1991*

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