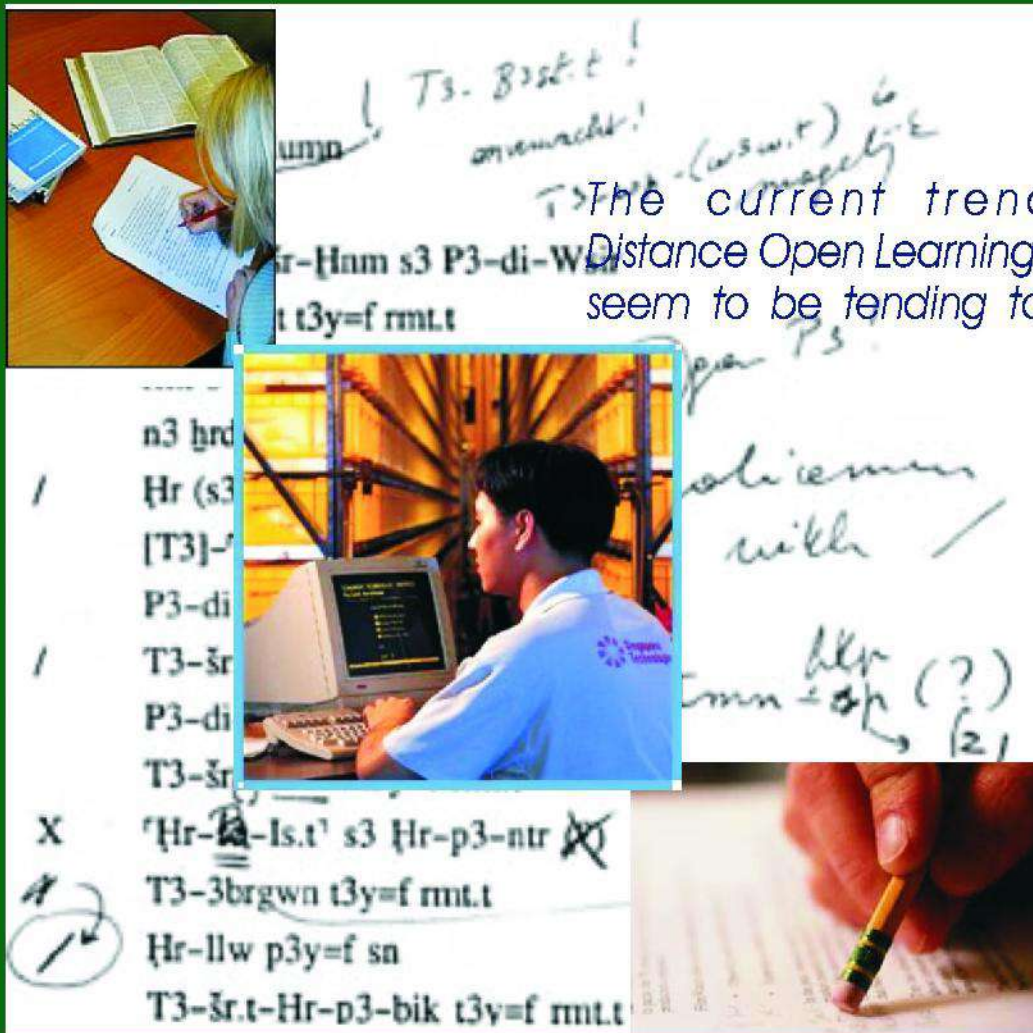


## Editing in Distance Education



The current trends in Distance Open Learning (DOL) seem to be tending towards



Handbook

6

# Editing in Distance Education

*Revised by*

**P. R. Ramanujam**

**Staff Training and Research Institute of  
Distance Education  
INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY**  
Maidan Garhi, New Delhi 110 068

# **STRIDE Handbook 6**

## **Editing in Distance Education**

**Revised version of Handbook 6**

*Prepared by*

**B. N. Koul and Kalpana Mishra (1989)**

**Revised and Re-designed**

*by*

**P. R. Ramanujam (2002)**

**Print Production:**  
T. R. Manoj and C. N. Pandey

**Secretarial Assistance:**  
Manoj Kumar Sahani

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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 today. A more recent realization of the effectiveness of the ODL systems is its unique capability of handling programmes for trainers and learners especially 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) on 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 a 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 human resource 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 Institute 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

### Aims and Objectives

This Handbook aims at giving an overview of the complex processes involved and the sophisticated professional skills necessary in those who want to edit distance-learning materials. After having carefully gone through this Handbook, we expect you to be able to

- recognise and describe the different aspects of editing distance learning materials;
- explain the need and the ways of editing the content, format (instructional design) and language of the draft materials;
- master the necessary skills to carry out all the three types of editing; and
- maintain the quality of the materials by continuously improving and fine tuning the materials.

### What is your role as an editor of distance learning materials?

Your role as an editor of distance learning materials is very important, as it covers all stages of course development: initiation, development, production and even post-production activities. You are expected to produce materials which are *self-instructional* and *learner friendly*. But you cannot do this alone. You have to work with teams of course writers with different abilities, educational technologists, media specialists and institutional administrators. You are responsible for the academic and pedagogical quality of the material; which means, you have to check the content, language and the instructional design of the materials.

You should be able to perform all the above mentioned functions yourself, as an editor. You ought to have the necessary competence, skills and involvement to do that, or you must manage to get the tasks done through others. Of course, you need the necessary resources and infrastructure from the distance education institution which asks you to work as an editor.

### Your role will be determined by your institution

In some cases, the editor may have to work alone, and in others with a group of people. The editor is sometimes involved at the planning stage itself, but many a time the editor comes on the scene at the production stage only. In the

Open University, Britain, for example the 'course team' approach confines the editor's role to copy editing, as the rest of the work is done by other members of the team. The Chairperson of the course team works as the chief editor. On the other hand, the editor in the National Extension College (NEC), London, bears most of the responsibilities of editing. The editor in NEC plays a significant role at all the stages in developing the print based course materials – from commissioning the course writers to the final stage of printing and subsequently, maintaining the quality of materials.

At the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), the internal core faculty members act as course/pogramme coordinators, while course writing and editing are mostly done by external academics. This Handbook aims to acquaint you with the complex role of an editor of distance learning materials. It has seven sections. The first four covers steps that you have to take in the process of editing, and sections 5 and 6 focus on the editorial responsibilities at the production and the post-production stages of course development. Section 7 gives a summary of the previous sections.

The following diagram summarises the possible roles editors and their places in the overall process of editing and preparing of distance-learning materials:

STAGES OF EDITING	EDITOR'S INPUT
<b>Writing stage</b>	Identifying Authors Keeping Records Contacting Authors
<b>Processing of the material/ Editing stage</b>	Content editing Format editing or instructional design with the help of educational technologists Editing diagrams & pictures
<b>Production stage</b>	Copy editing or interacting with copy editor Instructing Printers Proof reading
<b>Post Production stage</b>	Gathering information to maintain quality Course Maintenance Course Revision Course Withdrawal

Figure 1 : Editing of Distance Education Materials: Stages and Functions

## Distance Education System : Some Requirements

As a first step, you have to understand what the distance education system is about, what it has achieved and what its eminent practitioners have said about it – their experiences, trials, success, failure, etc. If you are able to acquire the necessary knowledge about the distance education system you can adapt yourself to the editorial requirements more successfully. You can also apply your knowledge quite creatively because open learning requires an open learning specialist as an editor. Instructional design expertise is important because the processes of developing distance learning-materials are different and more complex than writing conventional text-books. You also need to have a clear understanding of the institutional goals, resources and constraints. Production schedules, printing schedules, budgets, launch dates, writers fees, royalties, production costs of typesetting, designing, copy rights, etc. may be often very demanding. You have to also keep in mind the profiles of learners and their learning styles. This background knowledge would help you in the various stages of course preparation and editing. STRIDE Handbook 1 gives you an account of all these with a degree of depth and elaboration.

As different institutions follow different approaches to course development, depending on the institutional policies, needs, perceptions, resources and the capabilities of the staff involved in the course development, the nature and the extent of editing will vary. You may like to know about the different approaches to course development such as the *Course Team approach*, *Author-Editor approach* etc., at this stage. Before we discuss these issues, let us do an activity to know about your own situation.

### Activity 1:

Write briefly about the following aspects of your institution and your job:

- a) Describe the process of developing course materials in your university/institute.

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- b) What are your responsibilities as an editor?

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## Course team approach

The British Open University has adopted this approach. This is one of the best models of course development in the academic sense, but it is also the most expensive model. All distance teaching institutions may not have the same facilities and resources of the British Open University. It is not necessary for every institution to follow a model which works well in a particular situation but may not be affordable or successful in other situations. Distance teaching institutions in the developing countries have certain specific needs and also special constraints, which warrant less expensive but effective approaches to course development. *The Course Team* usually consists of a senior academic as a chairperson, other academics (some may external), a media producer, a line manager (coordinator), and an editor. The editor in this case takes care of the house style.

The relatively easy task of editing in the course team approach is determined primarily by two major factors: i) the composition of the course team and ii) the linguistic situation which is almost the same i.e. the mother tongue of the learners and the mother tongue of the course developers is the same: English. The composition of the course team is as follows:

- Course Team Chairperson:* Who is always an academic with expertise or familiarity with the subject/discipline in which the learning materials are developed.
- Course Writers/Authors:* Who are teachers or academics with subject expertise, writing skills, teaching skills, ability to work as per schedules, cost consciousness, necessary team spirit and open and receptive attitude towards educational changes, innovations, technology friendly and with excellent skills in communication.
- Instructional Designers (Educational Technologists):* Who are well versed in pedagogy, instructional design and media compatibility vis-à-vis different disciplines and fields of study (Institute of Educational Technology(IET) in the case of the British Open University lends this support, besides carrying out student research, course evaluation etc.).
- Media Person/Produce:* An employee of the BBC in the case of UKOU with high academic qualifications with the ability to work with academics and

also a mastery in handling audio-visual media, floor operations and the necessary understanding to appreciate the requirements of academics and subject experts.

*Editor:*

Who is usually an academic or a copy editor or one with abilities to edit the text and also the format.

*Graphic Expert, Librarian,  
Project Control Staff, etc.:*

These are technical and professional staff who assist the academics in a number of ways to complete the development of course materials.

The above would be the composition of a typical course team, particularly the one which follows the model of the British Open University's concept of Course Team. However, variations are possible. In certain contexts, because of non-availability of the right kind of persons in each category in adequate numbers, local considerations definitely influence the size, composition and the thinking of the course teams.

There are advantages as well as disadvantages in the course team approach. The biggest advantage is that the institution concerned can get excellent materials of very high quality because when competent academics come together and interact with instructional designers and media persons, every aspect of distance learning, academic quality, different perspectives and the pedagogic aspects of study materials would be taken care of. Ideally, a course team resolves all the issues and contradictions keeping in view the genuine academic needs of the learners. So, students get better quality materials in this situation.

The disadvantages are that the course team approach is very expensive, time consuming and very complex. The media components may not always be very effective in every situation and the enormous cost may not be justifiable. It is very difficult to get competent academics to work in teams and agree with each other on every crucial curricular and academic issue. It is also unrealistic to expect every one to work to the schedule. Above all, academics are fiercely independent in holding on to their ideological positions and defending their stand points very aggressively. Media persons may quite often emphasise aspects which academics may not appreciate. Because of these and many other difficulties, it may not be always easy to work with or in course teams. Compromises and adjustments are necessary to develop course materials in many different and difficult situations. Therefore, no one method of course development can be considered to be 'the best', and we have to look for methods which could work in specific situations or contexts.

## Course development in developing countries

Jenet Jenkins (1985), Derek Rowntree (1991) and others have talked about editing distance learning materials in the context of the western countries. But the situation is different in most developing countries. Even when institutions claim to be following the course-team approach they do not mean that the composition and the style of functioning of their course teams correspond to those of the UKOU course team. In many developing countries, course teams are loosely structured and usually individuals work independently on various units or blocks of print materials. The editor has to play the roles of many members of the course team. In other words, the 'team work', does not happen, though the teams, in the physical sense, may operate in a formal way. The reasons could be many, but the following two are important:

- i) Scarcity of resources
- ii) Lack of experience to work as teams because of certain cultural traits.

In a typical distance teaching institution of a developing country, we can anticipate the following to happen with regard to course development:

- Expert committees, consisting almost entirely of conventional academics, decide the curriculum and the syllabus of a particular course/programme with little or no understanding of course development for distance learners.
- The top management of the institution decides the dead lines, dates of launching the programme, the number of students to be enrolled, etc., because of political and other exigencies. Usually there won't be any information sharing between the top management and the faculty on such matters at the initial stages of the institution.
- The Department Head or the Director of the School may consult the Discipline Head in choosing the course writers and the time schedule.
- The members of the faculty, may be freshly recruited or senior academics coming from the face-to-face teaching institutions will have responsibility to arrange for course writers' meetings, allocation of units, meetings with audio-video producers if any, with graphic artists, printers or publishers. They may not have the necessary training or exposure to handle these complex tasks which demand a high degree of professionalism and interpersonal skills (for a more detailed discussion on this see, Renga Ramanujam, 1995)

## Editorial Concerns

The three primary concerns of any editor in charge of developing self-learning materials in the above situation are:

- i) *the educational effectiveness (i.e. making the text a self-learning one, following the principles of self-learning, independent-learning, etc.),*
- ii) *the academic credibility (i.e. relevant and adequate content, appropriate level, etc.)*
- iii) *the readability of the text (i.e. simple, clear, conversational style of language)*

If you, as an editor, happen to be a senior academic in the given discipline, you should take care of the content part. The other two, if necessary, can be managed with the help of a distance education expert (i.e. instructional designer) and a language expert. If not, then, you have to look for persons who can do all the three types of editing. When you do not get an ideal person with a combination of all the three editing skills, you can get the units edited independently, focusing on the three different aspects. Perhaps three different editors – content editor, format editor and a language editor – will have to work on the units.

In the absence of course team proper, the responsibility of getting the courses in a desirable format rests with the 'course coordinator' and the 'programme coordinator', as they are called in the context of the open universities in India. While the *course coordinator* is responsible for the individual course(s), the *programme coordinator* has the responsibility to get all the courses in time and give a shape to the materials that constitute the programme. If the coordinators are not in a position to do the editing job, then, they have to engage appropriate editors. At times, course editing and programme editing may come into conflict, mainly in terms of sequencing of content, if not editing of the format, house style and the language.

You may be a coordinator of a programme or a course or even a block consisting of a few units or lessons at times, depending on the way in which your institution has planned and distributed the course development work. Whatever the arrangement, as a coordinator, you have the responsibility to carry out, besides other tasks, the different editorial functions either by yourself or through others who are experts in their respective areas, such as subject specialization, educational technology and language. If you are lucky, you may get writers who have sufficient experience in writing self-learning materials. But you do not always get experienced writers to write self-learning materials.

You could expect at least three typical responses from the writers:

**Response 1:** Good subject experts will promise to give good content input but would not bother much about the needs of the learners (For these writers, the content, its quality, is the most important one. The rest may be important for you but not for them, for whatever reasons. However, you can certainly get good quality content from them). You are free to put the content in

whatever format you choose to. When you have the content, you have to shape it to suit your instructional design.

**Response 2:** Some writers may say: "We will try our best to put the content in the way you have suggested. But if there are gaps, do not blame us. You will have to do the rest". (This group is usually receptive to new ideas and experiments but may not promise the Moon. They may give the content of acceptable quality too).

**Response 3:** This is the response from the 'writers for all seasons'. They might have assured you something like this: "Don't worry about our contribution. We have been in this business for the past so many years and we have written scores of books and hundreds of articles on the same topic. As for your distance learning format, it is child's play" but they will give you both the content and the format in a dissatisfying manner that you can not use the materials straight way.

The range and nature of editorial work at this stage will depend on the pattern of staffing and infrastructure of your institution. If the institution depends on external writers for writing the courses or on the newly recruited staff who do not have adequate training in writing distance education courses, the difficulty and the complexity of editorial work will increase considerably. Your first job requirement as an editor will be, in either case, to look for course writers.

### Identifying the Writers

Course writers can be identified on the basis of personal knowledge, their fame or by recommendation. The other way of identifying effective course writers may be through proper and clear advertisement. When you advertise, you should clearly state the course requirements of your institution such as the *nature* and *length* of the course, the *time limit* you would allow the writers to send their written materials to you and, if possible, the *format or structure* to be followed by the writers while presenting the content. You should clearly state in your advertisement the facilities available to the writers, the rate of payment, and the copyright issues such as how the written materials will be used by your institution, etc.

"Ideal" course writers would be the writers who have sufficient experience in writing distance teaching materials and have subject expertise as well. If such people are not available you can select writers who know their subject well and also have the writing skills and teaching experience. These writers may be able to supply the content which you can reshape with the help of educational technologists. You may also appoint some young academics who can write well but who may not have much experience in teaching. There is no rule as to how many authors you need. It depends on the size of the project

and the availability of potential writers. Moreover, different distance teaching institutions make their choice of course writers, depending on their particular needs and the availability of course writers they need.

A contract with the writers should include the following details:

- the *content* the author is required to produce
- *deadlines* for drafts and finished copy (together with any penalty clauses for late delivery or failure to meet specifications)
- what constitutes an *acceptable manuscript* (for example, approved by the editor at draft or at final stage)
- what *fees* and *expenses* will be paid; how and when will they be paid
- standard of *presentation* (i.e., details of format and layout requirements, typed copy etc.)
- *copyright*: who owns it and who manages clearance of copyright material used in the manuscript.

#### Activity 2:

Imagine that you have received units/lessons from all the three types of course writers. How will you respond to the situation, especially when your dead line for producing the materials is fast approaching? What strategies would you adopt to complete your editorials tasks successfully in time?

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### Editing Process

The term 'editing' involves making the written/text material fit for production. It is the process of examining and correcting the written/print materials, so that it is suitable for publication. In distance education, the process of editing is carried out either by a chief editor or course coordinator or course developer or member of a writing team or by someone who is a professional editor. The role of an editor of distance teaching print materials covers all stages of course preparation. The editing of the self-learning material in print

has a mosaic pattern. It takes care of three different aspects. They are: *content, format and language*. We have considered editing of these three aspects in the following sections in more detail.

You have to think more about the learners' interests than about your own 'editorial freedom' in the usual sense, or about the authorial rights. You have to pay considerable attention to make the course materials helpful and useful to the learners. In the process, you have to make compromises and adjustments with the writers whose responses and productivity, in any case, would vary widely.

*The International Extension College Manual for Editors* of distance teaching materials lists the following as the essential aspects of editing.

- appointing/hiring writers to write courses,
- preparing the writers to write,
- developing a course outline that will help the writers,
- deciding on the structure of a unit,
- briefing the writers on presenting the subject-matter and introducing student activities,
- providing advice to distance learners,
- judging the reading level of learners,
- editing the language,
- testing the materials before printing,
- deciding on the format (i.e., page size, typeface, etc),
- copy editing,
- production and printing,
- course maintenance and revision,
- coordinating, writing and production.

However, different institutions follow different models of editing. We shall be mainly discussing here:

- i) *the process of editing during and after writing,*
- ii) *different organizational patterns used in editing distance teaching texts, and*
- iii) *the essential skills of an editor in distance education systems.*

If you have some years of experience in editing distance teaching materials, you will cope with your work quite well, even if your institution is a new one and the demands made on you are very difficult. If you have a trained course team, your job will be easy and free of risk.

If your institution is new, and if it does not have a course team, you as the editor will have to become familiar with editing of distance teaching material,

because the course writers will also be new to the job. This is actually the case with most DE institutions in the developing world. Since there will be a serious shortage of course writers, you have to contact subject experts who also have some experience in distance teaching. If you can manage with the help of these academics to get the content, you can then think of instructional design or format editing, and also language editing, which is a must, when the materials are written in English. Some writers may show a lot of enthusiasm and readily agree to write the units for you. Others may assure you that they will do the job as best as they can. You send them the briefs you have prepared on the basis of the guidelines and the curriculum or syllabi planned by the course committee (The expression course committee should not be confused with the expression *course team*. In some places this committee is known as an 'expert committee'). You also set a deadline to receive the written materials from the writers. After some time you may receive the draft materials. Here, you will discover many things.

Your briefs might not be strictly followed by many of writers. They may have elaborated the points which *they* thought important. The points *you* wanted to emphasize may have received shabby treatment. Some writers might have simply ignored your brief. Inspired by the title(s) of the unit(s) the authors may have turned out something which has little or no relevance to the central theme and the main concepts mentioned in your brief to be dealt with in the units/lessons.

You are convinced that such stuff will not serve your purpose, and that the materials are to be actually rewritten. But there is no time left for this. Moreover, the materials are in the form of conventional lessons or compositions. Introductions to each unit and block remain to be written; Aims and Objectives are to be stated in behavioural terms; Access devices are to be built in. The assignment scheme is to be specified. Areas which need audio-video programmes are to be decided upon. Without completing these and many such tasks, the materials in their original form may not help the learners in their learning. In other words, you have to use the *raw materials* and shape them into self-learning materials.

The materials received from the course writers may be unsatisfactory in many other respects too. The content may be either inadequate or inappropriate; the presentation may be disorderly, ideas may not be clear; and some of the key points may not be there, and minor points may be unnecessarily elaborated while points which need explanation are mentioned in passing or omitted altogether. The treatment of the content, thus, may be uneven.

Above all, the language could be quite confusing. Cliches, archaic expressions, deliberately employed difficult words, awkward turns of phrase, clumsy syntax and, finally ungrammatical sentences will spoil the content



and test your patience. You firmly resolve to modify the materials, if possible to rewrite them. But there are other practical problems.

Your university/institution has already announced the programme(s) hoping that everything can be managed and the course booklets can be got ready as scheduled. However, a lot of problems – both academic and administrative – arise, and tension builds up in every section of the university/ institution. In addition to these, you may have problems with the printer who tells you that you will have to wait at least for a month to get the first 'dummy' or ferro. The quality paper you want is not available, and the policy-makers of your institution feel that it is not advisable to change their earlier decision in this matter. Before you resolve this problem, scores of other problems may be distracting your attention. Applications start pouring in for admission to the Programme. The institution makes the selection, sends the admission letters to the selected candidates and also tells them the date by which the course materials will reach them. But the course materials are not ready, even after the specified date has come and gone. The perturbed students anxiously write letters and make incessant phone calls asking for materials. The administrative staff is irritated by the repeated queries about the course materials. The academic staff get worried. No one knows who is to blame. But every one wants to get the courses ready somehow. In all these, the role of the editor is very important.

In some departments all the editorial work is to be done by the academic staff themselves. In the editing of the first four courses of the Diploma in Distance Education of Indira Gandhi National Open University for instance, the course coordinator and a member of the faculty had to do the entire job of editing. In addition they had to do the copy editing and proof reading. An efficient proof reader and a copy editor could have spared them this tedious job. The academics could have written a few units during the time they spent on proof reading.

Now it must be clear to you that the editing process remains in a constant state of flux. In such a situation it becomes all the more necessary to train the course writers and the editors of distance teaching materials. During the process, the course writers themselves may become educational technologists or instructional designers and editors. That will be the best thing that you can hope for. If not, you have to adopt different strategies. In any case, Content, Format (or instructional design) and Language must be edited to assure quality of the materials.

**Activity 3:**

What are your responsibilities in the course development at your institution? How do you propose to carry them out?

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## CONTENT EDITING

*Arrangement of subject-matter, connection, completeness, sweetness, exaltedness and lucidity constitute the excellences of writing.*

*Among them, arranging in a proper order, the statement first of the principal matter, is arrangement of subject-matter.*

*The statement of a subsequent matter without its being incompatible with the matter in hand, right up to the end, is connection.*

*Absence of deficiency or excess of matter, words and letters, description in detail of the matter by means of reasons, citations and illustrations, and expressiveness of words, is completeness.*

*The use of words with a charming meaning easily conveyed is sweetness.*

*The use of words that are not vulgar is exaltedness.*

*The employment of words that are well known is lucidity.*

**The Kautiliya Arthashastra; 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C.**

The first three steps of processing the material is to go through the course content and make sure that

- the content is adequate
- its level is appropriate, and
- the presentation is clear, lucid and learner friendly.

These three factors refer to suitability and proper density of the content for a particular level of learners. For example, if a B.A. level course has content appropriate for High School classes it will be called inappropriate for B.A. Similarly, if a course to cover 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic Poetry presents only two poets, say Wordsworth and Coleridge, leaving Shelley, Keats and Byron out, the level may be regarded as appropriate but the content is inadequate.

## Editing In Distance Education

If you find the content inappropriate or inadequate, you as a content editor, are at liberty to delete or add the required content where needed. It would be better, if you consult the writer regarding the matter to resolve it. You will also have to check the material for technical accuracy, which involves assessing how adequately the objectives have been met. Points of disagreement, suggestions for additions or deletions, updating of the content, making comments about the way the topic has been handled and commenting on the educational effectiveness of the material, etc. will arise, and they need to be resolved by the content editor.

Once the content material is received, you have both the powers and the responsibility to shape it, modify it and set it in the most suitable way to produce distance teaching units and blocks. You have to 'produce' it with the help of educational technologists and other instructional designers of your institution. You have to turn the 'raw materials' (the bare contents or the 'text') into 'finished products' (distance teaching units, blocks and courses) and supply them as commodities in packages (booklets, assignments, audio-video cassettes) to the consumers (the distance learners). These analogies from the industry are crude and suffer from many limitations but they broadly describe correctly the course development in the distance teaching institutions.

Ideally, you should wait for the comments of the course team at your institution or you can consult the course director, or get the opinions and comments of other subject experts. This means allowing more time and a democratic process in arriving at a consensus. Where this is not feasible you can take a decision on these, assuming full responsibility for whatever choices you make.





If the content is too heavy, try to make it comparatively lighter. If it is too thin, you can add a little more substance and make it reasonably dense. It would be very good, if this pruning and feeding could be done by the course writers themselves. But you can't expect that to happen always for practical reasons. When it does not work, you will have to depend on yourself or other academics to do that.

When you are satisfied with the content and the format of the written text, it is advisable and useful to pass on the material to the course-team or the academics concerned and to ask for their comments, opinions, suggestions and criticism. You should remember that in spite of your careful editing of the material you may have still failed to notice certain shortcomings.

The opinions, criticism, etc., of the course team or the academics may suggest that certain sections need further modifications, or some more points are to be included. You can make the necessary changes with the approval of the writers (if the writers themselves are willing to make the changes, that would be ideal). But you should also ensure that this does not take a long time. There is no fun in developing a course for ten or twelve years. By the time the course is ready, there would be hardly any students.

The course authors or writes play the major role in selecting and presenting the content. However, for some degree of uniformity in selecting and presenting the content and pitch it at the appropriate level, you need some one to go through the entire course, preferably all the courses pertaining to the programme concerned to smoothen out the possible unevenness of the content level and the style of presentation. This task can best be done by a senior academic as the Chief Editor.

Content editing must focus on the following aspects which have close links with instructional design as well:

- Relationship or link between the objectives set at the beginning and the content presented in the main body of the unit;
- Appropriateness of the level, adequacy and the quality of the content (It does not serve our purpose, if the authors present excellent content ignoring the level of the learners. The level of content, for example, difficult enough for a doctoral degree, will be no good for the first year undergraduate students who are introduced to the basic concepts of a given course/discipline);
- Logical sequencing of the content;
- Explanations, illustrations, examples wherever necessary;
- Spontaneous flow of ideas and arguments;
- Relevance of information given;
- Updated and accurate information;
- Presentation of content in small and manageable chunks in the forms of sections and sub-sections;
- Enough number of activities to break the monotony of the reader and to help him/her access the main points of the discussion

The key elements in content editing, however, relate to the points listed above. But how to ensure that the above points are taken care of? Here are some clues:

- Check whether the objectives are kept in view when the content is presented in the main body (If not, either change the content or modify the objectives in the second draft of the unit. Remember, no draft is good enough to be final).
- Present each main idea in a section and the supportive ideas in sub-sections.
- Do not allow too many ideas and details to crowd the text (It will be intimidating and stifling).
- Draw a concept map to ensure logical flow of ideas and arguments (of course, it depends on the requirements of a given discipline).

- Give at least one activity or exercise at the end of every section, and if necessary, after a sub-section too. Vary the level of activities and avoid trivial exercise and activities that demand too much from the reader. (For example, there is no fun in this exercise: "When did India become independent"?, if it is given at the end of the section which starts with the sentence, "India became independent on 15 August 1947". Similarly, there is no point asking your reader/learner to answer a question, which is good enough for a tutor-marked assignment).
- While numbering the sections and sub-sections, do not go beyond three digits (i.e. 1.1, 1.1.1 are good enough. 1.1.1.1 and 1.1.1.1.1 will lead to confusion and awkwardness).
- Use familiar examples, photographs, graphics etc. to help the learner grasp the main points clearly and easily.
- Start the presentation from the known and then move on to the unknown i.e. start from the easy and familiar and move on to the more difficult part of the content.
- Try to incorporate the feedback you may have received from your colleagues, potential students, previous batch of students and experts at the time of developmental testing. Read the unit as a student would and identify the possible areas of difficulties. Check them with the opinions of your peer group and the potential students. use the feed back appropriately to improve the *quality* of the content.

Some writers have the skills to present the content interestingly, even without the above 'access devices' consciously built in. But the access devices always help you to enhance the understanding of the content by the learner. While introducing the access devices, it is always advisable that the format editor (i.e. distance education expert) and the content editor should take care of possible jumbling of content sequencing or illogical division of sections and sub-sections. Then, you look at the summary of the unit also carefully. Here you will have the following items, besides the summary of the main points and/or conclusions:

- Suggestions/possible answers to the SAQs/Check Your Progress exercises.
- Glossary of terms, wherever necessary.
- Reading list i.e. a list of books and articles for further reading.

The content editor should take care that the summary and the answers to the SAQs serve the intended purposes. The *summary* should help the learners recapitulate the main ideas already discussed. The *answers* should give the feedback and reassure the learner about his learning. The *glossary* must act as an instant dictionary with contextual meanings of the terms explained. The *reading list* should consider the *availability*, *readability* and *affordability* of the book/articles recommended. Content editing, thus, must ensure *the academic relevance, the quality and the logical presentation of the content*.

**Activity 4:**

i) What is your area of specialization? What is the level of the course which you have to edit?

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ii) List five topics in some order that can become unit titles in your course.

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iii) Select one from the above. List 8 sub-topics that can be treated as sections or sub-sections of the unit chosen

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## INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN OR FORMAT EDITING

After deciding on the adequacy of the content, you as an editor should see whether the writer has followed your guidelines or briefings on the presentation of the content and has *structured* it in such a way as to help the distance learners to learn without the presence of a teacher. That is, check the material to see whether the text is self-instructional. You have to satisfy yourself whether a unit has a proper introduction, clearly stated aims and objectives in behavioural terms, adequate access devices, a clear and logical presentation, and a summary. (We have discussed these access devices in more detail in the Course ES-312 Design & Development of self-learning of the PGDDE programme of IGNOU).

Structure of an IGNOU Unit

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### UNIT 1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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#### Unit Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Social history of distance education
- 1.3 Socio-political changes vis-a-vis educational systems: A case
  - 1.3.1 Pastoral India
  - 1.3.2 Feudal India
  - 1.3.3 Colonial India
  - 1.3.4 Independent India
- 1.4 Commercialised Vs. Industrialised type of education
  - 1.4.1 Democratisation of education
  - 1.4.2 Fall in educational standards
- 1.5 Distance education: An Appreciation
- 1.6 Let us sum up

A specimen unit structure of IGNOU course materials: PGDDE, ES-311, Block3, Unit 1

## Editing in Distance Education

The format editing is done to maintain the pedagogic principles of self-learning material, and uniformity among the various units of a block and a course, normally to help the learners quickly grasp the content through access devices. Format editing is done to maintain the in-house style or the uniformity of length, presentation etc, of units of a programme. The presentation of content has to be structured on the basis of instructional design, using the access devices. The essential or desirable features for the structure are the following *access devices*:

- content list,
- introduction,
- objectives,
- sequencing of content in a logical order,
- section and sub-section headings
- illustrations and graphics
- self-check questions,
- glossary,
- sample answers to self-check questions,
- list of books, journals etc. for further reading
- references etc. .

The job at the format editing stage is to check if all these features are present in the print material.

What we mean here by 'format editing' is nothing but the instructional design inputs which come from the instructional designer or educational technologist working in a typical course team situation. In the absence of facilities for a full-fledged course team working as a team, alternative strategies must be found to get the same output and quality. In India, content editing and language editing were and are being done in the correspondence lessons of the old type too. What is really an additional input is the attempt to improve upon the earlier or existing practice by bringing in the advancements of educational technology and instructional design in presenting the otherwise good content. Let us look at the figure given on next page.

A. IGNOU Unit Structure	B. UKOU Unit Structure
<p><b>UNIT 2 UNIT DESIGN</b></p> <p><i>Structure</i></p> <p>2.0 Objective 2.1 Introduction 2.2 Key Terms Used in a Distance Education Text 2.2.1 Aims and objectives 2.2.2 Unit 2.2.3 Assessment questions 2.2.4 Essential and recommended texts/further readings 2.3 Key Features of a Unit 2.3.1 Beginning a unit 2.3.2 The body of a unit 2.3.3 Ending a unit 2.4 Different Kinds of Self-Learning Texts 2.4.1 Teach-yourself books 2.4.2 Manuals and handbooks 2.4.3 Programmed instruction 2.4.4 Open learning materials 2.4.5 Correspondence units 2.4.6 Study guides/Wrap-up materials 2.4.7 Distance education units 2.5 Let Us Sum Up</p>	<p><i>Unit 15</i> <i>The mechanics of an electric lift</i></p> <p><i>Contents</i></p> <p>4mp 4 Introduction 5 1. Electric lift 6 2. Lift kinematics 7 3. Lift structure 13 4. Buffer dynamics 18 5. Hoistage dynamics 22 6. Conclusion 24 Reference 28 Data sheet 29</p>
(PGDDE, ES-312, Block 2, Unit 2)	(Curtsey: PM752A, OU course, Block 9, Unit 15)

The very physical look of the above formats would suggest to you that distance learning lessons have certain special features which are not there in the lessons normally used in the classroom teaching. But the 'formats' are not just 'physical' layout, design and font size. They have certain useful pedagogic and learning principles embedded in them. These pedagogic and learning principles, in fact, warrant the changes in the physical design and layout of the texts in order that the intended learning objectives are achieved effectively. In any format of a SLM unit, you can see three main components: *the beginning, the main body and the end*. Each component includes some of the pedagogic and the self-learning principles in a variety of ways allowing enough scope for the text to remain open and flexible. These are the access devices through which learners comprehend the content. We shall see what the pedagogic and the learning principles are and how they get incorporated in SLMs in the following sub-sections.

## Components of a Unit

Of course the 'Structure' itself gives us first an outline of the unit. By looking at the list, we would know what we should look for in a particular unit. This preliminary information is also pedagogically significant in that it prompts us to start our learning exercise with a focus. This psychological preparedness or readiness to learn is important for any learning process. Thirdly, we would know the scope of the unit and thus we know what we should expect from the unit. 'Objectives' enables the learners to focus their study and they will legitimately look for the necessary information/content from the unit to achieve the set objectives. The learners will also try to relate the objectives with the sections and sub-sections of the unit that are presented logically and with sample illustrations. Whether the objectives should be set in behavioural terms or instructional terms and at what levels will have to be decided by

you, depending on your purpose and also the school of thought you belong to as a format editor, you have to look for the above three elements in any 'introduction' and if you do not find at least two of them, then, you will have to rewrite the introduction afresh.

## Instructional Design

*Instruction is a human undertaking whose purpose is to help people learn. Although learning may happen without any instruction, the effects of instruction on learning are often beneficial and usually easy to observe. When instruction is designed to accomplish a particular goal of learning, it may or may not be successful .....*

*"Instruction is a set of events that affect learners in such a way that learning is facilitated. Normally, we think of these events as being external to the learner – events embodied on the display of printed pages or the talk of a teacher. However, we also must recognize that the events that make up instruction may be partly internal when they constitute the learner activity called 'self-instruction'." Robert M.Gagne (1988)*

Writing for distance education institutions is a new experience even for the most prolific writers. In distance education materials the presentation of content has to be structured. The materials have to be self-instructional in nature; and poor structuring can make learning difficult for students. This structure or format is adopted to help the distance learners learn on their own without the help of a live teacher. Your job is to check whether the structure and the contents are properly balanced and correctly matched. You have to ask these questions repeatedly: "Is it clear to learners? Are they going in the right direction?" If you get the right answers, then, you can be sure of the quality of the learning materials. But very often you may not get the right answers. How to solve the problem?

## Structure

First of all, list those features that are essential or desirable for the structure, i.e., content list, introduction, objectives, content in logical order, access devices, self-check questions, model answers, etc. These features provide a structured and organised format to the Unit.

See whether the Unit is divided into sections and subsections in a proper and logical order. These sections and subsections properly listed in an itemized Content list, are times called "Structure" - the word 'structure' has a very specific meaning here.

## Introduction

Then an introduction to the Unit should be there. The 'Introduction' tells the learners in brief what the Unit is about. It helps them to get ready for studying the Unit. It should be both informative and interesting to attract learner's attention. The introduction should include the purpose of the studying through the Unit, its thematic outline, and structural linkage with what has been discussed earlier and what is going to follow.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In order to carry out a research study, you have to first acquire relevant information on the subject. In other words, you have to collect data. This data is required to test your 'hypotheses' or generalizations that you have made for the time being. Let us suppose that as a researcher, you want to look into the relationships between study habits and achievement motivation of Undergraduate Students of IGNOU. For this, you have to select a few representative cases or samples from the entire population of undergraduate students of IGNOU. The process of selection demands thorough knowledge of various sampling techniques and data gathering tools. In this Unit, we shall familiarize you with the concepts of sample and population. We shall also discuss the characteristics of a good sample and the various methods of sampling.

Specimen from MADE, ES-315, Block 3, Unit 1

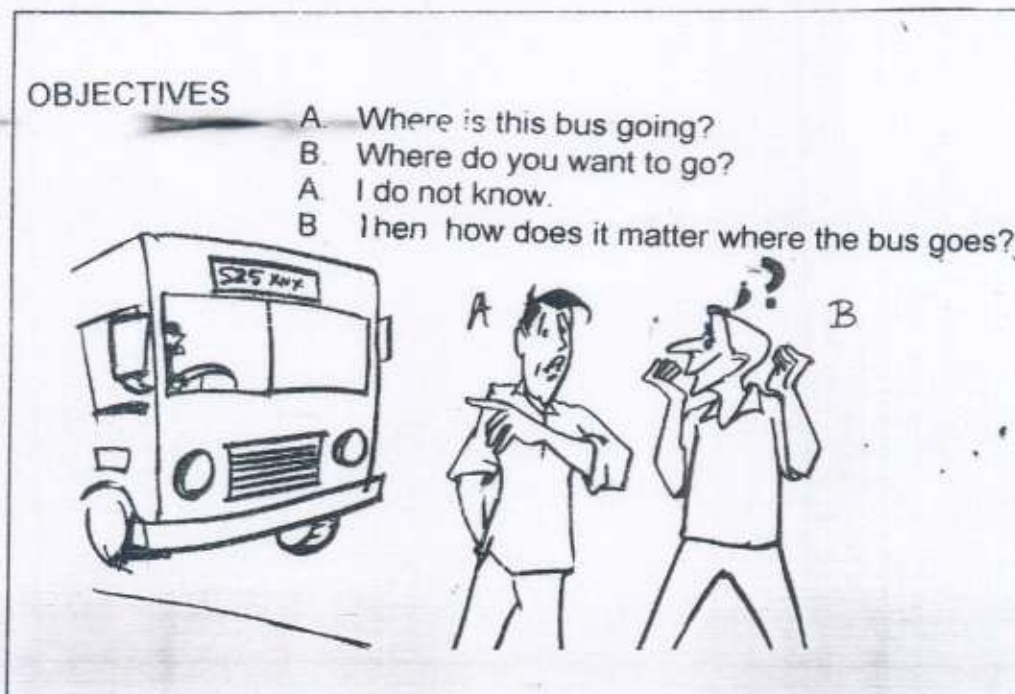
'Introduction' serves usually three main purposes:

- It establishes a *logical linkage* between the previous unit or knowledge and what is going to be presented in the following unit(s)
- It gives an *overview* of the content presented in the unit more explicitly than what the 'structure' i.e. list of contents does;
- It also gives the learners *study guidance* wherever needed as to how the learners can proceed or what the prerequisites are for their successful study of the unit;

## Objectives

The third feature you have to look for is the clearly stated objectives. The statement of objective is crucial because it makes explicit what the learners should be able to do after going through the Unit. The placement of these objectives is flexible. Of course, they should come at the beginning of the Unit but they may come before the introduction or with the introduction itself. Further, you have to check that these objectives are stated in behavioural terms. That is, the terminology to be used to state the objectives

should be descriptive (i.e., define, describe, list, explain etc.) or discriminative (i.e., illustrate, distinguish, etc.). Terms like know, understand, learn, etc. are to be avoided. The following list of examples will help us here.



### Sections and Sub-Sections

Then you have to check the sequencing of the content, whether it is logical and clear. Logical sequencing means development of ideas from easy to difficult, from known to unknown, from simple to complex. Clear structuring of the content means that you have to check whether the subject matter is divided into small bits, into clear sections and subsections with proper headings. Such division helps learners to recapitulate the main ideas and concepts in the Unit. There should be almost the same amount of content in each section. Lengthy paragraphs - running into pages - should be avoided. Smaller paragraphs increase readability and comprehension. You should also check whether each difficult idea should be explained with examples.

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## 1.5 THE SYSTEMS APPROACH TO COURSE PLANNING

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Distance education should be systematically planned, and the system shown in Figure 1 provides a framework for planning. Note that the order of

### 1.5.1 Educational needs

There is no need for further comment on this, except to stress that a consideration of educational needs must precede all other stages of planning. A wrong judgement about level of learning required, a poor choice of content, or a mismatch between course objectives and student aspirations can condemn a course to failure even before it is written.

### 1.5.2 Defining objectives

From a definition of needs, we arrive at broader *aims*. These provide a *general framework*. But for detailed planning, we need greater precision, and we can acquire this by defining objectives. A *statement of course objectives describes what learners will be able to do at the end*. Objectives will cover cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning as required. For example, courses for managers will normally have a number of affective objectives, arising from the need for managers to develop skills in managing personnel, as well as cognitive objectives concerned with learning about different theories and practices of management.

### 1.5.3 Resources and constraints

Once we have defined the objectives, we can make decisions about methods, in the light of the resources available to us and the constraints on their use. In figure 1 (see p. 22) 'resources' and 'constraints' are set beside 'objectives' to indicate that they are to some extent interdependent. Sometimes, course planners decide on all the objectives and then consider methods; at other times, certain constraints will exclude particular methods or objectives from consideration.

A specimen of Section and Sub-section: IGNOU course materials: PGDDE, ES-312, Block 2, Unit 1

### Self-assessment questions (SAQs)

You also need to check whether there are regular self-assessment questions, in text questions, activities and other interactive devices. Are these exercises etc. interesting and varied? Can the learners do them, using the information given in the text? Is the author asking learners to do something they're not equipped to do?

**Sample**

**Check Your Progress 1**

Describe the assumptions on which the use of parametric tests are based.

- Notes:** (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.  
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

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A specimen from MADE, ES-315, Block 4, Unit 2

**End of the Unit Features: Summary, Glossary, Further Reading**

The content should be summed up properly with concluding comments. There are different ways of summarising the unit. Here are some examples:

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**2.4 LET US SUM UP**

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In this Unit, we have attempted a discussion mainly about the meaning and relevance of the philosophical method of inquiry in educational research, and the different steps that need to be taken to conduct this kind of research in the area of education.

We have also discussed the significance of historical method, its application in the study of various educational problems, the collection and interpretation of data, and the main features of historical research in education.

Summary: a specimen from IGNOU course materials MADE, ES-315, Block 2, Unit 2



Glossary, if necessary, should be there to explain technical terms used in the text.

A list of further suggested readings and the title of the reference books used should also be there at the end of each unit or the Block in a style approved by the institution. The books should be (i) easily available (ii) readable and (iii) less expensive. We may even suggest a specific chapter from a book or an article from a journal. But they should be easily accessible, or made available to the learners.

**Examples:**

1. Chapter from a Book: Judith Calder, 1994 "Course Feedback: Its Costs and Benefits; its Limitations and Potential", in G. Dhanarajan, et al (eds) *Economics of Distance Education: Recent Experience*, Open Learning Institute Press, Hong Kong., 1994, pp. 241-255.
2. Article from a Journal: Rainer Ommerborn & Rudolf Schuemer, 2002 "Using Computers in Distance Study: Results of a survey amongst disabled distance students," *Indian Journal of Open Learning*, Volume 11, No. 1, January 2002, pp.51-72.
3. Book: Renga Ramanujam. P, 2002 *Distance Open Learning: Challenges to Developing Countries*, Shipra Publications, 115A, Shakarpur, Vikas Marg, New Delhi-110092.

At this point you will also have to check the adequacy of the length of the Unit. If it is too long or too short, you have to discuss with the writer what can be cut or added.

**Diagrams and Pictures**



You may introduce diagrams and pictures in the material, because a piece of continuous prose may not be the best way of presenting factual information. Many a time some other format would be clearer and more effective. The other format adds variety and interest to the text, and pictures, diagrams etc. can also often serve to transmit information in a simple and forceful way. So writers should be aware that a good picture often expresses its meaning better than words do. However, like any other part of a distance teaching text, pictures especially, are open to misunderstanding and therefore need careful testing. You should see that

- picture and text reinforce each other,
- only those objectives are shown which learners recognise easily,
- pictures are meaningful (not included just to brighten the page), and
- pictures are clear

When a piece of complex information is given, it may be better to use a diagram than prose, you will have to decide on the suitability of the diagram and choose the right kind among a "table", "flowchart", "bar chart", a "pie chart", etc. You should be sure that these charts are not used casually, they are only suitable for presenting specialised information. They should be developed clearly and logically. Check the accuracy of figures, and finally check the overall structure and presentation of the Unit.

Here is a sample check list for course writers and editors.

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### CHECK LIST FOR COURSE WRITERS/EDITORS

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#### Does the Introduction

- relate the present unit to the previous unit and the next unit to ensure continuity? Yes/No
- give reasons for studying the material with emphasis on relevance of the unit and application in daily life? Yes/No
- motivate the student so that he/she will go about studying the unit without a 'push'? Yes/No
- give a brief account of the theme(s) under discussion? Yes/No

#### Do the Objectives

- cover the entire unit content and emerge from close analysis of the topic? Yes/No
- contain clear behavioural statements? Yes/No

- help the student to assess his own learning? Yes/No
- set achievable tasks before the students? Yes/No
- Is the study material planned logically according to the development of the theme of the unit? Yes/No

### Is the Content

- divided into sections, each section having a manageable content density, a proper heading and labeling? Yes/No
- presented in a way to make it convenient and coherent reading? Yes/No
- designed to sustain student's interest by using examples, graphics, illustration, humour, anecdotes etc.? Yes/No
- stylistically personal and conversational? Yes/No
- presented so as to facilitate retention by use of tables, graphs and charts etc? Yes/No
- designed to contain examples relevant and familiar to the experience of the learner? Yes/No
- organised so that the in-text questions/problems provide feedback to learners about their progress and allow breaks in the learning activity come at the end of the unit? Yes/No
- planned so that its description and in-text questions are such that they develop skills of computation, analysis, interpretation and critical examination? Yes/No

### Does the Summary

- review the main points for recapitulation and reinforcement? Yes/No
- contain statements of major concepts? Yes/No
- refresh the learners' mind about what they have learnt? Yes/No

## Editing In Distance Education

**Does the unit contain a glossary of new terms/ concepts along with their working definitions?**

**Do the in text-questions and exercises**

- cover the whole content area? Yes/No
  - enable the learner to test mastery of the stated objectives? Yes/No
  - determine the objectives for which the learner's performance is poor and which part of the unit is to be covered again? Yes/No
  - have the answers, hints and answers to the intext questions been provided? Yes/No
  - has a list of books for further reading been given? Yes/No
- 

After checking the content, structure, language, diagrams, figures and pictures collate your comments and send them back to the author. As with all stages, scheduling is vital. Make sure that the material is sent back to the author before the deadline.

## LANGUAGE EDITING

The use of language in writing and editing distance teaching materials is very important. It is the *language* used that makes the self-learning material easy, learners friendly, comprehensible or difficult, interesting or boring. The language used by course writers should be simple and clear for effective communication with learners. Language editing is done to vet vocabulary and sentences used in the material. A language editor examines the simplicity and comprehensibility of the words used and makes necessary changes so that learners will have easy access to the content. Of course, the nature of language is determined by the nature of the discipline or the content.



(Curtsey: The Times of India)

The language used in self-instructional materials should be simple and clear for effective communication with learners.

The principles of language editing are applicable to all languages. However, but English or any foreign language causes additional problems, to our course writers in India such as, influence of mother tongue, confused expressions, wrong idioms, ungrammatical and/or unacceptable sentences alongwith many other common errors. As an editor you have to pay serious attention to

grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure. Of course, language editing depends on your knowledge and command over the particular language. If you do not feel confident you can always consult a language expert or leave this task for the "language editor".

**Simple Language :** First, you have to check whether the language is simple. Simplicity and clarity of language increase the speed of reading. These qualities persuade learners to read the text, participate in and interact with it and finally make them think critically about the content.

The term 'simple' is a relative term, as it is related to the level of learners, their level of comprehension and the level of the course. However, here, by simple language we mean straightforward, unambiguous language. The language should carry the message directly to the learners so that they do not have to rake their brains over the meanings of words and phrases. High sounding, difficult and many syllabled words should be replaced by more common, easily understandable, short words.

Similarly, if the sentences make you go through them again and again, to get the meaning, their structure must be difficult – lengthy and twisted. Simple, short and direct sentences are appreciated better. If you find lengthy sentences which make the meaning obscure, break them into two or more small simple sentences.

Here are two examples which illustrate that the message can be communicated more effectively through simple and straightforward language. 'A' is a badly written paragraph, followed by a second paragraph 'B' containing the same idea, rewritten:

**A) An example of impersonal writing**

*Supplies should be re-ordered in advance of their running out. The most efficient procedure for re-ordering is to take stock regularly, ordering all supplies which have run low, while bearing in mind the length of delivery time.*

*Precautions must also be taken against theft although damage of other kinds is also to be guarded against.*

**B) An example of personalized writing**

*You should re-order supplies before they are finished, not after. It is best to check the supplies every week. Make a note telling you how much is left of each item. Order the items which need replacing. Remember, you must often wait for several weeks until the manufacturers can deliver your order.*

*It is your job to protect your supplies. Make sure that thieves cannot enter the store. Also make sure that the supplies are safe from fire, rain and insects.*

If an idea is not clear in the written form, it is likely that the sentence is too long and complex. For example, "The treaty of Utrecht actually adopted a proposal attempted before the war, but whether it could have been adopted previous to the war is hypothetical, as war - wariness and a change of government in England were what brought a determination." It would have been simpler and clearer to say: "The proposals of the Treaty of Utrecht were not new, war-weariness and a change of government in England now made them possible."

There are some other features of effective writing.

Be simple - remove surplus words and use the simple expressions. For example mark the difference between the following sentences.

"In summary, there is great variation in the availability and quality of help offered by teaching staff to students with learning problems."

Its simpler form would be,

"Teachers vary in the study assistance they offer students."

So you as a language editor should check that the authors have not used more words than are necessary or used uncommon words unless they are needed.

**Avoid unnecessary repetitions :** unnecessary words and phrases should be avoided. Phrases such as, "true facts", "definite decision", "grave emergency", "free gift" or "final ultimatum" become redundant. The use of adjectives, especially of 'very', should be minimal.

**Be specific :** It is always better to choose words which are as specific as possible. General and abstract words too have their uses but these are rare. Too many abstract words create the impression that the writer is not sure of his subject. For example, most abstract nouns are vague concepts which are not experienced through the senses. So, a good rule is to change them back into the verbs from whence they came, (e.g. "his satisfaction was apparent" - "He was satisfied").

Thus, being specific is a good way of creating clear and precise usage that avoids ambiguity.

- **Avoid passive forms of verbs:** Active forms of verbs make communication more effective, so active verbs should be used wherever possible and desirable. For example- "This paper discusses the activity of x cells ....." or "The results indicate....." are better ways of expression than using passive voice in both the cases.

- **Avoid negatives:** Whenever a positive statement can be used instead of a negative one, use it. Negatives can also cause confusion, particularly when two or more are together in one sentence. For example, sentences like, "It was not that he didn't like the Queen...." Require an extra effort to understand. It is clearer to say "His feelings for the Queen were ....". Again, "it became impossible to not say that he hated it", is confusing.
- **Be economical with jargon:** It is easy to make writing sound impressive by the use of jargon when the author is saying very little.

Lengthy paragraphs should be avoided. Ideas should be developed gradually and logically. You, as an editor, should break running paragraphs into small, manageable, and comprehensible paragraphs.

Please note the following points too:

*Avoid*

- a) over punctuation
- b) quotations not very essential to the theme or those which are commonplace
- c) inconsistent spelling
- d) Indianisms
- e) direct speech (dialogues)
- f) inconsistent tense
- g) long sentences (of more than four typed lines or two printed lines)
- h) irregular word order
- i) cliches and worn out phrases
- j) superfluous words or phrases

*Use*

- a) popular i.e. frequently used forms of words
- b) British spelling as far as possible
- c) Indian words, where equivalents are not available
- d) simple but mature sentences
- e) proper punctuation
- f) verbal expressions rather than nominal expressions

One should remember that writing is a tool to communicate ideas, thoughts and messages. If the tool becomes complex and begins to sound so impressive that we become engrossed into it rather than the message, then it is not effective at all. The very best use of language conveys ideas and meanings so smoothly that the reader becomes interested in the ideas and the tool (language) is not noticed.

**Style:** Second significant feature of language editing is its concern with style. You have to see, whether the text is written in a personalized style or not. This



means that the style should be conversational, informal and direct. Personal pronouns, i.e., 'I', 'you', 'We' etc. should be used. A personalised style narrows the distance between the learner and the text material or the writer. It is necessary to write in a language which communicates directly with learners. Of course, it can be argued that every writer has his or her own style and that the style should match the subject and the content. Yes, we agree, however, you can modify it, if it is too formal and rigid.

Use of contractions such as isn't for is not: can't for cannot etc., is an accepted norm and desirable feature of self-instructional materials. Try to avoid "passive" expression of impersonal address, for example - 'a group discussion is needed after reading the Unit....' is too formal and impersonal. Instead you can write - "Read the Unit and then discuss the contents in a group."

Secondary, the style should vary. As a good teacher varies his style appropriately according to the content, the course writer should make the lesson interesting and lively, perhaps by fitting with it humour or anecdotes at appropriate places.

The style should be conversational, informal and friendly. The author should not appear aloof and academic all through. However, it is important that style needs to fit the subject. A course on philosophy ought obviously to be written quite differently from a course in physics, or nutrition. And within these subjects there are subtopics which require differences of treatment. There will be differences in the way the sentences are put together, and also in the way the subject-matter is broken up into sections and displayed.

### **Simple language, effective communication and readability**

A self-instructional lesson or unit should communicate with learners effectively and directly, which is possible when you use a simple and clear language. Your style should be personalised. Simple language increases the speed of one's reading and a personalised style narrows the communicational distance between the reader and the text or the writer. In other words, the readability of a text depends upon the simplicity of its language and the directness of expression and style.

### **Readability**

Readability is the quality of a text that grips your attention and persuades you to read further and comprehend the text without getting bored or tired. The flow of language and the clear, logical development of ideas in a text should encourage you to read more. When you get the satisfaction of having understood the idea or the argument of the text right at the beginning, you want

to go further, get more information, question the writer's ideas, investigate the truth of the writer's statements, criticise them and arrive at a balanced assessment of your own. How to read a self-learning text?

A self-learning text should persuade you to read it, participate in and interact with it before it makes us think critically about it. To help accelerate this process it is absolutely necessary to write in a language which communicates most directly. This is, in general, true of all good texts but it is imperative in distance teaching, to make communication effective and direct, as the learners have to learn independently.

*But how to produce a text that can communicate to us directly?*

*How to write in a simple language?*

*What do we mean by a simple language?*

*How simple should it be and simple for whom?*

*How to evaluate the difficulty level of language?*

These are questions that inevitably arise when we talk of simple language and readability.

### **Why simple language?**

By simple language we mean, language that is straightforward and relatively unambiguous in meaning. It should convey the message and the meaning of words and phrases clearly. If my lesson makes you consult the dictionary very often, it means I have used too many unfamiliar words. If the sentences vary lengthly and the sentence structures are difficult, twisted and complicated.

When we write for distance learners, we aim at communicating with them effectively. We want to keep up their speed of reading as well as their interest, in order to help them learn. For that, our language should be simple, plain and clear.

Construct your sentences in such a way as to communicate directly by using active voice, and by addressing the reader. As far as possible, keep your sentences short. Try to write simple sentences in place of complex sentences. If your sentence is too lengthy - even simple sentences can be very long - break it into two or more small, simple sentences you may ask: "Is it necessary that we should always write simple sentences?" Of course, compound and complex sentences have their own use but often you can manage with simple and short sentences.

At this point, we should remember that there is no hard and fast rule in using a particular sentence structure. Whether we use simple, compound, or complex sentences, we use them for specific purposes - look at the following sentence:

*'If you are afraid of the wolf, don't go hunting in the forest'*

It is a complex sentence. Try to break the sentence into two simple sentences and see the effect. You won't get the force and the punch of the original sentence in other forms of construction. But let us remember that it is not always possible or desirable to hold to any rigid 'rule'. What we said earlier about sentence structure should hold good for the use of verbs too. Whether to use just one verb or the main and the auxiliary verb will depend on what you really want to communicate.

## Paragraphing

Paragraphing is another important feature in writing. Even if your sentences, grammar and vocabulary are simple and very intelligible, lengthy passages may spoil the effect. As far as possible, present your ideas in their gradual, logical development, explaining each idea in one paragraph. If you pack your paragraph with very many ideas, you may be taxing the reader too much. The reader may find it difficult to comprehend and remember your arguments. Paragraphing, in fact, helps you to think more logically and present your ideas clearly. Development of ideas and transition of arguments must be clear from the way we paragraph.

## Style

There is no 'rule' to teach you as to how to develop a style. You must struggle hard to develop a style of your own. However, you can learn much from the different styles of various writers. Perhaps you may prefer one to the other. Some times you may try to imitate the style of your favourite writer, and you may be quite successful at that. Still, you must find your own way of writing which you think will convey your ideas most effectively. As the saying goes, "the style is the man", and your style, in some way, will reflect your personality.

## Conversational and friendly style

In distance teaching, a conversational and friendly style has an educational purpose. When you write a lesson, you are actually communicating with your learners. You want to speak to them through your writing. And so you try to write as you speak. Why do we emphasize this point? The reasons are pedagogic.

In the classroom your *voice and gestures* make your communication effective. In distance teaching, your *writing* should carry your voice to the readers. You may be physically absent, but you can make your readers hear you, see you, and even observe your gestures through your style. But you should know how to write in a conversational style.

## Use personal pronouns

When you and I have something to talk about, we talk directly. I may say, for example: "You seem to be right. But I have a few questions to ask you". This will be the mode of our dialogue or conversation. We acknowledge each others presence. This recognition brings us closer and makes our communication direct.

Impersonal style alienates us because we miss the rapport between interlocutors. Suppose I write: "The author desires that the reader recall what transpired between them during their chance meeting not so long ago". Do you see any warmth in such a style? The same thing could be said like this instead, "Could you recall the discussion we had when we met casually some time ago?"

## Your style should vary according to the subject

Even a simple writing style can be dull and monotonous, if you don't vary it a little. Check at every stage of your writing whether the language is simple and the style lively, suitable to express your ideas. An idea can be expressed in so many ways. Choose the most appropriate and effective one.

The style should also match the subject. When you want to describe a solemn or tragic event, you wouldn't try to be humorous, would you? Again when you are explaining a scientific law, or a mathematical formula it is difficult to vary the style, apart from making your points clear in different ways. Of course, you could give humorous examples, like Einstein did!

Einstein was once asked by a young man whether the *Theory of Relativity* could be explained in simple terms. Einstein replied in the affirmative. The young man asked how. Einstein seemed to have replied:

*"If you wait for your lady love at the bus stop for five minutes, you would feel that you have waited for five hours. When your lady love turns up, and after having spent five hours talking to her you feel that you have hardly spent any time with her. This is Theory of Relativity on the concept of Time".*

Another version of Einstein's humour is as follows:

*"When you are courting a nice girl, an hour seems like a second. When you sit on a red-hot cinder a second seems like an hour. That's relativity".*

Some writers can make even the driest and the most difficult subject both interesting and clear, while some can just be clear. Both are successful, so far as they aim at teaching. However, the first category of writers do a little more than teaching: They command the readers attention quickly and persuade them to read and learn. Read the following passage from Dostoyevsky's *Poor People*:

*"My dearest Varvara Alexeyevna,*

*To continue our talk of yesterday. Let me tell you, my dear, that once upon a time I too was a featherbrained young man, thoroughly smitten with an actress, but the funniest part was that I had practically never seen her except that once in the theater. And yet I was in love, head over ears. My neighbors at the time were five boisterous young men with whom I grew friendly almost against my will; I kept my distance, at first. Not to be a killjoy, however, I listened and nodded in agreement. The things they told me about that actress!"*

How do you like the above passage? Don't you feel like reading the whole novel? Or the entire works of Dostoyevsky?

### **Evaluating the difficulty level of language**

Print material, is often the only source of the self-learning material for students in poor countries. They are prepared in the form of instructions, case studies, articles, technical reports or text books. Of course, other components such as diagrams, maps, charts, figures, tables, practical tasks and exercises also become an integral part of the printed learning material. However, we consider only the *textual* components in terms of their difficulty and level of readability.

Psychologists, educationists, and language experts have conducted extensive research to evaluate the language level suitable for particular groups of learners. Their findings and recommendations can help us to some extent in writing lessons for distance learners. However, we should keep in mind certain general guidelines to evaluate the level of difficulty of language. You could, of course, merely trust your own judgement as to the relative difficulty of the learning material, a judgement that may be based upon years of experience.

However there are two methods of evaluating the level of the language used in self-learning material. They are:

- i) *The Fog Index*
- ii) *The Cloze Test*
- iii) *The Complexity Quotient*

**i) Fog Index**

Gunning (1968) says that the two things that make a text 'foggy' or difficult to read, are: the number of words of three or more syllables and long sentences. The formula that Gunning created, and which is used to calculate a *Fog Index*, is given below:

$$\text{Fog Index} = (\text{Average number of words per sentence} + \text{Percentage of words with three or more syllables}) \times 0.4$$

You could go through this activity, which will help you calculate the Fog Index of the learning materials that you develop or edit.

In Figure 2, you will come across two paragraphs of 100 words each. Read through both paragraphs and decide which of them is more difficult and why, as well as what it is about one of the two paragraphs that makes it more difficult to study?

**Paragraph 1**

A major problem facing both the writer of distance teaching material and students is workload. In conventional teaching it is possible to continually assess teaching, to finish a session early or return to it the following week. In distance teaching the problem is to assemble a package of material that can be studied by the majority of learners within the allocated time. The lengthy material makes excessive demands on everyone associated with it. The author who writes it, the printers or software specialists who put it into the required format and the editors and graphic designers who put it into the house style.

**Paragraph 2**

A typical ethical dilemma arises in deciding on whether to deceive participants, even if this will be only temporary. Some researchers react to this dilemma by arguing for an absolute code of ethics, which would prohibit any researcher to use certain practices under any circumstances; others would leave such decisions to the conscience of the individual researcher concerned. These decisions are complex since they ultimately involve a judgment as to the practical value of the research project. In the paragraphs below, the trade off that often occur between ethical and other commitments, in making a particular research decision, are discussed.

Figure 2: Calculating the Fog Index of the textual material (Courtesy: Fred Lockwood, 1998)

There are 100 words in each of the two paragraphs in Figure 2. Paragraph 1 and paragraph 2 consists of seven sentences, of four sentences. The average

numbers of words per sentence in the two paragraphs are thus 14.3 and 25 respectively.

In the top paragraph there are 11 words of three or more syllables (the percentage is therefore 11), and in the bottom paragraph there are 25 words; so we have a percentage of 25. If the data is inserted in the formula, the Fog indices for the two paragraphs are 10.12 and 20.00 respectively.

Fog Index (top paragraph) =  $(14.3+11) \times 0.4 = 10.12$

Fog Index (bottom paragraph) =  $(25.0+25) \times 0.4 = 20.00$

It is clear, that the first paragraph is more readable than the second.

Gunning spent years investigating the readability of textual material in a whole range of academic and technical areas and with a broad range of learners of different ages.

You may find it useful to discover the Fog Index of the material you present to your learners and check what others believe should be the typical index range of appropriately pitched material. However, we do not have to do this mechanically as explained in the above example. Computer software is now available that will assemble different indices and will do this automatically.

For example, a facility is available (when using the Grammar tool in Microsoft Word) that will allow you to calculate an index of readability called the *Flesch Reading Ease Score*. This is a widely used index and has been demonstrated to be extremely reliable in predicting the difficulty of prose text. When Flesch Reading Scores were calculated for the two paragraphs in Figure 2 the following indicators were available in seconds:

	First paragraph	Second paragraph
<b>Counts</b>		
Words	100.00	100.00
Characters	483.00	543.00
Paragraphs	1.00	1.00
Sentences	7.00	4.00
<b>Averages</b>		
Sentences per paragraph	7.00	4.00
Words, per sentence	14.29	25.00
Characters per word	4.74	5.35
<b>Readability</b>		
Passive sentences	14.29	00.00
Flesch Reading Ease	52.75	32.56

Figure 3: indicators to find out the difficulty for text material  
(Courtesy: Fred Lockwood, 1998)

Lockwood (1998) explains that the indicators confirm that there are 100 words in each of the above paragraph. The first paragraph has seven sentences and the second paragraph has four; the average number of words per sentence are 14.29 and 25 respectively. The *Flesh Reading Ease Score* is based on the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence with scores ranging from 0 to 100. Lockwood suggests that standard writing averages should be between 60 and 70 with a high score indicating the greater number of people who can readily understand the text. In the case of the two paragraphs cited above the scores are 52.75 and 32.56, and the second paragraph is considered significantly more difficult than the first. One can easily guess that this is fairly obvious from one's casual reading of the two paragraphs. These days we have the computer software to check the whole booklets or even courses in this way in a relatively short time.

Computer software also helps us to check spelling and even grammar. However, one must have the necessary basic knowledge of grammar, syntax, idioms, vocabulary etc. in order to decide whether the computer software is really helpful or not in a given linguistic context. For our purpose it will be enough to note the differences in spelling between British English and American English. We must remember that the computer software that we generally use is always based on American English, although we in India follow the British spelling.

#### ii) Cloze Test

The Cloze Test is a simple exercise, something like 'fill in the blanks'. Some samples of the textual material from which a series of words are deliberately omitted, and the missing words are to be filled in.

*It was four o'clock in the morning when a banging on the gate was heard, the banging was so thunderous that it quite rewarded all the inmates for their pains and efforts, and the hours of waiting. It was he, Semyon Ivanovich himself, Mister Prokharchin, only he was in such a state that everyone gasped and never gave a thought to the dummy sister-in-law.*

From the above passage try to remove every third word and see how the passage reads!

Typically we delete every fifth or seventh word in a passage used as a close test. The words written in the subject are compared with a short list of acceptable words. The Cloze Test should be very simple to conduct and score. It is very valid and reliable in predicting the reliability of prose material, as it measures what is designed to measure and does so consistently.



Lockwood says:

"It is because of this that colleagues within the OU (Scott and Macdonald-Ross, 1995) administered three short Cloze Tests to approximately 3,000 students as part of their postal survey of OU students' reading skills. The sample included students from all five foundation courses and four levels of educational qualification" (Lockwood, 1998).

The reliability and validity of the tests were formed to be quite high.

### iii) The Complexity Quotient

Rowntree (1990) suggests a short-cut to judge the difficulty level of one's writing. He calls it the Complexity Quotient which simply means the *average* number of long words per sentence.

To calculate it:

1. X = Count the number of complete sentences you have on a page.
2. Y = Count the number of 'long words' (three or more syllables).
3. Divide X by Y (X/Y).

If your complexity quotient exceeds 3, your prose will be more difficult than that of most novels and, indeed, of most top-selling authors writing for non-specialists. You may like to check this quotient for the kinds of material you know your learners do find readable. (Rowntree, 1990, pages 230-231)

Fog Index, Cloze Test and Complexity Quotient are rough and-ready tools useful to check on the material that looks difficult. More than any of these formulas, your practice of writing can help you judge the difficulty level of your language. If you are sensitive to it, you can detect at a glance or instinctively feel where your language is getting out of control. You have to mentally struggle with words and construct the sentences many times before you finally put your sentences down on paper. Clear language reflects clear thinking; it means hard work.

What we have said with regard to the above examples in English, is true of all languages. Writing with clarity in any language is a proof of the writer's firm grasp of the subject. Whatever one's specialisation, if one's language is shaky, then writing for distance learners becomes difficult.

#### Activity 5:

Chose two passages from two different books. Apply Robert Gunning's 'Fog Index' formula. Find out the difficulty levels of the language i.e., the Fog Index in both the passage. (You may use a separate sheet)

## Editing of Materials Written in English

If language editing could be done by the course authors or the content editors themselves it would be good. But in a bilingual or multi-lingual situation where the medium of instruction is *not* the mother tongue of the writers and the readers (learners), then a number of problems arise in the entire process of educational transaction including editing of materials written in English. In India and many other developing countries *English* still remains the main instructional medium at the level of higher education, but the course writers with different discipline backgrounds may not have the necessary command of English, especially *written English* to edit their own courses.

Whatever the debate on the status and the role of English, the desirability or otherwise of continuing it at all the levels of education in countries like India, we have to accept the fact that for historical reasons English has been playing a crucial role in all the erstwhile British colonies even after the colonies have become independent. This role is to be seen in the day-to-day affairs of the state, the institutions, and the individuals in any country of the Commonwealth. The role of English in education in general and in higher education in particular cannot be ignored by these countries. Even if alternatives are possible, they cannot be brought in over night. In such a situation, we have to use English the way it can serve us best.

The issues related to English as a medium of instruction in distance education in 11 Commonwealth countries have been studied in depth by Koul and Creed (1991). Others have drawn the attention of distance educators to the various issues of language as a crucial factor in the practice of distance teaching.

In all these studies, we notice one common issue that stands out prominently: the need for improving the four basic skills of distance learners to cope with their study materials written in English: *reading, writing, speaking and listening*.

What is true of the distance learners is also true of the distance education course writers/ authors in the developing countries. The writers who write the learning materials in English do not usually have the required command of or the facility with English language which they would have acquired as a second or third language under extremely adverse conditions. It is not uncommon to see academics with doctoral degrees speaking and writing poor English. Since there were/are no instant remedial measures to correct their English, they continue with their own English, which may be pardonable in informal situations but unacceptable in formal and professional contexts. More over, language becomes crucial in determining the quality of content and its presentation.

Many course writers who write their units/lessons in their respective disciplines cannot simply overcome their linguistic limitations, unless they make conscious efforts over a period of time with proper back up.

Though we can find *explanations* for the phenomenon in Linguistics (historical linguistics, socio-linguistics and psycho-linguistics) we cannot find *solutions* to the problems created by incorrect uses of a language, particularly English which remains the mainstay of writing distance education courses in the Commonwealth countries.

### Possible Solution

The only solution that seems possible in the present situation is to get the units linguistically edited by those who have a reasonable command of English. Here, two things are important. The subject expert must realize that unless his expertise is expressed through the medium of (English) language, practically it (i.e. 'the expertise') has no value and academically it cannot enjoy any status; and the language expert, on his part must know that his job is to present the content in the best possible manner without distorting the ideas and the concepts discussed by the writers. Neither the content expert nor the language expert should claim superiority over the other, if their efforts have to bear fruit. During the process of language editing the following must get the primary attention:

- The linguistic abilities of the learners
- The level of the language to match the level of the content
- Grammar and spelling
- Vocabulary and technical terms
- Syntax and idioms
- Simplicity and clarity
- Conversational and friendly style

The language editor as well as the course writer should have some idea about the linguistic competence of the learners whose mother tongue is not English. But who are your learners? It is an extremely difficult and complex question to answer. In a country like India, if you consider the range of learners of whatever programme you choose, you are bound to meet with a heterogeneous variety with varying linguistic abilities and skills in English from the poorest to the best. For example, is there a definite standard to measure the linguistic competence of a student who has completed his school finals? The answer is an emphatic 'no', because the standards vary from school to school and from region to region.

It is this indeterminable state of the linguistic competence of the distance learners that results in their disappointing performance, particularly if the

admission policies of distance teaching institutions are liberal. We the academics responsible for the content and its presentation must arrive at a conclusion about our average learner and pitch the language accordingly. Our notional standard of expected linguistic competence of the learner to complete the given course will certainly help us determine the difficulty level of the presentation of the content.

Of course, the difficulty level of language will depend on the nature and density of content. You may have noticed that in many courses meant for the first year students of B.A. or B.Sc of the Indian Open Universities the content level is quite high and dense and the presentation is hardly conversational or friendly. This is so, because there has been little or no appreciation of the linguistic competence and previous knowledge of the learners.

As a rule of thumb, at least we should, and we can, ensure the following:

- Writing the correct sentences (i.e. without grammatical errors)
- Avoiding spelling errors
- Following the UK or USA spelling consistently (I would follow the UK spelling as it is widely used in our country)
- Writing simple and short sentences
- Using active voice wherever possible
- Using the correct idioms, phrases and expressions
- Employing personalized, conversational and friendly style to make the text user friendly and also make the learner feel that you are talking to him through your writing (e.g. "You", "I", "We").

The language editor can always consult the content expert while presenting the concepts and difficult ideas. The language editor may not be familiar with certain technical terms and discipline – specific jargon, and because of the unfamiliarity with the subject matter, he may "correct" the text. The 'corrections' will become errors and will result in confusion. Therefore, wherever the language editor has doubts about the concepts and the ideas presented in the text he should consult the content expert before correcting the language. The same applies to editors of content who 'correct' the language of the language editor!

## PRODUCTION STAGE: COPY EDITING AND PRINTING

Copy editing and printing are the most mechanical aspects of course production. These are also the aspects common to the editing of text books and journals. Nevertheless, they are as important in the production of self-learning materials as are the other kinds of editorial work. Once you are through with checking all the aspects of the content and the structure of the written material, you can start preparing the manuscript or the Camera Ready Copy (CRC) for the printer. You should give clear instructions to the typist/software specialist on the following:

- Starting a unit (with a new page)
- Indicating section headings (in capital or bold letters)
- Laying out exercises (whether they should be in a frame, or the space for writing answers to be indicated in lines or dots)
- Identifying special features like objectives, main points, summaries, etc.
- Arranging paragraphs (leaving uniform space between paragraphs)
- Allotting space for activities, exercises, tables, schemes, diagrams and illustrations, and
- Punctuation marks.

### Copy Editing

The next step is 'copy editing'. Although considered the most ordinary and mechanical aspect of editing, copy editing is an equally important feature of editorial work in the preparation of self-instructional materials. These features are common to editing of conventional text books, journals and self-instructional materials. In distance education, however, copy editing is the task of copy-editor and the editor's job is to interact constantly with the copy-editor. As an editor you should know the relationship between copy editing and pedagogy. To make self-instructional material effective, you need to know the purpose of access devices, spacing, graphics, illustrations etc. You should also be able to judge whether these devices are pedagogically strong or weak. You may ask the copy-editor to check that all technical terms are explained, paragraphs are neatly arranged; exercises and tables are properly laid out.

All corrections in the text should be clearly marked so that the typist knows the intentions behind the corrections. Get the script retyped. Make two copies of the script. Give one to the printer and keep one with yourself for future reference. The extract given below will give you an idea about copy editing.

When you 'copy edit' you check whether: the language is clear, all the technical terms are explained, headings of sections and sub-sections are properly indicated, paragraphs are neatly arranged, and your instructions on lying out exercises, tables, etc. have been carried out. In other words, you develop a house style and follow it meticulously. Make two copies of this script. Give one to the printer and keep the other safely with you for checking or future use.

**Specimen: Copy edited page**

**1.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The purpose of this unit is to show you that

- i) the different educational systems being practised in India in the past few thousand years came into being because of the frequent changes in the society, and
- ii) changing attitudes towards education make distance education a socio-political imperative.

You will have formed by the end of this Unit a compendious account of the evolution of distance education in the world. You will also have known the factors that brought about educational changes in India. Further, this Unit enables you to appreciate the relevance and efficacy of distance education in India.

**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

The conventional face-to-face system of education, being inadequate to accommodate the growing needs of the society, distance education has been recognised as an effective alternative educational system.

This Unit gives you an outline of the societal changes that caused significant changes in the sphere of education. Having gone through diverse phases of educational systems, for various socio-political and pedagogical reasons, India can not solely rely on the conventional educational system which is confined to the word of mouth. An upsurge of enrolment rate in the educational institutions is one of the vital factors that makes distance mode of teaching and learning a social imperative.

**1.2 IMPACT OF SOCIETAL CHANGES ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF INDIA**

If we go by Macaulay's comment (that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia) on education in India and his contention for introducing the English language in the Indian educational system, it may sound presumptuous to suggest that we had any system of education before the British colonized India. However, one is forced to think differently when one considers the amount and the quality of scholarly work that is evidenced by not only the extant Vedic literature, but also by what followed it till the British Raj started in India. Let us elaborate on this point. The educational systems in India, over the past few thousand years frequently changed from time to time, in accordance with the societal changes.

*The educational system(s) in India over the past few thousand years changed from time to time because of the socio-political changes. Although the contributions to various branches of knowledge and culture by the Indian educational systems cannot be denied or under-rated, the fact remains that education as such was limited to a comparatively limited number of people. Mass education and democratisation of education are of relatively recent origin. But the education accessible to a few elite past and now few years from changes in educational systems are affected by historical necessity. Let us briefly sketch the different educational patterns in India at various historical stages.*

An example of Content Editing

## POST PRODUCTION RESPONSIBILITIES

You have to maintain your contact with the Courses even after they are produced. The cycle of reviewing the effectiveness of the learning package does not end once the material is produced. Someone will have to 'maintain' the course and collect evidence on the performance of the material. You have to make the necessary changes in the course to maintain its quality.



I have been living here undisturbed for years — thanks to a couple of those boards I picked up somewhere!

(courtesy: *The Times of India*)

### Maintaining Quality

This task pertains to revising, reshaping and updating the materials as the on-going process of distance teaching. A good and comprehensive text may become inadequate or outdated soon. However, distance education courses have a 'life span' of a few years, generally five to seven years. That is, a distance education course is not discarded after using it for just one batch of learners.

To maintain the standard and quality of the distance teaching materials you have to keep a watchful eye on further developments in the field concerned as well as the new techniques/designs for preparing quality texts for our learners. Quality of distance education courses depends on the following considerations:

- i) the learner group (its level, ability, motivation, aspirations etc.)
- ii) the content coverage (the veracity, relevance and adequacy of content), and
- iii) the unit design/structure (the efficiency of the instructional design employed).

As an editor you will need to identify and deal with errors that have crept in, by keeping a record of points that need updating in the master copy. So your first step in this regard will require gathering information regarding the course performance. The information can be collected either from systematic feedback from course users or through unsystematic collection of relevant feedback.

**Systematic feedback:** Systematic feedback from course users can be obtained from two sources

- the records of learners' scores on assignments
- the learner's assessment of the course materials.

A periodic review of learner's scores on assignments will lead you to identify which of the assignments do badly and thereon where the source of difficulty lies.

The source of difficulty may lie either in the assignment or in the respective units or course materials leading to the assignment. If the difficulty lies with the assignment, the sources of the difficulties may be traced back to anyone or a combination of the following:

- i) The learner ability assumed may be much higher than the actual level of learner-ability, and consequently the expected standard/level of performance may be unreasonably high.
- ii) The objective(s) or the task(s) set in the assignment may not reflect the objective(s) or the learning experiences) of the Unit that it is based on.
- iii) The presentation of the assignment may be defective-the learner getting a partially or totally different idea of the task required of him/her from what the course writer intended to give.

In any of these cases the assignment should be modified. If none of these is really the source of difficulty and if still the learners have fared badly in dealing with the assignment, then you will have to check the Unit concerned and discuss the matter with the subject expert.



**Learners' Assessment :** us learners' assessment of the course material can help us in the process of checking the course materials. Learners' assessment can be obtained by presenting an 'assessment questionnaire' with every assignment/unit and getting the learners' response to it.

The major difficulty with such assessment questionnaire is the huge size of information collected that you have to process through. If a computer is available to you, then your job is much easy..But one must get the time to do that.

You may also collect information through several other methods. These methods include sending of 'course comments' page or a 'difficulty sheet' with every course book and ask the learners to return them with their remarks. This way learners may write on the difficulties or problem they face while going through the course. They can also point the 'errors' that they notice. The illustrations given below will help us here.

**Illustration 1:**

Tick the appropriate box to indicate what you feel about the Unit.	
The Units was i)	
Stimulating	<input type="checkbox"/>
Boring	<input type="checkbox"/>
Demanding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informative	<input type="checkbox"/>

Statements of opinion which the learner is to endorse on a 4-point or 5-point scale.

**Illustration 2:**

"The Unit presents too much data to keep track of the main argument"				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Tick the appropriate box to indicate the extent of your agreement/ disagreement with the statement)				

Sometimes each box is given a verbal description as in the following illustration.

**Illustration 3 :**

The problems that are given in the assignment are:			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
much too difficult	slightly difficult	just right	too easy

[Note that in illustration 1 each box represented a different attribute. But in illustration 3 the boxes represent the different degrees of the same attribute (namely, 'facility' of the assignment problem)]

**Unsystematic collection of information**

Some times even an angry letter from a dissatisfied learner or an expression of disappointment from too keen a learner may contain some useful hints to maintain/improve course quality.

You may also get 'errors' pointed out by faculty members of the University.

Academic-counselors, who mark the response sheets, can also identify errors if a majority of learners have proceeded on a misunderstanding. These academic-counselors may also write to you or the University suggesting the ways to rectify the defect.

You can also collect the views of subject experts, faculty of similar universities, and prospective learners.

Members of the faculty of the university can elicit frank views of students during the seminars, summer schools or any other gathering at study centers. Faculty members can forward the opinion thus collected, to you.

The chart (Lewis & Meed, 1986: 154-5) presented below summaries the different ways of collecting data during the development and monitoring of open-learning materials. It also sets out the advantages and disadvantages of the various methods and suggests how appropriate each is in open learning.

Method	Advantage (Example Only)	Disadvantage (Example Only)	Appropriateness for Open Learning
Pre-and post-testing of all or a sample of learners, on some or all of this objectives	Makes it possible to assess learning progress	Data needs supplementing by other data	Yes
Validation	Large-scale trial run under real conditions	Requires resource and careful timing	Yes
Tutor's views	Can spot different learners' experiences (e.g. via telephone calls and assignments)	May not be representative; tutors have their own hobby-horses	Yes
Learners list best/worst things about each module	Shows priorities. Frequency of mention is significant	Only involves items at the extremes	Yes
Structured questionnaire to elicit learner views of material	Easily analysed	Can avoid all the 'real' questions	Yes
Developmental testing	Spontaneous. Rich and varied data can be collected	Interpretation can be difficult. Lacks precision	Can be adapted to suit open learning
Learner diaries/files, recording reactions to the materials	Immediate Catches what the learner feels at the time	Can be wordy. Hard to analyse	Possible
Discussion about the materials with a group of learners	A number of views aired. Learners can think of more points than when on their own. Chance to draw out and explore views	Can be dominated by one or two confident learners who may not be representative. Easy to 'lose' data	Difficult
In-depth interviews with individual learners	Probe reasons for queries	Time-consuming	Difficult

Note: Collecting information from a variety of sources uses the strengths of different methods.

### Keeping 'marked copy'

Thus collecting requisite information for quality maintenance of distance education courses is a continuous and lengthy process. Information is not gathered at one sitting, nor from one single source. The information keeps coming from different sources round the year. Hence it is necessary to

develop and maintain a device to keep record of all pieces of relevant information that are obtained from time to time and through various sources.

For this purpose a 'corrections file' for each course should be maintained. This file is to be opened as soon as a course is printed. All information pertaining to the corrections needed and difficulties experienced should be placed in this file besides, a copy of the course book should be retained with this file exclusively for the purpose of marking errors. This will be your 'marked copy'. The marking should preferably be made with some bright colours, in red ink, for example.

Observations are helpful to update the course on the bases of post-publication developments in the area concerned, such as the additional information made available, changes in the resources linked with the course, etc. should also be marked in the relevant places in the 'marked copy' for corrections. The 'marked copy' and corrections file' should be kept safe because these will be the documents to base the quality maintenance operations on.

On the basis of the information collected and received, you may decide whether the course requires maintenance, revision or withdrawal.

### Course maintenance operations

In the first two years of launching a course it is the maintenance operations rather than revision operations that the university should think of practicing.

**Deciding on the corrections to be made:** When the error-data are collected you must decide in respect of each correction – whether it is to be dealt with urgently, or perhaps, it can wait.

At this point, you have to decide whether leaving a correction unattended to will seriously affect the understanding of a learner. That is, you should decide as to which errors are serious enough, as to warrant immediate remedial treatment which, if allowed to stay uncorrected, are likely to mislead the learners.

The choice of the terms or notes to be corrected immediately should be made on the basis of the seriousness of error(s) involved. The amount or extent of change required, the resources needed to bring about such a change and the availability of such resources may constitute a secondary but important consideration.

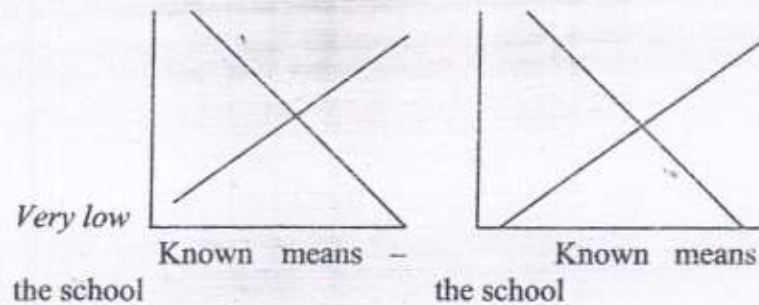
**Course Maintenance:** When you identify developmental and production errors, they need immediate attention soon after the course is put to use. Timely attention to such problems makes the *course grow forcefully clear* with the passage of time.

For course maintenance, you have to be concerned with the following activities:

- Dealing with the errors that escaped the attention of the proof readers
- Changing a word or phrase or a mark of punctuation here and there
- Occasionally reprinting a short section or two if the errors therein are too many to list down and to rectify or too complicated to explain to be readers.

**Corrigendum : Block 1 of Course 1**

Page No.	Line	Please read	In the place of
		Growth and Present Status	History and Present Status
8		Pastoral India (PI)	Pastoral India
8	6	Streams of education-the <i>Pathshala</i> and the <i>Madrassa</i>	Streams of education the <i>Pathshala</i> and the <i>Madrassa</i>
9	14	Before long-education	Before long education
9	3 <sup>rd</sup> Column	Teacher/Student relationship	Teacher Student
10		Relative rise and fall ..... general	Relative fall and rise ..... general
11		<i>Very high</i>	



12 6

You have to keep in mind that redrafting or reprint of the course material at this level will be kept to be minimum.

When you identify the errors that need immediate attention, you can prepare *errata*. The *errata* must contain an index column (locating precisely the context of the error) an error column (whether a phrase, word or line is given

with the error component clearly marked) and a correcting column (where you present what the corrected version should read like).

The *errata* must be dated and coded. This will help you when you want to replace earlier *errata* with an updated version. It is likely that more errors are discovered on a later data or errors taken to be inconsequential at one time turn out to be serious ones with a particular learner group.

The shorter the length of the *errata* the easier its use and the greater its usefulness. You have to be very careful regarding the inclusion or errors. There may be errors which you can reasonably expect your learners to identify and rectify themselves. Or, there may be some mistakes which may not cause any hindrance in getting the message across. You can keep such errors out of your errata sheet. When the errata is short, a learner may carry out the corrections in the 'text' with ease, before he starts studying it.

Where mistakes are more substantial, you had better rewrite and print a page or few pages rather than include lengthy lists or passages in the errata.

Rewriting part of a course is admissible in yet another situation – when the purpose is that of updating. But it should not be attempted just because you find a part of your course slightly unsatisfactory. You had better allow it to stay till the course is revised.

When you have to update a part of the course content, you can prepare and issue an updating or supplementary booklet depending on the length of 'content' you are updating. Issuing these slips is easier and more pragmatic than revising the course just for the purpose of updating part.

## Course Revision

Revision operations are much more elaborate and broad based than maintenance operations. Consequently, they involve more time, money, planning and effort. An institution cannot generally afford to spend its resources to revise a course after every course term or two. On the other hand the course revision operations should not be delayed beyond seven or ten years of course use. The general policy is to check whether a course needs revision after reasonable period of its being in use, say five to seven years. Course revision is then to be thought of under following circumstances.

- When the course becomes too old fashioned to continue in use.
- The quantum of course maintenance activities becomes too large and relatively more expensive than course revision.

Course revision is always taken up on a planned basis and it should be initiated only when you are sure that it cannot be postponed any further.

Periodic check on the course will help you in deciding whether a course revision is necessary or not. The sources, such as, the corrections file, learners comments, their assessment, comments of external authorities on the subject, consultations with experts etc., will help you to check the level of urgency for effecting revision(s).

Now, yet another question comes up – what are the other considerations which may guide you in the regard? They are:

- i) **The 'age' of the course** – If the course has become very old, say more than a decade, it should be revised.
- ii) **The degree of its success** – You can allow your course to continue without revision, if positive comments from your learners and academic-counselors outweigh the criticism from other quarters.
- iii) **The period of its operation** – The course must have been in operation long enough to give you a clear picture of what revisions are needed.
- iv) **The stock position** – If the existing stock level is high, a revision may mean a waste of existing stock.
- v) **The 'life expectancy' The stock position** – If the course is not to be of use of if it is not expected to be inconsiderable demand after one or two years, revisions may be uneconomical.
- vi) **The students strength** – If student strength is low, revision may be unduly costly and, perhaps, inadvisable.
- vii) **The availability of finance and workforce** – Revision is feasible only if these two are available to meet the minimum requirements.
- viii) **The institutional priority** – Priorities may vary from institution to institution, between revising an old course and introducing a new one.

When you decide on course revision, you will also have to decide what to revise and how to revise. You will need to modify those parts

- which are found too difficult for the learner to follow
- which effect bad teaching/learning
- which have become out of date

So, at the level of course revision your concern will be with almost similar details as in course maintenance but a more liberal attitude towards redrafting parts of course material is the normal practice. Parts of the whole of Units/Blocks may be rewritten, if necessary.

Now, whom should we contact to effect the revision? Of course, the best person to revise a course is the original writer. If it is not possible to get him/her to this task, you can request one or more of the university faculty to do the job. You, as the course editor can do it yourself rather than entrusting it to some outsider. You can always consult experts in the subject or language for the purpose.

## Course Withdrawal

If you find the whole course needs substantial change, you should think of replacing it with a different course rather than revising it. In such cases of replacement, the question of course maintenance or course revision does not arise at all. Such cases form a third approach to quality maintenance operations. At times a course may have to be withdrawn on considerations, which are not necessarily academic – this too is possible!

In the cases of fast changing content, it is important to update the courses very quickly and substantially. Technology based courses, for example, need to be updated from time to time because of the rapid developments that take place in this field. As a general rule, it is better to develop courses with a relatively short shelf life in such situations. Course withdrawal, then, will be an easy proposition. In other cases, datedness of the content, major political and ideological changes, philosophical or paradigm shifts etc, may also warrant withdrawal of courses.



## SUMMARY

Editing of distance learning materials is a highly specialized task in the context of India and other Commonwealth countries where English is used as instructional medium but not spoken as the mother tongue of the learners or teachers. These aspects become crucial in the process of editing the study materials written in English.

- **Content editing**
- **Instructional design or Format editing**
- **Language editing**

*Content Editing* would involve the appropriateness of the level, adequacy of coverage and presentation of the content recommended for a course. Although courses are written by different course-writers, content editing of individual units, the flow of content across the units within a course must be checked for logical progress of ideas and arguments. Quite often there will be overlapping of the same content, since the units are written by different authors who may not consult each other on what they write. It is the job of the content editor to identify and delete repetitions, unnecessary details, avoidable controversies, accuracy of information, appropriateness of the contents in a unit or a course, adequacy of treatment, clarity of ideas, usefulness of examples, and the rest of issues related to the academic credibility of the courses and programmes. Usually, a senior academic takes the responsibility of editing the content as a Chief Editor. If the Chief Editor is available within the institution it will be very helpful. If not, we have to look for an expert content specialist and brief him/her about the requirements of distance learning materials and request the person to edit the content accordingly. Content editing is extremely important from the learners point of view as well, because, after all, distance learners must be in a position to grasp the content quickly and master it in order to complete their study programmes.

*Instructional Design or Format Editing* is equally important in distance learning situations for the same reasons of making the content accessible to the students in the absence of a classroom teacher. Instructional design helps the authors judge the requirements of a course or a programme as well as the learning needs of the learners who have very little or no face-to-face contact with the teachers as well as their peer groups. Under this theme we have

discussed various access devices and the interactive strategies that could help distance learners in their learning which is usually a private activity. In order to enhance the effectiveness of distance learning, instructional designers negotiate with course authors and collaborate with them in designing appropriate format for the course materials in specific disciplines and subject areas. For example, the instructional design factors that are suitable for humanities and social sciences may not readily suit science courses, at least in certain crucial matters. On such occasions, course authors and instructional designers will have to negotiate and resolve academic/content and pedagogic/instructional issues.

Instructional design will vary from subject to subject and also across the levels of learners. The academic nature of a discipline or a subject will require appropriate modifications in the design or format of each of the access devices and interactive mechanisms. In the Indian context we refer to this aspect of editing as format editing at times. Whatever be the preferred nomenclature we use, the essential point is that distance learning materials must be looked at from instructional or pedagogic point of view by those who have acquired expertise in this area. The instructional designers are the experts who can help course writers and subject experts to cast their content in a required format that would enable the distance learners to study through the materials without the physical presence of a teacher. All reservations about instructional design that normally subject experts who are new to distance education system would gradually disappear when the subject expert are persuaded to test their content with the distance learners in real situations of learning at a distance. Mostly the subject experts who initially resist the suggestions from instructional designers eventually become themselves expert instructional designers in their own disciplines or areas of study. For this to happen, it takes time and quite a lot will depend on the ability and tactfulness of instructional designers in their interaction with subject experts.

*Language Editing* is another important aspect that we have considered in this Handbook. In a multi-lingual situation like India where English is not the mother tongue of most of the people we have to pay special attention to language editing while developing distance learning materials. We have suggested that in general language should be simple, direct and conversational. When we talk about English language and its use in our situation we take special care of the difficulty level of the language in terms of grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure (syntax) and the style. We should take care of the basic grammar. As a rule, we must use simple words in place of difficult words if simple words can serve our purpose. However, if we have to use technical terms and jargon specific to the disciplines or fields of study. For example we can not replace medical terms, legal terms, engineering terms etc. with common vocabulary. But we can always give a glossary that gives the contextual meaning of terms used. We also recommend simple and short sentences in place of difficult and long winding

sentences. We have given you some formulas to calculate the difficulty level of the language used in the given texts. All these suggestions must be taken as general guidelines only. Ultimately the difficulty level of any language used in a course will be determined by the special requirements of the subject/content and also the level of the learners. For example the same subject, say history or science can be taught at school level and also university level to different sets of learners with different needs. In such situations, the difficulty level of the language will necessarily differ.

Besides the three types of editing, we have also touched upon the technical production aspects such as copy editing and proof-reading; course maintenance ; course revision etc.

We hope that you would find this Handbook useful when you edit distance learning materials of different disciplines for different types of learners at different levels. We also hope that what we have discussed keeping in view the requirements of Indian distance education situation will be relevant to comparable situations of other developing countries as well. The core of the discussion in this Handbook thus, focuses on editing of the content, instructional design and the language used when we develop distance learning materials in print.

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