UNIT 8 EDITING IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

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8.0 INTRODUCTION

If course development in distance education is a team work, work of the editor is that of an intermediary, diplomat, manager and administrator - all bundled into one. The editor's role is pivotal in coordinating the activities, both academic and production related, of the different individuals who are apparently entrusted with discrete tasks but actually are performing interrelated roles. In other words, the editor in the development of distance learning course materials is the invisible operator who pulls the strings rightly at the right time to get the contributions from the academics and the production staff and gives a final shape to the materials which become the primary sources of learning for the distance students.

Different institutions follow different approaches to course development, depending on the institutional policies and the needs, perceptions, resources and the capabilities of the staff involved in the course development. Nevertheless, the nature and the extent of editing may vary from approach to approach. You may have known about the different approaches to course development such as the course team approach, author-editor approach,...etc. (see the relevant document).

Course team approach as popularized by the British Open University is, of course, one of the best models 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, nor is it 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 practical approaches to course development. Accordingly, the editorial functions and concerns have to be understood in the respective contexts rather than treating them as rigidly set norms to be followed uniformly by each institution.

In this unit we shall first explain briefly the different possible approaches to course development, the combinations of different personnel involved in the course development, the corresponding editorial responsibilities and concerns and the possible editing strategies that will work. We shall then focus on the three distinct areas/kinds of academic editing practically necessary format editing, content editing, and language editing. We shall also touch upon the fourth kind, i.e. copy editing which is technical and common in any editing in the print medium.
You will notice that we are talking primarily about the editorial practices at the Indira Gandhi National Open University which may very well be the practices at the other distance teaching institutions of India and also in the developing countries having similar academic and cultural needs as obtaining in India.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After having gone through this unit, you should be able to:

- identify and describe the different functions of a distance education editor;
- explain the significance of the varied editorial concerns vis-a-vis the learning needs of distance students;
- analyse the different tasks involved in the different types of editing; and
- analyse the factors which influence the quality of editing, and thus, the quality of distance learning materials.

8.2 EDITING IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

In a situation where course team approach is followed, as is the case with distance teaching institutions in the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, the job of an editor is usually confined to copy editing which is commonly done by editors of publishing houses. Or the editor may additionally have to function as liaison manager coordinating the various activities of the members of the course team and finally to bring out the printed booklets. In the case of audio-video materials, the editor will perform a role similar to that of an editor of a film or radio/television programmes. Here we are concerned with editing of self-learning materials in print only.

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 environment. In all the countries we have mentioned above, the linguistic situation is almost the same i.e. the mother tongue of the learners and the mother tongue of the course developers is the same: English (Of course in the French speaking provinces of Canada, it is French). The composition of the course team is as follows:

a) The course team chair (Convenor or Chairperson) – Who is always an academic with expertise or familiarity with the subject/discipline in which the learning materials are developed.

b) Course writers/authors - The subject experts who actually contribute the academic content and therefore are responsible for the academic quality of the materials.

c) Media expert(s) - Usually the producers responsible for identifying the areas/topics which can be used for the production of radio/TV or audio/video programmes; these producers are basically academics with broad understanding of the disciplines they have to handle (e.g. Humanities, Social Sciences, Sciences, etc.).

d) Educational Technologists/Distance Education experts - Who advise the course authors/subject experts on the various aspects of writing self-instructional/self-learning materials (e.g. determining the level of the learners, their previous knowledge, learning environment, learning styles, setting the objectives, sequencing the contents, designing the activities and assignments, evolving the feedback mechanism, assessment/evaluation, etc.).
e) **Graphic designers, Cartographers, etc.**

Who advise the course team on the number, size, style, etc., of graphics, illustrations, photographs, etc., and also help the team in deciding the layout, cover design, etc., for the booklets.

f) **Editor(s)**

Who assist the above five categories of experts in placing their inputs rightly, optimally and in a professional manner; the editors in this situation usually have to play a coordinating role, besides polishing the texts in terms of language, layout and presentation.

Jenet Jenkins (1985), Derek Rowntree (1991) and others who talk about editing distance learning materials in the context of the western countries usually have the course-team context of the above kind in mind. But this situation need not exist in most developing countries. Even when institutions claim to be following the course-team approach they do not mean that the composition and the way of functioning of their course teams correspond to those of the course teams of the western type. In many developing countries, course teams are loosely structured and usually individuals work independently on various units or blocks of print materials. The editor or the course coordinator has to assume 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

Both, however, have to be created, though the process is a lengthy and cumbersome one. 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 particular course/programme with little or no understanding of course development for distance learners.

- the top management of the institution decides the deadlines, 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.

- the departmental head or the director of the school may consult the discipline head on 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, would be given the responsibility to arrange for course writers’ meetings, allocation of units, meetings with audio-video producers and other, if any, with graphic artists, printers or publishers. They may not have the necessary training or exposure to handle these complex tasks which demand high degree of professionalism and interpersonal skills (for a more detailed discussion on this see, Renga Ramanujam, 1995).

As a result of all the above, the editing business in a newly established institutions becomes a highly complicated and unsystematic one. Since it is not possible to ensure team work at every stage of course development, the editor in this situation will be faced with many challenges which an editor in a full-fledged course team will not.

In the context we have been talking about, the editor has to fill the gaps which are bound to arise because of the assorted nature of activities carried out by individuals loosely called the ‘course team members’. Let us explain.

In the course development of a **programme**, consisting of four **courses**, the following structure can be thought of:
In our hypothetical programme, we shall then have 16 blocks (i.e. 4 blocks in each course) and 64 units (i.e. each block containing four units). In the process of writing these 64 units, we are not sure as to how many will be written in-house and how many will be written by external course writers. We are also not sure about the expertise of course writers, whether internal or external, in writing self-learning materials – an act which requires special writing skill and academic orientation (i.e. some grounding in distance education concepts), besides being an expert in the academic discipline.

Different writers with different writing skills may contribute the academic content. They usually work independently and one does not know what the other has presented in his/her unit. As far as the content presentation and the quality are concerned, there will be overlapping and unevenness which will have to be smoothened by an editor who has a good grasp of the subject matter. Language will be another matter of concern because there will not be uniformity of style. If these can be taken care of, somehow, still there will be need for some one who can shape the materials into distance-learning or self-learning format, incorporating or introducing the relevant features of self-learning texts. It should be clear by now that in situations where distance education is yet to take firm rolls, there will at least be three distinct types of editorial work, apart from the common copy editing:

- **format editing** (to be done by educational technologists or distance education experts).
- **content editing** (to be done by (senior) academics in the field).
- **language editing** (to be done by language experts who have adequate command of the language which is the instructional medium).

Obviously, the editor in the classical course team does not have to worry much about the above types of editing because the three experts concerned are already there in the course team and they work in unison exchanging notes and drafts at every stage of course development on regular basis during the meetings of the course team. But in the second situation, which is our concern here, the three types of editing need to be done in a slightly different way.

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

i) the educational effectiveness (i.e. making the text a self-learning one following principles of self-learning, independent-learning, etc.),

ii) the academic credibility (i.e. the level, adequacy, accuracy of the content), and

iii) the readability of the text (i.e. simple, conversational style, appropriate level, etc. of language).

If the editor happens to be a senior academic in the given discipline who can take care of the content part, then the other two can be managed with the help of a distance education expert and a language expert. If not, then, whoever is responsible for developing the course(s) will have to look for persons who can do the three types of editing. When you do not get an ideal person with a combination of all the three editing skills, you have to look for persons who can edit the units independently focusing on the aspect in which he has the expertise. The academic who coordinates these functions is called a course coordinator.
How the three types of editing can be done in the absence of a course team in the classical sense will be the focus of our discussion in the following sections.

8.3 SOME BASIC CONSIDERATIONS IN EDITING SELF-LEARNING MATERIALS

In the absence of a 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 constituting the programme. If the coordinators are not in a position to take care of 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 the content, if not the editing of the format, house style and the language.

You may be a coordinator of a programme or a course or even a block 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, which you are not always, you may get writers who have sufficient experience in writing self-learning materials.

In countries like India, though correspondence/distance education has been in practice for decades you do not get many good writers with professional skills to write genuine self-learning materials in print. The 'experience' of the academics working in many of the institutions offering distance education programmes is often unprofessional and they do not differ much from their conventional counterparts with regard to expertise and attitude necessary to respond to the distance learners' needs.

Absence of training policies and facilities and the general apathy towards professionalism have made these academics sceptical about the very idea of writing self-learning materials in a special and professional way. Lack of exposure has limited their understanding of the vast range and variety of ways of developing self-learning materials and therefore,
they tend to treat any professional training in writing self-learning texts as imposition. They even take pride in their ever increasing enrolments and argue that their students are happy with the materials in the form of notes, little realizing that in the absence of better alternatives students will accept anything that is available to them. Such an approach also indicates that there is little institutional concern for standard and quality of learning materials and educational programmes, notwithstanding high enrolments and pass rates in the examinations. So you cannot expect the writers of 'correspondence lessons' to write the self-learning materials in the full sense of the term without sufficiently training them.

Your other alternative is to choose writers from conventional institutions — writers with good classroom teaching experience. They may or may not have the necessary writing skills you are looking for and many of them may not accept the offer. The third alternative is to get the units written by your own colleagues. This third alternative is constrained by two factors: a) the number of writers willing to write the materials and b) the time they need, because they will have responsibilities other than writing for you. In any case, some sort of orientation and training will be necessary for all or any one of the three categories of writers who may be writing the learning materials. Without the necessary training background, the writers will not get the clear focus and the guidelines as to what and how to write. You will, therefore, call a meeting of the course writers before they start writing the units.

Typically, a course writers' meeting is held for a day or two wherein you and your faculty would explain to the writers at least the following aspects:

- The special features of distance learning;
- The needs of the distance learners, their level, their previous knowledge, etc;
- The importance of self-learning materials (SLMs);
- The format(s) of SIMs;
- The syllabus structure of your courses;
- The role of multimedia instructional system and the place of SLMs in print within the system;
- What the writers can contribute in terms of content, format and presentation;
- The time schedule;
- The terms and conditions of the contract with the writers.

You may involve your senior colleagues and the educational technologists (distance education experts') at this stage. At the end of the meeting things may fairly be clear to you and the writers as to what the expectations are from each other. You decide to wait till the deadlines are over to receive the units from your writers.

Course Writers: Possible Types

If you were perceptive, you would have noticed during the meeting of the course writers at least three typical responses from the writers:

One response may be from the good subject experts who promise to give good content input but would not bother much about your systemic needs and 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.

The second response might be like this. "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 content of acceptable quality too).

The third response may be from the 'writers for all reasons'. They might have assured you something like this: "Young man! 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 for us. You will get our units in time but send our payments promptly after receiving them. (These are the ‘high profile’ writers who usually move closely with heads of institutions, senior managers and bureaucrats with a propensity for much visibility and less sincerity. You have to accommodate them because these are the persons who lend their names, if not the content of high quality, an act which the institutions may think important to earn credibility and acceptability for their pioneering efforts. (For political reasons ironies such as these, may have to be accepted as contributions in whatever shape they may reach you).

The last category may at times send you their units in time or never. The second category would send in their units more or less in time with an acceptable content in a reasonably good format, incorporating the features of self-learning materials to the extent possible within the time frame. The first category, would send us their units in time or, if they are otherwise busy, after a few reminders. The quality of the content supplied by these writers will be of very high quality, though they may not have put it in the format desired by you.

In short, you may receive the units of the following three categories:

(i) Units in the form of rough drafts which need heavy editing, padding and polishing in terms of content, format and language.

(ii) Units which give you excellent content but need transformation in terms of format and presentation.

(iii) Units with acceptable quality of content and generally good in terms of format but needs some language editing and also some polishing of content and presentation.

Whichever category of units you receive, they all must pass through one or the other of the three types of editing we mentioned earlier: **format editing, content editing and language editing**. We shall discuss each one of them in some detail in the following sections.

### Check Your Progress

**Notes:**

a) Space is given below for your answer.

b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of the unit.

2. Briefly describe the possible three types of Course Writers. (You can think of other possible types too). Comment on these types from the point of view of an editor.

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### 8.4 FORMAT EDITING

What we mean here by ‘format editing’ is nothing but the educational technology inputs which come from the 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 situation, content
editing and language editing have been 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 in presenting the otherwise good content. Let us look at the figure given below.

![Sim format example](image)

The very physical look of formats as shown in figure 8.2 would suggest 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.

### 8.4.1 The Beginning

Let us look at figure 8.2 again.

In the IGNOU unit for example, the ‘structure’ gives you the entire list of contents discussed in the given unit. Of the contents given in the ‘structure’, the first two sections 1.0 and 1.1 and the ‘structure’ itself constitute the beginning of the unit. What do they signify?

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 this particular unit. This preliminary information is also significant in that it prompts us to start our learning exercise. 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.
Section 1.0 i.e. ‘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 subsections of the unit. 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 (For a more detailed discussion on objectives see Unit 7 of this Block).

Section 1.1 (i.e. ‘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;

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.

In the courses of some programmes of IGNOU, the ‘Introduction’ precedes ‘Objectives’.

8.4.2 The Main Body

Look at the ‘Structure’ again in figure 8.2. Sections 1.2-1.3... actually contain the ‘meat’ or the content of the unit. You will notice that these sections are further divided into subsections. In the actual text each section, sometimes some important sub-sections too, will be followed by an activity – an exercise, a Check Your Progress exercise or a Self Assessment Question (SAQ).

Editing of this part of the unit pertains to content editing. The course authors or writers 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 to smoothen out the possible unevenness of the content level and the style of presentation. The responsibilities of a content editor are crucial in ensuring quality as well the academic credibility of the courses. If the content editing is not done properly, then, the quality of the course/programme will suffer, notwithstanding the case given to the technical and production aspects of course preparation.

Editing at this level must focus on the following aspects:

- 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 doctoral degrees, will be no good for first year undergraduate students who are initiated 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 access the main points of the discussion;
• Sign posting through headings, bold or italic font sizes and numbering.

The list is only illustrative and not exhaustive. Rountree (1991) and Jenkins (1985) will be useful in giving you comprehensive treatment of the issues related to content selection and presentation. Lockwood (1994) gives you an indepth analysis of the learning activities possible in self-learning texts. ES-312 "Instructional Design" is one of the courses of IGNOU’s (India) Post Graduate Diploma in Distance Education Programme which discusses many of the relevant issues related to course development for distance education in the context of the developing countries.

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 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 exercises and activities demanding 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 “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 or 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 student would identify the possible areas of difficulties. Check them with the opinions of your peer group and the potential students.

Some writers have the skills to present the content interestingly even without the above ‘access devices’. But the access devices always help you to enhance the understanding of the learner. While introducing the access devices, it is always advisable that the format editor (i.e. distance education expert) and the content editor consult each other to avoid any possible jumbling of content sequencing or illogical division of sections and sub-sections.

8.4.3 The Ending

This is the last and third component of a self-learning unit. Here you will have the following items:

• Summary of the main points and/or conclusions.

• Suggested/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 editor should take care that the summary and the answers to the SAQs serve the intended purposes. The summary should help the learner 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 books/articles recommended.

Content editing, thus, must ensure the academic relevance, the quality and the logical presentation of the content.

8.5 LANGUAGE EDITING

Ideally, language editing must be done by the content editor. In a situation where the mother tongue of the learners happens to be the language of the medium of instruction also, usually the language editing is done by the course writers or the general editor focusing on the style and the difficulty level of the language used in writing the text. 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. In India and many other developing countries English still remains the main instructional medium at the level of higher education.

To enter into a 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 is out of the scope of this section. However, 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 in all 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 that one common issue that stands out prominently is 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 command of or the facility with English language which they 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 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.

Many course writers who write their units/lessons in their respective disciplines cannot simply overcome their linguistic limitations.

Though we can find explanations for this phenomenon in Linguistics (historical linguistics, socio-linguistics and psycholinguistics) 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.

The only solution that seems to be 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 has no value and academically it cannot enjoy any status; and the language expert, on his part must know that his job is to convey the content in the best possible manner without distorting the ideas and the concepts presented in the content. Neither the content expert nor the language expert should claim superiority over the other, if their efforts should 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 matching the level of the content
- The grammar and the spelling
- Vocabulary and technical terms
- Syntax and the 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 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 disappointing performance of courses, particularly if the admission policies are liberal. Pending an academic policy decision that needs to be taken by the institutions concerned, we the academics responsible for the content and the presentation must arrive at a conclusion about our average learner and pitch the language accordingly. Our notional standard of expected linguistic competence 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 Indian Open Universities the content level is high and dense and the presentation is hardly user 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 sentences correctly (i.e. without grammatical errors)
- Writing the words without 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 this unfamiliarity he may “correct” the text. These corrections will become errors and will result in confusion. Therefore, wherever the language editor has doubts about the concepts and the ideas presented he should consult the content expert before correcting the language.
8.6 COPY EDITING

Copy editing is a mechanical aspect of the editing process. The house style followed by an organization regarding the layout of the text is taken care of by the copy editor at this stage. Before Desk Top Publishing (DTP) came into practice, manuscripts were edited by professional copy editors primarily to assist the printer to bring out the text in the way the organization wanted it. So the focus of copy editing is on the following aspects which constitute the house style:

- Inside cover page, the first page or the starting page of the block/book wherein you mention the names of the experts, authors, production staff, etc. and also the titles of the course, block and the units;
- Specifications about the font sizes of the unit title, sections, sub-sections, sub-headings, etc. and the numbering;
- Starting of each unit (whether on a new page, what should be the space allowed before the unit starts, etc.);
- Space for activities, exercises, etc. within the text;
- Conventions of arranging tables, figures, graphics, photographs, etc. and placement of titles for all these items and deciding appropriate places and space for them;
- Alignment of paragraphs, the margins, etc., to keep the uniformity of the physical look of the text;
- Sharpness of letters/characters and space between words and lines;
- All other items of layout in a printed text.

In the pre-DTP days, copy editing had to be done by a professional copy editor. These days every one who knows how to operate personal computers (PCs) can do the copy editing as per the specifications decided by the faculty. The specifications for the layout and font size of a unit could be decided by the faculty before the materials are sent for printing.

8.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed:

- the role of editing in the different situations obtaining in the distance teaching institutions,
- the range of editorial concerns in the development of self-learning materials, and
- the different types of editing which may be necessary such as content editing, format editing, language editing and copy editing.
Editing is crucial in assuring quality of learning materials. The editor/course coordinator has a major responsibility in the process of developing quality learning materials for distance learners.

8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. In the first place I would read the relevant literature to understand the process of course development in distance education, and will also discuss it with experienced senior colleagues.

I would, then, consider the content requirements of the course concerned. I would contact the experts in the field, and after getting their consent to be my course writers, I would have a meeting with them to explain to them the format in which I want the units/lessons from them. I would give them a definite schedule to get the units and decide on the payment as well. Once the units are received I would go through them first, and if necessary I would seek the help of the educational technologists and others to finalise the units.

2. I can think of the following three types:

i) Those who can give excellent content in a desirable self-instructional format;

ii) Those who can give excellent content, but without the self-instructional format. In this case, I will seek the help of the educational technologists;

iii) Those who can give an average content in a somewhat self-instructional format both of which will be in need of heavy editing.

3. Access to content is through language. Unless the language used in a unit is simple and clear, the distance learner studying in isolation will have problems. S/He cannot contact others to explain the presentation of content at every stage. Simple and clear language also motivates the learner and enhances self-learning.

REFERENCES


Ramanujam, P.R. (1995); Reflections on Distance Education for India, Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi.