PARTICIPANTS RESOURCE PACK FOR MODULE: 5

DEVELOPING CONTENT FOR ODL

MODULE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this module participants should be able to:

- Identify characteristics of good open and distance learning materials
- Create SMART learning objectives
- Produce interactive learning content
- Use appropriate language to create open and distance learning materials
- Use an existing template to structure content for open and distance learning.

GROUP ACTIVITY:

In your groups, identify and note some key features of the ODL materials you have just observed.

One member of the group is expected to report in Plenary.

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1. KEY FEATURE: LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Individual Activity: Use the information from the presentation to do the following

Identify a unit topic in one of your courses and use the SMART principle to develop a minimum of four (4) objectives.

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2. KEY FEATURE: INTERACTIVITY ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK

PRE-ACTIVITY

Use your knowledge of types of assessment tools to classify each of following as INTERACTIVE or NON-INTERACTIVE:

POST ACTIVITY

ASSESSMENT TOOL	INTERACTIVE	NON-INTERACTIVE
multiple choice		
portfolio		
observation		
essay		
research		
questionnaire		
matching		

Using the objectives that you created earlier and the information you learned from the presentation, develop two self-mark activities that promote learner interactivity.

Key Thought Frequent, immediate feedback is critical for promoting self-directed learning!

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3. KEY FEATURE: WRITING STYLE

Your course materials may be well-planned and constructed, but may be ineffective if the language used is not appropriate to the learner population. This section provides some suggestions for writing in an accessible way. It is important that you consider the following guidelines:

3.1 **Simple Language**

- Use vocabulary appropriate to your target group (Remember English is a 2nd or 3rd language for most learners)
- Keep to one idea per paragraph
- Eliminate unnecessarily long phrases and sentenced by using one word (E.g.Use "*Many*" instead of a large number)
- Use familiar words
- Use relevant examples
- Use precise words
- Use strong active verbs (eg. "You may use scissors" instead of "Scissors may be used")
- Choose your structures (simplify sentences, keep them short, limit the use of negatives, watch your word order)

3.2. **Learner-friendly Style (conversational)**

It is important and desirable when creating ODL materials that you create a warm, learner-friendly environment for your learners. Below are additional tips that are useful in doing this.

- Make the materials as readable and accessible to as wide an audience as possible
- Be consistent in writing - users become familiar with your writing style
- Use a more informal style of writing (eg, refer to yourself as "I")
- Speak directly to the learner and call your learner "you"
- Use the kind of tone you might use in a one-to-one conversation (conversational tone)
- Include humour where possible
- Use gender sensitive language (rather use they, them instead of he/she, etc.)
- Use bulleted lists where possible

Key thought: *learners should ENJOY reading and using the course material!*

3.3 **Accessibility**

Using access devices can create a more pleasant experience for learners by making it easier for them to navigate throughout the information or content. The following list of access devices can be useful in achieving this.

(i) Before the Main Body of the Unit/Section include:

- Explanatory title
- Contents list
- Flow diagrams
- List of objectives

(ii) During the Unit/Section include:

- Introduction
- Headings and sub-headings
- Instructions
- Numbering system
- Verbal signposting (don't just tell your learners what you are telling them - tell them why you are telling it)
- Visual signposts (icons, layout and structure should be apparent where possible)
- Summaries

(iii) After the Unit/Section include:

- Keywords
- Motivational chat
- Linking statements

Key thought: *ODL materials have a fairly complicated structure and access devices help learners find their way around the materials!*

3.4 **Physical Features of ODL Materials**

It is imperative that you keep your learner in mind by considering how your material will appear physically on each page. The following tips do not only enhance the appearance of your materials but it enhances readability and understanding by your learners.

Tips: on physical features of ODL materials

- White margins and white space (give space for learners to make notes in the margin and to answer SMAs, ITQs)
- Notional hours ought to be included(assume the time it would take the average learner to complete a Unit/Section - this is done to avoid overloading)
- Keywords (to explain technical terms, new concepts, difficult words - decide where to include your keywords)
- Graphics and illustrations (to break monotony, makes materials interesting and appealing)
- Icons (develop own set - remove the need for repeated written instructions)
- Summaries and linking statements
- References

Structuring a Unit for ODL Materials (Unit Template)

It is important to break content up into manageable chunks to facilitate independent learning. Most ODL courses are normally subdivided into units that usually correspond to a week's work. In print, each unit is like a chapter of a book. On the web, units usually correspond to one subdivision of the course web site. This part looks at the structure of a typical unit. Good self-study materials usually have three key stages:

- explaining what the unit will be about (through the use of an introduction and a list of learning objectives)
- conducting the session (this is the bulk of the unit where learning objectives are addressed and teaching and learning mostly takes place)
- reminding learners what the unit was all about and checking whether they have learnt the content (a common way to do this is to provide a self-mark activity and a summary of key points in the unit). The Commonwealth of Learning proposes the following components at each stage of the unit structure:

Introductory material

1. Unit number and title
2. Introduction
3. Contents list
4. Statement of pre-requisite knowledge (or pre-test)
5. Learning objectives for unit
6. List of any equipment needed for studying the unit
7. Other resources needed for studying the unit (e.g., a textbook)
8. Time required for the unit

Teaching and activities

1. Examples
2. Explanatory text
3. Activities with feedback
4. Diagrams and illustrations
5. Topic summaries

This stage is usually divided into topics, each matching one learning objective

Closing material

1. unit summary
2. self-mark activity (based on the unit learning objectives)
3. link forward to the next unit

SUMMARY

Developing ODL materials gets easier with practice; you will find that working in groups together with the use of peer review is a great idea. You have learned that one of the most important things is to organize your work into a template that captures the key features of ODL materials such as:

- Objectives
- Activities
- Assessment
- Resources

Writing objectives and content using language that is clear, specific and relevant to the context of the learner is important for enhancing the appeal and readability of your materials. Creating the zeal or desire for learners to continue to interact with the ODL materials depends on how easy it is to understand and apply the information. Thus it is crucial for you to make use of accessible icons, pictures, illustrations, concept maps, flow charts and other enhancing tools for cognitive processing. Providing other resource materials and various types of assessments enable learners to monitor their progress. At the same time keeping your text straight to the point while using a conversational and friendly tone helps to keep your learner on task and makes the lesson more personalised and sociable.