

DEVELOPING OF DISTANCE EDUCATION COURSE WARE AT NAMCOL

Introduction

The Programmes & Materials Development (PMD) division at the Namibian College of Open Learning (NAMCOL) is responsible for planning new distance education programmes and courses, drafting and editing all study materials, laying these out in a user-friendly manner as well as ensuring that materials are printed, packed and despatched to learners in good time.

Media

As in any other Open and Distance Learning (ODL), print is the main medium of instruction at NAMCOL. This medium is supplemented by the following:

- audio cassettes
- radio programmes
- web-based lessons

Approaches to Course Writing

When developing a new course or in the case where an existing course needs to be revised, NAMCOL follows two approaches:

- single writer approach, and/or
- team writer approach

Each of these approaches has its advantages and disadvantages and depending on the extent of work, the programme developer will appoint a single writer or a team of writers to develop/revise the new/existing course.

Course team

A course team is recruited and appointed by NAMCOL. The course team is appointed on the basis of its subject and language expertise and usually consists of the following members:

- (i) Course Writers/Revisers
- (ii) Programme Developer/Instructional Designer
- (iii) Content Editor
- (iv) Language Editor
- (v) Materials Production Manager
- (vi) Programme Manager
- (vii) Proofreader
- (viii) DTP Technician
- (ix) Typist

(x) Illustrator

Course Writing

Ask any Instructional Designer and he/she will tell you that the process of writing is the most challenging stage in an otherwise dynamic process.

After appointment of the course team members, they are trained in how to write distance education materials. Production schedules are compiled and agreed with the course team. Contracts are signed and, yes, everyone is enthusiastic about this new project. With everything in place, one is perhaps too keen to think that a smooth ride lies ahead.

But this is materials development and we know there's no such thing as a smooth ride in materials development. Two, three months into the writing process, and an otherwise smooth ride is turning into a bumpy ride with some writers quitting due to other commitments, some refusing to give up on half-written units, holding on to these units as your proverbial drowning (wo-)man clutching at a straw. And this despite a production schedule that looms like the sword of Damocles [<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damocles>] over one's head.

Time is running out. Now, a flurry of activities ensues as plans are revisited and production schedules are improvised upon. New writers are appointed, tighter production schedules are compiled, because this course should be ready for implementation in the new year.