UNIT 2  EDITING

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- differentiate the editing of distance teaching texts from the editing of newspapers, magazines, books, films, etc;
- describe the process of content and format editing during and after writing the course material for distance education; and
- explain what is meant by simple writing and why editing language is important in distance education.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The term ‘editing’ involves making 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 is pivotal, as it covers all stages of course preparation — initiation, development, production and even post-production. The editor in a distance teaching system has to examine the materials and see that they are self-instructional.
and learner-oriented. S/he has to work with course writers, educational technologists, media specialists and institutional administrators. S/he is responsible for academic and pedagogical quality of the self-learning material; that is to say the editor has to check the content, structure of the unit/block, the format, and the language.

In this unit the concept of editing is restrictive. It applies only to print-material. There are editors of films and audio and video programmes. They edit a film or a filmstrip or an audio programme. We have discussed editing the audio and video programmes in course-318 of this programme.

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.

2.2 EDITING OF DISTANCE TEACHING MATERIALS

If you happen to be an editor in a distance education institution, you will soon realise that your job is a complex one. The proverbial servant might find it impossible to serve two masters at once but that is exactly what the distance educator is expected to do. In other words, you will have to play different roles simultaneously in order to ensure that the course is ready in time. At the same time the challenges and surprises that you meet during the processes of course development and production make you perhaps the real master of the situation. We shall explain this apparent paradox in the following paragraphs.

You may understand the complexities of editing in distance education better if you notice the difference between various kinds of editing. You are likely to be familiar to some extent with the job of an editor of a newspaper or a publishing house or a university press. You may have also known something about the editing of films and radio, television programmes. Here we shall focus on editing in distance education and how it differs from the other kinds of editing.

2.2.1 How does a distance education editor differ from other editors?

The newspaper/magazine editors do not ‘brief’ their reporters, correspondents and writers on what to write and how to write. But they take the liberty — because their profession allows it to them—to cut others’ writing to any size and to change it to suit their purpose without consulting the writers or waiting for their permission.

The editor of a reputed publishing house or a university press may reject written material from an author or accept it with some or no changes. Or, after accepting it, he/she may delay its publication for editorial reasons.
The film editor suggests a few cuts here and some additions there when the production of a film is nearly over. In comparison with the film producer, the director and the artists, the editor's job remains relatively unknown.

You should have noticed a common feature in the work of these editors. They usually begin editing only after receiving something that has already been produced by others—whether a newspaper article, or a book or a film. Also, the editors in all these cases operate in a comparatively independent but narrow domain. In other words, there is very little scope for negotiations, compromises and adjustments between the editors and the writers or the producers.

Such a situation would be extremely unhelpful in the editing of course materials for distance education. The process of editing is carried out during the process of course planning, development and production. Frequent negotiations, compromises and adjustments between the editor and the course writers become inevitable. This is the essential difference between editing in distance education and the other kinds of editing we have mentioned above.

2.2.2 Why do the editorial functions differ?

The functions of the editors differ because the aims of the institutions or firms in which they work, differ.

The editor of a newspaper or a popular magazine always has in mind the commercial success of the firm. Naturally, making a news item or a 'story' as sensational and attractive as possible as in keeping with journalistic ethics. This is equally true of the editors of commercial radio and television programme and of publishing houses thriving on the publication of cheap novels.

On the other hand, the editors of serious academic and research publications aim at a comparatively restricted, select and, elite audience. They look for academic excellence and a high quality of research, unmindful of commercial success. They allow, understandably, a wide range of variations in presentation, language and style, though they may be strict about content.

Your position as an editor of distance education course materials is obviously a very different one. 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.
Activity 1

Note: How are these editors likely to act in their particular situations? Write your answer in the space given below:

a) A distance education editor receives a text from a famous subject-expert, finds the content satisfactory but the presentation and the language very bad.

b) A newspaper editor receives a leading article on a controversial political event from his own foreign correspondent. The article is extremely well written but thoroughly contradictory of what the newspaper has been saying all along.

c) A film editor views a film and finds some of the scenes unnecessary to the theme. The producer and the director feel that the scenes should be there in the film.

d) Your article on the latest developments in Quantum Physics has been accepted by an established scientific journal. But the editor is not satisfied with some sections of the article.

I’ll present a sample answer to (b). I can think of three possibilities in this case:
1) If the editor cares little for the value of the personal experience and investigation of the correspondent but cares only for the name of the correspondent, s/he will publish the article after carefully omitting the controversial portions.

2) If the editor is just worried about his/her job, s/he will withhold the article by not publishing it and not informing the writer about it.

3) A clever editor will wait for some time till public opinion changes in favour of the writer's views on the particular event and then proceed to publish the article without any alterations. S/he may possibly write a brief introduction before publishing the article.

2.2.3 Different roles of editors in different distance teaching organisations

The degree of your compromises, adjustments, freedom and rights depends on the nature of the course requirements of different distance teaching institutions. Some institutions have editors who play a dominant role at every stage of course development—starting from course planning up to course production and launching of the course—National Extension College of the United Kingdom is an example.

Some other institutions have well established course teams where the editor functions as a coordinator of the various activities that constitute course development and production. The Open Learning Agency, Vancouver, Canada has such editors-cum-coordinators. The Open University of the United Kingdom has only copy editors since the course team does the rest of the job.

There are some institutions which, because of certain peculiar circumstances, expect the editors to do content editing and linguistic corrections, leaving course planning and course development to the academics of the Divisions/Schools concerned. The current practice at Indira Gandhi National Open University falls under this category.

2.3 EDITORIAL FUNCTIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISTANCE TEACHING MATERIALS

Whatever be the specific nature of the work of editors in a particular distance teaching institutions, there are certain common editorial functions to be carried out either by the editor alone or with the help of the course team in order to complete the course production satisfactorily. The International Extension College manual for editors of distance teaching materials list the following as the essential aspects of editing:
Preparation of Text

- 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,
- co-ordinating, writing and production.

In addition to these, we can also include the choice of media (i.e., which portions of the course need audio-video programmes), and assignments in the domain of editing.

The scope of this unit does not allow for a detailed discussion of all the aspects of editing we have mentioned above, and some of the problems such as course planning and course design have already been discussed in block 2 of this course. Course maintenance and revision will be discussed in unit 4 of this block. So, we shall be mainly discussing (1) the process of editing during and after writing, (2) different organisational patterns used in editing distance teaching texts, and (3) the essential skills of an editor in distance education systems.
The following diagram summarises the editor's roles and responsibilities in the overall process of course preparation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDITOR'S INPUT</th>
<th>STAGES OF COURSE PREPARATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying authors</td>
<td>Writing stage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Training authors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping records</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contacting authors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Content editing</td>
<td>Processing of the material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Format editing (structure editing or interaction with educational technologists, editing the standard of presentation, diagrams and illustrations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language editing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Copy editing</td>
<td>Production</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proof reading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gathering information to maintain quality</td>
<td>Post production</td>
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<td>Course maintenance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course revision</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Course withdrawal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction with electronic media specialist</td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 1: An editor's roles and responsibilities during the various stages of course preparation
2.3.1 Processing the written materials

The process is as interesting as your editorial work is challenging. Once the content material is received, you have both the powers and responsibilities to shape it, modify it and set it in the most suitable way to produce distance teaching units and blocks. You have to ‘process’ 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).

But you can begin this shaping and restructuring only after making sure that the content is adequate and its level is appropriate. You should also see whether the writer has followed the guidelines for presentation of the content and structure of distance teaching materials. You have to make necessary changes from the pedagogic point of view, because the quality of the material is the prime objective. You have to examine the unit/lesson from two major perspectives:

- Content accuracy or content editing
- Structural correctness/format or format editing

**Content editing**

If the writer of a foundation course has written about a few important points in detail and left out other general aspects of a given subject, then we say the content is inadequate. Similarly, if an undergraduate course is loaded with difficult points which are meant for postgraduates or research students, we may say that the content level is inappropriate. How do you decide these issues?

Ideally you should wait for the comments of the course team at your institute 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 and 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 writers themselves. But you can’t expect that to happen always. When it does not work, you will have to depend on yourself or other academics or the writer regarding the matter.

You will also have to check the material for accuracy, which involves assessing how adequately the objectives have been met, noticing...
errors and points of disagreement, making suggestions for additions or deletions, and commenting on the educational effectiveness of the content material.

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 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 that a unit has a proper introduction, clearly stated aims and objectives in behavioural terms, adequate access devices, a clear, logical presentation and a summary. We have discussed these access devices in unit 04 of block 02 and unit 06 of block 04 of ES-312.

The format editing is done to maintain uniformity among the various units of a block and course. The format used in different courses of a programme may vary. But normally to help the learners quickly grasp the access devices and content the format should be uniform. Format editing is done to maintain the in-house style or the uniformity of units of a programme. In distance education materials the presentation of content has to be structured. The essential or desirable features for the structure are: content list, introduction, objectives, content in logical order, access devices, self-check questions, glossary, model answers, references etc. The job at the format editing stage is to check if all these components are present in the print material.

2.3.2 Revising the text before preparing the manuscript

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 despite 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 see to that this does not take an unnecessarily long time.

The view of editing taken in this section is very broad indeed. It is not necessary that each institution assigns all these tasks to one and the same person and then calls him/her 'the editor'. In fact the tasks may be distributed among different people who are given different designations.
2.4 LANGUAGE EDITING

The question of language in writing and editing distance teaching materials is very significant. It is the language used that makes the self-learning material comprehensible or difficult, interesting or boring. The language used should be simple and clear for effective communication with learners. Language editing is done to vet vocabulary and sentences used in the material. An editor examines the simplicity and comprehensibility of the words used and makes necessary changes so that learners will have easy access to the content.

Simple language, effective communication and readability

A self-instructional lesson or unit should communicate with us effectively and directly, which is possible when the language used is simple and clear.
and the style is personalised. Simple language increases the speed of one's reading and a personalised style narrows the 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.

**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 the learner 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 and it is imperative in distance teaching, to make communication effective and direct.

But how to produce such 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 some of the questions which inevitably arise when we talk of simple language and readability.

To answer the above questions somewhat satisfactorily, we have discussed a few issues in the following sub-sections.

**Check Your Progress-2**

1. What do you mean by readability?

**Note:**

a) Write your answer in the space given below.

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

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2.4.1 Simple language in distance teaching materials

If you are writing for distance teaching, you should keep in mind quite a few points pertaining to language: sentence structure, vocabulary, style, paragraphing, etc. All these key features are presented in the following discussion.

Why simple language

By simple language we mean, language that is straightforward and relatively unambiguous in meaning. It should convey the message without making us rake our brains over the meaning of words and phrases. If your lesson makes me consult the dictionary very often, you are using too many unfamiliar words. If the sentences force me to re-read them very often, their structure must be 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, so it is obvious that our language should be simple, plain and clear.

Sentences: Construct your sentences in such a way as to communicate directly. 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.

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 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 result. You won't get the force and the punch of the original sentence in other forms of constructions.

Use short sentences and less adjectives: as a general rule we may use short main clauses (i.e. simple sentences) and avoid lengthy subordinate clauses. Look at this sentence:

"When the entire country was devastated by furious floods and murderous famine, when the people of the land, finding no alternative to keep their bodies and souls together started slaughtering the emaciated cattle and hunting for grass, nuts and roots, when the foreign enemy was amassing his
soldiers and arms with a view to inflicting a defeat such as one that would never allow either the ruled or the ruler to recover from the bleeding. Mortal wound and the internal foes were at each other’s throat to grab the spoils from whatever was left undestroyed by the fury of the natural elements, the frolicking, slothful, irresponsible, cowardly old monarch was employing all the faculties of his lazy brain in inventing ways of keeping himself blissful in the company of young dancing girls of ravishing beauty and the brimming cups of wine kept in vintage for decades and centuries, and the deceitful, selfish, lecherous, treacherous, cruel and gambling friends."

The sentence may appear to be mesmerising. But you may not get the message clearly and directly. You ought to do a stylistic analysis of such a sentence in order to see its weaknesses.

Now let us try to rewrite it in smaller sentences and with fewer adjectives. We may also change some of the words used.

"The whole country was ruined by floods and famine. People were killing the cattle and collecting grass, nuts and roots to survive on. The foreign enemy was preparing to attack the country and bring it under their rule. The internal enemies were trying to plunder the wealth of the country. The old king was keeping company with wine, women and gamblers!"

You may judge for yourself whether this passage gives the message more directly than the earlier sentence or not.

**Vocabulary:** You should have noticed that some of the high sounding words and adjectives in the above long sentence have been omitted in its rewritten form. Vocabulary is an area where you can stick to some rules. Never go for high sounding, difficult words when you have easily understandable, common words. As far as possible, use short words. Multisyllabic words often make your writing difficult, the style pompous and the message weak.

Some people have the wrong idea that if you use many difficult words you are more scholarly. They don’t realise how such words can obscure the meaning and make communication ineffective. Simple vocabulary and simple grammar make your writing readable and your presentation lucid.

Use **Active forms of verbs:** Active forms of verbs make the communication effective. According to Plutarch, Julius Caesar said:

"I came' I saw' I conquered".

Now, try to make the active verbs passive (at least the first and the last). Probably you will write: "(Egypt) was seen by me; I came; (it) was conquered" you miss the power and the directness of Caesar’s speech.
Preparation of Text

But let us remember that it is not always possible or desirable to hold too fast to any rigid ‘rule’. What we said earlier about sentence structure should hold good for the use of verbs too.

Look at this sentence:

“A truck carrying eggs collided with a bus. All eggs were broken”.

If you stick to the ‘rule’ that you should use active verbs, you may write; “A truck.. ..collided with a bus. The bus broke all the eggs”. But would you want to write like that?

**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, 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.

**Style:** There is no ‘rule’ to teach you 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. Sometimes 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.

*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.

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. 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?”

But there is a danger here. As Holmberg warns as, ‘conversational style’ should not be ‘chatty’. Friendliness does not mean an absence of seriousness. A conversational and friendly style does narrow the distance between writer and the reader. But also remember, that as a writer your ultimate aim is not to become ‘maty’ or ‘chummy’ with the reader but to teach, and the reader’s main aim is to learn.

**Humour:** Be humorous, if you can but see that your effort to be humorous doesn’t backfire.

I remember what happened when one of my teachers gave a demonstration lesson. His aim was to elicit the students’ response and he chose a very humorous essay to do so but soon realised that all his fifty students had unchanging grave expressions on their faces. He stopped his demonstration in disgust and sat in a corner, muttering to himself that we were “Humourless dull individuals”. When the next teacher read out the first sentence from the same essay there was a burst of laughter from everyone, except from the ’humorous’ teacher, who left the class in anger.

So, be humorous at times, if you have a flair for it, but if not, just be plain and say what you want to say. In either case, concentrate on your main job — teaching.

**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 and 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.

**Activity 4**

List all the features of the 'simple language' we have discussed. See which of the features are present or absent in unit 4 of this block.

Write your answer on a separate sheet.

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
Preparation of Text

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.

2.4.2 Evaluating the difficulty level of language

Print material, besides audio and video programmes, constitutes a major part of the self-learning material whether 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 are also likely to be an integral part of the printed learning material. It is therefore limiting to 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. But their findings and recommendations can only help us to a limited extent when we write lessons for distance learners. However, we may keep in mind certain general guidelines to evaluate the level of difficulty of our 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.

If you do not have such experience, or want to consider an alternative, you might like to consider 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, is 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 to calculate the Fog Index of the learning materials.

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 judgement as to the practical value of the research project. In the paragraphs below, the *trade offs* that often occur between ethical and other commitments, in making a particular research decision, are discussed.

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**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) = \((25.0 + 25) \times 0.4 = 20.00\)

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, you 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.
Preparation of Text

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 material. When Flesch Reading Scores were calculated for the two paragraphs in Figure 2 the following indicators were available in seconds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counts</th>
<th>First paragraph</th>
<th>Second paragraph</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Words</td>
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<tr>
<th>Averages</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sentences per paragraph</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words per sentence</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters per word</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>5.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readability</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive sentences</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flesch Reading Ease</td>
<td>52.75</td>
<td>32.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

The indicators confirm that there are 100 words in each paragraph, that the first paragraph has seven sentences and the second paragraph has four and that the average number of words per sentence are 14.29 and 25 respectively. The calculation of the Flesch 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. It is suggested 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 the scores are 52.75 and 32.56, and the second paragraph is considered significantly more difficult than the first. While you suspect that this is fairly obvious from your reading of the two paragraphs, the computer software would allow you to check whole modules or even courses in this way.

Other software packages are available that will provide similar indices—average sentence length, words not in the programme vocabulary, words used repeatedly, etc. The beauty of such software is that you can make simple modifications to successive drafts (shortening sentence length, substituting more common words, deleting repetitive words and phrases) and immediately see the effect upon the series of indicators. Field trials suggest that such simple modifications significantly reduce the difficulty of the material.” *(Lockwood, 1998)*

**ii. Cloze Test**

The Cloze Test is extremely simple. It is based upon samples of the textual material from which a series of words have been omitted, and the missing
words are to be filled in. The introduction from the IET Survey of Reading Skills (Scott and Macdonald-Ross, 1995, page 9) illustrates this readily.

*Only one word has ______ left out each time ______ this is indicated by a continuous line. All the lines ______ of equal length, so they ______ no clue as to the ______ of the missing word. Spelling is ______ important, as long as it ______ clear what the word ______ that you intend to ______ in the gap. If at ______ you can't think of a ______ to put in the gap, read on and ______ back to it later. You may also go back and change your choices.*

Cloze Tests do vary somewhat but typically delete every fifth or seventh word. The words written in by the subject are compared with a short list of acceptable words. The Cloze Test is not only extremely simple to conduct and score but has demonstrated that it is extremely valid and reliable in predicting the reliability of prose material. It measures what it is designed to measure and does so consistently. 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.

Passage One was drawn from a basic skills training screening test—an indicator of basic functional literacy. Passage Two was typical of OU foundation course material—it could be equated with the editorial one would expect in a broadsheet newspaper. Passage Three was an extract from a book review in the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* and typical of the text one would expect to encounter in an academic study. In interpreting test scoring it is argued that those with a test score of 60 percent or better can satisfactorily comprehend the material. A score between 40 percent and 60 percent indicates partial comprehension, and less than 40 percent indicates inadequate comprehension.

Almost all students achieved a score of 60 percent or more on Passage One; they were virtually all functionally literate. On Passage Two almost one-third scored less than 60 percent, indicating that they demonstrated only partial comprehension. However on Passage Three almost one-third scored less than 40 percent — indicating inadequate comprehension — and two-thirds scored between 40 percent and 60 percent, indicating only partial comprehension. In all about 95 percent of the students had difficulty in comprehending the passage.

For an institution that prides itself on the quality of its teaching, and its ability to pitch the material at the appropriate level, the findings were sobering. The authors remark (Macdonald-Ross and Scott, 1995a):

*... most entering students enrolled for OU foundation courses have reading skills which are not at an appropriate level for working with academic prose, and many are seriously deficient.*
Preparation of Text

If the OU, with 25 years' experience of producing self-instructional material, can produce teaching material that one-third of new students finds unintelligible (partial comprehension), perhaps it would be prudent to check the difficulty of your material. (Lockwood, 1998, pg. 146-147)

The Complexity Quotient

Rowntree (1990) suggests a short-cut to judge the difficulty level of your writing. He calls it the Complexity Quotient—it is simply 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)

The above measures such as the Fog Index, Cloze Test and Complexity Quotient are rough-and-ready tools. They offer a useful way to check on 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 writers’ 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 passages. (You may use a separate sheet).

2.4.3 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 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.

In ‘copy editing’ 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 laying
out exercises, tables etc. have been carried out. Make two copies of this
script. Give one to the printer and keep the other safely with you.

2.5 PROBLEMS FACED BY EDITORS OF
DISTANCE TEACHING MATERIALS

After you have had some years of experience in editing distance teaching
materials, you may 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 free of risk.

Now, think of a situation where the institution is new, its aims are unique, it
does not have a course team although it is trying to create one, the editor is
not familiar with the editing of distance teaching material, and the course
writers are also new to the job. This is actually the case with most countries
in the developing world.

But even in such circumstances you have to start somewhere because you
are the ‘editor’. Since there is a serious shortage of course writers, you
decide to contact subject experts who also have some experience in distance
teaching. Hoping that you can manage with the help of these academics
(remember, you don’t have ‘educational technologists’ as yet) you also ask some experts to supply the content.

With a fair amount of optimism you go ahead and sign contracts with your writers. Some writers show a lot of enthusiasm and readily agree to write the units for you. Others assure you that they will do the job as best as they can. You send them the briefs you prepared on the basis of the guidelines and the curriculum 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 material from the writers.

Hoping that the writers will send their materials in time, and in satisfactory form, you go ahead with your plans to start other courses. You are perhaps even tempted to arrange for a printer so that you can get the course material ready in time and launch the course comfortably according to your schedule, even after the last date for receiving the materials is over, your writers do not send the materials. After repeated reminders, you finally receive the materials with a sigh of relief. But you are in for another shock.

Your briefs have not been strictly followed by many of writers. They have elaborated these points which they thought important. The points you wanted to be emphasised have received shabby treatment. Some writers have not even bothered to look at your brief. Inspired by the title(s) of the unit(s) the authors have turned out something which has little or no relevance to the central theme and the main concepts mentioned in your brief.

You are convinced that such stuff will not serve your purpose, and that written materials are to be 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 is to be specified and areas which need audio-video programmes are to be decided upon. Without completing these tasks, the materials in their original form may not help the learners much.

You also find the materials unsatisfactory in many other respects; the content is either inadequate or inappropriate, the presentation is disorderly, ideas are not clear and some points are unnecessarily elaborated while points which need explanation are mentioned in passing or omitted altogether.

Above all, the language is quite confusing, and contains cliches, archaic expressions, deliberately employed difficult words, awkward turns of phrase, clumsy, unmanageable syntax and, finally ungrammatical sentences—all of which spoil the content and test your patience.
You firmly resolve to modify the materials, if possible to rewrite them. Your academic colleagues too feel the same way. But there are other 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 host of problems—both academic and administrative—arise and tension builds up in every section of the university/institution.

In addition to these, there are problems faced in the press. The printer tells you that you will have to wait at least for a month to get the first 'dummy'. S/he also informs you that the quality paper you want is not available, and the policy-makers of your institute feel that it is not advisable to change their earlier decision in this matter. Before you resolve this problem at the press, scores of other problems are waiting your attention. Applications start pouring in. The institute makes the selection, sends the admission letters to the selected candidates and also specifies 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 candidates anxiously write enquiring letters and make incessant phone calls. 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.

The rewriting, reshaping and structuring of the units are all to be done by you. In some departments all the editorial work is to be done by the academic staff themselves in which case they are called 'course coordinators' or 'course chairpersons'.

In the editing of the first course in the Diploma in Distance Education for instance, the course coordinator and a member of the faculty had to do the entire job of editing. In addition to that the academics had to do the copy editing. An efficient proof reader could have spared them this tedious job — they 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, instructional designers and editors. That will be the best thing that you can hope for.
Activity 3

You have joined a new distance teaching institution as an editor. The institution doesn’t have a course team. It has a few educational technologists. The institute wants you to develop course materials for the first course (12 lessons or units) for a degree programme in physics. You are given six months to do this. There is only one academic in the department of physics. How will you go about your job? Give a tentative time schedule. (Prepare your schedule on a separate piece of paper). The following model may help you prepare your own.

Suppose the Course Committee were to submit the outline on 1st April, 2000, I would plan my time schedule like this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>(You can use this column)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Contacting the writers, signing the agreements, etc. (15 days)</td>
<td>15.4.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Receiving the written materials from the writers (60 days)</td>
<td>15.6.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Getting the experts comments (10 days)</td>
<td>26.6.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Revision of the content (15 days)</td>
<td>11.7.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Designing the text by 3 educational technologists (30 days)</td>
<td>10.8.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Linguistic corrections (15 days)</td>
<td>15.8.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Comments from Distance Education Experts (10 days)</td>
<td>25.8.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Possible changes in the structure of the text (5 days)</td>
<td>30.8.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Typing the manuscript and copy editing (15 days)</td>
<td>14.9.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Printing, proof reading and binding (16 days)</td>
<td>30.9.2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why did I plan my schedule this way? Here are some clues.

1. Contacting efficient physics teachers is not difficult. If I make my offer attractive I can get the best without spending too much time on the search. So I give 15 days for signing the agreements, briefing the writers, etc.

2. For writing I allow 2 months because it is the most difficult part of the job. Designing the text is another tedious process and it takes at least a month for one educational technologists to design 4 units (i.e., 1 block)
Give your reasons for planning the schedule the way you did.

Write your answer in the space given below:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.6 LET US SUM UP

The essential difference between editing distance teaching materials and other types of editing is this: whereas the editing of a newspaper, a book, or a film begins at a later stage, the editing process in distance education involves all the stages of course development and production. The editor initiates the process of course development and continues to play an important role in the production, launching and revision of the course. Copy editing which is usually taken for ‘the editing’ in other situations, is only one part of editing distance teaching materials.

The main problem that course writers in the developing countries face is that of grammar and vocabulary. A conscious effort may help them overcome their difficulties with the English language.

While judging the difficulty level of the language and the subject we should be very cautious. Simplistic notions about the level of language may harm the intellectual growth of learners. The difficulty level varies, depending on the individual’s educational and intellectual background. But that is no excuse for writing deliberately in a complicated style. In order to enable the distance learners to learn effectively, it is necessary to make our language simple and clear, and the style conversational and friendly.
Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

1.  
   i) Developing a course outline  
   ii) Deciding on the structure of a unit  
   iii) Briefing the writers on how to present the material  
   iv) Offering advice to distance learners  
   v) Judging the reading level of learners  
   vi) Copy editing  
   vii) Production and printing  
   viii) Testing the materials before printing  
   ix) Deciding the format  
   x) Editing the language.

2. The various issues associated with revising the text are to verify the content and structure, to incorporate the opinions, criticism etc. of the academics.

3. Readability is the quality of a text that grips your attention and persuades you to read attentively and to comprehend the text without getting bored or tired. Readability is essential for comprehension, interaction and assessment.