Building Quality into Distance Education: Establishing Standards

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Paper Presented by:
Diane K. Schulz Novak
Distance Education Specialist
Secondary School Teacher Education Project (SSTEP)
c/o Domasi College of Education
P.O. Box 49
Domasi, Malawi
Africa

sstep@sdnp.org.mw
Session Overview

Description: This session will look at quality standards. It will define quality standards and discuss their advantages and disadvantages. It will address the process of establishing quality standards and how to document them.

Objectives: • Participants will decide whether quality standards will be helpful for their organisation. • If the participants decide to develop quality standards, they will be able plan a process to begin documentation.

Audience: Primary: Managers of Distance Education Programmes Secondary: Distance Education Developers

Content sequence:
1. Distance Education at Domasi College of Education
2. Definition of Quality Standards
3. Advantages and disadvantages of Quality Standards
4. Types of standards
5. Process for developing standards
6. Content of standards

Presenter: Diane K. Schulz Novak
Diane has a Master of Science degree in Instructional Systems Technology from Indiana University. She began working with quality standards while a course developer. As she progressed in her career, she used and developed standards while in positions of Development Manager and Quality Assurance Manager. She has worked with the following organisations in developing quality standards or guidelines:
• The Quaker Oats Company
• United Airlines
• Manitoba Emergency Services College
• Domasi College of Education.

Credits: The following people contributed ideas to this presentation: Ken Silber, Mike Stelnicki, Rob Foshay, Earl Misanchuk, the Distance Education Centre at Simon Fraser University and the past and present members of the Distance Education Committee at Domasi College of Education.

Background: Malawi is facing a huge shortage of qualified teachers at the secondary school level. In order to address this shortfall, Domasi College of Education (DCE) has established a programme that allows unqualified teachers to upgrade to diploma level by distance education. Teachers who used to see no possibility of upgrading are now showing how successful they can be when given the chance. In addition, the teacher-learners continue to teach their classes as they study at home, helping Malawi's secondary education system meet its needs.

The majority of the content for the distance education programme is delivered in distance education modules. DCE has developed over 140 distance education modules. In order to ensure that the quality of the modules remains high, DCE has established quality standards for writing their modules.
Background to Quality Standards at Domasi College of Education

Malawi is facing a huge shortage of qualified teachers at the Secondary School level. In order to address this shortfall, Domasi College of Education (DCE) has established a programme that allows unqualified teachers to upgrade to diploma level by distance education. Teachers who used to see no possibility of upgrading are now showing how successful they can be when given the chance. In addition, the teacher-learners continue to teach their classes as they study at home, helping Malawi’s secondary education system meet its needs.

The majority of the content for the distance education programme is delivered in distance education modules. DCE has developed over 150 distance education modules. In order to ensure that the quality of the modules remains high, DCE is in the process of establishing quality standards for writing their modules.

At this time there are two standards documents the first is called the Distance Education Manual. Currently, the module developers use it as a reference as they develop their modules. The college also uses it for training new module developers and reviewers. Plans are to expand the Distance Education Manual to cover policies and procedures for handling field assignments, supervision, examinations and the residential programme. The second standards document is the Module Production and Editorial Guidelines. Typists and editors use it when producing the distance education modules. The examples of process and product standards used in this paper are adapted from these two documents.

What are Quality Standards?

As professionals in distance education, we are always looking to improve the quality of our products. The COL Training Toolkit, Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning (1999:2-3), gives the following definitions about quality:

- **Quality** is a characteristic of the products and services an organisation offers.

- **Quality assurance** is a process directed toward achieving that characteristic. It is the set of activities that an organisation undertakes to ensure that standards are specified and reached consistently for a product or service.

- **Quality control** operates retrospectively, ‘inspecting out’ or discarding faulty products that fail to conform to a predetermined standard.

**Quality control** and **quality assurance** together with the assessment of quality systems – the monitoring, evaluation, and audit of procedures – are overlapping functions in regulating how an organisation or venture works.
Why should we be concerned about quality? *The COL Training Toolkit, Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning* (1999:2-4), gives the following reasons:

- government’s interest in return on public investment in education relative to other areas of expenditure
- the assertion that education and training is essential to economic recovery, growth, and competitiveness
- the assertion that the institutions responsible for education in the recent past have failed in their mission to meet demand because of ivory tower or anti-business attitudes
- insistence that education costs should be reduced and educational organisations made more accountable.

Quality is usually associated with efficiency and effectiveness. One way that professionals have used to improve efficiency and effectiveness is to establish and follow standards. You may already be familiar with and even used standards. The American Psychological Association (APA) has established standards, called the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, for formatting research documents. Many professionals follow these standards when they write research articles. This is commonly known as APA style. Another example of standards comes from the Chicago Manual of Style. This very large and detailed set of standards defines a style for publishing written materials. Many organisations use all or parts of both of these sets of standards. Both of these standards define the way documents should look. Other standards document the process and procedures that should be followed when developing materials.

Silber and Stelnicki (1992:7) give the following definition of standards.

Standards are the written documentation of a group consensus about an attempt to make uniform the philosophy, policies, practices, and criteria of all, or some parts, of the instructional development/performance technology process as carried out within the context of a specific organisation to be used by competent professionals during the performance of their jobs.

To summarise the above definition, standards usually have the following characteristics.

- have written documentation
- include philosophy, policies, practices, and criteria
- cover all or part of the development process
- are specific to the organisation
- are used during job performance.

Since standards address quality, organisations that are writing standards need to define what their organisation defines as quality. As you look at quality you need to look very closely at your internal customers (employees) and your external customers (client). In many cases, organisations define quality in their mission statements. Each organisation will need to spend time deciding on their own definition of quality.
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The following is an example of what one organisation defined as quality.

We define quality as instruction that is effective and efficient.

• effective – learners leave the training able to perform the skills necessary to do their jobs
• efficient – the instruction makes good use of the time available for the training – the focus is on the critical skills and knowledge the learners need to perform.

The following characteristics are what we strive to attain for quality:

• content accuracy
• consistency
• ease of use
• match to multiple target audiences
• motivation
• production value
• timeliness.

The list above is in priority of what the organisation feels is important to quality. Sometimes it is necessary to make tradeoffs between efficiency and effectiveness. On a case-by-case basis, use the above list to help you consider which sacrifices can be made.

End of example of definition of quality.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Standards

There are many reasons that you might consider as you try to decide whether standards are appropriate for your organisation. Here we will separately look at the advantages of standards, then the disadvantages of standards.

As we look at the advantages and disadvantages of standards, we will look at how they relate to three areas.

• managing quality
• managing productivity
• managing projects.

Let’s first look at the advantages of each of the above, then the disadvantages.

Advantages of Standards for Managing Quality

We are all interested in putting out quality products. Standards can assist you meeting your quality needs in the following ways. They can:

• help define the quality of the instructional products
• provide better project documentation
  ➢ checklists
  ➢ review forms
  ➢ approval forms
  ➢ other forms to assist with documenting the process.
Advantages of Standards for Managing Productivity
In addition to quality, we are also looking to work efficiently and produce our instructional products as quickly as we can without jeopardising the quality of our products. Standards can help us:

- provide for consensus building about the process of development
- increase developer productivity by telling them what is expected
- provide easier design of products, the most efficient ways of working are defined
- help new employees learn their jobs quicker by following the standards
- clarify roles and responsibilities for product development.
- provide for team building, peer review and coaching
- deliver training for new employees.

Advantages of Standards for Managing Projects
Managing the development of one project can be a challenge, but if your organisation is developing many projects at one time, you will need to find ways to manage each project efficiently. Standards can help you do this by:

- helping with smoother project ‘hand-offs’ between developers or phases
- better time/cost estimates for new projects and products
- better project management
- more accurate charges to clients.

Disadvantages of Standards for Managing Quality
With standards you may find the following disadvantages:

- rigid adherence to a process even when it is not working
- adherence to the process becomes more important than the quality of the products
- documentation of standards is confusing, incomplete, or difficult to use.

Disadvantages of Standards for Managing Productivity
Some organisations have experienced difficulties managing their productivity when they use standards. These usually centre around attitudes towards the standards, but may include the way the standards are written. Some of the disadvantages of standards towards productivity are:

- one or more persons need to take the time to write the standards
- persons in the constituent groups need to set aside time to help develop the standards
- difficulty in building consensus among constituent groups in the development process
- standards may reduce flexibility/creativity of developers
• developers resisting the use of the standards, especially by developers who ‘do it intuitively’ or ‘another way’
• difficult to maintain consensus as new employees arrive and others leave
• updating and maintaining is difficult.

**Disadvantages of Standards for Managing Projects**
The disadvantages of standards for managing project are:
• staff may feel threatened by having their work measured against criteria
• staff may resist having skill deficiencies identified.

**Types of Standards**
Standards can be used for two different purposes to document how to develop a product and the specifications of the product. These two kinds of standards are called:
• process or procedure standards
• product standards.

Standards that document how a product should be developed are called **process or procedure standards**.

Standards that document what a product should look like, its product specifications, are called **product standards**.

Standards can also be a **combination** of a process and a product standard.

Standards can also be written with varying degrees of flexibility. Some standards are written with **mandated** steps that one **must** follow in all situations. Other standards are written as **guidelines** with suggestions of ways to proceed and parameters to follow. Many organisations will have a combination of mandated rules and guidelines for standards. In areas where they have a need for more control of quality, they will mandate the steps. In other areas they may encourage more originality and creativity and may only use guidelines.

**Process Standards**
Process standards will document what one should **do** during a step in a process. The focus of process standards is action. The following is an example taken from a process standards. Keep in mind that it is only a portion of the standards.
Module Development

In order to deliver the content to the teacher-learners in the field, DCE contracts subject matter experts to develop distance education modules. The development process may include one or more of the following processes:

- writing
- reviewing
- updating
- production

**Writing** the module is where the author analyses, organises, and writes the content for the distance education module.

**Reviewing** is where a content expert carefully looks at the module for content and educational quality.

**Updating** is where the updater makes minor changes to module to enhance the learning or correct small errors.

**Production** is where the module is put into published form. It may include typing, desktop publishing, creating artwork, printing, duplicating, and binding.

Module Development Process

The module development process at DCE is aimed at being very collaborative. The goal is to have groups of people meet and agree upon issues around:

- which modules to develop and when
- what should be included in each module
- the scope and size of each module
- who will play what roles during development
  - writer(s)
  - reviewer(s)
- time frames for development (deadlines).

Figure 1.1 shows the flow chart depicting the development process.

Sections 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 discuss the process for module development.
Flow Chart for Module Development

Initiation Phase

Subject Area Meets on Module Development/Revision Needs, Submits Request for
New Module Development or
Existing Module Revision/Update

Distance Education Committee Meets
to Approve which Modules will be Developed or Revised or Updated

Analysis Phase

Analysis Phase of Module Development
Audience Analysis
Existing Materials Collected
Parameters set for Module Development
Consultation with other Resources

Development Phase

Development Phase of Module Development
Write Objectives
Structure Content
Sequence Instruction
Write Explanations, Activities, Tests, etc.
Write Overviews and Summaries, Glossaries

Review Phase

Review Phase of Module Development
Submit draft materials to typist/desktop publisher
Module Writer(s) Complete Quality Checklist
to ensure all materials are submitted
(diagrams, maps, tables, activities, tests)
and Educational Review

Production Phase

Subject Matter Expert Reviews Module

Submit documents to Editor

Module Writer, Reviewer and Editor meet to
discuss/decide about changes

Document Revisions

Final Approval by Module Writer
Module goes to Printer

Fig. 1.1. Process of module development.
Initiation Phase

The process for developing distance education modules begins with the Initiation Phase. The Initiation Phase begins with a meeting by members of the subject area and continues to be consultative throughout the development process.

Meeting of Subject Area Members

The Head of Department or Section Head will call a meeting of the Lecturers in a subject area.

The following will be invited to the meetings:

- all Lecturers from the institution who teach in the subject area
- any other Lecturers who teach in the subject area
- any other teacher with a degree from a qualified institution of higher learning identified by the department
- the Head of Department for the subject area

During this meeting the following should be discussed and agreed upon.

- modularisation of content (not in existing modules) based on the course outlines, into units
- identify a chart/outline of units and their titles
- changes to the curriculum and how the affect the existing modules
- proposed moderate or major revisions to existing modules
- size and scope of any new modules that need to be developed
- assign roles and responsibilities of personnel for proposed revising, writing and/or reviewing modules
- establish time frames for proposed revising or developing of modules
- complete form to apply for new module development or module revision to Distance Education Committee

Request for New Module Development

The Subject Team will complete a formal request for new module development. This request will include the following:

- name of proposed new module
- how the new module fits into the existing or revised curriculum
- reason for requesting new module development
- proposed personnel assigned to the module development including details of their roles and responsibilities
- schedule for module development
- description of the size and scope of the proposed module

Request for a Moderate or Major Revision of an Existing Module

The Subject Team will complete a formal request for new module development. This request will include the following:

- name of proposed module to be revised
- description or diagram of how the current and proposed revised modules fit into the existing or revised curriculum
- reason for requesting moderate to major module revision
- proposed personnel assigned to the module development including details of their roles and responsibilities
- schedule for module development
- description of the size and scope of the proposed module
The request will be signed by all of the persons attending the meeting. Address all requests for module development or for moderate to major revisions to a module to the chair of the Distance Education Committee.

**Decisions on Modules to be Written or Revised**

Once the Distance Education Committee receives a request for module revision or development they will meet to discuss the applications. The Distance Education Committee will make decisions for module revision/development based on the following criteria:

- results of module evaluation by learners
- results of performance by learners on examinations and continuous assessment
- evidence of a change in the curriculum
- available resources for module development.

**Analysis Phase**

This is the second phase of the DCE module development process. The phase begins after the Distance Education Committee approves the application for module development or moderate to major revisions. During this phase, the assigned module writer(s)/developer(s) will begin work on the module.

**Collect Existing Materials**

The writer begins to work on the module by collecting any existing materials. This may include but not be limited to:

- subject course outline
- chart/list of unit titles and its sub-concepts or sub-titles
- results of module evaluation by learners
- results of performance by learners on examinations and continuous assessment
- course lecture notes
- textbooks on the subject

**Analyse Your Audience**

Once again, we know that the key to quality in education is knowing the needs of your audience and targeting the learning directly for your audience. At this time you should review any feedback from your learners. This might be module and/or residential session evaluations; comments from learners, feedback from field supervisors, feedback from teacher-helpers, and feedback from the facilitators of the residential session. Review what you have learned about the learners and how they interact with their learning materials. Make a list of things you want to consider about your learners as you begin to develop your new module, or do moderate to major revisions to an existing module.
Consult with Colleagues
Once the writer(s) has collected any existing information and looked at the audience needs, it is important to check with other specialists in the area. These may be:
• lecturers from other colleges and universities
• subject matter experts from other institutions
• e-mail or internet inquiries from other institutions
The purpose of this consultation is to try to establish if there is any more current information on the topic or if the content collected is appropriate/adequate.

Prepare and Present Report to Subject Team
After the consultation with colleagues, the writer(s) will compile all of the information gathered at this time and prepare a short report. The report will include the following:
• name of module
• personnel assigned to the module development including details of their roles and responsibilities
• finalised schedule for module development
• description of the size and scope of the proposed module
  ➢ approximate number of units
  ➢ approximate number of pages
  ➢ list of resources to be used to assist in writing

Subject Team Approval
Upon receiving the report, the subject team will discuss the report. They will suggest any additional changes that they want considered, if there are any. Once all in the subject area agree, the writer(s)/developer(s) can proceed to prepare to develop the module.

End of example of process standards.

Product Standards
Product standards document what the product will look like when it is complete. They discuss the output of a process, the product specifications. Product standards focus on the result. Earlier we discussed two product standards, the APA style and the Chicago Manual of Style
On the following page begins an example of a portion product standards that have been developed for an organisation. Once again, keep in mind that this is only a portion of the standards for this organisation.
Structuring Your Module

The DCE Curriculum is set and approved by the Academic Committee. The Distance Education courses follow the same curriculum as the conventional residential programme.

During the original writing of the distance education modules, each subject area met to “modularise” their content. By modularise, we mean that the content covered in each year of the program was organised into modules. Each subject area has a maximum of 12 modules plus a module for methods of teaching in each subject area.

Modules

A module contains approximately seven to 12 units.

A module has an overview, units of instruction, a module test, references, and an optional glossary.

Modules are approximately 80 to 120 pages in length.

Units

Each unit should be ten to 20 pages.

Each unit must have an:

- introduction
- explanation including learning activities
- summary
- unit test
- answers to unit activities

Lessons

The content of a unit is divided into lessons, topics, sub-topics and occasionally sub-sub topics.

A lesson is a self-contained unit of work. Lessons may be long or very short. The length of the lesson depends on the content and how much the learners already know about the content.

Lessons should be organised into groups or “chunks” of information. These should be given headings to help the learners organise their learning.

Headings

Headings help the learner structure the instruction by indicating categories of information. Headings can also help learners locate information.

To help you identify headings, write an outline of your content. You can then use the levels of the outline to identify your headings. To help us understand what headings we are talking about we have given the different levels names. The following example of the levels of an outline gives you these names.

I. Lesson
   A. Topic
      1. Sub-topic
         a. Sub-sub topic

Since headings are useful for locating information use concise and informative heading. Use seven words or less.

Fonts for Headings

In the distance education modules, the headings given to these levels are:
Lesson Title

Topic Title

Sub-topic Title

Sub-sub-topic Title

Structure of a Lesson
Good teaching needs structure. The lesson structure should have three basic parts. These are the:

- introduction
- development
- consolidation or summary

Introduction
The introduction should be relatively short and should lead into content of the lesson.
In the introduction you should:

- get their attention
- relate to what the learners already know
- give learners an idea of where they are going

You may name the topics that will be covered in this lesson. These should match the titles for the topics. You may want to use a bulleted list to list the names of the topics in the lesson.

Development
This is the main body of the content. Here is where concepts and/or procedures are taught.
The content should follow a logical structure and sequence and flow from topic to topic.
Research has shown that adult learners prefer consistency. For this reason it is helpful to establish a pattern to your sequencing and structuring and to use that pattern throughout the module.

Consolidation
This is the concluding or summary of the lesson, or topic. Its purpose is to strengthen what they have just learned.
In the consolidation you should:

- summarise what they should have learned
- attempt to assess their level of learning
- assist the learners in applying what they have learned

We suggest that you include an activity to help your learners consolidate their learning. This might be a reflection, hands on, or assessment.

Figure 4.1 on the following page illustrates the structure of a unit. Notice the main phases of the unit in the left column and how they are further divided into sub-phases in the right hand column. The sub-phases will be your lessons and topics.

End of example of product standards.
**Process and Product Standards**
Most organisations include both process and product standards but will usually lean more towards one or the other. Organisations that find it important for people to follow prescribed steps will have an emphasis on process standards. Organisations that require their products to fit exact specifications will have an emphasis on product standards.

**Process for Developing Standards**
The process for developing standards is not a cut and dry, step by step process. It is more an iterative process. But there are some general guidelines that you should follow as you develop your standards. These are:

- define quality
- analyse procedures
- define product standards
- work closely with people in the organisation
- let the standards grow with the organisation.

Let’s look at each of these general guidelines.

**Define Quality**
Once your organisation has decided to develop standards for their products, they will first need to look closely at their organisation and its goals and objectives. As you recall, quality standards depend upon how the organisation defines quality. The process for developing standards begins with the organisation defining quality.

You probably recall the example given earlier in this paper of an organisations definition of quality. The organisation came to this definition by asking many questions of many people. The following are some of the questions that should be discussed and agreed upon:

- What is the purpose of the organisation?
- Who is the client?
- What are the needs of the employees?
- What do they mean by quality?

Once the organisation agrees on their purpose and goals, you will need to look closer at your client and your employees. You should do an audience analysis to look at what the client needs and expects and another audience analysis of the people who will be developing the instructional materials.

The most critical part of the whole standards development process is agreeing on what is a ‘quality’ product. If the stakeholders can define and agree on what they consider a ‘quality’ product, it is the beginning of the quality standards. Some of the questions that might be addressed are:
Questions about the Client (Learner)

- What are the needs of the audience?
  - What are the learners doing besides using the proposed learning materials?
  - How will the learners be using the information in the learning materials?
  - What do the learners already know?
  - What skills, knowledge and/or attitudes do the learners need?
  - What are the learners’ goals and aspirations?
  - What is their reading ability?
  - What is the environment like where the learners will be doing their learning?

The answers to these questions can help the writer of the standards fit the learning materials to the needs of their learners. For example, if the learners will be doing the majority of their learning in rural areas where they may have limited access to electric lighting, the product will need to be designed that has larger type and is easier to read by candlelight. If the learners are using the learning materials while they are working a full time job, the learning should be broken down into smaller pieces allowing the learners to manage their learning in small pieces of time when available. These kinds of things can be built into standards by setting guidelines or mandating steps for what the product should look like or the size of a unit or lesson.

Questions about the Organisation

- What image does the organisation want to project?
  - content accuracy, consistency, and other measures of quality?
  - professional, efficient?
  - friendly and helpful to the client?
  - creative, original, relaxed
- What are the funds available for development?
- What resources are available to produce the product (people, time)?

If you are working for an organisation that is facing a serious time shortage, you will need to find ways in your process standards to become more efficient. If the content you are developing has any special needs like need for safety, or very high levels of accuracy needed, this will need to be addressed in your standards.
Questions about the Product Developers

- How much experience do they have?
- What are the writing skills of the developers?
- What experience do the developers have with teaching?
- How much development training have they had?
- How much time do they have?
- How often do developers leave and enter the organisation?
- How much technical assistance is available?
- What constraints might they face from other organisations?
- How much creativity can the organisation allow?
- What support do the developers need to develop the instruction?
- What is the attitude of the developers to standards?

The answers to these and other questions will help you decide what needs to be standardised and what you can leave more flexible for the developers. For example, if your group of developers is constantly changing and they have limited experience with developing instructional materials, you will want to have more detailed, step by step mandated standards that a new person get up to speed quickly. If your group of developers is experienced with developing instructional materials, they can be given more flexibility and freedom in their guidelines or standards. Since the developers will probably be the ones using the standards most often, it is important that they be considered during the analysis of quality. Above all, they should be easy for the developers to use. Address their needs.

Analyse Procedures

Once your organisation has defined its needs you can begin to look at prioritising the most important steps for developing. You might consider the following questions?

- What are the most critical functions for developing this instructional product?
- What task do they perform the most frequently?
- What steps in the process are the most difficult to perform?
- How difficult is the step to learn?
- What would a process diagram look like for developing products for this organisation?
- What steps in the process have given the developers the most problems?
- What ways can we implement to make tasks more efficient and effective?
  - flow charts
  - checklists
  - job aids
- What concepts are needed in order to perform the tasks correctly?
Begin with the things that are the most critical, frequent, and/or difficult. You might find it helpful to look at ways expert developers work and learn efficient and effective ways of working from them.

**Define Product Standards**

If you decide that your product needs to have a defined style, you will need to make decisions about the “look and feel” of your product. The following are examples of some of the questions you might ask are? Keep in mind this is in no way exhaustive. The questions are too many to include here.

- What communications need to be standardised to improve efficiency?
- What kinds of quality reviews and approvals need to be put in place?
- What is the structure of the content (units, lessons, and topics)?
- To what level of readability should the materials be standardised?
- Should the writing style be friendly and informal or formal?
- Will it have an index, table of figures, or other organising features?
- How much will the standards require sound educational practises?

This last bulleted item may be the most important question to ask as you define a quality instructional product. The standards should consider what research has shown us about the way people learn. Make sure that a qualified educational specialist assists in establishing the standards for its educational quality.

The following two checklists come from the *COL Quality Assurance in Open and Distance Learning Training Toolkit 005* (1999:4-4 to 4-5). They are the kinds of questions that an educational specialist would consider.
Checklist to Evaluate the Academic Credibility of Learning Materials

- Are the aims and objectives sufficiently explicit?
- Do the aims seem relevant to the needs of the target audiences?
- Should any additional aims and objectives be included?
- Is the content up-to-date?
- Is the content accurate?
- Are the content and presentation culturally appropriate?
- Are there any important omissions?
- Do there seem to be any faults of emphasis?
- Are the assertions made adequately supported by evidence?
- Do the materials avoid oversimplification or over generalisation?
- Are they true to the nature of the subject or discipline?
- Are they balanced, and at pains to present opposing points of view when appropriate?
- Are the media that have been selected being exploited appropriately and to their full potential?

Checklist to Evaluate the Likely Effectiveness of Learning Materials

- Does the structure seem sensible and coherent, using introductions or previews, and summaries or reviews where appropriate, and providing a means that allows learners with different needs to use the lesson in different ways?
- Are adequate steps taken to motivate the learners and make clear to them what they are to do with the material and to get out of it?
- Are the materials pitched at the right level of difficulty and matched to the assumed prerequisite skills and understandings of the learners?
- Is the tone that of a rigorous but friendly tutor, lively and interesting?
- Is the language plain and straightforward?
- Are analogies, examples, case studies, and illustrations used where appropriate to develop understanding?
- Are questions, exercises, and activities properly integrated into the materials to encourage learners in the self-assessment and practice of relevant skills?
- Are print and electronic media effectively integrated?
- Is the form of presentation conducive to effective learning?
- Are learners given sufficient information and practice of a kind likely to help them achieve the objectives?
- Is the relationship between assessment items and aims and objectives clear?
- Are assessment items clear in what they demand of learners?
- Are assessment items likely to result in answers that can be marked with reasonable consensus of agreement among different markers?
- Is the likely learner workload reasonable for the topic?
As you make decisions about how you should build your products and how they should look, you may want to look at products from other organisations. Talk with people to see what decisions they made and why and any lessons they learned.

**Work Closely with People in the Organisation**

Possibly, the most important thing is to always work with the people in the organisation as you make decisions about processes and products. You may want to have regular meetings where you look at where the problems are and how to address them. You might look at successes and share ways that people have found to save time or improve quality. The more people who help make decisions, the more likely they are to use the standards.

Once you have a beginning on the standards, start working with the staff to use them. Orient the staff to the standards and set up ways to enforce them. If they only sit on the shelf, they are of no use to the organisation. The same goes for if they are not enforced, they will not be used.

**Let the Standards Grow with the Organisation**

As you have probably noticed, your organisation will need to make many decisions. You cannot do this in a short amount of time. Begin with documenting the most critical steps or characteristics.

Standards might be set when one encounters a problem, the guideline or standard is established to solve the problem. Address the needs of your organisation as the standards develop. Monitor and make adjustments and changes when you need to. You should establish a procedure for making changes and additions to the standards.
Content of Standards

There are many kinds of items that you may find documented in a standards manual. Each organisation will look at its needs and decide what needs to be standardised and how they will implement the standards. The following list of items included in standards is adapted from Silber and Stelnicki (1992: p 8).

Chapter 1: Introduction
- History of the organisation
- Purpose of the standards
- How to update the standards (who, when, how)
- How to use the standards
- Roles and responsibilities of the key players

Chapter 2: Overall process
- Diagram of the overall process
- Description of the phases in the overall process
- Define roles and responsibilities for the process

Chapters 3 to ? (depends on the number of phases and steps)
- Description of each phase and or step in the process
  - How it fits into the total process
  - Diagram of the steps in the phase
  - Description of the steps in the phase
  - Purpose
  - Definitions
  - Risk factors
  - Key design issues
  - Key project management issues
  - Inputs (what, who, and when) and how to do them
  - Action steps (what to do, when to do, who does, and how to do.)
  - Outputs (what, who, when, quality criteria, and formats)
  - Examples
  - Roles and Responsibilities
  - Approvals (who, when, how)
  - Job-aids
  - Reference to other resources
  - Time and cost allowed for each phase
  - How to handle unique situations

Other Possible Sections
- Process for problem resolution
- Reference to related organisation standards documents
- Glossary
- References
Summary

Standards are one way of trying to make the development of your instructional products more efficient and effective. Standards should build quality into your products.

There are both process and product standards. Process standards document the way to develop, product standards document the specification of a product.

The standards should be written addressing the needs of the learners, the organisation and the developers. You should begin by documenting the most critical tasks, the most frequently performed tasks, and the most difficult tasks to learn and to perform.

There will be many questions you will need to ask and answer as you develop standards. Be sure to include all the key players in your decision-making. Standards should be written in consultation with others giving the users a feeling of ownership.

References

Domasi College of Education. (2002). *Distance Education Manual*. Domasi, Malawi: Domasi College of Education.


