Lesson 2

<h1 style="text-align:center">COURSE WRITING METHODOLOGIES</h1>

Aim
Write course documentation and materials methodically and with clarity.

DEVELOPING COURSES
Courses can be developed in different ways, but every course uses written documents that define, describe, outline and detail the direction and contents of that course. Three types of documents that are commonly used to develop a course are course outlines, curriculum documentation and study notes:

a) Course Outlines (or descriptions)
These describe the course either as a whole, or by breaking it into its components (i.e. modules and/or lessons).

These documents are mostly used in the pre-enrolment phase e.g. for course selection or marketing. For less formal courses e.g. Adult education, hobby classes, the outline may provide a guide for teaching staff to follow as they deliver the course.

A course outline may be seen by both the student and the teaching staff.

b) Curriculum Documentation
These documents define what a course is, in every respect. Their purpose might be:
- As a reference point to be used by anyone writing course notes, study guides, or even delivering lectures or practical sessions.
- As a document to be submitted for accreditation purposes.

They are generally seen and used only by the staff of the school (teachers and administrators).

Curriculum Documentation can be costly to write, and even more costly to maintain up to date. In large education systems (eg. government accreditation systems) they are commonly written before anything else, and their development involves seeking and applying input from designated experts. For example, a curriculum advisory committee commonly sets the framework for writing this documentation then meets periodically with course writers to review their progress.

Curriculum documents are not always necessary, and if they are not required for accreditation, you should seriously consider the cost benefit to be had before deciding to allocate financial or manpower resources to this type of documentation.

c) Study Notes
These are documents such as text books, handouts, accompanying notes, study guides, work sheets or anything else which serves one or another of two purposes:
- To provide a source of information

or
- To provide a guide or pathway for the student to follow.

Continuous or Periodic Course Development
The relationship between course development and time has almost always been assumed to have only one option, that being to develop a course, finish development and then deliver it.

Changes to the course have almost always been viewed as something to be done every so many years; the only variable being how often a major review would be undertaken.

There are, in fact, two options:

Periodic Review
Here curriculum documentation (or course outline if there is no curriculum document) is revised using a similar procedure to that used for its original development. Commonly it is reviewed by a committee and a curriculum writer who then makes alterations. The committee is then required to make any adjustments and approve the alterations. The time interval between such reviews is commonly (across the world) every five years.

Continuous Review
This involves seeking input routinely and continuously from teaching staff and/or students (and/or perhaps industry). The course might never undergo a major change at any one point in time, but it could feasibly be altered daily, weekly or monthly; irregularly and as the need is detected.

This approach would have been difficult to manage prior to the widespread use of computers, but in today's world, it is relatively easy to change curriculum documents, course outlines or study notes, as and when desired.

IDENTIFYING NEEDS

Student Perspective
Students do not always know their needs. To know what is needed in a particular discipline, one first needs to understand that discipline. If a student does not understand the discipline, their understanding of their needs in a course will necessarily be limited. If they do understand the discipline, there may well be little reason for them to undertake a course.

Students will inevitably have wants and expectations that relate to a course they undertake. Every student is likely to have a different set of priorities and expectations, and those expectations are likely to change as they progress through the course.

What will have changed when a student comes to the end of a course?

Their Perceptions - The course should have enlightened them and, with greater understanding and awareness, they may appreciate needs they didn't see when they started.

The World - The community, industry and the value of knowledge and skills can be very different at the conclusion of a course, compared with what it was at the beginning.

Educator's Perspective
An effective educator needs to be empathetic, that is, they must have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of the student, not just while the student is studying, but also when they have completed the course.

Family Perspective
Parents and/or families want to see value for education.

Community and Industry Perspective
Community and employers are motivated by their work and profit (or in the case of government or non-profit organisations, achieving more value for the money spent). Some employers will be concerned with-long term benefits from training, but often employers only worry about the short term.

IDENTIFYING RESOURCES
Consider what resources are required to deliver a course successfully. It may be preferable to develop a course that utilises the best resources, but if those resources are not realistically available to all participants; it becomes an impractical way to develop that course.

Student Resources
Students will commonly need information resources, such as notes and textbooks, and may also need other resources as well (such as equipment, people to work with, etc).

Teacher Resources
Teachers may also require information resources (such as a library), but there are other things a teacher may need to properly deliver a course (eg. photocopying facilities, internet access, a budget for phone calls, etc).

WRITING AIMS, COMPETENCIES AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA
Aims are the areas of learning a course is attempting to impart to the student. The aims may be general in scope, or specific. A student may or may not be required to formally demonstrate they have fulfilled those aims.

Competencies and **learning outcomes** are generally those areas of learning in which a student should be competent to do at the end of a course.

Assessment criteria are criteria which are considered when a student is being assessed.

The success or failure of a student is commonly measured against competencies by considering assessment criteria.

Example:

Learning Outcome
Determine procedures for the safe and appropriate operation of a tractor, in a horticultural or agricultural situation.

Assessment Criteria
- Determine the legal requirements governing the operation of tractors, in the learner's locality.
- Compare the design specifications for three different tractors, of similar horsepower.
- Develop a procedure for the safe operation of a tractor, in a specified horticultural or agricultural workplace.
- Determine the tractor mounted implements appropriate for a specified horticultural or agricultural workplace.
- Explain the correct operation of two different tractor mounted implements, to perform specified tasks.

WRITING COURSE NOTES - A Guideline

- 1st Step - The first step in developing any course is to determine an overall aim.
- 2nd Step - Next dissect the course into modules and/or lessons.
- 3rd Step - The next step should be to determine either aims, or learning outcomes; or both, for each part of the course.
- 4th Step - All steps after this should retain a focus on and relate to the overall course aim, and the aims set for each module or lesson.

Option 1

Some writers would next develop information resources to fit the aim; then create tasks such as research, practical tasks or assignments to reflect both the aims and the information resources.

Option 2

Some writers develop assignments first that are designed to test the student's competence with respect to the aim. They then design experiences e.g. Tasks, Practicals, Research that help strengthen knowledge and/or skills related to the aims; and finally select or develop information resources that enable the assignment and experiences to be performed.

WRITING PRACTICALS

Precise and plain language is the best approach to writing practicals irrelevant of the subject matter. Use simple and direct statements, a numbered or bulleted list of instructions and don't be repetitive. If the practical requires the student to perform tasks that may have associated health and safety risks advise appropriate precautions they need to undertake.

WRITING FOR CLARITY AND UNDERSTANDING

Clarity makes writing easy to understand. Clarity in writing means that the reader should not have to re-read to understand the writer's meaning. It should also be clear to the reader what they are reading and why.

a. Use simple and directly worded sentences –
b. Avoid including abstract thoughts
c. Choose simple words as far as possible
d. Be explicit i.e. the reader should know why and what they are reading
e. Avoid grammar and syntax errors i.e. the grammatical structure in sentences
f. Avoid ambiguity

Principles of Good Writing

1. Understand the purpose of what you are writing before you commence
2. Write to express not impress
3. Write the way you speak
4. Don't use unnecessary words
5. Avoid unfamiliar words
6. Use short simple sentences
7. Avoid errors in grammar and spelling
8. Write for your reader i.e. take into account the reader's experience

Structuring the Course

1. Select the topic
2. Develop a course aim
3. Decide on overall content i.e. number of lessons and what each lesson will cover
4. Develop aims and objectives for each lesson
5. Using the lesson aims as a guideline, develop a series of set tasks and assignments for each lesson.
6. Write the lesson content to coincide with the set tasks and assignments.

You may not need to provide ALL the information, but the lesson should guide and encourage the student to extend their knowledge when they complete their set tasks and assignments or reports i.e. through further research, problem based assignments and further investigation and reading.

CODING COURSES

Courses need to be coded in order for the writer or institution to keep track of them. It also means that both the student and institution are clear on which course is being undertaken**.**
Some government accredited courses also require the course code to be shown on certificates, incorrect course codes means that a qualification awarded could be deemed invalid.

Example of Coding Procedure
At ACS, for example, all course codes contain four parts, as follows:

a) First letter indicates the course level:
B indicates Bachelors (B modules can be used for credit in degrees, diplomas or certificates)
V indicates Vocational (V modules can be used for credit in diplomas or certificates)
A indicates Adult education (designed to be studied only for general interest)

b) *Second two letters* indicate the discipline of the course or module. For example:
HT means horticulture
Wr means writing and publishing.

c) First number
When a code has three numbers, and the first is 1, 2, 3, 4 and so on, the number indicates whether the course is the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th (and so on) level of post secondary education.

d) Final numbers distinguish one course or module from another.

Example of a module code: BHT101 – Horticulture I

FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

Flexible delivery can include distance education, but is much more than just distance education. Flexible delivery may mean providing the student with flexibility in areas such as the following:

- A choice of the time of day or the week when they study
- A choice of the rate at which study progresses
- A choice of the method(s) used to study (text books, or videos, or lectures, or combinations of such resources)

Flexibility may be achieved in many different ways. Here are just a few examples:

- Programming classes to provide a series of options, for the student to choose from;
- Providing tuition on a one to one basis
- Providing a classroom with a series of self contained study booths, and self paced learning materials in each. The student studies by watching videos, slide presentations, reading texts, doing written assignments etc, at their own pace. As and when they need help, a team of tutors are on hand to come to the students assistance.
- Providing lectures on TV or radio broadcasts
- Providing lectures/classes on a two-way radio system.

AN EXERCISE IN APPLYING STRATEGIES FOR FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

Consider the following standard strategies used in teaching, and what could be done to improve flexibility in the way each of these strategies is applied:

Assignments and Exercises
Students carry out a range of tasks, experiments, reports, etc.
Comment: Work is carried out individually or in groups; assignments are realistic and relevant to the objective; the teacher's duty is to advise the student.

Brainstorming
Group suggests many solutions to a problem or task in a given time.
Comment: Student use their imagination, originality and creativity to find solutions. Suggestions are later listed, evaluated and rated according to priority.

Buzz Group
Groups of 2-6 members discuss issues for a short period.
Comment: Provides variety to the lesson, helps discussion on difficult topics, can be grouped according to experience or slow learners.

Case Study
Groups discuss topics and propose solution.
Comment: Encourages thinking, discussion and problem solving. Encourages attitude development.

Demonstration
Teacher performs operation while students watch.
Comment: No room for errors by the teacher, class needs to be small to watch demonstration unless visuals are used.

Discussion
Open discussion by all.
Comment: important when dealing with adults, rely upon student experience, material is covered in a non-threatening manner.

Guest Speakers
Speaker presents information and responds to questions.
Comment: Respect given to speaker for being "guest" or expert in the field, high attention rates for listeners, speaker needs to prepare topic if providing a formal talk.

Laboratory Practical Work
Students perform and evaluate tasks and experiments.
Comment: Encourages thinking, discussion, reasoning and observation skills, and provides a systematic approach to problems.

Lecture
Is a period of uninterrupted talk by the teacher, with or without demonstrations.
Comment: Good for fast learning, does not promote thought, rarely changes attitude, teacher needs to be prepared students should be supplied with appropriate handouts.

Mutual Lectures
The lecturing is shared between a number of students presenting a topic.
Comment: Preparation time required, involves team work, teacher's duty is to supervise.

Practical Workshop
Set tasks are performed.
Comment: Feedback is continuous, students become motivated, the teacher becomes a guide.

Projects
Students work on longer-term activities (individually or in groups).
Comment: Access to resources needed, can be time-consuming, can motivate students to high levels and encourages imagination and initiative. Teacher's duty is to motivate and provide minimal guidance.

Role Playing
Students are required to act out roles for which they are training
Comment: Preparation not needed, some skills and factual material may be learnt from the exercise.

Seminars
A small group meeting to discuss a topic;
Comment: Preparation may be needed, good for clarifying information.

Simulations
Knowledge and skills are practised without "real" equipment.
Comment: Reduces anxiety by students if equipment was real.

Tutorials
Teacher acts as a counsellor to help the student in a one-to-one situation.
Comment: Teacher to be supportive, sympathetic and encouraging. Student is to work through a set task or a problem.

Now….beside each of the following teaching techniques, write an example of what could be done to offer the student a high degree of flexibility in the way this technique is applied:

Assignment and Exercises
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Brainstorming
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Buzz Group
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Case Study
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Demonstration
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Guest
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Lecture
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Mutual Lectures
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Practical Workshop
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Projects
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Role Playing

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Seminars

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Simulations

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Tutorials

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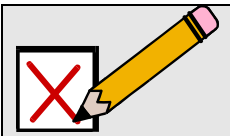
	SELF ASSESSMENT Perform the self assessment test titled 'Self Assessment Test 2.1.' If you answer incorrectly, review the notes and try the test again.

SET TASK

Interview someone who has developed a course, in person, via email, or on the phone. This might be someone who runs (or has run) a hobby course, or perhaps something more involved.

Find out what they consider the most difficult thing to teach (in their experience), and what teaching strategies they employed to overcome that difficulty.

	ASSIGNMENT Download and do the assignment called 'Lesson 2 Assignment'.