

Distance Education Specialist Centre (DESC) Course Design Manual



A comprehensive guide for designing online courses within the Distance Education Partnership Programme (DEPP)

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Contributors: DEPP Consultants

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Project Director

Distance Education Modernization Project

35/10 Nawala Road

Colombo 05

Sri Lanka

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Overview and the purpose of the Course Design Manual (CDM)

The Distance Education Modernization Project (DEMP), established through the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka seeks to promote the latest generation of distance learning throughout the country. The Distance Education Partnership Programme (DEPP), which operates within the DEMP, has been charged with the responsibility of establishing and promoting an online learning system for institutions engaged in tertiary and higher education in Sri Lanka.

The Distance Education Specialist Centre (DESC) is committed to ensuring excellence, quality and success to partner institutions through many support functions and will provide leadership and good guiding principles for online course design and development. These Post Secondary Partner Institutions (PPI's) are the "enablers" for design, development and delivery of online education in Sri Lanka. Institutions and providers are encouraged to engage a course design team led by an Instructional Designer (ID) or learning specialist who would be guided by the principles covered in this "how to" manual.

Who can benefit by using this manual?

Online course development is essentially a team responsibility, so the following stakeholders may find this course design manual helpful in developing their instructional design skills:

- Instructional designers
- Classroom instructors/professors
- Subject Matter Experts (SME), content creators and publishers
- Administrators who are seeking to launch online education programmes or establish an online educational unit at their institution

- Others seeking to contribute to an online course design team.

Table 1 below lists typical design team member titles, and some key competencies that may help portray a typical team composition for design and development of online course development. Team composition may vary depending on many circumstances and members with various skill sets may assume multiple roles. Some educational units employ a course coordinator, or a programme manager who would perform a more administrative role and team support role.

Table 1

Title or Team Role	Key Skills and Competencies that may be valuable for this role
Instructional Designer (ID) (also referred to as Instructional Technologist, Learning Specialist, or Course Designer)	Imagination/ creativity, communication skills, an ability to synthesize details, basic computer skills, word processing skills, time management, project management, and decision-making skills. Sound knowledge of training and education.
Subject Matter Expert (SME) (this may also be the online teacher, but not necessarily so)	Content knowledge, ability to provide course content and activities for learner-centered education. Word processing skills.
Graphic Artist or Multimedia Specialist	Web and computer graphic artistry
Learning Management System (LMS) Technologist and/ or LMS System Administrator	Basic computer system skills, familiarity with internet usage and/or LMS usage, organizational skills, and help/ support background
Online teacher &/or online tutor/ mentor	Facilitation skills, Basic computer word processing skills, record keeping and administrative skills

Course evaluator(s) (also referred to as Course reviewer, or Course Editor)	Competent in following evaluation tools(s), knowledge of principles of good teaching/learning and copyright.
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A full position description for an ID position as provided by DEPP can be found in appendix 1. Descriptions of duties for other team members can be found in appendix 2.

How to use this Course Design Manual (CDM)

The CDM is the legacy document. Copies will be located within the DESC and is available to DESC staff and to PPI personnel for practical use and reference. This manual is a comprehensive resource for novice or seasoned educators who plan on designing simple or complex learning environments on a learning management system (LMS). Many of the strategies, and processes explained in this manual may be transferred on other LMS's, MOODLE is the chosen LMS for DEPP. More information about the LMS can be accessed at the MOODLE website (<http://www.moodle.org>). There may need to be some adjustments that are specific to the virtual learning environment or to the functionality of the LMS if transferring content, and developed strategies on another LMS.

Good online teaching and learning within the DEPP framework

Good teaching and learning is more than merely solid design, effective development and good facilitation of content and activities. A system approach to online design and development incorporates important components and aspects that can lead towards an online educational experience that is greater than the sum of its parts! The DEPP Instructional

Design Model has been laid out in a flowchart format in the *Conceptual Framework for Distance Education in Sri Lanka* (Revised September, 2006, page 25). This CDM expands upon the model by adding detail required for designing and developing contextually solid online learning experiences, which are built on a new learning paradigm. Online education has changed the way a teacher would design, develop and teach. It is strongly recommended that users refer to the model in order to help guide planning and operations at any stage of their processes.



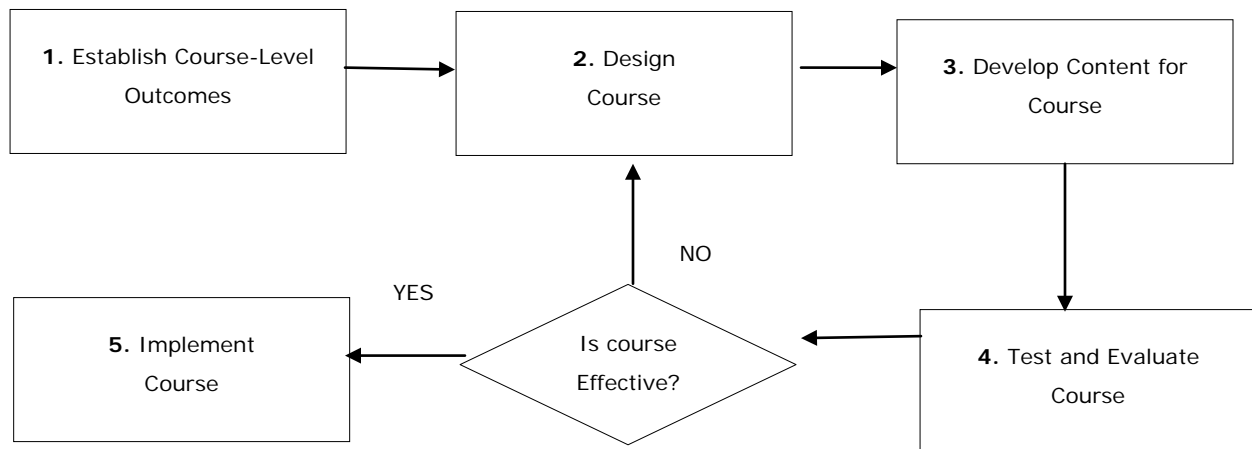
Where is the teacher?



Who is "teaching"?



Online Learning Instructional Design Model



Getting the most from the model requires a dissection of its parts and then a fleshing out or expanding of the phases or sub-components of the model structure in order to provide an explanation and detail of good practice required for process and production. The model diagrammed above is a useful high-level framework. It is vital to use the model, this CDM, current research in instructional design process, and to access your local community of educators and the training programmes that the DEPP office has prepared in order to help you achieve success.

Step 1. Establish Course-level Outcomes

Learner, task and context analysis which help form course-level outcomes are important first steps. Writing course-level outcomes and some insight into learning theories and instructional theoretical foundations are needed to help shape the underpinnings of the design phase. Lesson-level outcomes, and the matching of assessment choices to outcomes are also needed at this stage. Step 1 requires a strong emphasis from the ID and the SME roles.

Do you know your audience?

Learner characteristics have an immense impact on instructional planning. The design team can use learner characteristic data in order to shape learning, make accommodations for learners, for setting a climate, or for supporting discourse that may be interpreted as indirectly related to the learning process. The design team may not have the opportunity to gather updated learner details prior to the planning for online learning so best guesses are acceptable. Characteristics should be assessed and accounted for by any means possible. It is hazardous to make assumptions about Sri Lankan learners however, as online learning via the MOODLE platform is relatively new to most of this audience of learners. The following general areas need to be examined:

Personal characteristics (expectations from online learning, special needs, prior skills/ educational background, barriers to learning, motivational factors)

- Social characteristics (age, demographics, access to multimedia centers (MMC's), workplace characteristics, feelings about computer use, preferences towards working alone or in groups)
- Academic preferences (support aspects, computer literacy characteristics, language literacy)
- Cultural (a consideration of language diversity, a consideration for cultural diversity within the course/programme)

If your course or programme is being offered to a new or a relatively novice audience then a learner inventory, one which has been included in appendix 3 may be useful. The ID, SME or other team members should implement learner inventories to help get a better feel of their learner characteristics at

the pre-design phase. It is also essential to realize that learner characteristics are subject to change and they can be