# TIDE OER Author Guide

Andy Lane and Pam Furniss

## Introduction

Welcome to the guide for authors of Open Educational Resources (OER)[[1]](#footnote-1) who have participated in the TIDE programme. The TIDE programme, as set out in TIDE’s core Academic Professional Development Programme document, covers the educational practices required to evaluate, adapt, author, test and deploy OER, primarily for distance education students in Myanmar. In this guide, we will describe the style and approach to writing you will need to adopt as an author (or adapter) of an OER and offer practical advice to help you with your role. Within TIDE we have exposed you both to printed and online educational resources. The focus for this guide is on authoring printed resources as these are most familiar to distance education students in Myanmar but many of the lessons are also applicable to online resources. There is further guidance on how to use these OERs with distance education and campus-based students in the TIDE Trainers Handbook.

## Background

The existing OER that you have been exposed to in TIDE have largely come from the Open University and were devised as print based or online based resources but have mostly been presented to you as online courses (but with the option of downloading a print based version). All these courses adopt techniques for distance learning that have been used over many years by the Open University. This means the courses are designed for independent learning by someone who is reading and studying on their own. In practice the courses may be used in several different ways including as the basis for face-to-face teaching, for distance learning with tutor support, or blended with practical training, work experience, or other learning activities. The TIDE Trainers’ Handbook provides further guidance on the ways in which these OER can be used in different teaching contexts.

## Your role as an OER author

As an OER author you will be evaluating existing OER to see whether it can be adapted for use with your distance education students in Myanmar and/or planning to develop a new OER for use with these same students (however such OER can also be used with campus based students as noted in the TIDE Trainers Handbook). While you may not currently be doing this, the changes to the distance education system in Myanmar, and the move to the one campus two systems models whereby your university now has responsibility for your distance education students, mean that will be doing so in future. So, this Guide and the TIDE professional development programme are all part of helping you prepare to author OER.

Your main role in future will be to plan and write the content of the OER/courses you are responsible for. This will be your priority, but you will also be expected to read, review and comment on the OER/courses written by the other authors. Sharing your ideas and giving and receiving comments are essential parts of this role. This peer review process helps to assure the accuracy, relevance and quality of the materials.

## Who is your target audience?

The first step in writing educational material[[2]](#footnote-2) is to understand who you are writing for. This includes a variety of potential students depending on their programme of study and where in it your OER/course will be studied. This means you need to think carefully about what prior knowledge and skills the students will have and anticipating what topics they might find difficult[[3]](#footnote-3).

## Writing for distance/independent learners

Effective distance learning is much more than manuals, self-instructional packages, correspondence courses, or courses delivered by electronic media. Distance teaching should present the learner with engaging and well-planned study materials made up of clear guidance and rich experiences that encourage active learning. The learning experience is, of course, greatly enhanced if the student has the benefit of a supportive and experienced tutor but an important principle of writing for independent learners is that this support should not be assumed and that students have to rely on you to build is as much support as possible within the study materials. As an author, you must put the ‘teacher in the text’[[4]](#footnote-4).

## Writing approach and style

To be successful, text that is written for independent study needs to be engaging and lively. There are several ways of achieving this.

Firstly, it is important to have a consistent approach to how materials are presented to students. We have tried to use a consistent approach with TIDE training materials, and, similarly, all the online courses on OpenLearn that you will have worked with have similar sets of components and ways to structure and present then on screen.

A second important aspect is the writing style. You may have experience of writing lecture notes, reports, or instructional manuals but you will need to adopt a different style for the OER/course to be studied by distance education students. The key aspects include:

* You should address the student as ‘you’ and write as if you were having a conversation, not as you would write for a textbook.
* Consider the narrative (i.e. the story you are telling). There needs to be a logical sequence within each study session.
* Use headings and sub-headings to divide the material but take care that your heading accurately describes what follows beneath.
* Use language that is easily understood. Avoid long and complicated sentences.
* Be consistent in your use of terminology and always explain important terms.
* Try to include interesting examples and case studies of real or imaginary people to bring the material to life.
* Do not rely too much on numbered or bulleted lists.

## OER/course structure and components

Each OER/course should consist of roughly equal sized study time and follow a standard template. This provides users with a familiar framework and so makes it easier to plan study activities. The main components of each study session should be as follows:

* a title that concisely and clearly describes the session contents
* an introduction that lays out what will be covered in the study session
* learning outcomes, each tested by at least one self-assessment question (SAQ)
* core content, text with illustrations, diagrams, graphs, examples etc.
* key terms that are highlighted and defined
* in-text questions (ITQs), short questions with answers immediately following
* a summary, which includes a numbered list of key points covered in the study session
* at the end of each study session there are between three SAQs – students attempt the questions independently, but also learn from the provided answers.

The structure creates a learning pathway for the student that links the components in a narrative route through the text. They can track the introduction of a topic and a statement of the corresponding goal in a learning outcome, through the relevant section of core content to the summary points and SAQs at the end. Table 1 describes some of these components in more detail and highlights the reasons why they are included in each study session.

Table 1 Purpose of study components.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Component** | **Description** | **Purpose** |
| Learning outcomes | A set of statements that indicate what students should have achieved by the time they have completed a study session. | Learning outcomes are the goals. They are important tools for both teachers and students. For teachers, learning outcomes provide a way of making it clear to students what they are expected to have accomplished by the end of a study session. Learning outcomes indicate a knowledge outcome (what the teacher wants students to know) or a skill outcome (what the teacher wants students to be able to do).For students, learning outcomes highlight what is expected of them. Outcomes provide a way for students to assess their own learning.  |
| Key terms | Important terms, highlighted in bold type, that students should be familiar with by the time they complete the study session. | Students can often feel overwhelmed by the number of ideas, concepts and principles that they encounter in a lesson. The highlighted terms are the words and concepts that they really need to focus on and understand by the end of the study session. In printed materials, the key terms are often listed together at the back. In the online materials, key terms are highlighted and a glossary is provided. |
| Core content | Text authored by experts, covering the topics outlined by the module title and learning outcomes. | While new content can be authored OER provide existing teaching material to draw upon and adapt or update and can also reinforce or complement existing materials.  |
| In-text questions (ITQs) | Brief questions embedded within the core content that learners are expected to complete as they read through the modules. | ITQs encourage students to pause in their study and briefly reflect on what they have learned. The ITQs are based on preceding sections of the study session or may refer back to earlier study sessions in the same module or invite students to consider how their own experiences are relevant to the topic. This reinforces prior learning and encourages students to reflect on what they have read.  |
| Summary | A brief overview of the main concepts covered in the study session. | The summary brings together the key ideas and concepts from the different parts of the study session. For teachers and students, the summary can be used to recap important ideas and concepts at the end of the session. |
| Self-assessment questions (SAQs) | Another set of tools for learners and teachers to use to evaluate learning achievements in the session. | These can be used to test the student’s knowledge of the material. At least one SAQ tests the student’s understanding of the key terms introduced in that session. |

The consistent length of the study sessions is intended to make it easier to plan your schedule for study. Note that the course total of study hours will obviously vary depending on the mode of study, depth of learning, individual capability, etc.

## Assessment

Assessment can be used to support learning. It does not only demonstrate achievement and ‘passing’ a course. It also:

* acts as a powerful tool for teaching
* can be coupled with feedback from the teacher
* helps students to improve their learning and achieve better outcomes
* is a source of encouragement
* builds confidence.

Such assessment can be formative or summative.

Formative assessment can come in several types: in-text questions (ITQs) with answers in the main text, and self-assessment questions (SAQs) where answers are provided but these are separated from the questions. Students should answer these questions to help reinforce their studies and assess their own progress.

ITQs are intended to engage the student in ‘active’ reading. This reinforces learning more effectively than giving information passively. Students can cover the answer in the module to hide it and attempt their own answer first, or they can simply read the answer given.

SAQs provide an opportunity for students and for you as the teacher to assess progress. Students should be encouraged to write their answers to SAQs in their own words and then compare them with the answers provided. The SAQs help students to see what they have learned well and identify what they may need to revise or ask you about. In printed materials, the SAQ answers are all included at the back of the book. In online courses, the answers appear below the question by clicking on the ‘Reveal’ button. You may think that providing the SAQ answers makes it difficult to use the questions to assess progress because the students could easily just copy the answers, but in practice, good students will soon realise that there is nothing to be gained by copying. You will soon recognise the answers that have been copied!

For summative assessment, you and others may wish to develop further assignments, quizzes or examination based on the OER/course. These could be designed to meet criteria and test learning outcomes set by an accrediting institution or organisation.

## Finding and using open educational resources

You will be creating and writing new material in your own words, but you will probably also want to make use of existing resources where these are relevant to your OER/course. You will also want to find and use images to illustrate the OER. A key point is reusing existing resources is knowing if you have permission to do so and how to properly acknowledge the sources you use. Please remember it is not acceptable to copy and use any existing material without including a written acknowledgement of the source. This applies to material found on websites as well as printed material. It applies to any type of written material and to images, data and other resources. Some images may be published ‘Copyright free’. This means they can be re-used without payment to the copyright holder, but the source still needs to be acknowledged.

The important point here is to know whether the material you want to use has an open licence and which licence that is, as that determines what you can do with it. This whole topic has been central to TIDE and it is important to review what you have learned in the activities relating to finding and using OER.

For any text, image, photograph, diagram, table, etc., that you wish to use, you must record the full details of the source and include this in your draft. For example, for photographs you should, at a minimum, state the photographer’s name and confirmation that they, and any people being photographed, have consented for their picture to be published. You should also include a photo name or description, the website address if found online and, if possible, the date and location of the photo.

You can use your own photographs, but you must still include the details as described above. Photos will need to be high resolution to reproduce clearly in print.

Your OER/course must include citations and references, which should be listed at the back. There are many styles of referencing, but the Harvard style of referencing is one the Open university generally uses. When preparing your OER/course, do not worry too much about the style because this can be corrected later but you must include all the details of all sources you have used.

## The OER/course production process

There can be many steps in the authoring and development of OER/courses.

The first is to think about the learning design. This will include the learning outcomes and the in-text devices that you want to use.

The second will be to outline the structure and content of the material that are appropriate for addressing the learning outcomes. Annex 1 provides a checklist that was used by authors of the study sessions in OpenWASH as one example of the things to consider.

The third will be to think of the summative assessment tasks that will both test and reinforce student learning.

A fourth will be getting other academics to read and review what you have written and provide constructive feedback on the subject matter for you to revise. When all reviews and revision have been completed you can also involve a copy editor who reads it for grammatical accuracy and consistency rather than academic accuracy and consistency.

A fifth will be engaging with speciality staff in the design and development of media items such as audio or video recordings, online quizzes and possible animated diagrams.

# Annex 1 Checklist for Authors of OpenWASH Study Sessions

Use the questions below to help you think about your draft as you write it.

Remember: we are writing for people with a wide range of backgrounds who will study this material for the first time so we cannot assume they know anything we haven’t taught them.

TITLE OF THE STUDY SESSION:

* Is it focussed correctly? Does it fairly represent everything taught in this Study Session?
* Is it clear and understandable by students? (no difficult words they don’t know yet)

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY SESSION:

* Is it written in a welcoming conversational style, addressing the student as ‘you’? “In this Study Session you will learn about ...etc.”
* Does it briefly introduce everything that is in the Study Session?
* Does it comment briefly on why it is important to know about these topics?

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

* Are they written in clear language that tells students what they should be able to do in order to demonstrate that the Learning Outcomes have been achieved?
* Can these Learning Outcomes realistically be achieved by studying what is taught in the Study Session?
* Are the Learning Outcomes in the same order (sequence) as the topics are taught in the Study Session?

KEY WORDS:

Appear in bold type in the text, always with a clear definition. These are the terms we expect students to be able to define and use correctly.

NOTE: Bold type should not be used for emphasis. If you want to emphasise a word or phrase please use italics.

* Is each keyword clearly defined the first time it is used in the Study Session?
* Is the definition understandable? (no new unexplained words in the definition)

TOPICS:

* Are essential topics, terms and concepts taught at an appropriate level?
* Are the topics in the best possible order (sequence)?
* Have the topics been explained adequately for someone learning this material for the first time? Are you using everyday language and explaining in simple terms?
* Is it clear why students need to know about this topic? How will it help them to improve their practice?
* Are the topics appropriate for future years of new development in WASH services?

INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS VIA TEXT DEVICES:

* Are there in-text questions (ITQs) with answers following immediately after? Do the answers seem realistic (i.e. could an average student genuinely write that answer?)
* Are diagrams used appropriately to help understanding? Are the diagrams too complex? Do they have too many labels, or too few?
* Are there photos to illustrate the study session?
* Is every figure (diagram, photo etc.) numbered, with a caption, with its source and any copyright details? Remember to introduce or refer to any diagrams and tables in your main text – e.g. ‘As Figure X.X shows …’
* Are boxes used appropriately, e.g. to make definitions or key points ‘stand out’ on the page? Does each Box have a number and a title?
* Do not embed boxes or other coloured areas using Word tools. Just use plain text, indicating where a box starts and where it ends.
* Are there examples or case studies (real life stories of a person/project) in this Study Session?

SUMMARY:

* Have you included a numbered list of key points at the end of the Study Session?
* Is the Summary complete (it refers briefly to every main topic)? Does it really ‘summarise’ (try not to copy big chunks of text).

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS (SAQs):

* Are there achievable Self-Assessment Questions (SAQs) after the Summary? SAQs test each Learning Outcome (LO), but an SAQ may test several LOs at the same time.
* Have you included the answers to your SAQs at the end of your study session?

REFERENCES:

* Have you included citations in the text at all places where you have made use of a source of information?
* Are all your sources of information listed at the end of the Study Session in a list of References?
1. OER are educational resources for self-study by students. They have an open licence applied to them which means you can use, re-use, remix or adapt them for your own teaching, depending on the actual licence used [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is worth noting that a variety of terms are used to describe the things that students might study – educational content, learning resources, teaching material, educational resources, teaching texts etc. But in all cases, there are academics who have the prime responsibility for authoring these, supported by other specialists who can help in their educational design and delivery. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is covered in depth in the online course on Teaching and Learning Tricky Topics [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This was very much the focus of one of your residential school activities – Putting the Teacher in the Text [↑](#footnote-ref-4)