

Unit 4 : The structure of a unit

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Introduction

As unit by unit writing starts, what shape should the units take? If a unit has a poor structure, students will have difficulty learning. They may get lost. They must have their attention drawn to what is important and must find their way easily through the text. Clear headings and other typographical features will help with this, but these are of little use if the basic structure of the unit is unsound.

At the end of this unit you will be able to consider the introduction, body and end of a unit and, for each section:

- * list those features that are essential and those that are desirable;
- * recognise different ways of presenting the features;
- * assess material and decide whether these features are present;
- * advise the writer on improving the structure;
- * make certain amendments yourself.

We will examine unit structure in logical order, from beginning, to middle and end. The unit will take about an hour to complete. In the assignment you will consider the structure of a complete unit, and suggest some revisions. This may take you 2 or 3 hours.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims

This is the first of the three major 'thematic' Blocks of the course. We have chosen these themes – childhood, education and community – because they are experiences that we all share, and because they have proved fertile sources of inspiration for many artists, writers and composers. We all have vivid memories of childhood, and I hope to use your memories to develop the skills discussed in Block 1:

- It is often easier to *write* about a vivid childhood experience which had a profound impact on us when it happened and which we have had time to get into perspective. More recent memories are often more confused; we have not yet sorted out the importance of different events. However, we hope that by practising your writing on an event in the past, you will become better equipped to weigh up recent events, and will feel more confident to write about these in the latter part of the course.
- When we are *reading* about a familiar experience we are perhaps better placed to understand the author than when he is describing an experience which is new to us. His writing about shared experiences will provide you with a common ground which will help in your appreciation and criticism of his work. Again, I hope that by practising the skills of reading critically and selectively on an account of a shared experience, you will feel confident to tackle accounts of new and unfamiliar experiences.
- I hope that, by triggering off memories of childhood, I can encourage you to *think critically*. It is often the events closest to us that are the most difficult to look at critically. By becoming aware of our own prejudices we go a long way towards evaluating the views of others. (You will be doing this extensively in Block 3.) In particular I want to alert you to:
 - the difficulties of writing honestly about childhood
 - the different perceptions of children and adults.

1.2 Outline

I would like to begin with one aspect of childhood – games –, first as you remember them, and then as various artists have seen them. Games form an important part of a child's life; they provide vivid memories, but are also very important in preparing children for adult life. I shall then consider a series of paintings, poems and accounts of childhood episodes. Finally, I will compare childhood and adult perceptions of the world.

1.3 Timing

The Block should take about 24 hours. As in the first Block, I begin by giving timings for individual activities. I hope, however, that you will need fewer hints as the course goes on. Remember: don't get stuck on one activity for too long. Proceed with the Block and return to it later.

1.4 Assignments

There are two assignments. In the first you are asked to write an account of an experience from your own childhood. The second is divided into two parts; *Part I* asks you to compare three paintings; *Part II* asks you to compare two poems.

EXAMPLE 2: From 'The Arts: a fresh approach', National Extension College, Cambridge, UK, 1977, p.19

7. It might be useful to have a list of equipment or books the students will need for the unit. It could be helpful, too, to suggest in section 1.3 how students might divide up the work. Obviously they are not going to study for 24 hours at a stretch. How long will each section take?

8. The writer might have included a revision exercise or summary of work done in the previous unit. There could also be some sort of diagnostic test, to help the students work out where their strengths and weaknesses lie before they start work on the unit. It would also be useful to have a contents list giving page references.

We can now list the elements needed for a unit introduction. They include:

- a statement of aims
- an introduction to the subject
- study data (time, equipment, books)
- a description of learning outcomes
- orientation to the subject

All these elements will help students to organise their study. There is a serious difficulty, however, in preparing a unit introduction. How much detail do we include? On the one hand, we want to include all the information students will find useful, both when they start the unit and later when they want to refer back to it. On the other hand, if the introduction is long, many students will not remember all the information and some will not read it at all. We therefore need an introduction that contains just the right amount of information.

3. Presenting an introduction

How, then, should we present an introduction? First, let us look at alternative ways of introducing the five elements listed above.

Aims: a common technique is to present the aims in terms of behavioural objectives; 'at the end of this unit you will be able to do the following ...' and a list follows. This technique gives students explicit guidance on what they will achieve. You will find a list of behavioural objectives at the beginning of each unit in this manual.

A difficulty with behavioural objectives is that in certain subjects the list may be long and forbidding. This applies particularly to science subjects. I have come across units with 20 or more objectives listed. In such cases it may be better to present a description of aims, and specify objectives as each occurs in the unit, with each section heading, for example.

A further difficulty is that formal statements of objectives may look silly and boring in some subjects. The course from which the example above is taken has broad aims concerned with developing skills of writing, reading and thinking. If the objectives were presented formally they would be almost identical in each block. The writer has avoided this repetition by the clear and useful description of aims.

Many teachers strongly dislike the idea of restricting the aims of their teaching to matter that can be fully described in terms of behaviour. While this anti-objectives position deserves to be taken seriously, distant students need clear guidance on the purpose of their studies.

A section headed 'aims' is therefore one alternative to formal objectives. Another is an informal description of aims included in an introduction. (See exercise 2 below.)

Introduction to the subject: this can be an outline, as in Example 2, or an overview describing the main concepts to be discussed, or simply a contents list. Its function is to attract the student's interest and focus attention. Introduction and aims may sometimes be within the same paragraph. The introduction may often indicate how the content of the present unit relates to others in the course.

Study data: most courses have a general introduction giving guidance on study, but often students will need a particular book or equipment for one particular unit. They need to know this before they settle down to work. Such information is often presented in a list or displayed in a frame. When units vary in length, guidance on timing is also needed.

Learning outcomes: a description of these will help students understand what to expect. Expected outcomes are included in any formal statement of objectives. You can also include a brief description of the major work the students will do, as in section 1.4 in Example 2.

Orientation: in Example 2, some orientation is included in the description of aims. We must make sure that the writer has a clear view of what the students know or need to know before they start the unit. If certain skills or facts are essential, then revision of these may be included in the introductory section. If some students are likely to be more advanced than others, a preliminary test will help each individual to discover where to concentrate his efforts.

There is no set formula for starting a unit, but the introduction should always be short, clear, and motivating. Do you think the introduction in Example 2 satisfies those criteria? I think on the whole it does, but perhaps it is rather long.

4. Improving an introduction

Editors often have to rewrite or amend introductions. Writers often forget about matter-of-fact points like equipment needed. Others fail to express their aims clearly enough, and you may have to rephrase them. You may need to impose a format on the introduction, and reorganise the text to fit. Usually the introduction is the last part of a unit to be completed, so final amendments are often made by the editor after the writer has finished work.

Example 3* is another introduction, this time from a workbook containing 8 lessons (units). It is from an in-service upgrading course for unqualified primary school teachers in Lesotho. This book is about home economics. Look at the example carefully then try the exercise.

* Example 3 has been reduced in size in our printing, so that two pages can be shown on one of ours. Many other examples have also been slightly reduced, to make them fit. The smaller type indicates which these are.

INTRODUCTION		Page
Introduction		
PART ONE - CHOOSING CLOTHING FOR YOUR FAMILY		
LESSON ONE - Your Family's Clothing	1
LESSON TWO - Fabrics	11
LESSON THREE - Fashion and Changing Styles	24
LESSON FOUR - Caring for Your Clothing	44
PART TWO - MAKING YOUR OWN CLOTHES		
LESSON FIVE - Sewing	53
LESSON SIX - Knitting	66
LESSON SEVEN - Crochet	79
LESSON EIGHT - Altering	88
<u>Directions for Practical Work</u>		
A. Sewing Practical	101
B. Knitting Practical	129
C. Crocheting Practical	135

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Home Economics II. This course will deal with choosing, making and caring for clothing, and managing your family's home. Workbook 1 is on Clothing, Workbook 2 is about Laundry, Workbook 3 deals with Home Management and Workbook 4 is on Home Improvements.

In Part I of this Workbook you will learn about choosing clothing for your family. You will learn about the different fabrics clothes are made from. This part also covers fashion and changing styles of clothing, and how to care for your clothing properly.

Part II is about making clothes yourself. There are directions for learning to sew, knit and crochet. You will also learn how to alter clothes so that they fit properly.

The Worksheet for this workbook has three parts. Part I has general questions which will show that you have understood the workbook. Part II has personal questions which will make you look at and think about your own clothing. Part III is your practical work.

You will learn some very useful skills by doing the practical work. It is important that you give yourself plenty of time to practice your new skills and also to complete the things you choose to make. You may choose to make all three things. This will give you practice in all three new skills and you will feel confident to continue making clothes for your family on your own.

Good luck with Workbook 1.

EXERCISE 2

We have said that an introduction should include a statement of aims, an introduction to the subject, study data, a description of learning outcomes, and any necessary orientation to the subject. It should be short, clear and motivating. What suggestions would you make for improving Example 3?

(10 minutes)

Comment

It is hard to suggest ways to improve this excellent introduction. I note that it starts with a clearly displayed contents list. The text itself starts with a welcome, then a summary of the material. Aims are given by explaining to students what they will learn, and the work for the tutor (worksheet) is clearly described. The importance of practical work is stressed, and the introduction ends with an encouraging "Good luck".

As a student, I would want to know how much time to take over the work. I would also want to know what equipment and materials I would need, and whether I would have access to any face-to-face support for my practical work. I would therefore suggest adding these points. You may have thought of some different ones.

5. The body of the unit

This will normally consist of a number of sections, each of which presents at least one new point, and of exercises related to those points. The writer must make the structure clear. You will need to check that the unit is divided into sections, and that different kinds of work within each section are clearly distinguished.

It is unusual for a unit to be so short that a student works through it in one session. A division into suitable sections therefore provides the student with obvious stopping places.

Within the sections, headings or signs can mark changes from text to exercises. Clear organisation will help the students to see where they are going. Some students will want to take short cuts, missing out or skimming through certain sections. The layout of the text - the use of headings, spaces and signs - will provide the student with guidance. We

shall look at layout in detail in a later unit, but a good layout is only possible if the unit has a clear structure.

EXERCISE 3

Examine the units in this manual. Note how they are divided into sections, with exercises and examples marked off distinctly.

(5 minutes)

6. Common errors

It is difficult to devise a clear structure that will work for all units in a course. You will learn more about organising the main body of the unit as you read through the manual. As you edit, what should you particularly look out for?

There are a number of common errors writers make:

- * no breaks in the unit: it runs straight through with no subheadings;
- * random breaks: a few subheadings are given, but they do not provide a clear division into sections;
- * inconsistent numbering of sections;
- * exercises start in the middle of a paragraph;
- * exercises all at the end of a unit.

You may be able to add to the list from your experience. Remind the writer of the distance learner's circumstances. Short spells of study, the difficulty of concentration, the need for frequent checks on progress: all these demand a clear structure to enable students to organise their study effectively.

7. Ending a unit

First, your ideas.

EXERCISE 4

What features would you expect to find at the end of a unit? Jot down your ideas before reading on.

(5 minutes)

Comment

You might find any or all of the following: a final test or assignment; a summary or descriptive review of the unit; a checklist to remind students of what they should have done; ideas for further reading or optional activities; a reference to the next unit, to encourage the student to read on; answers to self-assessment questions. Your list will probably be different from mine; as with the beginnings of units, there is no set formula for ends.

Imagine the writer asking the student three questions: Have you done everything? Do you remember what it was about? Can you show me what you remember?

Have you done everything? It is usual, in a longer unit, to provide the student with a checklist of all the main activities. Sometimes we arrange this with space for the student to mark off tasks completed. The example below from an English literature course is arranged under section headings, and gives short descriptions of the work and page references.



CHECKLIST 19

Judging for Yourself

- Read chapter 3 of *Literature and Criticism* quickly, p. 95
- Reread and annotate chapter 3, p. 95.
- Make notes on the points we suggest, p. 95.
- Optional exercise: compare and contrast the extracts from Browning and T. S. Eliot, p. 95.
- Consider the points we raise in our 'questions to ponder', p. 97.

Shakespeare

- Make a summary of Act 3, p. 97.
- Read our commentary and make notes on the two questions we raise at the end, p. 97.

The Pilgrim's Progress

- Read pages 110-142 with our commentary and answer our questions, p. 98.
- Read pages 142-173 with our commentary and answer our questions, p. 100.

EXAMPLE 4: From 'English 'A' level', National Extension College, Cambridge, UK, 1975, volume 2, p.102

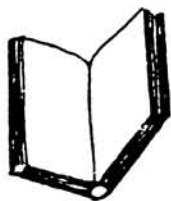
Do you remember what it is about? A reminder of the main point is useful, especially when the study of a unit stretches over several days or weeks. This could be a summary, or a list of objectives placed at the end of the unit instead of at the beginning. Below you will find an example of a summary from a science course.

SUMMARY OF UNIT F1

1. The earth and the planets of the solar system were formed from a cooling cloud of gases and dust.
2. The earth is a series of layers called the core, the mantle and the crust.
3. There are three kinds of rock: igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic. Igneous rocks were molten in the past and then solidified. Sedimentary rocks are formed from small particles which generally join together in water. Metamorphic rocks are rocks whose structure is changed by heat or pressure.
4. Soil is formed by weathering of rocks. Chemical weathering results in clay. Mechanical weathering results in sand. An important part of soil is humus.
5. Soil conservation is very important for the future.

EXAMPLE 5: From 'Our Planet Earth: Study Guide Unit F1', Zim-Sci, University of Zimbabwe and Ministry of Education and Culture, Harare, Zimbabwe, p.53

Can you show me that you remember? An assignment or self-marked exercise placed at the end of a unit ought to provide the student with an opportunity to review the major themes of the unit as a whole.



Before you answer "How much do you know?" read and revise Part 2 of this Unit. Spend a whole lesson on revision.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?



1. Weathering is
2. Two types of weathering are and
3. A soil made up of very small pieces which holds much water is a
4. A soil made up of larger grains which holds little water is a
5. A rock which often forms a clay is
6. A rock which often forms a sand is
7. Soil may be conserved in many different ways. List as many as you can.

EXAMPLE 6: From 'Our Planet Earth: Study Guide Unit F1', Zim-Sci, University of Zimbabwe and Ministry of Education and Culture, Harare, Zimbabwe, p.53

The extract below is from a British human biology unit called 'the food chain'. It shows, first, a suggestion for optional extra work. Next, the unit objectives, labelled 'checklist'. Finally, a note about the next unit.

End of unit recommendation

If you can get to the Natural History Museum in South Kensington (London), it is well worth a visit-taking up at least half a day of your time and may be more. The Museum now has a number of new exhibits which you will find very helpful. Their Ecology section is great fun with buttons to push, very clear explanations and a computer to play with. It looks good and is terrific on food chains and recycling. While you are there, there is a largish Human Biology exhibit and (for later in this course) a really good section on the Evolution of Man. If you have a helpful local library, ask for New Scientist, 15.1.81, (Vol. 89, No. 1236). There is an article 'Pests control pests, but at what price?' which makes interesting reading.

You should now be able to:

- state the parts of a typical food chain and give examples including man
- draw simple diagrams illustrating the carbon and nitrogen cycles and explain the importance of decomposers and legume root nodules
- briefly outline the reasons why agriculture began where it did
- give examples of deforestation, erosion, eutrophication and monocultures; explain how they come about and suggest a remedy for each of them
- give the reasons why fertilisers are used and relate their use to eutrophication
- give two clear arguments for the use of pesticides - one related to agriculture and one to community health
- distinguish between natural pesticides like pyrethrum and synthetic ones like DDT and list the hazards associated with the latter
- assess the relative merits of pest control by biological and chemical methods
- briefly describe the effect on marine food chains of pesticides, fertilisers and fishing
- make some constructive suggestions for easing the world food problem and be aware of some of the problems of implementing them.

Checklist

The next unit tells some of the story of food from farm to table.

EXAMPLE 7: From 'Human Biology 'O' level, National Extension College, Cambridge, UK, 1981, Volume 1, pp.105-6

EXERCISE 5

In Example 7 above, the objectives are at the end of the unit. Can you list reasons for and against placing objectives at the beginning of the unit, and at the end? Try to write at least one reason in each box of the table below.

	For	Against
Objectives at the beginning		
Objectives at the end		

(10 minutes)

Comment

The answer below shows that it is not easy to decide on the best position for objectives.

	For	Against
Objectives at beginning	Defines for students what they are going to learn. Helps them organise their work	List may be too long and forbidding. Some of the objectives may mean little to the student
Objectives at end	It should be easy for students to understand all the objectives. They can look back and check that they have achieved them.	Not so effective as at the beginning; no help to the student in organising work. The student may have concentrated on the wrong things because the objectives were not clear at the outset.

Some people prefer objectives at the beginnings of units, and others choose to place them at the end. You will have to decide for yourself which you prefer.

8. Preliminary editing

You can make a rough estimate of the quality of a first draft by examining the structure. This takes a few minutes. Check the aims of the unit, and check that there is at least one exercise corresponding to each aim, so students have an opportunity to show what they have learnt. If the aims are not clear, or these essential exercises are lacking, the unit is unfinished or inadequate. You should ask the writer to rewrite it before going any further.

If you accept the text, then you can go on to edit it in the ways suggested in the next few units.

Summary

This unit has identified a number of features that should be present in every unit.

At the beginning there should be:

- . a statement of aims
- . an introduction to the subject matter
- . study data
- . a description of learning outcomes
- . orientation to the subject

In the body of the unit there should be:

- . clear division into sections
- . a sequence of new material and exercises

At the end there should be:

- . a check on what the student should have done
- . a check on what the unit was about
- . a check on whether the material has been learnt

An editor must check the text to ensure that all these features are present, advise the writer where improvements are needed, and suggest ways of making the improvements. You must also be prepared to attempt some amendments yourself, and the assignment will give you an opportunity to do this.

ASSIGNMENT C

Choose a course unit or text similar to those you will normally be working on. Check whether the features listed in the summary are present. Mark any points which need clarification. This should take only a few minutes.

Now make a careful analysis of the introductory section. Look again at the samples in this unit, and look at other examples from your own institution. Can you improve the beginning of your sample unit? Try to write an improved version. This may take a couple of hours.

If you have never tried this before, you will probably find it difficult. It is worth persevering; often, an introduction needs revising at the last moment, and the editor may be the only person available to do it.

When you feel ready, discuss your work with a colleague. Remember to explain what you have been trying to do, so that the discussion is constructive.