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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Adi Walker who obtained a Distinction in his Master's degree and who is now working for his Doctorate degree - both by distance education, and while working as a humanitarian in the north west of Pakistan. His unusual discipline and commitment were inherited from his late mother, my wonderful wife.

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Back cover – About the Author

"Knowledge comes from college but education comes from travel. There is a significant difference between 'schooling' and 'education'. I know of some who are well schooled but far from being educated: while others may be unschooled yet highly educated" (Anon).

1. INTRODUCTION

"Ah, September: eternal month of new pencil cases, clean textbooks and butterflies in the tummy. No matter how old I get, this month will forever tingle with the anticipation of a new school term and all its promise, excitement and potential tedium.

This autumn, though, millions of people around the globe will be going 'back to school' without leaving their front doors. ***Few recent trends have caught on quite like online education, which is rising at a staggering rate****. The hundreds of free courses offered by elite universities on 'tech-ed' sites like Udacity, edX and Coursera seem to herald a future in which world-class education becomes available to anyone with a reasonable broadband connection and a desire to learn. This summer The Economist suggested that the Massive Open Online Course (Mooc) is shaking the foundations of academia's "ivory towers"; the New York Times reckons we are living in "the year of the Mooc"; and a survey by the Sloan Consortium found that enrolment in online education enjoys a 21% growth rate, compared to the paltry two per cent in higher education overall.*

So far, most of those courses cover mainstream academic subjects, with a notable bias toward science, mathematics and business. Udacity currently offers only courses in business, computer science, design, mathematics and science. But, given the high expectations that the Mooc movement will democratise education, it's intriguing to think of the barrier-breaking impact it may have on seemingly 'specialist' arts subjects like classical music." (BBC Report 17.09.13).

This massive development in distance education (sometimes called 'open learning') is reflected in the UK where many universities and colleges now offer on-line education. The Open University is outstandingly the largest of the 70 academic institutions in terms of student numbers.

While many of the examples in this book focus on humanitarian aid and development workers, the principles apply to anyone seeking employment, changing career paths or looking for further development during retirement. Age is no limit to education and particularly distance education; it can be especially advantageous for people with disabilities. The current recession world-wide has forced many to reconsider financial constraints in a climate

that demands people to be better qualified and experienced to cope with the demands of competition for posts.

The last decade has probably been the worst in living memory for the frequency and severity of human-made and natural emergency situations. These have resulted in millions being displaced in their own countries or forced to seek asylum elsewhere. The massive explosion in the human population results in more people being affected by a disaster than would have been the case a century ago.

Many humanitarians work on short-term missions in different geographical locations. Between contracts there may be uncertain periods of time that could well be occupied with distance education, as following many formal full-time courses might be difficult or impossible in such situations.

2. TECHNIQUES AND RESOURCES FOR SELF-ORGANISED EDUCATION

Anybody embarking on a distance education programme must realise that there is a need for more discipline than is required of those who sit in formal class rooms on a full-time or part-time basis. The time-table and presence of other students reinforce commitment to attend. (Support strategies for distance learners will be covered in chapter 3).

Additionally, humanitarian employees may face stresses abroad which they have not encountered when employed in their own country. They may be operating in a hostile and dangerous environment, surrounded by local people suffering appalling tragedy, separated from family and friends, and trying to cope with extreme deprivation, language, geographic/climatic and cultural differences. In such circumstances career development and further learning is not easy. Yet it is possible. Millions have done it and so can you.

Before looking at the skills and techniques that are required for distance education with formal college links, it is useful to review briefly the informal strategies that are available for self-directed learning.

Reading

Some people have set themselves reading targets by using libraries and resource centres. Many university or other institutional libraries (e.g. museums, hospitals, and non government organisations) may be open to the serious reader.

If you are working abroad you can have your professional journals redirected, perhaps to your local country headquarters. Ask your colleagues if they have books, magazines or training materials that they can share. Your organisation may have a library with reading resources, videos and CDs that could be used for learning and leisure. Perhaps you have already arranged for CDs of literature to be supplied to you by TALC, ELDIS or another organisation. A complete library of resources can be transported on CDs and these are especially useful for those unable to get Internet access. Amazon Kindle and similar electronic devices are easily carried, easily perused while waiting for public transport, and they provide access to millions of magazines, journals and books, many of which can be obtained free of charge (or at a cost far lower than is required of a hard copy). My favourite websites include:

a. www.obooko.com has hundreds of contemporary eBooks free in pdf, epub and Kindle file formats for computers and eReader devices. There is no charge to join. Genres include romance, thrillers, fantasy, humour, money, business, health, beauty, religion, hobbies, travel, astrology, entertainment, computers, Internet and others

b) www.networklearning.org has a library of free humanitarian manuals. There is even a manual on how to write a manual! Writing a manual or a book is a valuable and disciplined way to learn a subject while making a useful contribution to your own CV. www.hesperian.org has free books available relating to aspects of health

c) www.gutenberg.org offers over 42,000 free ebooks: choose among free epub books, free Kindle books; download them or read them online. All these eBooks were previously published by *bona fide* publishers. They digitized and diligently proofread them with the help of thousands of volunteers. Over 100,000 free eBooks are also available through their Partners, Affiliates and Resources

d) www.calibre-ebook.com. This is a fantastic site. Start by watching the tutorial to see the facilities on offer. It will search for eBooks and hard copies, listing sources and prices. It can convert texts to eBook formats and it will give storage and organisation for your library

After exploring sites and obtaining resources, set aside at least one hour a week for reading. Perhaps a colleague shares similar interests: two or more people reading the same material can form the basis of useful discussion as well as reinforcing the discipline needed for study.

A Talk Club

In a more relaxed situation a group of colleagues can arrange to meet on a regular (weekly or monthly) basis. People take turns to present a topic for discussion. This can take the form of a 20-minute presentation followed by an open forum. It is important to stimulate the conversation by raising issues in the preliminary chat without supplying all the answers. The topics can be a mixture of cultural, humanitarian or other issues; these can break down barriers between international and local staff as well as providing practice in

language and presentations as well as the discipline of meeting regularly and reaching deadlines. (You can find clear guidelines on how to give a PowerPoint presentation in Walker A, Walker B and Walker R. (2013). How to Succeed in Aid and Development Work: a free download from www.networklearning.org).

Short Courses

Some organisations allow time out to attend courses and conferences in-country or abroad. However, only a few offices optimise the learning by insisting on a brief report or presentation to colleagues on returning to the office or field. Such knowledge or skills gained from a short course or workshop can be shared through a Talk Club.

Self-constructed Study

This is easier if there is regular and good Internet access. It involves selection of a particular subject area (best relevant to your work, if you want the support of your boss!) and choosing a single website that contains literature and/or a group of discussants associated with it. Here are some examples related to the work of many humanitarians but there are others. Explore the sites, design your programme – and start!

a) **Community Capacity Building and Development**. www.scn.org. This site has over five thousand documents in more than thirty languages. A good place to start is the list of Modules. If you click on the first document under each module listed here, you will go to the module introduction, which, in turn, lists the other documents in that module. These can be read online or downloaded free. Go through the topics and write out your own agenda or curriculum

b) **Management**. www.ngomanager.org. This site has resources relating to a wide range of management subjects and has a readership of over 4,000 from 70 countries. The organisation is managed by a highly experienced humanitarian who directs a management school in Geneva, running courses there and elsewhere

c) **People in Aid**. www.peopleinaid.org. Their Code of Good Practice is an internationally recognised management tool that helps agencies enhance the quality of their human

resources management. This site has extensive resources, runs courses and has discussion groups of which the one concerning human resources for emergencies is highly active

d) A good source of literature is the **Overseas Development Institute** (ODI) which is Britain's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues - www.odi.org.uk

e) **Language Learning.** www.crelearning.com provides 80 languages freely to aid workers. It claims that new languages and dialects are welcome and will be provided on request to their team of UN volunteers. There are many other free language courses available especially through YouTube.

3. DISTANCE EDUCATION

Who is it for?
This section provides an introduction to distance education. It is a practical guide for people who want to put their experience and knowledge in a wider context by studying a course through 'distance education' methods. It will also be valuable for humanitarians who cannot afford time out for full-time studies or who are on short-term contracts in a sequence of different countries. Such students will be helped if they can also attend a short full time course in a related area to provide the added advantage of sharing experiences with others.

Distance education is usually based on a combination of reading materials, assignments and sometimes field or practical work under the guidance of a tutor. The programme may be supported by audio-visual material, interactive CDs, computer links and virtual class mates through Internet. These may form a group for mutual support and encouragement even though they may be spread over wide areas and never actually meet.

To confirm that distance education is really for you, let us consider one example of facts and figures relating to the Open University (OU) in the UK. (This information is taken directly from its website).

> ***The Open University in facts and figures***
> *Since the OU's launch in 1969 almost 1.8 million people worldwide have achieved their learning goals by studying with us.*
> *The OU is the largest academic institution in the UK, in terms of student numbers. It has:*
> - *more than 240,000 students*
> - *close to 7,000 tutors*
> - *more than 1,100 full-time academic staff*
> - *more than 3,500 support staff*
>
> ***The UK university is also European and worldwide***
> *Open University students are not just in the UK. Most courses are available throughout Europe and some are available worldwide directly from the OU. Many more courses are available through our partnerships and accredited institutions. There are currently:*

- *In 2011/12 16,125 students studied directly with the University overseas and more than 37,000 students on validated programmes*
- *The Open University has 15 curriculum partnerships established in 23 countries*

The OU outside the UK

Who are the OU's students?

Our students come from the widest possible range of backgrounds. We have students who are in their teens, including some Year 12 and 13 school students who are studying OU courses alongside A-levels. We have students in their 90s - and all ages in between.

- *The average age of new undergraduate OU students is 31*
- *Only 9% of our new students are over 50*
- *27% of new OU undergraduates are under 25 this year (19,982 students)*
- *Over 31,000 students are under 25*

We are the largest provider of higher education for people with disabilities:

- *More than 17,000 people with disabilities studied with us in 2011/12.*

We are opening up opportunities for lower-income groups. Our open admissions policy helps thousands of people who failed to achieve their potential earlier in life:

- *45% of students had one A level or lower qualification at entry*

Thousands of people, who might not have been able to study because of work or family commitments, are able to study part-time with us:

- *Over 71% of OU students work full or part-time during their studies*

So distance education gives you the choices to study when, where, and for as long as you wish. You also have freedom to concentrate on those areas

that are more interesting to you or that are more relevant to your work. However, you will need self-discipline and may still need support from others.

Distance education (sometimes called 'open learning') modules may form complete courses or be components of a larger programme or simply stand alone. The time taken will depend on the level and the ability of the learner and their previous experience. (To gain an insight you can just read this Study Guide and work through the later exercises which will take about one hour of work).

Many academic institutions have arrangements with others so that a course or a programme of study can be composed of modules selected from different academic bodies. This enhances the range of available choices. Such modules may be called Distance or Continuing Education Units.

A Continuing Education Unit (CEU)

The CEU is an internationally accepted unit for continuing education and professional development. It is based on criteria and guidelines established by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET) and is a measure used in continuing education programs, particularly those required in a licensed profession in order for the professional to maintain the license. Examples of people who need CEUs include educators, nurses, mental health professionals, and social workers. Generally, a CEU is defined as ten hours of participation in a recognised distance education programme, with qualified instruction and sponsorship. CEU records are widely used to provide evidence of completion of continuing education requirements mandated by certification bodies, professional societies, or governmental licensing boards. The records also provide employers with information on training pertinent to particular occupations.

Websites that provide CEUs online allow professionals to take courses at their own pace and at convenient times and places. Expense and travel time savings from online completion of CEUs can be significant.

Many universities provide distance education programmes and CEUs so that it is possible to obtain a certificate, diploma, degree or postgraduate qualification with modules studied through different providers. Thousands of ordinary people have progressed by this means – so can you. Nevertheless,

you will have to take more control of your studying than you did when you were in a more traditional learning situation such as at school. There follows an example showing how modules from different sources can be put together.

An Example of a Distance Learning Programme

For over 25 years, the University of Wisconsin - Disaster Management Center (UW - DMC) has provided professional development in international disaster/emergency management through traditional training and distance learning. Since 1988, some 7,000 individuals from more than 100 countries have enrolled in the UW-DMC curriculum of self-study courses. The UW-DMC has collaborated with the UNHCR since 1985 in refugee emergency management training as well as the delivery of a Diploma.

The Diploma in Disaster Management

This personal study programme can combine UW - DMC self-study courses with courses from anywhere in the world. The Diploma requires 60 CEUs, combining 25 CEUs from UW-DMC self-study courses, 25 CEUs from professional electives (disaster/emergency and general) from any recognised organisation and 10 CEUs from a Professional Study Project. There are no residency requirements. From more than fifty countries, there are many professionals enrolled in the Diploma Program.

Upon successful completion of the examination, the University of Wisconsin will record your Continuing Education Units (CEUs) on a University transcript and send you a Certificate of Completion for each course. Completion of each UNHCR course earns at least 1.5 CEUs towards the UW-DMC Diploma in Disaster Management.

For more details, contact the University of Wisconsin through www.engr.wisc.edu/dmc, or through www.the-ecentre which is the UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Training.

An example of how modules from different sources can be combined to form a study programme is illustrated in the following diagram.

This Distance Education Guide
Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons
(from www.networklearning.org)
Contingency Planning
(from www.the-ecentre.net)
Planning an Emergency Response
Managing an Emergency Response
Managing External Relations
Providing Emergency Support and Advice

A further example of a university offering distance education programmes can be found in www.rmit.edu.au.

The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology is one of Australia's original and leading educational institutions. With more than 60,000 students studying at RMIT campuses in Melbourne and regional Victoria, in Vietnam, online, by distance education, and at partner institutions throughout the world, the University has built a worldwide reputation for excellence in professional and vocational education and research. A vibrant alumni community now stretches across more than 100 countries.

What learning techniques will I be using?
Distance Learning programmes may include:

- pre- and post-module tests
- frequent tasks and activities
- 'stop and think' breaks
- fieldwork to be done away from your desk or work place
- interviews and fact-finding exercises
- broader questions and topics to think about and discuss
- case studies drawn from a range of countries
- suggestions for group discussions with friends and colleagues
- suggestions for further reading and study

Colleges offering distance education modules will normally provide guidelines on how to proceed. This is particularly important for those courses leading to professional registration or license. There will be indications of prerequisites (qualifications or other modules) if they are needed. Make sure that you obtain a copy of the guidelines and regulations and study them well so that deadlines and required conformities can be met.

4. PLANNING YOUR PROGRAMME

Although there is no universal terminology for the components of academic programmes, the following are in common but inconsistent use:

Definitions

1. **Programme.** A collection of cognate courses leading to an educational or professional qualification. E.g. B.Sc, ITEC Massage Diploma
2. **Course.** A selection of modules (with appropriate pre-requisites and co-requisites) that can be followed in full-time, part-time or distance education mode, leading to a certificate, a diploma, or a degree (general and honours levels)
3. **Module.** A unit of theory, practical work/work experience, problem-solving exercises, assignments and assessments for a defined subject
4. **Precertificate Qualification.** Given to a student who has completed a course to bridge the 'O'L – 'A'L gap. (This is intended for students who have missed formal schooling at this level)
5. **Certificate Qualification.** Given to a student who has completed satisfactorily a course equivalent to one year of full time study
6. **Diploma Qualification.** Given to a student who has completed satisfactorily a course equivalent to two years of full time study
7. **Degree (general) Qualification.** Given to a student who has completed satisfactorily a course equivalent to three years of full time study post secondary school
8. **Degree (honours) Qualification.** Given to a student who has completed satisfactorily a course equivalent to four years of full time study post secondary school
9. **Profile.** Several assessment/examination methods can be included. These tests are final examinations (unseen, open book, unlimited time, seen questions with answers written under examination conditions), weighted contributions from practical work, assignments, and assessments from previous years, and profiles.

Profiling has been developed in many educational systems, and particularly by the Royal Society of Arts for its courses in the UK and elsewhere. Non-profiling systems usually involve the summation of marks from different sources and the sum is matched against predetermined standards. Profiles offer a range of assessments of the student under several headings of significance to employers. Here the final student

assessment is expressed as graded statements under different headings, and not as a single category based upon a summation of results.

Key words in the philosophy of the programme provisions are:

CONCENTRATION of programmes centred on a specific subject

COMPREHENSION of programmes allowing flexibility of study modes and a range of exit points so that students can leave the course at a choice of levels but with a qualification.

COHESION of courses of cognate disciplines to encourage the sharing of modules by students from different backgrounds.

COMPLEMENTARY modules will allow students to follow additional practical courses (such as computing, languages, first aid, photography) that can be used to enhance professional capacities.

Now, with the help of Internet, you need to address the following questions:

- What subject would I like to study?
- Which institutions offer such courses?
- At what level should I study?
- How much will it cost?
- Will my family/friends be supportive of my activities? Will I be able to juggle study and family/social times?
- Is the subject relevant to my work? Is my boss sympathetic? Will s/he allow me to study in work time?
- Do I really have the commitment to follow this path?

When these questions have been answered to your satisfaction, you now need some techniques and strategies to help you through.

A Study-Buddy

To get the most out of your course you need to plan your approach to studying. Most people also benefit from encouragement to keep going. So select a 'study-buddy' (a teaching helper or mentor) with whom you can talk about the course and who will undertake to check your progress from time to time. The study-buddy could be another student of the same course, or may be a colleague or friend who has an interest in the subject, but need not necessarily be a person experienced or expert in the subject. A learning

helper will provide the opportunity for meaningful and stimulating discussion. This is most important for the testing, expansion, and reinforcement of the ideas and concepts that you will gain from the course. Once you have chosen a study-buddy, you need to negotiate with that person what his or her role will be. The study-buddy could:

- check your progress regularly
- comment on your written work
- discuss suggested topics with you
- give you advice about field work locations
- provide encouragement

Do I need personal objectives?

Yes, you do. You will need to think about why you are taking the course and what you hope to gain from it. You may need something to do at the weekends, or you hope to be better at your job. You may want to see if you have the ability to cope with a more advanced course of study by distance education. Or perhaps you just want a break from the pressures of your employment. Any of these is a valid reason for study and you may have other ideas.

Distance education is more demanding than traditional classroom instruction because you will need to provide your own framework for study instead of having it imposed on you by the course or workshop timetable. You will have to be self-motivated and disciplined enough to continue when a 'voice inside' is telling you to stop and go for a drink! One of the problems of self-

study is that some people begin with great enthusiasm at a pace that cannot be sustained. The best way to start a self-study course is to plan your own study schedule over a pre-set period by thinking ahead and making your own timetable.

Your **timetable** will specify the days and the hours that you have set aside for study each week. Ideally, these arrangements will be agreed with your study-buddy who can support you in this resolve. So write the scheduled time in your diary or on a chart displayed over your working area. You may be able to get the agreement of your boss or colleagues to allow some of the study time (on a regular and undisturbed basis, of course!) to be included within working hours. Organise your work area to allow this.

Schedule your timing around events, such as holidays or travel or high-stress employment times.

Here are other methods to help your learning.

1. Develop **a study reflex** by studying consistently in a place, which you associate with work. Do not try to study when lying on your bed. This location is associated with sex, or sleep – and that is what will happen!

   You will study best if you always study in the same chair in the same place with a good light. This will help you develop a 'study reflex'. If your concentration starts to fail then move to another place and relax.

Keep that study place for concentrated work, not for other trivial activities such as eating and relaxing. If you have only one place, then simply make another by turning your chair through 180 degrees, or placing it at the side of the same desk or table.

2. **Reward yourself** with short breaks of physical or different activities or cups of tea *after* you have completed a particular task or studied for a predetermined period of time (e.g. one hour).

3. **Discourage 'study busters'** among your friends and family by putting a notice on the door saying, "GONE AWAY". You may also hang a line of dirty underclothes, socks and other washing across the inside of the door to discourage those who are really determined to disturb your concentration!
   The most demanding study busters are children. Especially your own. It is difficult to explain to a three-year old child who is appealing for attention that Mum or Dad must not be disturbed "because they are engaged in cerebral activities associated with an important distance learning programme of international significance concerning national governance"! Unusually supportive collaboration between partners is needed to cope with this situation.

4. **Travelling and waiting time** can be used for revision. Prepare notes in small writing on pocket-sized cards or pieces of paper (one quarter the size of this page) which can be carried easily in pockets or bags, and refer to them while waiting for bus, train or ox/camel cart. Electronic gadgets really come into their own here.

5. Use **active learning techniques**. This means asking yourself questions that you or your study-buddy would like answered *before* you read the material. Then search for the answers in the material provided. At the

end, review the main points *and explore their use in your work*. Only when knowledge is applied does it becomes a skill.

What do I do if I get behind with my work?
Unexpected events may occur to delay your progress. Don't panic! This is a common experience.

1. Read the regulations that govern your course again. There may be allowances for some assignments to be skipped or delayed

2. Check that you have set yourself realistic goals and adjust them if necessary

3. Inform your tutor and ask for guidance rather than inventing excuses

4. Seek support or suggestions from your study-buddy or a fellow student

5. Remember that 'perfection' means doing the best that you can in the time available. It does not mean putting into your assignment, every single example and reference. Be selective. In the last resort you may need to complete some tasks at a lower standard then you normally set for yourself to help you catch up.

Perfection is the enemy of good! If you aim for perfection you may always be dissatisfied. Aim for good and you can be happy.

Further advice before you start your studies

THE SQ3R READING METHOD

Any distance learning and self-study programme will involve a large amount of reading. Perhaps you have already had the experience of reading a page of a book, or a whole chapter, after which you realise that none of the information has been registered or remembered. Indeed, it is possible to read even a short paragraph mechanically while your mind is far from the subject. This can easily apply if you are feeling tired, or you have had a stressful day at work.

The SQ3R (**s**urvey, **q**uestion, **r**ead, **r**ecall, **r**eview) reading method is well tried, world-wide, and it can also help you to overcome concentration and memory problems with reading.

Survey
Before studying a book, a chapter, or any written material, survey the whole piece of writing by scanning it quickly to get an outline of its content. Key information is often contained in the introductory or concluding (summary) paragraphs. Important information is usually to be found in the first sentence of a paragraph, while the rest may be an expansion or development of the same idea. Look at the table of contents, glance at the tables and figures, and note especially lists of important points. This will tell you if you should spend more time reading the material carefully.

Question
Your reading will lead to active learning and be more easily remembered if you formulate a few specific questions for which you are searching for answers. If there are headings in the material, turn the heading into a question. E.g. If the heading is "Impediments to Development", change the heading (in your head) to "What are the Impediments to Development?" But ask yourself other questions as well.

Read
Read at whatever speed is comfortable for you. At the same time make notes about the information in your own words, or use a highlighter pen to indicate important ideas. (However, you should not make marks in a book or journal which has been lent to you by a friend, or borrowed from a library!)

Recall
Now close the book or other volume, and work hard to recall what you have read, section by section. This is more valuable than rereading because it forces you to actively remember. You are not expected to recite the text word for word, but to see whether you have picked up the main ideas and facts. For maximum learning, the recall should take place *as soon as possible* after the reading. The longer you leave it, the more information will be forgotten. If you do not try to recall, you may just fool yourself into thinking that you have done some serious work.

Review
Finally, review what you have written and read. Again, this is most effective if done soon after the initial study. It is far better to do this than leaving the review to a 'swotting period' just before a test or examination, and perhaps long after your initial study.

Tell me, I'll forget.
Show me, I may remember.
Involve me and I'll understand.

5. TIME FOR SOME ACTIVITIES

You have decided on the subject you wish to study. You know about the level – introductory, medium, advanced, or postgraduate. You have found out if you will obtain a certificate, a diploma, a degree or a postgraduate qualification. The professional body is satisfied that the qualification gives a licence to practice. You have selected and applied to the college of your choice and read the guidelines and regulations. Now -

STOP AND THINK! Then write down the answers to the following questions:

1. What are your personal reasons for studying this course?

2. Who would you like as your study-buddy?

3. What would you like your study-buddy to do?

4. What will you do for your study-buddy in return for the help?

5. To what extent will your partner/friends support your studies? Ask them to protect your study time.

6. Plan your study times and write them in your diary, or make a chart. How many weeks have you planned for each module?

7. Which college have you contacted and in which location will you actually study?

8. Have I asked my boss if I can study at work?

Reinforcement of your knowledge. Ask any teacher or lecturer when they best learned their subject – when they were students, or when they taught the subject. All will say that mastery of a subject is best acquired by teaching it to others. So teachers are the best students and you will have to become a teacher if you are to become confident about your knowledge in your new field of study. This section, therefore, includes some brief exercises.

ACTIVITY

Explain to your study-buddy the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning. What techniques can you use to overcome the difficulties? Then teach your study helper about the use and value of the SQ3R reading method without referring to this document. Give your helper a relevant article and test the method together.

Humanitarians
For those who are beginners in the field of humanitarian work you may like to obtain a free distance education module called "Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Download it from www.networklearning.org.

This module will allow you to explore distance education without any outside commitment. It is self assessed and covers an introduction to disaster terminology, the global disaster situation, the differences between refugees and IDPs, the Sphere Minimum Standards, the Deng Humanitarian Guiding Principles, and a case study from Sri Lanka.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN CYBERSPACE!

Distance education can be lonely but it need not be. Access to internet and e-mail facilities gives you access to information and also to people: those like yourself who are following the same programme. There are people 'out there' with whom you can share ideas and mutual support.

When you put this book aside use the Internet to:

- obtain documents. The world library is available from your keyboard.

- create virtual classrooms with class mates. You can keep in touch by e-mail, listserve (regular topics for those interested in the same subjects), newsgroups, and live chats through programmes like Google Chat and Skype. The latter is truly fantastic. It can be downloaded free and if you have internet facilities you can talk free of charge to anywhere in the world providing your correspondent has obtained the same facilities. With a cheap headset you will think your Skype partner is in the same room as yourself. There is an equivalent programme for your phone called 'Viber'. Like Skype it is free but it needs Wi-Fi access.

6. STARTING A RESEARCH PROJECT

Research does not necessarily mean ivory towers, boffins and zillions of dollars-worth of equipment. Fundamentally a researcher is a person who is simply nosey, who is curious and persistent enough to want to know what is happening, or how a system works, or how many, how much, where, when and by whom. (Notice that 'why' questions have been excluded; 'why' questions are usually the preserve of philosophers and theologians. Why is the earth 92-3 million miles away from the sun? God knows).

There are basically two kinds of research:

1. **Descriptive Research**. This involves keeping records of what is happening. It needs pen and paper although a calculator or computer may help in tabulation and adding up results.

   E.g. How many patients attended the clinic? How many males/females/adults/children? What were their conditions? How were they treated? When (times and dates) did they attend?

   E.g. What is the incidence of nail-biting in my child's school? Is there a difference between boys and girls of different ages? How many children are helped to stop the habit? By what means?

   E.g. (For leisure). How many different species of birds do I see in my locality? At what time of day? Is there an educational programme about conservation in the schools?

   Date, time, conditions, location, map coordinates can all be recorded.

2. **Experimental Research**. This often arises from questions developed from descriptive research.

   E.g. What would happen if we changed the location, the time, the altitude, the temperature etc? It can involve making several measurements of the same thing at different times, or making comparisons between different locations or different techniques. Mostly it involves changing something and measuring the outcome.

   E.g. Would we reduce the impact of accidents happening to colleagues if every office had a qualified first-aider?

E.g. Would the birds visiting my garden differ in numbers and species if the bird table was relocated or made higher/lower? (Note that there are actually two questions here. This will be discussed in the next section)

E.g. Would poverty be reduced if we taught loom *construction* as well as *its use*?

What happens if we change something? That is the fundamental of experimental research.

Many have embarked on research, published an article and registered for a higher degree. A few have achieved this even without an undergraduate qualification.

In the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and some other countries, the **Master of Science** or the **Master of Arts, Law, Business Administration, Music** degrees generally contain a balance of taught and research components. The **Master of Philosophy** (M.Phil.) is a research degree, requiring the completion of a thesis. It is a lesser degree than the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) or Engineering Doctorate (EngD), greater than (or sometimes equal to) the Bachelor of Philosophy (BPhil,) and in some instances may be awarded as a substitute for a PhD thesis which is a marginal fail.

Master's degrees may sometimes serve as a provisional enrolment for the PhD which is usually a research thesis only. Some do have taught components especially in relation to research methodology, publication and thesis defence at a *viva voce* examination. A Ph.D is regarded as a senior or second master's degree. An M.Phil. is generally considered equivalent to the French Diplôme d'études Approfondies or DEA, Spanish Diploma de Estudios Avanzados DEA, or First Doctoral Degree.

A Research Project is a good way to extend your career, keep yourself from losing sanity, and enhance job prospects. (Some universities permit you to back-date a registration which allows the inclusion of data collected earlier). To be of maximum benefit to your career, and to reduce time, it is best if your research is directly related to or an essential part of your work. Others have done it – so can you! We are going to explain how to set about it in easy steps.

7. STEPS FOR FORMULATING A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

There are many exceptions to generalisations that can be made about research projects at different levels. With an archaeological topic experimental approaches are likely to be limited to methods of investigation. An analysis of Bach's music is likely to be mainly descriptive. Comparisons can be made between populations of nail-biters in different schools and then experimental changes can be made to the effectiveness of different treatments to discourage the habit. At any level there may be opportunities for both descriptive and experimental approaches.

However, as a progression is made from personal research, through school-based projects to first and second degree programmes, there will be a trend from descriptive towards experimental research. A Master's degree project may be mainly descriptive, while a Ph.D or D.Phil (Doctor of Philosophy) programme is more likely to include an experimental approach. All reports and theses will start with a literature review and probably conclude with ideas for further study as many research projects raise more questions than answers.

Fundamental to all research is the formulation of **a research question** that is to be addressed. The question may well be supported by ancillary questions. No research project should be started without the construction of the questions(s) that are to be addressed. The following simple steps are intended to help you select your subject, construct the question, and know how to organise your final proposal. Most colleges will help you through these stages by means of the completion of several forms and their guidelines.

IMPORTANT NOTE. Although you are progressing with distance education, the higher you go with your programme, the more likely that the institution will want you to complete some **residential workshops.** This is in order to be sure of your competence in areas such as writing, research methodology, the use of statistics, analytical procedures and preparation of your final report and examination. But we will start with the steps: you can face the consequences later! The residential requirements may have financial and travel implications especially if you are registered with an organisation in another country.

Another word of advice. Wanting a doctorate is not enough to ensure success. Several candidates have started on that route and dropped out because their priorities were not rightly ordered. First and foremost you need to be consumingly interested in research for its own sake. You want to know how things work and what makes them happen. The qualification will follow. The collection of massive amounts of data, enough to cause a fog, can be followed by the thrill of seeing images emerge from the mist. Patterns will form from what at first seemed random. That thrill and satisfaction is the main reward for a researcher. The qualification is the icing on the cake.

Step 1. Selecting possible areas of work

Start by listing the major fields you have covered in earlier studies and that you found interesting. Look for subheadings within your modules/assignments and aim to finish up with a list of about 20. Your list may look similar to this:

- human resource management
- logistics
- monitoring and evaluating
- playing music in a group
- community participation in sports
- the role of IT in development
- taxation and import of aids goods
- transition from emergency to development
- development, conflict reduction and peace building
- natural history of Bumble Bees
- etc

Now add to the list areas in your experience that were not covered in your studies.

- the potential relevance of SPHERE Minimum Standards to development
- the value of workshop training to NGO staff education
- water and sanitation
- marriage and divorce
- natural childbirth
- application of the Deng Humanitarian Principles in developing situations
- etc.

Think about each in turn and write 3 or 4 words ONLY alongside each one to define the field. E.g. Human Resource Management - adverts, interviews, team building, and downsizing.

OK, you have outlined all the areas within which your research could be made.

Now cross out all the areas in which you have little or no interest. Perhaps economics, statistical methods, logistics etc. Don't cross out every one (!). Leave about 6 headings and divide these into A) and B) according to more or less interest. Do not give any more thought to those areas you have discarded.

That should take about half an hour. Put the task away and go to bed. DO NOT DO ANY MORE ON THIS UNTIL TOMORROW.

You have made a good start for one day.

Step 2. Narrowing your options

Look at the college proposal form and the others supplied by the institution of enquiry - then forget them: this will allow your subconscious mind to use its structure. Do not attempt to complete the forms today.

Can you get to see a copy of anybody's completed project? It is always helpful to look at the completed thesis of a successful candidate to give you an idea of what is required, even if you have little idea of the topic.

Now choose three or four areas from your list and dump the rest. Do not even think about them again. Can any of the remaining ones be combined? This may be possible if your choices are related e.g. management and leadership.

Write two or three lines outlining the areas you are left with. Do not worry that you have only a couple or three options at this stage. The actual topic is somewhat arbitrary. Every project gets interesting once you start (later it gets boring but it finishes up more interesting again, I promise!)

(In the next step you are going to list as many unanswered questions as you can under these three topics).

Step 3. The research question(s)
Your response to Step 2 was superb. Well done!

Now you need to formulate some questions more carefully for your three topics. My own view (not accepted universally) is that 'why' questions are for philosophers and theologians e.g. why is the world round? God knows. Social scientists and scientists can find answers more easily to what, how, when, where and who questions. "What are the physical mechanisms that cause a rotating molten mass to form a sphere?"

1. Use these question words to formulate one main question and up to half a dozen ancillary questions for each of your three areas. Try to form your questions in a way that allows answering by means of a research process rather than the expression of an opinion formed irrationally. That means avoiding a question such, "Do we just sit and wait?" This could be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' without foundation other than supposition.

2. Formulate your questions in a way that conveys a single idea. "Should we be relying on individuals, or focusing on consortiums or committees?" actually implies more than one question.

3. Now look at all your questions again and add one word alongside each which briefly describes a process or a technique that could be used to answer the question e.g. questionnaire, interview etc. Your completed modules will offer other ideas. You could scan the module to look for these even if you do not fully understand them.

OK, we are getting there with only a couple more stages to go and one of these will be a week of reflection.

Step 4. Your Turn to Answer Questions!
You have moved a long way in a short time by reducing a huge field to a small choice of three areas. However, be flexible enough to allow for the possible need to change one or more of these areas before you finally reduce to one – and then start on the forms!

You have been *asking* many questions. Now it is your turn to *answer* some while you reflect on these three topics. You need not bother to write anything down unless you are helped by so doing.

1. First of all, there might be a problem. You may be about to change your work and possibly your continent. Will your three topics be applicable in a totally different context? Perhaps your thinking has been limited by the 'here and now'. If you relocated in Thailand perhaps a research question might be, "Are the Sphere Minimum Standards and Deng Humanitarian Principles applied equally in refugee camps A and B near the Burmese border?"

2. So - can your research topics be applied anywhere, or is there one which can only be researched locally?

3. Think about a balance between philosophical and practical. Questionnaires and practical measurements almost always give results you can work with, analyse and plot graphically. Literature contradictions and philosophical confusions are harder to resolve ('Managers need to make autonomous decisions' OR 'Successful managers are those who consult everybody before making a decision'). A balance of approaches gives a project a better chance of high marks, than a single approach which may be a success – or totally unproductive. It is good to crack a problem with more than one approach, but at some stage check that this is also the view of your supervisor.

4. Have you thought about comparing two or more analytical methods for tackling the same problem or applying one technique to two or more situations?

5. Have you realised by now that there are other ways of asking questions in addition to 'what, where, which, who, how and when?' For example:
   - is/are there ways of …
   - can you …
   - etc

6. Having read other widely different project reports, have they given you any further ideas for research topics or research approaches/techniques?

7. Lastly (for the time being!) would your topics be limited to your organisation and its own activities? If your research carried you into other

organisations, would they cooperate, respect your presence and give you their information willingly and openly?

So think on these things for a week, and I'll be back!

Step 5. Your proposal: structure and sequence

There are several different ways of structuring information; you need to choose the one which is the best when making a presentation or a research proposal or research report. As most people can remember three or four points, but not five or more, this will dictate the number of sections you use. Each section may be subdivided, but the same rule applies.

Please do a small exercise. There are 120 ways to arrange five sentences but here are just eight examples. Choose the one which you feel is best for telling your story.

1. I was on sentry duty
   I opened fire
   It was a lucky escape
   The enemy approached
   The enemy ran away

2. I opened fire
   I was on sentry duty
   It was a lucky escape
   The enemy approached
   The enemy ran away

3. It was a lucky escape
   I was on sentry duty
   I opened fire
   The enemy ran away
   The enemy approached

. 4. The enemy ran away
   I was on sentry duty
   I opened fire
   It was a lucky escape
   The enemy approached

5. I was on sentry duty
   The enemy approached
   I opened fire
   The enemy ran away
   It was a lucky escape

6. The enemy approached
   It was a lucky escape
   The enemy ran away
   I was on sentry duty
   I opened fire

7. The enemy ran away
   I was on sentry duty
   It was a lucky escape
   The enemy approached
   I opened fire

8. It was a lucky escape
   The enemy ran away
   The enemy approached
   I opened fire
   I was on sentry duty

Of course, some novels are written in a way which sets out a problem then recapitulates to explain the events which led to this situation. (E.g. "I opened my eyes and looked down the barrel of a gun!") While a highly skilled narrator can do this, most of us need a safer approach. Perhaps you chose number 5. Why? It gives a chronological account – I was on sentry duty AND THEN the enemy approached AND THEN and so on. However, there is another structure hidden here which is invaluable for any form of presentation, report or even an impromptu short speech.

Group 5 illustrates:

- a situation
- a problem
- a solution (or solutions
- the effect
- a comment

Try it out for yourself. Think of any topic. Malaria, perhaps.

Malaria kills about three million people every year, directly or indirectly, mostly children **(the situation).**

The parasite is developing resistance to anti-malarial drugs and the mosquitoes are becoming resistant to insecticides **(the problem).**

We must find a way to reverse resistance or develop better ways of treatment **(possible solutions).**

In these ways, we can combat one of the world's worst diseases **(the effect).**

In achieving this we will have to feed three million more people every year **(a comment).**

This example uses only single sentences but it could be expanded into paragraphs, sections, or chapters. For some purposes it may only be necessary to use the situation, the problem and possible solutions with comments after each possibility. In other situations it may be sufficient to start with the problem e.g. a research proposal.

To summarise this section, the structure of information is important and it should follow a logical sequence. The arrangement can be based on:

- a chronological sequence
- describing the end situation, comparing it with the beginning, reviewing possible causes to explain the difference
- using situations, problems, solutions, effects and comments
- answers to a list of questions: how, when, what and why etc

1. Now consider Part 1 of many Proposal Forms. They ask for the problem. However, for each of your three areas write one sentence defining the situation, then in one or more sentences, describe a problem arising from the situation.

2. Finally, discard one of your areas and complete the form for each of the other two. Hopefully this will help you to decide which area you will select for your research.

Step 6. Filling the forms

Different academic institutions have different requirements for research registration. However, you are likely to be sent four types of forms in addition to Research Guidelines:

1. A brief initial Registration Form
This requires a Topic Outline (statement of the Problem: Key Questions to be Investigated (not more than three or four): Possible Methods: Probable Data Sources: Possible Outcomes. This information will be used to identify a supervisor who has related research interests.

2. A Risk Assessment Form
This will be sent if your work is to be carried out in dangerous areas. You will need to identify and rank hazards, who might be harmed and how, evaluation of precautions, and elaboration of safety plans.

3. An Ethics Form. This will be mandatory if your work is sociological, psychological or involves animal experiments.

4. The Full Research Proposal Form
This is the tough one! (You will be told the number of words to present). It will include a literature review, assessment of the problem(s) to be

addressed, a critical outline of the methods to be adopted, analytical procedures and possibly a time frame (bar chart) showing all activities to be followed. (The end points can be aimed at but should be considered flexible. For example, the literature search will continue in a minor way throughout the time period. While writing your discussion you may come across other references that have to be added and there may be some cited which you can exclude. You are really wise to try working to an earlier deadline than the actual one because this will allow for sick kids, back ache and all the rest of the hazards that beset family members).

You are strongly advised to do some writing throughout the project; keep a record with bullet points under the section headings instead of leaving all the writing to a final bang.

Do not plan to write up your project in the way in which it will appear between the blue covers. For instance, as soon as your research methods are initiated you can write up the Materials and Methods section. Probably you will rewrite your Introduction last of all when your project is finished as only then will you see what you are introducing!

MOST important. MOST important. Keep your references accurately as you go so start by deciding the method you are adopting for giving references. Kept alphabetically it is then easy to list these at the end. Finally you will read your whole report checking that each literature citing is listed AND there are no references listed which are not cited in the text. (Perhaps you will have a small additional block called Bibliography which contains general recommended reading without implying specific citation).

So - Methods is easiest to write and this will encourage you to avoid writer's block.

8. THE FINAL THESIS

When you get writer's block (and you probably will!), write the Title Page, Acknowledgements etc that come at the front of a thesis. Contents can be done at the same time but page numbers will definitely change as you write. In summary:

1. Write Methods as soon as your research is under way. Write the preliminary pages (Title, Dedication etc) if you get writer's block. But they can be written later

2. Keep references meticulously. If not, you may waste hours or even weeks trying to retrack incomplete references. It is most important to keep all your references in the format required by the intended journal for publication, or the university requirements for a postgraduate thesis. E.g. Harvard format. There are many free downloads to help with keeping records of references.

3. Record bullet points in sections as you get ideas. You can move information around later to ensure balance of section lengths

4. Keep your eye on new literature arriving throughout your project time

5. Then write Results, Discussion and Conclusions

6. After Discussion and Conclusions, check all referencess are cited and you have not cited references not referred to in the final list

7. After Conclusions add a page on Ideas for Further Research

8. Last of all write and polish the Introduction. Only after the rest of the report is written will you really know what you are introducing

9. The quality of your report will be judged by its suitability for publication. If any opportunity arises for you to give a presentation at a meeting, however small, take it. Participants will give you further ideas and comments. If you can find a journal that will publish what you are doing, also take it as this will preempt any pass/fail decision by your examiners. “Is it of publication standard?” “It has already been published!”

9. EPITAPH

We are living in extraordinary times with history being rewritten on a daily basis. These dramatic changes are going to give rise to new approaches to distance education and new opportunities for research. You have embarked upon and perhaps completed your journey into distance education but you need not stop there. Perhaps you will take a break and then you can continue for the rest of your life. Just reflect on some of the recent changes in the world and there arises a plethora of new opportunities for studies.

The Presidents of America and Iran have talked to each other on the telephone for the first time in over 30 years. Perhaps their conversation included the following snippet:

- "Hello Iran. Have you accepted the world's consensus opinion to stop the development of nuclear weapons?"
- "Yes, America. Of course I have. How about you?"

Then there might be a message from Syria –

> "We have agreed to international inspectors taking our 1,000 tons of chemical weapons and ensuring their destruction. Can we hear about the progress being made with Russia's destruction of their 20,000 tons of chemical weapons, and America's destruction of their 25,000 tons of chemical weapons?"

There is something paradoxical about spending billions of dollars to destroy weapons that cost billions of dollars to manufacture!

The World Climate Change Report has just been published. It is well researched, attributes changes to the human population and talks of pollution reduction. But if the population explosion was reduced there would be little need for any other measures! That is where we started, in the Introduction. The next hundred years will be fascinating but somebody else will have to do the research and write the modules. Probably. Although: centenarians in England, Wales (and elsewhere) are increasing dramatically:

1982: **2,560.** 1992**: 4,460.** 2002: **7,090.** 2012: **12,320**.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Walker BSc MSc PhD CBiol FSBiol FRSM has followed careers in industry, hospitals, academia and education, the civil service and humanitarian work. After being Head of a UK University Department of Pharmacology for 15 years he was appointed as one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Further and Higher Education. With the University of London Teaching Methods Unit he provided training for new teachers and organised many other workshops in modern teaching methods in Africa, Asia and Europe.

For three years he organised and directed the Birth Research Unit in Sri Lanka; over half the communications to learned societies received national or international awards. After recently working for people with disabilities in Uganda he has settled in Thailand. These experiences have come together in this book.