

QUALITY CONTROL

By:

SERRV International

Quality Control - Preproduction

- During preproduction the first step in maintaining quality is careful selection of the materials to be used. Materials should be of the same quality as the sample that was sent to the buyer. If the same materials are unavailable or need to be substituted, the buyer must be notified immediately. All materials should also be examined for quality. Wood should be properly dried or final products will crack. Textiles should be checked for color fastness and shrinking. Fittings and fasteners should function properly and withstand use. All materials used should be consistent in quality and color. In general, it is not a good idea to compromise quality for cost by using inexpensive, but poorly made materials. Paying a little more for good quality materials will pay off in the long run by building buyer's confidence in your products.
- In this stage of production, perhaps the most important thing to take into consideration is the sample that is sent to the buyer. Handcrafts are often made in small workshops, and large orders may be filled by a number of different producers. In this case, extra care must be taken to make sure that the final products are all alike and are the same as the sample. Each producer should have the same exact counter sample as the sample sent to the buyer.
- Sometimes, after the sample has been sent, producers find out that the amount of raw materials at their disposal is not enough for a large order. Immediate communication with the buyer is essential, as well as the creation of counter-samples for as many producers involved with the product. The challenge of finding an abundance of raw materials can come with virgin materials and mostly with recycled materials. Virgin and recycled materials can vary in size, color and texture, and amount; but letting the buyer know about "variations" is important during this stage of production.

Quality Control - Production

- **The counter-sample of the sample sent to the buyer should continue to be your guide.** This is the product that the buyer is expecting. Production of the order should be compared to the counter sample several times during the production process, not just once the product is finished. Some buyers may request that a production sample (photo or actual product) be sent to them for their approval to assure the product matches their specifications before it is shipped. Every single product should match the counter sample. Quality control throughout production can help identify mistakes and correct them before they result in costly errors. If a product is not correct at any stage during the checks, it should not move on to the next stage of production. This is a common error inexperienced producers often make.

EFFECTIVE QUALITY CONTROL means that you:

1. Maintain counter sample originals of the same sample sent to the buyer, and regularly check production against these counter samples.
2. Check quality control at multiple points throughout the production process, not just at the end of production.
3. Use a thorough quality control checklist (see pg 5) or a "score card system" (see pgs 6 and 7) for monitoring consistency and quality of your production.
4. Provide all artisan groups with a copy of the quality control checklist and make sure they know to check for these quality issues as they make products.

- **Training of artisans should be part of quality control** during production. All artisans should be trained in how to check for quality issues as they make the products and be provided with a check list of what to look for when monitoring the quality of their production. Each one of the artisans involved in production should have a counter sample identical to the sample sent to the buyer. Training and good communication with the artisans is essential. Artisans should understand what is involved in producing crafts for export and how to meet quality requirements.
- **Working conditions** are also a factor in good quality control. These conditions include things like fair wages, proper work areas and equipment, and worker incentives. The price paid to the artisan can impact the quality of production, as does the time they have to fulfill an order. If artisans have to produce a large order in a short amount of time, this could result in quality being compromised. If artisans are paid a low wage, they have little incentive to invest time into making a good quality item. Finally, good quality production also depends on workshop conditions. Work areas should be kept clean and artisans should have the tools needed. Sometimes a product can be rejected simply because the product has gotten dirty.

QUALITY CONTROL CHECKLIST

- COLOR:** Do the colors match the colors requested in the order? Do they match the sample? Is the color consistent in all products? Do the dyes crack, rub off or fade?
- MATERIALS:** Are the quality of the materials identical to the sample? Is the quality consistent in all the products produced for the purchase order?
- ODORS:** Does your product smell of stain, paint, fumigants, textile ink, soil, repellents, mold or cigarette smoke? Chances are your buyers will notice these odors and complain. Be sure to air products adequately before packing for shipment.
- SIZE AND DIMENSIONS:** Are the products the same size as the original sample or order request? Are the dimensions accurately duplicated in production? Is the weight of the finished product the same as the original sample?
- FINISHES:** Have the requested finishes been added, such as linings, closures, hooks, stands, etc.? Are they exactly like those on the counter sample and purchase order?
- CONSTRUCTION:** Are you using trained, skilled artisans and appropriate tools and technology to deliver a quality product?
- STORAGE:** Is the climate in the storage area controlled? Is there mold? Insects? Is the moisture level adequate?
- PACKAGING:** Is the quality of the label, tags, and poly bag as requested?
- RUSH ORDERS:** If you are working against a deadline, has the rush compromised the quality of the quality of the product?
- PACKING:** Are the packing materials in good condition? Are the boxes strong enough to withstand rough handling? Are the contents safe from the effects of water?

Source: Aid to Artisans Export Manual, 2005

1. Quality Control Score Cards for your Artisans :

Artisan Name : **Group Name :** **Artisan Number :**

ArtisanName Group A A26

Product Details

Quality Control

Date	Item name	Code	Colour	Size	Style	Quantity	Date to be completed	Date completed	Producer Price	Clean	Completed on time	Accurate pattern / design	Neatness	Colour accuracy	Correct shape	Correct size
01-Jan-10	key ring	KR001	Indigo / red	Small	traditional	20	01-Feb-10	29-Jan-10	\$1.50	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓

** You may also want to include value of materials

Record of Materials issued

Materials Issued

Date issued	Materials	Value of materials	Colour	Size	Quantity issued	Date item completed	Quantity used	Quantity returned
01-Jan-10	Beads	E120/Kg	Blue	11	500g	01-Feb-10	420g	80g
23-Feb-10	Cotton Yarn	E70/kg	White	10g	1 Kg	05-Mar-10	980g	20g

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Presented by Zoë Dean-Smith from ***Vital Voices*** –

Senior Director Global Entrepreneurs in Handcrafts Program / TechnoServe Consultant – Handcraft Development

Quality Control – Postproduction

- Once an order is finished, and has met all the requirements of the producer's check list, it is time to prepare it for shipping. The first step is careful packaging and packing of the products to assure they will get to their destination without damage. Quality can be compromised if products are not properly packed for shipping. A product may have been made well, but can be damaged during shipping, resulting in losses. Products should not be packed while paint/coating is still fresh, or packed too tightly; and should have adequate protection.
- **Packaging** refers to the way products are put inside an outer layer of wrapping material either individually or in sets. Packaging protects individual products from damage during shipping and can also be the way products are presented to the final customer.
- **Packing** refers to placing the already packaged items into the master cartons for shipping. Cartons are often loaded and unloaded several times during shipping and can be roughly handled, dropped, or exposed to potentially damaging weather. Items that are not properly protected and rub against each other inside the carton can damage the products' finish or cause fibers to break, in the case of baskets. It is the exporter's responsibility to assure that products are properly packed and to cover the cost of adequate packing materials.
- During shipment, moisture is a common cause of damage to products. Products made from wood, leather, textiles, bamboo, grasses and other natural fibers should be completely dry before packing to avoid growth of mold and mildew that can damage products.
- Specific buyers prefer their products packaged and packed in different ways. This list contains examples of how certain items (see pg 9). Be sure to always ask the buyer if you do not know their preferences.

Packaging Recommendations for Different Kinds of Products

- **BASKETS:** Whenever possible, baskets should be fumigated and you must provide us with a copy of your fumigation certificate. Baskets often do not need to be wrapped. If shipping baskets as part of a container shipment, you need not pack the baskets in cartons but can stack them loosely in the container, with the heaviest baskets at the bottom.
- **CERAMICS:** Individually wrapped and boxed. When ordered as a set, please package as a set.
- **INEXPENSIVE LIGHT ITEMS:** Inexpensive light items such as slide whistles, flutes and brushes should be wrapped and stacked.
- **JEWELRY:** Please place individually in small plastic bags.
- **LEATHER:** Place in plastic bags. Please use a silica drying envelope when possible.
- **METALS:** Individually wrapped and boxed. When ordered as a set, please package as a set. If they cannot be boxed, they should be very well wrapped in plain paper and layered.
- **PAINTED AND LACQUERED** products: Individually wrap and box. Please be sure that these products are 100% dry before wrapping to prevent packing materials from sticking to the product.
- **PAPER:** Place in plastic bags. Please use a silica drying envelope when possible.
- **SHELLS:** Wrap carefully, place in a plastic bag and then box if possible.
- **STONE and GLASS:** Individually wrapped and boxed. When ordered as a set, please package as a set.
- **TEXTILES:** Package in a clear plastic bag. When ordered as a set, please package as a set.
- **WOOD:** Individually wrap and pack in individual boxes. Please use a silica drying envelope when possible.