



(Photo by Kirsty Wigglesworth, Press Association Images)

As part of international ceremonies in Ukraine commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Crimean War, reenactors wearing uniforms of the era ride into the infamous Valley of Death 4 October 2004 to recreate the "Charge of the Light Brigade," one of the most famous incidents in British military history. Many historians agree that poorly constructed and delivered orders contributed to the attack's failure.

Effective Writing for Army Leaders

The Army Writing Standard Redefined

Desirae Gieseaman

Day after day, the inexperienced commanders of a cavalry division and its small light cavalry brigade wait impatiently for the order

to attack. The written order finally arrives, but to the division commander, it seems "utterly obscure."¹ The situation becomes urgent. With relationships in the

chain of command strained and the means of communication severely limited by the austere environment and the hilly terrain, efforts to gain clarification only increase the confusion.

Finally, the division commander believes he understands which target to attack and passes on the order. Then, the light brigade's commander leads over six hundred brave cavalry soldiers in a charge from which less than two-thirds will return. The brigade's "noble six hundred," later commemorated in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's beloved poem *The Charge of The Light Brigade, Memorializing Events in the Battle of Balaclava, October 25, 1854*, attack the wrong target.²

While Tennyson's poem celebrates the light brigade's courage and sacrifice, it also alludes to leadership failings that led to the tragedy, with the phrase "someone had blundered."³ Among those failings were poorly written orders. The intended readers—the division and brigade commanders—could not understand the mission or the commander's intent:

Lord Raglan wishes the cavalry to advance rapidly to the front — follow the enemy and try to prevent the enemy carrying away the guns. Troop Horse Artillery may accompany. French cavalry is on your left. Immediate.
[Signed by Gen.] Airey.⁴

Ironically, this concise order—the last of four, all ambiguous—seems reasonably consistent with the U.S. Army's definition of *effective writing*: "writing that can be understood in a single rapid reading and is generally free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage."⁵ The order is a quick read, and the text appears generally free of errors. A style check shows no passive verbs. The meaning of the individual words, the phrases, and the sentences seems clear enough—even with a sentence fragment and some nonstandard punctuation. The order even seems consistent with the U.S. Army's notion of *mission orders*: "directives that emphasize to subordinate the results to be attained, not how they are to achieve them."⁶

Nonetheless, the order's failure to fulfill its communication function demonstrates that rapid readability—supposedly achieved through conciseness and generally error-free grammar, mechanics, and usage—does not necessarily add up to effectiveness, let alone comprehensibility. The U.S. Army's writing standard could not have helped make the light brigade's final

order effective despite its worthwhile elements—even if British military leader competencies at the time had been more satisfactory.

Nor can the U.S. Army's writing standard provide twenty-first century soldiers and Army civilians the kind of guidance they need and deserve so they can become effective writers. The Army needs a new writing standard, one that would emphasize the functions of writing over its forms, one that would account for the effective thinking and reasoning that must underlie effective explanations.

A functional standard would emphasize the reasons Army leaders write and the processes they use to develop and express their ideas to their intended readers. It would integrate the conventions for various types of written products—their forms—in a way that helps writers learn to apply those conventions proficiently. A functional writing standard would help writers become skilled thinkers and communicators because it would help them profit from the unparalleled power of writing to enhance their critical and creative thinking.

Not all aspects of the traditional Army writing standard should be discarded. Its enduring elements simply need to be understood in terms of how they support a greater whole, and then updated based on modern writing situations and research on the nature of writing and functional communication.

This essay describes why Army writing is effective when it is functional. It discusses some of the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional Army writing standard and describes the critical role of *purpose* for Army writers and for Army readers. It briefly discusses processes writers can use to write effectively—with a focus on planning, and then it surveys some of the writing genres for which Army writers apply conventions from various authorities. Finally, it proposes a practical approach for the Army to achieve accountability for writing standards.

Functional Writing

The plain English meaning of *effective* can provide a starting point for redefining effective Army writing. *Effective* means "adequate to accomplish a purpose; producing the intended or expected result."⁷ On one hand, a writer might consider a product effective if it was adequate to accomplish *the writer's purpose*—if it satisfied the writer's reason, or reasons, for writing.

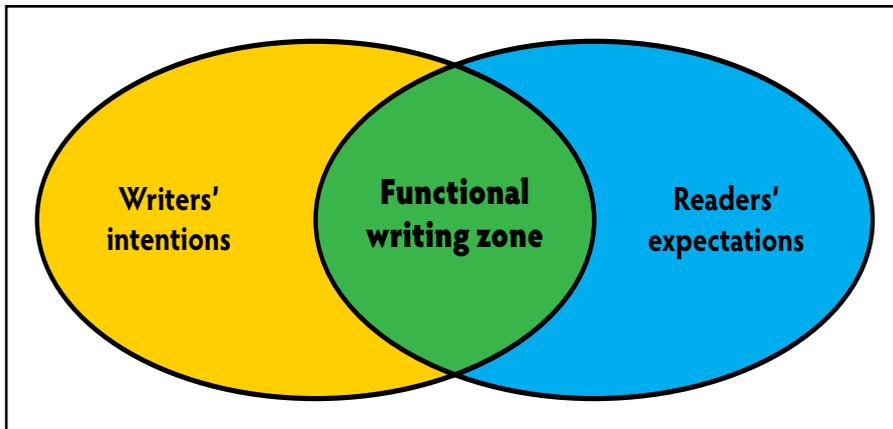


Figure 1. Where Writers' Intentions and Readers' Expectations Converge

On the other hand, a reader might consider a product effective if it supplied *the reader's expected result*—if it satisfied the reader's reasons for reading. Functional writing accomplishes both by joining writers' intentions—their reasons for writing—with their intended readers' expectations—their reasons for reading—with in a notional *functional writing zone* (see figure 1).

Army writing is effective when it is functional, when it satisfies the writer's and the intended readers' purposes and meets appropriate standards for writing processes and writing conventions. In the functional writing zone, writers use the steps of writing *processes* and the conventions of written *products* to achieve effectiveness, while products and processes remain subordinate to meaningful *purposes*. When Army writers bring together their intentions and their readers' expectations within the functional writing zone, they are much more likely to think, reason, and write effectively.

Based on this functional concept, table 1 summarizes the essential elements of effective Army writing. It lays a foundation upon which Army leaders could build assessments appropriate for various types of documents, publications, or genres.

Similar to the joint term *measure of effectiveness*, truly effective written products should support "attainment of an end state or achievement of an objective" that is determined mainly by readers' expectations—their reasons for reading.⁸ For example, in the course of performing an assigned writing task such as a report, the writer's purpose should become a refined version of the purpose given by the person who will become

the reader. If a supervisor or instructor assigns a report that should identify and describe a solution to a problem, the reader's purpose for reading will be general—to learn about a workable solution. The writer's purpose will be more specific—to create and describe a well-reasoned solution with clarity and precision, after reflecting on the writing situation, the problem, and potential ways to solve it.

Similar to the joint term *measure of performance*, the old Army definition of effective

writing tends to lead writers to focus on "task accomplishment."⁹ Typically, Army writers care about completing their assigned tasks. Some, however, define task accomplishment in terms of the final product's specific outward characteristics of form instead of how effectively the product communicates a focused message that will support accomplishing a mission. Indeed, readers expect certain conventions of form, which contribute to effectiveness and are relatively easy to assess, but readers care mainly about what they can learn by reading. This principle should liberate aspiring writers from paralyzing anxiety about conventions of correctness.

The Traditional Army Writing Standard

The Army demonstrated its commitment to good writing in 1985 when it tried to achieve the "elimination of poor writing within the total army."¹⁰ Army Regulation (AR) 600-70, *The Army Writing Program* (superseded in 1988 by a regulation on correspondence) formalized the definition of *effective writing*. In 1986, a Department of the Army Pamphlet named *Effective Writing for Army Leaders* (DA Pamphlet 600-67) detailed guidelines for implementing the writing program introduced by the concise (four-paragraph) regulation.¹¹ This pamphlet coined the phrase "the standard for Army writing" and justified its adoption by framing writing as a leadership skill. It added, "Good Army writing is clear, concise, organized, and right to the point."¹²

Bottom line up front. Among its many common-sense rules, the now-rescinded DA pamphlet mandated structuring written staff products with the main point, or bottom line, at the beginning. The pamphlet said Army writers should give the *bottom line up front*, or *BLUF*, because “the greatest weakness in ineffective writing is that it doesn’t quickly transmit a focused message.”¹³

Active voice. Another virtue of the DA pamphlet was its emphasis on preferring the active voice (subject-verb-object sentence structure) to enhance clear communication:

Many Army writers overuse the passive voice and create sentences that are indirect and unfocused, and that slow communication. The passive voice hides the doer of the action, blocking communication. Active example: Army beat Navy. Passive example: The Navy has been beaten by Army. ... The active voice is direct, natural, and forceful. ... The passive voice is abused in Army writing.¹⁴

English teachers, experienced writers, and especially readers weary of slogging through poorly written Army products still prefer active voice. Unfortunately, Army writers still routinely overuse passive constructions.

Coaching and accountability. The Army’s passives problem, along with many others, continues partly because focusing on form does not work, and partly because the Army neglected the pamphlet’s chapter on coaching writers (called “mentoring” by the pamphlet) and holding them accountable.¹⁵ Instead, the policy’s emphasis on form over function and the force’s lack of coaching and accountability, along with overapplication of a narrow standard to all manner of products,

have ensured “the total Army” would, for the most part, continue writing poorly. The solution begins with writers’ and readers’ purposes.

Purposes—The Reasons for Writing and the Reasons for Reading

Since the mid-1980s, many applied linguistics researchers have moved away from linguistic theories that try to understand language by understanding patterns in grammar. Instead, linguists try to understand language through functional linguistic theories that emphasize context, relationships, and communication functions.¹⁶

The importance of meaning. Research in applied linguistics and English education, as well as new technologies used for teaching, has profoundly influenced approaches to teaching English composition. Researchers have found that functional, contextual approaches are much more effective than traditional “drill-and-kill” techniques focused on structure.¹⁷ Granted, researchers have, primarily, studied high school and college learners. However, functional approaches for teaching writing are suitable for learners of any age because they provide meaningful learning experiences.¹⁸

Reading and writing as learning. The primary value in Army written products is the learning they provide for readers. Army readers, for the most part, naturally and legitimately expect to learn when they read Army written products—official correspondence, reports, manuals, or orders; academic writing projects; contracts; blog posts; news articles; and many other genres. In the functional writing zone, writers aim to provide content that causes their intended readers to

Essential Elements of Effectiveness	General Descriptions of Measures
Purposes	How written products satisfy the reasons intended audiences read and the reasons authors write for them
Processes	How writers perform writing tasks
Products	How texts present their messages and demonstrate appropriate writing conventions

Table 1. Measures of Effective Army Writing

learn. Writers can do this effectively by asking themselves what they need and want to learn as they write, and what their intended readers need and want to learn by reading. Then, writers can incorporate appropriately complex cognitive processes into their writing processes. They can conceptualize cognitive learning using the cognitive processes in “Bloom’s taxonomy for teaching, learning, and assessing,” as revised by editors Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl in 2001.¹⁹

A team of educational researchers led by Benjamin Bloom developed the original, now-obsolete, Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives in 1956. Educators around the world have used the 1956 version to improve curricula and assessments. However, the body of research in cognitive psychology since the 1950s and changes in the practice of education necessitated a revision. Anderson and Krathwohl made significant improvements, although many educational institutions have yet to adopt the revised taxonomy (illustrated in table 2, page 111), with empty cells where users would write in learning objectives.²⁰

The taxonomy’s main intended audiences are teachers and test designers writing learning objectives and assessing learning. However, its cognitive

process dimension, which has a sound basis in cognitive psychology research, is a powerful aid for writers aiming to enhance learning. Cognitive processes fall within the six categories listed horizontally in table 2, from left to right *in order of increasing complexity*. The taxonomy organizes nineteen processes within the categories:

1. Remember—recognizing and recalling
2. Understand—interpreting, exemplifying, classifying, summarizing, inferring, comparing, and explaining
3. Apply—executing and implementing
4. Analyze—differentiating, organizing, and attributing
5. Evaluate—checking and critiquing
6. Create—generating, planning, and producing²¹

It is important to understand that this is not a tidy hierarchy where every learning task fits neatly in a box, and that the cognitive process categories are not a ranked list of cumulative behaviors.²² For instance, Anderson and Krathwohl explain, “critical thinking and problem solving tend to cut across rows, columns, and cells of the Taxonomy Table.”²³

Moreover, other than the two-dimensional table, Anderson and Krathwohl do not offer a visual representation such as a pyramid; this would misrepresent their intent. With that in mind, a simple stacked Venn diagram is helpful for illustrating that more complex processes overlap with less complex processes (see figure 2).

Writers can refer to Bloom’s revised taxonomy as they aim to use the processes appropriate for their writing situation. In many writing situations, they can think of themselves as problem solvers who develop creative solutions for complex problems by aiming for processes in the most complex cognitive learning category: create. Writers using processes within the *create* category do not exclude less complex, or less cognitive, processes; they integrate them. Unfortunately, Army writers often settle unnecessarily for merely *analyzing* their topics when their writing situations call for evaluating or creating. Moreover, writers’ overall processes need not be strictly cognitive; they can integrate affective and psychomotor processes as well.²⁴

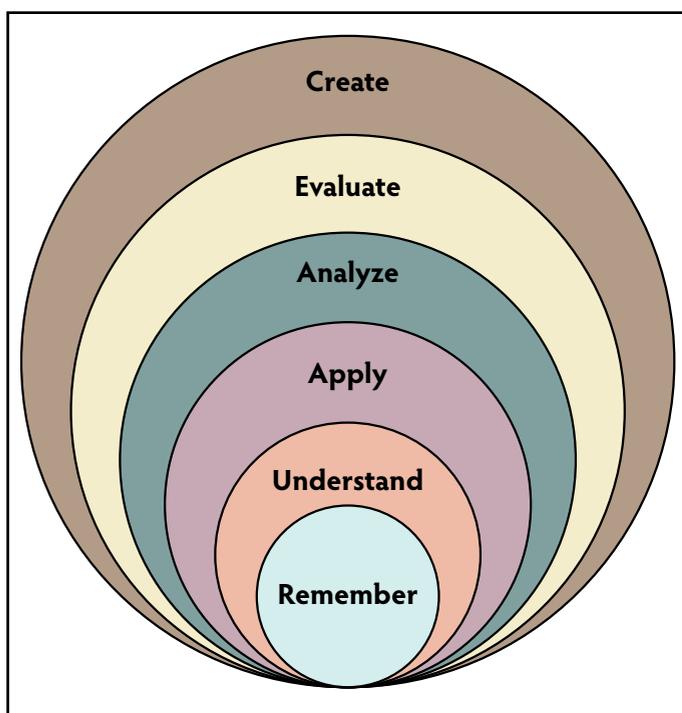


Figure 2. Overlapping Cognitive Processes from Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy

The Knowledge Dimension	The Cognitive Process Dimension					
	1. Remember	2. Understand	3. Apply	4. Analyze	5. Evaluate	6. Create
A. Factual						
B. Conceptual						
C. Procedural						
D. Metacognitive						

Table 2. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

Writing as critical and creative thinking. The act of writing provides numerous ways to evoke creative thinking and integrate it with critical thinking. Through writing, Army problem solvers can use creative processes relevant for doctrinal processes typically considered analytical, for instance. Even the Army's *military decision making process* (MDMP) depends on a considerable amount of creativity, particularly in the "generate options" step (for which doctrine provides few creative techniques). Placing various MDMP steps in the appropriate cognitive dimension categories suggests the types of cognitive processes suitable for each step. It also suggests that creative thinking is integral to the MDMP.

Most U.S. higher learning institutions offer a class on "applying both critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe problems and approaches to solving them."²⁵ All students can sign up for this class—which will help them elevate their cognitive processes and their communication skills. Typically, it is named English Composition, and the instructors teach many techniques known to help with creating and developing ideas, as part of processes for writing.

Processes—The Ways Writers Perform Writing Tasks

There is no single writing process that all writers use in all situations. English educators using research-based approaches for teaching are not likely to insist on strictly defined and sequenced steps. They may propose variations on writing processes with as few as three parts or as many as ten.²⁶

Numerous writers' handbooks, composition classes, and online sources discuss processes for writing. Therefore, this article mentions the parts of writing

processes only briefly. Because of the importance of starting well, this discussion emphasizes planning for longer and more complex Army products. However, even relatively short products such as e-mails can benefit from many of the principles given.

Major writing process activities typically include planning, drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading, but writing guides disagree on where to place various subtasks because few fit neatly into a single activity. Each writer works differently. As with the major Army operations process activities, all the major writing process activities "are not discrete; they overlap and recur."²⁷ Proficient writers use good writing processes and adjust them "to suit their personalities as well as specific writing situations."²⁸

In the operations process, planning, "the art and science of understanding a situation, envisioning a desired future, and laying out effective ways of bringing that future about," represents the beginning.²⁹ To facilitate good beginnings for writing projects, Army writers can consider several planning tips:

- ◆ Use creative prewriting activities to move beyond the natural urge for self-expression.
- ◆ Use copious amounts of questions to understand the writing situation and imagine possibilities.
- ◆ Take advantage of the power of writing, and other techniques, to stimulate creative thought.
- ◆ Incorporate collaboration as early as possible, and allow time for drafting and further development based on feedback.
- ◆ Set out to embrace and enjoy drafting and re-writing as ways to raise learning levels and to improve mastery of writing conventions.

While good operational planning is critical to accomplishing missions, considerable strategic work needs to occur in advance. In other words, the



(Photo by Sgt. Justin Naylor, 1st Cavalry Division PAO)

Pfc. Adrian Mack, a supply specialist with 2nd Advise and Assist Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, U.S. Division–North, talks about the different styles of communication 28 June 2011 with Spc. James Taylor, a heavy vehicle operator with 2nd AAB at Contingency Operating Base Warhorse, Iraq.

beginnings of successful operations encompass activities that occur before operational planning. A similar principle applies to writing.

Creative prewriting activities. Writers' handbooks present numerous creative prewriting activities as ways to develop ideas. Their names vary, but suggested activities typically include the following techniques, compiled from Lynn Quitman Troyka and Douglas Hesse, *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*, and Jean Wyrick, *Steps to Writing Well*:

- ◆ *Journal writing*—writing private, short, daily entries in a notebook kept within easy reach
- ◆ *Freewriting*, including variations called *looping* and *the boomerang*—writing uninterrupted text rapidly for ten minutes or more
- ◆ *Brainstorming*, also called *listing*—quickly writing down ideas without screening, organizing, or developing them
- ◆ *Structured questioning and answering*, including variations called *cubing* and *cross-examination*—asking categories of questions such as who, what, where, when, why, and how; or asking questions about definitions and characteristics,

comparisons, relationships, circumstances, or evidence

- ◆ *Clustering*, also called *mapping*—drawing a circle with the main topic written inside, and then drawing lines from it to more circles with related topics written inside them, and drawing lines to still more circles with more subtopics
- ◆ *Talking*—chatting informally or inviting a friend to ask questions about the topic
- ◆ *Reading*—reading or browsing to learn how others are discussing the topic
- ◆ *Drawing or dramatizing*—creating diagrams, pictures, models, scenarios, or even songs or raps to stimulate ideas.³⁰

Prewriting to develop ideas—regardless of the technique—can serve another critical function.

Writers can use prewriting to satisfy and move beyond their natural desire for self-expression and into the functional writing zone. In this way they can more easily identify their target readers and create value for them. Writing is a great tool to develop and clarify one's thinking and reasoning, but this function differs from writing directly for the benefit of other readers. Journal writing, stream-of-consciousness freewriting, brainstorming, questioning, clustering, talking, reading, or drawing while considering a topic help open a valve from the psyche. Mature writers use these types of techniques to nurture themselves and their ideas, to increase their learning, and then to develop and organize focused messages that will satisfy their readers' reasons for reading.

Copious amounts of questions. The second planning tip is to use copious amounts of questions. All writers should front-load questions during early planning and pursue answers doggedly.³¹ They should write down practical and intellectual questions such as these to help them understand their *writing situation*:

- ◆ What is the purpose of this writing task, according to the person who assigned it or the intended readers?

- ◆ What will be my purpose for writing—what do I want to achieve, solve, or demonstrate for the intended readers?
- ◆ What characteristics of the intended readers do I need to consider?
- ◆ What makes this project important?
- ◆ What are my biases and limitations, and how can I overcome them?
- ◆ What authorities do I need to consider about the format, topic, process, or any other conventional standards for the task?

As with any task, writers should understand the overall picture before they start drafting.

Ways to stimulate creative and critical thinking. The third planning tip is to take advantage of the power of writing—and drawing or other visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or collaborative techniques—to stimulate thought. Some writers use note cards or sticky notes they can move around as parts of a storyboard. Some work with images or three-dimensional models. With a pen and paper, it is easy to sketch relationships as diagrams, outlines, or pictures. For some writers, using a pen and paper with cursive handwriting is more stimulating than writing with a computer. This makes it easy to set aside concerns about typing words correctly. Moreover, questioning tends to work best when authors write down their questions—and their tentative answers—as they arise. Writers who need to overcome inertia or uncertainty often find that journaling, brainstorming, or extended freewriting (thirty minutes or more) helps jumpstart ideas. Working quickly enhances these techniques—using touch typing or cursive handwriting is helpful.

The ability to use writing to stimulate thinking and reasoning improves with repetition.³² With each subsequent journal entry, iteration, or draft, ideas develop further as written words develop on the page. Rare is the writer who can produce a fully developed concept or product, or solve a complex problem, in a single pass. When supervisors, commanders, or instructors assigning writing projects insist on a good process and allow time for it, they will be more likely to receive well-crafted products.

Collaboration and feedback. The fourth planning tip is to incorporate collaboration with peers and subject matter experts as early as possible, and to allow enough time for drafting and rewriting based on their

feedback. Writers should avoid the mistake of referring only to experts and sources whose points of view support their own. Collaboration with peers is helpful; engaging with sources and people whose points of view, knowledge, and strengths differ from the writer's is vital.

Critical thinking and reasoning should not be performed entirely in isolation; neither should writing. Even the best writers cannot see every instance in which their thinking, reasoning, or writing could use improvement; they need test readers who can provide feedback during development. Getting feedback near the end is too late. (Some formal processes for Department of the Army publications build in peer review and drafting; truncated time lines, along with other issues, can interfere with effectiveness.)

The benefits of drafting and rewriting. The final planning tip is for writers to embrace and enjoy drafting and rewriting as ways to raise learning levels, focus their message, and improve their mastery of writing conventions. To solve complex problems, writers concentrate on and revisit their work repeatedly and persistently, over time. They seek feedback along the way.

Writers learn writing skills, including specific conventions—grammar, mechanics, style, organization, or formatting—as they receive feedback on their drafts and then rewrite. Writing formal products does not come naturally to anyone, any more than higher-level thinking comes naturally, but this is a blessing in disguise. Writers can benefit from regarding their first drafts as developmental rather than as containing errors of sentence or paragraph structure that others might criticize. Their test readers can adopt a similar view. Usually, test readers can better serve writers by providing questions, guidance, and recommendations rather than outright corrections.

Among the reasons writers should make their own changes is that even recasting elements of grammar or style can engage writers' thinking, reasoning, and communication skills. The early drafts of sentences, paragraphs, essays, letters, or reports likely will need development in their messages, not just in their use of conventions.

Products—The Conventions of Written Texts

Specific purposes, processes, and conventions appropriate for Army writing differ ad infinitum for the

topics, the genres, the intended audiences, and many other factors. The traditional Army writing standard could not encompass every kind of Army writing any more than Cinderella's slipper could fit her stepsisters.

Army authorities on written products. The Department of the Army has seventeen regulations just on information management. The Department's main publishing regulation lists over forty kinds of official Army publications and numerous types of media for them.³³ Many Army publications and documents are subject to Department of Defense and U.S. Government Printing Office standards as well.

The Army regulation on correspondence alone contains over twenty tables and over sixty figures illustrating how to apply the rules.³⁴ FM 6-0 establishes conventions for staff studies, decision papers, running estimates, briefings, after action reviews, schedules, plans, orders (with up to twenty-one types of annexes), and various matrixes.³⁵ Various policy documents establish standards for web content and public affairs publications. In addition to Department of the Army, TRADOC establishes numerous requirements. Official administrative publications of TRADOC include a multitude of circulars, memorandums, pamphlets, regulations, supplements, and forms—all governed by various regulations.³⁶ Other subordinate Army organizations establish their own writing requirements, many drawing on Standard English authorities as well.

A move to consolidate and simplify. Proponents for specific Army writing standards established in Department of the Army and TRADOC information management (25-series) administrative publications, in doctrine, or in any other authorities could serve the force by consolidating, reducing, and simplifying their conventional standards. Authorities that have not already done so should articulate their standards in plain English and provide meaningful contexts that illustrate how to apply them. Moreover, they should consider ways to achieve accountability and consistency, starting with ensuring the writers they intend to apply their standards receive effective instruction and coaching on using them in context. Army writers need to become proficient in the rules pertinent to their particular writing tasks, but they need to put the rules in their

place—subordinate to a functional standard of effectiveness.

Standard English. Along with administratively or doctrinally defined Army standards, commonly accepted principles for English writing apply to most kinds of Army writing. Individual writers within any Army organization have numerous tools available to help them apply Standard English conventions. It should go without saying, but for products prepared in Microsoft Word, supervisors and instructors should not accept writing for which authors have not used a process that includes drafting and re-writing, developmental feedback if appropriate for the situation (substantive and proofreading), and systematic use of Word's proofing options set for checking both grammar and style. Moreover, even e-mails can be spell-checked, and reviewed by a test reader if appropriate.

A process for accountability. Commanders, instructors, leaders, and supervisors should refuse to accept substandard writing, and they should avoid inadvertently perpetuating it. AR 600-70 declared that "commanders at all levels" were responsible for "upholding the common standard, working actively to eliminate poor writing in their commands, and providing poor writers opportunities to improve."³⁷ For Army writers to improve, this aspect of the old policy needs to be revived. DA pamphlet 600-67 outlined a process for supervisors to give developmental feedback on writing, and for writers to self-monitor, self-correct, and assess and improve clarity, packaging, and major style elements (such as unnecessary passive voice).³⁸

The Army was to conduct diagnostic testing, establish writing core curricula in Army schools, and provide options for remedial work. Supervisors were to review paper drafts of staff products in detail, mark up errors, and send the drafts back for corrections so writers could make their products consistent with the standards. In effect, supervisors were to edit all staff products—not by making corrections, which perpetuates problems, but by identifying errors in a way that writers would understand how to fix them before they submitted a final version. This might have been an effective approach for helping writers improve their proficiency in the limited conventions DA Pam 600-67 articulated.

However, just three years after the Army Writing Program was created, a new regulation on preparing and managing correspondence (AR 25-50) superseded it.³⁹ By the 1990s, the age of personal computers had arrived. The Army writing standard became separated from its context and intent, the categories of Army writing expanded, the volume of Army writing increased exponentially, and a practical means for accountability and writing improvement seemed to disappear.

Implementation of a New Army Writing Standard

Army writing is effective when it satisfies the writer's and the intended readers' purposes and meets appropriate standards for writing processes and writing conventions. To implement this functional standard effectively, the Army must avoid reverting to traditional approaches for teaching English composition, which remain all too common.

Former Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. John A. Wickham's vision for establishing "a common standard, ... goals, ... and ... responsibility" for Army writing

remains relevant.⁴⁰ However, the approach introduced in 1986—predating the computer age and based on a traditional understanding of writing—remains overly focused on correcting discrete points of grammar, mechanics, and usage, and facilitating rapid reading of limited document types.

Instead of trying to achieve the "elimination of poor writing within the total Army," a new Department of the Army writing policy should inspire Army leaders to write well and to think well. It should inspire effective teaching and coaching. As with Wickham's policy, the new vision should be rooted in Army leadership principles. It should encompass the act of writing not only as a way of communicating "focused messages" but also as a way of developing those messages for targeted readers. Placing a new writing policy in the Army's leadership regulation—AR 600-100, *Army Leadership*—could help banish any latent doubt that the Army considers writing a critical leadership competency.⁴¹

Writing teachers and coaches. Writing teachers and curriculum developers at Army training and education institutions should have appropriate



(Photo by Staff Sgt. Timothy R. Koster, 362nd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)

Soldiers from the 302nd Maneuver Enhancement Brigade and its subordinate units complete a written examination during the Best Warrior Competition 23 March 2014 at Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

credentials or professional development. Ideally, their expertise should include familiarity with writing theory and research-based English teaching methods developed after the mid-1980s. The “NCTE [National Council of Teachers of English] Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing” and “Guiding Principles [for] Sound [Postsecondary] Writing Instruction,” summarized here, express the major principles that teachers, coaches, and institutions should follow.

The NCTE believes—

- Everyone has the capacity to write, writing can be taught, and teachers can help students become better writers.
- People learn to write by writing.
- Writing is a process.
- Writing is a tool for thinking.
- Writing grows out of many different purposes.
- Conventions of finished and edited texts are important to readers and therefore to writers.
- Writing and reading are related.
- Writing has a complex relationship to talk.
- Literate practices are embedded in complicated social relationships.
- Composing occurs in different modalities and technologies.
- Assessment of writing involves complex, informed, human judgment.⁴²

According to the NCTE guiding principles, sound postsecondary writing instruction—

- Emphasizes the rhetorical nature of writing
- Considers the needs of real audiences
- Recognizes writing as a social act
- Enables students to analyze and practice with a variety of genres
- Recognizes writing processes as iterative and complex
- Depends upon frequent, timely, and context-specific feedback from an experienced postsecondary instructor
- Emphasizes relationships between writing and technologies
- Supports learning, engagement, and critical thinking in courses across the curriculum.⁴³

Any soldier seeking a writing class through a civilian institution should obtain a syllabus and a textbook or materials before registering—regardless of how the instruction is

delivered. If the approach seems dated or inconsistent with the NCTE principles, the soldier should keep shopping; the same goes for software programs for writers.

In addition to making sure Army writing teachers have appropriate credentials or professional development, the Army should establish an Army-wide volunteer writing-coach program. A writing-coach program would require a relatively small investment in training and administration. With about three weeks of training from a qualified teacher trainer—an English teacher with advanced expertise in using and in training others to use English composition teaching techniques—soldiers and Army civilians who already were proficient writers could become proficient coaches. Three weeks could allow enough training time to introduce Army and Department of Defense authorities that govern specific genres. Over time, more and more Army organizations could have resident writing coaches.

Institutional leader training and education. Based on a new Army writing policy and research-based principles on teaching writing, TRADOC Regulation 350-10 could follow through with an updated approach to training and educating officers, warrant officers, non-commissioned officers, and civilians in effective writing.⁴⁴ Proponents for all courses identified in TRADOC Regulation 350-10 should specify the types of writing for which their participants need to be proficient, the appropriate authorities, and, as much as possible, the optimal ways to ensure their participants know how to produce the standards. The Action Officer Development Course—the only course expressly required by the regulation to teach writing—needs to replace its woefully obsolete distributed learning writing lesson.

Early in 2015, the Army instituted a writing assessment for noncommissioned officers, intended to lead to opportunities for nearly one hundred thousand soldiers to take English composition courses at civilian institutions.⁴⁵ The success of this initiative will depend on leaders paying attention to the assessment results and ensuring their soldiers follow through by enrolling in and completing appropriate courses (courses consistent with the NCTE guidelines and the soldiers’ needs).

Ours to reason why. The U.S. Army no longer needs to settle for the mindless overapplication of a narrow, obsolete standard of limited value for helping leaders write well. The types of Army writing have evolved substantially, technologies have changed

radically, and decades of research have revealed much about the nature and power of writing. In light of these developments, maintaining the old writing standard would be inconsistent with Army leadership principles.

In *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, Tennyson describes cavalry soldiers riding to their deaths because of their leaders' mindlessness and poor communication skills. Of the soldiers, he writes, "theirs not to reason why."⁴⁶ Perhaps that was true—it was theirs to

obey. However, the twenty-first century U.S. Army wants leaders who do reason why—it calls them strategic thinkers. A better approach to Army writing will help the Army develop them. ■

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Ms. Desirae Gieseman is an editor for Military Review. She holds a BA from William Woods University with majors in French, business administration, and economics, and a master of education from the University of Missouri, Columbia, in curriculum and instruction, which includes graduate study in linguistics. She studied French at the University of Caen, France, through the Experiment in International Living's School for International Training; at Eurocentre in La Rochelle, France; and at Middlebury College's summer immersion program in Vermont. She is the author of *A Simple Instructional Guide for the Global Classroom*.

Notes

1. Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Reason Why: The Story of the Fatal Charge of the Light Brigade* (London, England: 1958), 232. Woodham-Smith discusses the causes of the disaster in detail. "British Battles, Crimea, 1854," British National Archives online, accessed 30 April 2015, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/battles/crimea/charge.htm>, gives an informative summary.

2. Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *The Charge of The Light Brigade, Memorializing Events in the Battle of Balaclava, October 25, 1854*. Accounts differ of the number of soldiers conducting the attack and the numbers killed, wounded, or captured. See "British Battles, Crimea, 1854" for the official casualty report.

3. Tennyson, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*.

4. Woodham-Smith, *The Reason Why*, 231; see also the United Kingdom's National Archives website, accessed 18 February 2015, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/battles/crimea/charge.htm>.

5. Army Regulation (AR) 600-70, *The Army Writing Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 5 April 1985), superseded November 1988 by AR 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence*; the current AR 25-50 is dated 17 May 2013. A derivative of the Army writing standard, as applied to Army correspondence, survives in paragraph 1-10, "Writing Quality," and chap. 1, section IV, "Effective Writing and Correspondence: The Army Writing Style."

6. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 6-0, *Mission Command* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, May 2012), 5.

7. Dictionary.com, s.v. "effective."

8. JP 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, August 2011), GL-13. *Measure of effectiveness* is defined as "a criterion used to assess changes in system behavior, capability, or operational environment that is tied to measuring the attainment of an end state, achievement of an objective, or creation of an effect."

9. *Ibid.* *Measure of performance* is defined as "a criterion used to assess friendly actions that is tied to measuring task accomplishment."

10. AR 600-70 (obsolete), *The Army Writing Program*, 3.

11. Department of the Army (DA) Pamphlet 600-67, *Effective Writing for Army Leaders* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2 June 1986), obsolete since 15 January 2013 although unofficial copies survive on the Internet. Former Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. John A. Wickham, Jr., referred to the communication breakdown at the Battle of Balaclava in the foreword to illustrate the importance of clear communication in the Army.

12. *Ibid.*, 1.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, 2.

16. Carol A. Chapelle, "Some Notes on Systemic-Functional Linguistics," Iowa State University website, 28 October 1998, accessed 13 April 2015, <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~carolc/LING511/sfl.html>, gives a short summary of functional approaches to linguistics; Scott DeLancey, "On Functionalism," (lecture 1, Linguistic Summer Institute, Santa Barbara, CA, 2001), accessed 13 April 2015, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/delancey/sb/LECT01.htm>, provides a more detailed explanation of structural versus functional linguistic theories.

17. Michelle Navarre Cleary, "The Wrong Way to Teach Grammar," Atlantic.com, 25 February 2014, accessed 13 April 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/02/the-wrong-way-to-teach-grammar/284014/>. Cleary cites Diane Lapp and Douglas Fisher, eds., *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 2011); George Hillocks, Jr., "What Works in Teaching Composition: A Meta-analysis of Experimental Treatment Studies," *American Journal of Education* 93, no. 1 (November 1984): 133-170; Steven Graham and Dolores Perin, "A

- Meta-Analysis of Writing Instruction for Adolescent Students," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 99, no. 3 (2007): 445–476; Steven Graham et al., "A Meta-Analysis of Writing Instruction for Students in the Elementary Grades," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 104, no. 4 (2012): 879–896; W.B. Elley et al., "The Role of Grammar in a Secondary School Curriculum," *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies* 10 (May 1975): 26–42; and Thomas Flynn and Mary King, eds., *Dynamics of the Writing Conference: Social and Cognitive Interaction* (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1993).
18. Alice Omaggio Hadley, *Teaching Language in Context*, 3rd edition (Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 2001), chap. 2, "On Learning a Language: Some Theoretical Perspectives," and chap. 3, "On Teaching a Language: Principles and Priorities in Methodology." Omaggio Hadley does not distinguish between research into first and second language learners; nor does she identify the age of learners studied. Principles are similar—see the National Council of Teachers of English, "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing."
19. Lorin W. Anderson and David R. Krathwohl, eds., *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (New York: Longman, 2001). Many U.S. learning institutions, including those in the Army, still use the obsolete 1956 version; Anderson and Krathwohl summarize the changes in appendix A. See also Leslie Owen Wilson's "The Second Principle" website, accessed 15 May 2015, <http://thesecondprinciple.com/teaching-essentials/beyond-bloom-cognitive-taxonomy-revised/>. Keep in mind, however, that some Internet sources are not reliable for understanding the revised taxonomy.
20. *Ibid.*, 28–30.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, 267.
23. *Ibid.*, 270.
24. Leslie Owen Wilson, "Three Domains of Learning—Cognitive, Affective, Psychomotor" website accessed 9 April 2015, <http://thesecondprinciple.com/instructional-design/threedomainsoflearning/>. Wilson offers an interesting perspective on how some teachers are blending cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning.
25. ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army GPO, 2012), 7. The Army design methodology is defined as "a methodology for applying both critical and creative thinking to understand, visualize, and describe problems and approaches to solving them."
26. See Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 3-90.90, *Army Tactical Standing Operating Procedures* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, November 2011), chap. 2, for a three-stage writing process for developing effective tactical standard (formerly called *standing*) operating procedures.
27. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, *The Operations Process* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, May 2012). The major operations process activities are plan, prepare, execute, and assess; ADRP 5-0 avoids calling them phases or stages.
28. Lynn Quitman Troyka and Douglas Hesse, *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 61. *Note:* Writers should replace very old writing handbooks and style or grammar guides with up-to-date and authoritative sources that reflect current standards and suit their learning styles.
29. ADP 5-0, *The Operations Process*, 6.
30. Troyka and Hesse, *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*, 64–69; and Jean Wyrick, *Steps to Writing Well*, twelfth edition (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2014), 7–18 and 26–29. See Wyrick for descriptions of looping, boomerang, cubing, and cross-examination.
31. Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts & Tools* (Tomales, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2014), 6. The authors propose helpful intellectual questions for writers. Understanding a writing situation also requires practical questions.
32. Trent J. Lythgoe, "Flight Simulation for the Brain: Why Army Officers Must Write," *Military Review* (November–December 2011). Lythgoe discusses writing as thinking. He also took inspiration from the Battle of Balacava.
33. AR 25-30, *The Army Publishing Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 3 June 2015).
34. AR 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 17 May 2013).
35. FM 6-0, *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 5 May 2014).
36. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command website, TRADOC Administrative Publications, accessed 20 May 2015, <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/index.htm>.
37. AR 600-67 (obsolete), *The Army Writing Program*, 3.
38. DA Pam 600-67 (obsolete), *Effective Writing for Army Leaders*, chaps. 4 and 5.
39. AR 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence*. Evidence that the original Army writing standard was limited to correspondence includes the fact that a regulation on correspondence superseded it, and that all the writing examples in DA Pam 600-67 were of correspondence.
40. AR 600-70 (obsolete), *The Army Writing Program*, 1.
41. AR 600-100, *Army Leadership*, 8 March 2007. *Note:* DA Pamphlet 25-40, *Army Publishing Program Procedures* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 3 June 2015), chap. 3, is the authority for the writing style and format of authenticated Department of the Army publications.
42. Writing Study Group of the NCTE Executive Committee, "NCTE Beliefs About the Teaching of Writing," November 2004, NCTE website, accessed 22 June 2015, <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/writingbeliefs>.
43. NCTE Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), "Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing," October 1989, revised November 2013 and March 2015, NCTE website, accessed 22 June 2015, <http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/postsecondarywriting>. The principles for postsecondary teaching of writing also include four enabling conditions (see website).
44. TRADOC Regulation 350-10, *Institutional Leader Training and Education*, 12 August 2002. According to chap. 6, the Action Officer Development Course is part of the Civilian Leader Development Army Civilian Training Education and Development System. It trains staff skills, including writing, for interns and "new journey-level" employees.
45. Jim Tice, "Changes for NCOs: New Writing Test, Leader Course," *Army Times* online, 8 February 2015, accessed 22 June 2015, <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/careers/army/enlisted/2015/02/08/army-nco-2020-projects-new-writing-test-leader-course/22799669/>. Tice reports, "A mandatory writing assessment [will be given] for the nearly 100,000 active and reserve soldiers who attend NCOES [Noncommissioned Officer Education System] courses annually. Results of the [NCO 2020] survey indicated that writing is a major challenge for many NCOs, . . . and the assessment is designed to identify specific weaknesses so that leaders can guide soldiers into appropriate civilian education courses."
46. Tennyson, *The Charge of The Light Brigade*. According to Woodham-Smith, *The Reason Why*, 218 to 219, Lord Raglan, from six hundred feet above the Battle of Balacava, had a clear view of the enemy units. He apparently could not imagine the cavalry's perspective—in a valley, where the enemy units were not visible. After the Crimean War, the British military instituted numerous reforms in administration and education.