



Staff Sgt. Jacob Preisler, Troop B, 3rd Battalion, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, writes a paper as part of in-processing at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, 11 May 2021. Soldiers and NCOs in-processed at Lightning Academy after writing a paper on the following topic: "If you could change a thing about the Army, what would you change?" (Photo by Pvt. Daniel Proper, U.S. Army)

From PME to Publication

Maj. Brennan Deveraux, U.S. Army

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Thousands of Army leaders of all ranks attend professional military education (PME) programs every year. These programs exist to "provide content, impart habits of mind, and establish and assess proficiency essential to the profession of arms."¹ Writing is a foundational component in PME as a means for students to demonstrate an understanding of course content and to develop the ability to think both critically and creatively. Writing

requirements at U.S. Army PME programs are bound to grow in the coming years with the chief of staff's emphasis on professional discourse.

These assignments will come in many forms based on the school's objective and student population. Some papers are expository, some are works of original research, and some are argumentative; all exist as part of the core curriculum to provide students an opportunity to consolidate course concepts and develop written

communication techniques. The intrinsic value of writing in these Army schools is significant, strengthening students' logical reasoning and forcing them to tackle complex problems with no readily apparent solution. For many students, simply working through this process is enough.

However, important ideas can spring from PME writing assignments that deserve a wider audience. Sadly, in most cases, the last set of eyes to see these papers are the instructors tasked with grading them. Still, with some forethought and a few alterations, any PME student can and should publish one of their assigned writing projects as a professional article.

What follows serves more as a guide than a how-to list of instructions, with critical questions aspiring authors should ask themselves when assessing if transitioning a PME paper to publication is right for them. This will depend on many factors, including the topic, resident knowledge, writing ability, and the author's general willingness to tackle the project. The foundation for this guide is the personal experience of its authors combined with objective feedback from venues including *War on the Rocks*, *From the Green Notebook*, and *Army Magazine*.² Prospective authors can reference this article during multiple stages of PME—once early in the process to frame their assignments as potential publications and again near graduation to convert their ideas into publishable form.

The Hard Part Is Over

While a handful of Army leaders have jumped at the chief's call to action for professional writing, many are likely deterred. Writing an article, after all, is a difficult undertaking. However, when it comes to writing,

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the hardest part is getting started. The three most significant hurdles to crafting a good article are coming up with a topic, physically writing the paper, and turning those ramblings into a coherent narrative. The last part will always remain a challenge, but this special edition shares tips on crafting a good article in other sections.³

What makes the proposition of transitioning a PME writing assignment into a published article a good one is the fact that the assignment inherently forces soldiers to overcome the first two hurdles. If the idea was important enough to invest the time and energy to articulate in writing, it is important enough to share with a wider audience. Because of this, PME writing projects are ideally suited to transition to professional articles. However, not every topic is worth sharing with the world.

What Glitters Is Not Always Gold

Some writing assignments are just that, assignments. The broader defense community or even a specific branch has no desire to read everything written during PME. This reference guide is not an open invitation for students at the Advanced Leader Course or the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) to submit any old writing assignments that received a good grade. Instead, prospective authors must ask themselves three questions about the respective assignment before transitioning it into a professional article.

First, is the topic relevant beyond the school setting? Some assignments are designed to simply reinforce course concepts, allow the student to demonstrate an understanding of a specific reading, or prove knowledge of a historical event. These are examples of school-specific topics that are not meant to leave the institution, although they may inspire a larger project. For example, absent uncovering some new archival evidence, a Maneuver Captain's Career Course student writing a historical analysis of the First Battle of Grozny is unlikely to find an audience beyond their instructor.

Second, am I the right person for this project? Ryan Evans, the founder of *War on the Rocks*—one of the most widely read outlets for national security commentary—urges authors to write from their “special knowledge” of a topic, “that thing you know better than anyone else or most anyone else because you have done it, experienced it, or studied it very closely.”⁴ Prospective authors must ask themselves if they are the right person

to comment on a given topic. This is one of the more challenging questions to answer, as many probably doubt their specific expertise. Returning to the earlier example of the career course student writing about the First Battle of Grozny, their paper may have provided the author with a basic knowledge of the context of the First Chechen War and the state of the Russian army, which allowed them to extend their analysis.

However, merely knowing what happened in the battle is foundational but not special. Still, this could be a jumping-off point. Instead, what if the author then examined what occurred through the lens of a block of instruction on defense operations in an urban area? In this case, the author could draw more significant inferences and provide novel analysis, even though they are not necessarily the subject-matter experts on the conflict. The author might explore the idea of being transported to 1995 Grozny tomorrow and assessing if the Army has sufficiently trained them to lead a company-sized defense in the city. If not, how might the infantry and armor branches ensure that future commanders had this requisite knowledge? This is the case of not being deterred by a lack of expertise but reframing a paper to ensure you are an appropriate author.

Finally, is this a topic you are interested in? If an author does not care about an issue, it shows in the work. If our hypothetical author simply is not that interested in urban warfare or the Battle of Grozny, then they are best served finishing their assignment and moving on to something different.

If all the boxes are checked, and the topic deserves a broader audience, then some prewriting planning at PME institutions can enable a smooth transition from a writing assignment to a published article.

Paving a Path at PME

The first and best thing that a student can do to maximize the likelihood of publishing a PME paper as an article is to conceptualize it while writing the PME paper itself. Dr. Robert Baumann, who directed the CGSC master's degrees program for sixteen years, recommends that authors take advantage of the opportunities for reflection and collaboration that PME provides. "Do an honest self-assessment about your own writing abilities, your available time, and your personal circumstances," said Baumann. "If you have something that you want to write on, make the rounds and talk

to some people. Start to think about what a target publication might be. Examine some of the things that other people have written for that publication from a structural point of view. What stages did it go through? What sort of composition does it have?"⁵

The author's topical focus helps a student determine the audience, which should, in turn, shape the author's choice of outlet. If, for instance, a student wrote a paper about the tactical integration of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) into a combined arms battalion in the defense, leaders at the battalion and company echelons are probably the primary audience. With this in mind, branch journals like *Infantry* and *Armor* would be an effective outlet.

Some PME assignments focus, explicitly or otherwise, on tactical issues. Returning to the example of UAS integration, where an Advanced Leader Course student's paper might address the author's personal experience integrating UASs during a National Training Center rotation, they could expand their findings from a combined arms battalion in the defense to defensive operations, writ large. Their battalion-level PME paper might carry conclusions on the scope of training, organizational change, and service-level procurement that might make the paper suitable for publication in *Military Review* or in outlets like Modern War Institute, *Army Magazine*, or *War on the Rocks*.

Other assignments might be more appropriate for a narrower audience. Some PME assignments require students to interact with strategic issues. While these soldiers have to meet the assignment's requirements, they should not contort themselves to publish something they do not have an immediate interest in. However, by following some strategic threads to the tactical level, they may uncover conclusions that connect to their communities of interest. For instance, a student at the Army War College might choose to examine the limitations of the American defense industrial base as it pertains to UAS production and its ramifications for the Army's readiness for large-scale combat operations. If they find engaging with the topic at this level uninspiring, they could develop an article that examines some of the downtrace effects of this issue. For instance, how might a combined arms battalion manage UAS employment and maintenance under the assumption that it might not be able to replace systems that were lost or suffered catastrophic

damage? In this context, the student's PME paper provides a foundation for a strategic problem, while their article provides tactical-level solutions appropriate for a branch publication.

While understanding the potential audience can help shape the narrative of a piece, any written assignment intended to leave the school setting should aim to have straightforward language for a general reader. The military is notorious for the overuse of acronyms

A Few Alterations

Even if an author considered publication while working on a written assignment during school, they should still expect to revise the PME paper before submitting it for publication. The first change is removing any schoolisms to make the draft more accessible to an audience outside the classroom. Baumann recalls that one of the biggest obstacles that PME students faced in pursuing publication was the adjustment from the academic style

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Aspiring authors who struggle with clarity should approach this in three steps. First, they can practice empathy and think about what is not easily understood by the layperson. Second, they can seek out people outside their immediate professional circle—friends, family, and soldiers from other communities—who can comment on the comprehensibility of their article. Finally, they can rely on a potential venue's editor. No one knows their audience better than an editor; most are well-practiced at triaging submissions. Rathbun's approach at *Army Magazine* epitomizes this: “We work closely with our authors to make our articles readable for our broad audience. We'll work with you all along [the] way if you'd like, and we enjoy the conversation.”⁷ Still, before sending the project out for consideration, a few final steps are needed to transform a school assignment into a polished article.

of writing typical to the punchier prose desired by most outlets for commentary. “Except in rare instances, you're going to spend a lot less time writing about methodology and reviewing the literature in an article,” he said. “A thesis can run wild, but the requirement in a published article is to cut to the chase a lot sooner.”⁸ This may mean making drastic changes to a paper's structure.

Any portion of a paper included primarily to meet academic requirements but not pertinent to the target audience should be removed or restructured. Removing large sections of a paper such as a literature review or an extensive explanation of research methods may require authors to make broader structural changes to a draft. For example, the CGSC's force management paper requires more than one thousand majors each year to identify an Army capability gap and advocate for a solution.⁹ This is a wellspring of ideas and is an ideal circumstance by which to generate a substantive article that could contribute to positive change in the Army. However, course requirements demand that students use the essay to demonstrate a grasp of the service's force management process. The rigid structure has value for the school but does not directly translate for publication. This guide provides a real-world example of the required restructuring of such a paper in the section titled “Before and After.”

The second change is ensuring the article is written for the correct audience. In transitioning from writing in the classroom to writing for a general audience, authors should consider livening their work and making it more engaging. “Tell stories,” said Evans. “Human beings are story-creating and story-consuming machines. Any topic can lend itself to a good anecdote. Treat anecdotes as the seasoning for what might otherwise be bland.”¹⁰ While an instructor is bound to read your assignment, the general public has no such requirement. No matter how convincing an argument is, if the writing is not engaging enough to keep the reader’s attention, it won’t be easy to get the point across. Part of this challenge is formatting an article for a specific audience.

That brings us to the third change: formatting. As already discussed, assessing the audience for the project will help the prospective author choose a venue. For soldiers who don’t currently read their branch magazine, *Military Review*, or other national security-focused outlets, this is as good a reason as any to start. Each venue will list preferred word count, acronym policies, and citation standards. Understanding the preferences of an outlet’s editor will increase the likelihood of their work being published and minimize the depth and the number of revisions required. Once formatted, the article is almost ready for submission.

A coherent narrative is the final step to moving forward. This is tweaking minor structure, polishing word choice, and ensuring that the author’s logic flows for the reader, allowing them to draw similar conclusions, even if they may disagree with certain assertions. This revision process, while at times tedious, can be a collaboration with peers, mentors, and editors. After all, the author is no longer being evaluated for a grade; they are attempting to publish the best possible version of a paper they can. However, this goes beyond simply editing.

Instead, this final step is turning a well-written product into something meaningful for the defense community. Few papers will present never-before-seen data or identify problems the defense community is not at least partially aware of. Lt. Col. Joe Byerly, the founder of From the Green Notebook, explains this transition to a meaningful product. While his venue began as a blog, it is now an outlet for writing from military practitioners and the broader community of interest. Byerly notes that “a lot of people think that they have to have some

new and novel idea, but all you’re doing is putting your idea into the consciousness of the current reader. You are contributing your spin on an idea, based on your own unique experiences.”¹¹ Achieving this may mean crafting a unique argument from widely available data. This is what one of our authors did with a CGSC paper.

Before and After: A Real-World Example

This guide has been filled with a handful of hypotheticals. This is partly because the actual adjustment from a school paper to a professional article is sometimes complicated. The real-world example that follows showcases the necessary transformation to highlight the process.

A 2020 CGSC force management paper titled “Extending the Battlefield: The Need for Shorter-Range Ballistic Missiles” was transformed into a RealClear Defense article.¹² The author’s original assertion in the assignment reads formally and right to the point, identifying a problem and proposing a solution in the opening paragraph:

The Army should develop a new surface-to-surface missile with a range between 600-1,200 kilometers. This missile type is defined by the recently dissolved Intermediate-Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty as a “Shorter-Range Ballistic Missile.” This materiel recommendation is a modernization of a current capability. Essential to this solution is the requirement that the new missile is compatible with existing Army rocket artillery platforms—High Mobility Rocket Artillery System (HIMARS) and the Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS). Although this method may constrain the innovation process, this specific materiel approach is the best course of action to achieve the necessary Army capability while limiting negative impacts on the force as a whole.¹³

This structure may be clear to an instructor but is not necessarily engaging for a reader.

The rest of the assignment was just as structured, requiring the author to outline the Army’s need for this change by citing strategic documents, proposing specific modernization efforts, and identifying potential implications to the force. While the assignment received a

good grade, the topic was not a novel idea. In fact, the Army had already openly proclaimed a need for these new missiles and was outlining a plan for developing them. Still, the research was sound and could be easily applied to a broader argument.

So, instead of simply rehashing the topic, the author put a personal “spin” on it, leveraging previous research experience on interservice competition between the Army and the Air Force. The following introduction from the RealClear Defense article “Service Aggrandizement or an Operational Need: The

and inefficient service rivalries, the Army must communicate its long-range strike requirements to the joint force. Once established, the service can focus its modernization efforts around an accepted battlefield necessity, and in turn, overcome the Air Force contention that the Army is simply capitalizing on emerging technology for service aggrandizement. However, suppose the Army is instead designing missiles to augment or supplement an established Air

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Army’s Responsibility to Define Its Long-Range Strike Requirement” is the transition of the CGSC paper. The author reformatted the research, adjusted the language, and attempted to incorporate a “hook” to draw in readers to the meat of the argument.

The US Army’s inability to articulate and define its long-range strike requirement has sparked an intense public inter-service competition with the Air Force. While the Army’s 2017 modernization strategy identified long-range precision fires as a top priority, the service failed to codify specific goals or tie them to operational needs. To make matters worse, just two years later, in 2019, the United States withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty—an agreement that since 1987 had banned the development of surface-to-surface missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. Importantly, missiles in this range window are not inherently tactical or strategic. Thus, with the natural “buffer” between the Army and the Air Force’s missile responsibilities no longer in place, missile development has ignited a battle over service roles and missions.

To prevent further exacerbation of this unnecessary conflict and avoid unproductive

Force mission. In that case, the Defense Department must weigh in on this effort duplication before the public competition morphs into a rivalry that hurts the joint force.¹⁴

The adjustment to the topic changes the assignment from a school-centric piece about a known problem to an issue with broader Defense Department implications. The amount of transformation varies based on the topic, original paper structure, and desired venue. However, some of the writing is already complete, even if it is in the wrong order.

Some Overarching Thoughts

A good test to see if a potential paper is more than simply sharing research is to check if the draft provides the What, So What, and the Now What. This common reasoning tool is easily applied to most papers.

- The What: Does the article provide the relevant information needed to understand the problem?
- The So What: Does the article analyze and assess the information to provide the reader with the context surrounding the issue and its subsequent meaning for the defense community?
- The Now What: Does the article outline potential courses of action or areas to accept risk instead of just glamorizing a problem?

If the author can answer yes to all three questions, format the paper according to the venue's instructions, remove any school-isms, and this PME paper is ready to be sent off.

Your paper will never be perfect. Luckily, the people on the receiving end are generally helpful about getting it across the finish line. "If you have a good core idea, most places have an editor that will make it better," said Byerly. "Most people think they have to come out of the gate with a draft that is immediately publishable. People get intimidated because they see the final product on *Military Review* or From the Green Notebook and they don't realize that hours of editing and publishing went into that initial draft."¹⁵ So, do not be afraid of taking that next step.

However, while this article encourages authors to submit revised papers and portions of PME papers for publication, the authors would be remiss in failing to consider that revision might not be the best approach. War on the Rocks' Evans said that he rejects the vast majority of articles that started as PME papers. "The tone, format, and principles of writing a PME paper are very different from writing an article," said Evans. "War on the Rocks articles need to be argument-driven, engaging, and typically much shorter than a PME paper. Rather than starting with the paper and editing from there, servicemembers would be best advised to take the two-sentence core argument of the paper and start an entirely new document."¹⁶

Whether one takes Evans's suggested approach and starts anew, submissions that read like assigned essays are unlikely to pass editorial review for most outlets. On the front end, prospective writers can start by seeking to make their PME papers more like the

article that they intend them to be. On the back end, authors should ensure that they revise their articles to make it clear they are making an argument versus answering some classroom prompt. Either way, starting a new document is not a nuclear option—the thinking that already occurred in articulating an argument for a PME paper can carry over to an article submission, even if the author rewrites the entire piece.

Conclusion

Budding authors in PME should consider prospective audiences beyond their instructors. Learning to communicate outside their immediate network will enhance an Army leader's ability to influence beyond their chain of command, help them develop as subject-matter experts, and potentially create change within their community. Rarely will leaders at any echelon have the time to step away and dedicate themselves to a large writing project, often requiring work on nights or weekends. Instead, PME, by its very nature, not only affords authors this time but also forces students through the most challenging part of writing. While not every topic is worthy of leaving the institution, PME students and graduates should assess the projects they are working on or have completed for relevancy across specific communities; if they are passionate about the assignment, then they should make the necessary changes to get it into the hands of an editor. There are no great tips for actually writing a PME paper. However, once it is done, once all the effort has gone into crafting a coherent narrative concerning vital defense community issues, PME students, new and old, should strive to share their effort, join the professional dialogue, and start fostering change. ■

Notes

1. Department of Defense (DOD) Instruction 1322.35, *Military Education: Program Management and Administration*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: U.S. DOD, 26 April 2022), https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132235_vol1.PDF.

2. While writing this how-to guide, we discussed the process of converting professional military education papers to publishable articles with the editors of these venues: Ryan Evans, War on the Rocks; Joe Byerly, From the Green Notebook; and Liz Rathbun, *Army Magazine*. We also discussed and received input from Dr. Robert Baumann who directed the Command and General Staff College's (CGSC) master's degrees program for sixteen

years. All quotations provided specifically for this piece are to help aspiring authors.

3. Theo Lipsky, "How to Write an Article," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 27–34.

4. Ryan Evans (founder, War on the Rocks), in discussion with authors, 11 April 2024.

5. Dr. Robert Baumann (former director, CGSC), in discussion with authors, 16 April 2024.

6. Liz Rathbun (managing editor, *Army Magazine*), in discussion with authors, 18 April 2024.

7. Ibid.

8. Baumann, discussion.

9. The F100 paper is the culminating assignment of the “Force Management” block of instruction of the Common Core curriculum for all Army officers who attend CGSC. For the Common Core philosophy, see “Appendix B (CGSOC Common Core) Extracted from CGSC Circular 350-5,” accessed 18 June 2024, https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cace/12-1/12-1_AppB_CommonCore.pdf.

10. Evans, discussion.

11. Joe Byerly (founder, From the Green Notebook), in discussion with authors, 16 April 2024.

12. Brennan Deveraux, “Extending the Battlefield: The Need for Shorter-Range Ballistic Missiles” (unpublished manuscript, F100: Force Management, CGSC, 2020).

13. Ibid.

14. Brennan Deveraux, “Service Aggrandizement or an Operational Need: The Army’s Responsibility to Define Its Long-Range Strike Requirement,” RealClear Defense, 26 August 2021, https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2021/08/26/service_aggrandizement_or_an_operational_need_the_armys_responsibility_to_define_its_long-range_strike_requirement_791716.html.

15. Byerly, discussion.

16. Evans, discussion.

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