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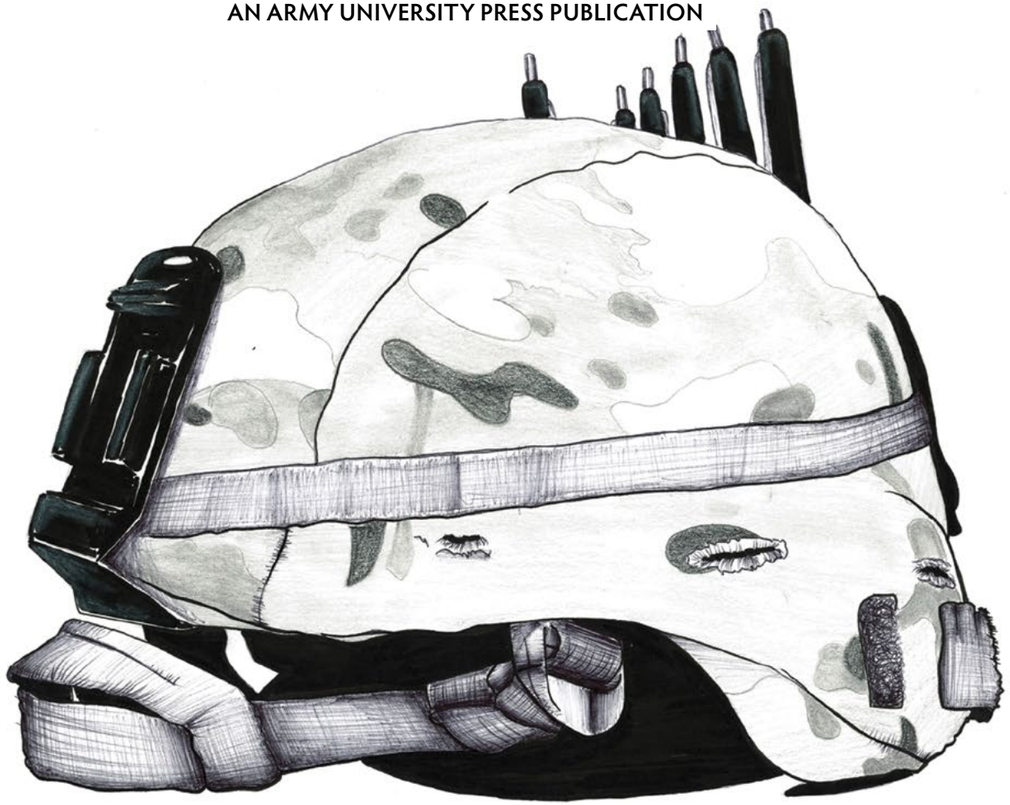

Military Review

September 2024

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Military Review

THE PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL OF THE U.S. ARMY

September 2024

SPECIAL EDITION

Professional Military Writing

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Military Review

THE PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL OF THE U.S. ARMY

Professional Military Writing Special Edition, Vol. 104, No. SE-02
Professional Bulletin 100-24-SE-02
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By Order of the Secretary of the Army:

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Chief of Staff

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to the Secretary of the Army
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ARMY UNIVERSITY PRESS

UNITED STATES ARMY
THE CHIEF OF STAFF

June 21, 2024

I owe a debt to Captain David Johnson. Though I've never met him, he taught then-Captain George to run a training meeting. His "Training Management Tips" article—full of practical advice—landed on my desk in the June 1992 issue of *Infantry*. As that article helped me, our journals strengthen and prepare the Army today.

Our Army must be ready when this interwar period ends. As we cannot know where or when we will face our next battles, we must transform, train hard, and reinvest in our profession now. Vibrant intellectual discourse helps the Army identify, debate, and refine the best ideas into fielded forces, equipment, and concepts.

Fortunately, good ideas don't have rank. On unit visits, I hear all kinds of ideas that could strengthen our profession. If your idea can improve our Army, write it down. The articles in this special issue can help you hone your idea in your unit and then submit it for publication through our journals. Your leaders will help you; the Army's senior leaders will steward a supportive culture. Not all articles will be published or change the Army, but our profession relies on *your* contributions.

I ask that you write and publish well-argued articles in our journals. Where rigid conformity has defeated other armies, your responsibly written dissent strengthens the Army profession and postures us for victory on future fields of battle.

This We'll Defend!

Sincerely,

Randy A. George
General, United States Army

UNITED STATES ARMY
THE SERGEANT MAJOR

June 21, 2024

The next fight will be hard. Success or failure is in our own hands and depends on our ability to prepare. The enemy will give us no grace if we fail to learn or adapt quickly.

No one is closer to the Army's problems than our Non-Commissioned Officer Corps. Day in and day out you are the closest to the fight and take care of our Soldiers. This leadership comes with the professional obligation to share what you have learned with the next generation of Soldiers. Your insights, ideas, and experiences are critical to winning the next battle. Many Soldiers think professional discourse, primarily writing, is officer business—false.

None of our NCOs should have a problem telling another Soldier when they need to check their azimuth. We should have the same resolve when stewarding the profession. Discuss, research, write, debate, articulate, and present your ideas. This special issue is designed to help you get started.

You have the answers—we need to hear them, the next war depends on it.

This We'll Defend!

Sincerely,

Michael R. Weimer
Sergeant Major of the Army

Professional Military Writing

Col. Todd Schmidt, PhD, U.S. Army
Lt. Col. Zachary Griffiths, U.S. Army
Maj. Brennan Deveraux, U.S. Army

In 1738, Benjamin Franklin wrote in his *Po or R ichard's A lmanack* [sic], "If you would not be forgotten as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading, or do things worth the writing."[1] This bit of encouraging guidance was plagiarized from an earlier book, titled *Introductio ad P rudentiam: Or, D irections, Counsels, and Cautions, Tending to P rudent M anagement of A ffairs* in Common Life, published in 1726 by Dr. Thomas Fuller of Cambridge, England.[2] Regardless of its origins, the advice communicates several lessons for military leaders.

First, it recognizes that aspiring leaders want to live lives of consequence, whether as a parent, spouse, or professional. Second, it advocates for contributing and sharing meaningful knowledge, wisdom gained, and lessons learned for the betterment of society. Third, it suggests that our actions should be bold; that, to be remembered, we cannot always follow in the footsteps of those before us but must forge our own path in life.

This special edition of *M ilitary R eview*, focused on improving professional writing and discourse as part of the chief of staff of the Army's Harding Project, is a deliberate attempt by the editors and authors to help improve and advance how we, as military professionals, "write things worth reading."

As the primary leads in compiling this special edition, we hope you find the articles we have commissioned and assembled valuable, particularly for young and midcareer professionals who desire to contribute meaningfully to our profession of arms. To sharpen their leadership ability and potential, the authors in this compilation understand that it is incumbent on them, and our entire community, to share their thoughts through writing. For, in writing, we not only share knowledge, but also, through the process, we reflect upon and better comprehend the lessons we mean to share.

Yet, professional writing can be a daunting exercise. Thinking of it as an "exercise" is important. Good writing requires practice. Good writing is a perishable skill that, when put off, requires resharpening. Good writing becomes great when it is sharpened by the review and critique of others interested in helping you improve and flourish in your written communication skills.

The articles in this special edition are organized into three broad categories that are designed to complement each other and provide tangible tools for individuals beginning the writing journey, organizations developing professional discourse programs, and authors navigating publication. Combined, these articles serve as a "how-to" guide to help the force operationalize the chief's call to action on professional discourse.

For the individual, Capt. Theo Lipsky's "How to Write an Article" provides a practical foundation for aspiring authors. It offers a detailed step-by-step guide to the writing process, ensuring that the advice is not just theoretical but can be immediately put into practice. Dr. Trent Lythgoe's contribution, "Rewriting: The Secret to Writing Well," works in tandem with Lipsky's, offering readers nuanced tips and tricks for revising, editing, and proofreading drafts. The simple writing examples he includes throughout his piece are invaluable for inexperienced and veteran authors alike.

For organizations working to improve professional discourse in their units, Lt. Col. Jay Ireland and Maj. Ryan Van Wie draw from their personal experience in "How to Develop and Run a Unit Writing Program" to provide tangible recommendations. They outline some of the challenges and decisions they faced, making the content more relatable and applicable. They are

candid about the commitment it takes from leadership to make a voluntary program successful. Maj. George Fust's article "Speech: It's a Technique," takes professional discourse beyond writing, proposing unique ways that leaders can foster learning through TED Talks, debates, and digital media.

For those pursuing publication, Capt. Rebecca Segal provides "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback." She outlines the process for authors to reach out to colleagues, experts, and mentors to receive informal feedback throughout the writing process to strengthen a draft. She simultaneously provides tips for would-be editors not to discourage or stifle someone who trusts them with their creative work. John Amble complements Segal's piece in his article "Your Draft Is Done, Now What? Working with an Editor." He shares his experience serving as the editorial director of the Modern War Institute at West Point, demystifying the role of the editor and highlighting the importance of authors seeing them as teammates and advocates.

In keeping with the chief of staff of the Army's guidance and following recommendations of the Harding Project, Army publications and platforms are being renewed.[3] To reach the Army, our journals will transform to a web-first, mobile-friendly standard that reaches today's scrolling soldier. That soldier will learn about our journals through updates to our professional education courses and more accessible archives of our century-long history of written military thought. Empowered stewards across the Army will sustain our journals for the next hundred years.

Army leaders live their lives as Ben Franklin advised, routinely doing "things worth the writing" and by improving the Army when they "write things worth reading." As you contribute to the Army's journals—hopefully leaning on the articles within this issue—you'll be solving problems and strengthening the Army profession. ■

Notes

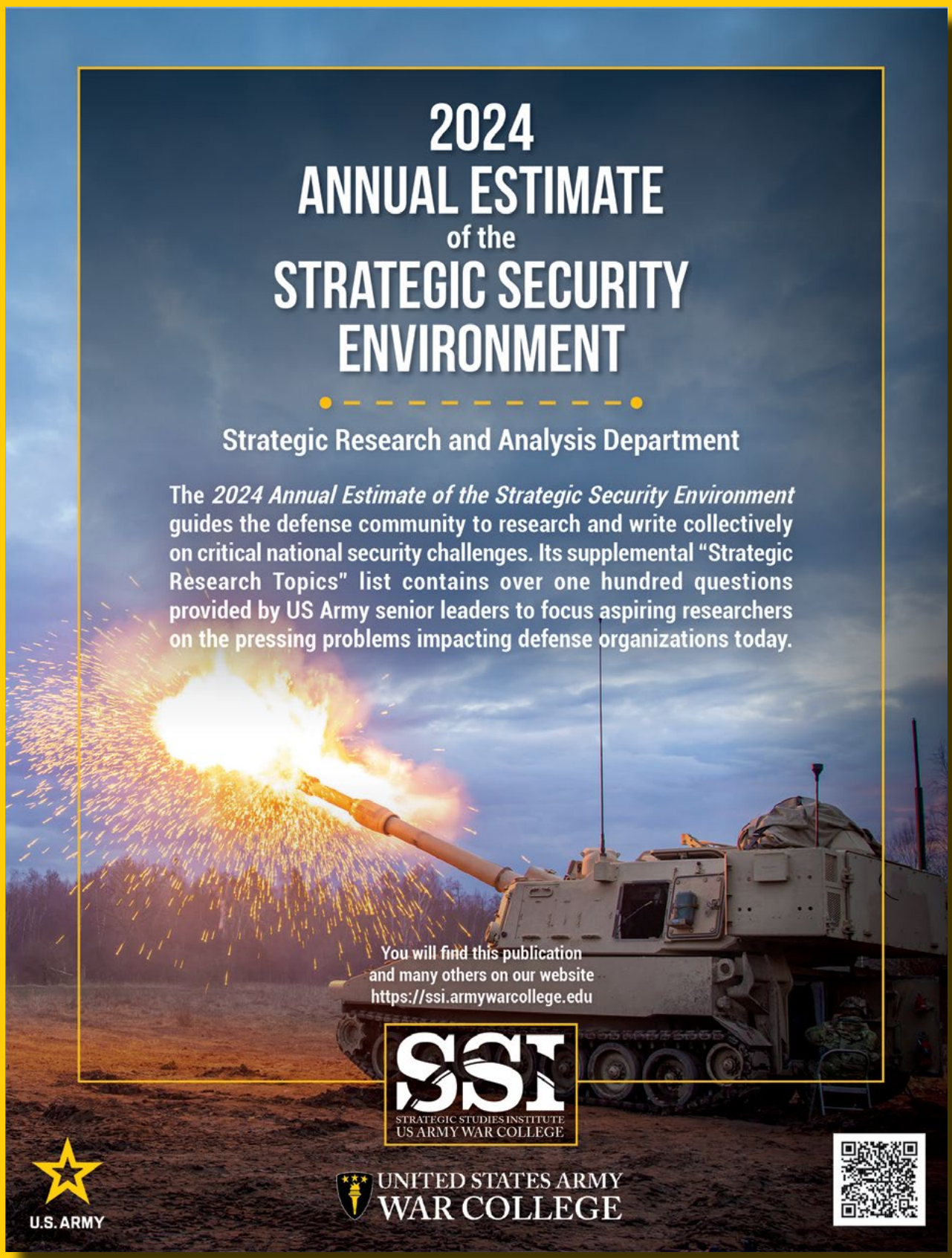
1. Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richard's Almanack* (Waterloo, IA: U. S. C. Publishing, 1914), 32.

2. Thomas Fuller, *Introductio ad Prudentiam: Or, Directions, Counsels, and Cautions, Tending to Prudent Management of Affairs in Common Life* (London: Printed for J. Wyat, and W. and J. Innys, in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1726), 40.

3. Todd Schmidt, "Strengthening the Army Profession through the Harding Project," *Military Review* 104, no. 2 (March-April 2024): 1–2, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April-2024/Harding-Project/.

"It may be time for the US military profession to take a fresh look at its military journals. We should define the job to be done, and decide how the journals can best do that job."

—Kenneth E. Lay, "Military Writing: A Response to the Challenge of Our Profession," *Military Review* 44, no. 7 (July 1964): 60


2024
ANNUAL ESTIMATE
of the
STRATEGIC SECURITY
ENVIRONMENT
Strategic Research and Analysis Department
The *2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment* guides the defense community to research and write collectively on critical national security challenges. Its supplemental "Strategic Research Topics" list contains over one hundred questions provided by US Army senior leaders to focus aspiring researchers on the pressing problems impacting defense organizations today.
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Write for *Military Review*

Suggested Writing Themes and Topics—2024

- From a U.S. military perspective, what are the greatest near-term external threats to the United States? Why, and how?
- What are the greatest long-term threats (looking out twenty-five years)?
- Many observers assert that Russia, China, and Iran already see themselves at war with the United States. Is there evidence that these and other actors are conducting actual "war" against the United States, and what are the probabilities of their success?
- What confederated blocs of nation-states are now aligned against the United States, and how do they cooperate with each other? What types of treaties or agreements do they have that outline relationships they share to reinforce each other?
- Which U.S. adversaries best synchronize their DIME (diplomacy, information, military, and economic) elements of power to achieve their strategic goals? Contrast and compare employment of DIME by China, Russia, Iran, and the United States. How should the United States defend itself against foreign DIME?
- Do China, Russia, and Iran have "Achilles' heels"? What is their center of gravity? If they have one, how can it best be attacked/exploited?
- What do China, Russia, and Iran view as the United States' "Achilles' heel" or center of gravity? How specifically are they attacking it?
- What is the role now of the U.S. Armed Forces in Africa? Far East? Middle East?
- What does the future hold for nanoweapons? Electromagnetic warfare? Artificial intelligence? Information warfare? How is the Army planning to mitigate effects?
- What is diversity? How does one reconcile the concept of diversity with the concept of unity?

For information on how to submit an article, please visit https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/MR-Article-Submission-Guide/.

Enter the U.S. Army's premier writing competition!

2025 General William E. DePuy Special Topics Writing Competition

This year's theme: "The challenges of planning for security in a world that is increasingly borderless, multicultural, and economically interdependent."

Developments in modern technology, changing global demographics, increasingly complex economic ties among nations, and the speed and ease of population mobility have dramatically highlighted factors that now must be considered and dealt with to achieve success in modern conflicts. The age of empires that overtly built on the assumption that some states had a natural Darwinian entitlement for military conquest of other states viewed as racial or cultural inferiors has largely disappeared. However, while the age of empires is arguably over, the myths of empire remain. Different permutations of the same instinct to pursue imperial ambitions, but in a different guise, appear to remain powerful underlying elements of aggressor ideologies, nationalism, racial animus, some forms of organized religion as well as international economic and criminal cartels of one stripe or another. It is also a key impetus for resurgent revanchism, a state posture seeking to retaliate against other states for perceived historical wrongs that animates the desire to recover lost territory.

The intent of this year's DePuy competition is to identify by close examination where such factors strongly influence today's operational environment and to identify specific strategies to either mitigate their influence or provide solutions for exploiting them to achieve the accomplishment of strategic objectives. A few examples of such possible topics are provided below. These are provided primarily to encourage authors to identify on their own the most salient of any of a myriad of other such topics relevant to the theme.

- How are China, Russia, and the United States viewed by the populations in Central and Southern Africa as each nation competes to exploit Africa's natural resources? How are they viewed by the international community with regard to their presence in Africa?
- Does racism, tribalism, ideology, and religion play a role in China, Russia, Iran, and other states where conflict has emerged or is emerging? How do they manifest?
- Does regionalism, racism, ideology, or history play the most prominent role in Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific region where increasing tensions and potential for conflict are emerging? How do they manifest?
- How much influence do cartels of different varieties and international business conglomerates have on foreign policy dealing with the U.S. military deployments overseas? Do such entities view themselves as virtual independent nations without an obligation of loyalty to traditional nation states?
- What long-term impact would a large-scale war (non-nuclear) between China and the United States have on their mutual economies? Impact the world order?

Competition opens 1 January 2025 and closes 30 June 2025

1st Place: $1,000 and publication in *Military Review*
2nd Place: $750 and consideration for publication in *Military Review*
3rd Place: $500 and consideration for publication in *Military Review*

Prize money contributed by the Association of the United States Army

For information on how to submit an entry, please visit https://www.armyupress.army.mil/DePuy-Writing-Competition/.

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The Origins of Professional Journals, 1878–1910

Dr. J. P. Clark

Writing is a great way for individuals to make sense of the problems they face while also contributing to potential solutions. While Army leadership strives to revitalize professional journals, their predecessors had the additional burden of creating these initial venues for professional discourse.

22 **Muddy Boots and Powerful Pages**

Why We Write

Sgt. 1st Class Leyton Summerlin, U.S. Army

Why would a muddy-boot-wearing warfighter be inclined to write? Writing is a powerful self-development tool, unparalleled in its ability to clear one's thoughts and hone ideas. The more one undergoes the writing and refining process, the more one develops the skill of concise communication.

FOR INDIVIDUALS

27 **How to Write an Article**

Capt. Theo Lipsky, U.S. Army

One way to give life to an idea is to write about it. The author provides a how-to guide for writing a commentary article for publication.

35 **How to Write a Book Review**

Lt. Col. Zachary Griffiths, U.S. Army

Book reviews benefit the Army profession and the Army professional. Given that more books are published than can possibly be read, reviews provide concise, critical summaries of important books for the busy professional.

43 **From PME to Publication**

Maj. Brennan Deveraux, U.S. Army

Maj. Gordan Richmond, U.S. Army

Important ideas can spring from professional military education (PME) writing assignments that deserve a wider audience. With some forethought and a few alterations, any PME student can and should publish one of their assigned writing projects as a professional article.

51 **Rewriting**

The Secret to Writing Well

Trent J. Lythgoe, PhD

To transform an article from a rough draft to a polished manuscript—something that editors will want to publish, and people will want to read—authors must adopt a rewriting process: revising, editing, and proofreading to strengthen and clarify writing.

60 **With All Due Respect**

How to Foster Dissent in the U.S. Army

Lt. Col. Matthew Jamison, U.S. Army

The presence of healthy dialogue and debate about military matters is key to critical thinking, shows that all perspectives have value, and supports the effectiveness of military units. Dissent must be presented effectively based on context.

FOR UNITS

65 **Building and Running an Online Forum**

Lt. Col. Erik Davis, U.S. Army

Lt. Col. Nick Frazier, U.S. Army

Online forums promote collaboration across both time and space, making it easier for everyone to engage. They expose a diverse audience to varying opinions, create a safe environment for controversial ideas, and provide a place to debate the arguments posed by others in articles.

Professional Military Writing Special Edition

Volume 104 ◆ Number SE-02

70 **Catalyst Papers**

A Practical Writing Style for Army Leaders to Share Ideas

Lt. Col. D. Max Ferguson, U.S. Army

Catalyst papers are a distinct approach to writing Army white papers that encourages all ranks to share observations from the field, introduce suggestions, and examine lessons learned in a relaxed writing style.

76 **How to Develop and Run a Unit Writing Program**

Lt. Col. Jay Ireland, U.S. Army
Maj. Ryan Van Wie, U.S. Army

A unit's leadership can develop and incentivize professional writing in their organization to cultivate subordinate communication skills, set reasonable writing goals, mentor authors through the submission process, and incentivize writing across the formation.

82 **Speech**

It's a Technique

Maj. George J. Fust, U.S. Army

Like writing, speech can be a deliberate professional development tool in a unit program to provide an option for renewing and encouraging professional discourse. It is a universal mechanism for transmitting ideas: it can inspire, spark creativity, and appeal to those of the next generation turned off by traditional mediums.

WHEN PUBLISHING

88 **Writing Is a Team Sport**

How to Find and Write with a Coauthor

Maj. Brennan Deveraux, U.S. Army
Capt. Leah Foodman, U.S. Army

Coauthoring is a great way to reduce unease about writing and distribute the workload, but it has its fair share of challenges that authors must account for to succeed.

94 **A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback**

Capt. Rebecca Segal, U.S. Army

The feedback process is critical to achieving quality writing. Feedback can come at any step along the writing process, from brainstorming to writing to editing, but there is an art to giving and receiving feedback.

100 **Your Draft Is Done, Now What?**

Working with an Editor

John Amble

A professional editor describes the editorial process and how an author can get the most out of that process, make it smooth and efficient, and be confident that when the article is published, it will be at its best.

106 **Building a Community**

How to Create a Professional Writing Network

Lt. Col. Nathan K. Finney, PhD, U.S. Army

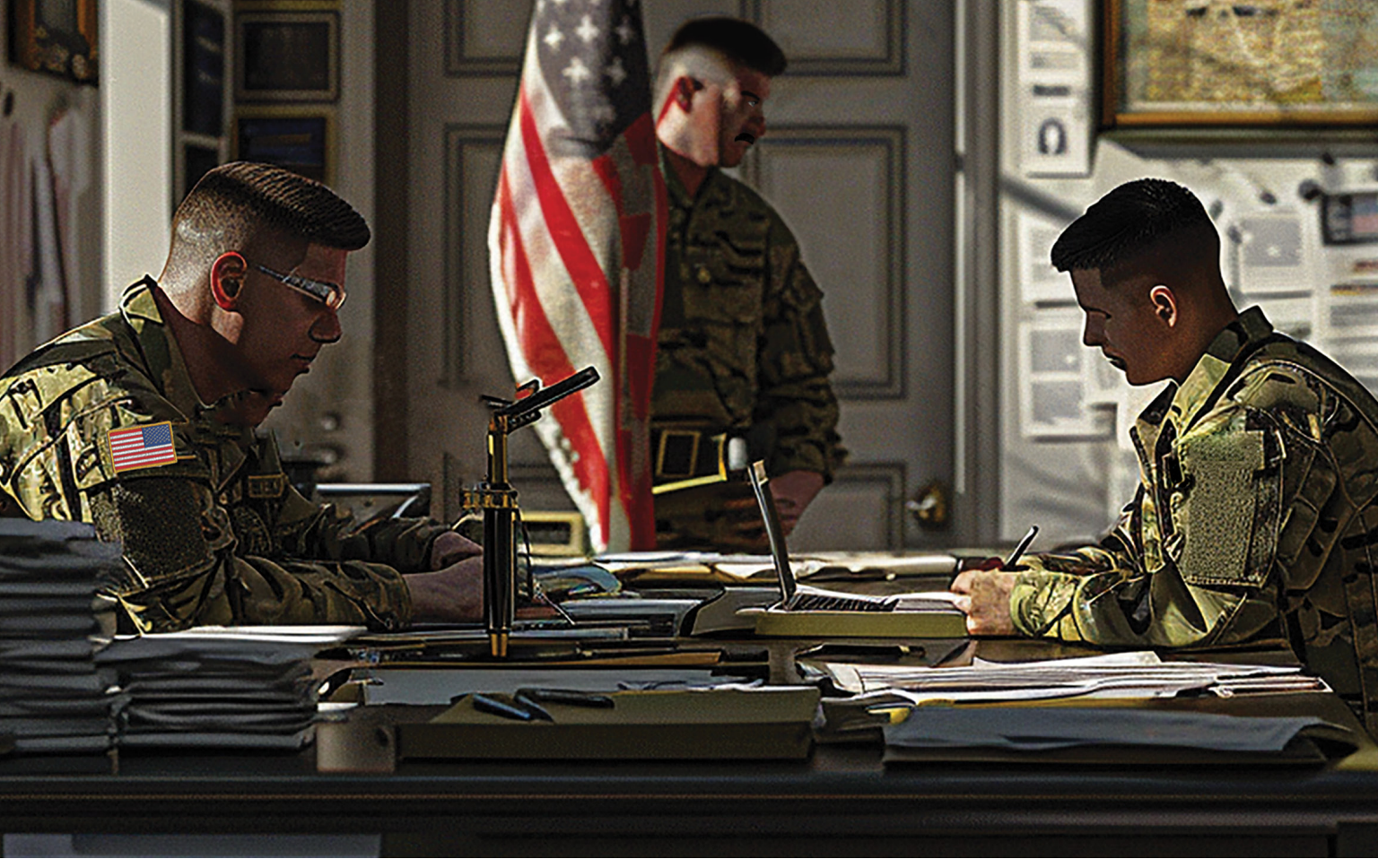
Professional writing, no matter the profession, is a group project. From idea generation to a first draft, through revisions and into the publishing process, every step of the way includes the men and women around you. An article will always be improved by engaging a community in its crafting.

111 **Punctuation Mark**

Article Selection by Professional Publications

Col. Todd Schmidt, PhD, U.S. Army
Col. William Darley, U.S. Army, Retired

The editor in chief and the managing editor of Military Review *offer advice on what professional military journals look for during the process of article selection for publication.*



(AI illustration by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)

Renewing Professional Writing

Lt. Col. Zachary Griffiths, U.S. Army

Nearly a century ago, the U.S. Army raced to ready for the next war. Tight budgets, surplus World War I equipment, and only enough manpower for a "mobilization army" meant that the Army had to think harder.[1] Knowing that success would require integrating new technologies and operating concepts, the chief of infantry renewed the *Infantry Journal* in 1934 by naming Maj. Edwin Forrest Harding as editor. In just four years, Harding doubled circulation and fostered critical debates over the rapidly maturing tank and combined arms.[2] Today, the Army again finds itself in an interwar period, seeking to transform for the next war.

To prepare for this next war, the Army needs professional discourse. Military journals are the place for such discussion, inspiring change in the Army and always changing to meet requirements of the day. Today, the Army is again renewing its journals to ready us for the challenges ahead.

The Army's Journals, an Overview

The Army has a wide array of outlets, each geared to a different audience and set of problems. There are two Army-wide journals: the Army University's *Military Review* is the official professional journal for the entire Army, while the Army War College's *Parameters* focuses on strategic issues.[3] For tactical issues related to a specific branch, there are journals like *Infantry, Army Sustainment*, and the *Field Artillery Professional Bulletin*.

Outside the Army's professional and academic journals but within the Army are a cohort of online outlets. West Point's Modern War Institute and the Army War College's War Room focus on professional topics in a web-first, mobile-friendly format with rolling publication, podcasts, and effective social media engagement.

Below that level are newsletters published by organizations or units supporting an even narrower community of interest, such as the XVIII Airborne Corps' *Infantry Brigade Combat Team Warfighting Forum Monthly Newsletter* and the National Training Center aviation training team's *Eagle Eye*. These can include other formats such as SharePoint repositories or even YouTube channels. Unfortunately, they are not systematically archived, and units bear the cost of production and distribution. The form and scope of these newsletters vary widely.

As compared to newsletters, official Army publications benefit from full-time staffs and institutional support. While uniformed staffing may have fallen over the last forty years, largely civilian editorial teams solicit, screen, edit, and publish the Army's professional journals today.[4]

Additionally, there are many great websites, channels, and feeds run by civilian entities but focus on the military such as War on the Rocks, by soldiers in their unofficial capacity like From the Green Notebook, or by Army associations like *Army Magazine*. While some are free, many charge fees that limit the impact of their journals.

Official and unofficial outlets foster professional discourse together. Articles at War on the Rocks may reference *Military Review* articles that reference posts at the Modern War Institute. This is healthy; each outlet has a unique audience and focus. However, the Army has an interest in fostering dialogue *within* Army journals because of the unique value they provide the force.

Unique Value of the Army's Journals

Hosting professional discourse in Army journals is of interest to the service. Professional journals cut across the Army, spreading and storing authenticated and attributed insights and lessons, which provide access to and confidence in the articles we publish.

Accessibility is the key strength of the Army's journals. In the military, the classification of information and common access card requirements often inadvertently hinder knowledge distribution. Likewise, association journals and private outlets often limit access to those who pay a fee. But *Infantry* makes training tips and articles accessible to every infantry unit and library in the Army by publishing and disseminating each issue. Accessibility means that every soldier and civilian must have access to these journals.

The Army's journals also provide an important moderated marketplace for ideas. Anyone can submit an article, and the author of "Training Management Tips," mentioned by Gen. Randy George in this issue's foreword, did.[5] Russel Eno, then *Infantry*'s editor, reviewed the draft, determined it would interest the *Infantry*'s audience, and honed the article through back-and-forth with Capt. David Johnson, the author. Satisfied he had a well-argued credible article supported with evidence, Eno published Johnson's piece as a training note alongside a reflection from the chief of infantry on night vision during the Gulf War and a feature article on desert operations. It was a balanced issue, covering a diverse range of topics of interest to the infantry.[6]

The publication pace, both then and now, is not lightning fast. This frustrates those who hope for instant feedback. But it also has its benefits. Fortunately, most articles for professional journals are not time sensitive. Johnson's lessons on training management are nearly as applicable in 2024 as they were in 1992. This is a moderated marketplace, where editors understand their audience, sift through submissions, and then hone the best articles. This process is possible because of the alignment of the editors, authors, and readers on desiring the best for their branch and service.

Once ready for publication, the Army disseminates each journal—cutting across unit boundaries and

Lt. Col. Zachary Griffiths, U.S. Army, directs the Harding Project to renew professional military writing.

hierarchy. Through publications, leaders can speak to soldiers, soldiers to their leaders, and both to their peers. Johnson's article may have started as a professional development session for other leaders in the 25th Infantry Division. However, the helpful insights in "Training Management Tips" would never have found their way to then Capt. George's desk at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, if *Infantry* had not published and disseminated the article. Likewise, doctrine writers or others interested in improving training management might not have considered his insights.

Once published, the Army libraries archive each issue. Today, the Army could not access "Training Management Tips" if Johnson had instead published in an unarchived newsletter or white paper. While newsletters and white papers help solicit feedback and generate support, their reach is limited. More recently, well-meaning leaders have advocated for increased engagement on social media, but posts and writings on private websites are ephemeral.[7] Even articles published at well-known institutions like the Council on Foreign Relations can be lost to time.[8] But we can still benefit from Johnson's 1992 article on training meetings three decades later.

Finally, authentication of the Army's journals builds confidence in each article (see the figure). In this age of mis- and disinformation, in a time where anyone can post on social media under a false identity, each of the Army's professional bulletins are authenticated by the service. Soldiers can have confidence that articles in the Army's professional journals have been vetted. In a hierarchical Army, professional journals are unique. Doctrine takes years to codify. Formal lessons-learned systems require common access cards. White papers and newsletters rely on ad hoc distribution and are lost in email accounts. Only the Army's journals are accessible to everyone, spreading and storing insights and lessons to improve the Army.

Causing Change

The Army's journals have the potential for profound impact on the force, sharing valuable lessons that can change how Army units fight and operate. The May-June 1992 issue of *Infantry*, which hosted "Training Management Tips," also published useful articles on the battalion wedge formation, combat lifesaver training, and mortar employment. Other journals offer useful information for senior leaders on topics like asking better questions or thinking about cause and effect.[9] Additionally, journals build communities around shared challenges like jungle operations or innovation.[10] Journals link leaders and improve the Army.

Importantly, the Army's journals also offer a place for thoughtful dissent. When done best, the Army's journals host thoughtful back-and-forth, such as the debate over officer retention and burnout in *Military Review* last year.[11] Other pieces, like Wong and Gerras's "Lying to Ourselves," force introspection on the Army's leaders.[12]

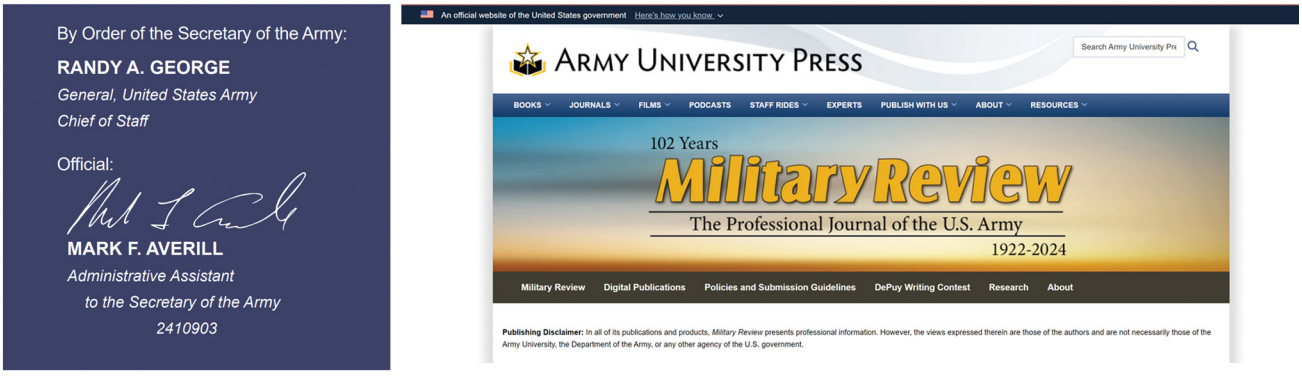
Journals also help refine the Army's recent operating concepts: AirLand Battle, counterinsurgency, and today's multidomain operations. In the official history of AirLand Battle, the Army's Training and Doctrine Command includes 109 references to *Military Review* and highlights the "spirited debate in the professional military journals" following the introduction of Active Defense, a predecessor of AirLand Battle.[13] Likewise, debates over counterinsurgency tactics filled the pages of professional journals, providing useful lessons for deploying units and helping refine counterinsurgency doctrine.[14] More recently, the Army's journals helped refine multidomain battle into multidomain operations and now continue honing that concept.[15] No single article will rewrite the Army's warfighting concepts, but each article adds to the conversation.

Notably, recent discourse has migrated beyond the Army's official journals. While *Military Review* and the branch journals hosted much of the debate on AirLand battle, counterinsurgency debates birthed Small Wars Journal, War on the Rocks, and others. These modern platforms published more quickly and delivered content formatted for the web and smartphones. The information environment is changing.

The Digital Age

The robust professional debate that filled the Army's *Infantry* and *Armor* professional journals in 1934 has fractured across a variety of web-first outlets and onto social media. Some outlets, like West Point's Modern War Institute are official, while others, like War on the Rocks and From the Green Notebook are not. Outside strictly professional discourse, many soldiers now post to sites like Reddit or in short videos on TikTok.[16] This transition away from official venues has led to increases in mis- and disinformation.

This medium is approved for official dissemination of material designed to keep individuals within the Army knowledgeable of current and emerging developments within their areas of expertise for the purpose of enhancing their professional development.



(Figure by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)

Figure. Authentication Then (Print) and Now (Online)

Most information no longer comes on broadsheets or in printed books. When reading newspapers or skimming social media feeds, apps format automatically to the screen's size. A click or search rapidly retrieves the desired article. Breaking news is automatically pushed through social media or via an alert. These changes have made information more accessible than ever.

But the Army's journals have not kept up. Where hard copy *Infantry* magazines hosted professional discourse through the 1990s in orderly rooms and at staff duty desks, today's leaders read, listen to podcasts, and watch short videos on their smartphones.

The paradox of this fractured publication landscape is the slow death of conversations on branch and Army issues. For example, with reinvestment in bridging, the Army needs more debate about the employment and structure of engineer bridging companies. However, outlets like Modern War Institute, War on the Rocks, and From the Green Notebook do not appear to have ever posted an article on wet-gap crossings.[17] Contrast this with the back issues of *Engineer*, which has dozens of articles focused on the subject. Sadly, publication of *Engineer* has fallen from about four to only one issue a year, effectively killing debate on this important topic.[18]

Only the Army cares deeply about these niche professional topics, so the Army must host them. These debates, and others like them, are critical to the Army's transformation and warfighting prowess. However, underinvestment and failure to adapt to modern standards impedes these conversations. While the Army largely missed this web-first, mobile transition, the service is taking a lesson from its past to transform the journals for the future.

Embracing Change

Throughout their century-long history, the Army's journals have hosted thoughtful discourse while transforming in format—an approach the Army will draw on today. In the 1930s, the vigorous Forrest Harding renewed the *Infantry Journal* with a lively new cover, soliciting articles from notable military thinkers, and delivering content relevant to members of the infantry association.[19] The Army's professional journal, *Military Review*, has also evolved over the last century. Starting as the *Instructors' Summary of Military Articles* in 1922, *Military Review* matured alongside independent American military thinking. Likewise, the branch journals, once largely controlled by branch associations, moved under branch schools following a change in rules about uniformed editors working for associations.[20] The Army's journals have historically evolved with their times.

Today, renewing the Army's journals requires attention to accessibility of contemporary and archived articles, ensuring journal inclusion in professional

military education courses, investments in staffing, and appointing a steward to guide these journals into the future.

Renewing the Army's journals requires a web-first, mobile-friendly website that integrates easily with social media. The recently launched Line of Departure hosts professional bulletins side-by-side with rolling publication. With Army journals consolidated in one place, visitors can also more easily discover articles in the other journals of interest, diversifying audiences across the force. Furthermore, social media accounts can push individual articles into soldiers' social media feeds. While social media cannot replace thoughtful dialogue, it is a venue for bringing content to audiences. Finally, Line of Departure's search function will allow readers to reach back into the archives. As old articles are processed, they will not only be searchable at Line of Departure but will also start appearing on search engines like Google and Google Scholar.

The Army is integrating journals into professional military education courses. Across all Army schools, educators are refining lesson objectives to ensure all military students are familiar with the Army's professional journals and the format for articles. This includes expanding existing scholars programs to the Sergeants Major Academy, which is piloting the Ultima Scholars program this fall.[21] Between revised learning objectives in military courses and investments in scholars programs, soldiers will better understand their opportunities and obligations to strengthen the Army profession.

A critical aspect of achieving these modernizations is a reinvestment in journal staffs. Journals will soon have dedicated uniformed and civilian staff with web publications functions consolidated at the Combined Arms Center. The new Harding Fellows program will ensure the Army selects those with the aptitude and inclination to edit their branch journals; the program develops fellows through graduate education and then employs them as editors under their Center of Excellence director. Passionate uniformed editors and their talented civilian counterparts, armed with connection to their peers, engagement data, and an institutional advocate, will ensure that the Army's outlets remain relevant.

As the steward of the professional journals, Army University Press will be the central advocate, overseer, and coordinator. They will ensure these renewal efforts cohere into a new system and advocate for journals into the future. Together, these efforts will renew the Army's journals. Still, this effort to renew professional discourse is dependent on the support and effort of the force.

Your Role

Renewing the Army's journals requires more than just the institutional actions outlined above. Leaders at all echelons must set the example. As the chief of staff of the Army recognizes three articles a month, other Army leaders should take the time to recognize thought-provoking articles or those that bear directly on important questions to their organizations.[22] It only takes a minute to send an email or make a phone call, but that small action can have a tremendous influence on the recipient's likelihood to write again or to encourage others to write.

Furthermore, leaders at all levels should consider reading and writing programs as part of their leader development and staff training programs.[23] While professional education courses have an important role, soldiers spend far more of their time in operational and staff assignments. At more tactical levels, brigade, battalion, and company leaders could further encourage soldiers to convert white papers or staff estimates into articles for their branch journals. Professional writing is not hard, but soldiers may require a gentle nudge to start.

Leaders should consider how they underwrite risk for subordinates who write. Soldiers have written in the Army's journals for more than one hundred years, demonstrating intellectual courage and shaping the force. If the Army discourages dissent in formal channels, it arises elsewhere, often in an unprofessional manner. Some ideas may be unpopular, but they should find a home in Army professional journals if they aim to solve problems and strengthen the profession.[24] Support soldiers who publish well-reasoned articles aimed at making the Army better.

Conclusion

The Army's professional journals are uniquely important. Through open access, the journals inform the Army, share lessons laterally, provide an outlet for thoughtful dissent, allow us to learn from our past,

and make us better communicators. At the institutional level, the Army is modernizing the journals through improved accessibility, incorporation into education programs, and an emphasis on embracing the digital age.

But these changes are not enough. Leaders must also underwrite reasonable risk for their subordinates who take up the pen and encourage professional writing that improves our Army, even if they have dissenting opinions. ■

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(Illustration by Reggie Torrez, Army Multimedia and Visual Information Division [OCPA], U.S. Army)

John Wayne at His Writing Desk

The Origins of Professional Journals, 1878–1910

Dr. J. P. Clark

The Army faces an array of challenging missions while struggling to keep pace in a rapidly changing world. Although this is a fair description of our current moment, it also describes the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is, therefore, not surprising that military professionals at that earlier time turned to writing. As the articles in this special issue make clear, writing is a great way for individuals to make sense of the problems they face while also contributing to potential solutions. While

our task today is to revitalize professional journals, our predecessors had the additional burden of creating these initial venues for professional discourse. A look back at the four phases of professional writing from the 1870s through the 1900s provides a broader context to the challenges of professional discourse, illuminating potential lessons for today.

Echoes of Today

In the popular imagination, the Army of the late nineteenth century had only one mission—policing the frontier—and that required nothing more than hard riding and common sense. There are no scenes in *Fort Apache* of John Wayne writing for a professional journal, nor any sense that he should have.

In reality, the time was far more complex. The problems at the real Fort Apache in Arizona would be familiar to Afghanistan veterans. The complex internal dynamics of the Southwest Native American nations created a shifting mosaic of friendly, neutral, and hostile factions. The situation was further complicated by adversaries' ability to exploit a porous border, across which was a sometimes helpful, sometimes antagonistic neighbor.

Moreover, the frontier was not the Army's only mission. This was also the era depicted in the television series *The Gilded Age*, a time of intense technological and social change. In the last years of the nineteenth century, the Army actually devoted most of its resources to coast defense as artillerymen, engineers, and ordnance officers developed state-of-the-art optics and electrical systems, intricate hydraulic gun carriages, and advanced propellants and explosives to meet the challenge of defeating fast-moving, armored warships at great distances.[1] Technology also indirectly created a mission for the Army through the profound societal disruptions of urbanization and economic upheaval during the Second Industrial Revolution. The Regular Army and state militia were called upon so often during labor disputes that some officers argued that the Army should make urban constabulary duty its primary role.[2]

In the decade after the Civil War, however, the Army lacked the means to systematically think about and devise solutions to these varied problems. Professional military education was limited to West Point, and there were only a few schools where junior engineers and artillerymen could learn purely technical skills. The field army conducted virtually no training at anything larger than the company level. The greatest problem, however, was isolation. The Regular Army's roughly twenty-seven thousand personnel were scattered over more than a hundred different locations; most individuals served at posts garrisoned by just a handful of officers and one hundred or two hundred soldiers.[3] Personnel policies that limited interchange among the various staff bureaus, corps, branches, and even regiments within a branch were exacerbated geographic dispersion. Finally, the Army had no general staff to direct effort and no doctrine to provide a common tactical framework. In sum, despite the Army being small, it was exceptionally difficult across vast distances to share best practices, debate important issues, and develop solutions.[4]

The Military Service Institution in the 1870s: Top-Down Generalists

In early 1878, a group of officers serving in the various units stationed around New York City and at West Point resolved to address the problem of the Army being "brought together only by war."[5] Without some mechanism for sharing ideas, isolated organizations would develop along diverging lines and generally lose knowledge of the other elements and larger whole. The group also believed that warfare had reached a state of complexity such that a single mind could no longer grasp all of its elements. This required intellectual cooperation as described by the West Point superintendent, "It is only by united and harmonious effort that the many may even approach to that degree of excellence which [ensures] success in war."[6]

To enable such a united and harmonious effort, this group of reformers created the Military Service Institution of the United States (MSI). The MSI was patterned mainly on a British equivalent that still exists today, the Royal United Services Institute, though it was also inspired by the U.S. Naval Institute and built upon an existing professional study group within

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the West Point faculty. In addition to its *Journal of the Military Service Institution* (*JMSI*), the MSI also supported a library and a museum of U.S. Army artifacts.[7]

The MSI benefited from high-level support. Most of the founders and members of its governing council were relatively senior veterans of the Civil War, while the MSI's first president was the commander of all Army forces in the eastern United States, Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock. With the permission of the secretary of war, Hancock provided the MSI office space within his headquarters on Governors Island. The superintendent at West Point delivered the inaugural address, and the commanding general of the Army, William T. Sherman, wrote several letters commenting on military law that were subsequently published in the first few issues of the journal. With such backing from senior leaders, it was not surprising that within a year, as many as one-fifth of the regular officers were members.[8]

The *JMSI* helped focus intellectual energy through its annual essay contest, with all entrants writing on a topic selected by the MSI's council. It is possible to plot the Army's operational and institutional challenges by tracing the evolution of the essay contest questions over time. The MSI's topics went from "The Indian Problem" and the military features of the U.S.-Canadian border in case of war with the United Kingdom in the 1880s to the lessons of the Spanish-American War and whether military training should be part of public-school curricula in the 1900s. Of course, some topics are evergreen and still relevant today, such as recruiting, fostering esprit de corps, and the army's strategic role. The stature of the first award committee members indicates the contest's prestige: a former secretary of war, a serving general officer, and Rep. Joseph E. Johnston, a West Pointer and former Confederate commander.[9] Surviving letters from some of the Army's leading thinkers suggest that the competition truly motivated them.[10]

The success of the MSI in fostering a vibrant professional culture is exemplified by the career of Arthur L. Wagner. According to historian T. R. Brereton, after several years of garrison duty, Wagner was bored and close to resigning his commission. The twin opportunities of serving as a professor of military science at what is today the University of Florida and winning the 1884 MSI essay contest reinvigorated Wagner's professional interest. He went on to make a number of critical contributions and rise to the rank of brigadier general before his premature death in 1905. For example, he introduced modern tactics instruction at the nascent Fort Leavenworth school; wrote textbooks that taught many of the future senior commanders of the First World War the basics of reconnaissance, security, attack and defense; and oversaw the conduct of the Army's first large-scale realistic field-training exercise, at which he also conducted perhaps the first modern after action review.[11]

Branch Associations in the 1880s: Bottom-Up Specialists

The MSI remained a mainstay of U.S. Army professionalism until World War I, though there were limitations to its generalist approach. In the first issue of the *JMSI*, the institution's secretary urged readers to track developments in other branches: cavalrymen should read about coast defense mines and artillerymen should read about the saber in mounted operations.[12] Yet specialists found they needed outlets within which they could speak to other specialists. The second phase of branch journals reflected this need; it was a bottom-up effort primarily driven by the faculty at branch schools.

It was not coincidental that the growth of professional journals occurred around the same time the Army was significantly expanding the scale and scope of professional military education. Senior leaders like Sherman and Phil Sheridan were responsible for the growing the number of schools by reopening the Artillery School at Fort Monroe, Virginia, and founding new ones such as one for engineers at Willet's Point, New York, and another for infantry and cavalry at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.[13] The senior leaders, however, had a limited vision of professional education; they wanted the schools to do little more than teach basic technical and administrative skills to junior lieutenants.

The expansion in what was taught was due to a bottom-up effort driven by faculty members like Wagner and Emory Upton, who were not content to teach drill regulations and basic unit administration. Sometimes against explicit guidance from senior leaders, these midranking officers pushed the boundaries to teach more advanced, staff college-like subjects. Upton's "Art of War" course at Fort Monroe—going far beyond

ballistics and the employment of guns, students also studied strategy, history, military law, and what today would be called combined arms tactics—was one inspiration for the founding of the Naval War College. The schools also pioneered the use of techniques such as wargaming, map exercises, and terrain walks.[14]

As intellectual hot spots, schools became natural homes for branch journals and associations. The physical proximity of individuals engaged in thinking about common problems created the intellectual stimulus, the presence of libraries to conduct research provided the means, and, at least for the faculty, the need to develop course content also gave some motivation. Cavalrymen at Fort Leavenworth led the way with the formation of the Cavalry Association in 1885—just seven years after the MSI—and with the first issue of its journal appearing in 1888.[15] Within a year, artillerymen at Fort Monroe were ready to follow suit, claiming that the occasional article in the *JMSI* was not sufficient, particularly as they often wanted to discuss highly technical issues that would be of little interest to the other branches.

The prospect of multiple journals potentially competing for authors and readers caused concern, at least among some. Tasker H. Bliss, aide to the Army's commanding general and himself a future chief of staff, warned the editor of the *JMSI* that something had to be done to co-opt the fledgling branch associations before they grew so large as to choke out the parent tree. The editor, however, disputed Bliss's premise that there was a fixed lump of content and subscribers. He noted that the MSI's Fort Leavenworth chapter had gained membership since the creation of the Cavalry Association, while overall article submissions to the *JMSI* remained robust.[16] At least within the Army of the 1880s, there was a reinforcing cycle of intellectual energy and output that created more energy and output.

The Lyceum in the 1890s: Mandatory Writing

Though Bliss was incorrect in believing that the Army could not sustain more than a single journal, there were limits to the intellectual output as demonstrated by the next stage in the development of professional writing—the "officers' lyceum."

The lyceum was the initiative of the Army's top commanding general, Gen. John M. Schofield, who had been one of the early supporters of the MSI. Schofield's ambitious plan was to expand professional writing across the entire officer corps through top-down direction. In 1891, he issued a general order that directed every post commander to establish a lyceum—what today we might call a study group—with two functions. The first was to prepare individuals for their promotion examinations through classroom review of regulations. The second, more ambitious function, was to "to gradually bring the line of the Army to [a] high standard of professional acquirement" by having every lieutenant and captain write an essay on a topic of their choice but approved by the post commander. Due to the *much* slower promotion rates at the time—most officers were not promoted to major until their fifties—the essay requirement applied to all officers with about thirty years of service or less. Over the course of the year, all the officers at any given post would discuss their various essays within the lyceum.[17]

"Though Bliss was incorrect in believing that the Army could not sustain more than a single journal, there were limits to the intellectual output as demonstrated by the next stage in the development of professional writing—the 'officers' lyceum.'"

The results were mixed. Supportive commanders with the intellect and temperament to mentor officers and facilitate discussion produced some successes. Even without such support, motivated officers produced quality papers, some of which were published in the *JMSI* or branch journals. Yet the historical evidence suggests that the lyceums fell far short of Schofield's objectives.[18] Many post commanders did not care or simply did not know how to create an atmosphere of inquiry;

particularly at the smaller posts, there were not sufficient research resources available; and many individuals did not have the skills to conduct worthwhile independent research. As described by one officer who would go on to write the standard American military history textbooks during the early twentieth century, the result was "a constipation of ideas in a flux of words."[19] The Army had not created the conditions for success.

The Infantry Association in the 1900s: Writing for Organizational Advantage

Not all the branches organized their associations and journals at the same pace. The laggard was the infantry, which formed a society in 1893 but did not begin publishing a journal until 1904.[20]

A lot happened in those intervening years. The United States became a global power with the Spanish-American War, which in turn led, directly or indirectly, to a significant expansion of the Army and accompanying influx of new officers; the development of the Army's first comprehensive, tiered system of professional military education; and the creation of a general staff to manage it all. One unfortunate byproduct of these rapid expansions of people and organizations was fighting among the branches for force structure and power.[21]

The *Infantry Journal* was a product of this intraservice rivalry period. As opposed to the first two phases of associations and journals, which came respectively out of geographic concentrations of units and schools, the early editorial staff of the *Infantry Journal* mainly consisted of infantrymen assigned to the newly founded general staff. The rough modern equivalents would be if the MSI were founded at Fort Liberty, North Carolina; the early branch journals at places like Fort Sill, Oklahoma; and the *Infantry Journal* coming from the Pentagon.

The *Infantry Journal* reflected this Washington, D.C., context. Like the other branch journals, most articles were on broad professional topics like techniques for training understrength units or translated extracts from the new Japanese doctrine. The extensive editorial section, however, was openly combative; the same issue as the articles just mentioned also featured complaints about a general marginalization of the infantry and the long period since an infantryman had last served as the superintendent at West Point.[22] The *Infantry Journal* grew so powerful that the Army's chief of staff sent one of his aides to seek the editor's support for pending legislation. Even more startling than the Army's senior officer feeling compelled to win the support of a captain for the service's position was that in this case, the junior officer refused.[23] There is some risk in allowing the flow of ideas, though it is difficult to argue that the Army was not far better for having a vibrant professional culture, even if this did cause some problems for senior leaders.

Implications and Questions for Today

As noted at the outset, there are many similarities between the problems of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, and what we face today. Therefore, it only makes sense that we can find lessons in their solutions as well, particularly considering the emphasis of Army senior leaders on revitalizing professional writing and journals. Writing undeniably strengthens the profession by generating solutions, invigorating individuals, and building communities across space. Yet strangely, military writing seems to come in clusters, even though the work itself is mainly solitary and feeds into virtual communities independent of geography. This was the case in the nineteenth century but is also true today, even in the era of Microsoft Teams and Google Docs. Personal connections matter in multiple ways: colleagues help generate and refine ideas while also providing encouragement and support to see a writing project through to completion. Schools will likely remain intellectual engines because faculty and students regularly wrestle with the problems of their functional communities and have many of the resources necessary to write. But as this brief history demonstrates, other locations and organizations can also become clusters of thought, so long as there is the right combination of leadership, enabling resources, and talent.

The past offers less of a guide in relation to the need to have common places for professional communities to share ideas. In the nineteenth century, the problem was how to sustainably staff and publish a journal. Publications require much work and resources, but those came through a combination of top-down support and bottom-up organization. Today, the bar to publishing in any one of a variety of formats—prose, audio, or video—is little more than a laptop or smartphone with a few apps. But the ease of publication is offset by the difficulty of reaching a significant portion

of the professional community. We need "watering holes" where members of the community can all go for quality content that will persist longer than the refresh of a timeline or feed. In meeting this challenge today, we will have to find our own way.

The final lesson is that one size will not fit all. Even the nineteenth-century Army required multiple forums for professional discussion, each catering to a different set of issues and problems. Some dealt with broad issues of concern across the profession, others dealt with more specific topics of interest to only some subset of specialists. Today's Army has even more specialties, some of which are also in conversation with like specialists in other services, academia, or business. At the same time, there is the opportunity for sharing ideas and tools in more formats: yes, articles but also spreadsheets, code, interactive maps, podcasts, and video. The consistent factor, however, is that these discussions are fundamental to a strong profession, which so long as the forums are oriented around communities confronting shared problems, will never have a lack of material in today's world. ■

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(Illustration by Sgt. 1st Class Curtis Loter, Multimedia and Visual Information Division [OCPA], U.S. Army)

Muddy Boots and Powerful Pages

Why We Write

Sgt. 1st Class Leyton Summerlin, U.S. Army

In our society, people expect instant gratification for the most menial work. This makes it easy to lose sight of the importance of writing, particularly when the author's feedback loop rarely makes it back to them. With little-to-no immediate impact or gratification, why would anyone want to write? It is challenging, intimidating, and can make us feel vulnerable. Least of all, why would a muddy-boot-wearing warfighter be inclined to tackle such a task?

Writing is a powerful self-development tool, unparalleled in its ability to clear our thoughts and hone our ideas. When we pen these insights to paper, we are forced to draw them out in their entirety, exposing weaknesses in our arguments that must be shored up and points of friction that need clarification. The more we undergo this writing and refining process, the more we develop the skill of concise communication.

More important than what writing does for the author is how writing transforms the reader. When a hard-earned lesson is shared, it makes the readers better decision-makers. When an insight is digested, it shapes our view of the world and impacts our lives in ways we could never have imagined. In 1987, Chief of Staff of the Army Gen. Carl E. Vuono said, "Sharing knowledge and experience is the greatest legacy you can leave to subordinates."[1]

The following stories from Master Sgt. John Bandy and Lt. Col. Jay Ireland show us the importance of sharing our experiences and the direct link among reading, writing, and the warfighter. Others, such as my own, demonstrate the indirect and peripheral impact we can have when we share our insights, ideas, or experiences.

Words Are Lifesavers—Master Sgt. John Bandy

I met Master Sgt. Bandy while assigned to the 2nd Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry Regiment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade in 2023. His liveliness, experience, and approachability stem from his genuine care for soldiers and love for the Army, which drives soldiers to flock to him for mentorship. He is more aware than most of the importance of sharing lessons.

One day in early 2004, while I was on duty, I was told to read an article about Operation Gothic Serpent, a U.S. military operation in Mogadishu, Somalia. Something from that article stood out: 95 percent of casualties fell in the streets.

Fast-forward to November 2004. I was in the middle of Operation Phantom Fury [Fallujah, Iraq], the United States' most extensive urban fighting since Vietnam. Nothing—and I mean nothing—compares to the chaos of Fallujah. Amidst that chaos, there was an ever-present chant in my head: stay out of the streets.

Around me, buildings crumbled, and we had to keep dodging into ruins to stay safe. Thanks to that article, my team avoided getting caught in the streets; one night, it saved our lives. As we were about to hunker down, I got a bad feeling about our position. I told everyone to hop into our vehicles, and just as we did, enemy mortars pummeled the spot where we were. Stay out of the streets.

I am forever thankful I read that article and have not stopped reading since. I owe a lot to the NCOs who used to mandate that we read in-house written content while on duty or when we could find white space. That one piece of advice, found in a dusty journal I was made to read, saved my team and me many times. Thank you to those who take the time to share their stories and lessons. They're not just words; they're lifesavers.

Learning Faster—Lt. Col. Jay Ireland

Another perspective comes from Lt. Col. Ireland. A passionate leader whose care for soldiers is easily seen in his work. As the commander of the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment from the 1st Cavalry Division, he is most recently known for his successful unit writing program.[2]

I've commanded during combat, and it shaped who I am. I'm always worried about letting my team down or making that dreaded call to someone's family. I wouldn't wish that on anyone, and to prevent that, I am now forever driven to pass on what I've learned,

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Soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division prepare to enter and clear a building 12 November 2004 during fighting in Fallujah, Iraq. Master Sgt. John Bandy recalled reading an article about Operation Gothic Serpent in Mogadishu, Somalia, in early 2004. While in the middle of the Second Battle of Fallujah, "stay out of the streets" echoed in his head. He said, "That one piece of advice, found in a dusty journal I was made to read, saved my team and me many times. … They're not just words; they're lifesavers." (Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Johan Charles Van Boers, U.S. Army)

whether to help save the lives of soldiers or help make somebody's job a little easier.

It started in 2009 when my troop was about to deploy to the mountains in Nuristan, Afghanistan. My boss had the officers read the redacted 15-6 investigations on the attack at Outpost Wanat. It was all marked up, but we read every word, looking for anything to help us keep our folks safe and one step ahead of the enemy. That year was intense and full of Taliban activity. Reading that report undoubtedly helped us prepare for the hell we experienced. I learned the value of reading as it pertains to warfighting and felt a sense of relief that we all took that assignment from my commander seriously.

When we redeployed, I wanted to share my experiences and help future soldiers. I wrote about defending our combat outpost, mixing tactics and personal stories. When I thought it was ready for the Armor *professional journal, I solicited feedback from others, but I was told it wasn't ready for publication. So, I stuffed it in a drawer, never to be seen again. Looking back, I know it wasn't perfect, but I wish I hadn't given up. I regret not using the feedback as motivation to transform that paper into a professional article. This way, I could have shared our hard-earned lessons and helped someone else stay one step ahead.*

Let me be the first to say that it's OK if your first try isn't perfect. Writing is challenging, and now that I'm in charge of a battalion, I want to encourage all soldiers to write about and share their experiences. As an Army, we're in this together, and I'll help anyone get their work ready for others to read so we can all stay one step ahead.

Unforeseen Impact—Sgt. 1st Class Leyton Summerlin

From 2019 to 2023, I was a drill sergeant at the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCoE). In 2020, my

wife and I found out she was pregnant with our first child, and I realized that the soldiers I was training would one day be her leaders if she were to join the service like many in our family. This persistent thought drove me to work harder than ever, and I became the MCoE Drill Sergeant of the Year two days before she was born. This position is the primary trainer for newly assigned drill sergeants at what is now Fort Moore, Georgia. If I could help drill sergeants, I figured this would have a broader and more significant impact on the Army's future leaders who might one day lead my daughter.

During this time, I developed a three-day leadership class that every incoming drill sergeant attended. I led these classes through group and interactive discussions focused on providing them with a deeply rooted sense of purpose, practical tools, and guidance from seasoned peers. The problem was that I used only a whiteboard and a marker in this class. There was no written version.

My senior leaders challenged me to put the class into writing so I could pass on three years of hard work to the instructors who would come after me. No matter how hard I thought this would be or how much I dreaded trying to pen this class to paper, I knew they were right. I locked myself in a room after work for several nights and battled with writer's block until I finally had a finished product.

Because I have learned so much from the Army's professional journals, I decided to contribute my thoughts and published "Standardizing Excellence" in the *Infantry* professional journal.[3] I had no grand expectations for this piece. I simply hoped to inspire a few young soldiers over the next twenty years or so.

After three years and two changes in the position, I learned that this class is still taught, and the article I wrote is an integral part, positively influencing far more soldiers than I could ever have hoped. I'm grateful to have had Sgts. Maj. Garner, Gonzalez, and Hapney as leaders who pushed and supported me to write and share my thoughts and experiences with others. I will forever encourage anyone whose heart is in the right place to do the same.

This 9 July 2008 photo shows a view of the Wanat combat outpost located in the rugged, mountainous terrain of Nuristan Province, Afghanistan, looking east from a mortar position manned by soldiers from Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team toward the town bazaar and a key observation point. The Battle of Wanat between U.S. service members and approximately two hundred Afghan insurgents was fought days later on 13 July 2008. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Jesse Queck, U.S. Army)

Empowering Voices

When is the right time for soldiers to start sharing their ideas and experiences with the Army's journals? The answer is now. Whether it's eight hundred or four thousand words, a young private first class or the old lieutenant colonel, everyone has ideas others can benefit from.

While the narratives in this article provide reasons to

write and call for authorship, it's always easy to find reasons not to, whether we don't have the time, find it intimidating, fear retribution, etc. For enlisted soldiers, we might lack writing skills or think no one will value our ideas. For an officer, it may be the self-induced pressure of perceived incompetence from others.

However, if you were told that what you write today might save someone's life or inspire excellence in others who then, in turn, win a future war that protects your loved ones, would you do it? As soldiers, we have no problem running into a hail of gunfire or sprinting through a potential minefield to close with and destroy the enemy or to save a friend. Whatever makes it hard to pick up the pen and share your idea or experience, overcome that obstacle. You may not realize it or ever find out, but someone is counting on you. Do not write for yourself; write for them.

Here are some closing thoughts on getting started and approaches to strengthen the profession of arms:

1. *Capstone*. Write a reflective piece at the end of your time in a particular duty position. Whether you were the Drill Sergeant Academy commandant at the end of your tenure or a platoon leader finishing a rotation at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, share what you learned, failed at, or wished you had done differently.
2. *Branch*. Is there a branch-specific challenge, such as integrating unmanned aircraft systems within an infantry rifle platoon? Write about how you think it can be fixed.
3. *Institutional*. Does something need to change in our primary military education courses? If so, create a dialogue between the institution and the force to solicit clear and thoughtful feedback.
4. *Organizational*. Do you think your unit could be more effective in garrison and in training? Leaders, inspire your soldiers to contribute by writing these answers in a white paper and possibly publishing them in a journal to help others outside the organization. ■

I'm grateful to have had Sgts. Maj. Garner, Gonzalez, and Hapney as leaders, and an amazing wife who pushed and supported me to write and share my thoughts and experiences with others.

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2. Jay Ireland and Ryan Van Wie, "How to Develop and Run a Unit Writing Program," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 76–81. This article, included in this issue, provides a unit writing program model to promote healthy discourse and clear professional writing within our formations.

3. Leyton M. Summerlin, "Standardizing Excellence," *Infantry* (Summer 2023): 11, https://www.moore.army.mil/infantry/magazine/issues/2023/Summer/pdf/12_Summerlin_txt.pdf.

"Keep toiling at the mill. If you aspire mainly to command (and you should) remember it can only be done with work and one must practice, practice. The idea that the military looks askance at the writer is sheer bunk. Any Army functions well mainly through clear writing."

—S. L. A. Marshall, "Genesis to Revelation," *Military Review* 52, no. 2 (February 1972): 24

Spc. Daniyel Kim, an aircraft structural repairer with 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, 7th Army Training Command, writes an essay during the U.S. Army Europe and Africa Best Warrior Competition at U.S. Army Garrison Bavaria Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, 8 August 2021. The essay covered issues relevant to Army leadership, tactical proficiency, and lethality. Based on the *Army People Strategy*, the Army is ensuring it has the right people, with the right skills and training, in the right roles, to succeed in complex future missions. (Photo by Spc. Michael Alexander, U.S. Army)

How to Write an Article

Capt. Theo Lipsky, U.S. Army

Every day, soldiers have good ideas about how to better our Army. Doing something about these ideas is hard. Those soldiers with good ideas often don't know where to begin. Some think themselves unqualified to speak up. Others figure they lack the power to do something about their ideas were they to try. For these reasons, many good ideas die in our Army without a hearing.

One way to give life to an idea is to write about it. Much of the world is the consequence of a decision by someone with an idea to put pen to paper. Doing so is not easy, particularly if one lacks practice, but writing repays the effort needed many times over by sparing a good idea a premature death. What follows is a short guide to writing a commentary article for publication. Read it when you think you've got an idea worth sharing.

Why Write?

Elsewhere in this special issue of *Military Review*, Sgt. 1st Class Leyton Summerlin provides an extended

answer to the question, "Why write?"[1] His reflection is excellent and warrants a careful read. As a complement, this article considers the question briefly below, because in answering it, one already begins also to answer how to write an article.

You can be forgiven for asking, "Why bother writing?" There are many self-evident reasons to not write. A soldier may think they spend enough of their life thinking about the Army. An officer may think that social media affords them more reach than writing and for less effort. Some worry that speaking invites more trouble from higher headquarters than it's worth. Others say that the chance the Army listens is slim, and slimmer still is the chance that the article changes anything.

So, why write? For one, writing makes us better thinkers, and thinking is soldier business. In setting down ideas we are forced to confront logical holes and the limits of our knowledge on a topic. It is only once we see our thoughts that we can improve them. This fact has moved many, such as historian David McCullough, to observe, "Writing *is* thinking."[2]

Writing also makes us better leaders. Brig. Gen. S. L. A. Marshall said it best in 1966 when he wrote that those "who can command words to serve their thoughts and feelings are well on their way to commanding men to serve their purposes … senior commanders respect the junior who has a facility for thinking an idea through and then expressing it comprehensively in clear, unvarnished phrases."[3] A day spent on the line today shows this as true now as it was in 1966.

Above all, writing endures. Our writing outlasts our thoughts, our spoken words, our online activity, and ultimately, ourselves. Col. Emory Upton's example teaches us as much. Upton led Union troops with valor on the bloody Civil War battlefields, then dedicated his life to writing about how to improve the Army. He died before he saw his writing make a difference. But make a difference it did, leading to critical reforms that readied the Army for the First World War. You just never know what may come of your writing.[4]

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Have an Idea

Good writing starts with a good idea that the writer cares about. Figure out what, if anything, you want to say. This seemingly obvious point is worth marking because the temptation runs the opposite way. Out of a desire to be heard, we decide to write and then try to figure out what we want to say. This a common human error. Guard against it. An article with something to say is worth a hundred without a point.

The good news is that soldiers and officers get good ideas all the time in the conduct of their duties. We care about these ideas because we care about our profession, even if it can frustrate us, or else we would not put up with the hardships of military service. These ideas may address a technical problem with equipment, a doctrinal gap discovered during training, a cultural issue observed in a formation, or a regulatory shortcoming.

Ideas are incomplete if they stop at diagnosis. When they do, they amount to what many call "admiring the problem." Rather than admire a problem, come up with potential ways to fix it. Research the mechanisms by which change happens in the Army. Proposed fixes don't need to be perfect but should be as specific as possible. Strong, precise analysis and recommendations are more likely to be adopted.

When you have an idea, you may dismiss it on the grounds that were it any good, someone else would have thought of it. After all, the people who craft doctrine and lead formations are smart. What are the chances they missed something that a soldier now sees? The short answer: high. On the ground, we see what happens when the Army's policies and doctrine meet reality. Issues arise in practice that do not in theory. Consequently, your observations are crucial.

Even if you decide your idea has merit, humility may stop you from writing. Most of us are not experts in the topics that interest us and so feel unqualified to write about them. Rather than give up on an idea, take the opportunity to learn. Search for related reading in the many databases available via Army libraries or on defense websites. Talk to those in your unit who may know about the issue of concern, whether a maintenance chief or first sergeant.

If you are still worried you have only part of the answer, consider coauthorship. For example, an artilleryman and an aviator who have a novel idea for how to train the observation of artillery fire using unmanned aircraft systems could author an article together. The artilleryman might provide insight into

gunnery training and the aviator on air space deconfliction. Coauthorship can work many ways, but when it's effective, it makes the article more credible and more comprehensive.

You may discover that someone has already written what you want to say. If so, do not despair. The historical record can sustain two pieces of writing that argue the same point. For an idea to gain momentum, it often takes more than a single piece. Your topic need not be entirely novel. The key thing is to offer the reader a new piece of information or a new angle from which to view your topic. News people sometimes call this a scoop. What's yours?

Pick Your Audience

Once you have an idea that you care about, have studied the topic, consulted your fellow service members, and come up with possible solutions, it is time to pick an audience. Even a good idea well-articulated will not get far if addressed to those who can do nothing about it. Find out who needs to hear your argument and write as if you're talking to them across a mess hall table.

So how do you know who your audience is? Often, the answer asserts itself as you study the problem and its solutions. For example, if you have seen a problem with enlisted promotion policy, you may decide the Army deputy G-1 and the Human Resource Command leadership are your audience. Of course, you want others to read the piece, but here writing abides by the marksmanship principle "aim small, miss small."

What if you don't know who within the great Army bureaucracy can do something about your identified problem? A good place to start is the Army regulation or manual concerning your topic. The first chapter or preface will usually list responsibility holders or proponents for the policy in question. Ask those in your unit who have experience in the institutional Army, as most senior officers do, whether you're on the right track. Their answers will fill in what publications leave out.

Picking your audience empowers you to look forward. Articles that simply mourn past mistakes limit themselves. Articles that anticipate an upcoming decision or opportunity and recommend actions for the audience to take maximize the chance the piece has of making a difference. Pick an audience early and carefully so you can then anticipate your audience's next opportunity to act on your idea. Without knowing your audience, you won't be able to do so.

Targeting an upcoming decision is not always possible, but always consider doing so. Say you want to recommend a change to barracks maintenance policies. If your desired audience will soon testify before a House committee on the topic, framing your article in terms of what your audience should say to the committee representatives is useful. The same could be said for upcoming regulations revisions, acquisition decisions, force structure changes, or even cultural pivots.

Make an Outline

You now have an idea you care about. You have done your homework; you know your audience and have perhaps identified an upcoming decision to target. It is time to map your idea out. Do so by making an outline. Preparing a good outline for an article, like preparing a good route on a map, will make the trip on which you are embarking much easier.

There are many article types, including those that use narratives, lists, dialogue, historical vignettes, or fiction to convey a point. Depending on your argument and style, your piece may call for any of these. For this article's purpose we will consider one of the more common article types one encounters in today's commentary: an argumentative essay, ranging roughly from eight hundred to three thousand words.

A typical structure for an argumentative essay, though not the only one, runs as follows: an introduction that poses the article's central point, a section that provides needed background information, a body that explains the problem in depth, a set of recommendations, a consideration of alternate perspectives, and a conclusion that looks forward.

Start with an outline. An outline sorts the many thoughts in your head into their respective roles, alerts you to gaps in your argument, gives you a roadmap when you get lost in your writing, and ensures your editor finds in your first draft a structure with which he or she can work. A sample outline format is provided in the figure.

Write your outline at the paragraph level. Each paragraph should contain a single thought. The preceding paragraph to this one, for example, concerned the purpose of an outline. This paragraph concerns the nature of your paragraphs. More than one thought per

An Abbreviated Example Outline

Section One: Introduction
- i. Topic sentence for the hook paragraph: A surprising, punchy bid for the reader's attention
- ii. Topic sentence introducing the argument: An urgent statement of the problem and a summarized recommendation

Section Two: Background
- i. Topic sentence that provides an overview of the issue background
- ii. Topic sentence that introduces an additional aspect of the background
  - a. First piece of evidence

Section Three: The Problem
- i. Topic sentence that relates the problem to the background
- ii. Topic sentence concerning an aspect of the problem
  - a. First piece of evidence
  - b. Second piece of evidence
- iii. Topic sentence concerning a second aspect of the problem
  - a. First piece of evidence
  - b. Second piece of evidence

Section Four: How to Fix the Problem
- i. Topic sentence reviewing possible solutions
  - a. Statement of relationship between nature of the problem and solution
- ii. Topic sentence introducing recommendation one
  - a. How it addresses problem characteristic in theory
- iii. Topic sentence connecting recommendation to evidence
  - a. First piece of evidence
- iv. Topic sentence introducing more supporting evidence
  - a. Second piece of evidence
- v. Topic sentence acknowledging an alternate recommendation
  - a. First piece of evidence
  - b. Second piece of evidence
- vi. Topic sentence addressing why you do not forward the alternate recommendation
  - a. Reference your analysis
  - b. Countercitation

Section Five: Alternative Perspectives
- i. Topic sentence acknowledging the existence of alternate explanation of problem, the most prevalent being …
  - a. First piece of evidence
  - b. Second piece of evidence
- ii. Topic sentence that addresses why you do not adopt this explanation
  - a. Reference to your analysis
  - b. Countercitation

Section Six: Conclusion
- i. Topic sentence that restates the problem with fresh language that draws on the argument you have developed since the introduction
- ii. Topic sentence addressing upcoming opportunities to change
  - a. First piece of evidence
  - b. Second piece of evidence
- iii. A closing sentence that reminds the reader of the question's urgency

(Figure by author)

Figure. Example Outline

paragraph makes them too big and big paragraphs kill momentum. So, I'll end this paragraph here.

Include in the outline a first draft of each paragraph's first sentence, often called a topic sentence.

Writing each topic sentence into the outline confirms for you that each paragraph has a single discernible idea. Doing so allows you also to see whether your writing flows. If you read *only* the topic sentences from your outline sequentially and there are no great leaps in thought or topic, you can rest assured your writing will be easy to follow. If your topic sentences jump around or do not flow naturally, they require your attention.

When figuring how to best connect topic sentences, consider the advice of then Capt. Joseph Greene in the July-August 1936 edition of the *Infantry Journal*, who, in his own commendable how-to article, explained continuity this way:

> This is one of the important tricks of writing—hooking thoughts together. It is done in two main ways: by using connecting words and phrases, such as "therefore," "but," "and also," … and several scores others; and by using sentences, phrases or words that reflect back to the old thought or carry forward into the new … Remember, too, that thought should not only flow smoothly from one paragraph to another but from one sentence to another within paragraphs. This does not mean that every sentence must contain a special connective word. That kind of writing, even though it is much easier to read than disconnected composition, is tiresome. It is avoided chiefly by using plenty of short sentences among the longer ones. Witness this four-word sentence.[5]

Write the Article

You have distilled your good idea into an outline aimed at a specific audience. It is time to start writing. Doing so is hard. George Orwell, one of our greatest authorities on writing, famously compared writing a book to "a long bout of some painful illness."[6] But like a lot of hard things in the Army, it is worth doing. So how does one start?

Simply put, start writing, follow the outline, and keep going. You may be unhappy with the words that come out at first. They may jumble, take digressions, repeat themselves or fall flat. Resist the urge to edit them as you first write them. Writing requires momentum, and second-guessing your prose can kill that momentum. Editing is important but follows the first draft.

As you start writing, remember the outline, but you need not adhere to it sequentially. For example, you may write body paragraphs before the introduction or conclusion. You may write a consideration of why you're wrong before you write your recommendations. That said, do not abandon your sections altogether. We'll look at them in sequence now.

The introduction often includes at least two paragraphs. This is because an introduction has two tasks: to grab the reader's attention and to pose the article's main point. One can grab the reader's attention many ways, but a basic principle, like in comedy, is that surprise works. In the second paragraph, you might state the article's main point. If you want to target a particular upcoming decision—say, for example, an upcoming revision of force structure—address that decision in the introduction.

Next is the background section. Consider your article's background broadly. Though you may not need to explain the nature of enlisted promotions to one of your target audience members, like the Army deputy G-1, some of your readers might do with a refresher. Background sections are a good place to refer to other articles on the same topic. These sections also afford you a chance to introduce yourself and note why your voice is useful to the conversation on your chosen topic.

The body of your article is where you develop your argument. If you intend to discuss multiple problems or a multifaceted problem, you may want to divide the body of the article into subsections to help your reader keep track of your argument. Though there is no one right answer, a principle to consider is that your body should be longer than your background and introduction combined.

Give evidence for your argument in the body of your article. You might draw evidence from history, from current events, from academic research, or from other writing. You might also want to invoke your own experience. Be mindful of resting too much of your argument on a single piece of evidence, a single case, or a single anecdote. Doing so weakens the argument by inadvertently suggesting it is only true in certain cases, or worse, not at all.

Once you convey to the readers the nature of the problem with evidence, tell them how to fix it. Recommended solutions don't need to be perfect or complete. Too complete or confident a solution may

invite unproductive nitpicking or distract readers with minutiae. However, specific recommendations separate your piece from a mere complaint and propel the conversation in productive directions.

Consider some alternative perspectives to avoid straw manning, to demonstrate good faith to your readers, and to improve your own argument. Often there are many ways to view a problem and drawbacks to any fix, including your proposed one. Write out the best of these counterarguments as you see them. Then address them with evidence and concede where they point out unresolved issues.

You have arrived at the end. Resist the urge to begin your closing by writing "In conclusion." Instead, remind your reader of the identified problem's urgency, its stakes, upcoming opportunities to change things for the better, and how to do so. If you invoked an image or theme at the outset, consider returning to it. This has the effect of tying a bow for the reader.

As you write, think about the publication in which you intend to submit the article. If the publication has stylistic preferences listed on its submission page, adhere to them. Read several articles the publication has already run that are comparable to yours. Note their typical tone, average paragraph length, use of headers, and topic. Mimic them. Doing so does not sacrifice style but does show a thoughtful deference to the publication that takes your piece on.

Revise

You are not done when you complete your draft. You must revise your work. Set your draft aside, think about something unrelated to it, then return to it. Read the entire piece aloud. Its flaws will instantly strike you, whether they are ones of grammar, of logic, of evidence, or of style. In the time you took away from the piece you may have encountered supporting or discrepant evidence. Make needed changes.

Do not limit the article's revisions to your own. Writing is difficult because by writing, you speak your inner thoughts to others. It is hard to tell where you end and your article draft begins. It would be easier to not write anything at all because when you are silent, it is harder for others to criticize your position. The vulnerability inherent in writing makes it an unexpectedly personal thing. Nonetheless, good writing results from good feedback. Seek it. For advice on how to do so well, see Rebecca Segal's piece included in this publication.[7]

Ask for feedback from those who would know if you were wrong. The fellow soldier who agrees with you whenever you discuss issues over coffee, however good a person, should not be the only one who reads your draft. Seek feedback on your draft from your leadership as well. Leaders may have much to offer your piece, as they have usually been around longer than you and know a thing or two about the context in which your problem developed.

Showing your work to your leaders serves other purposes, too. Your article may alert them to an overlooked problem in their formation. Sharing your draft with your leaders will also spare them a surprise if it is published. This is particularly important if you are presenting controversial recommendations or challenging policies that directly impact your organization.

Some of the feedback you get may be hard to hear; not everyone will love your article. However, if the idea is worth pursuing, then take in the feedback that helps you better craft an argument. At times, this may involve some extensive rewriting. Trent Lythgoe's piece "From Rough Draft to Polished Manuscript: The Power of Rewriting," elsewhere in this compilation, gives great guidance on how to rewrite well.[8]

Seek feedback from your unit public affairs office and security officers as part of a prepublication review. These reviews are intended to prevent unintentional disclosure of controlled information or controversy, both of which are unlikely. The purpose of a prepublication review is not to censor. Submitting your article for a prepublication review is a low-cost way to err on the side of caution. One can learn more about prepublication reviews in Army Regulation 360-1, *The Army Public Affairs Program*, and Army Regulation 385-5, *The Army Information Security Program*.[9]

Submit Your Article

Once you have sought and incorporated feedback and rewritten your piece as needed, you are ready to submit your article. Guidance for how to do so can be found on publication websites, typically under a "submissions guidelines" page. Adhere strictly to these guidelines and submit to one publication at a time. Editors at publications often receive dozens of submissions a week, so afford them patience as they consider yours. John Amble gives sage advice on working with editors elsewhere in this issue.[10]

Submit first to the publication or website most likely to reach your target audience. Publications and websites are born, die, and change, but at the time of this writing, the following generally holds: tactical issues, concerning problems roughly at the brigade level and below, are suited for branch magazines and websites such as From the Green Notebook, which enjoy tactical-level readership. Questions of doctrine or regulation may reach relevant those positioned to change both through publications such as *Military Review* and the Army War College's *Parameters*. Ideas related to high-level policy may require a hearing from Pentagon policymakers and so might be well suited for *Army Times* or the website War on the Rocks. Other platforms cover the gamut, such as the Modern War Institute.

Publications and websites differ on the sorts of articles they want. Some only accept op-eds—short for "opposite the editorial page," a throwback term to when opinion pieces from writers not affiliated with a newspaper's editorial board appeared opposite that paper's editorials in the layout. Some, such as *Military Review*, desire formal citations. Some accept what they call "commentary." If you have a publication in mind, learn that publication's expectations early in the writing process to avoid wasting time on the wrong sort of article.

Publications will often ask for a pitch before you submit your draft. In just a few words, these pitches must state the problem, why it matters, how to fix it, and why your voice is worth listening to. Pitches may seem like a chore. Embrace them instead as a useful exercise. If you struggle to distill your argument to those essential points in the space of a hundred or so words, the clarity of your argument may benefit from iterative process of trying.

Your writing will be rejected at some point. No matter what, keep writing. Recall that the good to be gained from writing is reaped whether you are ever published, as it is in the process of writing that you learn and discipline your thoughts. Only once you are at peace with rejection will you start to write with the confidence to do so well. It's almost but not quite a *Catch-22*, which, by the way, was rejected twenty-two times.[11] ■

An abridged seven-step guide to writing an article can be found in the appendix following this article.

Notes

1. Leyton Summerlin, "Muddy Boots and Powerful Pages: Why We Write," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 22–26.

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3. S. L. A. Marshall, *The Officer as a Leader*, 1st ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Company, April 1966), 79.

4. Richard C. Brown, "General Emory Upton—The Army's Mahan," *Military Affairs* 17, no. 3 (1953): 125–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/1982669.

5. Joseph I. Greene, "Write It Up for the Journal," *Infantry Journal* 43, no. 4 (July-August 1936), https://archive.org/details/sim_infantry-journal_july-august-1936_43_4/page/324/mode/2up.

6. George Orwell, "Why I Write," *Gangrel*, no. 4 (Summer 1946), republished online by the Orwell Foundation, https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/why-i-write/.

7. Rebecca Segal, "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 94–99.

8. Trent Lythgoe, "Rewriting: The Secret to Writing Well," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 51–59.

9. Army Regulation (AR) 360-1, *The Army Public Affairs Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 2020), chap. 7, https://armypubs.army.mil/ProductMaps/PubForm/Details.aspx?PUB_ID=1020482; AR 385-5, *The Army Information Security Program* (Washington, DC: U.S. GPO, 2022), https://armypubs.army.mil/ProductMaps/PubForm/Details.aspx?PUB_ID=1021668.

10. John Amble, "Your Draft Is Done, Now What? Working with an Editor," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 100–5.

11. Sian Cain, "From Animal Farm to Catch-22: The Most Regrettable Rejections in the History of Publishing," *The Guardian* (website), 26 August 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/books/shortcuts/2019/aug/26/animal-farm-catch-22-most-regrettable-rejections-history-publishing.

Appendix. How to Write an Article: An Abridged Seven-Step Guide

Step One	Have an idea worth writing about. To know whether the idea is worth developing, ask of it, • Is this idea useful? • Is there evidence to support this idea? • Is there anything new about this idea—what is your scoop?
Step Two	Pick your audience. To know who your article's audience might be, ask, • Who would care? • Who has the power to act on your recommendations? • Who faces upcoming decisions related to your topic?
Step Three	Write the outline. Do so at the paragraph level. There are many types of articles, but a reliable argumentative format is as follows: • introduction to seize the reader's attention • background information the reader needs • a discussion of the problem that concerns you • your recommended solutions • a consideration of reasons you might be wrong • a conclusion that looks forward
Step Four	Write the article. Your task here is to turn your thoughts into words. Don't edit yourself too much as you do so. Save that for the next step. Otherwise, you'll never get enough out.
Step Five	Revise your writing. • Read your piece aloud to yourself. • Seek feedback from those who know your topic. • Take nothing personally.
Step Six	Submit your writing. • Pick a publication suited to you. • Pitch your piece well and briefly. • Expect rejection.
Step Seven	Keep writing. You will be a better thinker, a better speaker, and a better soldier for it. Good luck.

(Appendix by author)

(Illustration by Reggie Torrez, Army Multimedia and Visual Information Division [OCPA], U.S. Army)

How to Write a Book Review

Lt. Col. Zachary Griffiths, U.S. Army

The Army's journals have featured book reviews since their beginning.[1] Book reviews should describe whether a new book satisfies its thesis and identify who should read the book. On the first point, reviewers should only judge books by what they set out to do. On the second, reviewers should clearly and specifically identify who would find the book interesting or useful.

Book reviews benefit the Army profession and the Army professional. For the profession, reviews provide numerous services. Reviews are a means of screening books of interest for military audiences. Given that more books are published than can possibly be read (or listened to), reviews also provide concise, critical summaries of important books for the busy professional. Unlike a unit reading program in which everyone reads and reflects on a single book or article, unit review programs can cover and critique many books on similar topics, building depth in an area important to a unit.[2] I implemented such a program like this when I

Table 1. Comparison of *Military Review* and *Parameters* Book Review Requirements

Military Review	*Parameters*
Type of book	Type of book
What the book says	Main argument
Authority of the book	Authority of book and sources
Special attractions or deficits	Contribution to the field
Relevance to the security community	Relevance to senior defense leaders

(Table by author)

commanded a company, leading to book reviews published in *Military Review* and *Parameters*.[3]

For the professional, book reviews improve critical thinking skills needed for success at places like the Command Assessment Program.[4] Book reviews are also a straightforward way to jumpstart professional writing.[5] Most military journals are looking for reviewers for new books, so a short email with your qualifications to the editor or book review editor may be all that is necessary to get started.

This how-to guide walks a potential reviewer through the whole process: getting a book, prereading the book, reading the book, and writing the review. Prospective reviewers can apply the approach below to any review, though reviews of fiction may require some adaptation. Throughout this article, I draw examples from Eliot Cohen's *The Hollow Crown*, which I reviewed as I wrote this piece.[6]

Types of Book Reviews

First, it is important to note that there are two main types of book reviews. This piece focuses on the six-hundred- to eight-hundred-word book reviews found traditionally in the back of the Army's journals. These reviews help readers identify and screen books. Alternatively, review essays either take a book as the starting point for a new but related essay or may review several books at once.[7] They are a more advanced and less common form, and not the focus of this article. The Army's journals almost exclusively review new, nonfiction books.[8]

The Army's major outlets describe the key components of a book review with slight variation (see table 1). Whether you are reviewing for *Military Review*, *Parameters*, or the Army's other branch journals, these lists of questions are good guidelines to consider as you review the book.[9]

Reviewing the Book

Reviewing a book requires identifying a book of interest and obtaining an assignment from a journal to review that book. Personal interest is critical! You will spend hours reading, critically analyzing, and writing about this book. Once you have identified the book, reach out to your desired journal's editor or book review editor.

Your pitch to the editor should help them rapidly assess your proposal and determine whether they can obtain a review copy for you. You should also include why you are qualified to review the book. In many cases, serving as an officer or noncommissioned officer in a given field is sufficient. If you have additional expertise—like related education, operational assignments, or previous publications—flag those for the editors in writing or an attached resume to strengthen your case as the right person to review the book. In all, a pitch to an editor might look like this:

> Good morning,
>
> I request to review *The Hollow Crown* by Eliot Cohen.
>
> *The Hollow Crown*, published by Basic Books in the fall of 2023, distills Professor Cohen's class on Shakespeare and power from Johns Hopkins for a national security audience–and would certainly be of interest for Army officers experiencing "court intrigue" in the upper echelons of the interagency. To

this review, I'd bring my experience as a lieutenant colonel in the Army Special Forces, who has worked on high-level "courts" at the National Security Council and in the Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army. I have also attached my resume.

Please let me know if you are interested in a review of *The Hollow Crown*.

Ideally, the editor accepts your proposal and then sends you the book to review.[10] If your proposal is accepted, journals will typically provide you a deadline of about six weeks after receiving the book. While this is often negotiable, plan to rapidly read and review the book.

Prereading the book. Reading a book that you are reviewing differs in intensity and focus from just reading a book, so plan to preread it first. When you receive the book, heft it. Consider it. I found that *The Hollow Crown* comes in an attractive blue book jacket over a medium-length book of 277 pages. The prominent subtitle, "Shakespeare on How Leaders Rise, Rule, and Fall," makes the book's purpose clear.

Next, dive into the front matter. This part of the book may contain title pages, quotes, praise for the book, a page with print and copyright information, a dedication, table of contents, preface, and a foreword by someone other than the author.

The Hollow Crown opens with a "Praise" section inside the front cover. This section reveals that the book is aimed at an audience of national security leaders. The copyright page reveals that the publisher is Basic Books. A quick Google search finds that Basic is a reputable publisher of award-winning and influential books.

Finally, I come to the contents. The contents are admirably well organized into three parts, each with three chapters and an introduction and conclusion starting and ending the book. The section and chapter titles also imply a clear organization. For example, Part I is called "Acquiring Power," and the three chapters are called "Inheriting It," "Acquiring It," and "Seizing It." Pretty clear.

Next, flip each page through to the back of the book. As you come across figures or pictures, take a moment to admire each one. Consider the frequency and how easily you can interpret each figure or table. *The Hollow Crown* has no figures, but the large number of block quotes is obvious, even from a cursory scan.

Once you arrive at the back of the book, consider the acknowledgments, notes, index, and author biography. Cohen's acknowledgments state clearly that this book caps off his career as a national security professional and academic, distilling a half century of studying politics and Shakespeare under great teachers.

Following the acknowledgments, reviewing the book's notes provides a sense of how meticulously the book was researched but can also reveal reliance on a few sources if you find the same source again and again.[11] After the notes, you'll usually come to the index. Based on your personal interests, see whether the index helps you find relevant material. Better indexes are topically organized, while others list proper nouns. If a reader is not generally familiar with the material, the latter are much less helpful.

My cursory scan of *The Hollow Crown*'s eight-page index suggests the book will focus on personal examples of leadership and power. Beyond Shakespearean characters, several famous names jump out with lengthy sections in the index—Adolf Hitler, Winston Churchill, Abraham Lincoln—while names like Queen Elizabeth I and Dwight Eisenhower appear with single line entries. Likewise, concepts like fear, murder, and management also appear in the index. In all, *The Hollow Crown*'s index appears strong as is expected from a well-known publisher.

While you are at the back of the book, review the author's biography. If you have not already, take a moment to understand how this book fits into the author's broader writings. After concluding this study of the book, its front matter, and the back matter, I am primed for *The Hollow Crown* to be a serious book.

But before you jump deep into the book, consider jotting down a few notes. I make marks in colored ink in the book's margins and also write notes inside the back cover. Underlining feels good, but I rarely recall why I underlined something later, and underlines do not jump out as strongly as a short marginal note.

Finally, consider looking at other reviews. The benefits of looking at the reviews of others include understanding

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other perspectives, but they may also anchor or bias your read. However, I sometimes find books that I want to review through different reviews, so other reviews are not always avoidable.

With your preread complete, you are ready to read the book.

Reading the book. Rather than reading directly through from beginning to end, I recommend starting nonfiction books with the first chapter, then reading the last chapter, and then reading the book from the second chapter through to the last. You should also develop an appreciation for how the book's structure will help support the thesis and the conclusions.[12]

> The organizing concept of this book, which informs its structure, is the arc of power—namely, the ways in which it is acquired (by inheritance, struggle, or coup), how it is exercised (inspiration, manipulation, and crime), and how it is lost (arrogance, self-deception, and voluntary relinquishment).

Readers should look for a similarly clear statement of the book's thesis and structure as they read the first chapter. And do not forget this thesis, as it forms the basis for your review. Consider bookmarking the page where you found the thesis for easy reference.

"While the title suggests the book might focus on all of thirty-eight plays, two narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and other poems, he focuses only on the 'better-known tragedies … and the histories' and then further focuses on those 'in which power is a central preoccupation.'"

As you read the introductory chapter, pay special attention to the book's thesis and how the author scopes the work. Ultimately, book reviewers should judge books based on the author's intent. By understanding the intent, you can decide whether the book adequately supports the thesis. The first chapter should also convey why the book was written, identify the research question, define key terms, and situate the book with other books in the same field. These details are all critical to the success of your review.

Cohen effectively delivers this information in *The Hollow Crown*. Cohen provides the thesis eight pages into the first chapter. After teasing the idea of narrative arcs over several pages, Cohen's thesis argues that Shakespeare's most powerful political insights "reveal how leaders evolve, for better or worse, and why easy assumptions about leaders becoming more seasoned and cautious as they age may be wrong."[13] He also describes why he selected the organizing principle seen in the table of contents, which focused on narrative arcs around acquiring power, exercising power, and losing power. Consider this clear statement of structure:

The first chapters should provide other important information necessary to review the book. Early in the introduction, Cohen narrows the possibly wide scope. While the title suggests the book might focus on all of thirty-eight plays, two narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and other poems, he focuses only on the "better-known tragedies … and the histories" and then further focuses on those "in which power is a central preoccupation."[14] He then reminds the reader that the interpretation he presents is influenced by his personal experiences with "people wielding power in government" and other places.[15] Finally, in terms of intended readership, Cohen clearly states that he "assumes no deep familiarity with Shakespeare's plays" and aims the book at those seeking to understand politics, especially the "court" politics present near those who wield power.[16]

Taken together, these details should strongly inform your review. The thesis is vital to answering the first question of a book review: Does the book accomplish what it intended to? Likewise, the careful scoping of the subject material and his influence on the interpretation form potential assessment measures for the book. This material will also inform your answer to the big second question: Who should read

the book? Reviewers should assess whether the author effectively reaches the intended audience, and how that intended audience aligns with the readers of your target outlet. Armed with these details, flip immediately to the last chapter.

In the concluding chapter, expect authors to restate the thesis and briefly review the principal points from the book. More scholarly works will point out remaining open questions for scholars and make recommendations for action. Understanding these points early in your reviewing process can help identify any mismatches between the expectations set out in the first chapter and the conclusions in the last while also scaffolding your read of the book.

Having preread the book and then closely studied the introduction and conclusion, the reviewer should again jot down notes in the margins or at the back of the book. Write out the thesis as you understand it. Make note of any discrepancies or apparent evolution in the author's thinking so that you may refer to key passages as you read the book. With your notes complete, read the book.

As you read the rest of the book, take notes of points of clarification, areas of strength, or questions that arise. For example, alongside a paragraph on how *The Hollow Crown* is a product of a course at Johns Hopkins, I note "course → book" in the margin, simply explaining what is in that important paragraph for easy reference later. Keeping the thesis in mind as you read will help you identify points for your critique. Make margin notes or endnotes as you come across passages that reinforce or contradict the author's main points for reference as you write your review.

Writing the Review

Standard book reviews are formulaic. They must start with an engaging hook, provide an argument about the book's quality, contain a summary, critique the book's strengths and weaknesses, and then conclude with a restatement of an opinion on the book and who should read the book.

To start my review, I draft an outline with the headings in table 2 and fill it in from the notes I left in the back of the book and my memory. I then progressively flush out each section until satisfied with the prose, combine them into a cohesive whole, and edit.

There are two imperatives for the book review: they must be concise and entertaining. At under eight hundred words, book reviews are not exhaustive treatments of books. The reviewer must touch on the key points and include brief illustrative examples. To entertain, book reviews are appropriate times to pull out all your tricks: alliteration, metaphor or simile, varied sentence structure for dramatic effect, and the rest. As book review readers are likely to skim the work, entertaining prose and clear, concise topic sentences are especially important.

Table 2. Generic Book Review Structure

Hook
Introduction
Main argument
Summary
Strengths
Critiques
Conclusion and reader recommendation

(Table by author)

The hook. In selecting this book, I hoped that *The Hollow Crown* would help me understand my experiences at the National Security Council. It did. And my time there offers a suitable hook that also gently introduces the book's focus on how leaders acquire power, exercise power, and lose power: "Although I was familiar with court intrigue, I was not prepared for the National Security Council's intrigue."[17]

In this hook, an opening short paragraph aims to capture the reader's eye while the initial clause invites the reader to question whether they have felt court intrigue in their careers.

The introduction. The next paragraph provides examples of the dynamics that Cohen discusses in *The Hollow Crown*, while the final paragraph of the introduction makes a case for why this book could be helpful for national security leaders today. By the end of this introduction, readers remaining with the review are ready for more.

> One might enter as an editor in the Executive Secretariat and then leap into a role as a senior adviser for a deputy national security

adviser. Others held court in deputies' or principals' meetings for many years, deftly staying above the fray. Still others fell, finding knives in their backs as other strivers seized their spots. While this court intrigue is tame compared to the murder and magic of William Shakespeare's plays, Professor Eliot Cohen shows how much we can learn from the Bard. Indeed, one need not squint hard to see that courts continue to run most human organizations today.[18]

of the book and the book's contribution to the field. The paragraphs below summarize the book and provides illustrative examples of the ways that Cohen integrates Shakespeare into his book. Given the eight-hundred-word limit, devoting 122 words to summary is appropriate.

Readers will become familiar with the book's rhythm. In each chapter, Cohen first defines the chapter's subject, provides motivating modern examples, pivots to illustrative lessons from Shakespeare, and concludes by applying

The Hollow Crown effectively explores Shakespeare's political insights into how leaders evolve. While never explicitly stated, Cohen draws on Shakespearean examples to advocate for an ideal arc.

The main argument. The next section should introduce the book, state the thesis, and provide a judgment on whether the book satisfies the thesis. Drawing from the thesis at the beginning of the book and the slightly evolved thesis in the final chapter, the first sentence of this section includes the book's name, a judgment ("effectively"), and a statement of the thesis. I then describe my interpretation of the book's core message: how Cohen believes leaders should rise, rule, and exit.

The Hollow Crown effectively explores Shakespeare's political insights into how leaders evolve. While never explicitly stated, Cohen draws on Shakespearean examples to advocate for an ideal arc. Leaders should acquire power legitimately or seize power when a ruler is weak. They should rule through inspiration and manipulation (with only the occasional murder). Then, rulers should depart the stage in their prime. Cohen explores this arc through an expertly organized book divided into parts on acquiring, exercising, and losing power, subdivided into three appropriately named chapters.[19]

The summary. Reviewers will sometimes lose their way in the summary section, preferring the comfort of summarizing the book to the critique. In this section, I touch on *Parameters*' questions about the authority

the lessons to recent cases. In the chapter on murder, Cohen explains that murder might literally mean killing others (see Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin, for example), or less literally, the unexpected departure of senior executives to new and undefined opportunities elsewhere. Examples from Henry VI, Richard III, and Macbeth show the early benefits and ultimate risks of ruling through murder, which Cohen effectively compares to the individual rises of Adolf Hitler and Xi Jinping. This effective structure allows chapters to stand on their own while remaining part of a cohesive whole.[20]

This next paragraph helps answer a likely question for any potential reader: How well do I need to know Shakespeare to enjoy this book? It also reveals my limited authority for judging his inclusion of Shakespeare, while clarifying that those less familiar with Shakespeare could benefit from reading the book.

A deep appreciation for Shakespeare's works is not required to enjoy the book. Readers familiar with Shakespeare will enjoy how *The Hollow Crown* integrates and explains his plays related to power. Readers like me, with a passing familiarity from plebe English and high school, will find much to appreciate—and

might also find themselves inspired to reread *Macbeth* or *Henry VI*.[21]

Finally, this paragraph situates *The Hollow Crown* in the existing literature. When situating a book, consider the journal's audience. While not all of *Parameters*' readers will have read *Master of the Senate*, Robert Caro's tome is famous enough that most will be familiar with it. I am especially fond of *On Leadership*, so I included that positivist view on leadership, while nearly all *Parameters* readers will be familiar with *A Message to Garcia*'s messages of diligence and honesty.

> *The Hollow Crown* occupies an unusual literary space but would rest easily on a bookshelf alongside biographies and excellent leadership texts. Its most direct parallel is likely *Lincoln and Shakespeare* by Michael Anderegg (University Press of Kansas, 2015). Readers will find much in common, however, with books like Robert A. Caro's *Master of the Senate* (Knopf, 2002), which explores Lyndon B. Johnson's manipulative leadership style. *The Hollow Crown* also offers a more cynical counterpoint to more affirmative leadership books like John W. Gardner's *On Leadership* (Free Press, 1990) or Elbert Hubbard's classic 1899 essay, "A Message to Garcia."[22]

The strengths. A review must also touch honestly on a book's strengths and weaknesses. To signal the skimming reader a transition to the *book*'s strengths, I started this section with "At its best" and then offered a broad topic sentence that covers the two examples of strengths that follow. In the subsequent paragraph, I signal that I am touching on another strength with the words "also" and "delight."

> At its best, *The Hollow Crown* helps readers see common challenges in new ways. Cohen deliberately tackles a common belief that leaders improve with time. Through the examples of *Henry VI* and *Macbeth*, he shows that isolation, arrogance, and poor selection of subordinates can undermine initially savvy leaders. Also relevant to military readers, Cohen expertly explores perceptions of strength and weakness in *Richard III* in his chapter on murder. Richard most admires those willing to murder on his behalf, as these hard men mirror his lack of sentimentality. His reliance on these hard men, however, is his undoing, leaving Richard unhorsed and dead on the battlefield. Leaders today would do well to abide by these lessons.
>
> Cohen's prose is also a delight. Lines like "Kings who wish they were carefree shepherds often end up as slaughtered sheep" and "Leaders who are lions, however, do not have to tell their underlings that is what they are" demonstrate Cohen's inspiration from Shakespeare's excellent writing (188, 194).[23]

The critique. *The Hollow Crown* is a strong book that largely delivers. One area where I felt slightly deceived is the early emphasis on court intrigue that is largely absent throughout the book. As an officer working on a general's personal staff, likely to come across more courts in the future, I would benefit from greater instruction from Shakespeare on how to do this well, so I made this point in my brief critique.

> Despite the book's strengths, most readers will see themselves as courtiers instead of kings, and *The Hollow Crown* focuses more on these "kings," despite Cohen's claim that "courts are the central point in the vortex of power" (23). Short sections on court politics and evaluating subordinates are helpful but insufficient for those courtiers on the sidelines.[24]

The conclusion and reader recommendation. Book reviews should conclude with a restatement of your argument on whether the book satisfies its thesis and a recommendation on who should read the book. The restatement of my argument reminds readers of the initial hook in the National Security Council and connects that thesis to potential readers. I then provide a few specific thoughts on who would benefit from reading this book. I deliberately conclude on the ambitious, to whom Cohen has provided *The Hollow Crown* as more of a warning than a blueprint.

> Eliot Cohen's *The Hollow Crown* gave me insight into the rise, rule, and fall of members of the National Security Council, and it will help readers understand power, leadership, and the dynamics of courts. Scholars' programs at the Command and General Staff College and US Army War College would benefit from the unique perspective of this book. Others who would benefit from this book's insights include readers preparing to serve on a high-level

personal staff, those soldiers with a literary bent, or the ambitious among us.[25]

Once complete, send the review off to the journal's editor.[26] Book reviews should thoughtfully review a book but are not the last word. Reviewers should not stress too much but rather write reviews that adequately represent the book, provide thoughtful critiques, and screen the book for other busy professionals.

Conclusion

Individuals, units, and the Army profession all benefit from robust book review sections in the Army's journals. Reviewers benefit through improved critical thinking, developing expertise, and obtaining books. Readers benefit from reviews that help them screen books or from the summaries they provide. Units benefit from reviewing programs that build expertise through critical reading and writing—or from reviews that help them find books of interest. Finally, the profession benefits when more leaders can think and write critically, screen books quickly, or review the high points of books they cannot find time to read.

Book reviews are good for the profession and good for the author. Follow these simple instructions and publish one soon. ■

Notes

1. Alison Moulds and Beth Gaskell, "Crafting the Professional Reader: Book Reviews in the Military and Medical Press," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 55, no. 2 (June 2022): 217–36, https://doi.org/10.1353/vpr.2022.0014.

2. Joe Byerly, "How to Develop a Unit Reading Program," From the Green Notebook, 14 September 2020, https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2020/09/14/how-to-develop-a-unit-reading-program/.

3. Lee Namy, review of *The Politics of War Powers: The Theory and History of Presidential Unilateralism*, by Sarah Burns, *Military Review* (website), 3 April 2020, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/MR-Book-Reviews/April-2020/Book-Review-002/; Jacob Shelton, review of *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West*, by Giles Kier, *Parameters* 51, no. 2 (18 May 2021), https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.3073.

4. Everett Spain, "Reinventing the Leader Selection Process," *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 2020, https://hbr.org/2020/11/reinventing-the-leader-selection-process.

5. Jay Ireland and Ryan Van Wie, "Aligning Incentives: Professional Writing in the Army's Operational Domain," *Military Review* Online Exclusive, 9 February 2024, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2024-ole/aligning-incentives/.

6. Eliot A. Cohen, *The Hollow Crown: Shakespeare on How Leaders Rise, Rule, and Fall* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/eliot-a-cohen/the-hollow-crown/9781541644861/?lens=basic-books.

7. See Douglas Lute and Jordan Becker, review of *America's Great-Power Opportunity: Revitalizing U.S. Foreign Policy to Meet the Challenges of Strategic Competition*, by Ali Wyne, *Military Review* 103, no. 1 (January-February 2023): 143–47; Zachary Griffiths, "Waugh We Fight," War on the Rocks, 10 November 2023, https://warontherocks.com/2023/11/waugh-we-fight/. Outlets like *Foreign Affairs* often publish review essays that review multiple books on a single theme. For more discussion of types of reviews, see Adam Garfinkle, "The Review," in *Political Writing: A Guide to the Essentials*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 87–99.

8. Thomas Bruscino, "Dusting Off the Dusty Shelves," *Dusty Shelves* (blog), War Room, 20 September 2019, https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/special-series/dusty-shelves/dusting-off/.

9. Military Review Staff, "Book Review Submission Guide," Army University Press, accessed 8 April 2024, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/MR-Book-Review-Submission-Guide/; Parameters Staff, "Book Review Guidelines," U.S. Army War College, accessed 8 April 2024, https://media.defense.gov/2023/Apr/13/2003199232/-1/-1/1/PARAMETERS_BOOKREVIEWER-GUIDELINES_20230306.PDF.

10. The least preferred method is to write a review and then shop around the completed review. While this may work, many outlets do not take unsolicited reviews. Obtaining an assignment from an editor is the best way.

11. You might also find these as listed citations, bibliography, or other names.

12. Some readers may wonder about whether they can review a book by listening to it. I find it harder to focus on and flag particular issues when I listen to books and, therefore, recommend a hard copy for reviewing, though digital copies present the advantages of search and digital tagging.

13. "William Shakespeare Biography," Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, accessed 8 April 2024, https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/william-shakespeare/william-shakespeare-biography/; Cohen, *The Hollow Crown*, 8.

14. Cohen, *The Hollow Crown*, 9.

15. Ibid., 8.

16. Ibid., 248–9.

17. Zachary Griffiths, review of *The Hollow Crown: Shakespeare on How Leaders Rise, Rule, and Fall*, by Eliot A. Cohen, *Parameters* 54, no. 2 (Summer 2024): 169, https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol54/iss2/15.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 170.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 170–71.

26. Ibid., 169–71.

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
Maj. Gordon Richmond, U.S. Army

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, 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

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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 and jargon. Liz Rathbun, the managing editor of the Association of the U.S. Army's *Army Magazine*, explains that they are "a magazine that welcomes all readers" and "can be understood by everyone. That means no jargon, few if any acronyms, clear sentences, as well as short sentences and paragraphs."[6] Regardless of a student's interest in publication, they would do well to avoid some of these communication issues in writing for PME.

Liz Rathbun, the managing editor of the Association of the U.S. Army's *Army Magazine*, explains that they are 'a magazine that welcomes all readers' and 'can be understood by everyone. That means no jargon, few if any acronyms, clear sentences, as well as short sentences and paragraphs.'

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.

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 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 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 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 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 author reformatted the research, adjusted the language, and attempted to incorporate a 'hook' to draw in readers to the meat of the argument."

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.

Rewriting

The Secret to Writing Well

Trent J. Lythgoe, PhD

You've come up with a great idea, done the research, and drafted an article. Well done! You've made it farther than most. Many people think about writing for publication, but few find the courage to start typing or the tenacity to keep at it until a draft emerges.

Still, important work remains. The article you have now is a rough draft—emphasis on *rough*. To smooth it out, you must rewrite it. Rewriting is the work writers do after the first draft. It includes revising to improve the draft's substance and structure, editing to make it clear, and proofreading to make it correct.

This article is a guide to the rewriting process: revising, editing, and proofreading. This process will strengthen and clarify your writing. It will transform your article from a rough draft to a polished manuscript—something that editors will want to publish, and people will want to read. Although rewriting is a lot of work, it's worth it.

Why Rewrite?

Admitting that your draft needs rewriting can be discouraging. After all, you worked hard to write it, wrestling your thoughts onto page after page until triumphantly placing that final period (Take *that*, world). At this point, it's tempting to run a spell check, fix the typos, and hit send.

Don't.

Despite your best efforts, the chances are nearly 100 percent that your draft is terrible.[1] But don't despair—this doesn't mean you're a bad writer. All first drafts are terrible. *All of them*. My first draft of this article was awful (ask the editor). So was the first draft of that splendid article you read recently. And that brilliant writer whose work you admire? Their first drafts are dreadful, too. But here's the key: Good writers rewrite terrible first drafts until they're not so terrible. Poor writers don't.

Rewriting is the secret to writing well.[2] It's what separates good articles from those that might have been good—if only the author had expressed their high-quality thinking using high-quality writing. Rewriting is where the battle is won or lost.

So don't be discouraged. Writing a terrible first draft is a normal, necessary step in the writing process. After all, you cannot harness the power of rewriting until you have a draft to rewrite.

The Reader

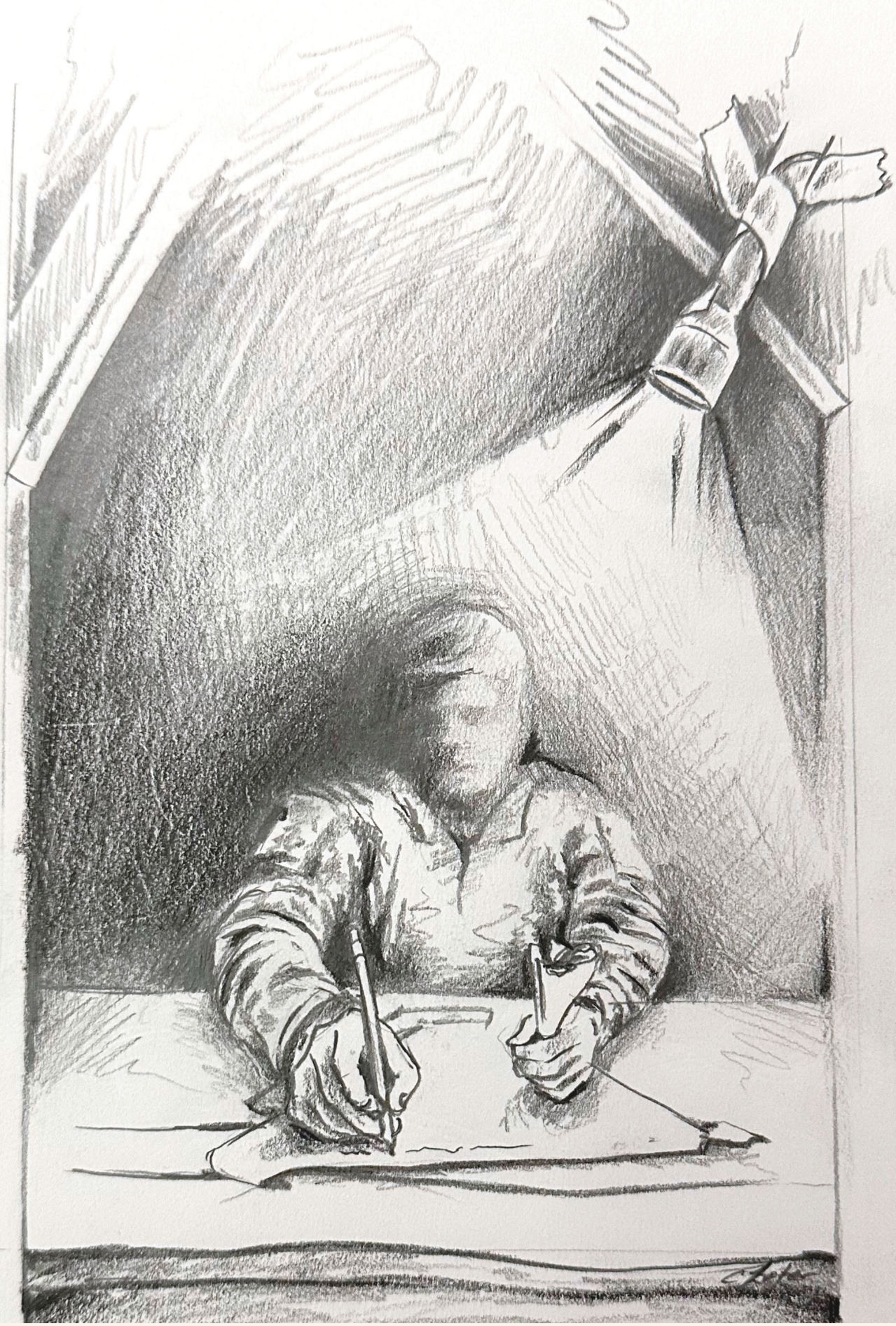
Effective rewriting requires you to see your writing as a reader instead of a writer. Up to this point, you've been thinking like a writer—sorting out what you want to say and putting it into words. Now, however, you must think like a reader. You've said something, but have you said it clearly and convincingly? That's up to the reader to judge.

And the reader is a brutal judge. The reader doesn't know or care how hard you worked or what you intend to say. All that matters is if they understand what you've written and find it compelling. If they don't, it's almost always your fault.

How can you satisfy this unforgiving creature, the reader? By critiquing your work as the reader will—coldly, objectively, and ruthlessly. When you find your writing isn't compelling or logical or clear (and you will), you must rewrite it, again and again, until it is so compelling, logical, and clear that the reader cannot ignore or misunderstand it.

Revision

The first rewriting task is revision, which improves the article's big parts. The goal is to clarify the article's



(Illustration by Sgt. 1st Class Curtis Loter, Army Multimedia and Visual Information Division [OCPA], U.S. Army)

main point (thesis) and align everything else—every page, passage, and paragraph—to support it. Don't worry about the small parts, like sentences, words, and punctuation. Save them for later. Fixing them now will only slow the revising. Besides, as I'll discuss below, you'll likely have to cut some parts of the draft. Time spent editing parts that you later abandon is time wasted. Focus on the big stuff.

Before revising a draft, rest it by putting it away for a few days or a week. The first draft will seem strong when it's fresh. But after some time away, you'll see its flaws clearly. Resting will help you be objective.

Start revising by finding the article's main point, the thesis. It should be stated clearly in the introduction and in one or two sentences (the *thesis statement*). Read that last sentence again. *State the main point early and clearly*. Don't make the reader hunt for it or guess.

Once the main point is clear, align everything else to support it. This involves four tasks: strengthening arguments, murdering your darlings, improving structure, and refining paragraphs.

Strengthening arguments. Revising a draft often reveals weak ideas. Arguments that seemed strong in the first draft now seem fragile. Strengthening them will require more research and drafting. This can feel like taking two steps back. But rest assured, all is as it should be. You are using your writing to clarify your thinking.

Writing is not the output of thinking. Writing *is* thinking. Inexperienced writers often imagine that thinking comes before writing. However, writing and thinking happen at the same time. Drafting helps writers discover what they have to say; revising helps them sharpen and strengthen it.

Murder your darlings. The second revision task is cutting needless passages. Revising often reveals passages that don't support the main idea. Cut them, or as English novelist Arthur Quiller-Couch said, "Murder your darlings."[3] Dramatic? Sure. But the point is that writers tend to fall in love with writing that they worked hard to draft. Cutting it can be painful. Nevertheless, you must be ruthless. If a passage, paragraph, or page does not advance the main point, kill it.

Improve structure. A well-structured article presents ideas in an order that makes sense to the reader.[4] A history article, for example, might use a chronological structure by discussing events in the order they happened. A problem-solving article might use a problem-solution structure, as shown in figure 1. Other writing structures include evaluation (discussing pros, then cons), comparison (examining what's the same, then what's different), and causal (discussing causes, then effects). The list goes on.

The problem
Why the problem is important
The solution
How the solution solves the problem

(Figure by author)

Figure 1. Problem-Solution Structure

Articles may combine multiple structures. For example, in this publication's article on book reviews, Zach Griffiths combines analytical and evaluative structures (see figure 2).[5]

He first analyzes the book's main argument and then evaluates its pros and cons. The order makes sense. It would make less sense to critique the book's main argument before summarizing it. A logical structure makes the article easy to understand.

Refining paragraphs. Writing effective paragraphs is vital, and it's where many new writers struggle. Each paragraph should discuss one (and only one) idea. Revising paragraphs involves finding each paragraph's main idea, stating it clearly, and ensuring that the rest of the paragraph's sentences develop the idea.

Although paragraphing should be simple (one paragraph = one idea), bad paragraph advice is nevertheless easy to find—usually in the form of ridiculous rules: A paragraph is between 120 and 150 words long, or three to five sentences, or six to eight sentences, or one inch deep on the page.

Nonsense.

A paragraph is a unit of *thought*, not of

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Hook
Introduction
Main argument
Summary
Strengths
Critiques
Conclusion and reader recommendation

(Figure by Lt. Col. Zachary Griffiths, U.S. Army)

Figure 2. Combined Analytical and Evaluative Structures

sentences or words or inches. Each paragraph is as long or short as necessary to develop one (and only one) idea. Most paragraphs develop an idea using a series of related sentences. But they can also be one sentence—like the next paragraph—or even one word—like the last one.

Although most paragraph "rules" aren't worth following, here are three paragraph guidelines (not rules) that work well most of the time.

First, state each paragraph's main idea in the first sentence. Writers often bury the main idea, or worse, don't state it at all. Find the sentence that states the main idea and move it to the beginning of the paragraph. If no sentence states the main idea, write one.

Second, organize the rest of the paragraph around the main idea. The first sentence states the main idea—the rest of the sentences develop it. When you find a sentence that doesn't, move it or cut it.

Third, short paragraphs are better than long ones. If a complex idea requires a lengthy explanation, divide it into chunks and discuss one chunk per paragraph. The breaks between chunks will allow the reader to pause and process one chunk before moving to the next one.

Revision is done when you're satisfied with the strength of your ideas, the order in which you've presented them, and the paragraphs you've built to communicate them. It's time to edit.

Editing

Extant methodologies for the employment of editing techniques are collectively seen as the systematic clarification and expurgation of the prose such that the reader's subjective, constructed interpretation of the meaning of the text is, to the highest degree possible, congruent with the writer's intentions.

Aren't you impressed with that paragraph? Surely, I've convinced you that editing is important, not to mention showing off my astounding command of the language. I'll bet you had to stop reading and look up "expurgation." Look how smart I am!

In truth, I doubt you're astounded, convinced, or impressed. More likely, you're dumbfounded, annoyed, and depressed. Things between us were fine until I dropped that pompous drivel on the page. I'll try again:

> Editing is about making your writing *clear* so it's easy to read and understand.

You'll forgive me for making you read that bit of torturous text, but I had a reason: to show how this article might have been vastly different if I had made different writerly choices.

Writing well means making good choices. Because English is infinitely flexible, writers can choose to express the same idea in countless ways:

> Observe attentively the effection of the rapid perambulation of a ternary cohort of visually impaired *Apodemus sylvatici*.
>
> Behold, a trio of gentle souls cloaked in eternal twilight. Guided by nature's unseen hand, they dart gracefully across the sun-dappled meadow.
>
> Three blind mice. See how they run.

Same ideas—different choices.

Editing is the process of reconsidering choices. It focuses on the article's small parts—words and sentences. As you drafted, you chose to use this word or that one, to write a sentence this way or that way, to put this sentence after that one. Editing is the time to revisit these choices, making sure they are good ones, and if not, to make better ones.

One Rule: Always Be Clear

What makes a writing choice better or worse? In professional writing, the best choice is the one that makes the writing *clear*—easy to read and understand. Clear writing is simple, concrete, and uncluttered.

Importantly, simply following English grammar rules will *not* produce clear writing. To be sure, good grammar is important. However, as the last section

shows, grammatically correct pompous drivel is still pompous drivel. Clear writing is a choice, not a checklist.

That said, there is one rule that you can count on in professional writing—one that I never break if I can help it: *Always be clear (ABC)*. In the professional world, clear writing is always best.

This claim may seem brash. Isn't writing an art? Isn't what's "best" a matter of opinion? Sure—if we were talking about literature. But we aren't. We're talking about *professional* writing.

Professionals aren't reading your article for fun. They're reading it because it's professionally valuable. They want useful information, not entertainment. Professionals are also busy. They can't afford to waste time hacking through a jungle of convoluted writing.

Unfortunately, writing is rarely born with the clarity professional readers expect. That last paragraph, for example, was born as two longer paragraphs. Figure 3 shows how I edited them.

Most passages are born like the one in figure 3—dense and cluttered. Clearing them up requires meticulous editing. Here's how to do it.

Start with Subjects and Verbs

Clear writing starts with subjects and verbs. A basic sentence describes a subject doing something to an object: *Smith helped Jones; The tank crushed the fence; I see you*. Subjects, verbs, and objects form the core of English sentences, often appearing in that order: subject-verb-object (SVO).

The SVO sentence is a powerful writing tool because it's what readers expect.[6] Kids as young as twenty-four months old string together subject-verb sentences (*Baby drink*). They add objects soon after (*Baby drink juice*). Our sentences become more complex as we grow, but subconsciously, we still expect them to start with subjects and verbs.

Consider, for example, this passage from a recent Army white paper (I've underlined the main subjects and verbs):

> The Army must solve its recruiting challenges to successfully transform for the future. Building on successful initiatives like the Soldier Referral Program and the Future Soldier Prep Course, which has brought more than 14,000 new soldiers into the Army since its inception in the summer of 2022, the Army is now making more fundamental changes to its recruiting approach.[7]

The first sentence works well because it's what we expect—the subject (the Army) and verb (solve) at the beginning. The second sentence, however, makes us wander through thirty-four words before telling us who (the Army) is doing what (making changes). The delayed subject and verb require the reader to hold thirty-four words of information in their mind before figuring out why that information is relevant. As a result, the sentence is mentally taxing and hard to read.

Of course, not every sentence can or should be a simple SVO sentence. But even in longer sentences, getting to the subject and verb quickly makes things clearer. For example,

> The Army must solve its recruiting challenges to successfully transform for the future. *Consequently*, the Army is fundamentally changing its recruiting approach.

Moving the subject (Army) and verb (changing) to the beginning of the second sentence and adding the signal word *consequently* make the passage clearer.

Use Concrete Language

Concrete language is another way to make writing clear. Concrete language is words and sentences that readers can easily imagine. The opposite is abstract language, which is hard for readers to imagine. Compare, for example, these two sentences:

> A reduction in program expenditures is being implemented because of the challenges arising from recent resource reductions.
>
> The Army is cutting program costs due to recent budget cuts.

The second is more concrete because it replaces vague words like "resources" and "reductions" with concrete ones like "cut" and "costs." It's also built around an SVO sentence: *The Army* (subject) *is cutting* (verb) *program costs* (object).

Concrete language is effective because it activates the reader's visual brain. Humans, like other primates, are visual animals.[8] We have evolved to use visual cues for everything from basic survival, like finding food and selecting a mate, to complex social behaviors. A large part of our brain is dedicated to processing visual information.

BEFORE

Professionals ~~readers~~ aren't reading your article for ~~pleasure~~ fun ~~on their beach vacation in their free time~~. They're reading it because it's professionally *valuable*. They want ~~you to give them~~ useful information, not ~~to entertain~~ entertainment. ~~They Want your article to inform, educate, or persuade them~~.

~~However, valuable writing isn't enought–your writing must also be easy to read and understand~~. Professionals ~~readers~~ are also busy. ~~Although they want useful information~~, they can't afford to waste time hacking ~~their way~~ through a jungle of convoluted writing ~~to get it~~.

AFTER

Professionals aren't reading your article for fun. They're reading it because it's professionally valuable. They want useful information, not entertainment. Professionals are also busy. They can't afford to waste time hacking through a jungle of convolated writing.

(Figure by author)

Figure 3. Example of Editing

When we read, our visual brain tries to build a mental picture of the writing—like turning a script into a movie.[9] Concrete language makes this mental movie easier to create. Unsurprisingly, studies show that humans process concrete language more efficiently than abstract language.[10]

As you saw in the example above, using subjects and verbs is one way to make writing concrete. Our brain is primed to notice people and things (subjects) doing stuff (verbs) in the world around us. The closer the writing is to this visual world, the easier it is for the reader's brain to process.

Another way to make writing concrete is by using specific rather than vague words. For example, instead of *addressing* a problem, *fix*, *solve*, or *correct* it. Instead of writing that something impacts the organization, state that it *improves* or *damages* it. Instead of,

> Our organization is conducting an evaluation of the potential for the allocation of additional resources,

try

> We're asking headquarters for more money.

Replace abstract words with concrete ones whenever possible.

The abstract sentence in that last paragraph is a good example of the bureaucratic writing style military writers often use but shouldn't. Bureaucratic writing, like its namesake, is dense and confusing. People imagine that bureaucratic language sounds educated, credible, and official. It doesn't.

Compare, for example, these two passages—the first from a Department of Defense report on hazing, and the second from U.S. Navy Capt. Chris "Chowdah" Hill's command philosophy:

> Hazing violates a Service member's basic human dignity, jeopardizes combat readiness and mission accomplishment, weakens trust within the ranks, and erodes unit cohesion. Any incident of hazing is an affront to the Department's values. DoD remains steadfast in its commitment to continuously evaluate its policies and procedures to prevent, detect, deter, appropriately address, and ultimately eliminate hazing across the Armed Forces.[11]

> Hazing is stupid, degrading and a colossal waste of time. Just like bullying, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, hazing does not create an environment where we love or value the Sailor. It does not give mission and purpose to Sailors.[12]

Hill's simple, concrete passage is shorter, clearer, and far more powerful.

Lastly, use caution with figurative language like analogies and metaphors. Figurative language brings concrete images to the reader's mind that may or may not be helpful.

Well-placed figurative language can help readers understand a complex or abstract concept. Earlier in this section, for example, I used the analogy of a mental movie to describe how our visual brain processes writing.

However, figurative language can confuse rather than clarify when it brings irrelevant images to the reader's mind. The worst offenders are clichés—avoid them. Ditch "think outside the box," "grab low-hanging fruit," and "run it up the flagpole." Likewise, dump tired sports clichés, like "blocking and tackling," "stepping up to the plate," and "getting a ballpark figure." These irrelevant images make it hard for the reader to focus on what matters.

Use Active Voice

You probably know that Army writing uses active voice sentences. This is good advice. Active voice sentences are usually short and clear, while passive voice sentences can be wordy and vague. Active voice sentences follow the SVO sentence pattern discussed earlier:

> Private Jones mopped the floor.

In contrast, passive voice sentences begin with the object and end with or omit the subject:

> The floor was mopped by Private Jones.
>
> The floor was mopped.

The active voice sentence is shorter than the second and more concrete than the third.

Of course, using passive voice isn't always wrong. In fact, it's the better choice when the actor is unknown or unimportant, when the writer wishes to shift the sentence's emphasis, or when stating a general truth.[13]

Nevertheless, military writers often overuse passive voice, resulting in wordy, vague writing:

> The physical locality of regions will be further defined in order to assist the SRAO's with their rotation plans. Regions will receive a list of all of their positions that may be used for rotational purposes. Also, a list of organizations that are exempt from the regionalization program will be provided to each region.
>
> Quarterly updates via VTC are being implemented in order to offer regions a forum in which they will receive updated information, provide their lessons learned, and receive assistance with their issues and concerns.
>
> Metrics are being developed to help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the regionalization program. The results of this new requirement will be reported bi-annually by each region, and will be used to further develop and improve the process.[14]

When misused or overused, passive voice clutters the writing and confuses the reader about who is doing what to whom. Although passive voice sentences have their place, most of the time, active voice is best.

Declutter

Speaking of clutter—cut it. Clutter is extra sentences and words that aren't needed to convey the message. It's the smaller sibling of unmurdered darlings. Neither do useful work.[15] Cut them.

Military writing is notoriously cluttered, as in this example from U.S. Army doctrine:

> A relief in place is an operation in which, by direction of higher authority, all or part of a unit is replaced in an area by the incoming unit and the responsibilities of the replaced elements for the mission and the assigned zone of operations are transferred to the incoming unit.[16]

That's fifty-one words to say, "A relief in place is when one unit replaces another one." We could even leave in a few specifics: "A relief in place is when one unit takes over another one's mission and area." Still, the sentence is half the length of the original.

Cutting clutter starts with removing needless words. Every word in your article should be necessary to communicate your ideas. But if you look, you'll find that many aren't. For example, the extra words in everyday phrases:

> It's ~~entirely~~ possible that he ~~fully~~ intends to ~~freely~~ admit his mistake.

Or unnecessary hedging and throat clearing:

> ~~I believe it is important to understand that~~ Army units need good leaders.

Or needless adjectives and adverbs:

> ~~Extremely~~ effective artillery ~~totally~~ destroyed the attackers but left the defenders ~~very~~ low on ammunition.

No matter the type, fix all clutter the same way: cut it.

If you're unsure if something is content or clutter, try the "useful work" test.[17] Rewrite the passage without the word or phrase in question. If you can remove it without losing or changing the passage's meaning, what you removed wasn't doing useful work. Cut it.

Simplify

Simple writing uses common words in short, direct sentences. For example, we could simplify this passage from a recent Army white paper:

> Following extensive consultations with Congress, Army leaders are moving forward with a significant force structure transformation.[18]

Simplifying writing makes it clearer:

> After consulting Congress, the Army is changing its force structure.

Many writers mistakenly believe that big words and complex sentences make writing more credible. But the opposite is true. Simple language is *more* credible than complex language because readers can understand it. Not only can complicated writing confuse readers, but it may also cause them to suspect the writer is using fancy language to hide weak ideas.

Simplicity begins with simple words. Don't use long words when short ones will do:

> We need ~~assistance~~ help because we don't have ~~sufficient~~ enough ~~personnel~~ people.

Simplicity applies to phrases as well. Watch for prepositions and prepositional phrases. They're easy to overuse and can often be simplified:

> Her evaluation report ~~was a reflection of~~ reflected her performance.
>
> ~~It is advisable to~~ Proceed ~~with caution~~ cautiously.

Watch also for nominalizations—especially verbs changed into nouns. Professor Helen Sword calls them "zombie nouns" because nominalizing verbs sucks the liveliness out of them.[19] Lifeless zombie nouns require another verb to make them go, resulting in needlessly wordy writing. For example:

> Trainers conducted an evaluation of the unit, held a meeting with unit leaders, and gave a presentation of the results.

The zombie nouns *evaluation, meeting,* and *presentation* require the writer to add *conducted, held,* and *gave.* Here's a rewrite:

> Trainers evaluated the unit, met with unit leaders, and presented the results.

Turning the zombie nouns back into live verbs makes the sentence shorter and simpler.

Another way to simplify is by breaking up long, confusing sentences. Long sentences aren't necessarily bad. Mixed with shorter ones, long sentences give the writing variety and rhythm. However, things become confusing when writers pack too much information in one sentence, as in this fifty-four-word behemoth:

> For example, a coordinated fire line—a line beyond which conventional surface-to-surface direct fire and indirect fire support means may fire at any time within the boundaries of the establishing headquarters without additional coordination but does not eliminate the responsibility to coordinate the airspace required to conduct the mission (JP 3-09)—illustrates a permissive control measure.[20]

Not only is this sentence long, but it separates the subject (coordinated fire line) from its verb (illustrates) with a forty-five-word interjection. Breaking it up and keeping subjects and verbs together improves the passage:

> A coordinated fire line is an example of a permissive control measure. It is a line beyond which surface-to-surface assets can fire without coordinating with the headquarters that established the line. However, the firing assets must still coordinate airspace to conduct the mission.

Long sentences are no crime but confusing sentences are. Remember, always be clear.

Lastly, while simple writing helps the reader, it also helps writers make fewer mistakes. Simple words are easy to spell and hard to misuse. Short, direct sentences are easy to write and less likely to have punctuation and grammar mistakes. Simple writing is good for everyone.

Proofreading

Proofreading comes after revising and editing. It involves finding and fixing grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors. This is important. If your article is sloppy, editors may also assume your thinking is sloppy.

Ironically, the best way to proofread isn't by reading but by listening. Read your article aloud or have text-to-speech software do it for you (I use Microsoft

Word's Read Aloud feature). Your ears will catch errors that your eyes will miss.

Double-check your work with software (I prefer Grammarly and Microsoft Word Editor). However, don't assume the software is always right. You know your article better than the computer does.

Finally, trust your ear. If it sounds correct, it probably is correct. Writing a great article doesn't require an English degree. You already know everything you need to know about the language. Don't worry about dangling participles, squinting modifiers, and split infinitives. I have no idea what those things are, but I still managed to write this article.

If you're worried about making egregious grammar mistakes, ask a friend or two to read it. For feedback tips, check out Rebecca Segal's "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback," included in this issue.[21] Remember, the goal isn't perfect English—it's giving the reader a useful, clear article.

A Final Word

Rewriting is the secret to writing well. Rewriting turns rough drafts into polished, publishable articles. It starts with revising, which improves the big parts—thesis, structure, and paragraphs. Next is editing to improve the little parts—sentences and words. The final step, proofreading, fixes any remaining correctness problems. Rewriting will help make your article as clear and compelling as the ideas that inspired you. ■

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After the closure of Camp Colt, Pennsylvania, in late 1918, Lt. Col. Dwight D. Eisenhower (*standing in front of the tank*) continued serving with the Tank Corps until 1922, when he left Camp Meade, Maryland (where this photograph was taken), to serve as executive officer for the 20th Infantry Brigade in the Panama Canal Zone. (Photo courtesy of the Eisenhower Presidential Library)

With All Due Respect

How to Foster Dissent in the U.S. Army

Lt. Col. Matthew Jamison, U.S. Army

Professional discourse is not limited simply to writing and publishing articles. In fact, the presence of healthy dialogue and debate about military matters is key to critical thinking and supports the effectiveness of military units. However, this dialogue often does not happen organically. Instead, it must be encouraged in the form of a culture that supports dissent. This article addresses the importance

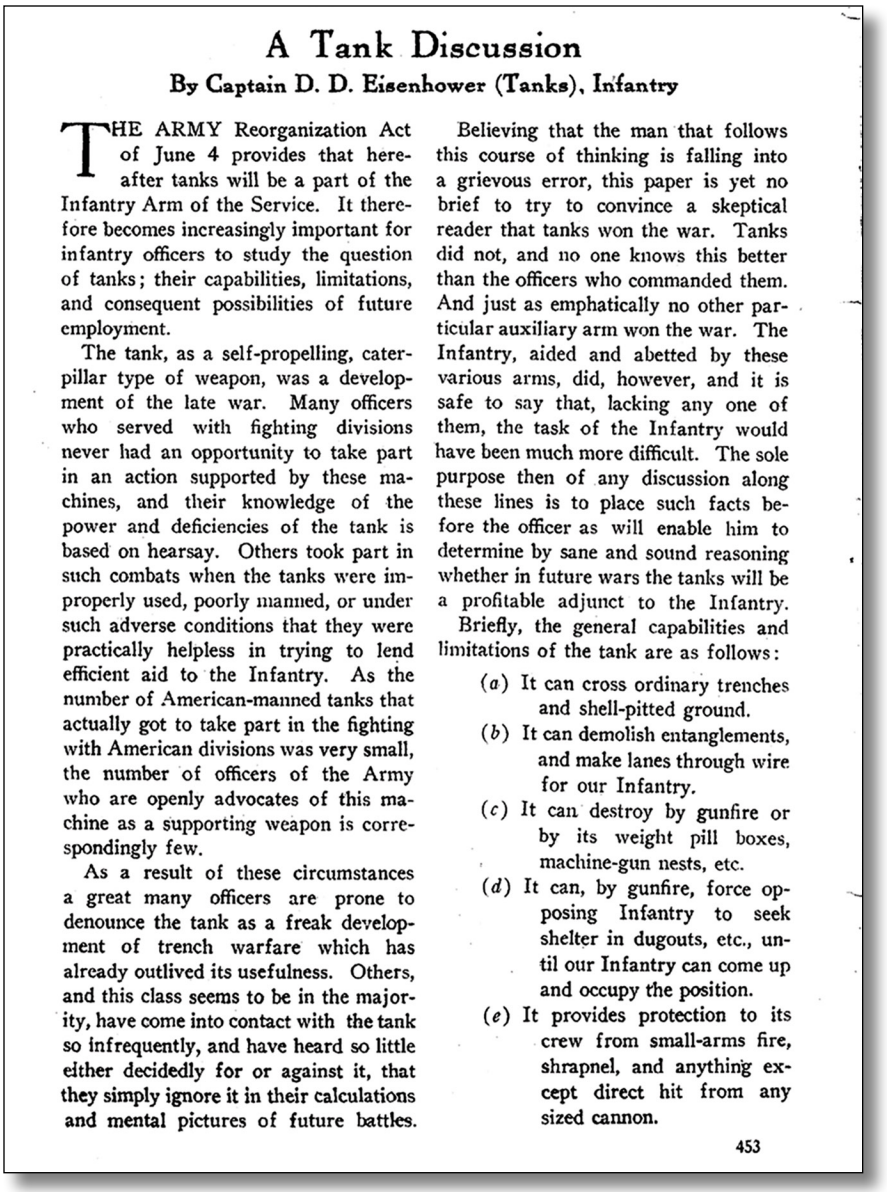
of dissent, considers ways to dissent effectively, and offers concrete examples for fostering dissent within an organization.

Importance of Dissent

Just as the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff provides his best military advice to the president of the United States, military leaders owe informed and honest feedback to their bosses, whether in the context of national defense or internal military matters. Providing your best advice likely means challenging the status quo at times and offering alternative perspectives, which is critical for sound decision-making and planning at all levels. Dissent can play a vital role in ensuring that leaders consider all aspects of a situation before making decisions.

Dissent informs decision-making, offering a vital feedback mechanism to leaders. The on-the-ground commander often has a clearer perspective of available resources or the impact of a decision than the senior officer operating at the ten-thousand-foot level. It is his duty to offer that perspective, especially if it contradicts prevailing opinions. The more serious the issue, the more forceful the dissent should be. Once a final decision is made, however, subordinates must fully support the selected course of action.

Thoughtful dissent counters groupthink. Leaders who are surrounded by "yes men" will not be effective. Numerous historical examples demonstrate the negative consequences of failing to raise or effectively communicate dissenting opinions in the moment. H. R. McMaster's excellent work, *Dereliction of Duty*, details the Joint Chiefs of Staff's failure to "articulate effectively either their objections or alternatives" at the onset of the Vietnam War.[1] Conversely, David Margolick's "The Night of the Generals" addresses six retired general officers who spoke out against the conduct of the Iraq War, though they failed to do so while in uniform and in a position to affect change.[2]



A Tank Discussion

By Captain D. D. Eisenhower (Tanks), Infantry

THE ARMY Reorganization Act of June 4 provides that hereafter tanks will be a part of the Infantry Arm of the Service. It therefore becomes increasingly important for infantry officers to study the question of tanks; their capabilities, limitations, and consequent possibilities of future employment.

The tank, as a self-propelling, caterpillar type of weapon, was a development of the late war. Many officers who served with fighting divisions never had an opportunity to take part in an action supported by these machines, and their knowledge of the power and deficiencies of the tank is based on hearsay. Others took part in such combats when the tanks were improperly used, poorly manned, or under such adverse conditions that they were practically helpless in trying to lend efficient aid to the Infantry. As the number of American-manned tanks that actually got to take part in the fighting with American divisions was very small, the number of officers of the Army who are openly advocates of this machine as a supporting weapon is correspondingly few.

As a result of these circumstances a great many officers are prone to denounce the tank as a freak development of trench warfare which has already outlived its usefulness. Others, and this class seems to be in the majority, have come into contact with the tank so infrequently, and have heard so little either decidedly for or against it, that they simply ignore it in their calculations and mental pictures of future battles.

Believing that the man that follows this course of thinking is falling into a grievous error, this paper is yet no brief to try to convince a skeptical reader that tanks won the war. Tanks did not, and no one knows this better than the officers who commanded them. And just as emphatically no other particular auxiliary arm won the war. The Infantry, aided and abetted by these various arms, did, however, and it is safe to say that, lacking any one of them, the task of the Infantry would have been much more difficult. The sole purpose then of any discussion along these lines is to place such facts before the officer as will enable him to determine by sane and sound reasoning whether in future wars the tanks will be a profitable adjunct to the Infantry.

Briefly, the general capabilities and limitations of the tank are as follows:

(*a*) It can cross ordinary trenches and shell-pitted ground.

(*b*) It can demolish entanglements, and make lanes through wire for our Infantry.

(*c*) It can destroy by gunfire or by its weight pill boxes, machine-gun nests, etc.

(*d*) It can, by gunfire, force opposing Infantry to seek shelter in dugouts, etc., until our Infantry can come up and occupy the position.

(*e*) It provides protection to its crew from small-arms fire, shrapnel, and anything except direct hit from any sized cannon.

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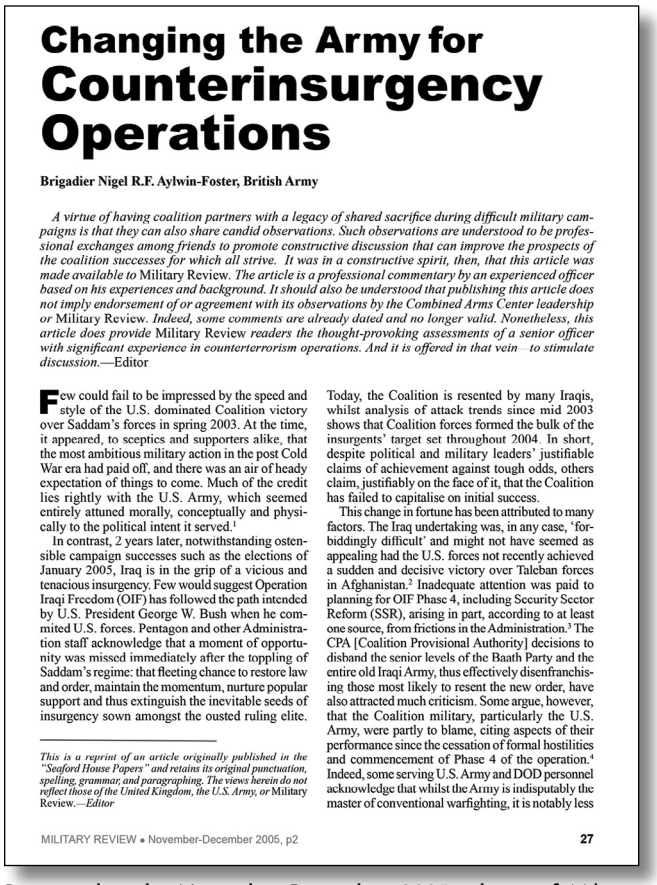
While serving with the 305th Tank Brigade at Fort Meade, Maryland, then Capt. Dwight D. Eisenhower collaborated with other colleagues to develop new concepts for employment of armor in warfare. He attempted to articulate leading-edge ideas of speed-oriented offensive tank warfare through written articles but encountered bitter opposition from senior infantry officers, who considered tanks as having utility only in a supporting role. On publication of the article in the November 1920 issue of *Infantry Journal*, he was threatened with court-martial by Maj. Gen. Charles S. Farnsworth, chief of infantry, who instructed him to stop promoting concepts many senior leaders deemed heretical to the proper role of the infantry. The full article can be read online at https://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p4013coll7/id/799/.



Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations

Brigadier Nigel R.F. Aylwin-Foster, British Army

A virtue of having coalition partners with a legacy of shared sacrifice during difficult military campaigns is that they can also share candid observations. Such observations are understood to be professional exchanges among friends to promote constructive discussion that can improve the prospects of the coalition successes for which all strive. It was in a constructive spirit, then, that this article was made available to Military Review. *The article is a professional commentary by an experienced officer based on his experiences and background. It should also be understood that publishing this article does not imply endorsement of or agreement with its observations by the Combined Arms Center leadership or* Military Review. *Indeed, some comments are already dated and no longer valid. Nonetheless, this article does provide* Military Review *readers the thought-provoking assessments of a senior officer with significant experience in counterterrorism operations. And it is offered in that vein—to stimulate discussion.*—Editor

Few could fail to be impressed by the speed and style of the U.S. dominated Coalition victory over Saddam's forces in spring 2003. At the time, it appeared, to sceptics and supporters alike, that the most ambitious military action in the post Cold War era had paid off, and there was an air of heady expectation of things to come. Much of the credit lies rightly with the U.S. Army, which seemed entirely attuned morally, conceptually and physically to the political intent it served.[1]

In contrast, 2 years later, notwithstanding ostensible campaign successes such as the elections of January 2005, Iraq is in the grip of a vicious and tenacious insurgency. Few would suggest Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) has followed the path intended by U.S. President George W. Bush when he commited U.S. forces. Pentagon and other Administration staff acknowledge that a moment of opportunity was missed immediately after the toppling of Saddam's regime: that fleeting chance to restore law and order, maintain the momentum, nurture popular support and thus extinguish the inevitable seeds of insurgency sown amongst the ousted ruling elite.

Today, the Coalition is resented by many Iraqis, whilst analysis of attack trends since mid 2003 shows that Coalition forces formed the bulk of the insurgents' target set throughout 2004. In short, despite political and military leaders' justifiable claims of achievement against tough odds, others claim, justifiably on the face of it, that the Coalition has failed to capitalise on initial success.

This change in fortune has been attributed to many factors. The Iraq undertaking was, in any case, 'forbiddingly difficult' and might not have seemed as appealing had the U.S. forces not recently achieved a sudden and decisive victory over Taleban forces in Afghanistan.[2] Inadequate attention was paid to planning for OIF Phase 4, including Security Sector Reform (SSR), arising in part, according to at least one source, from frictions in the Administration.[3] The CPA [Coalition Provisional Authority] decisions to disband the senior levels of the Baath Party and the entire old Iraqi Army, thus effectively disenfranchising those most likely to resent the new order, have also attracted much criticism. Some argue, however, that the Coalition military, particularly the U.S. Army, were partly to blame, citing aspects of their performance since the cessation of formal hostilities and commencement of Phase 4 of the operation.[4] Indeed, some serving U.S. Army and DOD personnel acknowledge that whilst the Army is indisputably the master of conventional warfighting, it is notably less

This is a reprint of an article originally published in the "Seaford House Papers" and retains its original punctuation, spelling, grammar, and paragraphing. The views herein do not reflect those of the United Kingdom, the U.S. Army, or Military Review.—*Editor*

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Reprinted in the November-December 2005 edition of *Military Review*, this article by British Brigadier Nigel R. F. Aylwin-Foster provided a blunt critique regarding what the author perceived as U.S. mistakes in the conduct of counterterrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan during the early phases of the Global War on Terrorism. The article provoked extensive spirited debate within the U.S military at the time and fostered intense internal scrutiny and attempts at productive change. Read "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations" online at https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/PDF-UA-docs/Aylwin-Foster-Nov-Dec-2005-UA.pdf.

Effective Dissent

The best way to dissent differs based on the context. When feedback is requested in a public setting, dissent can be provided publicly; otherwise, it may be best saved for private discussion. Regardless of how you choose to offer dissent, it is important that you separate any personal feelings from professional considerations. Professional disagreement is key to ensuring an ongoing healthy dialogue, while personal attacks encourage defensiveness and loss of trust.

- *Know your audience.* Consider how your boss receives information. If your boss gets defensive, keep your feedback private; he or she will not want to be challenged publicly.
- *Do your homework.* Be prepared to clearly articulate why you disagree. If you are unable to complete an assigned mission, explain the disconnect between available resources and mission requirements. Why are you unable to complete the task? What would work better and why? If you need more time, when will your readiness change?
- *Garner support.* Group dissent can be powerful. When several leaders join to express their disagreement with a decision, it can prompt rethinking.

These same rules apply whether you are disagreeing with a supervisor's decision or writing an article that challenges Army doctrine or conventional practices.

Dissent in Writing

It is a good feeling when you collect your thoughts, build a coalition, and get your boss to change his mind, driving change within your organization. However, the impact of your words can go much further. As the adage goes, "the pen is mightier than the sword." As such, your ideas have greater impact as more people are exposed to them. Writing is the best way to get your message out and create a powerful, lasting impact.

I have personally pushed back on the status quo in my own writing. When a teammate brought up an article by a senior leader that neither of us agreed with, I decided to craft a response. This article about the framing of officer experiences in the military was coauthored by a lieutenant general and several members of his staff.[3] I recognized that I might need to tread lightly, but I also knew that my position was rooted in professional disagreement, not personal animus. I was in touch with numerous junior officers through frequent counseling and understood their concerns. I shared my perspective through a response in *Military Review* and received very positive feedback.[4]

In my most recent article on command declination, I raised issues and provided recommendations that might make some leaders uncomfortable.[5] But this also generated valuable discussion and led to great interactions with leaders whom I had not known previously.

What can you take away from this for your own writing? I applied similar lessons as previously noted for effective dissent. I knew my audience and crafted my article to reach it; in the response article, it was the junior officers who wanted to feel heard from a "senior leader," while the command declination piece addressed

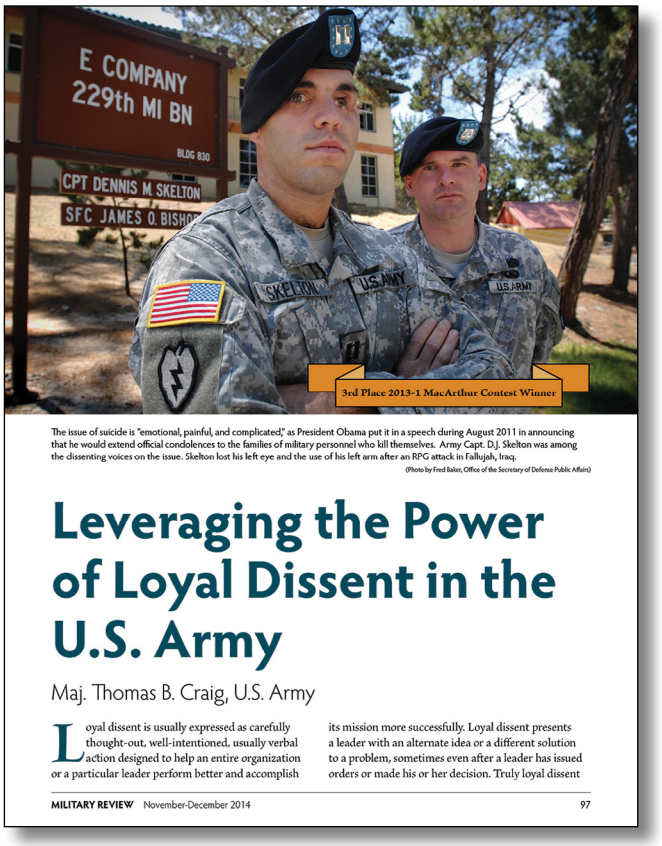
talent management concerns and was intended for those senior leaders directly. I did my homework and garnered support; my article on command declination incorporated research, interviews with senior leaders, and a survey of all air defense artillery majors and lieutenant colonels. With a 62 percent response rate, I was able to share analysis that clearly captured the considerations of that group. Shared at the unit level, my ideas led to a couple of good conversations. Shared through my writing, these same thoughts have driven much broader discussion and debate.

Encouraging Dissent

Unit culture is critical to encouraging dissent. The hierarchy inherent in the Army's rank structure can discourage dissent and cause fear of repercussion if viewed as insubordination. It is incumbent upon leaders to create an environment that not only treats everyone with dignity and respect but also recognizes the value of diverse perspectives from soldiers of all ranks and levels of experience. Soldiers who are not comfortable in an organization will likely be unwilling to share their good ideas or differing opinions. As chief of staff of the Army, Gen. Randy George is taking steps to establish just this type of culture across the force, indicating a need to "strengthen our profession from top to bottom by building expertise through written discourse."[6] An environment that supports the sharing of diverse ideas and a willingness to improve will start to encourage dissent at the institutional level.

OK, so dissent is important; how can you encourage it at your level? It starts by increasing feedback mechanisms. Here are three simple ways to encourage dissent within an organization:

- *Bridge the rank gap.* As a battalion commander, I started a Junior Enlisted Leadership Council in which a small group of highly motivated junior soldiers engaged directly with the battalion commander and command sergeant major. This forum provided them with an opportunity for mentorship and got them comfortable providing feedback on issues that were important to them, leading to new ideas that had a positive impact on the organization.
- *Ask for input.* This sounds intuitive, but in a decision brief or similar venue, specifically ask each person what they think rather than issuing a general call for input. People are more likely to share their opinions when engaged directly.
- *Counseling and mentorship.* Be clear about what information you want from subordinates and let them know how you will use it. I specifically told every staff officer that I counted on them to inform my decision-making. I also told every warrant officer that I saw them as a trusted advisor and that I expected the unvarnished truth from them. Those who provided it proved extremely valuable, and regular dialogue with them provided diverse perspectives.



Maj. Thomas B. Craig provides a brief tutorial on what he asserts is the tradition and usefulness of loyal dissent in the military. Read "Leveraging the Power of Loyal Dissent in the U.S. Army" from the November-December 2014 edition of *Military Review* online at https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20141231_art016.pdf.

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Conclusion

While this broader edition of *Military Review* focuses on writing, fostering a culture that encourages dissent is critical. Military units benefit when individuals are comfortable providing feedback. Fostering dissent shows that all perspectives have value, encourages critical thinking, and helps leaders make better decisions. By promoting this behavior, more individuals will apply these principles in their writing along with their everyday interactions. ■

Notes

1. H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998), 327.

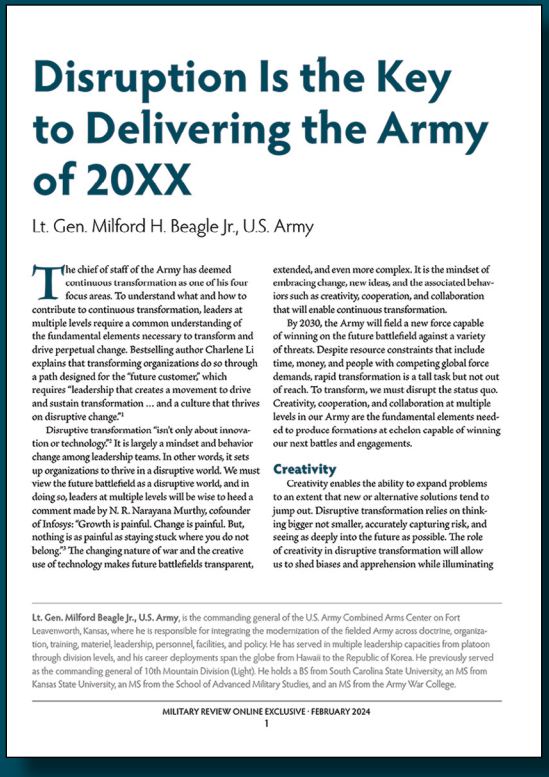
2. David Margolick, "The Night of the Generals," *Vanity Fair*, April 2007, https://archive.vanityfair.com/article/2007/4/the-night-of-the-generals.

3. Milford H. Beagle Jr. et al., "We Hear You!," *Military Review* Online Exclusive, 27 March 2023, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2023-ole/we-hear-you/.

4. Matthew L. Jamison, "We Hear You, But You're Wrong," *Military Review* Online Exclusive, 13 April 2023, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2023-ole/jamison/.

5. Matthew L. Jamison, "Soldiers Deserve Outstanding Leadership: Examining the Battalion Command Crisis within the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery," *Military Review* Online Exclusive, 3 May 2024, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2024-ole/soldiers-deserve-outstanding-leadership/.

6. Randy George, Gary Brito, and Michael Weimer, "Strengthening the Profession: A Call to All Army Leaders to Revitalize our Professional Discourse," Modern War Institute, 11 September 2023, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/strengthening-the-profession-a-call-to-all-army-leaders-to-revitalize-our-professional-discourse/.



Disruption Is the Key to Delivering the Army of 20XX

Lt. Gen. Milford H. Beagle Jr., U.S. Army

The chief of staff of the Army has deemed continuous transformation as one of his four focus areas. To understand what and how to contribute to continuous transformation, leaders at multiple levels require a common understanding of the fundamental elements necessary to transform and drive perpetual change. Bestselling author Charlene Li explains that transforming organizations do so through a path designed for the "future customer," which requires "leadership that creates a movement to drive and sustain transformation … and a culture that thrives on disruptive change."[1]

Disruptive transformation "isn't only about innovation or technology."[2] It is largely a mindset and behavior change among leadership teams. In other words, it sets up organizations to thrive in a disruptive world. We must view the future battlefield as a disruptive world, and in doing so, leaders at multiple levels will be wise to heed a comment made by N. R. Narayana Murthy, cofounder of Infosys: "Growth is painful. Change is painful. But, nothing is as painful as staying stuck where you do not belong."[3] The changing nature of war and the creative use of technology makes future battlefields transparent, extended, and even more complex. It is the mindset of embracing change, new ideas, and the associated behaviors such as creativity, cooperation, and collaboration that will enable continuous transformation.

By 2030, the Army will field a new force capable of winning on the future battlefield against a variety of threats. Despite resource constraints that include time, money, and people with competing global force demands, rapid transformation is a tall task but not out of reach. To transform, we must disrupt the status quo. Creativity, cooperation, and collaboration at multiple levels in our Army are the fundamental elements needed to produce formations at echelon capable of winning our next battles and engagements.

Creativity

Creativity enables the ability to expand problems to an extent that new or alternative solutions tend to jump out. Disruptive transformation relies on thinking bigger not smaller, accurately capturing risk, and seeing as deeply into the future as possible. The role of creativity in disruptive transformation will allow us to shed biases and apprehension while illuminating

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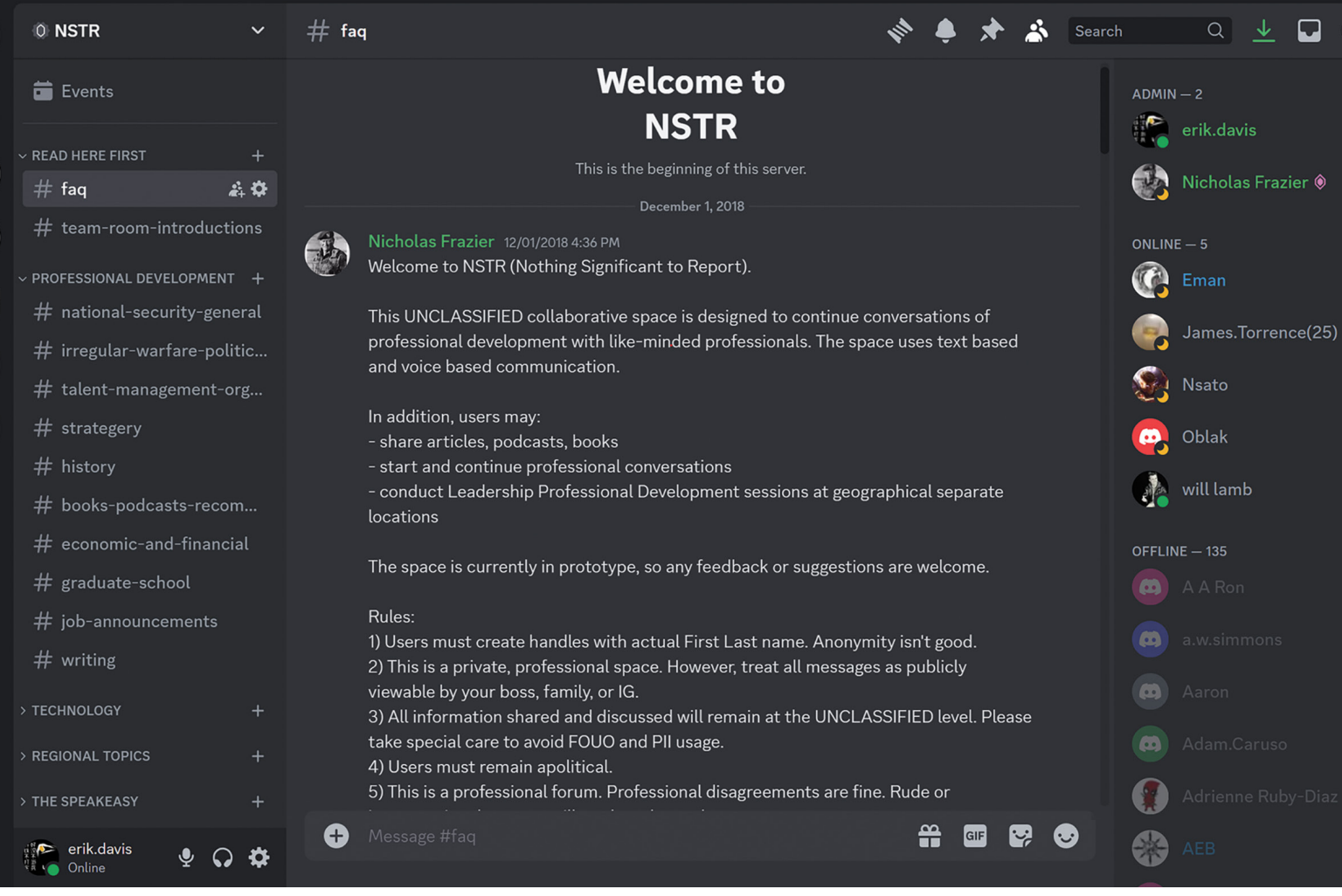
Lt. Gen. Milford H. Beagle Jr. asserts that transformation is largely a mindset and behavior change among leadership teams that sets up organizations to thrive in a disruptive world. Read "Disruption Is the Key to Delivering the Army of 20XX," *Military Review* Online Exclusive, at https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2024-ole/disruption-is-the-key/.

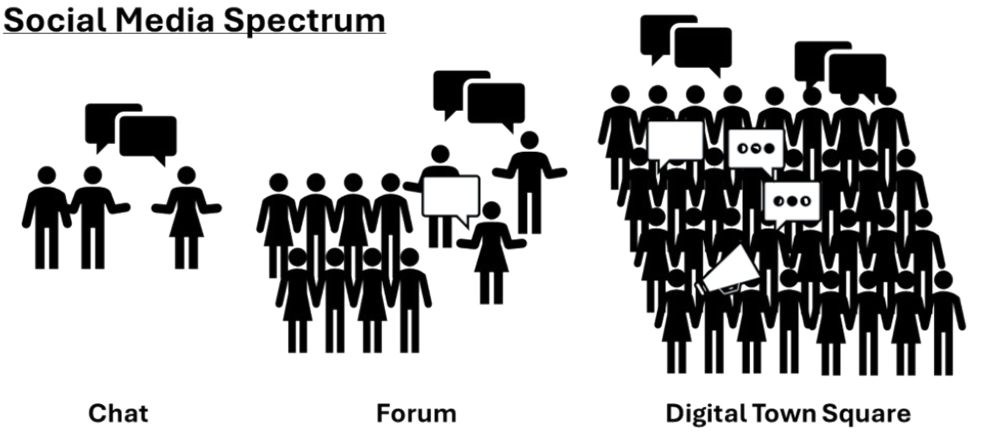


NSTR (or "Nothing Significant to Report") started as a Facebook chat in 2018 before making a move to Discord and then Microsoft Teams. Following the sunset of Microsoft Teams Free (classic) in 2023, NSTR made the jump back to Discord (*shown here*), where it now features threaded conversation and is free to use. (Screenshot from authors)

Building and Running an Online Forum

Lt. Col. Erik Davis, U.S. Army
Lt. Col. Nick Frazier, U.S. Army

Online forums are the latest home for Army mentorship. Going back to antiquity, from ancient Roman camps to the continental salons, through the now-defunct officer clubs, societies build informal venues to pass tacit knowledge or discuss ideas. The key upgrade with online forums is they allow us to collaborate across both time and space, making it easier for everyone to engage. We started one of these forums in 2018, which we named NSTR.



(Figure by authors)

Figure. Social Media Spectrum

NSTR (ostensibly named for "Nothing Significant to Report," but in truth we couldn't come up with a better name) started as a Facebook chat used by a small group of midgrade officers to share articles, ideas, and memes.[1] Over the years, the community expanded one at a time as we recruited from an ever-widening geography and background. Since its inception, NSTR has come to include a diverse group of service members, academics, writers, and tech nerds, with membership hovering between 125 and 175. NSTR membership includes soldiers with ranks from staff sergeant to colonel as well as retirees and civilians.

In 2021, we stood up a sister site on the Special Operations Command's Microsoft Teams site, "Think, Drink, Write, Fight" (TDWF), which currently has approximately 1,200 members. In the last five years, we have learned a few lessons on how to stand up and run an online forum. Your community may already exist but in a legacy email chain or a chaotic mega-chat thread. Moving forward, whether you are starting a new forum or trying to modernize an existing one, we offer some considerations to help with the process based on our experience.

Where to Run the Forum

A simple direct message chat among friends is the easiest to start. You're probably already in a couple, but these tend to only support a handful of people, which limits the variety of perspectives. Running a chat stream gets jumbled and comments get buried when multiple conversations start going. Alternatively, digital town squares like X and Reddit serve as broadcast platforms with incredibly low barriers to entry. These reach maximum audience size but are also vulnerable to online trolls. In between these options sit online community sites like Discord, Teams, or Bluesky. These provide a messaging platform balanced between the simple group chat and a massive broadcast. Look for one that provides threaded conversations and channels to help your forum sustain multiple conversations at one time. These different threads can be categorized, allowing people to focus their attention on topics of interest and ensuring the discussions stay generally thematic (see the figure).

You do not have to choose just one option. Large platforms offer chat, video, or audio tools to collaborate. In fact, many of the smaller tools exist within the larger ones. But you do need to decide where you want the forum to live. Common access card-enabled sites provide a tension between security versus access. Do you want your soldiers to be able to access it on their phones at the end of their day? Is this just for your

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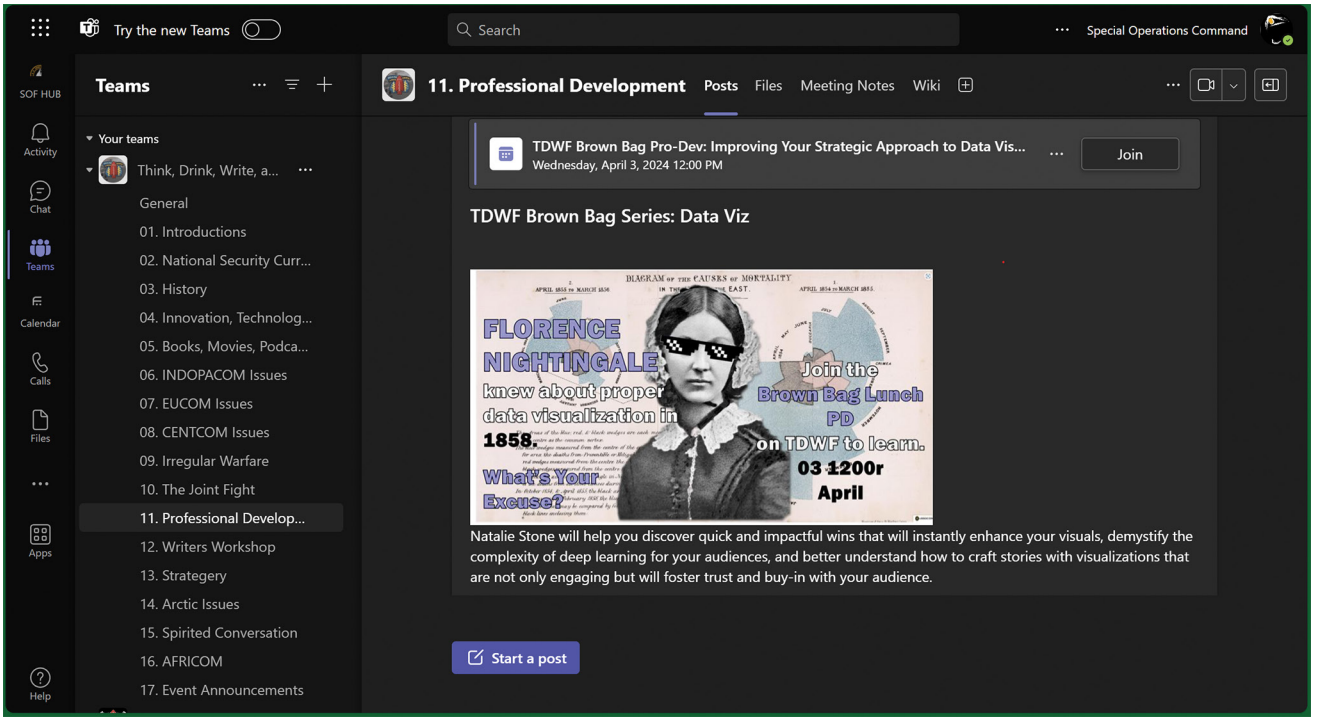
Lt. Col. Nick Frazier, U.S. Army, is a Gen. Wayne A. Downing Scholar with a master's in foreign service from Georgetown University. He is a 2024 Nonresident Fellow with the Irregular Warfare Initiative, a joint production between Princeton's Empirical Studies of Conflict Project and the Modern War Institute at West Point.



A professional development advertisement on the Think, Drink, Write, Fight Teams site. (Screenshot from authors)

unit or a community that lasts beyond the next permanent change of station? These are the fundamental questions you must answer to scope the forum and ensure it is designed for your intended purposes. For maximum reach, try looking for services that allow you to log in via an app and a browser. We also prefer ones that make it easy to copy and paste posts, as we tend to repost across forums. This will give your ideas their maximum chance to spread.

Back in 2018, we started at Discord, but quickly moved to Microsoft Teams, since Discord did not do threaded conversations at the time. But in 2023, with the sunset of "Microsoft Teams Free (classic)," we had no way to port our old threads to the new version without paying for an upgrade. So, we jumped NSTR back to Discord, where threaded conversations had become available. It even featured an effortless video chat. Despite the many available options, the key features a platform needs to thrive as a forum are threaded conversations and a cost of $0.

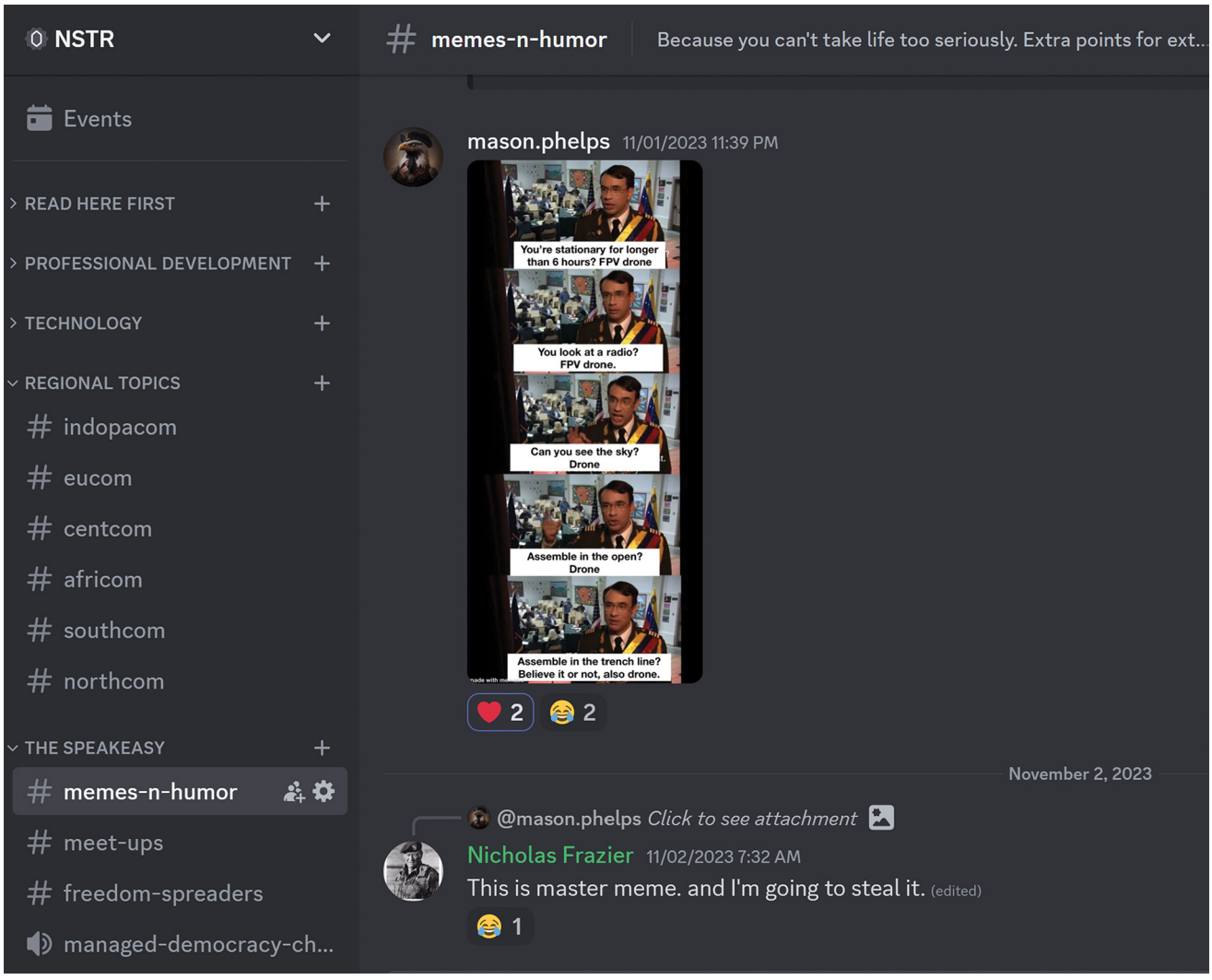
Who Runs It

Forums do not require much backside support; however, you may want to consider some best practices to keep things moving. How do you add people to the forum? Are they recruited, or is it part of in processing your unit? Who is checking to make sure they get access? We recommend having a couple of people who make sure new members get a welcome. This can be as simple as an @ing someone or sending them a direct message. This is also the perfect time to send them any "how to" guides you might have.

Introduction posts help onboard new users and provides the group a running "who is who" list for current members. Community rules encourage users to keep their information current with changing roles, interests, and promotions.

Any online forum is going to be mostly lurkers: people who read posts but do not reply or respond. That is not a problem, but without active posters there is nothing to read. Do not be afraid to run an editorial calendar of sorts when you start out. Like a watercooler cork board, regular posts draw people to rhythmically check the forum. Until the forum starts to self-sustain with community conversations, these can help build the habit.

Consider having a few select people who post and share articles to keep people returning. These can also be your designated responders. When a new soldier shares an article with nothing more than a link and



The "memes-n-humor" text channel on the NSTR Discord. (Screenshot from authors)

"Interesting …" a dedicated group of people nudging the conversation with "Yes, ands" will help draw out better formed thoughts from the original poster. What was it that caught your eye in this? What did you disagree with? Who else do you think should read this?

Digital forums also provide new tools to level up your conversations like effortless audio and video chatting—a more human way to connect. Brown bag presentations, show-and-tells, lectures, or even online happy hour mixers are a way to attach faces and voices to the cold chat threads. And you can record them for people to watch when it suits their schedules. This is a key feature when your members are dispersed across different time zones; there is a twelve-hour time difference between east Asia and the U.S. East Coast. Done well, this drives water cooler traffic to your forum.

A forum's size mirrors its function. British anthropologist Robin Dunbar found that many social groups cap out around 150 people.[2] While this may seem small, it can also be a key feature to making your forum productive, as it helps build a sense of community. Members who feel like they belong to a larger community with shared purpose find it easier to disagree on ideas, since they identify with something larger than the positions at debate.[3] This should preclude a lot of the trolling and bad faith posts you see on large public sites. However, establish rules of conduct, be prepared to remove posts that cross those lines, and be prepared to remove a user if they repeatedly step over that line. In five years, NSTR has only had to do this once.

One more controversial thing we strongly encourage is a meme channel. While senior leaders across the

Army have raised concerns about "getting memed," this is just the latest incarnation of the skits of yesteryear. Militaries the world over have always encouraged dry wit and warrior poets. A channel for a light-hearted joke can be an easy place to put a toe in the water before posting a much bigger idea. If you insist on narrow topics, you risk people moving the conversation elsewhere. As above, have a standard, and enforce it as necessary.

Conclusion

The measure of effectiveness for your online forum will be the discussions themselves: the ability to expose a diverse audience to varying opinions, create a safe environment for controversial ideas, and debate the arguments posed by others in articles. A catalyst paper, like the one Max Ferguson proposes in "Catalyst Papers: A Practical Writing Style for Army Leaders to Share Ideas," included in this special edition, needs a place to catch fire, to grow, and to improve as it weathers testing and rebuttal.[4]

You may not be the one to write, but you can do your part by building and tending the furnace that encourages sparks. Embers do not catch fire alone in a vacuum. Every published article made its journey through some sort of testing and tempering. If run well, your forum can be a foundry of the Army's future.

We all read more than we write. We ran NSTR for almost five years before either of us published an article. Instead, we focused on curating a space that fostered growth, ideas, and learning. The true value was connecting like-minded people from across the Army and other services. Over the years, these connections created real-world results like published articles, professional projects, and even job hires. This success motivated us to finally sit down and write our first article last year, which was the catalyst for this guide.[5]

A published article is the best way for the Army to share an idea across the entire formation and to capture it forever, another boulder in the slow-moving glacier of knowledge. That output is a great step, but the last in a long and necessary process. Not everyone will write a journal article, but everyone can play their role in the process by establishing and fostering a learning forum within their own organization. ■

Notes

1. Erik Davis and Nick Frazier, "Drink, Think, Link: Guiding Online Mentorship," *Military Review* Online Exclusive, 7 February 2024, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2024-ole/davis/.

2. Sheon Han, "You Can Only Maintain So Many Close Friendships," *The Atlantic* (website), 20 May 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2021/05/robin-dunbar-explains-circles-friendship-dunbars-number/618931/.

3. *The Internet Is Worse Than Ever—Now What?*, YouTube video, posted by "Kurzgesagt—In a Nutshell," 2:42–3:10, 29 November 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuFlMtZmvY0.

4. Max Ferguson, "Catalyst Papers: A Practical Writing Style for Army Leaders to Share Ideas," *Military Review* Online Exclusive, 16 January 2024, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/Online-Exclusive/2024-OLE/Ferguson/.

5. Davis and Frazier, "Drink, Think, Link."

"For *The Infantry Journal*, I wrote some articles on the theory of armored operations. Shortly thereafter came a letter from Fuller asking where I got my ideas. I replied that I had none and knew nothing about armor, but that I had written after reading his texts, either to agree or disagree."

—S. L. A. Marshall, "Genesis to Revelation," *Military Review* 52, no. 2 (February 1972): 24

(Illustration by Reggie Torrez, Multimedia and Visual Information Division [OCPA], U.S. Army)

Catalyst Papers

A Practical Writing Style for Army Leaders to Share Ideas

Lt. Col. D. Max Ferguson, U.S. Army

We know those ideas are out there. We see them every time we talk to soldiers, whether at home station, at the combat training centers, or on deployment. … Yet our profession currently misses out on those ideas. … Yet the nature of our profession is that the details are just as important—probably even more important—than the big ideas … [and] the Army needs the absolute best ideas at echelon.

—"Strengthening the Profession"

There's a pervasive notion within the Army that professional writing means we have to write in a sophisticated style, but this impression makes our writing rigid. Stuffy. Boring. It drives a lot of Army authors to write word salads and clunky sentences full of buzzwords.[1] This is a shame. We can all admit something upfront: most people don't like reading "graduate-level" writing. Even those who have graduate

degrees don't like reading dense, dry, long-winded sentences. If we don't like to read that stuff, why do we feel the need to write that way?

We must end the myth that professional Army writing should meet some bar of "graduate-level writing."[2] This assumed standard drives writers to add jargon to sound smarter or doctrinally sound. In the process, the key points can get buried. We should instead focus our attention on communicating ideas, not creating dread about rigid styles and specific formatting requirements.

This article explains the concept of a *catalyst paper* to help recalibrate Army writing norms. Catalyst papers are a distinct approach to writing Army white papers that encourages all ranks to share observations from the field, introduce suggestions, and examine lessons learned. Such grassroots research papers are written to help busy leaders think, spark dialogue among their peers, and introduce their teams to new methods. Commanders can share them across units and help nominate papers for publication in Army professional journals for dissemination and preservation.

The point of a catalyst paper is to concisely present ideas with a less formal writing style than typically found in academic journals. Catalyst papers encourage authors to relax their writing style toward a more conversational and digestible tone—because the papers are not meant for academics. They are written by leaders in the field for their fellow soldiers.

A Practical Writing Style

Sometimes we try too hard to say simple ideas. A good practice in those moments is to step back from the keyboard, look away from the page, and just say out loud what you are trying to say … and write that, exactly how you said it out loud. That's an easy way to clean up clunky writing. We do not need to overcomplicate what we are trying to say or place undue expectations on how we write. The hallmark of good writing (and good communication) is to distill complex issues into something simple to understand. This should be the expectation for catalyst papers: easily digestible, concise, and clear, not muddled with buzzwords and jargon.

We should reorient our writing toward a more practical style, striving for a conversational, not lofty, tone that is intentionally digestible. The sweet spot is probably somewhere around three to six pages (1,500–3,000 words), depending on the nature of the topic. Too short and you might not cover the substance enough, but too long and it risks a dismissal as "too long; didn't read." Any longer than about ten pages or five thousand words and the topic might be too broad or best presented as a series of papers. Experienced writers come to appreciate that it is actually easier to write a long paper than a short one—concise writing takes more effort than rambling.

Catalyst papers should not grow into much more than what they are intended to be: concise research papers to share findings and conclusions among Army colleagues. There doesn't need to be strict formats and etiquette to writing them. No *two-line spacing followed by one-line with left-indent, size 12 Arial font, set margins* and landmines everywhere for leaders to harp on. The papers should generally include the bottom-line up front, some background context, key points, recommendations, suggestions for further research and development if applicable, and a conclusion.

The relaxed style of a catalyst paper helps instill confidence in novice writers and gets them to research concepts and write about their findings. It preserves the best version of their thoughts so others can learn from what they discovered.

Fostering Initiatives at the Unit Level

Catalyst papers focus on adding value to the immediate organization: the battalion, the brigade, the division. They are unit-driven initiatives curated by command teams as they sense good ideas emerging from within their formations.

It can be an individual effort or a collective endeavor, such as a platoon leader and platoon sergeant working with their noncommissioned officers or leaders from different units (and different perspectives) collaborating to research and write the paper. Or, one action officer can be the lead author, pulling information from as many

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peers, outside experts, and contributors as needed. The ideas and the content are paramount.[3] The experience of doing real-world research with real-world impact is powerful. The trick is to find issues that soldiers are already inclined to work on, knowledge gaps within the team or emerging problems that they hope to solve.

Young leaders often just need a nudge to write and research. Paper ideas come from all sorts of conversations. They can come up in short-form blog posts (see Erik Davis and Nicholas Frazier's "Building and Running an Online Forum") or a unit's staff duty after action review comments.[4] Sometimes, paper ideas are best fostered from command teams who notice a soldier's demonstrated interest for an important topic and ask them to write about it as a catalyst paper. These papers can be great primers ahead of training or before fielding new equipment, or to capture progress at the end of one training cycle that can carry over to the next.

Catalyst papers do not need to be approached as major endeavors expected for publication or shared with the masses. Start them as an expeditious project to help surrounding colleagues to benefit from our work and our findings. We fight and die for the person to the left and right. Dedicating the time to help them through writing taps into that same motivation. Selfless servants and quiet professionals don't need or necessarily want the credit or attention from publishing. They just want to contribute to the team.

A catalyst paper should take a few days or weeks to finish and get out to the force. Set a reasonable suspense and spare the soldier from making the project more demanding than it needs to be.

A Catalyst for Research

It's helpful to dispel some misperceptions about what to expect or envision when we take on a research project. It's natural to think research is about discovering new theories, creating paradigm shifts, and marking inflection points. A research project doesn't always entail big ideas, cracking the code on a devilish problem, or going deep on an issue and solving all its tangled problems.

Research comes in many forms. It can be digging up old concepts from the past from archived materials and books or talking to our gray beards to show how what was old is new again, but different. It can be researching how other units, services, agencies, or civilian groups approach the same activity. Research can include doing interviews, comparing field manuals, or observing training from other services, civilian schools, and international courses.

But experienced researchers come to understand that most good research yields base hits, advancing the needle—the conversation, the knowledge of the field—slightly forward. "Marginal improvement is worth seeking … For marginally better thinking about an issue can lead to much more than marginally better results."[5] Catalyst papers help one set of soldiers pass the baton to the next, who pass it to the next, where they continue to build on each other's work. Validate, test, and reexamine findings. Determine the limits of theories and the specific applications, and how an idea works best under certain conditions but fails to produce in others.

That is the goal for Army professional discourse. Experiment with ideas, pick at one thread in a tangled mess of a problem, and share what is learned in that moment: successes along with the failures, the unexpected discoveries that came to light along the way, indications of how we can adapt old methods to new challenges, and what else is needed to further understand the problem.

Lastly, there is a hidden benefit to doing research that mirrors the same effect of teaching. Nothing teaches an individual about a topic better than having to teach a class on it. That same effect carries over in having leaders write a research paper on topic. Knowing our words will be read by others forces us to understand the subject, examine what we are trying to say, and discover aspects of the issue that we never knew existed.

There's a secret to having motivated leaders do research on a topic: no matter how well the paper turns out, just going through the journey of having to research and write about it forces those involved to become better.

Scope and Purpose

Catalyst papers help us learn about another unit's experimentation, where they found success, and what did not work. As leaders, we often choose to write to external audiences after we succeed while preferring to keep lessons learned "in house" times we encounter failure or disappointing results. This is a mistake. Writing about failures is as important as sharing successes. And nobody just wants to read someone else's victory lap. So, avoid writing a paper that just gloats about how

awesome your unit performed at a combat training center. Talking only about overwhelming success is not helpful in and of itself.

It certainly feels *good* to write about winning. But we should not let our writing be seen as posturing ourselves and our units over others. Articles that peacock about accomplishments just foster competition and whispers of disdain, not collaboration. Also, humblebrags are easy to spot and are quickly resented. We should highlight successes, but there is a subtle difference between sharing best practices and boasting. The distinction is in how forthright we are with our challenges, mistakes, and struggles along the way. Sincere professional discourse reveals failures, successes, and dead ends.

Scientists also have a bad habit of publishing articles about breakthroughs and discoveries. Rarely do scientists publish about when they tested for something and found no significant results. But sharing what you *did not find* when testing military concepts can be valuable. It helps others to learn from your trials and see what came up short so that they do not have to look there too. If you shine a light behind a door and see there's nothing there, write about it so others can try opening different doors. Don't oversell a concept that was tested, just share what insight was gained, explain how far you got, and what you did not get to try. This helps other units pick up the knowledge where you left off.

A Catalyst for Debate

A catalyst paper can spark a dialogue by just presenting one way to approach a problem. It should present a well-thought-out proposal backed up by research, but it may be seen as a shortsighted idea by others. That's okay.

Experienced decision-makers are likely to agree that we may not know what we want until we see what we do not want. And only after we see a bad proposal do we start to think about what the direction should be instead. So be comfortable letting catalyst papers serve this purpose as well. Help leaders think about what they want by showing them something they don't want.

Catalyst papers should be built to be probed, beat up, and kicked around. They spark the conversation. Because in the absence of any plan, a catalyst paper can offer something to start the conversation—a primer for others to weigh in on, to solicit their perspective, and to contribute to the eventual solution. Readers can like or dislike the ideas in the paper and the catalyst paper can still be a success, as long as it inspires a debate among professionals. The only way the paper is actually unsuccessful is if people read it and do nothing else. The goal is to promote discourse and inspire transformation.

A Catalyst for Publishing

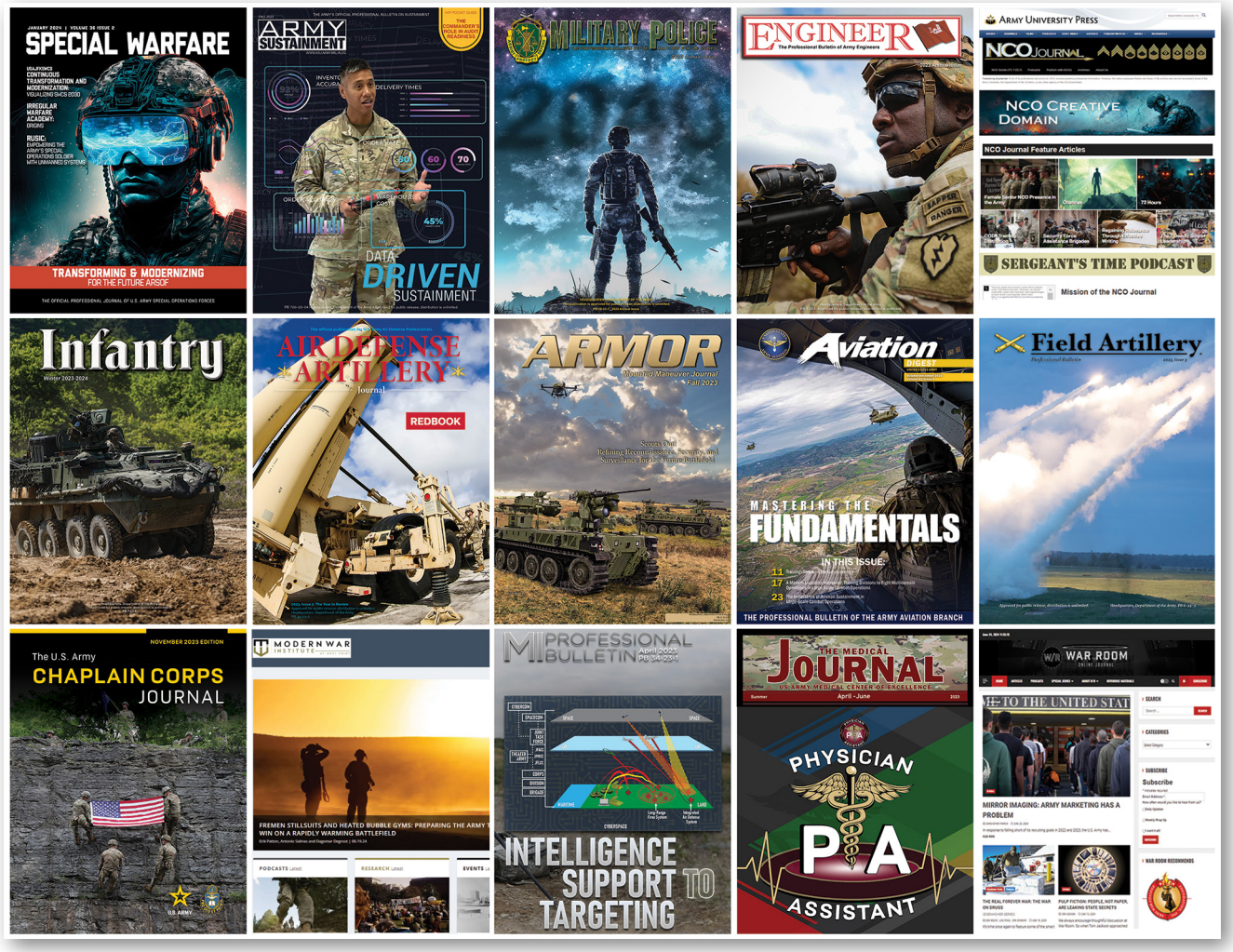
Unit-driven catalyst papers become the seeds that will produce impactful Army professional journal articles.

Of course, not all papers should be published. But some should, based both on the relevancy and coherence of the paper. The first paper or two drafted by a novice writer might remain as unit-level projects, but good writing often comes with experience—as soldiers write more, the better their work becomes. Commanders can help nominate the right papers for publication that deserve wider dissemination. This is how our professional journals build better content, draw more readership, and create more discourse. For those interested in starting a unit-led program to help new writers write papers and articles, see Jay Ireland and Ryan Van Wie's "How to Develop and Run a Unit Writing Program."[6]

It's also helpful to highlight the distinction between academic journals and the Army's branch journals. Academic journals are exclusive by design and have stringent expectations for their contributors to follow. For certain career fields, publishing in top-tier academic journals builds professional credibility and standing with employers. Army branch journals, such as *Infantry, Armor, Sustainment, Field Artillery*, and *Special Warfare*, have a different purpose. Their editors are looking for submissions that benefit the community and preserve Army articles for future reference. They seek primarily to reach military audiences. Their editorial standards are commensurate with our professional dialogue. In other words, they're not looking to make life difficult to publish for the sake of being exclusive. Quite the opposite, they want to be accessible and accommodating to Army writers and to help get ideas out to the force.

Suggestions

Embrace digestible writing. Shift our internal writing style to encourage a more conversational tone meant



While academic journals can certainly help writers build professional credibility, U.S. Army branch journals serve a different purpose—their primary audience is the military. Editors of these journals seek articles that can not only benefit the community but also preserve articles for future reference via their websites or other governmental archives. (Composite graphic by Beth Warrington, *Military Review*)

expressly to communicate ideas. We can pump the brakes on trying to write at the graduate level. Just celebrate when novice writers put words to paper and incrementally help them get better at writing over time. Academics are not our target audience, so we do not need to write for them. The audience is our fellow soldiers and colleagues within the profession, so write to them in a style that is easy to digest and clear to understand.

Introduce catalyst papers early. Catalyst papers can be introduced to junior leaders in NCO Education System courses, the Basic Officer Leader Course, and the Captains Career Course to instill confidence in this stress-free writing approach. Teach them how to collaborate to do research that advances an idea for their peers to debate. Publish the best ones in Army professional journals. Teach not just how to write the papers, but how to comment and reply to papers written by their peers, since the whole purpose of a catalyst paper is to start the dialogue.

Conclusion

Catalyst papers jump start conversations, and they help others chew on ideas and learn from current efforts. They can help us transform. They should be fast to read and easy to digest, structured and coherent but conversational. If you want to know what a catalyst paper looks and sounds like, you are reading one.

Catalyst papers are meant for units to share internally and publish in Army professional journals, not academic journals. The stringent and often

time-consuming process of publishing in academic journals is still important, it's just distinct from a catalyst paper. Different purposes, different audiences.

Writing a catalyst paper provides the best briefing you never had to give—because it is all captured on paper for anyone to read—even years later when you publish it in an Army professional journal. Writing and doing the research ourselves will always teach us more about a topic than if we just received the brief and were told all "the answers," because pulling on threads, talking to subject-matter experts, and wrestling with ideas is how we will discover new insights and unknown aspects of the problem.

These grassroots findings coming from the field might just help orient the rest of the Army to the issue discovered by your unit. Your efforts to help solve one small component of a wider issue might lead to a powerful breakthrough even if the whole problem remains to be solved. Write about those efforts, the challenges along the way, and findings in catalyst papers. Spark the dialogue across the profession so we can continue to transform. Strengthen the profession and the peers you serve with through written discourse. ■

The conclusions of this article were directly shaped by numerous professionals throughout the research phase. Peers and colleagues provided valuable insight, perspective, and feedback on this project, including leaders at each rank from sergeant to command sergeant major and second lieutenant to colonel. Ultimately, this article exemplifies a collaborative effort to bring forward ideas from the field through grassroots research. If you wanted to know what a catalyst paper looks like or how writing can help the Army transform through discourse, it looks like this article. In its original form, this article was written as a catalyst paper.

Notes

Epigraph. Randy George, Gary Brito, and Michael Weimer, "Strengthening the Profession: A Call to All Army Leaders to Revitalize Our Professional Discourse," Modern War Institute, 11 September 2023, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/strengthening-the-profession-a-call-to-all-army-leaders-to-revitalize-our-professional-discourse/.

1. Marshall McGurk, "When Understanding Goes M.I.A: Lost in Metaphors, Idioms, and Analogies," The Harding Project, 26 March 2024, https://www.hardingproject.com/p/when-understanding-goes-mia-lost.

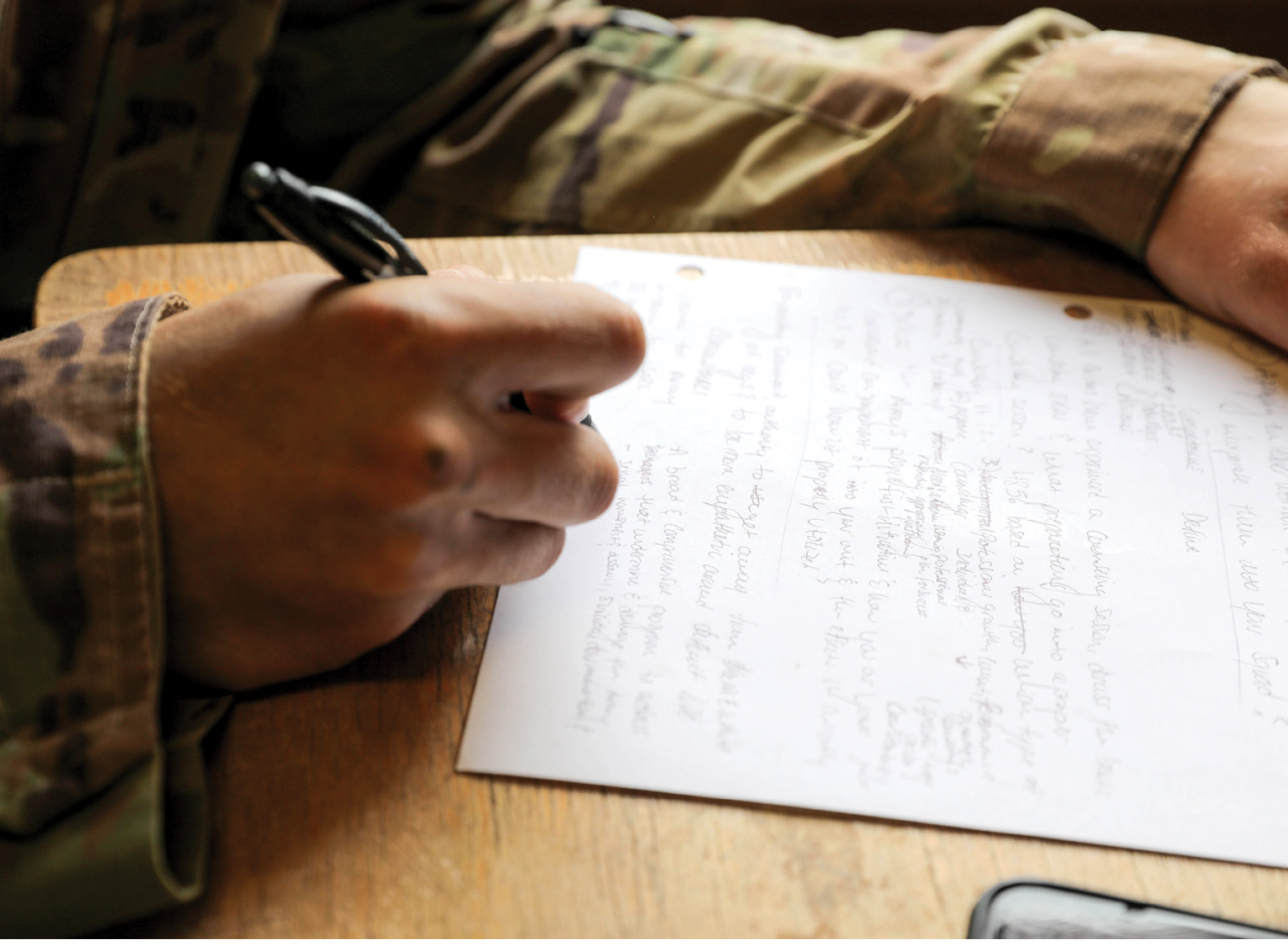
2. If this means trying to emulate the reading comprehension paragraphs on standardized tests, then we certainly have gone astray.

3. A note about whether to attribute yourself as the author of a paper: If inclined, they can be written as "nonpapers," where the author's identity, including name, rank, and position, is omitted to allow the content of the papers stand for itself and eliminate bias for or against the author. Nonpapers are a diplomatic tool used to discretely float proposals in sensitive negotiations. It's an informal document such as a discussion paper or white paper that excludes any attributable markings to remove outside influences that might otherwise prevent the idea from coming forward. Another approach to avoiding direct attribution is to publish an article on behalf of the unit or organization instead of the individual authors. The downside with nonattribution or publishing a paper on behalf of an organization instead of individual author is losing the ability to track down the contributors for additional questions and dialogue as time goes by. But it's better to get the ideas out into the Army community, and if authors are hesitant to write because of personal attribution, then a nonpaper or organizational paper are ways to resolve concerns of attribution.

4. Erik Davis and Nicholas Frazier, "Building and Running an Online Forum," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 65–69.

5. Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 31.

6. Jay Ireland and Ryan Van Wie, "How to Develop and Run a Unit Writing Program," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 76–81.



A U.S. Army Best Squad Competition participant writes during the essay preparation event at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, 7 September 2023. The Army is increasing emphasis on teaching and developing writing skills as an essential component of effective leadership at the small-unit level. (Photo by Sgt. Alyssa Blom, U.S. Army)

How to Develop and Run a Unit Writing Program

Lt. Col. Jay Ireland, U.S. Army
Maj. Ryan Van Wie, U.S. Army

Although this "how-to" compilation provides excellent tools for aspiring authors, professional writing can seem daunting for many soldiers. The nationwide decline in writing skills is well-documented, and schools are less frequently mandating writing courses, including at West Point.[1] The U.S. Army's fast-paced operational tempo and profuse tasks create trade-offs for soldiers and leaders who can only accomplish so much.[2] Additionally, varying education levels and writing skills create perceived entry barriers for aspiring authors. Given these constraints and trends, how can a unit's leadership develop and incentivize professional writing in their organization?

This guide provides tools for unit leaders who want to create a writing development program. Leaders at echelon can develop unit-level writing programs to cultivate subordinate communication skills, set reasonable writing goals, mentor authors through the submission process, and incentivize writing across the formation. Most importantly, these efforts will enhance critical thinking and foster an environment that supports professional discourse and debate on important topics.

The following guide is based on our experience creating and managing the 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment's Mustang Writing Initiative.[3] The "Initiative" began in January 2023 and included leader professional development sessions, working lunches, writing workshops, and battalion internal peer-review sessions.

We hope company and battalion leaders will read this article before they take the guidon or begin key staff and field grade key developmental assignments. Reading this might spark ideas for how leaders can develop similar unit writing programs in their formations. In our experience, creating and incentivizing a unit writing program was incredibly beneficial in developing writing skills and fostering professional dialogue as soldiers grappled with complex topics. In fact, the program led to the publication of ten articles, and numerous others will follow soon.[4]

Where to Begin? Establishing the Program

A unit writing program is a commander's program; it needs to be introduced as such. We published the intent of our unit writing program in our battalion's quarterly training guidance as part of the leader development strategy. The initial requirements and objectives should be clearly defined. At a minimum, you know to tell the formation the why, the how, and the who to get the program underway.

Start by figuring out the purpose of your program, the "why." Is it to produce articles? To spark conversations across the formation? Understanding why you want a program will dictate its structure. Our initial purpose was simply to improve the formation's written communication skills. This can be more tangible or focus on developing specific knowledge related to an upcoming mission or general unit operations.

With an overarching purpose established, figuring out the "how" comes next. While the specific execution details are likely to change and adapt to the reality of competing requirements, a basic framework is critical for expectation management. Our Initiative was based on improving written communication skills with tailored feedback, peer review, and senior leader engagement. What the commander spends time on is important, and other leaders will take notice.

Identifying the "who" is a little more challenging and is inherently influenced by your program objectives. We deliberately decided to make participation optional, acknowledging that professional writing takes time and focus that may not be available for all soldiers in our formation. As J. P. Clark highlights in this special issue, historic U.S. Army attempts at mandatory unit writing programs were met with mixed success.[5]

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Maj. Ryan C. Van Wie, U.S. Army, is an infantry officer and the executive officer of 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division. He previously served in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and the 4th Infantry Division. He holds a BS from the U.S. Military Academy and a Master of Public Policy from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Because of our broad audience and general professional development objective, we were creative with individual output expectations; we did not mandate publication in a professional outlet as the only end state. Publishing an article in a U.S. Army journal was not a feasible first step for numerous volunteers who needed additional writing development. We acknowledged different education levels and writing experiences among Initiative volunteers, and we had a broad definition for a "professional paper." Instead of only focusing on professional publications, we encouraged participants to consider publishing an after action review or a short white paper intended to be shared across our brigade and division. We found that simply working through the process was incredibly beneficial for the participant's professional development.

Once the program is established, the real work begins.

Running the Program

There is more to a unit writing program than simply putting out guidance. At the end of the day, these types of programs are mentorship and development opportunities that require leadership involvement. The extent of that involvement is a crucial decision that will influence how involved the rest of the formation is. Whether this is meetings, updates, or even just providing informal feedback, you need to have a plan for encouraging and supporting the aspiring authors.

Given an already busy battle rhythm, we conducted monthly Initiative meetings as working lunches to maximize attendance and limit scheduling conflicts. Initial meetings focused on identifying potential topics, developing arguments, conducting literature reviews, creating outlines, and leveraging evidence. These engagements can be solely leader-led or briefs from the participants, updating the group on their current progress or identifying potential issues. However, in-person meetings may not be possible for U.S. Army Reserve, National Guard, and deployed/geographically dispersed formations. For those units, Erik Davis and Nick Frazier's "Building and Running an Online Forum" provides innovative ideas for creating an online forum that would be ideal for a virtual unit writing program.[6]

One helpful approach we discovered was incorporating external resources. This could include bringing in a guest speaker or providing participants with an article to read beforehand. We found success in offering short discussions about writing techniques from sources such as Dr. Trent Lythgoe's *Professional Writing: The Command and General Staff College Writing Guide*.[7]

As the program progresses, the meetings must account for the varying progress of authors. As authors developed outlines and drafted papers in our program, we focused on providing them with tailored feedback from leaders with more writing experience. For us, this was generally provided by the battalion commander and XO in one-on-one office calls. Once authors began completing polished drafts, this transitioned to include submission advice and recommended next steps. As the Initiative evolved, our monthly meetings settled on the following format:

- Holding a brief discussion on recent professional publications of interest to our unit and recommending future reading.
- Having successful authors share their publication experience, including thesis development, evidence selection, research process, outlet selection, and submission lessons learned.
- Having authors with working drafts share an update on their projects, including current draft status, literature review, help needed, and goal outlet or product (e.g., after action review or white paper).
- Providing an opportunity for new authors to share project ideas, ask questions, and receive feedback from the audience on thesis development, paper outline, and literature review help.

There is a time commitment to running a program like this, and at the end of the day, there will be an opportunity cost. For us, this monthly working lunch typically lasted an hour to ninety minutes. Still, participants were encouraged to schedule follow-up appointments as needed to receive focused assistance with any steps in the writing process. On average, Initiative leaders (battalion commander and XO) invested approximately ten hours per month into the program. Those hours included our monthly group meetings, one-on-one discussions with participants, and reviewing draft outlines and papers.

Building the Audience

Depending on your writing program's "who," you may have to get creative to get participants, especially if it is entirely voluntary. It is worth noting that not

everyone in the formation will pursue writing. This guide is not advocating to create a program that forces everyone to submit articles to professional journals. The resulting flood of papers would drown our military journals' already thin editorial teams, and the rigor required for professional publication is not necessarily for everyone in the formation. The question then becomes how to incentivize participation.

We found that a commander's active participation in the program is the most important factor to motivating authors to volunteer. If the battalion commander is personally writing an article, participating in the program by sharing drafts (even if they are underdeveloped and need improvement), and receiving feedback about how to best proceed with their article, then others will be encouraged to dive in themselves. Our investment in the program showed that we valued professional discourse, enabling the program to take off with new authors joining the Initiative every month.

Another way to garner participation is to incentivize writing with senior leader affirmation. Successful Army writing across the force requires buy-in at echelon, with senior leaders meaningfully engaging with authors and continuing the professional dialogue started in an article. Authors will be encouraged to continue professional writing if they receive an email from a general officer telling them to keep going, or a positive comment from a battalion commander, company commander, or first sergeant who gained something from the article published by a first lieutenant or staff sergeant. If an author spends months refining an article and exercises personal courage by opening themselves up to worldwide criticism only to receive deafening silence, then it is reasonable to assume that the author will never write again. Worse, they may actively discourage those around them from attempting professional writing.

Because a lack of confidence in writing is an underlying issue, another approach to motivate soldiers to volunteer to start a project is to encourage coauthorship. This helps share the burden and furthers the network of people thinking critically in the unit. This is particularly important when the authors write about new and innovative ways of training ready formations and employing new technology. While a young lieutenant or NCO may not yet be a

Staff Duty Analytical Writing Assignment

Staff duty shifts are a great way to get staff duty officers (SDOs) and staff duty NCOs to write. Below are several prompts that we provided to our SDOs over the last year. They had to write one page, single spaced, and submit to the Top 3 and their company command team before their shift ended. The battalion commander or XO responded with feedback on the SDO author's writing and engaged with some of their ideas.

- **Crew Lethality.** Read chapters 3 and 4 from the *III Corps Lethality Report*. Write a one-page paper explaining what concrete steps you will take in to increase lethality in your current or future platoon.
- **Unit Culture.** Read the executive summary and finding 1 (pages 17–42) from the *Report of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee*. Write a one-page paper explaining what concrete steps you will take to ensure the Army's SHARP program is embraced and enforced in your unit at the soldier-level (platoon, staff section, etc.).
- **Delegation and Empowerment.** Read William Oncken and Donald Wass's "Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?" from the *Harvard Business Review*. Write a one-page paper explaining what concrete steps you will make to better delegate and empower your subordinates.
- **Ukraine Lessons Learned.** Read Jack Watling and Nick Reynolds's *Stormbreak: Fighting through Russian Defences in Ukraine's 2023 Offensive*, and write a one-page paper exploring which two aspects of large-scale combat operations described in this RUSI report are most important to your current job in 1st Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment? Briefly explain why these aspects are important and what you can do in the fiscal year 2024 training progression to address these large-scale combat operation trends.
- **Career Opportunities.** Read the U.S. Army Broadening Opportunities Program Catalog. Write a one-page paper that answers which Army career opportunities and broadening assignments are you interested in and why.

master at combined arms maneuver, they might be the subject-matter expert in their brigade or division on leveraging new equipment or operating in a new environment. A gentle nudge and encouragement from leaders might be the needed spark to inspire a young NCO or officer to start writing about their experience.

Finally, you can decide if it makes sense to have a mandatory component of the program. For example, we instituted a requirement for the staff duty officer (SDO) to complete an analytical writing assignment during their twenty-four-hour duty, and we used the division and brigade commanders' priorities as a guide. We then selected articles for the SDO to read, and prompted them to write a one-page, single-spaced paper explaining how the selected article was relevant to their current position.

Once complete, the SDO would send that essay to the battalion commander, executive officer, command sergeant major, and their company-level commander and first sergeant. Feedback for the SDO essay was provided in the form of a note from the battalion commander or XO focused on the essay's substance, the writing, and recommendations to improve. Because officers in our formation served as SDOs on average once a month, they had numerous opportunities to write papers for their chain of command to read. At just a single page, this assignment only requires five minutes to read and roughly another ten minutes to type a response. At a minimum, this allowed every lieutenant in the battalion to have an opportunity to receive direct feedback on their writing skills. This could sometimes inspire the SDO to join the writing program and expand their assignment to larger projects. Our battalion had two such instances.

Conclusion

Leaders at echelon can enhance writing skills in their units by creating unit writing development programs and incentivizing their soldiers to write professionally. This special edition provides an excellent starting syllabus for developing a unit writing program. Unit leaders can discuss two to three articles from this issue during leader professional development sessions or writing workshops to introduce prospective authors to each step of the writing process: Theo Lipsky's "How to Write an Article," Rebecca Segal's "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback," and John Amble's "How to Work with an Editor" provide an excellent starting foundation for any prospective author.[8] With that foundation in place, they can then transition to something similar to our working lunches, focused on reviewing works in progress, soliciting group feedback, sharing new helpful articles, etc. Units interested in coming up with ideas on what to write need to read Max Ferguson's article "Catalyst Papers: A Practical Writing Style for Army Leaders to Share Ideas."[9] Though the force is challenged by a busy operational tempo, an investment from leaders at echelon can provide soldiers with the writing development they need to meaningfully engage in professional discourse, share lessons learned, refine doctrine, and prepare the U.S. Army for the complicated operating environment of the future. ■

Notes

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"As to composition, I held with the few rules of thumb which practice had convinced me were sound. Knowing almost nothing of the rules of English grammar, then or later, I would still add nothing to the basic prescription:

- Every sentence must express at least one idea clearly.
- Economy of words is the correct principle, so shy at adjectives.
- There is always the right word, the strong word, so keep thinking and do not settle for a weaker one."

—S. L. A. Marshall, "Genesis to Revelation," *Military Review* 52, no. 2 (February 1972): 24

"And there is a fourth category of Infantryman—those who would like to write for publication but who do not have any of the confidence of this former group. They worry about their ability to write and fear that their efforts will be ridiculed by some editor sitting in a final judgement in a book-lined office someplace. So rather than face such ridicule and possible rejection, they do nothing about those articles that they have been thinking about."

—Marie B. Edgerton and Albert N. Garland, "Writing for Publication," *Infantry* 73, no. 5 (September-October 1983): 20–21

The battalion commander briefs paratroopers 13 June 2018 prior to a joint forcible entry assault mission in northern Italy during Rock Drop, a multinational training exercise that validated the entire 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment, 173rd Airborne Brigade. (Photo by Lt. Col. John Hall, U.S. Army)

Speech
It's a Technique

Maj. George J. Fust, U.S. Army

A leader who cannot stand in front of a group and confidently present ideas or brief a plan is a leader missing an opportunity. The spoken word is, and will remain, the foundation for how we communicate, inspiring others and provoking thought. Yet, we are rarely deliberate in leveraging the power of speech. Socrates made speech famous as a tool, but speech predates the written form as a method for transmitting knowledge. Speech is a critical component of professional discourse among our ranks but remains an underutilized tool.

Creating an effective environment for professional discourse is inherently multidimensional. Far too often, an overreliance on one technique or a methodology of

convenience generates suboptimal results. For maximum participation and retention, a variety of pedagogical approaches should be considered. One often hides in plain sight: speech. We use it every moment of the day. We employ it as a primary mechanism for communication, and yet we exclude it from leader development plans.

What follows are a variety of ideas to help inspire your organization to think beyond traditional leader development ideas. These methods include TED Talks, debates, podcasts and audiobooks, and storytelling. While not all inclusive, the ideas below can generate creative approaches in your organization to promote alternative learning and skill-development methods. They all share speech as the primary medium for unironically sparking a discussion that makes our Army better.

The "TED Talk"

With "talk" in the title, this approach is straightforward.[1] The concept of a TED Talk in an Army unit aligns with the spirit of the nationally recognized organization of the same name.[2] A key difference, however, is the Army version could include a question-and-answer session, and presentations can be a team activity that employs more than one speaker. A "talk" series is simple. Elements within an organization rotate responsibility for a focused-topic presentation. The idea is to go a mile deep, focusing on depth over breadth. The topics are ideally centered around the presenter's area of operations, warfighting function, unit requirements, or the like. It can also cover current events or a particular passion of a unit member. At its best, it drives discussion and understanding.

Once a schedule is drafted on who or what element is responsible for the delivery, the next phase is research. The individual or group should spend ample time deep-diving the subject. This may include reaching out to subject-matter experts or reading technical documents. A talk is not meant simply to inform. Instead, it should also inspire and generate discussion. The presentation format differs from standard Army briefing styles in that it can be more relaxed and include audience interaction. It can also occur in a variety of venues limited only by one's imagination. If necessary, slides or other visuals accompanying the talk should be complementary and not the central focus. If possible, visuals should be avoided; the emphasis is on the persuasiveness of the speech.

To maximize the value of the talk, spread the invite list wide or tailor it to a specific audience. Ask your higher headquarters and adjacent units to attend. Whoever the topic is relevant to should be encouraged to attend as time and mission allow. The benefit to the profession comes both in greater understanding of the subject discussed and in preparing and delivering the presentation. Executive communication and research skills are valuable attributes and create a foundation for contributing to professional discourse in other ways. A unit TED Talk is one of many speech-focused methods to improve your unit's leader development program.

Example. A soldier on staff duty generates a short current event essay about TikTok. He doesn't understand why the technology is a national security concern and why countries are considering banning it.

These sorts of topics are generated throughout a duty day and are a perfect candidate for a unit TED Talk. The subject is topical and relevant. The next steps are simple: (1) assign a team or action officer, (2) give a set period for research, (3) coordinate a venue, and (4) execute the talk. Bonus points for enlisting the help of a cyber officer or elevating the conversation to a classified level (although this may limit the audience). Consider the following:

- The best topics are those the formation is interested in or those that relate directly to the unit's mission.
- Be sure to choose the best venue. A video teleconference dial-in or a large space may be required.
- Don't forget the rehearsal.[3] The delivery of the brief is just as important as the content. The brief should inspire

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Lt. Gen. Mike Lundy, then commanding general of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and commandant of the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, holds a Q&A session 14 August 2017 with the CGSC class of 2018. (Photo by Dan Neal, U.S. Army)

and inform. It should leave a lasting impression and drive follow-on conversation. A weak or unprepared delivery is likely to have an opposite effect.

Let's Have a Debate

Competition is a powerful motivator. The desire to win can be harnessed in the name of professional development. With a little planning, you can unleash the intellect of your formation through debates.[4]

The "debate" referred to here is neither the cross-cubicle banter of two staff officers nor a contentious meeting. Debate, in this sense, is a deliberate and structured spoken contest with a judge.[5] It requires published rules and guidelines, time for research, and a topic narrow enough to avoid tangents. Common formats include the Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, or Oxford—each has its own rules and customs; however, these may not be the most suitable for your organization.[6] A simple style of alternating five-minute speeches can have the intended effect. Strive to have as much "evidence" as possible presented. Another option is for teams or individuals to prepare to debate both sides of an argument with a coin toss shortly before the event to determine the participant's position.

On the method of debates, we can learn from our Australian allies who have institutionalized debate as a mechanism for enhancing understanding and strengthening their army.[7] Formal debates reinforce learning throughout the Australian Army's professional military education system and help operational units explore concepts of interest. Typically, their executive officer-equivalent selects topics and forms teams. Debate subjects include tactical through strategic considerations such as unit force design, the employment of a new weapon system, or the unknowns of future

warfare.[8] The guiding philosophy is to choose a topic relevant to your organization.

Once the teams are selected and the topic decided, the next step is identifying a venue and time for execution. Ensure ample time is afforded for the participants to thoroughly research their main argument and supporting ideas. Competition will drive this self-discovery.

In addition to time, a set of rules for the debate format must be posted to ensure fairness and structure.[9] If the limit for the event is one hour, consider how much time each side gets for an opening statement, main argument, and rebuttal. Multiple "rounds" can be leveraged, or a point system can be implemented with an unbiased judge or judges. Get creative! Invite a guest judge or subject-matter expert as a witness. Yes, the goal is to "win," but the journey to get there will involve a deep understanding and retention of subject-matter relative to the profession. Other considerations include providing read-ahead material and a postdebate discussion that includes the judges' reasoning for selecting the winner. Bonus points if the debate is captured in a summary paper for posterity and wider dissemination.

Example. An intelligence organization in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command region receives a request for information: Which People's Liberation Army theater command has the highest readiness and capability? The standard approach is to search existing databases, reach out to the interagency, and generate a white paper. A debate can be employed to augment this effort.

The debate method will leverage people's natural competitive spirit to win while encouraging significant effort. It will likely cause analysts to invoke a variety of metrics to support their argument. These include historical training events, unit proficiency, current operations, order of battle, assigned tasks, equipment modernization, leadership personalities, and experience, to name a few.

The teams are incentivized to research and understand all the various aspects associated with readiness and capability. In doing so, they will naturally compare their knowledge of the U.S. Army as a model for understanding the foreign military. This strengthens their understanding of both militaries. It will also highlight gaps in knowledge and lead to deep dives for the answer.

The most competitive among them will solicit insight from experts in the field or even memorize facts related to the People's Liberation Army. All these aspects will assist in the debate and make them better intel analysts. They will identify resources and publications for future use. They will have a better holistic understanding of the area of emphasis while getting valuable public speaking experience.

Ultimately, the debate method provides a creative opportunity to think critically about a subject. Encouraging an audience increases learning potential. In this example, the end result is a better-informed answer to a request for information a decision-maker will use coupled with great training for the analysts.

Put the Headphones On

The ubiquity of technology offers additional audible mechanisms for professional discourse. Podcasts and audiobooks are viable alternatives to traditional written mediums. For the soldier in your formation who "hates reading" or gets bored with PowerPoint presentations, headphones can open a new learning path. The Army and affiliated institutions such as the Modern War Institute, the Sosh Research Lab, the Army War College, and a plethora of active-duty influencers generate podcasts; even the Training and Doctrine Command got into the business of releasing doctrinal manuals in audiobook form.[10] We're in a renaissance period of content creators with ample subjects and material for any interest. The key is harnessing this option for your unit's professional development.

As with the other options mentioned, a deliberate and structured approach will yield the best results. Merely handing a book to someone and asking them to read it will miss an opportunity. Mentorship is valuable because the mentor can guide the uninitiated. Layer the model when promoting podcasts or audiobook use. A few helpful ideas to get started follow:

- Crowdsource ideas from your formation. Ask for "must listen to" or specific episodes that are helpful to onboard someone in the unit. Generate a list and publish it.
- Assign "discussion leaders" responsible for generating read-ahead questions or topics of discussion. They are the guide for the duration of the book or podcast.
- Have a dedicated discussion session after the listening period. Rotate discussion leaders throughout the year and vary the topics to listen to.

- An alternative approach is a closed group chat exclusively focused on the book or podcast. A conversation in stride can occur in this forum.[11]

Books and podcasts can and should be used to supplement other leader development events. They can serve as preparation for debates or an upcoming visit from a senior leader. The beauty of a headphones approach is its flexibility. Individuals can listen during their commute or treadmill run. They can listen during their lunch break or in sound bites for as long as their attention span allows. The point is to offer an alternative that appeals to a generation connected to devices.

Here are a few words of caution. Units should avoid starting their own podcast or audiobook effort. The resources required and time commitment will detract from the unit's mission. Instead, consider serving as a guest on an existing platform. Podcasts and audiobooks may not be for everyone so vary their usage with other methods.

Storytelling

Much has been written about the power and effectiveness of storytelling for learning.[12] We sometimes leverage it without conscious thought. The act is as old as speech itself, used to capture experience and create culture. Organizations who use storytelling intentionally to promote professional discourse are employing a powerful human connection that transcends pedagogical preferences. Speech in this form taps into emotion and realism. Both factors are helpful for retention and understanding.

Everyone has a story to tell and this technique should be considered across echelons and age groups. Imagine standard Army resiliency training.[13] Slides with statistics are displayed. A chaplain or senior NCO offers vignettes and resources. Maybe a handout is given with guidance for helping a fellow soldier in distress. Did this training have the intended effect? Being informational is better than nothing; however, storytelling can make it real and make it stick.

If a soldier who has experienced personal loss were to describe the circumstances and feelings associated with their loss, the audience is more likely to be drawn in. They are more likely to remember the underlying themes. Sensitivity should be paramount when soliciting volunteers to provide realistic examples on this topic and others that are uncomfortable. The personal touch of a story can also help during counseling and while navigating a crisis or difficult event. The stories provide hope. We made it through last time, and now we can learn from past actions for this current event.

Storytelling historical events can also apply even in the absence of direct experience. The most common example is during staff rides.[14] History is a great repository for tailoring the message to a leader development goal. It helps transmit unit heritage with applications for understanding the future. With respect to the future, storytelling can also be in fictional form. We do it during mission planning when describing potential enemy actions. Additionally, units can deliberately employ fictional storytelling as a way to understand future technology employment or tactical changes. P. W. Singer and August Cole's novel *Ghost Fleet* is a great example. Nothing is stopping you from implementing a brown bag lunch, whereby a unit member tells a creative, fictional story relevant to their warfighting function or area of operations. The group can then discuss the hypothetical branches or sequels.

Don't forget the story when devising a leader development plan or trying to encourage participation in professional discourse. If you don't have it, invite a guest speaker who does. Ask the medic with a combat medic badge to assist during medical lanes. He will likely offer reinforcing stories that make the training real, urgent, and personal. Stories are the so what. Use them.

Conclusion

The power of speech in professional discourse should be deliberately employed to maximize leader development and foster ideas that make the Army better. Everyone learns and retains information differently. Speech is a universal mechanism for transmitting ideas: it can inspire, spark creativity, and appeal to those of the next generation turned off by traditional mediums. Speech as a deliberate professional development tool in a unit program provides an option for renewing and encouraging professional discourse that adds to the efforts for publishing articles discussed throughout this compilation. ■

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"Faculty and students alike were most impressed by a former high official in the Communist Party. He was the only guest lecturer invited to spend two days at the college, a favorable reaction brought about by three factors—knowledge of the topics, enthusiasm, and respect for the intellect of his audience. His sole training aids were a piece of chalk and a dilapidated blackboard that looked as if it dated from Napoleon's days at the *École Militaire.*"

—Richard J. Stillman, "The Effective Military Speaker—A Dying Art?," *Military Review* 44, no. 8 (August 1964): 7

"The best training aids and the finest ghostwritten talks, however, are not adequate substitutes for the laborious task of knowing one's subject. Perhaps a reevaluation is in order to permit a better balance between the substantive approach and the use of aids. As General Patton said: 'Hard work is the price of successful speaking—so few are willing to pay that price.'"

—Richard J. Stillman, "The Effective Military Speaker—A Dying Art?," *Military Review* 44, no. 8 (August 1964): 10

Two coauthors review and discuss development of the article they are preparing for submission to a military-oriented publication. (AI image by Michael Lopez, *Military Review*)

Writing Is a Team Sport

How to Find and Write with a Coauthor

Maj. Brennan Deveraux, U.S. Army
Capt. Leah Foodman, U.S. Army

Writing is rarely a solitary venture. While there are formal and informal means of building support networks to receive feedback throughout the writing process, coauthoring is a great way to reduce unease and distribute the workload. Still, before you randomly ask your office mates

to embark on a writing journey or agree to contribute to someone else's project, read this how-to guide on coauthoring an article to avoid some of the common shortfalls. Cowriting has its fair share of challenges that authors must account for to succeed, from coordinating writing schedules to avoiding reader confusion from multiple voices or styles (more on that later).

This guide shares hard-earned lessons based on our personal experiences as coauthors on numerous articles, many of which were published and many that crashed and burned. Through anecdotes and a review of different tried-and-true methods for coauthoring, this piece aims to steer both aspiring and experienced authors through the writing process from start to finish. Read on to learn how to select the perfect partner, establish a writing plan, mentor through coauthoring, and navigate the inherent difficulties of composing an article with multiple contributors.

A Note on Coauthoring

Statistically speaking, you will likely find yourself coauthoring a piece. About one-quarter of military-authored articles (113/450) were coauthored across *Armor, Engineer, Fires/Field Artillery, Infantry, Military Review*, the Modern War Institute, *Parameters,* and War on the Rocks between November 2021 and April 2023.[1] Coauthorship was most common in branch magazines, with 64 coauthored pieces and 107 single authored pieces (37 percent) in that period.[2] *Military Review* and *Parameters* pieces were just behind with 23 percent, and 16 percent of online pieces by military writers in Modern War Institute and War on the Rocks were coauthored.[3]

So why did I just bombard you with a bunch of data? Because, when struck by a great idea, many military authors' first step is finding the perfect partner.

The Perfect Partnership

Finding a suitable coauthor is a challenge. Writing will test your relationship early and often as priorities shift and inevitable creative differences arise. So, how do you find a partner who will elevate the project and see it through to the end?

The best approach to developing an effective union is to frame it as a team effort early: you are not looking for someone's help with *your* project, but a teammate to develop your project *together*. While a late addition to an already-drafted article isn't unheard of, the ideal time to find the perfect partner is in the brainstorming or outlining stage of the writing process. The earlier you find a potential writing partner, the better. Optimally, you and your coauthor develop the idea together.

I (BD) luckily experienced such a scenario while at the School of Advanced Military Studies. After class one day, a classmate and I discussed the failings of the Army's body composition program. We violently agreed on most points, and the decision to capture our argument in a short article together just made sense.[4] Sometimes, the willingness to voice your thoughts and engage with others is enough to attract an interested coauthor. Other times, a more deliberate effort is required. So, don't be afraid to discuss your idea with those around you while you are in your brainstorming stage.

Rebecca Segal's article in this compilation, "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback," outlines the value of discussion in solidifying an initial argument.[5] These conversations serve as an excellent venue for soliciting coauthors, as in the case of my after-class-chat-turned-paper. There is ample room for exploration and discovery at this stage in the writing journey.

Simply discussing your idea with peers, bosses, and subject-matter experts helps you flesh out your own thoughts and affords you the opportunity to hear additional perspectives that add value to your argument. Still, before propositioning someone to write your article with you just because they are enthusiastic about the idea, ensure you understand the nature of the contributions you are looking for. At the end of the day, you already have the initial inspiration; the coauthor should either make the process easier or strengthen the final product. Sometimes, they do both.

Ask yourself what you need in a

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coauthor. Do you need help writing? Do you need more expertise on the topic? Would rank or experience in a unique position add credibility to your argument? Does author diversity change the narrative of your argument or address potential bias? Identifying your gap allows you to find the right person to fill it. If a prospective writing partner brings value to your efforts, then ask for help. However, before diving into the writing process, make sure all authors agree on a writing plan.

> If you plan to sit in a room together and write, you may be disappointed with how little gets accomplished as you work through each sentence.

The Writing Plan: Methods to Avoid the Madness

So, you found a partner or two and are excited to start writing. Wait to start. The next step is the most crucial part of coauthoring. While all the other aspects of writing an article still apply (see Theo Lipsky's article for a detailed how-to guide), you must first figure out how to distribute the work among the authors.[6] This guide offers four approaches based on our experience, most of which were leveraged to write the coauthored pieces in this compilation (see the table). These methods are not the only approaches, nor are they mutually exclusive of each other (especially as hurdles arise). Oftentimes, the best approach to a writing plan is a conglomeration of two or more of these methods.

Joint adventure. Equal partners writing the article together; this is the likely going-in assumption for first-time coauthors. How else could it be? Yet, this plan is the most difficult to accomplish. Sitting down and writing the article *together* is more challenging than it sounds. Drafting can be a long process. If you plan to sit in a room together and write, you may be disappointed with how little gets accomplished as you work through each sentence.

Still, it can be done, especially with modern technology. While sitting in a cubicle taking turns on a single screen might tax the relationship, software that allows all authors to access and edit the document simultaneously has made this a more feasible writing plan as authors can collaborate in real-time despite geographical dispersion. In fact, the authors of "Building and Running an Online Forum" leveraged this method.[7]

However, concurrent editing has drawbacks, particularly when authors are emotionally invested in their writing. Losing work because someone typed over or deleted your contribution can be frustrating, especially among equals. A joint adventure, though possible, is often easier in theory than in reality. If you do select this as your primary writing plan, be cautious that the process does not create more conflict than cohesion between you and your coauthor.

Back and forth. Authors often defer to this method upon abandoning the joint adventure. Instead of working simultaneously, the back-and-forth method works sequentially with a single author owning the draft for a short period, then sending the draft to their partner. The partner picks up the draft, reviews and edits what was written so far, and adds new content to extend the piece in length. This gradual chunking method allows each author to step back from the project, then forces them to reengage on the topic by reading an updated version and diving back in.

The back-and-forth method works best when each author can dedicate time to the piece in short bursts but can't prioritize it for a long period. Like the first method, it also relies on some trust in the relationship, as each person is free to edit the other's work. This requires ample coordination as each author strives to build on the other's work while maintaining a shared vision. This is how the "PME to Publication" guide was written: the authors agreed upon an overall intent, specific outline, and frequently communicated via phone calls during the transitions.[8]

Table. Tried-and-True Writing Methods for Coauthoring

Tried-and-True Writing Methods for Coauthoring	
Joint Adventure	Written together as equal partners; simultaneous efforts on the same product
Back and Forth	Written together as equal partners; sequential efforts and shared drafts
Divide and Conquer	Each author assigned respective sections of an article that are combined when complete
Lead Author	Individual author owns the draft and manages the roles of other authors

(Table by authors)

However, do not fear potential lost work, as earlier drafts provide backups, and the authors can utilize the "track changes" tool during drafting and editing. Still, these first two methods will test the coauthor relationship and may unnecessarily complicate the draft if the writing styles don't blend well together.

Divide and conquer. The most straightforward writing method is to select who writes each section and then consolidate at the end. From personal experience, this is the most common approach to coauthoring, especially with more than two authors. In this method, the workload is divided up front and the expectations are clear. We crafted the piece you are reading now this way. It is quick and easy to coordinate. This simple approach affords authors a lot of independence within their assigned sections and is seemingly easier than the previous two methods, but it is not without faults.

Because each section is written separately, the collective product might lack cohesion or a common voice. This creates additional work at the end of the process to ensure that each portion of the article is written in a similar style and that the sections build on each other with logical transitions. When the reader can clearly identify the shift from one author to another within the piece, the effectiveness of the overall argument may be diminished.

Accomplishing these final touch-ups to develop a cohesive paper often requires a single author to take the lead. If this is your preferred writing method, there are two ways that you might choose to mitigate this challenge. First, you can designate your lead editor up front and establish that they will be responsible for final polishing. Second, you can incorporate the back-and-forth method in the editing process. This allows you to weave each author's voice throughout the piece and reduce sudden shifts in writing style.

Lead author. Sometimes, the writing relationship is not equal. This can be the result of varied experience, writing capabilities, knowledge of the subject, or simply time available to commit. When this is the case, having a lead author manage the project is a viable writing plan. The lead author will have a heavier workload, but the piece will more easily be converted to a singular voice and timeline hold-up frustrations are reduced. The other authors will contribute to specific sections, serve as an editor, or provide the topic expertise.

But at the end of the day, the lead author controls the draft, and depending on the relationship imbalance, may drive other aspects like deciding the venue, conducting the security review, and working with the editor. Of note, the lead does not necessarily have to be the highest ranking in the group. Usually, it is who is most capable of seeing the piece to completion. The lead author method works well as a mentorship tool for developing subordinates and is a common practice for helping someone with their first publication.

Coauthoring as Mentorship

While most of this compilation focuses on aspiring writers, the vital role of experienced writers in developing the next batch of authors must be addressed. Seasoned authors can provide the requisite mentorship to enable new authors to successfully enter the writing space or grant more opportunities to those with limited experience. The mentor can offer expertise in content development and drafting, assist in navigating the submission and editing processes, and open additional venue options by virtue of their established credibility.

Shortly after completing my (LF) undergraduate education, one of my professors approached me about a writing project. Rather than allow my academic

interests to dissipate as I began my military career (or have them relegated to conversation alone), he encouraged me to coauthor with him. His mentorship and guidance allowed me to channel my passions, leverage my research, and develop my writing skills to pursue a tangible goal. He taught me how to write for publication (as opposed to a grade) and select an appropriate venue for submission.

The work was published in a peer-reviewed journal nearly a year after our initial discussions.[9] My coauthor's mentorship served as my gateway to the world of professional writing. Transitioning from the school project to professional article mindset can be challenging; a mentor's tutelage can help you successfully take the leap.

Experienced writers should seek opportunities to take someone under their wing. Coauthoring through mentorship is an occasion to teach, develop professional relationships, and catalyze a mentee's publication experience. The more ideas are shared, the better our institution will become.

Writing plan development should be deliberate, and coauthors should select the methods that best suit their circumstances. However, as the common Army adage goes, "No plan survives first contact." Sometimes, even the best intentions and well-devised approaches fail or generate frustration. Not all partnerships will be success stories.

A Cautionary Tale

Coauthorship can be great, but the process is not always smooth sailing. In fact, sometimes it's downright difficult. As in any collaborative effort, disagreements are sure to arise. Though you might have agreed upon a position at the outset, perhaps new information based on research creates a difference of opinion. Though a good coauthor might play "devil's advocate" occasionally to strengthen your collective ideas, fundamental disagreement over principle is one potential barrier in the coauthorship process. If this issue arises, it might be best to part ways and take your respective ideas to new projects or hold onto them for a later opportunity. Publication is a new level of commitment to an idea: once the work is out there with your name on it, it will always be attributed to you. Thus, publishing an idea you do not 100 percent support is daunting and, frankly, unadvisable.

A second challenge to coauthorship is the classic group project frustration (think back to grade school). Particularly when it comes to writing as a hobby—rather than a profession—the workload might not always be evenly distributed. As an Army officer or professional in any field, life tends to get in the way. A solo author can shift their timeline without disturbing a partner, but a coauthor is not afforded such luxury.

To mitigate this challenge, coauthors should transparently discuss their conflicting obligations and other time commitments upfront and break down the workload respectively. This is also an opportune moment to identify strengths, weaknesses, and relevant experiences. The split is not always (often not) fifty-fifty, but it is better to manage that expectation up front and approach the project realistically. These conversations are paramount to selecting the best writing plan.

Of note, writing always requires discipline, commitment, and sacrifice. It is not easy to sit down to research, write, or edit after returning from a long workday or a field exercise. Though a beer with friends is often an admittedly tempting prospect, sometimes a constrained timeline requires an author to devote the time to their paper instead. This is particularly true of coauthorship; when another person depends on your contributions, the required sacrifices may feel more apparent.

A third challenge is voice. While it was already discussed briefly above, it is worth reiterating. Creating a singular voice is necessary yet challenging, particularly if the authors have drastically different writing abilities. No matter how logical your argument is, if the writing feels disjointed or distracts the reader, your article will not garner the attention it deserves.

Achieving a singular voice includes obvious efforts to create a similar tone throughout the piece: adjusting word choice, reworking sentence structure, and focusing on transition sentences or paragraphs between author sections.

There are also less evident hiccups that you might not expect when creating a singular voice. In our (recent) experience, sharing anecdotes in the first person became a potentially confusing endeavor with more than one author. This article has three different personal stories. Without the individual author's initials at the onset of each vignette, would you be able to identify which anecdote belonged to which author?

When we initially approached the multiple authors/storytelling dilemma, we decided to emphasize readability by letting the author tell the story in the first person with corresponding endnotes to refer the reader to the respective author and article. We thought it worked well; our first reviewer didn't. To add clarity, we reduced the number of anecdotes altogether and included the author's initials where appropriate. Even with experience (and this handy how-to guide), there will inevitably be obstacles for you and your coauthors to tackle as a team.

The final challenge of coauthorship deals with circumstances beyond the control of either party. Sometimes, things just don't work out.

I (LF … see what we're doing here?) recently coauthored a piece with a friend who was required to remove his name from our byline due to organizational constraints. I worked well with my coauthor throughout the writing process and did not experience any of the challenges described above: we agreed upon and strongly believed in our ideas, managed the workload equally in accordance with our initial writing plan, and integrated our contributions well into a singular voice.

Yet, his chain of command advised him against publication in the final weeks. Shocked, I offered to scrap the project entirely and walk away with the fulfillment of simply expressing our ideas on paper, writing to learn. In the spirit of professional discourse and sharing our thoughts, he encouraged me to publish individually, removing himself from the byline. Our work was successful in reaching a widespread audience and initiating discussion, and we were able to retroactively add his name back to the byline after publication. I am grateful to have selected a supportive, humble coauthor committed to sharing his ideas even if he did not believe he would receive credit.[10]

Conclusion

Though both internal and external factors can affect successful coauthorship, do not shy away from seeking a writing partner. If you are just starting out, look for a partner and share the burden. Understand what you're missing and find the perfect partner that brings value to your project or the writing process. Discuss writing plans and deal with potential friction points like expectations and timelines upfront. If all parties are inexperienced as coauthors, your best bet is to divide and conquer, taking care of individual sections first and working on blending at the end. This way, everyone knows their responsibilities.

If you are an experienced author, step up as a mentor and help introduce new voices to the conversation. Serve as a lead author to introduce others to the conversation. Ultimately, writing is a team sport: several collaborative minds are often far more capable than individual brainpower. The challenges can be overcome, but the advantages cannot be understated. We all benefit from an increased focus on professional discourse. ■

Notes

1. The data above was collected and shared by Zachary Griffiths, "Bring Back Branch Magazines," Modern War Institute, 27 April 2023, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/bring-back-branch-magazines/.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Brennan Deveraux and Katie Haapala, "Who Cares If Soldiers Look Fat? Reimagining the Army's Body Composition Program," From the Green Notebook, 16 March 2022, https://fromthegreennotebook.com/2022/03/16/who-cares-if-soldiers-look-fat-reimagining-the-armys-body-composition-program/.

5. Rebecca Segal, "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 94–99.

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

7. Erik Davis and Nick Frazier, "Building and Running an Online Forum," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 65–69.

8. Brennan Deveraux and Gordan Richmond, "From PME to Publication," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 43–50.

9. Max Margulies and Leah Foodman, "Suboptimal Selective Service: An Analysis of the Obstacles to Selective Service Reform in American Political Institutions," *Journal of Strategic Security* 14, no. 2 (2021): 74–88, https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.14.2.1903.

10. Leah Foodman and Kevin Shinnick, "Be All We Can Be: Reclaiming the Army Identity," War Room, 21 March 2024, https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/all-we-can-be/.

Receiving feedback. (Graphic by Beth Warrington, *Military Review*; original photo by Sgt. Antony Lee, U.S. Army)

A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback

Capt. Rebecca Segal, U.S. Army

"Is this worth ruining a friendship over?"

If you are sharing or receiving feedback on a paper from a friend and find yourself asking this question, you have probably gone too far. But don't worry, I have been there, on both sides of that situation, and have learned some of the art of giving and receiving feedback in a way that leads to a better paper outcome while maintaining the relationship.

A few years ago, a friend requested that I edit her paper. It was one of the first times I had been sought out informally to edit something, and so I dove into the

draft without a specific plan. As I read her article, I got stuck on the scope and structure, so I set up a call with her. I started by asking questions about the paper, but it soon became clear in her increasingly terse responses that my friend didn't want the deep structure changes I was hinting toward. I switched strategies and instead gave some smaller feedback. She seemed satisfied with this lesser feedback, and we concluded the call.

As the strategy changed mid-call, I realized that when she had requested for me to "edit" her paper, she was expecting surface-level feedback on a near-finished draft, as opposed to deep feedback on structure, flow, and clarity. While not friendship ending, if I hadn't changed strategies, there would undoubtedly have been tension in our relationship. Furthermore, she probably wouldn't have sought out my feedback again.

These days, I request and give feedback on professional topics weekly, both for formal roles as an editor for The Harding Project and From the Green Notebook, and informally for friends and coworkers before they submit their work for publication. The informal feedback process is critical to achieving quality writing. The feedback can come at any step along the writing process, from brainstorming to writing to editing. There is an art to giving and receiving feedback, and below is a guide of lessons I have learned from both the author and editor perspectives.

Brainstorming

Author. When you start brainstorming for a paper, find people from whom to bounce ideas. At this point, you should worry less about finding people who are capable of editing your writing. Instead, focus on finding people who are subject-matter experts in your topic area or simply people who are argumentative enough to provide you with constructive criticism. An expert might be your battalion's maintenance warrant officer, a weapons squad leader, or a civilian instructor at the schoolhouse—someone likely to hold a professional opinion. Find the right person based on their knowledge, not their rank.

To have these engagements, simply bring up the idea and ask them their thoughts. You would be surprised how productive having a conversation on your proposed topic can be in helping to solidify your initial argument. Ask follow-up questions and pose hypotheticals to draw out your ideas. It is critical to seek people with varied experiences; if everyone you talk with is the same rank and military occupational specialty as you, you're unlikely to receive well-rounded feedback. Similarly, if you aren't receiving pushback on your ideas, you probably need to keep talking to people. It is often in these back-and-forth conversations that force you to explain and support your ideas that you can flesh out and clarify your thinking.

A few years ago, I wanted to write a paper about a new doctrinal concept, but I struggled to create a cohesive outline. Though I spoke with a diverse set of experienced people in my unit on the idea, I couldn't get past brainstorming. I gave up on the paper. Still, I was passionate about the topic and engaged a friend of mine from another unit who had no experience in the area. Fortunately, he completely disagreed with me on the idea, and I was forced to defend my reasoning. In the argument that ensued, the paper structure became clear, and I wrote it the next day.

This experience taught me that it is better to have someone poke holes in an idea before I invest time and energy into the writing process. Had I waited for a complete draft to show my friend, I would have been more emotionally invested in the product and less open to substantial criticism.

Getting involved in intellectual communities where ideas are shared frequently is a great place to start to both observe and participate in these exchanges. This could be joining an online community like those discussed by Erik Davis and Nick Frazier, a unit writing program like Jay Ireland and Ryan Van Wie, or just creating an informal one among coworkers.[1]

Finally, if you sense there is a rank dynamic prohibiting good feedback, be explicit that you are seeking feedback because of their expertise, and that they shouldn't avoid constructive feedback because of rank. It can often be helpful to demonstrate appropriate intellectual back-and-forth by bringing up holes in your ideas or playing devil's advocate, and then encouraging your intellectual partner to do the same.

That "peer" for whom I edited? She outranked me. But in the context of writing, she was seeking out my advice as an

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editor. At no point did she pull rank into the conversation, nor did it influence my approach (beyond saying "ma'am" every few sentences). I needed to be sensitive to her requests regardless of her rank; she was seeking me out for my expertise and feedback, despite my rank.

While it is not your job as the peer to shepherd a writer through the process, the simple question as to the writer's next steps can help catch issues before the new writer loses faith or goes astray. Another tool is to show them Theo Lipsky's guide to writing an article.[2]

> For writers who have completed brainstorming but are getting stuck in translating abstract thought into writing, there are people out there to help.

Any good author-editor relationship requires trust and humility from both parties. Adding in the military hierarchy dynamic requires a reverence for this balance.

There will be people who are difficult to brainstorm with, but I have found that they are typically just difficult, independent of their rank. In these situations, assess the project goal and decide whether it is feasible with that individual. You may need to reframe expectations, change the dynamic, or work with someone else to achieve a successful outcome.

Editor. If you are the brainstorming partner, remember to first work to understand what the writer is requesting of you. Are they seeking your experience, guidance on finding resources for further study, or just looking for you to poke holes? Ask the author what they are hoping to get out of the brainstorming session and then help where you can. If you are new to the writing scene and unsure of why you were sought out, remember that the writer approached you because they value your feedback, so trust that. If the writer is new, they are sometimes nervous about sharing half-baked ideas and asking for feedback before a thought is coherent, so remember to balance any passion for a subject with the author's vulnerability in asking for help.

Once brainstorming concludes, ask the writer if they know how to proceed from where you leave off. Recently, I worked with an individual on brainstorming for an article. He had lots of fantastic ideas and largely just needed to say them aloud with somebody. Weeks after the brainstorming session, I followed up to see what happened with the article. It turned out he hadn't been sure how to research the topics and had trouble structuring the ideas, and so he had just dropped the paper.

Writing

Author. For writers who have completed brainstorming but are getting stuck in translating abstract thought into writing, there are people out there to help.

Again, unit writing programs create a local writing support system, so whether you are a part of the unit executing or just aware of that ecosystem, it can provide a great support network. Certain publications also have programs to help writers along the process. From the Green Notebook, for example, has an initiative where writers can work with an editor, regardless of where the writer is in the writing process. The editor can assist with everything from structuring an outline to helping get a draft ready for submission.

While not a replacement for a writing buddy, reading the paper aloud can be a good stopgap until one is found. This method is especially helpful for newer writers who viscerally know what sounds right but often have trouble translating that into their writing.

Once the outline is complete, it's time to start writing. If there is a good outline, then you should be able to get most of a draft completed, and then you can seek out assistance from others for specific parts or for editing the entire draft. Drafting alone helps ensure cohesion and consistency for the narrative voice.

If you can't get past the outline phase, seek out a friend or coworker and ask for help. The issue you are running into will determine whether you need a subject-matter expert to help with the ideas or an experienced writer to help with the writing process.

Editor. While clear writing represents clear thinking, unclear writing isn't necessarily a reflection of

unclear thinking.[3] Your job, again, is to determine which part the author needs support with.

If there is unclear writing but clear thinking, then it is likely the writing process itself that is the issue. Help the author break down the writing process into smaller chunks and offer to iterate more frequently so they don't hit a wall and stall.

> No editing should be a slaughterfest. Be empathetic; editing is an agreement of trust and vulnerability, and your job is to help the author.

Unclear thinking, on the other hand, indicates a need to revisit brainstorming. In this case, I recommend getting more involved not simply in the brainstorm, but also in connecting those amorphous ideas to a concrete outline.

This process may feel like a step back to the author. But realistically, they weren't ready to progress past brainstorming before. However, if you can help them construct a robust outline, the next iteration of writing should feel less frustrating and produce a better outcome.

Editing

Author. Receiving feedback on a full draft is the height of vulnerability an author experiences in the writing process. At this point, you have invested time and emotion into your paper. You are sharing something personal and asking for feedback. The first thing to remember is that you are asking for feedback, not for somebody telling you it is perfect. While congratulations and praise might feel nice, it won't make the paper any stronger.

If you have specific things that you want the editor to focus on, provide those instructions when you reach out to request edits. For example, are you concerned with the transitions? Do you want to ensure your article is readable to a nonmilitary audience? Is there a specific area that you are stuck on? This is also a great opportunity to provide a scope for your requested edits: Are you looking for deeper edits or simple copy editing?

As you gain experience writing and working with others, you will also learn who to be specific about which type of editing you want. I have people I reach out to for help with specific topics to ensure ideological rigor, and I ask others for help with writing clarity.

Finally, remember that it's your name on the byline. Know when to listen to feedback and when to ignore it. When you receive feedback that you disagree with, take a walk, or sit on the recommended revisions for twenty-four hours. Then, ask yourself if they are objectively right. If not, why not? Be honest with yourself and try to separate your ego from the feedback that your writing received. But don't feel required to make changes; they were offering you suggestions, even if they might outrank you. Finally, determine if your editor has a personal bias. This is especially relevant for opinion pieces and articles that explore newer, disputed topics. Ensure you provided a complete argument that stands up to their feedback but don't rewrite or scrap a draft simply because somebody disagrees with you.

Editor. No editing should be a slaughterfest. Be empathetic; editing is an agreement of trust and vulnerability, and your job is to help the author. If your author leaves disillusioned with the process, you have lost them and you have failed as an editor.

Before I dive into the paper, I confirm the level of edits the author is requesting and then resist doing any edits outside of what they have requested. A friend asked that I edit a paper of his that turned out to have content with which I wholeheartedly disagreed. It was a piece based on his experience, and I thought the analysis of that experience came to incorrect conclusions. I made a long list of notes for feedback as I read through the piece. Fortunately, I took my own advice and asked what level of feedback the author was looking for. It was clear he just wanted final, small-level feedback and not for his argument to be deconstructed, as I had been gearing up to do. Initially, it felt disingenuous for me to not provide my laundry list, but I realized that he wasn't going to listen to it anyway, so in some ways,

that list didn't matter. Instead, I focused on providing a few key points of feedback from that list. Therefore, the feedback didn't feel canned or disingenuous to me, but it also respected what he was looking for and was well received by him.

This is an art. Sometimes, you have to accept imperfection. However, in doing so, you can respect the author's wishes and help maintain their voice. Not to mention, this keeps the feedback from impacting the relationship and is an approach that will more likely motivate them to work with you again. When they show vulnerability in asking for help, you should choose to build trust instead of breaking it down. Furthermore, giving a little bit of good feedback that the author listens to is far more effective than giving a lot of feedback that the author ignores.

Conducting the edits can sometimes be a lofty endeavor, but I have developed a process I use with authors to limit unnecessary or duplicative work. I evaluate the overall message or argument, structure, individual sections, and end with transitions and fine tuning. I have found that strict adherence to this process helps limit author fatigue. Lots of sections end up being cut or moved, and so I prefer to wait until each step is set to help minimize unnecessary edits. Staying within the step also helps manage expectations for the author, ensuring they know what type of feedback they are going to receive and when. In my experience, this expectation management makes receiving hard feedback easier for the author and also helps limit the volume of feedback given at any time.

I always read the entire article first without making edits. Resisting the temptation to dive in as you see necessary can be difficult but is worth the value added to the overall paper's message.

I'll also ask how involved an author wants to be. Do they want feedback that they action themselves, or do they want me to go in and make edits? Their answer may change at different stages, so if I'm unfamiliar with the author, I'll often check back in.

When starting the edits, I confirm that I understand what the author thinks they are communicating and to whom. Sometimes this requires a phone call for us to talk through their message or intended audience; doing this early in editing the draft has been one of the biggest tools I have acquired. If nothing else, when editing for somebody I don't know, it humanizes both author and editor and gives me a better sense of their literary voice. But often, I find that the article underemphasizes or misses a key part of the author's argument or story, and catching this before working on any structural changes is key.

Sometimes, in editing, there is a paper that needs to take a step back. That conversation can be hard for both the editor and author, but receiving concrete and actionable feedback that is delivered humanely can be the best thing you can do as an editor. If needed, you can direct them to Trent Lythgoe's "From Rough Draft to Polished Manuscript: The Power of Rewriting," included in this compilation, as a guide to diving back into the project.[4] Still, remember to only provide that kind of feedback if you have confirmed that is what the author is asking for. Don't overstep and deter them from completing the project.

If the paper doesn't need to take a step back but you think it needs significant structural changes, limit yourself to three major pieces of feedback and focus on thematic issues. Then, iterate more to allow for successive approximations and fixing of any smaller issues. If you provide a laundry list like I had been gearing up for in my example, you will either lose the author's voice in the paper or their willingness to write completely. Again, focus on where you are trying to get with this paper and accept that you won't fix everything. It can be helpful to identify how many "points" on a one-hundred-point scale you are hoping to improve the paper. If you are just editing and not rewriting from the brainstorming phase, you are probably only able to do about a thirty-point improvement without risking losing the author's voice or the author themself.

Just like before sending it off, read the paper aloud; it can help you catch everything from jarring transitions to grammatical errors. This is even more important if you did not write it, as your brain will make the connections to soften mistakes.

A word of caution when making changes to someone else's work: you must understand your writing style and ensure you are differentiating between edits for grammar and clarity versus edits to conform the text to your preferred style or personal opinions. I know that I have a more "hard science" writing style, for instance, and it can sometimes be a struggle to avoid editing out the more artistic aspects of other people's writing. It is important that both writers and editors understand their own

writing style, so they can recognize implicit biases that impact the editing process. If you find yourself editing so much that the author's voice is gone, it's probably time to take a step back and remind yourself of the intended outcome. After all, it is their paper, not yours.

Finally, the editing process can be tiring for the editor and the author alike. Many iterations on drafts, continued conversations to clarify points, and disagreements between author and editor can leave both parties exhausted and unenthused. In these cases, taking a break or tagging in another editor can help. Even simply checking in with the author about how they're feeling in the process can help get the article to where both parties are satisfied.

Conclusion

Each piece you edit will be at a different stage in the writing process, and each author will want different types of feedback at varying stages of the writing process. This guide serves to share best practices for informal feedback so that you don't accidentally ruin a friendship in the process of making a paper as strong as it can be.

Regardless of whether you are the author or editor, there is an immense pride in getting a paper to publication. A friend who had been resistant to writing for years but has long since been an intellectual partner for my own writing reached out a few months back after having decided to seek publication on a piece of his own. His piece had great ideas and just needed some structural work. We have an easy writing partnership after working together for enough time, so editing for him was comparatively easy. I knew his voice and where he wanted the paper to go, and he was receptive to feedback, so it went smoothly. He submitted it and was immediately accepted. Within a week, he had been recognized by many Army senior leaders for his thoughtful contribution. I was as proud of him and his piece as if it had been my own. I beamed each time he reached out to tell me about another accolade. As emotionally invested in the paper as the author becomes, so too can the editor.

Integrating informal feedback is a critical part of crafting a strong article and sharing your ideas. The hard work will ensure the author's best voice is put forth for publication consideration. However, once the piece is ready, there is one final step: sending it off for publication. Like the informal process, this next step will partner the author with a venue's editor. If you are at this next stage, check out John Amble's article, "Your Draft Is Done, Now What? Working with an Editor," included in this compilation.[5] ■

Notes

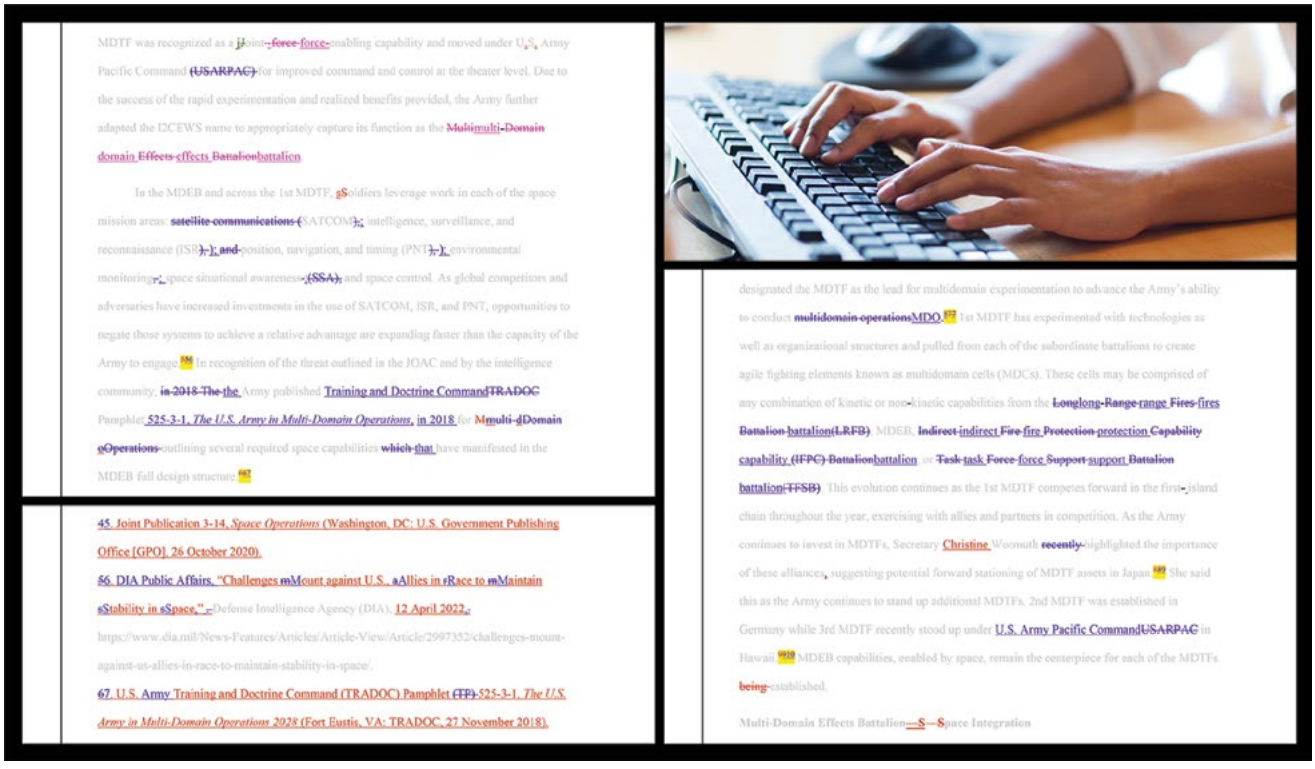
1. Erik Davis and Nicholas Frazier, "Building and Running an Online Forum," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 65–69; Jay Ireland and Ryan Van Wie, "Unit Writing Programs," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 76–81.

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

3. Marvin Swift, "Clear Writing Means Clear Thinking Means ...," *Harvard Business Review*, January 1973, accessed 31 May 2024, https://hbr.org/1973/01/clear-writing-means-clear-thinking-means.

4. Trent Lythgoe, "From Rough Draft to Polished Manuscript: The Power of Rewriting," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 51–59.

5. John Amble, "Your Draft Is Done, Now What? Working with an Editor," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 100–5.



After a submitted article is accepted for publication, editors work to ensure information is delivered with accuracy and precision by following grammar, punctuation, and usage guidance found in a broadly accepted publication style guide such as the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Using computer applications such as Microsoft Word ensure authors and editors can follow and discuss the editing progress from draft to print. (Composite by Beth Warrington, *Military Review*)

Your Draft Is Done, Now What?

Working with an Editor

John Amble

You have an idea. You think it is an important one, one that advances the U.S. Army's collective understanding of a critical subject. You have followed the Harding Project since its launch in September 2023, inspired by its commitment to revitalizing Army publishing and motivated by senior leaders' firm backing of the initiative, so you decide to write an article.[1]

You submit to a publishing outlet—perhaps it's your first time doing so. What should you expect if your article is accepted? What will the editorial process entail? And how can you get the most out that process, make it smooth and efficient, and be confident that when your article is published, it will be at its best?

First Things First: Before Submitting

This is an article about working with an editor, which, by definition, only occurs once you have submitted a piece of your work to a publishing outlet and it has been accepted. So why does it begin with a section focusing on what you do before submitting? After all, there are exceptional articles on the writing process elsewhere in this edition—Leyton Summerlin's "Muddy Boots and Powerful Pages: Why We Write" and Theo Lipsky's "How to Write an Article," for example.[2] It's because writing is a process—one that defies categorization into distinct phases with no overlap. Any discussion about one stage of the publication process and one stage only necessarily has artificial boundaries. Moreover, just as those phases have blurred lines separating them, they also influence one another. In this case, the work you do before submitting to a publishing outlet will shape both an editor's assessment of your article and the way you work together, should it be accepted.

So, what can you do to streamline the editorial process? First, write what you know. Every author is an expert in something. Find that something and leverage your experience with the subject or unique perspective on it. Doing so will improve your chances of having your work accepted, because editors deciding whether to publish it will likely also see your biography, assuming you have included one in your submission (whether an outlet explicitly asks you to or not, you should). And even for outlets that employ a blind review process, the natural credibility of a piece of commentary or analysis written by somebody with extensive experience on the subject will be readily apparent. That credibility will lend itself toward a more well-crafted narrative, which will make the editorial process smoother.

Second, choose the right publishing outlet for your work. There should be a fit in terms of not only subject matter but also length, style, and tone. The best way to know which outlet is the optimal home for your article is by reading the other content various outlets publish. As the editorial director at the Modern War Institute at West Point, I take a broad view of what constitutes modern war and thus what subjects we aim to cover with our publishing. Still, I frequently receive submissions that are well written, deeply interesting, and yet wholly outside of even these broad definitional boundaries. By submitting to the right outlet, you maximize your chances of having your work accepted and ensure that the editorial process will be as smooth as possible by avoiding the need for deeply substantive revisions solely aimed at fitting the piece to the publication.

Third, read an outlet's published submission guidelines and follow them.[3] They exist for a reason and editors will be grateful. Doing so also signals a degree of seriousness and commitment to having your work published. It will simplify the editorial process, removing the need to alter the length of the article, adjust the way citations are handled, and otherwise work iteratively to conform to the submission guidelines.

Fourth, you are your article's first editor. Proofread your work, and then proofread it again. Try to catch your own typos, grammatical errors, and syntax problems. Do not count on Microsoft Word's organic spelling and grammar tools to catch everything. Double-check the spellings of names and other proper nouns in particular. Read the piece aloud to see if you catch problematic items you previously missed. Take some time away from the article and come back to give it a fresh look. Push yourself to be critical, deliberately adopting the mindset of a reader predisposed to disagree with your argument or analysis.

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An author reworks aspects of the article with the assistance and under the guidance of an experienced editor. (AI image by Gerardo Mena, Army University Press)

Finally, invite feedback from your professional network. Writing can be a lonely endeavor, but that does not mean that it has to be. Share your article ideas with others—their responses will help you decide whether you want to commit the time and effort to begin work on a first draft. Once you have that draft, share it with peers, mentors, and others and invite them to critique it. Rebecca Segal's article in this edition, "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback," details why this is important.[4] Doing so will strengthen your work.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Now that you have done the hard work before submitting your article, it is time to send it to the outlet you selected. Here begins your work with an editor. It could be a short working relationship. Nobody's work is always accepted, and there is a very good chance your submission will be declined.[5] If that is the case, do not lose heart. If the editor explains that the outlet has chosen not to publish your article because the subject is not a good fit, you can ask if he or she has any recommendations for more suitable outlets. The world of military and defense publishing is small, and most editors will be willing to suggest alternatives. Even if that is not the case and you believe in the quality of your work, submit it elsewhere (but do not submit to multiple outlets at once). And if you never ultimately find a home for your article, the hours you spent crafting it were not wasted; they were hours that made you a better writer. File the draft away and move on. Maybe you will come back to it later when current events give it a new relevance or your perspective on the issue has changed. Maybe you will not. Regardless, keep writing.

If your work is accepted, the most important thing to understand is that you and the editor are now a team. You should understand each other's roles, perspectives, and ultimate objectives. You share the

same goal—publishing the best version of your work possible—but will almost certainly not have a common vision of how to get there. You have an intimate relationship with your article—its structure, its individual words, probably even its title. And why wouldn't you? All of it is your creation. An editor will not have the same relationship with it. To you, it is a complete draft. To an editor, it is a starting point. It may be a starting point very close to the finish line, but it is a starting point, nonetheless. This is a necessary feature of any team: it is made stronger by the distinct perspectives of its members, but it is strongest when those members appreciate their distinct roles.

"An analogy—admittedly imperfect but still useful—is to the three levels of war: strategic, operational, and tactical. On top sits the overarching (strategic) purpose of an article."

Just like any team, communication is key. This starts from the beginning. Share any useful context about your article. Were you motivated to write it after a direct professional experience with the subject matter? Tell the editor. Does your job give you a unique perspective on the topic? Tell the editor. Does it build on previous writing that you have published? Tell the editor. All that context will help the editor understand your intent and shape the editorial process to refine the article.

What's the Point?

If you publish articles in numerous outlets, you will find that each handles the editorial process differently. You might have an editor make edits to your piece and ask for you to approve them. You might receive a draft with comments an editor asks you to address. Or, most likely in my experience, the process will be iterative and a combination of both.

I find it useful to conceptualize editing as a three-layered process. An analogy—admittedly imperfect but still useful—is to the three levels of war: strategic, operational, and tactical. On top sits the overarching (strategic) purpose of an article. What is its intent? What effect does it aim to have on readers? Who does it aim to reach? At this level, an editor will work to ensure that the piece has a clear identity, that readers will naturally understand its purpose. An article about the potential of emerging technologies to improve targeting cycles and condense sensor-to-shooter times might be fundamentally analytical in character, simply describing to readers how these technologies work and their potential applications. Another on the same subject, however, might be a work of commentary, advocating for leaders to prioritize funding for research and development on those technologies.

These two articles will contain much of the same information, but the way that information is used will differ. If your work is one or the other, an editor will ensure that it is framed in such a way to make that clear. As such, edits and feedback that you receive will focus particularly on the opening and closing sections of the draft.

The middle layer of editing, to continue the analogy, is akin to the operational level of war, where campaign planning ensures that tactical actions connect to the overarching strategic objective. In writing, the parallel to this is structure development. Are there sections to the piece? Do they build upon one another logically? Is there a narrative thread that ties it all together, or is it a disjointed set of ideas that needs that thread reinforced? Do tangential points risk distracting readers? If it is intended to be a persuasive piece, have you anticipated counterarguments and addressed them? These are the questions an editor will be asking. The edits and comments you receive from the editor will be principally directed toward ensuring they are answered satisfactorily.

Lastly, there is the lowest level of the editorial process, where a lengthy sentence gets split in two, punctuation may be changed, word choice is questioned, and a host of other minor issues are addressed. Much

of this layer is predetermined by a style guide. At the Modern War Institute, we (like many other outlets you will encounter) use the *Chicago Manual of Style*. For spelling and related issues not explicitly covered in that style guide, it recommends referring to *Webster's Dictionary*. This is one part of the science of editing, following a set of rules prescribed by a style guide on everything from hyphenating compound adjectives to capitalizing words transliterated from foreign languages. The other part of the science of editing is fact-checking. Is quoted text found in the source provided? Does a NATO member state actually field a particular weapon system or vehicle? Is that the formal name of a treaty? Was a specific line item included in the most recent National Defense Authorization Act, or was it in the previous year's bill? The vast majority of factual inaccuracies I see in submitted articles are not deliberate distortions. But they happen, and they detract severely from the professionalism and credibility of published work. An editor will work to catch them and ensure that all information in an article is delivered with precision and accuracy.

There is an art to editing as well as a science. After all, writing is a creative process, even on the most technical of subjects. Does a particular word or phrase convey exactly what an author intends, or would a substitute do the job more effectively and clearly? Would a sentence's impact be amplified by placing it earlier in a paragraph? Does the article's lyrical quality—its combination of short and long sentences, its use of dashes to set off bits of explanatory material (like this one), and other features—enhance its readability?

This tripartite distinction between levels of editing has served me well, both in organizing my approach to each individual article I work on and in explaining to authors how the process works and what my intentions are with their work. But I mentioned that it is an imperfect analogy. Why? Because the levels of war delineate distinctions within an enterprise activity—warfighting—in which it is possible for individual members of the enterprise to focus principally on one level. In writing (and editing), the entirety of the work—from an article's overall structure to the placement of each punctuation mark—is interlinked. A single sentence's optimal formulation might change if a piece is restructured and its paragraph moved to a different place. Still, if you think of the process of editing and revision in these terms, it will help you understand that process and provide a framework for doing the work of transforming your article into its best possible version.

Trust ...

If you understand an editor's objectives and perspective, it becomes easy to trust him or her. That trust is crucial. On a practical level, it eases the process. If an editor changes *U.S.* to *US*, decapitalizes *commanding general*, or swaps out *Al Qaeda* for *al-Qaeda*, trusting that this change is determined by the outlet's style guide allows you to focus together on higher-level, substantive edits.

Moreover, an editor's experience (and access to reader metrics) lends itself to understanding what works and what does not, what is most likely to attract and retain readers' attention, and what tends to limit—or expand—an article's audience. The feedback you receive will reflect this understanding. Still, it can be extraordinarily difficult to cut the witty turn of phrase that an editor tells you feels out of place or eliminate a section you are especially proud of because it disrupts the overall flow of the article. "In writing," William Faulkner (probably apocryphally) warned, "you must kill all your darlings."[6] This means that you often need to ruthlessly eliminate bits of your writing that you are most pleased with in order to improve the work in its entirety. Doing so is extraordinarily difficult. But an editor's job is to identify your darlings for you and tell you which must go. If you trust the editor and trust the process, it will be easier to say goodbye.

... But Verify

Of course, people make mistakes. If an edit seems objectively wrong, question it. If you believe cutting text in one place removes necessary context for something that comes later in the article, raise the issue. If you simply do not understand the reasoning for a revision, ask about it. Many editors will anticipate those questions and, where the motives behind a particular edit or set of edits might not be intuitive, will explain them. Many will also explicitly encourage you to ask about edits that are unclear or to push back against those that do not preserve either your meaning or your voice. Your article might be published under the masthead of a particular publication, and it is in an editor's interest to protect the outlet's professional reputation by publishing the best version of it, but your name is

on it. A good editor will respect that. By ensuring open communication about any issues that arise, the end product will be a contribution to public discussion that both of you should be proud to see published.

Final Thoughts

As an editor, one of the most common mistakes I see authors make is adding a final section that contributes little value to the article. The tone is often disengaged, as if the author had run out of the energy needed to punctuate the article with the conclusion it deserves. Or it is packed with platitudes grabbed as the most readily available handholds when an author is not certain what else to do to bring the article to a close. Or, worst of all, it simply summarizes the points already made because years of writing for a grade in class have left too many of us with the false impression that Aristotle's triptych is the only way to structure our writing. The final section is your opportunity to choose what idea will be in readers' minds as they walk away from your article. Take the opportunity.

Since I should try to heed my own advice and avoid those common problems with a concluding section, I'll leave you with this. Go write something. Somewhere an editor is waiting to work with you on it. ■

Notes

1. Randy George, Gary Brito, and Michael Weimer, "Strengthening the Profession: A Call to All Army Leaders to Revitalize Our Professional Discourse," Modern War Institute at West Point, 11 September 2023, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/strengthening-the-profession-a-call-to-all-army-leaders-to-revitalize-our-professional-discourse/.

2. Leyton Summerlin, "Muddy Boots and Powerful Pages: Why We Write," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 22–26; Theo Lipsky, "How to Write an Article," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 27–34.

3. *Military Review*'s submission guidelines, for example, to "strive to reduce the number of endnotes to the minimum consistent with honest acknowledgment of indebtedness." You only see six endnotes here because this article is mainly drawn from personal experience and because I read the submission guidelines. "Military Review: Article Submission Guide," Army University Press, accessed 10 June 2024, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/MR-Article-Submission-Guide/.

4. Rebecca Segal, "A Writer's Guide to Giving and Receiving Feedback," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 94–99.

5. Zachary Griffiths, "On Rejection," Harding Project, 16 April 2024, https://www.hardingproject.com/p/on-rejection.

6. Van Jackson, "Nuke Your Darlings: On Writing in National Security," War on the Rocks, 14 December 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/nuke-darlings-writing-national-security/.

"The great evil of gobbledygook is not only that it is ugly and irritating and indigestible, but that it allows the user to get away with vagueness and irresponsibility for what he says at the same time that it makes him sound highly professional and articulate."

—Argus J. Tresidder, "On Gobbledygook," *Military Review* 54, no. 4 (April 1974): 22

Building a Community

How to Create a Professional Writing Network

Lt. Col. Nathan K. Finney, PhD, U.S. Army

The quintessential skill of an officer is to bring order out of chaos … To do that, and to be successful senior officers, you need to read, think, and write … I would argue you must write.

—Adm. James G. Stavridis

When we think about writing professionally, the vision that appears in many people's minds is likely one of a solitary individual, an intellectual island furiously generating ideas on a whiteboard or slaving away over a keyboard. When actually writing, we can also feel like we are a lone rock being buffeted by the waves—or at least I felt that way when first attempting to write. I struggled to gain the confidence to put my fingers on the keyboard, and even when I did, I thought my ideas were unoriginal or poorly argued.

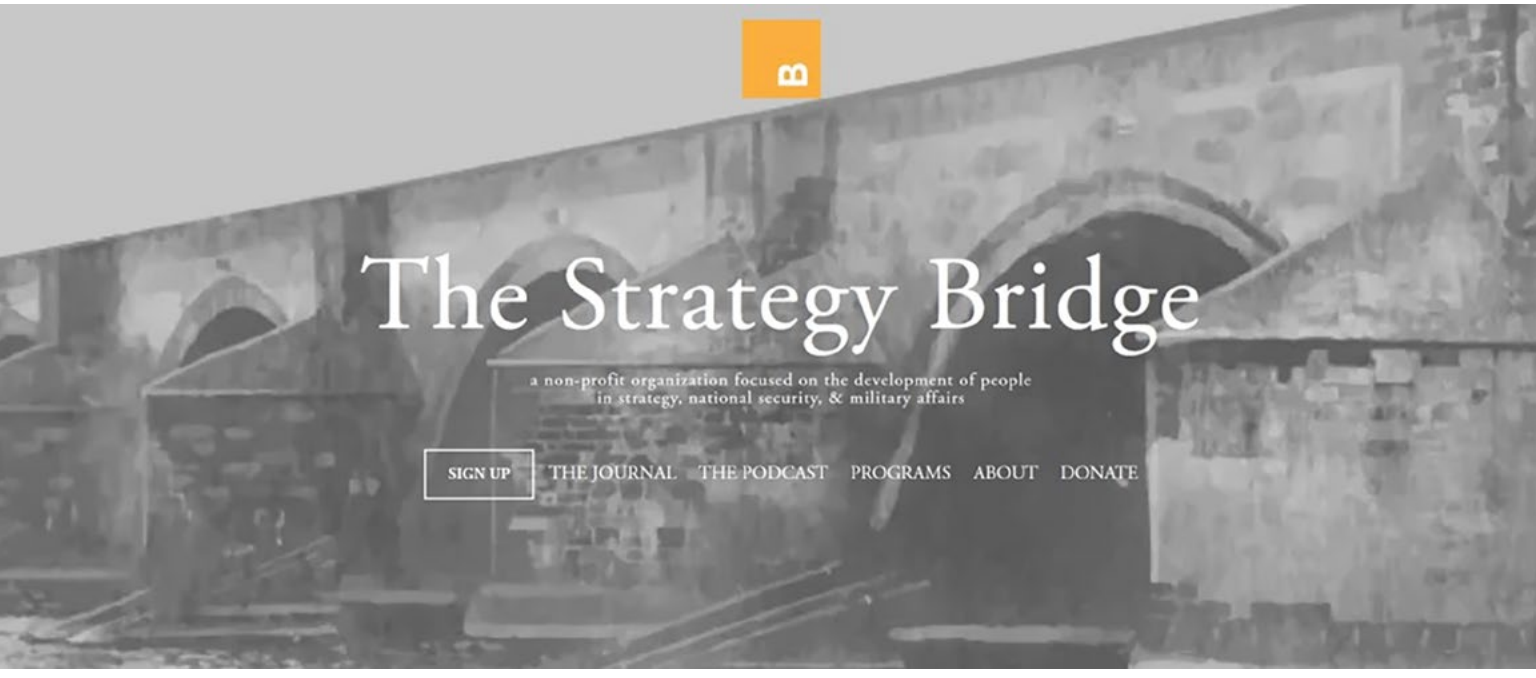
Looking back on over a decade of writing and publishing, however, my writing projects were never an individual endeavor. My writing—and all professional writing, no matter the profession—is a group project. From idea generation to a first draft, through revisions and into the publishing process, every step of the way includes the men and women around you. How you incorporate them and allow them to bring out the best in your work is up to you.

Even more than a group project, writing is an act of community-building. It can be a process whereby we draw from the communities around us, generating ideas from those around us by observing and discussing what they're reading, writing, or doing. It can be a process of extending our communities by reaching out to new people and professions to satiate our curiosity or expand our knowledge. Finally, it can be a process of strengthening by helping others to learn and write, even when we're not writing ourselves. "Iron sharpens iron" was a saying I often heard in my first few years in uniform. But raw materials, muscle and hammer, and heat are required to even forge a blade to be sharpened. A community provides and fosters the raw materials for an idea, helps shape and strengthen the idea through intellectual discussion, and provides energy through editorial feedback.

Writing Communities

The idea of writing as a community endeavor is not a new one. When I entered the Army, sharing information via forums like PlatoonLeader.net and CompanyCommander.net was critical for providing tools and advice for new officers.[1] Another article in this compilation, titled "Building and Running an Online Forum," provides a "how-to" guide to establish a modern version of these forums.[2] In my early career, most of these forums morphed into blogs where individuals on combat tours in Afghanistan and Iraq shared their trials, tribulations, and solutions.[3] These individual blogs began responding to each other and grew into platforms where multiple people—and frequently guests—could contribute.

My own writing experience mirrors this. I began blogging as "the barefoot strategist" in 2011 after returning from a deployment to Afghanistan.[4] In 2013, I helped start the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum, an organization focused on empowering junior officers.[5] At the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum's inaugural meeting in Chicago that same year, I joined forces with a few other military writers to create The



The Strategy Bridge is a nonprofit organization created to develop a community of thinkers and writers interested in improving the level of discussion on strategy and military affairs. (Screenshot from The Strategy Bridge, https://thestrategybridge.org/masthead)

Strategy Bridge.[6] At the same time, junior officers were forming other organizations to focus on military writing; these included Joe Byerly's From the Green Notebook, Drew Steadman's The Military Leader, and Josh Bowen's 3x5 Leadership.[7]

To capitalize on this groundswell of content and writing energy, a handful of us created the Military Writers Guild to pool the resources and knowledge of not only military writers but also civilian authors, editors, and publishers interested in military affairs.[8] Each of these forums and organizations added to a constellation of writers, creating an organic community for people to leverage and support.

Building Your Own Communities

What does this brief history lesson mean for today's writers? You can and should make your own communities to support your writing endeavors. Leverage and use the existing writing communities, but do not be bound to them. Create the groups of people, the connections, and the networks required to enable you. More importantly, use your efforts to provide the resources to help others do the same. The following are some hard-won lessons that might help you along the way.

Find your passion. What topics generate the most intellectual energy for you? What ideas get you engaged, or what are you trying to learn? What are the hot topics in your personal and professional circles that you eagerly engage in when among others? Writing is an exercise in thinking; that kind of active analysis and creation takes significant intellectual energy. If you are not passionate about the subject or curious enough to push through when you are tired or hit a roadblock, you may not have the energy to complete it. Engage with those around you to recharge your interest and energy, as required. Getting ideas and energy from those in your immediate vicinity is the first step in building your writing network.

Survey the landscape. Once you've figured out a subject of interest, do the preliminary work. Review branch journals, military journals, private but military-related publications, books, and other research

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The Military Writers Guild is a community committed to the development of the profession of arms through the exchange of ideas and experiences. Contributors include writers from the military as well as civilian authors, editors, and publishers interested in military affairs. (Screenshot from the Military Writers Guild, https://www.militarywritersguild.org/vision)

material to ensure you have a sense of what's already been done on the subject and where you might enter the discussion.[9] Additionally, assess the people and organizations that might know or engage with the topic and reach out for support. Expanding your connections beyond your immediate vicinity into subject-matter experts and organizations is the second step in creating a writing network.

The big idea. Now that you've found a topic that energizes you and researched the possibilities, develop the nugget of wisdom or key problem you're engaging with. This is essentially your hypothesis or thesis statement. The thesis in my first coauthored article in 2010 was "a vital aspect of [U.S. support to foreign policy] is advising and assisting partner security forces, also known as security force assistance (SFA). This support will be an enduring strategic requirement for the Army."[10] We had just finished writing a new doctrinal manual on SFA and wanted to delve deeper into the subject without the constraints of formal doctrine. After months of working on the topic, we knew exactly where we could enter the conversation, and we were passionate about what it meant for the Army. Finding your voice and understanding where your project fits is key in further developing the writing project and providing a clear hook for the people in your networks to cling onto as you start sharing your writing.

Identify your objective. What are you trying to achieve by working on this topic? If it is simply to research and think through a problem, then the objective should be to gather information and formulate your thoughts. What you share with those in your network or how you reach out to expand your network will be more informal and focused on clarifying your grasp of the issue. You may or may not end up working toward publication.

If your goal is to share information, shape a conversation within the profession, or have an impact toward some kind of change, then crafting the product and building the network must be more deliberate. Who

are the audiences you wish to inform or persuade? What mediums or publications will get the information to those audiences? Is the issue contentious or likely to cause others to immediately push back? If the goal is to do more than simply recite facts and share information, then you should carefully build a writing community tailored to sharpen your argument, foresee and address obstacles that might inadvertently be created, provide advice on how to avoid repercussions or blowback, and possibly even prevent you from making a professional mistake. This is the most impactful and important aspect of building and maintaining a writing community—ensuring accurate and clear arguments while preventing mistakes that could be costly.

Transmit in the clear. While social media isn't the tool it was in the recent past, it is still a path to generate discussion and feedback from people and places you would not expect. Studying regeneration of the force while on the Army staff, I was curious if and how the United States might quickly grow one million new soldiers in the event of a catastrophic modern conflict. Having spent three years building one new brigade to surge into Iraq, the fear was that the U.S. Army would be incapable of growing quickly if needed. I tweeted the idea for feedback, resulting in a great discussion that led to an article for the Modern War Institute.[11] Aside from sharing ideas with your current community, throwing an idea to assess the wisdom of the crowds is still a great way to expand your networks.

Embrace the cold call. Frequently, going direct to someone who is the expert on a topic you're interested in is the best path to information. Writers and researchers—and definitely professional military writers—recognize their work is for public consumption, resulting in a professional obligation to entertain credible and genuine requests for information. Plus, who doesn't enjoy talking about work they spent significant time and effort into publishing? Don't be afraid to reach out to someone you don't know. If you can get a warm hand off via an introduction, great. However, even an email out of the blue generally lands. I honestly cannot think of a time when someone I contacted didn't at least give me five minutes of their time. However, when you do so, be respectful of the other person's time by being brief and clear. If they bite, you'll have a shot at genuine information, expanding your network, and possibly creating another connection who can refine and support your work and grow into a mentorship relationship. You'll know almost immediately whether this new connection will strengthen over time.

“Writers and researchers—and definitely professional military writers—recognize their work is for public consumption, resulting in a professional obligation to entertain credible and genuine requests for information.”

Give back. Don't be an intellectual succubus. Just as you should expect most professionals to at least entertain your thoughts and ideas initially, you should expect to provide a similar service as you progress in your career and writing. Figure out where you can give back to the people and communities that have supported your writing journey. Use your connections to make connections between others. The master of this is Jim Greer, a retired colonel, former director of the School for Advanced Military Studies, and a current instructor at that fine institution. Jim has been a mentor of mine for almost two decades, and I'm but one of hundreds of officers that he guides. He is a master of recognizing how to connect people based on their areas of study, personal goals, or personalities. Be like Jim—connect everyone you can to strengthen and expand not only your community but also the whole profession of arms.

Reengage. As your network grows, keeping up with everyone in the various communities you've built is impossible. However, as projects, memories, or events remind you of those in your networks, reengage with a quick social media direct message, email, text, or phone call. Not only will this show respect and the appreciation for past support, but it will also likely recharge both sides

in the process of catching up. I worked on more than one project that was generated simply by reaching out to someone I had not communicated with in a while.

Be deliberate. As you progress in your writing and military career, there will be a time when the tables turn. Instead of reaching out for mentorship or support, others will be reaching out to you. As mentioned earlier, you should take this responsibility seriously and work to support those that you can. However, you must also be deliberate, mindful of your time, and refrain from overcommitting. Being open to others can take more than you are able to give if you are not careful. Build your community so that you can share mentorship and support, allowing you to balance how much you take on and provide a wealth and breadth of experience and advice to those who are seeking mentorship.

Reassess. Finally, always reassess the strength, purpose, and value of your communities. Some may have run their course and no longer provide what is needed for the group. Others are still valuable but may require increased time and attention. Just as you should be deliberate in the amount of time you provide to others to support their efforts, you should not fear letting some communities go if you assess your time is better spent in other directions or with other communities. Just as everyone is replaceable in the profession, every community is purpose-built and will either survive your departure or gracefully degrade as you move on to other endeavors.

The Return on Investment

No matter what writing project you pursue or what you intend to achieve by writing, you can expect that the process and finished product will always be improved by engaging a community in its crafting. We build trained, proficient, and strong teams to fight our Nation's wars—we should also build knowledgeable, experienced, and valuable communities to enhance our intellectual endeavors. Like the other articles in this compendium, hopefully, these considerations, tips, and tricks provide some value to support your writing endeavors. ■

Notes

Epigraph. James G. Stavridis, "Read, Think, Write: Keys to 21st-Century Security Leadership," *Joint Force Quarterly* 63 (4th Quarter, 2011): 110–12, https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-63.aspx.

1. Few sources remain that detail the integral importance of these forums to junior officers. They become so useful, the Army acquired them from the officers who started the forums, put them behind a CAC sign in, and killed the energy behind the forums. The Center for Junior Officers at West Point attempted to reenergize the forums in the middle of the 2010s but gained little traction. See Center for Junior Officers, "PLATOON LEADER.NET: No CAC Necessary," Medium, 28 May 2015, https://medium.com/@USArmyCJO/platoon-leader-net-8b36a14672e0.

2. Erik Davis and Nick Frazier, "Building and Running an Online Forum," *Military Review* 104, no. SE-02 (2024): 65–69.

3. Just to get a sense of the proliferation of military blogs during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, see MilBlogging.com's database from 2011. "Recently Added," Milblogging.com, archived 14 July 2011, at the Wayback Machine, https://web.archive.org/web/20110714093321/http://www.milblogging.com/result.php?mode=simple&searchfor=&orderby=listingDate&dir=desc.

4. "The Barefoot Strategist: Strategy, Planning, Policy, International Relations, Security Affairs, and Barefoot Running," Tumblr, accessed 28 May 2024, https://barefootstrategist.tumblr.com/page/20. Not at all a pretentious title for a blog, I know. We all cringe at our early writing.

5. Mark Jacobsen, Nate Finney, and Ben Kohlmann, "Why the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum Matters: Peripheral Networks and Innovation," War on the Rocks, 21 October 2013, https://warontherocks.com/2013/10/why-the-defense-entrepreneurs-forum-matters-peripheral-networks-innovation/. The Defense Entrepreneurs Forum still exists and can be found online at https://www.def.org.

6. Nathan K. Finney, "Bridging Divides: Thoughts on a Startup Conference," The Strategy Bridge, 25 October 2013, https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2013/10/25/bridging-divides-thoughts-on-a-startup-conference.

7. These are just a few of many military and military-adjacent organizations created in the early 2010s to empower junior officers to write: From the Green Notebook, accessed 28 May 2024, https://fromthegreennotebook.com; The Military Leader, accessed 28 May 2024, https://themilitaryleader.com; and 3x5 Leadership, accessed 28 May 2024, https://www.3x5leadership.com.

8. Military Writers Guild, accessed 28 May 2024, https://militarywritersguild.org.

9. See Todd Schmidt, "Strengthening the Army Profession through the Harding Project," *Military Review* 104, no. 3 (March-April 2024): 1–2, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April-2024/Harding-Project/. This will become easier as the Army University Press moves forward on archiving and connecting military professional writing resources.

10. Joshua J. Potter, Jon Klug, and Nathan K. Finney, "Developing Foreign Security Forces in the Era of Persistent Conflict," *Army Magazine* (January 2010): 43–48.

11. Nathan K. Finney, "A High-Tech Call to Arms: Mobilizing the Masses in the Twenty-First Century," Modern War Institute at West Point, 3 February 2017, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/high-tech-call-arms-mobilizing-masses-twenty-first-century/.

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Article Selection by Professional Publications

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This special edition of *Military Review* dedicated to the Harding Project and to professional writing would not be complete without a contribution from the editor in chief and the managing editor of the host publication. Clearly, the Harding Project supports the Army chief of staff's (CSA) intent for how the Army must improve and reinvigorate professional writing across the enterprise as well as how we must improve our professional publications.[1] Implied in this effort is that professional writing, written communication skills, and contributing to our institutional knowledge are imperative components of our professional ethic and are woven into the attributes and competencies of Army leaders.

The CSA is challenging soldiers to commit to critical thinking, research, discourse, and writing efforts as a professional responsibility with an eye for seeking publication in military-themed journals. At the institutional level, the desired end state is to provide the Army the benefit of soldier knowledge and insight and to stimulate professional discussion on issues of common concern. At the individual level, the desired end state is to develop leaders with the ability to write well, knowing that professional writing develops good reasoning, judgment, logic, creativity, critical thinking, planning, problem-solving, verbal communication, and ability to cope with complex issues.

To facilitate the successful pursuit of such efforts, the editors of *Military Review*—one of the older legacy publications of the Army with over one hundred years of experience publishing military articles—offer some concluding insights that may be of use in guiding authors seeking publication in military-oriented journals in general. Though we offer these insights regarding the nature of the article submission process from the perspective of *Military Review*, we do suggest that the observations provided are likely very similar to those employed by other similarly themed publications in the methodologies used to select articles. These observations are offered with the intent of helping aspiring authors formulate a personalized plan for developing and submitting publishable articles.

What Do Military-Themed Publications Look For?

The most sought-after articles for *Military Review* are "tip of the spear" articles—that is, those manuscripts that introduce something new to the professional literature available to the force as the product of original research or insight from experience of some kind. An article based on genuine original research that provides previously unavailable information is by far the most prized type of article submission by *Military Review* and for other publications with similar orientation of interest.

The second type of article in the hierarchy of most preferred are those that are the product of secondary research and analysis; that is, those that provide critical examination and analysis of already existing research done and previously published by others in a manner that provides new insights and perspectives. This is by far the most common type of article submitted to

Military Review and likely the most common type of article submitted to and accepted by most other journals with a similar orientation of interest as well.

The third type in the preference hierarchy are those that we term "insight" articles. Such articles provide lessons learned derived from firsthand experiences. These types of articles can be very useful to the military readership as a kind of original research, but such articles are always scrutinized with a certain measure of wariness with particular attention paid to the credentials and bona fides of the author. Sensitivity to the actual validity of claims of experience of one kind or another by the author is always a concern with such submissions. Consequently, such articles should be submitted with particular care in shaping and detailing the author's biographical background to help validate the authority of the views and promote confidence in the purported facts included in the article.

The final category of articles considered for publication are those that are novel and just plain interesting. Such articles often include those that deal with a military-related historical theme or that explore some unique activity or topic related to the military in some way of which readers may likely be unaware.

Disqualifying Features of Articles Considered for Publication

Noted below is a brief list of the major problems in submissions that, in the view of *Military Review*, can undermine their suitability for publication:

- Articles that have nothing to say and say it a lot
- Articles that treat every statement as a thesis without providing proof or evidence of research from reliable sources to support them
- Articles without a thesis—articles that meander without a controlling theme or seeming point
- Frequent use of logical fallacies, usually sweeping assertions (again without a concerted effort to provide reliable proof of claims)
- Articles that are either dry recitations in the manner of after action reports or diatribes that have not been formulated as articles that make a thesis-like proposition of some kind and which then fail to defend it with proof and reasonable argument (Lists of

(Composite graphic by Beth Warrington, *Military Review*)

events or collections of statements with information do not constitute an article.)

- Needlessly complex use of language: the use of obscure or highly technical jargon; pedantry; or ostentatious language, the apparent use of which is attempting to appear scholarly to impress rather than inform or coherently and systematically argue a thesis of some kind

Respect for Submission Guidelines

I don't think people truly understand how important it is to follow the article submission guidelines. One of the quickest ways to get on an editor's nerves is not following directions.

—Beth Warrington, Editor, *Military Review*, 2024

A common error authors commit when submitting articles to *Military Review* is failing to consult with or follow the manuscript submission guidelines. *Military Review*'s experience demonstrates that disregard for requested submission procedures is sometimes done out of innocent ignorance, as new prospective authors grope their way through the new and unfamiliar territory of how to submit articles to a journal. However, some prospective authors appear to just willfully disregard required procedures and protocols in the formatting of their submitted articles. Most often, such disregard appears to fall into two categories: authors assuming the formatting for papers submitted as part of class projects in military schooling suffices without further modification, or authors have boilerplate formats of their own device that they assume should be acceptable to any journal.

A consequence of ignoring submission guidelines is that authors of such articles are considered from the outset as oblivious to following instructions, or, in some cases, disrespectful to the publication. In the eyes of *Military Review* staff, such submissions reflect carelessness, if not arrogance, which cannot help but affect how these articles are received. Consequently, *Military Review* strongly advises prospective authors to pay close attention to the submission guidelines of whatever publication to which they intend to send their work, if for nothing else as a sign of professional respect and courtesy.

Evaluation Criteria

As clinical as a publication's article selection process may strive to be in determining the merits of an article without bias, evaluation is, in the end, inescapably a partially subjective process. To help mitigate subjective bias and promote a general objective sense of what evaluators should be looking for in manuscripts suitable for publication in *Military Review*, the below questions are provided to our article selection jury to help guide evaluation. One may assume that these questions also reflect similar kinds of questions other publications use when evaluating manuscripts sent to them. Such questions are provided to help guide a writer in the research for, development of, and final rendering of an article in text.

- Is the article the product of original research?
- Does the article show evidence of significant research using accepted academic standards?
- If the article is not a product of original research, is it an effective synthesis of existing secondary research and has it yielded significant original insight?
- Is research backed up by careful citations in the endnotes?
- Does the manuscript show significant reliance on questionable or spurious sources in its endnotes?
- Does the article offer plausible solutions to a problem or issue, or is it merely identifying an asserted problem or issue of some kind without offering a solution?

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Col. William Darley, U.S. Army, retired, has been the managing editor of *Military Review* since 2014. He graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in English/Spanish and holds a master's degree in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College. He served thirty-one years in the Army, including as editor in chief of *Military Review* from 2003 to 2008.

- Does the article contribute anything new to the literature regarding military affairs or security issues?
- Does the author of the article appear to be knowledgeable on the subject?
- Does the article accurately represent background facts and provide a credible examination of issues based on the facts presented?
- Is the article a product of original thinking, offering well-thought-out and well-researched alternate proposals, alternate viewpoints, or dissenting opinions regarding issues of contemporary importance?
- Is the article well written? Does it move logically from a clear thesis through a well-developed argument using supporting evidence to yield persuasive conclusions?
- Does the article reflect a good-faith effort to use suitable standards of English grammar, punctuation, spelling, and word usage? (A manuscript replete with problems in these areas should be considered as an indicator of the lack of seriousness the author had with regard to preparing the manuscript for consideration of professional publication.)
- Is the article written in a straightforward manner or does it give the impression that it has been written to impress colleagues rather than to inform and persuade readers of some thesis or argument? Is it pedantic?
- Does the use of obscure or arcane language or overly ornate sentence and paragraph structure that makes the article difficult for the average reader to follow or understand?
- Does the article use acronyms? If so, are they sufficiently defined for the reader?
- If the manuscript is a historical article, do the issues associated with the historical events evaluated have any direct relevance to current events or the conditions of the current security environment?

Concluding Thoughts for Authors Considering a Writing Project

Probably the most important factor for writing an article for publication is that an author must strongly feel he or she has something useful to say about their chosen discussion or topic. If one has a certain passion for contributing some new element of knowledge or insight regarding a subject of particular interest, this passion will be reflected in the product submitted and in their subsequent efforts to cooperate in the editing process to make it publishable. Such passion and commitment by the author very often serve to overcome any other obstacles or steps needed that are related to the eventual rendering of an article in print.

It is also useful to observe that military journals like *Military Review* exist solely for the purpose of publishing articles. Without articles, a publication has no purpose; it atrophies and disappears. Consequently, there is strong shared interest by a journal's staff in cooperating in the process of publishing well-written and well-edited material that is of interest to a constituent readership.

This is noted to temper sometimes extreme hesitance by some who are reluctant to embark on writing projects, especially by those who heretofore never liked to write or who are afraid of writing due to an assumed risk of embarrassment. To mitigate such fears, it is thus useful to point out that most journals need you far more than you need them—a factor that generally motivates an enthusiastic willingness among journal editors to help mentor prospective authors through an editing process. A compact of mutual respect between editor and author is formed on the assumption they are both trying to achieve the same end—a useful article for the Army.

Finally, *Military Review* operates with the view that there are no known substitutes for just plain hard work associated with learning and practicing the art of writing. Moreover, *Military Review* regards writing as perhaps the most essential activity a soldier can undertake for disciplining his or her brain to exercise meditative deliberation, incisive analysis, and mental acuity to organize thoughts into meaningful and effective communications. Therefore, *Military Review* strongly supports the Harding Project efforts and encourages soldiers of all ranks to adopt the practices this project is meant to cultivate in the study and practice of effective writing skills; this should be considered a professional obligation. In conjunction, *Military Review* respectfully suggests that one excellent metric for testing the progress and success of the CSA's writing initiative is that YOU commit, as a professional goal, to submitting a polished written product for consideration of publication to one of the many available military journals. ■

Note

1. Todd Schmidt, "Strengthening the Army Profession through the Harding Project," *Military Review* 104, no. 2 (March-April 2024): 1–2, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/March-April-2024/Harding-Project/; Randy George, Gary Brito, and Michael Weimer, "Strengthening the Profession: A Call to All Army Leaders to Revitalize Our Professional Discourse," Modern War Institute at West Point, 11 September 2023, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/strengthening-the-profession-a-call-to-all-army-leaders-to-revitalize-our-professional-discourse/.

Image reprinted from Marie B. Edgerton and Albert N. Garland, "Writing for Publication," *Infantry* 73, no. 5 (October 1983): 22.

Additional Legacy Comments on the Need for Writing

On Renewing Army Writing

"The Army does value imaginative thinking, of that sort which considers not only how things are, but also how they might be. What the Army does not value—in fact, disfavors—is imagination unaccompanied by the ability to get things done."

—William L. Hauser, "Professional Writing: A Professional Obligation," *Military Review* 54, no. 8 (August 1974): 41

"Members of the uniformed services today produce a genuine dearth of influential professional writing. In fact, the military maybe the only professional field whose chief published theoreticians and expositors are drawn from other disciplines and professions. Of the years from 1945 to 1960, Samuel P. Huntington remarks that 'at best the military were the draftsmen of strategy. The civilian leaders of the administration were always the architects.' …

… The present discouraging state of military writing has not always existed, nor is it inevitable in the future. The examples of Karl von Clausewitz, Henri Jomini, J. F. C. Fuller, Emory Upton and Mahan himself—each of whom recorded enduring military thought while in uniform—offer clear testimony that successful military service is not necessarily incompatible with successful professional authorship."

—Lloyd J. Matthews, "Musket and Quill: Are They Compatible?," *Military Review* 61, no. 1 (January 1981): 3

"When, with the passage of years, the military professional claims he has not added to the writ of his trade for lack of time, what he really means is that in disposing such discretionary time as he has had, he has accorded professional writing a low priority. And let us be honest. We all do have discretionary time, whether we spend it swinging at little white balls, cultivating the garden, refinishing the furniture, or whatever."

—Lloyd J. Matthews, "Musket and Quill: Are They Compatible?," *Military Review* 61, no. 1 (January 1981): 4

How to Write a Book Review

"After reading and studying the first year's books, each officer prepares a short, handwritten synopsis of a specific chapter or incident in each book, then discusses that item in an informal symposium. That gives each officer a chance to express himself orally and in writing, and the company commander an opportunity to assess each lieutenant's ability to communicate effectively."

—Harold E. Raugh Jr., "Professional Reading Program," *Infantry* 76, no. 2 (March-April 1986): 13

Constructive Dissent

We professionals must not leave the development of tactical doctrine to the institutional expertise—however good it must be—of the Army General Staff, the Training and Doctrine Command, or the service schools. Bureaucracies have no monopoly on ideas. In fact, their reputation has been of stifling innovation instead of promoting it … The US Army is perhaps the most forward-looking military organization in history, but its doctrinal agencies need to be supplemented by individual professional thought."

—William L. Hauser, "Professional Writing: A Professional Obligation," *Military Review* 54, no. 8 (August 1974): 45

"The bold and the brave in the intermediate grades are the best sources of military writing today—officers of conviction and determination in the grades of colonel, lieutenant colonel—and the bright young majors and captains."

—Kenneth E. Lay, "Military Writing: A Response to the Challenge of Our Profession," *Military Review* 44, no. 7 (July 1964): 56

How to Write an Article

"Those of us who have written for publication know that a lot of drudgery goes into composing an article, and there are a few experiences so disappointing as to see one's efforts come back in the mail with rejection slips."

—William L. Hauser, "Professional Writing: A Professional Obligation," *Military Review* 54, no. 8 (August 1974): 42

Rewriting and Editing

"Finally, I would commend Flaubert's three simple principles of good writing as more important than all the others: 'The first,' he said, 'is clarity. The second is clarity. And the third is clarity.'"

—Anthony L. Wermuth, "The Split Infinitive Is Here to Stay," *Military Review* 35, no. 6 (September 1955): 11

"Gobbledygook artists are never more happy than when they can devise some new monstrosity of a word and use it often enough to give it currency. For example, *orientate*, derived from *orientation*, has burrowed into the language like a liver fluke and now has dictionary sanction. …

… What I am driving at is that, when good solid words are available, you should not uglify your communication by violating usage or producing verbal deformities. Why *position* something when *place* or *locate* is available?"

—Argus J. Tresidder, "On Gobbledygook," *Military Review* 54, no. 4 (April 1974): 19

"A second vital consideration I would label 'purpose-centeredness.' Very early in the preparation stage, the speaker must carefully determine the purpose of his message. What does he want to achieve? What does he want his listeners to do? What is the goal of the presentation?"

—W. Stuart Towns, "Oral Communication and the Military Officer," *Military Review* 35, no. 8 (August 1973): 59

LTG (Ret) James M. Dubik Writing Fellows Program

In support of the chief of staff of the Army's efforts to revitalize and reinvigorate professional writing in the military, Army University Press (AUP) established a voluntary, nonresident writing fellowship program to encourage military professional writing and discourse on topics that contribute to a community of military and national security professionals.

The fellowship is named to honor the scholarship, writing, and professional contributions of Lt. Gen. (Ret.) James M. Dubik. His professional contributions to the military over the past several decades, on active duty, as well as in retirement, are exceptional and internationally recognized. He represents an ideal of a warrior-scholar that understands the importance of intellectual engagement in the community of military and national security professionals.

Purpose and Expectations

The objective of the fellowship is to help achieve improved scholarship and writing by authors by contributing a minimum of one article, one book review, and/or other equivalent product contribution to AUP, branch journals, or other military and professional platforms, as well as to serve as peer reviewers for articles by other Fellows on important national security and defense topics.

Fellows will be appointed for one academic year with the option of extension based on the quality of an individual's contributions. Fellows can be company or field-grade officers, NCOs, or civilians from across the services, allied/partner nations, the interagency, and academia. Senior Fellows can be senior field-grade or flag-level leaders, civilians, or nationally recognized scholars from academia. Senior advisors to the program will assist the director, AUP, in the administration of the program.

Additional Information

A detailed volunteer agreement will be signed before beginning the appointment. Generally, AUP will coordinate and provide recognition to Fellows at the conclusion of their appointments. Fellows are encouraged to state their affiliation with AUP on bylines and curricula vitae.

Important Dates

The window for applying for the Dubik Fellowship in Academic Year 2025-2026 will open on **1 January 2025**. All application materials are due to AUP on **3 February 2025**. Notification of selection will be on **28 February 2025**.

For more details or to apply, email
usarmy.leavenworth.tradoc.mbx.armyu-army-university-press@army.mil.