

Professional Military Writing

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In 1738, Benjamin Franklin wrote in his *Poor Richard's Almanack* [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 Prudentiam: Or, Directions, Counsels, and Cautions, Tending to Prudent Management of Affairs 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 *Military Review*, 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 mid-career 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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