Punctuation Mark

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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- 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/.
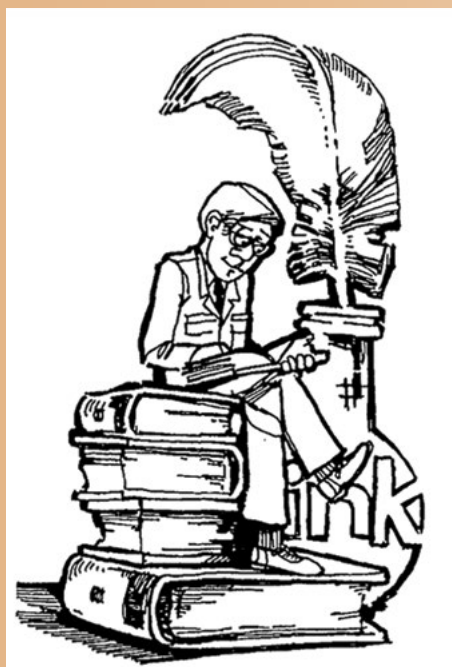
Additional Legacy Comments on the Need for Writing

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

Image reprinted from Marie B. Edgerton and Albert N. Garland, "Writing for Publication," *Infantry* 73, no. 5 (October 1983): 22.

"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