



Staff Sgt. Joel Velez, a small group leader at the NCO Academy Hawaii, instructs Warrior Leader Course students in how to plot 8-digit grid coordinates in January 2010. (Photo by Sgt. Ricardo Branch)

# Your Soldiers are Going to WLC? Here's What They Need to Know

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**A**s NCOs, we all have attended the Warrior Leader Course. We also use our own experiences to help teach our future leaders. But because our own experiences as WLC students were a long time ago, it's my goal to give NCOs a fresh look at how WLC is being conducted today from the eyes of an instructor. Here is some honest and upfront information about what Soldiers and leaders need to know before attending WLC:

1. **Come prepared** – Soldiers headed to WLC need to be involved with the completion of their paperwork, as errors can result in dismissal from the course. Not only do Soldiers need to have correct paperwork, they need to know about its status. Keep your Soldiers informed on what they need and get them involved in the process; after all, it is *their* paperwork, not yours.

Paperwork isn't the only thing; WLC has a packing list as well. NCO academies do a 100-percent layout to ensure all items are there and are serviceable. If you sign off saying you saw these items, then you must actually do the layout, too. By inspecting your Soldiers and their paperwork, it shows you care that they are prepared and sets them up for success during WLC.

2. **Height/weight and the APFT** – The very first evaluation your Soldier will go through is the Army Physical Fitness Test, and while instructors at WLC don't grade harder, we don't stray from the standard either. It is our job as leaders to enforce standards, and physical fitness should be important to all leaders. Before your Soldiers depart for WLC, you should give them an APFT and ensure they are doing their pushups and

situps in accordance with FM 7-22, *Army Physical Readiness Training*. Too many times, we see Soldiers fail because their home units aren't showing them what right looks like. A suggestion would be to use a PRT session to demonstrate the importance of doing these exercises correctly.

3. **Don't stress making the Commandant's List** – It is indeed a significant accomplishment to make the Commandant's List. But it's not the end of the world if you don't. Students who show up and are nervous about making the Commandant's List are often the ones who make a silly mistake and don't make the list. They are nervous because their leadership is stressing them to the point that they do not perform well during the course. Your Soldiers need to focus on the task at hand, not their overall score. The instructors are all very knowledgeable about the material they teach. Inform your Soldiers to pay close attention to what their small group leaders are teaching them.
4. **Stand out from your peers** – Soldiers who do want to make the Commandant's List need to find productive ways to stand out to their SGLs. Perception is everything, and each classroom has two SGLs and 16 students. With an instructor-to-student ratio that low, students doing the right thing will be noticed by their SGLs. Students should participate fully in class discussions as well as project themselves during all evaluations. This will help separate them from their peers and make them stand out in the eyes of their SGL.
5. **Take good notes** – Soldiers attending WLC are being evaluated the entire time. By taking good notes during class and in the leadership positions they will hold, your Soldiers can stand out by showing they care about what is going on. Your Soldiers' instructors are teaching the Army-approved curriculum from their experience. Of the instructors with whom I teach, all have been in the Army for at least 10 years and have a world of knowledge to share. Taking notes will ensure your Soldiers don't miss the little things their instructors are trying to teach them.

6. **Maintain good discipline** – Though it is likely your Soldiers' first and only time at WLC, it isn't the first time their SGL has taught. Remind your Soldiers not to fall into peer pressure, but to have the integrity to maintain good discipline at all times. Being disciplined doesn't just mean marching in lock step and following. If something needs correcting, your Soldiers should make the correction, and make sure their SGLs see that they are willing to stand up and make corrections that are needed.
7. **Learn land navigation skills** – Land navigation is a perishable skill that even those in military occupational specialties who use it all the time need to brush up on every now and then. Your Soldiers will be tested on their land navigation skills by finding four points within three hours. Though instructors go over map reading and land navigation at WLC, if you prepare your Soldiers before they come, they will have a much smoother experience and far greater chance of passing this part of the course. If you don't know map reading and land navigation too well, then now is the time to get into the field manuals so you can teach your Soldiers basic soldiering skills.

It is our job as NCOs to train and prepare our Soldiers for everything that the Army asks of them. Preparing Soldiers to attend WLC should be no different than preparing them for a field rotation or a deployment. Taking the time to make your Soldiers well prepared before WLC will start them off strong during the course and maximize their success. As U.S. Army Europe's command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. David Davenport, said, "The Warrior Leader Course is a pivotal point in an enlisted Soldier's career. Not only does it demonstrate what is expected out of noncommissioned officers and test your capacity to fulfill those responsibilities, it also serves as a stepping stone for you being a fit, disciplined and well-trained Soldier." ■

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