



XVIII Airborne Corps & Fort Bragg NCO Academy. (Photo courtesy of Caddell Construction, 2014)

# Stewardship of the Profession through Writing

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XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg NCO Academy

A modern noncommissioned officer (NCO) academy classroom provides students rows of desks with computer laptops resting upon them. The Army provides the laptops as a means for its students to produce written assignments for assessment. The Army provides the necessary equipment and training for the NCO Corps as part of the Army's *Noncommissioned Officer 2020 Strategy* (NCO 2020) to develop the NCO Corps for future conflicts as an educated and well-rounded leader. According to Dayton Ward (2018), "In addition to improving performance and Professional Military Education (PME) scores, encouraging a commitment to enriched writing deepens Soldiers' analytical and strategic thinking skills. This allows them to convey their thoughts with greater efficiency and make better decisions."

The *NCO 2020 Strategy* establishes the importance of NCOs who are capable of operating in complex scenarios and was developed "through a data-driven, analytical process that examined the current NCO development model using the Army Leader Development Strategy, the Enlisted Desired Leader Attributes for Joint Force 2020, the Army Learning Concept, and the Army Learning Model" (*Noncommissioned Officer 2020 Strategy*, 2016, para. 3). Tomorrow's operational environment promises to offer that complex scenario, as it will be ambiguous, dynamic, and intricate.

To train for something that hasn't happened yet the *NCO 2020 Strategy* states, "the Noncommissioned Officer Education System (NCOES) must fundamentally change and evolve into a comprehensive leader development process that links training, education, and



The members of the Curriculum Development Directorate conduct a Train the Trainer class on the redesigned Basic Leader Course. The students are members of the Army's 34 NCO academies and spent two weeks at the NCO Leadership Center of Excellence and U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy learning the Experiential Learning Model of instruction and the course materials to be taught. The BLC will begin being taught to the active component on July 31 and will be fully operational capable by January 2019. (Photo by David Crozier NCOL CoE & USASMA)

experiences spanning the operational, institutional, and self-development learning domains" (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2015, p. 5). To truly grow competent and self-reliable leaders to fill the Army's ranks, training and leadership development must encompass both physical and mental challenges.

The *NCO 2020 Strategy* identifies three lines of effort (LOE) as it aims to reach the desired end state "of competent and committed NCOs of character as trusted Army professionals capable of thriving in chaos" (U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2015, p. 9). The first LOE is *development* and emphasizes the importance that NCOs continue to grow as leaders. The second LOE is *talent management* and addresses positions and opportunities for NCOs. The final LOE is *stewardship of the profession* and emphasizes the role of the NCO.

### Development

NCO 2020's first LOE is *development* and has 21 different objectives in order to cultivate an NCO's learning into a practical level for the Army. A few of these objectives include:

- Scheduling Priorities
- Establish Level V Professional Military Education (Master Leader Course)
- Structured Self Development (SSD)
- Skills Qualification Test (SQT)

### Talent Management

The second LOE is *talent management* and involves "the purposeful expansion of an NCO's core Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) proficiency and leadership provided through developmental positions, opportunities, and assignments both within and outside of their career management field (CMF)," (U.S. Training and Doctrine Command, 2015, pg. 6). This LOE involves 14 objectives, some of which are:

- Strategic broadening opportunities
- Broad range of assignments
- Command sergeant major/sergeant major timelines and professional development models

### Stewardship of the Profession

The last LOE is *stewardship of the profession*, which revolves around building trust in the NCO and fostering their patriotism while also becoming a role model for subordinates. Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP)-1, *The Army Profession*, captures this obligation and defines stewardship of the profession as "the responsibility of Army professionals to strengthen the Army as a profession and to care for the people and resources entrusted to [the Army] by the American people" (2013, p. 39). This final LOE involves 14 objectives, including:

- The NCO Creed / FM 6-22
- Character development
- Professional reading and writing

### Writing as Leadership Tool

Effective writing is a useful method to deliver the effects of leadership. It influences others through text and a well-thought out argument, to behave or believe in an idea or argument that the author intends. Effective writing is a powerful tool to sway public opinion and present research-based solutions to complicated problems and obstacles.

Former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates is a well-published writer. In 2009, Gates wrote an article for *Foreign Affairs* magazine that established the groundwork for a shift in the 2010 U.S. defense budget (Gates, 2009). In it, he campaigned for the Department of Defense to decrease funding on equipment and programs geared for conventional warfare and shift to increase funding in preparation for unconventional warfare. His goal was a more agile and mobile military (Levine, Mount, & Silverheib, 2009). In the *Foreign Affairs* article (2009), Gates wrote:

We should look askance at idealistic, triumphalist, or ethnocentric notions of future conflict that aspire to transcend the immutable principles and ugly realities of war, that imagine it is possible to cow, shock, or awe an enemy into submission instead of tracking enemies down hilltop by hilltop, house by house, block by bloody block. (para. 44 )

Gates' article, using a well-researched and thoughtful argument, promoted the message that the U.S. government cannot dismiss the fact that while superior equipment is advantageous, the backbone of the military is its prior, current, and future personnel. Gates demonstrated how high-level articulation of ideas can enhance the prospects of success as the 2010 U.S.



Students at the XVIII Airborne Corps & Fort Bragg NCO Academy are working on an assignment, January 30, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Brandt)

military spending resulted in increased funding for the care of wounded service members and increased pay for retired military personnel (Amadeo, 2010).

Until 2016, the Army didn't put an emphasis on an NCO's ability to write. The Army has since changed this mindset and implemented higher levels of writing and composition into the Program of Instruction (POI) at all levels of NCO professional military education.

In conjunction with the actual act of writing, reading also increases intelligence and allows for a broadening of ideas and vocabulary. According to *Inc. Magazine*, "reading boosts our ability to understand new concepts—such as when one encounters a scenario, setting, or people they haven't yet had exposure to—and our capacity to incorporate these new ideas in our existing everyday lives" (Economy, 2017, para. 3).

With this concept in mind, NCOs should seek to read books or other professional pieces in the form of

journals, magazines, or online forums as often as possible. The Army provides its own forum for professional reading with the [NCO Journal](#), which offers NCOs the opportunity to display their own works of literature for other leaders to read and learn from. On the importance of reading and writing, former Secretary of Defense James Mattis said:

Thanks to my reading, I have never been caught flat-footed by any situation, never at a loss for how any problem has been addressed (successfully or unsuccessfully) before. It doesn't give me all the answers, but it lights what is often a dark path ahead. (Russel, 2013, para. 7)

In coordination with professional reading, progressing with civilian education classes is another way for an NCO to improve. The Army goes to great lengths to assist NCOs in furthering their civilian education (visit [www.goarmyed.com](http://www.goarmyed.com) to learn about the Army's tuition assistance programs) and has done its part as an institution to foster NCOs in improving their professional development and encouraging them to acquire skills that will help them transition to civilian careers after the military.

## Conclusion

As the Army seeks to adapt to a rapidly evolving operational environment, NCOs must accept and prepare for the arduous task by becoming well-rounded and fully developed leaders. Beyond just motivating subordinates and choosing courses of action for a unit, an NCO must be able to write "situation reports, operations orders, point papers, personnel evaluations, professional award recommendations, counseling reports, and even articles for publication" (Ward, 2018). Now, more than ever, the Army requires competent, articulate, and intelligent NCOs to usher it into a new era, where tomorrow's conflicts may be uncertain, but the Army's preparation isn't. So read, write, and lead your units into the future of warfare.■

**Further reading: NCO Journal's**  
**[Talent Management](#)**  
**[Stewardship of the Profession](#)**

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