



A U.S. Army Soldier with 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, writes a paper at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, May 11, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by Pvt. Daniel Proper)

Why We Write

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More than 240 years ago, Prussian Baron Friedrich von Steuben volunteered to assist the early Continental Army. What he encountered were independently-operated state militias lacking uniformed discipline, structure, and training. Baron von Steuben trained these troops to drill, lead, and teach, turning them from independent militias into a powerful and professional Army. In the process, he laid the foundation for the noncommissioned officer (NCO) Corps. The most important aspect of Baron von Steuben's contribution; however, came when he reflected on his experiences and wrote the *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, commonly known as "The Blue Book" (Giblin, 2018).

For nearly two and a half centuries, Baron von Steuben's guidance has continued to shape the U.S. Army and the NCO Corps. We still see his influence in *Training Circular (TC) 7-22.7: The Noncommissioned Officer Guide*, and *TC*

3-21.5: Drill and Ceremonies (Department of the Army, 2020; 2021). He taught our predecessors lessons in professionalism, standardization, discipline, leading, and teaching – all of which are still important in today's Army. He did this by using a necessary and important skill: writing.

As NCOs, we routinely communicate with subordinates, peers, and seniors to discover creative and more efficient methods of accomplishing tasks. These discussions sometimes make their way into written standard operating procedures (SOPs), battalion or brigade-level tactical SOPs, and continuity books throughout the Army. The ability to create discussions geared toward progress and efficiency is important, but the ability to shape them into solid arguments and write them down to be shared with others is equally important.

Recently, the Army overhauled the Noncommissioned Officer Professional Development System (NCOPDS) to place a greater emphasis on professional writing by

including graded essays and reports into Basic, Advanced, Senior, and Master Leaders Courses. Writing is a fundamental aspect of being an NCO and is included in the NCO Common Core Competencies (NCO-C3) under “Communication.” The NCO Leadership Center of Excellence (NCOLCoE) states, “Competent NCOs are effective communicators. NCOs cannot lead, train, counsel, coach, mentor, or build teams without the ability to communicate clearly. This competency includes: Verbal (Public Speaking/Military Briefings) and Written (English and Grammar) communications” (NCOLCoE, n.d., para. 7).

Call to Action

While many current NCOs have contributed written guidance at the unit level, I urge you to consider writing professional articles for the greater good of the force. Extend your sphere of influence and reach Soldiers and leaders beyond your formations.

As an NCO and Observer, Coach/Trainer (OC/T), I had the pleasure of meeting leaders from different types of organizations. They were smart, passionate, and absolute experts in their craft. They routinely share ideas on how to improve Army systems and processes while brainstorming among themselves during chow or smoke breaks. Their ideas would be plausible, effective, and oftentimes ingenious. However, they would often die at the end of the conversation instead of taking flight or being expounded on by others in a force-wide discussion. Writing can preserve your thoughts, ideas, solutions, and present them to all echelons to learn, buy-in, or help progress your ideas even further.

I have observed in many Soldiers a hesitation to write and put themselves out there. Below are some common reasons holding Soldiers from writing and submitting or publishing their work:



U.S. Army Sgt. Alexis Snyder, 111th Sustainment Brigade, writes an essay on servant leadership at the Army National Guard Region VII Best Warrior Competition at Fort Carson, Colorado, May 17-20, 2021. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Taylor Lakey-Tamacori)

- **Lack of confidence in your writing ability.** The best way to gain confidence in your writing ability is to write and submit. Even if you get rejected you’ll learn something. You don’t have to write a doctoral dissertation or novel. Write what you’re passionate about and the publication’s team of editors will guide you through the rest. It is actually an enjoyable process involving a back and forth about your work along with ideas and edits that shape your work for big Army.
- **Preconceived notion that no one cares about your topic.** No matter what you write about, or how small and niche the topic, there is someone out there who cares about the subject. Even smaller specialized articles have the power to change the Army for the better.
- **Belief that it won’t change anything.** Every article has the potential to make a positive impact on Soldiers. That article you write on how to efficiently use the Digital Training Management System may be the solution a Soldier halfway around the world at Grafenwoehr, Germany, desperately needs. Your article won’t change the Army overnight, but it can positively affect other Soldiers at their level, which will change the Army in the long run. A Soldier out there may need your professional expertise.

Positively Affecting the Army

The following are examples of articles I believe made a positive impact on the Army.

- 1.) Sgt. 1st Class Zachary J. Krapfl wrote about how to more accurately measure lethality in his article, “Defining and Assessing Lethality” (Krapfl, 2019). He created a rubric for his own scoring system and even invented a new type of marksmanship target that more accurately rewards critical kill zone shots.
- 2.) Sgt. 1st Class Christopher Mascia wrote “Leading Generation Z: Abandoning the Zero Defect Mentality” which outlines how to properly plan for and adjust to the generational shift occurring since millennials now lead Gen Z (Mascia, 2020).
- 3.) I personally wrote an article outlining negative trends OC/Ts observed with a list of solutions so units could do well during their combat training center rotations in “NCO C3: Required Competencies for CTC Success” (Najera & Williams, 2020).
- 4.) Sgt. Maj. Kacie K. Dunn detailed the NCO Professional Military Education policies that previously held back female Soldiers from

advancing at the same pace as their male counterparts in her article, “Pregnancy or Promotion” (Dunn, 2020). While this article may not have single-handedly pushed the Army to its current temporary promotion policy, shortly after it was published the Army unveiled its current promotion policy which uses one of the solutions provided in the article and better aligns with policies used by other military services.

These articles are important, not because they’ll win a Pulitzer Prize, but because they were written by Soldiers who want to improve and progress the Army forward, as all NCOs should want to do.

Career Development

Professional advancement can also be a significant motivator for Soldiers to develop their writing skills. Writing consistently can improve your confidence and critical thinking skills, which will assist you in your next NCOPDS course. Writing and publishing can also benefit your NCO Evaluation Report (NCOER) as getting published, sharing your ideas, and broadening your sphere of influence certainly sets you apart from your peers. Lastly, writing opens opportunities for awards. The DePuy Writing Competition, Eisenhower Professional Writing Competition, and even local competitions such as the United States Army Garrison (USAG) Bavaria Suicide Prevention Writing Competition often come with awards, cash prizes, or a mixture of both. Winning, or even placing, can positively impact your NCOER as well.

Tips for Success

Once you decide to write a professional article, I would like to share some tips to help you be successful.

- **A3 – Aim, Audience, Articulation.** What is the aim of your article? Have a clear understanding of what it is you want your audience to take away from your writing. If you don’t know, they won’t know either. Who is your audience? Audiences can vary from broad – “leaders” such as NCOs and officers, specific level leaders such as squad leaders or section sergeants, or specific jobs/roles such as the training room NCO. Know who your audience is, what they should do or be responsible for, and why they should care. This will help ensure your article stays on track and the information is conveyed. Be direct, to the point, and tailor your language to your audience.
- **Understand the publication requirements.** Each professional journal has unique publication standards related to length, topic, references, and prior publication. Understand your target audience and the aim of your paper, decide which

publication best suits that paper, then review the submission guidelines.

- **Pick a topic you are passionate about.** This cannot be overstated, especially if you are preparing to write your first article. Many people dread writing, but it becomes significantly easier when your topic is something you are passionate about. Writing an article is not a requirement – you are doing it because you have something to contribute or have a solution to offer. The topics you can choose from are virtually endless.
- **Introductory Paragraph.** The intro is arguably the most important section of your article and includes the thesis statement at the end of the paragraph which states the main point or claim and supporting or discussion points. If someone isn’t interested after reading the intro paragraph, they probably won’t finish the article. Discussing observations in support of the problem, why the problem is worth writing about, and how you can address the problem is fairly standard. Theoretical, empirical, and doctrinal implications can help strengthen your article’s introduction. Appealing to your audience’s emotions by getting them “hooked” or engaged is also incredibly effective.
- **Understand you are making an argument.** Generally, your article can be argumentative, analytical, or explanatory. Most are argumentative where you attempt to convince the reader there is a problem and you have a sound solution. Consider the supporting evidence you have and use it throughout your paper to convince the reader. Think of it as using hard facts (sources) to support your argument instead of a “because I said so” (argument with no sources). You can also start with your strongest point first in an attempt to capture interest, or build up towards your strongest point so as to end on a high note.
- **Lean on your peers and seniors for review.** It can be mortifying to some to have their writing reviewed by their peers or seniors, but they are valuable assets you have access to. Your peers can help provide additional supporting evidence and help ensure you’re going down a logical path (staying within your argument). Your seniors can also be vital to this process, particularly officers. They have a different perspective to your problem and solution, and can offer quick proof-reading or ideas.

Conclusion: Submit

The *NCO Journal* is a great publication for your professional articles and has a large Army readership.

You can find their guidelines at NCO Journal Submission Guidelines (<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/NCO-Journal/NCO-Journal-Submission-Guidelines/>). Find a topic you are passionate about, a deficiency you have a creative solution for, or a system/process you

think can benefit others and share it. Help shape the Army into a more efficient and lethal fighting force. "I will not forget, nor will I allow my comrades to forget that we are professionals, noncommissioned officers, leaders!" (Department of the Army, n.d., para. 3). ■

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