



Through writing, NCOs can leave the Army better than they found it. Written contributions help ensure Soldiers have access to relevant experiences, lessons learned, insight, and even personal and professional development recommendations. But how should Soldiers get ideas down on the page, and where can they submit their work? (U.S. Army Reserve Photo by Sgt. Alyssa Blom)

Regaining Relevance Through Effective Writing

By Sgt. Maj. David G. Cyr

Sergeants Major Academy

“Our NCO corps is admired by our contemporaries around the world and is an integral part of what has made our Army so successful throughout our 244 years of service to the nation,” wrote 16th Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael A. Grinston (Department of the Army, 2020, p. 3).

T rue, our Army is unlike any other because our NCO corps’ skills, experiences, and contributions set us apart from the rest, and

that’s something to be proud of. But can we hang our hat on our past, or should we continue to look for ways to improve and remain relevant as the backbone of the Army?

In a recent article, Master Sgt. Noel DeJesus said his “inability to learn from the experiences of thousands of sergeants major who have paved the way for me seems hypocritical” (DeJesus, 2024, para. 6).

I agree with this claim and support the notion we need to learn from the experiences of those who came before us lest we repeat their mistakes and halt progress.

For every NCO who submits an article for publication,

thousands remain mute in the hope someone else will speak up. The Army's senior leaders insist the voice of professionals at all levels is critical to strengthening our Army and adequately preparing to answer our nation's call (George et al., 2023).

To ensure we have a voice and our experience transfers, NCOs must seek opportunities to publish their experiences.

Sharing NCO Experiences

We have an unstated obligation to leave the Army better than we found it. We can do that through writing. Written contributions can help ensure Soldiers have access to relevant experiences, lessons learned, insight, and even personal and professional development recommendations. But where, or to whom, do you submit your work if you have something to share?

[Professional bulletins](#) like the [Military Review](#), the [Army Sustainment Professional Bulletin](#), and the [Army Communicator](#) provide NCOs with platforms to exercise their voice. They are easily accessible through the Army Publishing Directorate or each's web page. [Army University Press](#) consolidated additional branch-specific journals like [Special Warfare](#), the [Chaplain Corps Journal](#), and even [Applied Language Learning](#) (which provides leaders a place to share their insights on instruction techniques and curriculum development).

Additional opportunities exist through Army



First Sgt. Jason Wright leafs through a magazine at Victory Hall on Fort Riley, Kansas. Reading can reveal if your ideas have already made their way into print. (U.S. Army photo by Spc. Joshua Holladay)

channels like the [NCO Journal](#) and the [Harding Project](#), which offer online platforms to turn your thoughts into something that helps others learn and grow. Despite the many options available to NCOs, several barriers prevent Soldiers from taking the leap.

Overcoming the Barriers

As an instructor at the Sergeants Major Academy, I see firsthand how even our next generation of sergeants major shy away from or resist the writing process. Their reluctance is sometimes due to a simple lack of desire to write. Other times, it's because they are unsure what to write about.

That said, plenty of open and active discourse in the classroom leads me to believe they all have something to share. Within every NCO, there is a wealth of knowledge that can help our Army, and the only thing keeping most from sharing it with the world is confidence.

To help others find that confidence and share their voice, I created a list of four things NCOs can do to strengthen their writing skills and gain confidence (none of which include going back to school). Some of these worked for me. I hope they can for you.

Read

These are supposed to be tips to improve our confidence in writing, so why start with reading? While reading is fundamental, what I mean here is to research and figure out what already exists on a topic that interests you. That way, you can answer the question: *How unique is my idea?*

The *NCO Journal* and the *Military Review* want authors to consider whether their article is unique or written from a fresh perspective (Army University Press, n.d.). The only way to answer that question is to know what's out there, and the only way to know what's out there is to read. If you're like me, reading can be difficult because of noisy or busy environments. I find it best to read in a quiet setting at the end of the day.

Answer the Call

One of the responses I frequently get when talking to leaders about submitting an article for publication is the need for guidance on what to write about.

Answering a publication's call is a great place to start in those cases. Most of the resources listed above include article submission requirements, which usually include areas of focus. For instance, the *Army Sustainment Professional Bulletin* lists seasonal themes through next winter, including lessons learned in sustainment operations in Ukraine and maritime sustainment in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command theater (Army Sustainment, n.d.).

So, if you're struggling to settle on a topic, browse

the submission guidelines of potential platforms to determine what they seek. Doing so may spark your creativity.

Work Together

Find a battle buddy – someone who shares your views or can help you refine them through brainstorming or outlining. Someone who can help you edit, refine, and, when needed, delete unnecessary content.

In the January 2024 edition of the *Army Communicator*, Capt. Alvin Cade Jr. and Sgt. 1st Class Albert Jones co-authored an article describing the brigade support battalion's importance in logistical support to the warfighter (Cade & Jones, 2024). I am not making a case for or against their published opinions; I am simply showing that others are working as teams to get their thoughts published.

You can, too.

Risk Rejection

Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed 10,000 times – I've successfully found 10,000 ways that will not work" (Hendry, 2013, para. 2). He brought us the light bulb, for which, if I stop to think about it, I'm grateful. But he's also noted for his willingness to try and fail.

So, give writing a shot, and don't stop at your first *no*. Sometimes, you submit an article that doesn't meet the requirements or intent for one publication but does for another. While submitting simultaneous submissions to different publications is not generally a good or accepted practice, taking a *no* with one and turning it into a *yes* at another is common.

Remember, failure is not measured by the number of rejections but by when you give up.



Sgt. 1st Class Amanda Tidmore and Corbin Campbell, 305th Military Intelligence Battalion cadre, conduct research at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. Working as a team can help you get your thoughts published. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Spencer Bryant)

Conclusion

We all want to leave the Army better than we found it. But that requires stepping outside our comfort zones and sharing our thoughts and experiences. Writing is not always an easy process, but sometimes all it requires is starting.

The only bad paper is one that's never written.

Overcoming barriers and taking the leap might be as simple as finding a battle buddy to share the experience or taking a few minutes each day to read articles submitted by other leaders.

Whatever it takes, just get started.

Answer the call. Our Soldiers need to learn from your experience. Be bold and never fear rejection. One closed door leads to countless others that might be open. Ring the doorbell and see if someone is home. What's holding you back? ■

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