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# *Action ⚡ Officer*

## Staff Writing



**U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command**

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## Preface

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**Introduction** The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command headquartered at Fort Monroe, Virginia has made this packet available to viewers of the Plain Language Action Network and others interested in improving their power of expression.

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**Action Officer** The Army and sister services use the term, *action officer* to refer to a staff member (staffer). Action officers shape information and submit recommendations to senior decision makers, that when approved become decisions. To do this successfully, action officers must be proficient writers; they author documents that often have impact Armywide.

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**Self-paced instruction** This packet has been drawn from the *Action Officer Development Course* consisting of 11 lessons and 5 appendices that cover staff processes and communication skills, including writing.

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**Website** To view this course and others, visit the Army Correspondence Course Program website: <http://www.atsc.army.mil/accp/aipd.htm>

We've opened enrollment to this course to all federal employees and members of the armed forces.

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## Lesson 11—Writing with Clarity

### Overview

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**Introduction** This lesson describes a few simple ways to write with clarity. Apply its teaching points and writing takes on a clear, concise, and vigorous quality. To improve further and exceed the modest standards described here, study the works listed at the end of this lesson.

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### Rationale



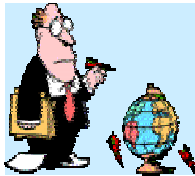
In today's world of time constraints and information overload, readers don't have time to wade through obscure writing, searching for meaning. If you write well, readers will read what you write, quickly understand it, and remember who wrote it.

As soon as you move one step from the bottom, your effectiveness depends on your ability to reach others through the spoken or written word.

—Peter F. Drucker

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### Objectives



- Identify standards and rules for Army writing.
  - Define the active and passive voice.
  - Describe types of wordy expressions and ways to eliminate them.
  - Write sentences of proper length and with proper emphasis.
  - Package writing for ease of reading.
  - Use editing tools to ensure correctness.
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**Overview**, Continued

**In this lesson** This lesson contains two sections and three appendices:

<b>Section A: Improvement Techniques</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>See Page</b>
		The Need for Clear Writing
	Standards and Rules	11-4
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## Section A—Improvement Techniques

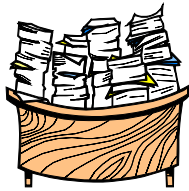
### The Need for Clear Writing

**Introduction** This map explains why action officers must be skilled writers.

**Necessity** Since writing lacks the advantage of immediate feedback to clarify meaning, it must be readily understood from the beginning. Here's what happens if it's not:

The reader will waste time	The writer will waste time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– rereading</li> <li>– guessing</li> <li>– grabbing a dictionary, or</li> <li>– picking up a phone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– taking calls from confused readers</li> <li>– writing a clarification message, or</li> <li>– explaining to an irate boss why the paper must be rewritten.</li> </ul>

#### Quality



While some bureaucratic writing is good, much of it is turgid, passive, and confusing. In spite of efforts to eradicate it, poor writing still survives:

- It's embedded in the bureaucracy.
- People think government writing should look *official*.
- The undereducated or insecure think they can impress by writing this way.
- Writers either don't know how or else are afraid to change.
- Leaders who should know better tolerate poor writing.

#### AOs are writers

Action officers must write well; they write documents for senior leaders to sign, often widely read, and having large impact. One who writes with a *golden pen* has an edge. An otherwise talented person who doesn't write well works at a disadvantage. This gifted writer says it best:

**Bad writing makes bright people look dumb.**  
—William Zinsser

## Standards and Rules

**Introduction** This map explains the writing standards and rules defined in Army Regulation 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence*. These standards are just that—they're not suggestions.

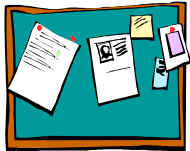
### Standards



To be understood quickly, writing must meet these standards:

Standard	Description
Complete	Answers the mail
Concise	Uses fewest words to get point across
Clear	Understood in a single, rapid reading
Organized	Logical and coherent
To the point	Bottom-line up front
Grammatically correct.	Proper spelling, punctuation, grammar.

### Rules



To meet Army writing standards, follow these composition rules from AR 25-50:

Item	Rule
<b>Bottom line up front</b>	State purpose and main point up front. For example, put the recommendation, conclusion, or reason for writing in the first or second paragraph, not at the end.
<b>Active voice</b>	Use active voice in most sentences.
<b>Short words</b>	Choose one or two-syllable words over multi-syllable ones.
<b>Short sentences</b>	Write short sentences (average about 15 words).
<b>Lean</b>	Write most paragraphs about one inch deep.
<b>No jargon</b>	Avoid jargon, especially when writing to outsiders.
<b>Error free</b>	Use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar.
<b>Informal</b>	Set a businesslike but informal tone. Use <i>you</i> , <i>we</i> , or <i>I</i> instead of <i>this office</i> or <i>this headquarters</i> . <u>Exception:</u> Because it's patronizing, avoid using possessive pronouns, <i>my</i> or <i>mine</i> . <u>Example:</u> Instead of saying <i>my staff</i> , say <i>our staff</i> .
<b>One page</b>	Limit length to one page for most correspondence.

**Clarification** Writing must be error free in spelling and punctuation but not always perfect in style. Remember, *perfect* is the enemy of *good*. In a busy staff environment, a reader who quickly grasps meaning will likely overlook finer points, such as an occasional *which* instead of *that* or a split infinitive.

## Active and Passive Voice

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**Introduction** This map explains the differences between the active and passive voice.

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**Terms** Voice refers to the relationship of a subject and its verb.  
Active voice refers to a verb that shows the subject acting.  
Passive voice refers to a verb that shows the subject being acted upon.

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**Active voice** A sentence written in the active voice shows the subject acting in standard English sentence order: subject-verb-object. The subject names the *agent* responsible for the action, and the verb identifies the action the agent has set in motion. Example: “George threw the ball.”

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**Passive voice** A sentence written in the passive voice reverses the standard sentence order.



Example: “The ball was thrown by George.”

George, the agent, is no longer the subject but now becomes the object of the preposition, *by*. The ball is no longer the object but now becomes the subject of the sentence, where the agent preferably should be.

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**Omitting the agent** A passive sentence may also omit the agent and still express a complete thought. But this makes a sentence vague because it may omit important information such as *who*, *what*, or *why* (perhaps intentionally).

Examples:

- The ball was thrown.
- The report was submitted late.
- No decision has been made.

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**Passive form** To configure a verb in the passive voice, use

- a form of the helping verb *to be*: The report was completed.
- a main verb forming a past participle: The report was completed.

Examples of forms of the verb, *to be*: *is, are, was, were, be, being, been*.

Examples of participle endings: *ed, en, un, t* (reviewed, arisen, begun, caught).

Caution: Don’t confuse a passive sentence with one that describes a state of being. Example: “The water was frozen.” Though the sentence appears passive, it isn’t because it is describing the condition of the subject. To be passive, the sentence would have to show action directed to the subject.

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## Using the Active and Passive Voice

**Introduction** This map explains how to convert the passive voice into the active. It also explains when it's appropriate to use the passive voice.

**Active versus passive** Writing sentences in the active voice is the single best way to improve writing.

<u>Active voice</u>	<u>Passive voice</u>
– uses fewer words	– uses 20 percent more words
– takes less time to read	– takes more time to read
– identifies the agent.	– may omit the agent.

**Before and after**

Passive voice: *It was recommended that an ethics committee be created, so citizens would be afforded a means of reporting fraud, waste, or abuse.*

Active voice: *City Council recommended the mayor create an ethics committee to enable citizens to report fraud, waste, or abuse.*

**Conversion steps** To convert a passive sentence into an active one, take these steps:

Step	Action
1	Identify the agent.
2	Move the agent to the subject position.
3	Remove the helping verb, <i>to be</i> .
4	Remove the past participle.
5	Replace the helping verb and participle with an action verb.

<b>Examples of conversion</b>	<u>Original:</u>	<u>Revised:</u>
	The report has been completed. A decision will be made.	Jack completed the report. Jill will decide.

**When to use passive** Though overused, passive voice still has legitimate purposes in our language.

Use the passive voice when the	Example
receiver is the focus of the action	John was awarded a prize.
agent is unknown	The store was robbed.
agent is irrelevant, or	The paragraphs will be numbered.
situation calls for discretion.	No decision has been made. (Your boss is sitting on the action.)



## Wordiness

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**Introduction** This map describes types of wordy expressions and ways to eliminate them:



### Types of Wordy Expressions:

- Pompous Diction
  - Overuse of The, That, and Which
  - Dummy Subjects
  - Redundant Pairs
  - Redundant Modifiers
  - Needless Repetition
  - Compound Nouns
- 

**Rationale** Using the active voice improves writing quality. However, if writing contains unnecessary, pompous, or long words, it will still be hard to read. Remember, the longer it takes to read, the weaker it comes across.

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**Pompous diction** Some writers choose words to impress, rather than to express. Big words and pompous phrases add deadwood that hinders meaning. Most wordy expressions have much shorter common synonyms far easier to read, write, say, and hear. See Appendix B, *Simpler Words and Phrases*. Examples:

Instead of saying	Try saying
consideration be given to	consider
for the purpose of	to
due to the fact that	because
forwarded under separate cover	sent separately
pursuant to authority contained in	per
prioritized list	priority list.

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**Overuse of *the, that, or which*** Use these words to clarify meaning; otherwise, leave them out:

- ~~The~~ regulations won't allow it.
- I feel ~~that~~ it's a good decision.
- The report ~~which~~ I'm writing is nearly finished.

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## Wordiness, Continued

### Dummy subjects

Dummy subjects are empty expressions that

- obscure the real subject
- make the sentence longer
- delay the point
- encourage passive voice, and
- hide responsibility.

Examples: Beginning a sentence with  
*It is*  
*It appears*  
*There is (are)*  
*It will be.*

### Examples

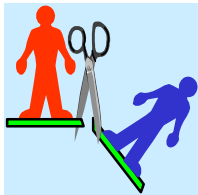
Otherwise, delete the dummy subject and move the real subject to the front.

Instead of saying	Try saying
It is my intention to	I intend to
There is one thing bothering me	One thing bothers me
It appears that	I think
It is essential that	You must.

### Exception

Beginning a sentence with *It* is permissible when the pronoun refers to its antecedent in the previous sentence. Example: “In spite of efforts to eradicate it, poor writing still survives. *It's* embedded in the bureaucracy.”

### Redundant pairs



Why create meaningless or unnecessary distinctions that add bulk but not information? If two ideas are slightly different, is it that important? If not, eliminate one and retain the one that expresses meaning more precisely.

Examples:

- The manager's function and role . . .
- The diplomats engaged in a frank and candid dialogue.
- The staff provides guidance and assistance.
- First and foremost, we must focus on priorities.

### Redundant modifiers

Examples of redundant modifiers:

- ~~Basic~~ fundamentals
- ~~Actual~~ facts
- ~~Really~~ glad
- ~~Honest~~ truth
- ~~End~~ result
- Separate ~~out~~
- Start over ~~again~~
- Symmetrical ~~in form~~
- Narrow ~~down~~
- Seldom ~~or ever~~.

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## Wordiness, Continued

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### Needless repetition

Needless repetition of words or phrases also creates redundancy and makes writing appear juvenile:

Before:

In the absence of a general officer or civilian equivalent, nonconcurrences may be signed by a substitute officially designated and acting for a general officer or civilian equivalent.

After:

If a general officer or civilian equivalent is not available, an authorized substitute may sign nonconcurrences.

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### Compound nouns

Don't use long strings of nouns as modifiers. Revising the sentence may add a word or two, but it's easier to read:

<b>Instead of saying</b>	<b>Try saying</b>
Material replacement alternatives	Alternatives for material replacement.
Increased high cost area allowances	Increased allowances for high cost areas.

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## Smothered Verbs

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**Introduction** This map explains how to shorten sentences by eliminating smothered verbs.

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**Action verb** An action verb is one that expresses meaning without helping verbs or other modifiers. Example: We agree with the decision.

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**Smothered verb** A smothered verb is a verb converted to a noun, so it needs a helping verb and prepositions or articles to express action. This lengthens a sentence and saps its vitality. It also encourages use of the passive voice.

“We are in agreement with the decision.” In this sentence, the writer has smothered the main verb (*agree*) with a noun (*agreement*). The noun now requires a helping verb (*are*) and a preposition (*in*) to show action.

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**Distinct endings** Most smothered verbs have distinct endings:

– ance	– ity	– ness
– ant	– mant	– sion
– ence	– ment	– tion.

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**Weak helping verbs** Smothered verbs rely on weak helping verbs to show action. If one of them appears, you know a smothered verb is nearby. Examples:

– be	– do	– give	– make
– can	– effect	– have	– provide
– conduct	– get	– hold	– put

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**Converting smothered verbs** To give your sentences more punch, find the smothered verb and convert it into an action verb (or substitute it with a harder hitting verb). This eliminates the need for a helping verb and other modifiers.

Instead of saying	Try
We held a meeting	We met
I made a choice	I chose
They conducted an investigation	They investigated
Consideration was given to	We considered
We are in support of the plan	We support the plan
He made an attempt to escape.	He attempted to escape.

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## Sentence Clarity

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**Introduction** This map explains how to write clear, emphatic sentences.

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**Length** So far, you've seen how using the active voice and eliminating wordy expressions enhances clarity. However, this may not be enough. If sentences are all long or all short, paragraphs may still be hard to read.

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**Variety** While sentences should *average* about 15 words, they need not all be the same length, nor is this desirable. If written clearly, an occasional long sentence is fine. However, after writing a long sentence, keep the next one short.

Caution: Should you write all long or all short sentences, you'll present too few or too many points of emphasis.

<b>Don't make all sentences</b>	<b>because it makes them</b>
the same length	monotonous.
long	dense and hard to read.
short	choppy, telegraphic, and juvenile.

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### Too long



#### Example:

I learned I was selected for the job, so I called Jeanne immediately, and I told her the good news, and that evening we celebrated by going out to dinner.

#### Analysis:

This sentence of 31 words with four stringy thoughts is much too long. And we're not sure which point the writer is emphasizing. This sentence must be divided into shorter ones, but they must not be too short.

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### Too short and choppy



#### Revision of original sentence:

I learned I was selected for the job. I called Jeanne immediately. I told her the good news. That evening we celebrated by going out to dinner.

#### Analysis:

Here, we deleted the conjunctions (*and, so*) and created four short sentences. They're easier to read, but when read in order they send a choppy message. They also raise four points of emphasis for the reader to ponder. We can make these sentences more effective by combining them.

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## Sentence Clarity, Continued

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**Just about right**

Example (four short sentences):

I learned I was selected for the job. I called Jeanne immediately. I told her the good news. That evening we celebrated by going out to dinner.

Final revision:

Upon hearing I was selected for the job, I called Jeanne and told her the good news. That evening we celebrated by going out to dinner.

Analysis:

Using a subordinate and an independent clause, combined first three sentences.

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**Emphasis**

Emphasis correctly placed adds clarity and force to expression.

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**Beginning of sentence**

Place introductory, preliminary, previously known, or less important points at the beginning. This tells the reader these preceding words have lesser emphasis than what is to follow.

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**End of sentence**

Place the point you wish to emphasize at the end of the sentence. You want to stress the newest or most important point there.

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**Bad example**

I called Jeanne and told her the good news, upon learning I was selected for the job.

Analysis: In this example, the emphasis is misplaced. Old information (job selection) should appear in the front and introduce the new information.

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**Good example**

Upon learning I was selected for the job, I called Jeanne and told her the good news.

Analysis: In this example, old information precedes the new.

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**Recap**

To add clarity to sentences,

- use the active voice
  - delete extraneous words
  - reduce clauses to phrases or words
  - replace long words with short ones
  - control sentence length, and
  - emphasize the main point at the end.
- 

Note: This has been a cursory treatment of sentence clarity. For a comprehensive presentation, consult this source: Joseph M. Williams, *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 2nd ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1985).

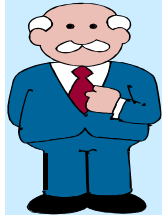
## Packaging

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**Introduction** This map describes how to package a document to make it reader friendly.

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### Rationale

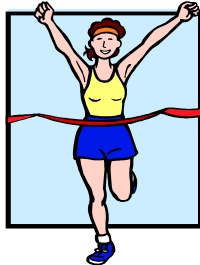


An ordinary meal is made more inviting when served with fine tableware and appealing garnishes. Similarly, readers are more likely to read something when it's attractively packaged.

Packaging is the arrangement of text to enhance its readability and visual appeal. This opens up writing and gives it *white space*. Whatever format used—letter, memo, or fact sheet—packaging makes it easier to read.

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### Up front



Unlike an O. Henry short story, staff writing doesn't feature suspenseful narratives and surprise endings. Putting the main point up front allows a reader to review a matter quickly and go on to something else.

Examples of main points:

- Purpose
  - Request
  - Reason for writing
  - Recommendation
  - Conclusion
  - Bottom line.
- 

### Putting the main point up front

To find the main point, pick the sentence you would keep if you had to cut out all the rest. In other words, request something before justifying it or provide an answer before explaining it.

To put the main point up front, open with a short statement of purpose, and then state the main point. Sometimes you can combine the two statements in one sentence.

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### Visual appeal



Most newspapers and magazines published today are visually appealing and easy to read through the clever use of visual devices. However when using these devices, don't overdo it: too much is as bad as too little.

Examples:

- Color
  - Labels
  - Bullet lists
  - Bold headings
  - Text boxes
  - Underscoring or *italics*
  - Tables and graphs
  - Graphic illustrations.
- 

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## Packaging, Continued

**Example** This is an excerpt from an old Army regulation and a revision. The original is passive and dense, while the revision is lean and packaged to give it white space.

Before	After
<p><b>11-12. Introduction</b> When Government property is lost, damaged, or destroyed and no other credit method is appropriate, relief from responsibility for the loss may be obtained by explaining the circumstances surrounding the loss, damage, or destruction to the satisfaction of the Secretary of the Army or his designated representative. This explanation ordinarily takes the form of a report of survey, which constitutes the most important credit instrument in the Army supply system. The report of survey system insures that appropriate investigation is made and that each report of survey is reviewed objectively at a suitable level.</p> <p><b>11-13 Purpose</b> The report of survey is an instrument to explain and record the circumstances surrounding the loss, damage, or destruction of property so that responsibility can be determined and to serve as a credit document to justify dropping property from the property book officer's account. Theoretically, the explanation on the report is made to the Secretary of the Army. However, authority for final approval has been delegated to lower levels, usually the installation commander or the reviewing authority. The report is particularly useful because it provides for detailed investigation, collection of all information regarding the case in a single report, and review of findings and recommendations. Installation commanders, reviewing authorities, and the Chief of Finance and Accounting (Office of the Comptroller of the Army) represent the levels authorized to take final action on reports of survey. The level at which final action is taken varies with different reports, depending on the nature of the loss, damage, or destruction, persons involved, and dollar amount involved.</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b> Report of survey (DD Form 200) is the most important credit method in the Army supply system. Use it to record what happened to lost, damaged, or destroyed government property. The property-book officer can then delete the item from the property account.</p> <p><b>Purpose</b> Use a report of survey to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– record details of investigation of loss</li> <li>– collect all information about the case in a single report</li> <li>– review findings and recommendations, and</li> <li>– delete the lost item from the property book.</li> </ul> <p><b>These levels may take final action:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Installation commander.</li> <li>– Reviewing authority.</li> <li>– Chief of Finance and Accounting (Office of the Comptroller of the Army).</li> </ul> <p>Level depends on the nature of the loss and the people and amount of money involved.</p>



## Bullets

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**Introduction** This map explains how to use bullets to make a long sentence easier to read.

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### Bullets



If a sentence contains a series of related ideas or laundry-list items, put them in a bullet format. To make a bullet format, follow these steps:

Step	Action						
1	Break the sentence into a lead-in statement and list ideas under it. Use this technique only for a long series. Don't use it for a series of only two or three ideas unless you want to emphasize them.						
2	Punctuate the lead-in statement in one of two ways: <table border="1" data-bbox="560 737 1390 856"> <thead> <tr> <th>If the lead-in statement is</th> <th>then use</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>a complete sentence</td> <td>a colon (:).</td> </tr> <tr> <td>an introductory phrase</td> <td>an em dash (—).*</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>*Style may vary, as explained below.</p>	If the lead-in statement is	then use	a complete sentence	a colon (:).	an introductory phrase	an em dash (—).*
If the lead-in statement is	then use						
a complete sentence	a colon (:).						
an introductory phrase	an em dash (—).*						
3	Use the same grammatical form for each listed item, such as an infinitive phrase, noun, or verb.						

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### Examples

#### Before:

Departure information will include a complete forwarding address, the reporting date to the new unit, the order and paragraph number, the issuing headquarters, and the date of departure.

#### After:

Departure information will include

- complete forwarding address
- reporting date to new unit
- order and paragraph number
- issuing headquarters, and
- date of departure.

#### After—alternate style:

Required departure information:

- Complete forwarding address.
- Reporting date to new unit.
- Order and paragraph number.
- Issuing headquarters.
- Date of departure.

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### Styles

Punctuation conventions for bullet lists are flexible. To minimize punctuation in this text, we've omitted the em dash after introductory phrases and limited the use of periods and capital letters. Whatever style bullet or punctuation adopted, be consistent throughout. When in doubt, follow local SOP.

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## Editing

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**Introduction** This map explains how to edit copy, whether it be yours or another writer's.

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**Difficulty** Even gifted writers often find writing to be an arduous task. Editing one's own work can also be trying because we're apt to confuse our intent with what we actually wrote. We don't always express intentions clearly.

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**Pride of authorship** Your writing is fair game to those reviewing it as it passes through the system. Be prepared to have it criticized and modified. To cope with pride of authorship,

- practice writing every day
- prepare excellent work that withstands scrutiny
- ask experts to help with errors you didn't see or can't fix
- accept valid criticism gracefully, and
- be tactful when proving critics wrong.



**Editing procedure** To edit copy, take these steps:

Step	Action
1	Lay copy aside for a day or two.
2	Then read it from the <i>reader's</i> viewpoint.
3	For objectivity, ask a critic to read it.
4	To see how the text flows, read the copy aloud while a critic follows.

Tip: In a first draft you'll write too much, so in the second cut out half the words.

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**Editing a writer's work** When it comes to having their work edited, most writers have thin skins. You may have the same shortcomings, but it's easier to see them in others. No one writes poorly on purpose, and only a few do from laziness. Besides pointing out errors, also offer assistance.

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**No nit picking** Someday, people may write letters for your signature. Before nit-picking them to death and sending them back, ask if they must be perfect or simply acceptable.

The mark of a good executive . . . you're handed letters which you know you could have written better yourself and you sign them anyway.

—General Dwight D. Eisenhower

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## Editing, Continued

### Rules



When editing a writer's work, follow these rules:

<b>Don't</b>	<b>Do</b>
judge one on writing ability	be objective
<i>nit-pick</i> about minor grammatical points or arbitrarily change words	weigh the value of proposed edits against cost in time and effort
change writing for literary effect	focus on meeting standards
hold one to your standards of perfection	accept the writing if it meets minimum standards of AR 25-50
ruthlessly mark up every minor thing	give feedback, one step at a time
use editing as an evaluation exercise	use editing to help the writer learn
rewrite the work; this relieves him of responsibility and causes resentment.	show the writer how to improve.

**Checklist** Edit copy three times: 1st for completeness, 2nd for conciseness, 3rd for clarity.

	✓	<b>Checklist</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Complete</b>		Just enough information	
		Examples where needed	
		Relevant facts	
		Valid interpretation of facts	
		Logical argument of position	
		Objective	
<b>Concise</b>		Main point up front	
		Active voice	
		Short words and sentences	
		Paragraphs one inch deep	
		No jargon or pompous words	
<b>Clear</b>		Subject matter laid out clearly	
		Subject advanced in stages	
		Smooth transitions	
		Clear linkages between stages	
		Correct spelling & punctuation	
		Informal	
		Packaged attractively	

## Section B—Back Matter

### Overview

---

**In this section** This section contains commonly recurring topics found in each lesson.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>See Page</b>
Summary	11-19
References	11-21
Practice Exercises	11-22
Answer Key	11-24

---

## Summary

<b>Key points</b>		This table summarizes key points of the lesson.	
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Summary</b>		<b>Page</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify standards and rules for Army writing.</li> <li>– Define the active and passive voice.</li> <li>– Describe types of wordy expressions and ways to eliminate them.</li> <li>– Write sentences of proper length and with proper emphasis.</li> <li>– Package writing for ease of reading.</li> <li>– Use editing tools to ensure correctness.</li> </ul>		11-1
<b>Standards and rules</b>	Standards and rules for writing per AR 25-50:		11-4
	<b>Standards</b>	<b>Rules</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Complete</li> <li>– Concise</li> <li>– Clear</li> <li>– Organized</li> <li>– To the point</li> <li>– Grammatically correct.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Bottom line up front</li> <li>– Active voice</li> <li>– Short words, sentences</li> <li>– Lean, one-inch paragraphs</li> <li>– No jargon</li> <li>– Error free</li> <li>– Informal</li> <li>– One-page letters.</li> </ul>	
<b>Active and passive voice</b>	<p><u>Active voice</u> refers to a verb that shows the subject acting. <u>Example:</u> <i>George threw the ball.</i></p> <p><u>Passive voice</u> refers to a verb that shows the subject being acted upon. <u>Example:</u> <i>The ball was thrown by George.</i></p>		11-5
<b>Using the active and passive voice</b>	<p><u>Active voice</u> is preferred—shorter, specific, forceful. <u>Passive voice</u> takes more words, vague, and weak.</p> <p><u>Converting passive to active:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identify agent.</li> <li>– Move agent to subject position.</li> <li>– Remove the helping verb, <i>to be</i>.</li> <li>– Remove past participle.</li> <li>– Replace helping verb and participle with an action verb.</li> </ul> <p><u>Use passive voice</u> when</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– receiver is focus of action</li> <li>– actor is unknown</li> <li>– actor is irrelevant</li> <li>– situation calls for discretion.</li> </ul>		11-6

*Continued on next page*

## Summary, Continued

Key points (continued)										
Topic	Summary	Page								
<b>Pompous Diction</b>	Types of wordy expressions and examples of eliminating them:	11-7								
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>for the purpose of due to the fact that</td> <td>to because</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Instead of saying	Try saying	for the purpose of due to the fact that	to because				
Instead of saying	Try saying									
for the purpose of due to the fact that	to because									
<b>Over use of <i>the, that, or which</i></b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>The regulations won't I think <u>that</u> it's good.</td> <td>(Leave out.) (Leave out.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	The regulations won't I think <u>that</u> it's good.	(Leave out.) (Leave out.)	11-8				
	Instead of saying	Try saying								
The regulations won't I think <u>that</u> it's good.	(Leave out.) (Leave out.)									
<b>Dummy Subjects</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>It is requested that There is (are)</td> <td>We ask (Leave out, rewrite sentence.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	It is requested that There is (are)	We ask (Leave out, rewrite sentence.)					
Instead of saying	Try saying									
It is requested that There is (are)	We ask (Leave out, rewrite sentence.)									
<b>Redundant Pairs</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>the manager's <u>function</u> and <u>role</u></td> <td>(Take one out.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	the manager's <u>function</u> and <u>role</u>	(Take one out.)	11-9				
Instead of saying	Try saying									
the manager's <u>function</u> and <u>role</u>	(Take one out.)									
<b>Redundant modifiers</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>basic fundamentals</td> <td>(Delete redundant modifier.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	basic fundamentals	(Delete redundant modifier.)					
Instead of saying	Try saying									
basic fundamentals	(Delete redundant modifier.)									
<b>Needless Repetition</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Dick gave the book to Jane. Jane took the book and read it.</td> <td>Dick gave the book to Jane and she read it.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	Dick gave the book to Jane. Jane took the book and read it.	Dick gave the book to Jane and she read it.	11-10				
Instead of saying	Try saying									
Dick gave the book to Jane. Jane took the book and read it.	Dick gave the book to Jane and she read it.									
<b>Compound Nouns</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>force modernization initiatives.</td> <td>(Rewrite phrase to break up the string of nouns.)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	force modernization initiatives.	(Rewrite phrase to break up the string of nouns.)					
Instead of saying	Try saying									
force modernization initiatives.	(Rewrite phrase to break up the string of nouns.)									
<b>Smothered verbs</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Instead of saying</th> <th>Try saying</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>We are in compliance.</td> <td>We are complying.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Instead of saying	Try saying	We are in compliance.	We are complying.	11-11 and 11-12				
Instead of saying	Try saying									
We are in compliance.	We are complying.									
<b>Sentence clarity</b>	To write with clarity, – write sentences that are neither too long nor too short – emphasize important points at the end of the sentence – use the active voice – delete extraneous words, and – reduce clauses to phrases or words.									
<b>Packaging</b>	Put the main point up front and use visual devices.	11-13								
<b>Bullets</b>	For ease of reading, use bullets for long lists.	11-15								
<b>Editing</b>	<table border="1"> <tbody> <tr> <td>– Lay copy aside, then read again.</td> <td>Be tactful when editing others' work. Follow <i>do's</i> and <i>don'ts</i>.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>– Adopt reader's viewpoint.</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>– Have a critic read copy.</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>– Read copy aloud as critic follows.</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	– Lay copy aside, then read again.	Be tactful when editing others' work. Follow <i>do's</i> and <i>don'ts</i> .	– Adopt reader's viewpoint.		– Have a critic read copy.		– Read copy aloud as critic follows.		11-16
– Lay copy aside, then read again.	Be tactful when editing others' work. Follow <i>do's</i> and <i>don'ts</i> .									
– Adopt reader's viewpoint.										
– Have a critic read copy.										
– Read copy aloud as critic follows.										

## References

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### References consulted



To write this lesson, we drew from these sources:

Army Regulation 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence*, November 1988.

Army Regulation 600-70, *The Army Writing Program*, April 1985.

DA Pamphlet 25-40, *Administrative Publications: Action Officers Guide*, October 1997.

DA Pamphlet 600-67, *Effective Writing for Army Leaders*, June 1986.

Blumenthal, Joseph C. *English 3200: A Programmed Course in Grammar and Usage*. 4th College Edition. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1990.

Fowler, H. R. *The Little, Brown Handbook*. 3rd ed. Boston: Little, 1986.

Sabin, W. A. *The Gregg Reference Manual*. 8th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996.

Strunk, William S. Jr. and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. 3rd ed. New York: Macmillan, 1979.

Williams, Joseph M. *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. 2nd ed. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1985.

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### Websites



To view Army publications listed above, access

U.S. Army Publishing Agency: <http://www.usapa.army.mil/gils/>

For more assistance on writing improvement, access

Plain Language Action Network: : <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/>

---

## Practice Exercises

---

**Instructions**     Select the one best answer.

---

1. Which composition rule applies to Army writing?
    - a. Bottom line up front.
    - b. Most sentences written in passive voice.
    - c. Sentences averaging about 25 words.
    - d. Paragraphs averaging about 10 sentences.

---

  2. A sentence written in the active voice shows the
    - a. subject being acted upon.
    - b. subject not acting.
    - c. subject acting.
    - d. object acting.

---

  3. Use the passive voice when the agent is
    - a. known.
    - b. unknown.
    - c. acting.
    - d. relevant.

---

  4. Which sentence contains a redundant modifier?
    - a. We must separate out the details.
    - b. The story is true and accurate.
    - c. The story is true but hard to believe.
    - d. It appears to be a true story.
- 

*Continued on next page*



## Practice Exercises, Continued

---

5. A smothered verb
- can stand alone without a helping verb.
  - is the same as an action verb.
  - is a helping verb.
  - is a verb converted to a noun.
- 
6. Identify the sentence written with an action verb.
- Sally attended the party.
  - Sally was in attendance at the party.
  - Consideration was given to the proposal.
  - We are in favor of the plan.
- 
7. Which sentence emphasizes the main point most effectively?
- Put out the cat when the clock strikes ten.
  - Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.
  - I'll tell you no lies if you ask me no questions.
  - Politicians are honest, for the most part.
- 
8. To package a document properly, state the main point
- at the end.
  - after a detailed introduction.
  - in the third or fourth paragraph.
  - up front in the first or second sentence.
-

## Answer Key

---

**Instructions** Correct answers are highlighted. Page and source listed below each question.

---

1. Which composition rule applies to Army writing?
- a. **Bottom line up front.**
  - b. Most sentences written in passive voice.
  - c. Sentences averaging about 25 words.
  - d. Paragraphs averaging about 10 sentences.

(Page 11-4, Rules)

---

2. A sentence written in the active voice shows the
- a. subject being acted upon.
  - b. subject not acting.
  - c. **subject acting.**
  - d. object acting.

(Page 11-5, Active voice)

---

3. Use the passive voice when the agent is
- a. known.
  - b. **unknown.**
  - c. acting.
  - d. relevant.

(Page 11-6, When to use passive)

---

4. Which sentence contains a redundant modifier?
- a. **We must separate out the details.**
  - b. The story is true and accurate.
  - c. The story is true but hard to believe.
  - d. It appears to be a true story.

(Page 11-8, Redundant modifiers)

---

*Continued on next page*

## Answer Key, Continued

---

5. A smothered verb
- can stand alone without a helping verb.
  - is the same as an action verb.
  - is a helping verb.
  - is a verb converted to a noun.**

(Page 11-10, Smothered verb)

---

6. Identify the sentence written with an action verb.
- Sally attended the party.**
  - Sally was in attendance at the party.
  - Consideration was given to the proposal.
  - We are in favor of the plan.

(Page 11-10, Converting smothered verbs)

---

7. Which sentence emphasizes the main point most effectively?
- Put out the cat when the clock strikes ten.
  - Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.**
  - I'll tell you no lies if you ask me no questions.
  - Politicians are honest, for the most part.

(Page 11-12, End of sentence)

---

8. To package a document properly, state the main point
- at the end.
  - after a detailed introduction.
  - in the third or fourth paragraph.
  - up front in the first or second sentence.**

(Page 11-13, Putting the main point up front)

---

Notes

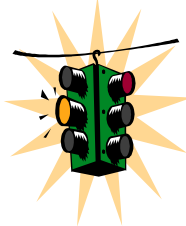

## Appendix A—Informal Staff Language

---

**Introduction** Action officers and other staffers use an informal vocabulary of colorful words and expressions to save time and say in a word or two what otherwise might take several words.

---

**Caution** The expressions are commonly used in the Pentagon and major commands. They may have different meanings or be irrelevant at your location. Moreover, they quickly lose currency. We neither condone nor criticize their use but suggest you use them in the right setting and in good taste.



Used appropriately, these terms enhance communication; used inappropriately, they confuse or offend. Moreover, if used indiscriminately these expressions can become a substitute for rigorous thought and precise expression.

---

**When to avoid** Avoid using these terms

- in official correspondence
- at formal briefings, or
- when dealing with outsiders.

---

**Definitions** Terms are defined below.

**Ambush (blind side)**  
Attack or oppose one's position unexpectedly.

**Ankle biters**  
People who criticize one's position but offer no constructive alternatives.

**Back brief**  
Fill in your boss or others on highlights of briefing you attended.

**Back channel**  
Communications channel that general officers use to transmit personal messages.

**Bean counter**  
One who concentrates on numbers and details while ignoring larger issues.

**Bless (sprinkle holy water)**  
Approve a proposal.

**Blowing smoke**

Someone who speaks with no sincerity or substance.

**Boiler plate**

Standardized remarks or graphics appearing in like publications.

**Bootleg copy**

Copy of a document given to someone before its official distribution.

**Building** (the Building)

The Pentagon.

**Chop**

Signing or initialing an action to indicate coordination. Also used when referring to a command attaching (or chopping) its forces to another command to support an operation.

**Circle the wagons**

Mount resistance to defend a position.

**Close hold**

Information not available for wide dissemination.

**Close the loop**

Action to close an event.

**Comeback copy**

Copy of proposed action that circulates for review and concurrence and *comes back* to action officer after addressees have *chopped* on it.

**Dog-and-pony show**

An elaborate briefing featuring sound effects, multiple screens, or other gimmicks.

**Dump**

A comprehensive presentation of information.

**Elevate the issue**

Refer an issue upward for resolution, when lower levels can't agree on a solution. Also refers to making an issue more visible by bringing it to attention of higher officials.

**Eyewash**

Cosmetic touches applied to an object or situation to impress visitors or bosses.

Examples: freshly painted facilities, manicured grounds, or fanfare.

**Face time**

Time spent with big bosses to gain visibility and impress them.

**Fallen through the cracks**

An issue that's been omitted, neglected, or forgotten.

**Gin up**

Work up a paper or get something started in quick fashion.

**Grease (grease the skids)**

Arrange to expedite an action or move it through the system without opposition.

**Horse blanket**

Very large sheet of paper pasted on a wall and used to brief complex data or diagrams.

**Horse holder (aide, spear carrier)**

An assistant to a general officer or senior executive.

**Hotwash**

An immediate critique of an important meeting or decision briefing to determine what the principals said and the follow-on actions involved.

**In the barrel (hot seat)**

Situation where one must appear before a boss to brief or explain a serious issue.

**Laydown**

A comprehensive presentation of an elaborate plan from "A" to "Z."

**Loose cannon**

Someone out of control whose ill-conceived schemes cause upheaval.

**Muddy the waters**

Add confusion or uncertainty to an action by injecting opposition or technicalities.

**Nonstarter (that dog won't hunt)**

A flawed program or proposal that won't work.

**Out of pocket**

Situation in which one is unavailable for duty, usually for personal or confidential reasons.

**Package**

All documents pertaining to an action assembled for coordination or signature (summary sheet, tasker, tabs, implementing papers).

**Pass action**

Transfer responsibility for working an action to another office.

**Peanut gallery**

Action officers and other staffers who sit in back or along a wall during a briefing.

**Prebrief**

A preliminary briefing to key players which precedes the final briefing to the decision maker. Used to fine-tune final presentation or as a trial balloon.

**Readahead (readahead package)**

Material sent to officials to prepare them for upcoming visits, conferences, or briefings.

**Sandbox (turf, rice bowl)**

Area of operations or responsibility jealously guarded by the owners.

**Sanitize**

Use innocuous language or omission of facts when reporting on a sensitive event to outsiders--especially one that affects national security.

**Scrub**

Make final revision or fine-tune an action.

**Shepherd**

Personally guide an action through the coordination process.

**Sign up**

Agree or commit to a proposal.

**Silver tongue**

A smooth convincing speaker.

**Slip**

Postpone or delay an action.

**Smoke and mirrors**

Slick packaging or other gimmicks used as a substitute for substance.

**Staffer**

One who does staff work.

**Stakeholder**

Someone who has an interest in or is affected by an action.

**Straphanger**

One who is along for the ride, takes up space, and contributes little or nothing.

**Strawman**

A rough draft for discussion purposes.

**Swag**

A gross estimate or guess.

**Tap dance**

Attempt to evade a tough question or hide ignorance by talking around the issue.

**Tasker**

Verbal or written directions that initiate an action.

**Up to speed**

Fully informed and on schedule.



**Vanilla**

Innocuous or noncommittal description or explanation.

**War lords**

Major field commanders.

**Weenie**

A low-level bureaucrat with little influence.

**Whitewash**

Gloss over or hide defects to escape censure or give the appearance of soundness.

**Wicker**

Arrange events to get something to work.

**Wing it**

Attempt to make a presentation with little or no preparation or knowledge of the subject.

**Wiring diagram**

Organization chart.

**Wise men**

Key powerful officials.

**Wrapped around the axle**

Lack of progress because of immersion in details or inability to see the big picture.

**Notes**


## Appendix B—Simpler Words and Phrases

---

**Introduction** In spite of campaigns to improve, poor writing still pervades bureaucratic institutions. It persists because people

- don't know any better
- think it's expected, or
- feel it's a way to impress others.



**Less is more** Official writing doesn't demand big words or pompous phrases. Small, one-syllable words

- form the backbone of the English language
- save writing and reading time, and
- increase your power of expression.



**Payoff** Simple words and phrases enable readers to

- read what you write
- understand it, and
- remember who wrote it.



**Instead of, try . . .** Review the list of big words and pompous phrases in the first column; then consider the simpler alternatives in the second.

---

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
a number of	some
accompany	go with
accomplish	carry out, do
accomplish (a form)	fill out
accordingly	so
accrue	add, gain
accurate	correct, exact
achieve	do, make
actual	real
additional	added, more
adjacent to	next to
advantageous	helpful
advise	recommend
affix	put, stick
afford an opportunity	allow, let
aircraft	plane
anticipate	expect
apparent	clear, plain
appear	seem
appreciable	many
appropriate	proper, right
approximately	about
as a means of	to
as prescribed by	under
ascertain	find out, learn
assist, assistance	aid, help
attached herewith is	here's
attempt	try
at the present time	now
benefit	help
by means of	by, with
cannot	can't
capability	ability
category	class, group

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
comply	follow
component	part
comprise	form, make up
concerning	about
conclude	close, end
concur	agree
confront	face, meet
consequently	so
consolidate	combine
constitutes	is, forms
construct	build
contains	has, holds
continue	keep on
contribute	give
cooperate	help
currently	(leave it out)
deem	think
delete	cut, drop
demonstrate	prove, how
depart	leave
designate	appoint, pick
desire	wish
determine	decide, find
develop	grow, make
disclose	show
discontinue	drop, stop
disseminate	send, issue
do not	don't
downsize	reduce
due to the fact that	because, due to
echelons	levels
effect	make
elect	choose, pick
eliminate	cut, drop, end

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
employ	use
encounter	meet
encourage	urge
endeavor	try
enumerate	count
equitable	fair
equivalent	equal
establish	set up, prove
evaluate	check, test, rate
evidenced	showed
evident	clear
examine	check, look at
exhibit	show
expedite	hurry, speed up
expeditious	fast, quick
expend	pay, spend
facilitate	ease, help
factor	reason, cause
failed to	didn't
feasible	can be done
females	women
final	last
finalize	complete, finish
for example	such as
forfeit	give up, lose
for the purpose of	for, to
forward	send
forwarded under separate cover	sent separately
function	act, role, work
fundamental	basic
furnish	give, send
has the capability	can
herein	here
however	but

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
identical	same
identify	find, name, show
immediately	at once, now
impact ( <i>v</i> )	affect, change
impact ( <i>n</i> )	effect
impacted	changed
implement	carry out, do
in accordance with	by, under
in addition	also, besides, too
in an effort to	to
in conjunction with	with
in lieu of	instead of
in order that	for, so
in order to	to
in regard to	about, on
in the amount of	for
in the course of	during, in
in the event that	if
in the near future	soon
in view of	since
in view of the above	so
inasmuch as	since
inception	start
incorporate	blend, join
incumbent upon	must
indicate	show, write down
indication	sign
initial	first
initiate	start
it is	(leave out)
it is essential	must
it is recommended	I/we recommend
it is requested	I/we ask
justify	prove

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
legislation	law
limited number	few
limitations	limits
locate	find, place
location	place, scene, site
magnitude	size
maintain	keep, support
majority	most
maximum	greatest, most
minimize	decrease, lessen
modify	change
monitor	check, watch
nebulous	vague
necessitate	cause, need
notify	let know, tell
numerous	many, most
objective	aim, goal
obligate	bind, compel
observe	see
obtain	get
operate	run, work
operational	working
optimum	best, greatest
partnering	partnership
option	choice, way
participate	take part
perform	do
permit	let, allow
personnel	people, soldiers
pertaining to	about, of, on
place	put
portion	part
position	place
possess	have, own
preclude	prevent



<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
previous	earlier, past
previously	before
prior to	before
prioritize	priority, rank
probability	chance
procedures	rules, way
proceed	do, go on, try
proficiency	skill
programmed	planned
promulgate	announce, issue
provide	give, say, supply
provided that	if
provides guidance to	guides
(the) provisions of	(leave out)
purchase	buy
pursuant to	per
reason for	why
recapitulate	sum up
reduce	cut
reflect	say, show
regarding	about, of, on
relating to	about, on
relocation	move
remain	stay
remainder	rest
remuneration	pay
render	give, make
request	ask
require	must
requirement	need
retain	keep
review	check, go over
selection	choice
similar	like
solicit	ask for

<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Try</b>
state	say
subject	the, this, you
subject to	may be
submit	give, send
subsequent	later, next
subsequently	after, later, then
substantial	large, real, strong
sufficient	enough
take appropriate	act
measures	
terminate	end, stop
that	(leave out)
there is (are)	(leave out)
therefore	so
thereof	its, their
this office	us, we
time period	time, period
transmit	send
transpire	happen, occur
type	(leave out)
until such time as	until
(the) use of	(leave out)
utilize, utilization	use
validate	confirm
verbatim	exact
via	in, on, through
viable	workable
warfighting	war, warfare
warrant	call for, permit
whenever	when
whereas	since
with reference to	about
with exception of	except for
witnessed	saw

## Appendix C—Discussion Papers

### Overview

---

**Introduction** This appendix illustrates various types of discussion papers and formats organizations commonly use Armywide.

---

**Application** Nonstandard formats. The formats shown here are nonstandard and may vary across organizations. When in doubt, follow local SOP.



Standard formats. AR 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence* prescribes standard formats for official correspondence such as

- informal memorandums (no official letterhead)
- formal memorandums (official letterhead)
- endorsements, and
- letters.

Access AR 25-50 at U.S. Army Publishing Agency: <http://www.usapa.army.mil>

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**In this appendix**

This appendix contains these topics:

Topic	See Page
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## Purpose and Format

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**Introduction** This map describes the purpose and format of discussion papers. It also briefly describes two types of discussion papers: talking paper and background paper. Other types of discussions papers are treated more fully in succeeding maps.

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**Purpose** Discussion papers impart information to help a decision maker express or respond to viewpoints. We use them in meetings, speeches, briefings, and conferences. These papers help readers remember key points, respond to opposing viewpoints, and guide discussion.

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### Format



Think how annoying it must be to have to plow through stacks of papers, none of which are written in a common format. We use various types of discussion papers in certain formats to

- achieve consistency
  - promote understanding
  - make documents reader friendly
  - shape content, structure, and length of writing, and
  - make writing complete, concise, and clear.
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**User's needs** The user's needs determine how much information to include in any type of discussion paper. However, try to limit content to one page. If you need more space, use a tab for backup information.

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**Talking paper** A talking paper outlines the substance of an issue in short sentences. If certain points need elaboration, add tabs but don't make the reader rely on them.  
Use when the reader has good, if not comprehensive, knowledge of the subject.

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**Background paper** A background paper is a detailed one-page summary with tabs or attached references.

Use when the reader has little or no knowledge of the subject.

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## Fact Sheet

**Introduction** A fact sheet is a one-page summary of essential facts about a topic.

<p>FACT SHEET</p>	<p>Date</p>
<p>SUBJECT: Use a word or phrase to define the topic.</p>	
<p>BACKGROUND. Briefly describe the situation to enable the reader to grasp facts in their context. But don't overshadow facts explained in the body of the paper. List references bearing on the issue.</p>	
<p>FACTS.</p>	
<p>1. Use a fact sheet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– to inform decision makers on background and status of an action.</li><li>– as backup information at briefings.</li><li>– to provide an executive summary of an action if lacking space on the decision paper to summarize a topic.</li></ul>	
<p>2. Use a separate sheet of 8 1/2 by 11-inch plain paper for each topic.</p>	
<p>3. Present facts in a sequence the audience most likely expects:</p> <p><u>Chronological order</u>: describing events as they occurred.</p> <p><u>Cause-effect, effect-cause</u>: demonstrating results or origins.</p> <p><u>Comparison-contrast</u>: how things are alike, how they differ.</p> <p><u>Bad news, good news</u>: order of importance.</p>	
<p>4. Limit content to a single page. Provide only enough detail for facts to stand alone. If you need more space, use a tab</p>	
<p>5. Don't inject opinion or suggestion. If going beyond the facts, use another format such as an information paper.</p>	
<p>6. If coordination is involved, show it at bottom of page or at a tab.</p>	
<p>7. POC. List point of contact, office symbol, telephone, and e-mail.</p>	

## Information Paper

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**Introduction** An information paper is a one-page discussion of facts, plus opinions, suggestions, arguments, or matters needing resolution.

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### INFORMATION PAPER

Date

**SUBJECT:** Use a word or phrase to define the topic.

**BACKGROUND.** Briefly describe the situation to enable the reader to grasp information in context. But don't overshadow facts treated in the body of the paper. List references bearing on the issue.

**PURPOSE.** Use this entry if someone requested the information.

**CONCLUSION.** In a sentence or two, state the bottom line or your interpretation of the information. Do not make recommendations—use a decision paper for that.

#### DISCUSSION.

1. Use an information paper
  - to provide background and status of an action.
  - to provide information on request.
  - as backup information at briefings.
  - to discuss implications of facts, make interpretations, offer opinions, note opposition, emerging problems, or matters for coordination.
2. For informal use, prepare an information paper on 8-1/2 by 11 inch, plain bond paper. For information sent outside your headquarters, a formal memorandum format is more appropriate (see AR 25-50).
3. Present information in a sequence the reader most likely expects or readily understands. See fact sheet on previous page for examples.
4. Limit content to a single subject, written on a single page. Provide only enough detail for information to stand alone. If you need more space, use a tab. But use one only if necessary.
5. If coordination is involved, show it at bottom of the page or at a **tab**.
6. POC. List point of contact, office symbol, telephone, and e-mail.

## Point Paper

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**Introduction** A point paper outlines main points, facts, positions, questions, and recommendations. Point papers frequently serve as readaheads to prepare the decision maker for briefings, conferences, and trips.

Use when the reader has an intimate knowledge of the subject.

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POINT PAPER

Date

**SUBJECT:** Use a word or phrase to define the topic.

1. **PURPOSE.** In this paragraph, explain why you are providing the information. Use a point paper to capture the essence of an issue and its main points or the contents of a lengthy document or briefing.

2. **DISCUSSION POINTS.**

- Bullet phrases, short to the point, and easy to read.
- Outline of main points to jog the reader’s memory.
- Limited to one page, if possible.
- One-inch margins top, bottom, right, and 1.25 left for hole punching.
- Serif font, 14 points—easier on the eyes, especially when the user must review dozens of point papers for a major conference.

3. **ASSESSMENT.** Summarize the impact of the issue on the Army and the organization. In many cases, senior staff members will have prebriefed the decision maker and will have received fresh guidance. You may have to base the assessment on input from them.

4. **RECOMMENDATIONS.** Based on the assessment, recommend actions the decision maker should take in anticipation of possible outcomes. Recommendations should support the organization’s goals and the decision maker’s intent. If the issue is complex, you may have to coordinate the point paper before sending it to the decision maker.

5. **POC.** List point of contact, office symbol, telephone, and e-mail.

## Position Paper

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**Introduction** A position paper lays out an organization's position or policy on an issue.

Use when advancing or defending a position.

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### POSITION PAPER

**SUBJECT:** Use a word or phrase to define the topic.

1. **BACKGROUND.** Short overview that doesn't overshadow the *position* paragraph below. If the sheet is one of many collected for a common purpose, consolidate the background in a single document and eliminate this paragraph from the individual sheets.

2. **POSITION.** Sentence or short paragraph stating organization's policy or position on the issue.

3. **FOR THE POSITION.** Supporting facts and arguments sequenced, labeled, and subdivided.

4. **AGAINST THE POSITION.** Summary of each argument against the position. Be accurate when representing opposing views. You don't want your boss surprised by their strength.

5. **REBUTTALS.** Summary of rebuttals to opposing arguments. Ideally, rebuttals will reinforce your position.

6. **SOURCES.** List sources:  
– Action officer (name, office symbol, telephone, e-mail).  
– Subject-matter experts.  
– Supporting documents.  
– Related talking, point, or position papers.

If using only one source, label this paragraph specifically.

Example: "POINT OF CONTACT."



## Decision Paper

**Introduction** This is a simplified example of a decision paper. Formats vary. Besides information appearing below, a typical format includes blocks for routing instructions, control number, suspense date, action officer's name, and the like.

### DECISION PAPER

1. **PURPOSE:** In one precise sentence state what you want the decision maker to do or what requested information you're providing. Also cite the tasker originating the action. In the examples below, the tasker is at the BLUE TAB.

Examples:

Item for signature: "CG sign memorandum (RED TAB) to MG White approving proposed Ranger Training Program (BLUE TAB)."

Item for approval: "CofS approve publication of revised FM 108-44, *Arctic Peacekeeping Operations* (RED TAB)."

Item of information: "Update DCG on status of Transition 21 Initiative (Information Paper at RED TAB)."

2. **BACKGROUND:**

- Briefly describe the situation requiring a decision, and explain why you chose the recommendation you did.
- If you need more space for details, put them in a TAB.
- Capitalize the word, TAB and explain each one in the order mentioned.

3. **RESOURCE IMPACT:** Always include, even if this entry is "None."

4. **COORDINATION:** Examples of coordination shown below. If coordination isn't required, then state, "Coordination not required."

OFFICE	NAME	CONCUR	NONCONCUR	DATE
Dir, PMD	Ms. Betty Bottomline	<i>BB</i>		15 Dec 00
Dir, SMT	Col Nate Naysayer		<i>NN</i>	16 Dec 00
Dir, RM	Col Sid Adell	<i>SA</i>		17 Dec 00
Ch, PA&E	LTC Wes Poinner	<i>WP</i>		18 Dec 00

5. **CONSIDERATION OF NONCONCURRENCE:** Attach consideration statement to the nonconcurrence(s) at the last TAB.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved: \_\_\_\_\_ See me: \_\_\_\_\_

## Consideration of Nonconcurrency

**Introduction** If unable to resolve a nonconcurrency, prepare a *Consideration of Nonconcurrency* in an MFR format. For the exact format, access AR 25-50 at U.S. Army Publishing Agency: <http://www.usapa.army.mil>  
For more information, review Lesson 4, *Responding to Nonconcurrences*.

OFFICE SYMBOL (MARKS NUMBER)

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF NONCONCURRENCE

1. If an office nonconcurr with a proposal and you can't resolve it, write a consideration of nonconcurrency. This statement helps the decision maker decide.
2. In the first sentence, recount your attempt to seek resolution:  
"I have personally discussed this matter with Colonel Naysayer, and we cannot reach agreement."
3. Respond to each point and offer rebuttal.
4. Discuss all nonconcurrences on one MFR.
5. Send a copy furnished to each nonconcurring office.
6. Ensure the originating office chief signs the MFR.
7. Place the MFR as the last tab to the staff action.

Sid Adell  
COL, GS  
Director

CF:  
XXXXXXXXXXXX

