Military Communication Skills

Lesson Preparation:
- Review Air Force Handbook (AFH 33-337), The Tongue and Quill, Chapters 2, 10, 12, and 16.

Cognitive Lesson Objective:
- Apply Air Force communication guidance for written documents and briefings.

Cognitive Samples of Behavior:
- Explain the seven steps to effective communication.
- Describe guidance for electronic communication (e-mail, voice mail, and telephone systems) in the Air Force.
- Apply T&Q guidance for writing background and talking papers.
- Explain the steps required to prepare a military briefing.
- Describe effective delivery techniques in a military briefing.
- Use guidance to prepare and deliver a military briefing.

Affective Lesson Objective:
- Respond to the importance of effective communication, including Air Force documents and briefings.

Affective Sample of Behavior:
- Actively participate in class discussions and assignments for writing and briefing.
Sometime in your military career, you will be asked to brief and write in specific military formats. As officers, a great deal of your success will come from your ability to brief and write effectively. So, you need to be familiar with the common types of staff correspondence and have flexible writing skills to adapt accordingly.

**SEVEN STEPS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

*(T&Q, PP 8-13)*

Paying attention to these seven steps will increase your success in writing and speaking. The first four steps are like building a foundation—preparation that’s critical to the end product. For the time well-spent in the front end, the payoff is CONFIDENCE in what you’re writing and saying.

- **Analyze purpose and audience.** What is my purpose? Who is my audience? What are their interests? How much do they know already? What will make it easy for them to understand or act? “You’re much more likely to hit the target if you know what you’re aiming at.” (FOCUS principles “Focus” and “Understand your audience” apply in this step.)

  > I want to write books that unlock the traffic jam in everybody’s head.
  > ~John Updike

- **Research your topic.** Do whatever it takes to get smart on your topic. In the military, co-workers and base personnel can be helpful sources of information. Often, there are continuity books or military instructions/manuals that may be of help. Libraries have reference material, as does the internet. However, see Chapter 4 in the T&Q for guidance in evaluating the soundness of internet sources. Finally, objectively writing about a topic may mean coming to terms with our biases/prejudices. We all have them; we just don’t want them getting in the way of our intended messages. Most problems and questions cannot be reduced to a single solution or answer. Anticipate multiple viewpoints for a more thorough research of your topic.

  > A man will turn over half a library to make one book.
  > ~Samuel Johnson

- **Support your ideas.** A common way to support your idea is by stating some facts (premise 1, premise 2, etc) followed by the conclusion (your idea). This form of supporting your idea is known as logical argument (verbal or written). If our premises aren’t airtight, we’ll fail to successfully support our idea. Giving examples that are meaningful to your audience is a helpful method to supporting your ideas. In addition, citing sources adds credibility; your ideas are not just a personal belief or opinion. Finally, avoid illogical or irrational ways of linking your premises and conclusions. For more information on avoiding logic errors, see the T&Q, Ch 5.
• **Organize and outline.** To continue building a solid foundation for any written or verbal communication, you need to organize your ideas in a meaningful way. For example, a topical or classification pattern is one way to organize your ideas. If you’re writing or briefing about military aircraft, you might want to sort your ideas by function (e.g., fighter aircraft, cargo aircraft, etc.). Some topics, such as American wars, are better understood using a sequence in time approach—going from the earliest to the most recent wars. Chapter 3 in the T&Q (p 17) provides information on developing your purpose statement and outlining ideas.

> I am returning this otherwise good typing paper to you because someone has printed gibberish all over it and put your name at the top.
> ~English Professor (name unknown), Ohio University

• **Draft.** The following guidance addresses most types of writing (or even PowerPoint slides for a briefing). Your goal in writing is to share a message with the audience. To successfully do so, connecting with the audience is vital:

  - First, Get to the point quickly. Use your introductory paragraph to state your purpose up front. Most AF readers don’t have the time or patience to read a document that resembles a mystery novel with a surprise ending.

  - Second, Organize your main ideas for a topic so readers know where you’re leading them. When discussing a topic, we usually are addressing some main ideas or main points. It’s very common to see the overview slide for military briefings identify 2-4 main points for discussion. The main idea or points are further elaborated upon with support information in any writing or briefing.

When writing a talking paper or background paper, the single-dash items identify the main points, while the double- and triple-dash items provide support information. In addition, it’s very helpful to your readers if you link your supporting information with transitions. For example, the words first, next, and finally let a reader follow your thought process to explain an idea. Transitions not only link ideas, they can also link paragraphs. For example, a common transition to let your reader know you’re changing main idea/points is, “Now, that we’ve discussed the benefits of exercise, let’s look at the major types of exercise.” Transitions are critical pieces to helping your readings follow your writing, paragraphs or your slides in a briefing.

  - Third, Make sure your sentences are clear and direct. Cut through the jargon and passive voice. Don’t make your readers wade through an overgrown jungle of flowery words.

  - Fourth, Finally, summarize or conclude your message in a way that connects all the dots and makes the message complete.

• **Edit.** On pages 91-102, the T&Q offers many great suggestions to improve the editing process. Here are some of the major points:
- Edit the document yourself before asking for help. Why should someone else invest time and effort to improve your writing if you aren't willing to do so yourself? Also, it’s just more respectful to others if you do the initial “clean-up.” However, be sure you’ve taken enough time between doing the draft and then the editing process—it makes a big difference in seeing objectively vs subjectively.

- Purposely edit at a slow pace. Our minds have a tendency to “fill in the gaps” when we read. One technique is to touch each word with your pencil tip as you review the document.

- Try on your audience’s shoes before you read. Try to visualize what it’ll be like for your audience to see or hear your information. We need to be in tune with how our audiences will react to each word.

- Find someone else to review your “near final” draft. That “someone else,” hopefully, has a strong background in the basics (grammar, spelling, jargon, writing mechanics), and also the big picture (the general flow and clarity) of your document.

- Plan on more than one editing pass. The T&Q suggests reading and re-reading your work, starting with the big picture and then on to the finer details. You just can’t catch everything the first time! And don’t forget about using spell-check. When you think you’ve got the paper in order, we’ve still got one more step to ensure a professional document.

- **Fight for feedback and get approval.** (also see T&Q, pp 103-109) When you submit your final document, you want the focus to be your paper’s message—not errors, lots of questions, or confusion. Find another set of eyes and tell them what you want to focus on. If you don’t identify the feedback need, you may get a grammar check vs something else. A good start is to seek feedback about your paper’s intended purpose and audience—“Does it still make sense when another person reads, and considers purpose and audience?” Finally, whatever feedback you receive, remember that you’re ultimately responsible for the content of your paper. Any comments from others during your editing or feedback steps can be used or not used by you.
THE IMPORTANCE OF USING

CONVERSATIONAL TONE

One basic concept remains the same for all military writing—conversational tone. The best way to communicate a message is to focus on the reader and write in plain English. In the 1960s, consumer advocacy groups encouraged legislation that led to the foundation of the government initiative to “write in plain English.” The premise of this was to write government and business documents using language that was clear, concise and straightforward. The movement continued through the Nixon, Carter, and Reagan administrations, and finally came to fruition on 1 June 1998 when President Clinton directed the use of plain English. The bottom-line is, “Use everyday words, rather than bureaucratic legalese.

When we talk to someone, we don’t use $64,000 words or stuffy language. To make your writing more like speaking, begin by imagining your reader is sitting across from you. Then write with personal pronouns, everyday words, contractions, and short sentences. **Write to “one” reader. Primarily use 1P (I, we) and 2P (you) and vary your pronouns.**

Writing in conversational tone also means being concise. Concise does not mean the same as being brief. You must add enough details to support your ideas, but do it by the most direct method. In other words, concise means getting to the point as effectively and efficiently as possible. **That’s why you should write predominantly in active voice, remove any unnecessary words, and avoid “dead” words, such as “that” and “which.”**

Why are all these points important in writing? They are important because the reader can’t see your non-verbal skills in a written document. Since you aren’t there to coax the reader along, you’ve got to make the document do the job for you.

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING EFFECTIVELY

Writing effectively is just as crucial to reader understanding as effective organization. Effectiveness and organization go hand in hand! Your thoughts may be perfectly organized; but if you don’t express your ideas in sentences and paragraphs so the reader can understand, you’ve wasted the time you spent planning, organizing, and writing. To write effective official memorandums, you should:

- Write actively; avoid passive voice as much as possible.
- Create reader interest; write to express, not impress.
- Repeat key words and ideas for emphasis.
• Personal pronouns: use we, us, and our when speaking for your organization; use I, me, or my when speaking for yourself; and use you, stated or implied, to refer to the reader

Ex: It is necessary the material be received in this office by June 10.

Fixed: We need the material by June 10.

- Talk to one reader when writing to many

Ex: All addressees are requested to provide inputs of desired course content.

Fixed: Please send us your recommendations for course content.

- Rely on everyday or simpler words (start vs commence, best vs optimum, use vs utilize)

- Keep sentences short (except for purposes of variety or clarity); start by breaking down large sentences and then reword to sound like speaking.

Ex: It is requested that attendees be divided between the two briefing dates with the understanding that any necessary final adjustments will be made by DAA to facilitate equitable distribution. (29 words)

Fix1: It is requested attendees be divided between the two briefing dates. Any necessary final adjustments will be made by DAA to facilitate equitable distribution. (11-13 words)

Fix2: Send half your people one day and half the other. DAA will make final adjustments. (10 -5 words)

- Avoid “there is” and “it is” (We request vs It is requested; Clearly vs It is apparent that)

- Arrange information logically; logic forms the road map for your reader

In AS 100, you’ll have two written assignments—writing a talking paper and then a background paper. Samples of these documents are available in the T&Q, pp 209-216. For your convenience, here’s some guidance on writing a talking paper.

**THE TALKING PAPER**

**Definition:** A quick-reference guide of key points, facts, positions and questions to use during oral presentations, memory ticklers or a quick reference sheet.

**Purpose:** Although you as an action officer or staff officer prepare the talking paper, someone else—most often the boss—uses it. While the boss is basically familiar with the projects, problems or issues you’re working, he or she may need a memory jogger on milestones, facts, figures or other specific points.
Qualities:

- Brief - As a memory jogger or reference, only as specific or detailed as required by the user.
- Telegraphic - Omit adjectives, articles and introductory phrases.
- Organized - Focus user on subject, establish main points, answer frequently asked questions, provide support, reach a conclusion or give a status.
- Structured for the user - Know the boss’ needs; know where talker will be used; know how familiar boss is with the subject; know how much detail the boss wants and know the desired format.

Format:

- Stationery - 8 1/2 X 11 inch plain bond paper (never use letterhead).
- Title - center in capital letters 1 inch from top; use three lines, be specific, do not underline or place in bold. Double-space the title.
- Margin - 1 inch all around.
- Headings not required, but may use: purpose, background, discussion, recommendation, etc.
- Text - don’t number paragraph, telegraphic wording/bullets, no punctuation at end, 1/2/3 dash sequence, double space between bullets and single space within a bullet.
- ID Line - 1 inch from bottom of page and flush with the left margin; includes rank, name/organization/offce symbol/phone number/typist’s initials/date prepared.

On the following page is a SAMPLE Talking Paper.
TALKING PAPER

ON

WRITING TALKING AND POINT PAPERS

- Talking paper: quick-reference outline on key points, facts, positions, questions to use for oral presentations

- Point paper: memory tickler or quick-reference outline to use during meetings to informally pass information quickly to another person or office

-- No standard format; this illustrates space-saving format by eliminating (PURPOSE, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION)

-- Usually formatted to conform to user’s desires

--- Both papers assume reader has knowledge of subject

--- Prepare separate talker for each subject

-- Prepared in short statement; telegraphic wording

-- Use one-inch margins all around

--- Single dashes before major thoughts; multiple dashes for subordinate thoughts

--- Single space each item; double space between items

-- Use open punctuation; ending punctuation not required

-- Avoid lengthy details or chronologies, limiting to one page when possible

-- See DoD 5200.1-R/AFI 31-401 to prepare classified papers

-- Include writer’s identification line as shown below

- Include recommendations, if any, as last item

Mrs. Story/ACSC/DESP/3-7084/jah/7 Apr 97
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE
(E-MAIL, VOICE MAIL, AND TELEPHONE SYSTEMS)

You can expect to have a computer and telephone assigned to your personal work area. Your office will likely have a printer, copier, and facsimile (fax) machines available, too. The proper use of any mode of government electronic communication is a serious matter. We have to be vigilant about how our use of electronic communication can be used in hostile actions against the United States (i.e., Operational Security/OPSEC). Yes, it’s very serious business, so expect annual Air Force training on this topic.

Keep in mind that the Air Force has the right to monitor our electronic communications. Unfortunately, we have a number of individuals who abuse the use of their electronic communications, resulting in criminal charges and consequences through the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). If your communication is always respectful, you’re halfway there! To practice respectful communication, imagine that everything you write will be read by the Secretary of the Air Force. It works! The other half of your effort is about communicating in a way that doesn’t compromise our nation’s security—OPSEC.

Now, to learn more about the right way to use electronic communications, you must read Chapter 12 in The Tongue and Quill. When you’re finished, complete the Electronic Communication Quiz in this lesson. If you have any questions, be sure to ask your instructor. Also, your instructor can provide you with the quiz answer key.
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS QUIZ

Match the following items in the 1st column with the related terms in the 2nd column. Some terms in the 2nd column will not be used; some may be used more than once.

1. Be polite and professional; be careful about humor and sarcasm.
2. Often contains slang, does not affect the AF (hopefully), and does not need a signature block.
3. Causing congestion on the network by sending inappropriate email messages (e.g., chain letters) or excessive storage on a server.
4. Do not discuss controversial, official use only, classified, or privacy act info requiring special handling of documents.
5. Read and delete unnecessary files daily; sign off the computer when you leave your work station.
6. Get permission before using large mail groups; use “reply all” very carefully.
7. Use includes communications the AF determines necessary in the interest of the Federal Gov’t.
8. Use includes personal e-mail approved by the “agency designee.”
9. Using someone else’s UserID or password without proper authority.
10. Using email for financial gain or copyrighted info without consent.

a. Email use prohibited
b. Email protocol rule: Keep your email under control
c. Email protocol rule: Be selective about WHAT messages you send
d. Official Use
e. Personal Email
f. Email protocol rule: Be selective about WHO gets the message
g. Authorized Use
h. Email protocol rule: Watch Your Tone
i. GS/GM-11
j. HTML

JUST FOR FUN!

1. A __________ is a computer that responds in request for information from client computers.

2. Each base has a limited number of __________ which is the number of bits/sec that can be passed along a communication channel in a given period of time.

3. Writing with ALL CAPS is the email version of ____________—rude email use.
THE BASICS OF BRIEFING

Why study speech, or more specifically, the military briefing? Why attempt to improve your oral communication skills? If for no other reason, speech is important because we use speech more than any other medium of communication, except for listening. About 80 percent of language activity takes the form of speaking and listening. The fact that children may speak 30,000 words a day before they can write half a dozen words dramatizes a condition that prevails throughout most of life. The world is, for most people, a speaking and listening world.

Most people agree—preparing a military briefing is time-consuming but relatively easy, as compared to actually giving a military briefing. However, no matter how well prepared or interesting your material is, you can’t be a successful briefer unless you can convey the message to your audience. The outcome of your presentation rests squarely on your delivery—making your verbals and nonverbal complement each other, rather than go against each other. An effective briefing must always be delivered with an “urge to communicate,” with directness and vigor. In Air Force briefing, the emphasis is on a direct, conversational style of speaking rather than an artificial, oratorical style. Think of your delivery as “amplified conversation” spiced with military respect and bearing instead of “public speaking,” and you should find it easier to face your audience.

HOW TO GIVE A WINNING MILITARY BRIEFING

DR. JOHN A. KLINE

(Dr. Kline is formerly an Air University Professor of Communication and Leadership and author of two books used throughout the Air Force—Speaking Effectively and Listening Effectively.)

Commanders say that one of the most important skills officers need is the ability to brief effectively. The good news is that any officer can become an outstanding briefer. The disturbing news is that many never do. Here is what you need to know to be able to give winning briefings—the kind that communicate and get desired results.

Before preparing a military briefing, you need a clear objective or idea of just what you expect the listeners to think, feel, or do after hearing your briefing. Next you must decide if you are giving a briefing to inform or one that seeks to persuade or advocate. Finally, you must commit to adhere to the ABC’s of briefing—accuracy, brevity, and clarity. Now you are ready to begin.

There are three things to know about preparing and presenting a military briefing. The acronym OSD (which also stands for Office of the Secretary of Defense) will help you remember them. They are Organization, Support and Delivery.
Organization

**Beginning.** Here, you tell them what you are going to tell them. Military briefings have a standard beginning. For example, if I were briefing you on how to give a military briefing I would begin: “Good Morning, I am Dr. John Kline. Today I will brief you on ‘How to Give a Military Briefing.’ More specifically we will look at three things—how to organize, how to support and how to deliver a briefing.”

**Body.** Here, you tell them the information. Main points in briefings are most often organized according to one of the standard patterns of organization: chronological, spatial, cause/effect, problem/solution, pro/con and topical. The bottom line of effectively organizing a briefing is to organize logically so it helps you present the information and, above all, helps your audience listen and retain it.

**Ending.** Here, you tell them what you told them. Military briefings also have a standard ending. Again, if I were briefing you on how to give a military briefing, I would end this way: “Sir/Ma’am, today I briefed on how to give a briefing. We looked at three things—how to organize, how to support, and how to deliver a briefing. Sir/Ma’am, this concludes my briefing. Are there any questions?”

Support

**Verbal Support.** Since a briefing is by definition, brief, support is generally limited to factual data carefully selected to accomplish the “need to know.” Still each of the standard types of verbal support is important. Definitions are often needed to explain new or unfamiliar terms or acronyms. Examples provide specific or concrete instances to clarify general or abstract ideas. Comparisons and Contrasts between the familiar and unfamiliar help audiences grasp new ideas more readily. Statistics and Testimony or quotations from expert and trustworthy sources help to prove the points you’re making.

**Visual Support.** Somebody once said, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” Visual aids can dramatize, amplify or clarify the points you are trying to get across to your audience. Most often you will use Power Point with your briefings. But whatever visual support you use, keep a few things in mind. Make it relevant, simple and large enough to be seen by your audience. And don’t let it draw either your attention or the attention of the audience away from what you’re saying.

Delivery

Although preparing the briefing can be laborious, delivery is the most difficult part for most people. But it doesn’t need to be. If you know your subject and have prepared well, then presenting briefings can be an exhilarating experience. The secret is to be well organized, have the right supporting information and then practice, practice, practice—giving attention to several important factors of delivery.

**Method.** Most of your briefings will be delivered extemporaneously. You will plan them idea by idea rather than word-by-word. Then you will just carry a brief outline or a few notes
to the lectern when you speak. This method will cause you to prepare carefully, yet it will enable you to adjust to your audience and sound more spontaneous and conversational.

**Eye Contact.** You will want to look directly at people, most likely giving more attention to the senior person(s) in the audience, but attempting to include all listeners. Effective eye contact will keep the audience's interest, allow you to adjust to nonverbal feedback, and make you appear more credible to your listeners.

**Body Movement.** Whereas in many speaking situations persons are advised to “get out from behind the lectern and move around,” with military briefings this is seldom the case. Military briefings are usually presented from behind the lectern. Be careful not to lean on the lectern, sway, rock or move out of the range of a microphone if there is one.

**Gestures.** Use them. The hands, arms, shoulders, head and face can reinforce what you are saying. Although gestures can be perfected with practice, they will be most effective if you make a conscious effort to have them appear natural and spontaneous rather than planned.

**Voice.** Three vocal characteristics are important. First is, quality. Although you should strive to be pleasing to listen and attempt to use your voice to its best advantage, rest easy in knowing some of the very finest briefers anywhere have only average voices. Second is understandability. Your audience must be able to understand you. Give special attention to articulation—how you form sounds, pronunciation—how you say words, and avoidance of stock expressions such as “okay,” vocalized pauses such as “uh,” “um,” or “and uh,” and, above all, poor grammar. The third characteristic is variety. Effective briefers vary the rate, volume, force, pitch and emphasis.

**Transitions.** One mark of a winning briefing is how well the parts are tied together. Effective transitions aid listening, provide a logical flow and add a professional touch. In written documents such as the one you are reading now, bold print or space between sections lets you know I am transitioning from one point to another. Briefers do the same thing with the words they use and the way they say them. For example, suppose I was briefing and wanted to transition from the first point, “Organization” to the second point, “Support.” I might say, “Not only is it important to organize our points effectively, it is also important we choose the right kind of information to support the points we are making.” Notice how I led you from one point to another. Attention should be given toward supplying transitions between the beginning and the body, the body and the ending, between main points, from main points to sub points and even between sub points. Effective transitions help your listeners and add polish and professionalism to your briefing.

**Conclusion**

Anything you’ve already learned about writing, grammar, and writing mechanics will be helpful in military communication. However, when you’re using Air Force specific documents and briefings, The Tongue and Quill is a resource you’ll always want to keep in easy reach. Effective communication in the military will be important to you as a follower, supervisor, and leader!
Bibliography:

---

**Briefings: Format (sample)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Overview</th>
<th>MP1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- MP1</td>
<td>- Support info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- MP2</td>
<td>- Support info</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MP2 - Support info

Support Info can include: Graphs, Pictures, Quotes

Summary
- MP1
- MP2

*PowerPoint slides are your note cards; they help your audience, too.*

---

**Briefings: Introduction**

- Greeting
  - “Good morning/afternoon Ma'am/Sir”

- Intro self/subject
  - “I'm...and I'm going to talk about...”

- Overview
  - “State main points (MPs)—what’s to come”
**Briefings: The Body (MPs)**

- Present support info
  - Ideas
    - Definitions
    - Examples
    - Comparisons
    - Testimony
  - Visuals
    - Graphs
    - Pictures/clip art
    - Quotes
    - Props
- Incorporate sources

**Briefings: Conclusion**

- Summary
  - State topic and MPs
  - Quick summary; don’t re-brief
  - Don’t add new info
- Closure
  - “This concludes my briefing.”
  - “Are there any questions?”

*Optional Closure Slide:*

- “Quote”
- Any questions?

*Remember: PowerPoint slides are your note cards; they help your audience, too.*