

# CANDIDATE PREPARATION GUIDE



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# INTRODUCTION TO ACADEMICS

“  
**A Marine is not just a fighter. A Marine is a thinker, a planner, and a strategist who is ready to adapt to any situation.**

**General Jim Mattis** ”

## **Introduction to the Program of Instruction (POI)**

OCS accomplishes its mission through six and ten-week programs of instruction (POI) designed to evaluate Officer Candidates for their potential to commission as a Marine Corps officer. Each Officer Candidate undergoes a series of progressively challenging assessments that tests their ability to apply knowledge and skills taught, while holding leadership positions. While at OCS, an important skill that Officer Candidates master is their ability to study, retain, and apply required information in a time constrained and stressful environment.

### **Academic Evaluation**

The academic evaluation component of the OCS POI comprises 25% of an Officer Candidate's overall GPA. Everything Officer Candidates need to know to be successful at OCS will be taught and trained formally during the program; however, Officer Candidates who invest time and effort in preparing early before arrival generally perform better than those who do not.

#### **Terminal Learning Objectives & Enabling Learning Objectives**

Terminal Learning Objective (TLO). The TLO informs the candidate of what they are expected to learn from the period of instruction.

Enabling Learning Objective (ELO). The ELO further dissects the TLO and gives the candidate a deeper understanding of the subject matter being presented.

## **Evaluation Types**

### **Written Exams**

Officer Candidates receive weekly exams on various military subjects required to build basic entry level knowledge of Marine Corps tactics, history, ethics, and other related subjects.

### **Performance Examinations**

Throughout the POI, Officer Candidates will be placed in leadership positions and exposed to evaluated tactical scenarios in a physically and mentally stressful environment. During these events, Officer Candidates will have the opportunity to demonstrate strong command presence, problem solving skills, and the ability to both think and act under pressure.



## Preparing for OCS Written Exams

Candidates should gain a deeper understanding of the material rather than just memorizing it. This can be done by applying the material to other situations, re-stating the material, or establishing parallels between the material and other similar topics. Try not to look at the material the same way each time. Try to interpret the information in a different way, come up with other examples of how the information can be applied, or change the strategy or learning style to review the material.

### Take Notes

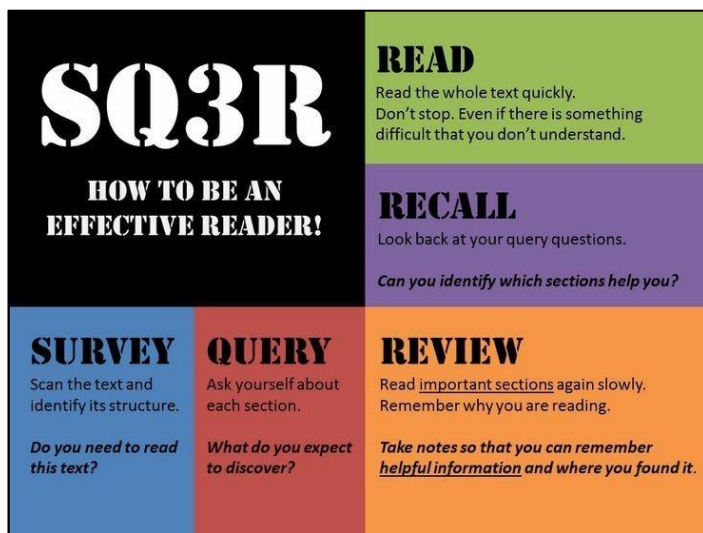
Prepare to study without being interrupted. Have several sheets of paper/index cards, a highlighter, and pens or pencils.

### Use Flash Cards

A flash card is a type of study aid that is designed to present a single unique question or problem that relates to a specific topic. Flash cards are a very simple but effective way to study a topic.

### SQ3R Method

The SQ3R method stands for Survey, Question, Read, Recite, and Review (3Rs). This method helps the student build a framework to understand a reading assignment.



(1) Review the learning objectives (LOs), headings, subheadings, captions under photos, charts, graphs, maps, and both introductory and concluding paragraphs. Take any notes on topics, headings, or visual aids that stand out.

(2) Formulate Questions while surveying the material. Turn LOs and headings into questions.

(3) Answer the questions that were created in the previous step. Pay attention to bolded, italicized, or underlined words or phrases.

(4) Recite each section after reading it. Also, ask and answer questions aloud about what was covered.

(5) The Review process is ongoing. Begin using the SQ3R process several days before the exam to mitigate the need to cram.

# FUNDAMENTALS OF LEADERSHIP

“  
Leaders are not born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work.

General Carl Vuono

”

## The Five Marine Attributes

Marine Attributes are “the manifestation of competencies and traits required of all Marines to meet the challenges of the present and future operational environments.” The Marine Attributes represent the ultimate training and education goals of the Marine Corps. The five attributes are:

### Warfighter

Marines are lethal, intellectually curious professionals, dedicated to a lifetime of study in the profession of arms and educated in the fundamentals of maneuver warfare, tactics, combined arms, and time-tested principles of battle.

### Leader

Marines embrace their responsibility to their fellow Marines, their families, and our shared legacy. A Marine has emotional intelligence to inspire and instill trust and confidence in other Marines.

### Physically/Mentally Tough

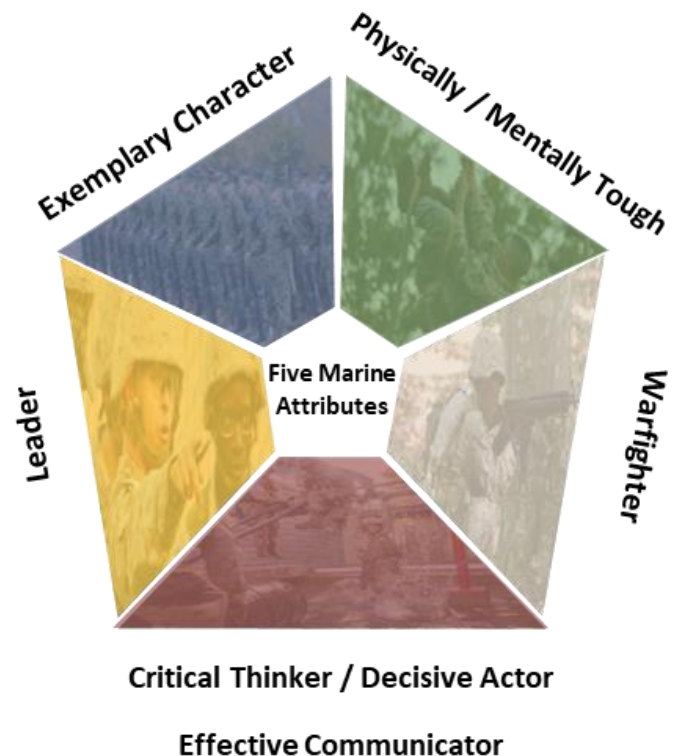
Marines foster a warrior spirit, thrive in complex and chaotic environments, and are hardened against and resilient to adversity in order to persevere against seemingly impossible odds. They hone self-discipline to push past human factors and preconceived limits.

### Critical Thinker/Decisive Actor/Effective Communicator

Marines think critically, make the best possible decision, and act on Commander's Intent. They seize the initiative and act with boldness and determination on available information in a chaotic environment.

### Exemplary Character

Marines have a clear understanding that they are entrusted with the special trust and confidence of their fellow Marines and that of the American people.





## **Four Situational Leadership Styles**

Though no two leaders are alike, the Marine Corps identifies four distinct leadership styles. Regardless of a leader's personality or preferred approach, it is possible for them to employ all four styles in a day. This is not to say that these four styles are an exhaustive list, nor the only methods for applying the leadership process

### **Telling Style**

The Telling Style is located farthest along on the Authoritarian side of the spectrum of leadership theories. The Telling Style is characterized by one-way communication from the leader to their Marines with minimal input. The leader simply decides and announces it to their subordinates.

### **Selling Style**

When using the Selling Style, leaders present their plan or decision in a method to foster investment from their subordinates. There may be limited opportunity to invite questions or comments, but the unit will ultimately conduct the leader's plan and method for accomplishing it with minimal variations.

### **Participating Style**

When using the Participating Style, the leader explains the problem, asks for their subordinates' input, but ultimately is the one making the decision afterwards.

### **Delegating Style**

On the furthest end of the Persuasive end of the spectrum of leadership, the Delegating Style is characterized by the leader stating an objective, the purpose behind the objective, stating left and right lateral limits, but then allowing their Marines to develop their own plan and own the decision making from that point forward.





## Considerations for Leadership Style Selection

### Leadership Style is Situational

Everyone is predisposed to one leadership style or another, but leaders can apply judgement to select the appropriate style based on the situation.

### Considerations

- Time available
- The ability, experience, training, and maturity of subordinates.
- Motivation/willingness
- Mission or Task
- The size and organization of the unit being led
- Subordinates' expectations
- Trust

### Leadership Style is Influenced by Who You Are

A leader's style is influenced by their personality. A leader who understands themselves knows how to lead better.

- **Personality:** Leaders are recommended to be themselves first, not to force a style of leadership to work when it does not conform to their own personality.
- **Confidence:** Marines respond well when the leader displays confidence under stressful or dangerous situations.
- **Experience:** Over time, leaders may lean toward a particular style when it worked in the past under similar situations. However, leaders must continue to improve upon their personal weaknesses to further refine their style and judgment when determining how they approach a given problem.
- **Moral Compass:** Marines find comfort in knowing that their leader is ethically sound and will do the right thing. The right values and the application of ethics must be the cornerstone of the chosen leadership style.

Throughout OCS, Officer Candidates will utilize multiple styles of leadership, whether it is serving as a Fire Team Leader during tactical events, a Candidate Platoon Sergeant managing accountability, or as a peer within the squad bay.

Candidates are encouraged to reflect on the four leadership styles to develop their own personal approach.

## Fundamentals of Marine Corps Ethos

### Ethos

Ethos is defined as “the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution.” To understand what is required of Marine Corps leaders, candidates must understand what it means to be a Marine.

### Marine Corps Ethos

Marine Corps Ethos is “the fundamental character or spirit of the Marine Corps, and more specifically, Marines everywhere.” Understanding the Marine Corps Ethos and what it means to be a Marine, is essential to understanding how to lead Marines. Being a Marine means being part of something larger than yourself. There is a spirit - an *esprit* - that defines the Corps.

### Elements of Marine Corps Ethos

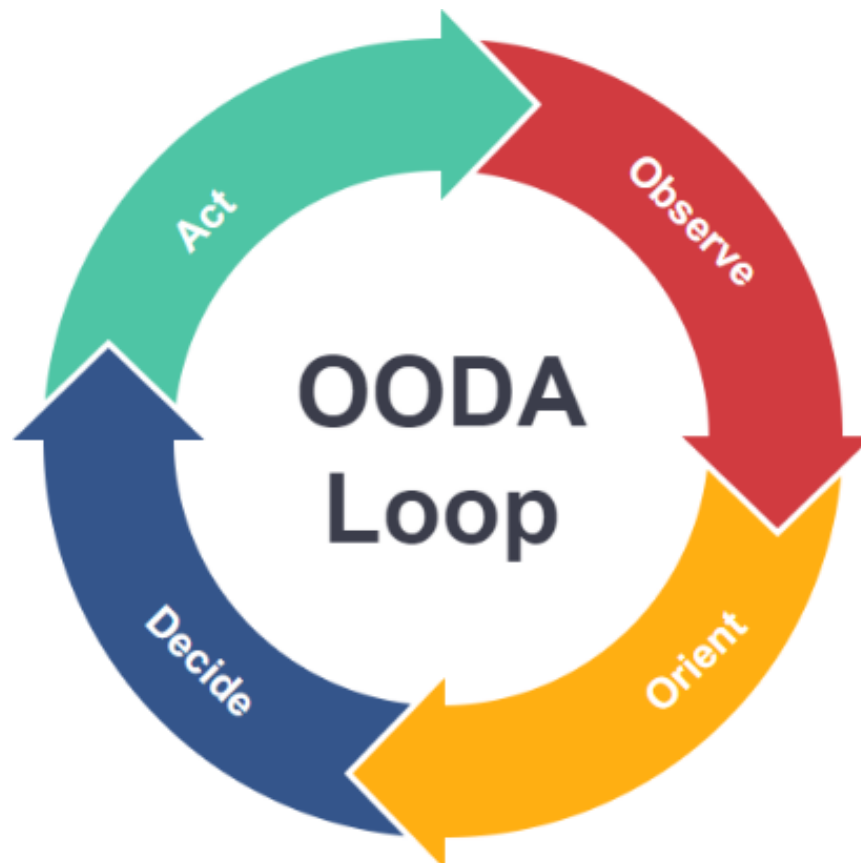
- **Marine Corps Core Values:** Our motto is *Semper Fidelis*, Always Faithful. We are faithful to our Nation, the Corps, and to each other. This is not blind faith; it is a faith guided by our values. Marines share the core values of honor, courage, and commitment.
- **Naval Heritage:** The Marine Corps’ naval character has shaped the Corps since its inception. The naval character makes Marines different because it combines the characteristics of soldiers and sailors. The historic partnership between the Navy and the Marine Corps is a heritage that continues today. The anchor in the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor emblem symbolizes that the individual Marine remains a soldier of the sea.
- **Expeditionary Mindset:** The expeditionary mindset is the most critical contributor to the Corps’ success in crisis response and complex contingencies. Marine leaders have deliberately cultivated this mindset for generations which generates both combat power and the organizational flexibility to accomplish diverse missions around the world. Our expeditionary culture emphasizes being fast, austere, and lethal.
- **Every Marine a Rifleman:** Since Marines are an expeditionary force in readiness, they find themselves in austere, hostile, and uncertain environments, which requires that Marines develop into proficient rifleman first.
- **Commitment to Selfless Service:** Those that are, or have been, forward deployed in austere environments know the difficulties of missing major holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, the death of a loved one, or the birth a child. It is the commitment to selfless service that gives Marines the ability to endure these challenges.

## Decision Making: Boyd's OODA Loop

### OODA Loop Defined

On the surface, Boyd's Cycle (observe, orient, decide, act – a.k.a. OODA Loop) is a simple reckoning of how human beings make decisions. This process can be applied to situations ranging from making tactical decisions to making ethical decisions. It is a continuous and simultaneous process.

- **Observe:** Observation is the task that detects events within an individual's environment. It is the method by which people identify change, or lack of change, in the world around them.
- **Orient:** Orient is the **most pivotal** of the four processes of the OODA Loop. Without the context of orientation, most observations would be meaningless, and the vast amount of information would be overwhelming.
- **Decide:** Decisions must be properly oriented to be effective. A key part of the decision-making process is **communicating the decision to those who need to know**. This includes subordinates, leadership, and adjacent parties.
- **Act:** Action is the implementation of the decision that has been made considering the observations of the surrounding environment.





# FUNDAMENTALS OF TACTICS

“  
In tactics, the most important thing is not whether you go left or right, but why you go left or right.

General A. M. Gray

”

## Introduction To Tactics

### Tactics Defined

Tactics is “the art and science of winning engagements and battles. It includes the use of firepower and maneuver, the integration of different arms and the immediate exploitation of success to defeat the enemy”.

### Tactics at OCS

Throughout OCS, Officer Candidates will be immersed in basic infantry tactics, serving in the various billets contained within an infantry Fire Team. Officer Candidates will be responsible for conducting land navigation for their Fire Team, issuing orders as the Fire Team Leader, among other responsibilities.

As you progress in your military career, you will become intimately familiar with higher echeloned tactics, such as squad, platoon, and company operations. Success at these higher echelons requires a firm understanding of the basic tactical employment of the Fire Team.

### Preparation for Tactical Events

Officer Candidates will be formally instructed on all evaluated tactical knowledge during their respective POI. However, a basic understanding of Fire Team level tactics, infantry formations, and common terminology, will allow you to be more familiar with the course content and deepen your understanding during formalized classes. The following pages will provide a basic overview of concepts that will be taught throughout the POI such as:

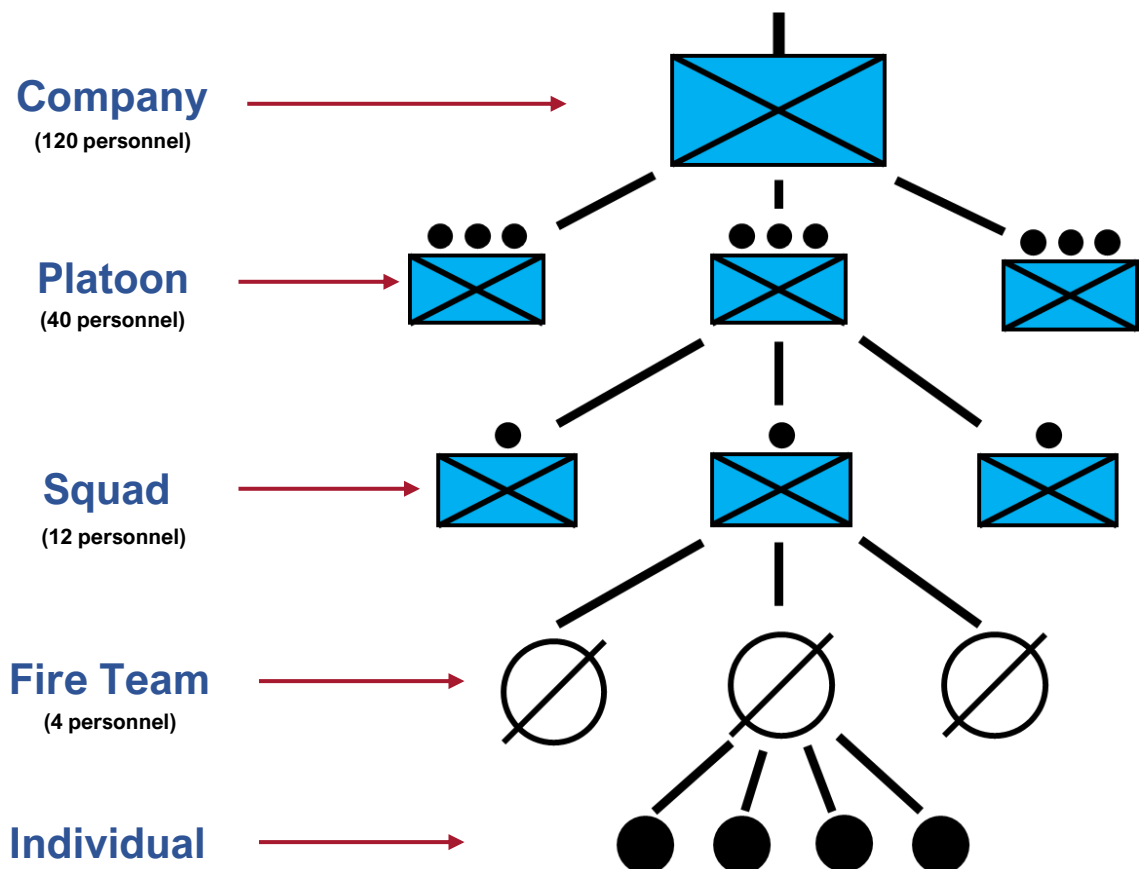
- Tactical Formations
- Preparing and delivering an order
- Common terminology





## Tactical Terminology

- **Billet:** Refers to a specific position or job assignment held by a Marine. Billets play a crucial role in maintaining structure, operational effectiveness, and ensure Marines understand their assigned duties and responsibilities.
- **Formation:** The specific arrangement or positioning of units, such as Fire Teams or Squads, relative to each other in order to accomplish a particular mission. The formation is designed to maximize combat effectiveness, control, and communication while maintaining security and flexibility.
- **Patrol:** A planned, organized movement of a small unit into enemy-held or contested territory for the purpose of gathering intelligence, disrupting enemy activities, securing areas, or supporting larger operations. Patrols are conducted to achieve specific objectives.
- **Dispersion:** The spacing between Marines within a formation. Factors such as enemy situation, terrain, and visibility will influence the amount of dispersion between individual Fire Team members.
- **Echelon:** In terms of unit size, can be used to refer to different levels of organizational structure based on the size of the unit and its positioning. See below graphic for echelons that Officer Candidates will be exposed to at OCS.





## Fire Team Billets

### Fire Team Leader



Is responsible for everything the Fire Team does or fails to do. Prior to combat, they are responsible for conducting Pre-Combat Checks, and rehearsals. During combat they are responsible for control of their unit's movement, fire discipline, care, condition and use of their team's weapons.

### Automatic Rifleman



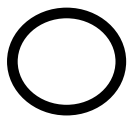
Is responsible for providing sustained, suppressive fire with their weapon allowing other team members to maneuver and engage targets by delivering a high volume of fire on enemy positions to pin them down.

### Grenadier



Is responsible for providing indirect fire support using a grenade launcher, typically mounted on their rifle, to engage targets in "dead zones" that other rifles can't reach, including high-angle fire, and to deploy smoke grenades for cover or to flush out enemies.

### Rifleman



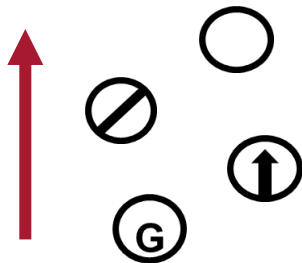
Is primarily responsible for providing accurate, lethal direct fire against point targets using a standard service rifle, often acting as a scout for the fireteam, and is considered the primary assault and close combat force within the unit

## Additional Responsibilities

- **Point:** Acts as an early warning for the rest of the unit. Forward most eyes and ears of the Fire Team, and most likely to make contact with the enemy.
- **Navigator:** Responsible for the direction of movement of the Fire Team and allows the Fire Team Leader to focus on the enemy situation and conduct of the patrol.
- **Pacer:** Keeps track of distance traveled, allowing the Fire Team Leader to have accurate information regarding the Fire Team's locations.

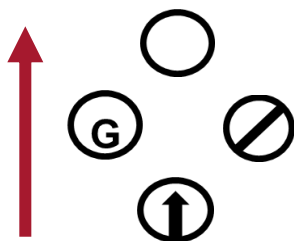
## Fire Team Formations

### Fire Team Column



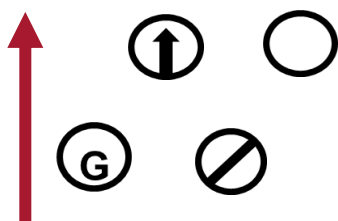
- Good speed and control
- Good security to the flanks
- Limited security to the front / rear
- Staggered
- Common formation

### Fire Team Wedge



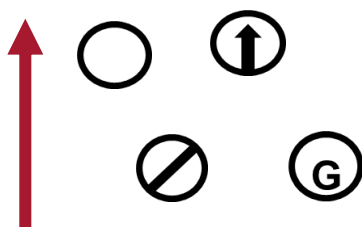
- Good speed and control
- Equal security 360 degrees
- Flexible to enemy fire and terrain
- Use when chance of **enemy contact is likely**
- Enemy **location unknown**

### Fire Team Skirmishers Left



- Good security to the front
- Limited security to the flanks
- Used when contact is **imminent** location of the enemy is **known** during the assault or the pursuit.

### Fire Team Skirmishers Right



- Good security to the front
- Limited security to the flanks
- Used when contact is **imminent** location of the enemy is **known** during the assault or the pursuit.

## Formation Selection

Which formation the Fire Team utilizes is determined by the Fire Team Leader and they will need to consider multiple factors such as:

- The Enemy Situation
- The Terrain
- Experience of the Fire Team

## Operations Order Overview

## Orientation

## Situation

## Mission

## Execution

## Administration and Logistics

## Command and Signal

## 10. COORDINATE INFORMATION

List only information applicable to text or more units and not mutually contained in unit 509A. This is always the last sub-paragraph in paragraph 60. EXECUTION: Complex transactions should be written in the annex. Sub-paragraph 60 is basic, of this paragraph. See mandatory.

**Time Schedule.** Resources, facilities, inspection and movement

**Critical Information Requirements.**

**ATTACHMENTS/ATTACHMENTS**

Do not repeat information already listed under Task Organization. Try to put all information in the Task Organization. However, when an attachment is required, but units that are attached or attached to the headquarters that issues the order. State when attachment or detachment is to be effective if appropriate. Use the term "remains attached" when units are to remain on commitment of the same. Use the term "remains attached" when units are to be or have been attached for some time.

**State that**

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## OPORD: SKELETON

Form & orders normally contain a code name & are numbered consecutively with a

unit.

**References:** The heading of the plan or order may, chain, date, or other documents will need to be included. The use and will reference the SOP for the SOP for the SOP for the plan or order. The right to a map by way across the road, the geographic area, if appropriate, their number and date, and units. If appropriate, the geographical area of the earth that applies to the coordinates on a particular





### **Operations Order Format (O-SMEAC)**

#### **Orientation**

The orientation brief begins the delivery of an order with a brief description of the terrain you will be operating in from “big to small”. Understanding the impact terrain has on your movement and mission will help you to come up with a feasible solution. A proper orientation is crucial to providing an effective brief.

#### **Situation**

The Situation paragraph provides details on both friendly and enemy personnel operating in your area of operations. We combine our understanding of the terrain with an understanding of the enemy force we are facing and what friendly support we may have around us to help our decision-making process for finding our solution.

#### **Mission**

A short statement containing all five “W’s”. Who, what, when, where, and why.

#### **Execution**

This is where we communicate our plan (solution) for the mission we are tasked to accomplish.

#### **Administration and Logistics**

Providing some of the finer details of the operation, this paragraph focuses on medical issues, enemy prisoner of war (EPW) handling, food, water, and ammunition needed to accomplish the mission.

#### **Command and Signal**

Here we wrap up the order by discussing how we will communicate key events throughout the operation and succession of command.



## Introduction to the Fragmentary Order

A fragmentary order (FragO) is an abbreviated form of an operations order, usually issued on a day-to-day basis, that eliminates the need for restating information contained in the original operations order. It may be issued in sections. It is an oral, a digital, or a written message that provides brief, specific, and timely instructions without loss of clarity. It is issued after an operations order to change or modify that order or to execute a branch or sequel to that order. Fragmentary orders are often necessary due to enemy action. They can only be issued if a complete combat order (known as a base order) has been previously issued. Fragmentary orders should cover only the information that has changed since the issuance of the base order.

## Fragmentary Order Overview

The below format will serve as a baseline. This is the minimal amount of information required for an effective order and **must be memorized**. Paragraphs and sub-paragraphs are bolded.

### **O. Orientation**

- (a) Current Location
- (b) Objective Location
- (c) Direction and Distance of Attack

### **I. Situation**

#### **a. Enemy Forces**

- (1) Composition, Disposition and Strength: (TSUALE/SALUTE)
  - (a) T – Time
  - (b) S – Size
  - (c) U – Unit
  - (d) A – Activity
  - (e) L – Location
  - (f) E – Equipment

#### **b. Friendly Forces (HAS)**

- (1) Higher Unit's Mission
- (2) Adjacent Units

### **II. Mission**

### **III. Execution**

- a. Concept of Operation
  - (1) Scheme of Maneuver
- b. Tasks
- c. Coordinating Instructions

### **IV. Administration and Logistics**

- a. Administration
  - (1) CASEVAC Plan



# RECOMMENDED READING

“

There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.

Colin Powell

”



## Recommended Reading

As stated previously in this guide, everything that Officer Candidates will be evaluated on will be formally instructed during the course. However, the below list of resources will help prepare you mentally for the rigors you'll experience while at OCS.

- **MCDP 1 “Warfighting”:** The foundational document of how the Marine Corps thinks and fights. Provides insights into the Marine Corps’ warfighting philosophy and will be a continued resource throughout your military career.
- **MCWP 6-11 “Leading Marines”:** Provides guidance on leadership principles and practices. Focuses on developing effective leaders who can inspire and lead Marines in both combat and non-combat environments.
- **MCDP 1-3 “Tactics”:** Outlines the principles and concepts of Marine Corps tactics. It focuses on how Marines should approach the planning and execution of operations in dynamic, complex environments.
- **The Armed Forces Officer:** Offers a comprehensive look at the role, responsibilities, and expectations of officers across all branches of the U.S. military. Serves as a foundational text for shaping officers into effective, principled leaders who can make sound decisions in complex and high-stakes situations..
- **The Marine Officer’s Guide:** A comprehensive resource designed to provide new and seasoned officers with essential knowledge and guidance on their roles and responsibilities. Covers a wide range of topics, including leadership principles, military traditions, ethics, and the practical aspects of managing Marines.

## Additional Resources

- [Commandant’s Professional Reading List](#)
- [Marine Corps Publications](#)
- [OCS Candidate Information Page](#)
- [Marine Corps History Overview](#)