SERGEANTS' CORNER

BY MICHAEL L. LEWIS

Army Correspondence

Being an effective leader is dependent upon being able to communicate your ideas and intentions in a clear and succinct manner. During an in-person conversation, you can discern whether people understand and comprehend you based on the questions they ask or their body language. However, in writing, you receive no such immediate feedback; your message must be clear and complete the first time to avoid confusion or errors.

To help budding NCOs improve their skills with the written word, a class on Army correspondence was added to the new Warrior Leader Course program of instruction. Based on Army Regulation 25-50, "Preparing and Managing Correspondence," the class explains how to master the Army's style of writing. Leaders without such skills will be limited in their success, said Sgt. Robin Mitchell, a small group leader at the Seventh Army Warrior Training Brigade's NCO Academy, Camp Normandy, Grafenwöhr, Germany.

"Not being able to write up an award or an NCO [Evaluation Report] is going to hurt a Soldier. If you're in the position of being a leader, you are going to have to know how to write and communicate. And, if you can't communicate effectively – written or verbally – your career is going to be short."

Specifically, effective Army writing transmits a clear message in a single, rapid reading; is generally free of errors in grammar, mechanics and usage; is concise, organized and to the point; places the main point at the beginning and uses active voice. In many cases, students learning this correct way must first "unlearn" the way they had been writing, Mitchell said.

Staff Sgt. Kurt Fehrenbacher, a military intelligence specialist at Fort Huachuca, Ariz., practices completing an award recommendation during the Warrior Leader Course pilot at the Fort Bliss NCO Academy last September.

"They have it pretty much set in their mind, this is how [my unit] does it. But, now they're learning the right way – Army [standard operating procedure] versus unit SOP."

While leaders will find themselves writing often in their careers, these four, common scenarios are tested in WLC:

MEMORANDUMS: A formal memorandum – used for correspondence that is sent outside the command, for notification of personnel actions and for showing appreciation or commendation to Soldiers – is written on official Department of the Army letterhead, a template of which is available online (at *http://www.army.mil/usapa/corporate/letterhead.htm*). An informal memo – used for internal correspondence – is written on plain white paper. For both, writers should use 1-inch margins, print on only one side of the sheet and employ the standard address and signature-block configurations. Many examples of memo formats can be found in AR 25-50.

AWARD RECOMMENDATIONS: Recognizing Soldiers for their achievements and service is a vital part of leadership, and perhaps the most important step in this process is the initial one, DA Form 638, "Recommendation for Award." In completing this form, leaders convince superiors that a Soldier's prospective award is justified. If written poorly, however, the Soldier may not be recognized because the leader failed in his or her duties. Due to limited space on the form, statements must be concise and persuasive. However, for some awards, especially those related to valorous or heroic actions, additional support documentation may be required, such as…

SWORN STATEMENTS: Typically used by military police and judicial personnel in the course of investigations or as evidence at trial, DA Form 2823 is also used to provide information to substantiate recommendations for awards. It should begin with, "I (name) want to make the following statement under oath," and can be written either as a narrative or in a question-and-answer format. In any case, the statement should be sequential – a series of facts concerning the who, what, when, where and why of the event.

Course instructors suggest that students brush up on their writing skills by becoming familiar with AR 25-50 and reviewing WLC course materials. The latter can be found on Army Knowledge Online at *https://www.us.army.mil/suite/files/19954312*.

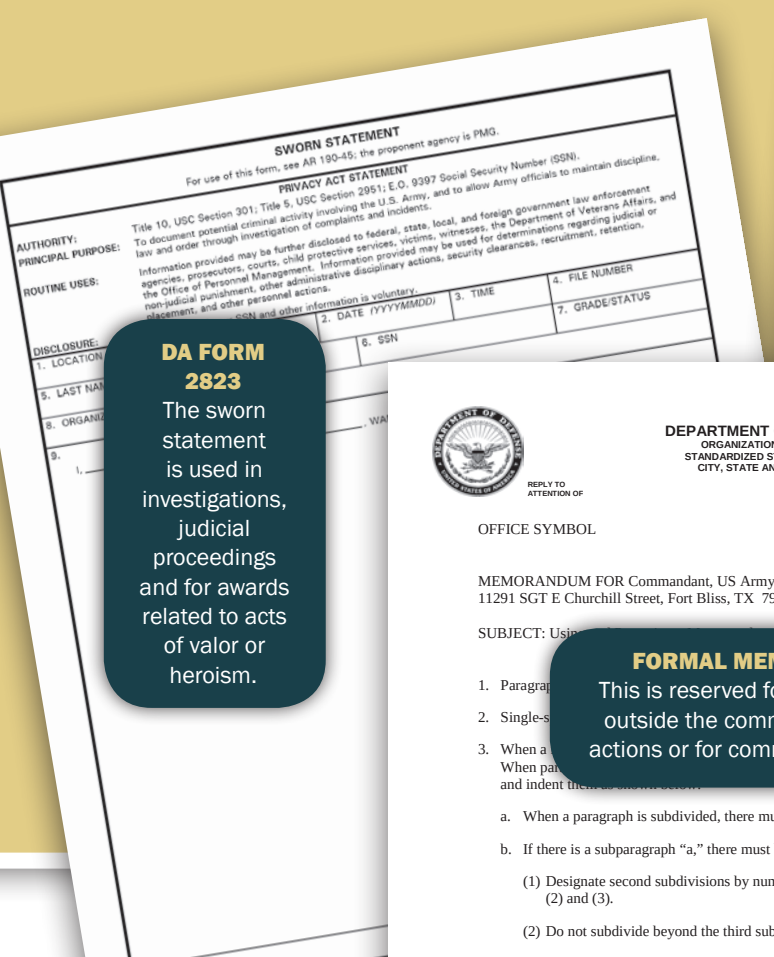
A monthly spotlight on the knowledge junior NCOs need to grow as professionals

KEYS TO THE ARMY WRITING STYLE

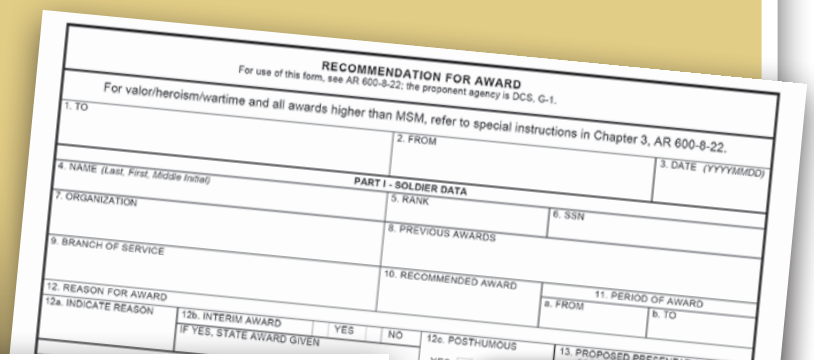
The goal of all Army correspondence is to aid effective and efficient communication and decision-making. Leaders who keep in mind the following tips will make their writing both clear and conscise and get their message across in a professional manner:

- ✓ **Put the main point at the beginning:** State your main idea or purpose up front. In other words, tell the readers what you are about to tell them.
- ✓ **Use active voice:** Passive voice hides the doer of the action, blocking communication, while active voice emphasizes the doer of the action. Using active voice, like, *"SGT Jones counseled PVT Smith,"* is also often shorter (five words) compared to passive voice, *"PVT Smith was counseled by SGT Jones,"* (seven words).
- ✓ **Keep it short:** People are busy and do not have extra time to read and study long, complicated correspondence. Use simple words and short sentences to aid comprehension.
- ✓ **Avoid jargon and slang:** Jargon words are specialized terms that few people may know; slang words are informal and unclear. Both are confusing and should be avoided.
- ✓ **Use correct spelling, grammar and punctuation:** Errors or mistakes not only detract from your writing, they can create a negative impression in the reader. Take advantage of the spelling- and grammar-check features of your word-processing program, or consult a dictionary when not using a computer.
- ✓ **Make it personal:** Use "I," "you" and "we" as subjects of sentences instead of "this office," "all individuals" and so forth. Using personal pronouns like these not only makes your writing more direct, it usually makes it shorter as well.
- ✓ **Keep it to one page:** By writing short sentences and short paragraphs, you should be able to say what you want to say in one page. That keeps the amount of paperwork down and conserves supplies.

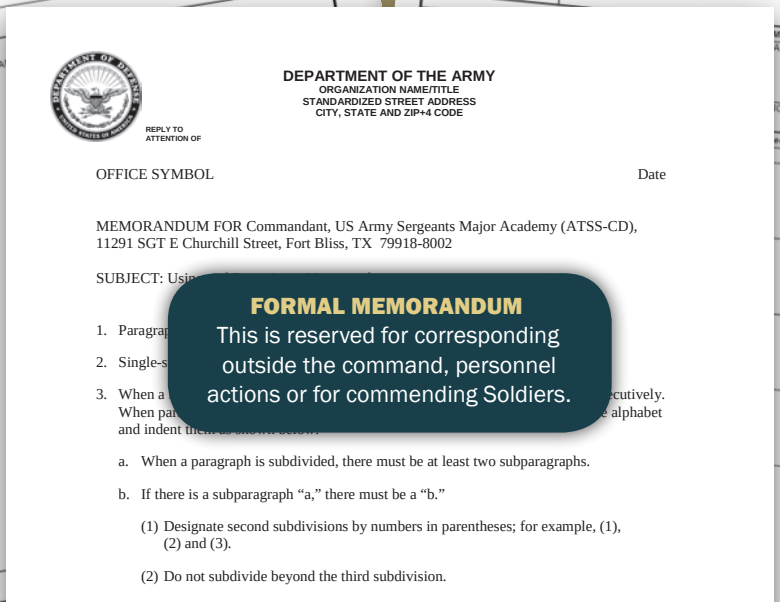
Form & function: NCOs' most common paperwork


SWORN STATEMENT
For use of this form, see AR 190-45; the proponent agency is PMG.
PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT
AUTHORITY: Title 10, USC Section 301; Title 5, USC Section 2951; E.O. 9397 Social Security Number (SSN).
PRINCIPAL PURPOSE: To document potential criminal activity involving the U.S. Army, and to allow Army officials to maintain discipline, law and order through investigation of complaints and incidents.
ROUTINE USES: Information provided may be further disclosed to federal, state, local, and foreign government law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, courts, child protective services, victims, witnesses, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Office of Personnel Management. Information provided may be used for determinations regarding judicial or non-judicial punishment, other administrative disciplinary actions, security clearances, recruitment, retention, placement, and other personnel actions.
DISCLOSURE: ... SSN and other information is voluntary.
1. LOCATION | 2. DATE (YYYYMMDD) | 3. TIME | 4. FILE NUMBER
5. LAST NAME | 6. SSN | 7. GRADE/STATUS
8. ORGANIZATION | WA...
9. I, ...

DA FORM 2823
The sworn statement is used in investigations, judicial proceedings and for awards related to acts of valor or heroism.


RECOMMENDATION FOR AWARD
For use of this form, see AR 600-8-22; the proponent agency is DCS, G-1.
For valor/heroism/wartime and all awards higher than MSM, refer to special instructions in Chapter 3, AR 600-8-22.
1. TO | 2. FROM | 3. DATE (YYYYMMDD)
PART I - SOLDIER DATA
4. NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial) | 5. RANK | 6. SSN
7. ORGANIZATION | 8. PREVIOUS AWARDS
9. BRANCH OF SERVICE | 10. RECOMMENDED AWARD | 11. PERIOD OF AWARD a. FROM b. TO
12. REASON FOR AWARD
12a. INDICATE REASON | 12b. INTERIM AWARD YES NO IF YES, STATE AWARD GIVEN | 12c. POSTHUMOUS YES | 13. PROPOSED PRESENTATION DATE

DA FORM 638
The award recommendation must be written well or the Soldier may not receive the award he or she is due.


DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
ORGANIZATION NAME/TITLE
STANDARDIZED STREET ADDRESS
CITY, STATE AND ZIP+4 CODE
REPLY TO ATTENTION OF
OFFICE SYMBOL Date
MEMORANDUM FOR Commandant, US Army Sergeants Major Academy (ATSS-CD), 11291 SGT E Churchill Street, Fort Bliss, TX 79918-8002
SUBJECT: Usi...
1. Paragrap...
2. Single-s...
3. When a ... ecutively. When pa... e alphabet and indent th...
a. When a paragraph is subdivided, there must be at least two subparagraphs.
b. If there is a subparagraph "a," there must be a "b."
(1) Designate second subdivisions by numbers in parentheses; for example, (1), (2) and (3).
(2) Do not subdivide beyond the third subdivision.

FORMAL MEMORANDUM
This is reserved for corresponding outside the command, personnel actions or for commending Soldiers.