

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR LEADERS AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Mission accomplishment requires skilled leaders able to make the right decision. The lives of your subordinates, peers, and superiors may depend on your skill at accomplishing this task. However, a more critical skill is the ability to clearly communicate that decision. Individuals who can get their intent and ideas across so that others understand the message and act on it possess one of the primary qualities of leadership--the ability to communicate clearly. Therefore, your success as a military leader depends on your ability to think critically and creatively and to communicate your intention and decision to others. How you arrive at your decision and then communicate it to others is the focus of ST 22-2.

THE ARMY STANDARD FOR COMMUNICATIONS

The Army has defined its standard for all written and verbal communications to assist you in developing the skills mentioned above. The standard defines good writing as "*writing you can understand in a single rapid reading, and is generally free of errors in grammar, mechanics, and usage.*" It means that your readers should understand what you meant to tell them. The Army standard also requires that your writing be clear, concise, organized, and to the point.

This standard also holds true for verbal communications. It means that by the time you finish presenting information or a course of action, your subordinates, peers, and superiors should know your intent and understand your decision.

It also means that your written and spoken communications must "*use the words people use in talking to one another each day. . . . Come to your point--tell me what you want me to do. Don't be shy. Don't waste my time.*" (General John Vessey, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.)

CRITICAL REASONING AND CREATIVE THINKING

Critical reasoning and creative thinking are nothing new. It's something you have practiced many times. It's just that you have probably never given any thought to how you go about it, nor how the process can enhance your communicative skills. Good thinkers have standards which they use to evaluate their critical reasoning and creative thinking process. In ST 22-2 we will pay particular attention to the process and the standards of critical reasoning and creative thinking.

Critical reasoning requires that you analyze the task, identify your goal(s), and clarify the problem you need to solve. This includes considering the many perspectives influencing the task. You also need to recognize that the data (information, evidence, facts, observations, or experiences) you work with may be incomplete. Critical reasoning requires that you examine assumptions, yours and others, along with inferences, conclusions, implications, and consequences of these assumptions.

Creative thinking, on the other hand, challenges you to stretch your mind to see new possibilities or different ways of doing things. It asks you to identify those inhibitors that focus your thinking along predetermined paths. Inhibitors include perceptions, culture, environment, emotions, intellect, and "idea killers" (usually expressed in such phrases as "We already tried that," "It would take too long," "The commander would never support it," "I have enough information," etc.). Successful creative thinking never takes place in a vacuum--it builds on critical reasoning skills.

The critical reasoning and creative thinking standards help you evaluate your reasoning and thinking for relevance, consistency, accuracy, fairness, and completeness.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD WRITING

Army Regulation 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence*, requires that writers incorporate the following principles into their communication:

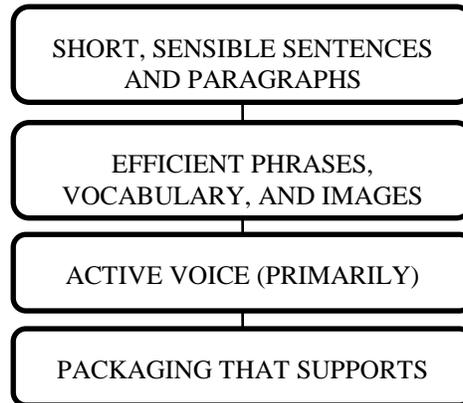


Figure 1-1

Short, sensible sentences and paragraphs.

Effective writers will employ both long and short sentences; *however, the average sentence will be somewhere around 15 words.*¹ The same holds true for paragraph length. Some paragraphs may be 2 inches in depth while others less than an inch, *but the average paragraph will be about 1 inch (about 6 lines) deep for a single spaced document.*

Efficient phrases, vocabulary, and images.

Use commonly accepted words and word pictures. Avoid the use of jargon **Error! Reference source not found.**, "official-speak," and acronyms, especially when writing or speaking to an audience that may not be familiar with them. Some examples include:

<u>Jargon</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
green-suiter	soldier
LES	pay voucher, pay slip
say again	what?
O4	Major
E7	Sergeant First Class

¹ Department of the Army, Army Regulation 25-50, *Preparing and Managing Correspondence* (Washington, DC, 21 November 1988), 7.

Active voice (primarily)

The key to determining active voice is to tell who is doing the acting. Try something like "The S3 will issue the orders" rather than "The orders will be issued by the S3." We will discuss this in more detail in chapter 2 (see p 2-22).

Packaging.

What is your *bottom line* (your position, conclusion, or recommendation)? Put it up front at the beginning.

Arrange your writing or speech so that your audience can quickly and easily understand your intent. Make sure you do not mislead your audience.

COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS FOR LEADERS AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

As you move up the Army's rank structure, you become responsible for more and more subordinate soldiers, NCOs, officers, and DA civilians. This responsibility includes your ability to write and speak well.

Writing is a learned skill, just like leadership, tactics, resourcing, and joint operations. You develop an understanding of leadership, for example, and you practice the skills of leading. That's what makes you a strong leader. Some people have the gift of leading, but they still must practice the skills to develop into effective leaders.

ST 22-2, *Writing and Speaking Skills for Leaders at the Organizational Level*, offers you assistance with developing your communication skills. Chapter 2 addresses writing skills and chapter 3 reviews speaking skills. The appendixes give specific tips on writing and speaking.