
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
THE BASIC SCHOOL
MARINE CORPS TRAINING COMMAND
CAMP BARRETT, VIRGINIA 22134-5019

MILITARY
CORRESPONDENCE
W1G0003XQ
STUDENT HANDOUT

Military Correspondence

Introduction

Effective writing is essential for successful communication. As platoon commanders or staff officers, written communication must be clear, concise, thorough and correct. This lesson will discuss several different writing responsibilities you will have as a Marine officer and familiarize you with types of military correspondence.

Importance

Written communication is an effective way to disseminate information and often vital to ensure mission accomplishment. The intent of this lesson is to familiarize you with military correspondence, especially the importance of proper correspondence format, and provide examples of various types of correspondence.

In This Lesson

This lesson will give you an understanding of basic military correspondence and familiarize you with using the Correspondence Manual to prepare correspondence correctly the first time, every time.

This lesson covers the following topics:

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Learning Objectives

Terminal Learning Objectives

TBS-LDR-2205 Given personnel, materiel, and references, process administrative correspondence to support the unit's mission and recognize Marines.

Enabling Learning Objectives

TBS-LDR-2205a With the aid of reference, write a standard Naval letter in accordance with the Naval Correspondence Manual without grammatical or spelling errors.

TBS-LDR-2205b Given an order or directive, identify directive by type without error.

TBS-LDR-2205e Given an evaluation, identify types of military correspondence without error.

Types of Correspondence

Several formats are associated with military correspondence. The styles you will be frequently required to use are: Standard bullets follow this format including when used in subheading text:

- Standard letter
- Endorsements
- Memorandums
- Business letters
- Position/Point/Talking papers
- Email
- Administrative action (AA) forms

Standard Letter

The standard letter is the military's version of a business letter. Use it to correspond officially within the Department of Defense (DOD).

Margin Settings. 1-inch margin on the bottom and sides of the page. Letterhead starts on the fourth line from the top of the page.

Style of Type. The standard letter is left justified. This means that in the text there is no indenting except for the first line of every subparagraph and every line of long quotations. Size 10-12 point of a block style font (Courier New). Note, the updated correspondence manual, SECNAV M-5216.5, states Times New Roman 12-point is the preferred font style and size for official correspondence, and Courier New may be used for informal. Best bet would be to check unit SOP.

Letterhead. The first thing on a standard letter is letterhead, and identifies the unit that originates correspondence.

Standard Subject Identification Code Block

Standard Subject Identification Code (SSIC). An SSIC is a four or five digit number that identifies the subject of a document. They are required on all Naval and Marine Corps correspondence. The use of SSICs provides a tested method for filing documents consistently and quickly. The SSIC you choose should be the one that best suits the subject of your letter. Found in the Navy SSIC Manual (SECNAV M-5210.2) and included in this handout.

Types of Correspondence (Continued)

Standard Letter (Continued)

Originator's Code. The next line in the sender's symbol block is the originator's code. It is typed on the next line below the first number in the SSIC and is the symbol for the office preparing the letter. Each command creates its own originator's codes.

Date. The last item in the sender's symbols is the date. It is typed on the next line below the originator code. The date is typed in what is called "standard letter format." Follow a day-month-year order without punctuation. Type the day, abbreviated month (first letter capitalized only) and the abbreviated year.

From Block. The "from" block, which is required on every standard letter, is typed on the second line below the date line.

To Block. This block is for the action addressee (who you want your letter to go to) and is typed on the next line below the "From" line.

Via Block. The "Via" block is directly related to your chain of command. Via format, whether sending correspondence up or down the chain of command, send correspondence to each unit between the sender and recipient. These units are to be named as vias.

No Vias. If there are no units between the sender and recipient then skip the "Via" block.

One Via. When there is only one via then simply state the unit in the same format as the "To" or "From" block. Do not number only one "Via". Place the "Via:" on the first line below the "To:" block on the left margin. Place the unit name blocked under the "To:" block.

Two or more Vias. When two or more vias are used, number them. The first command in the chain of command to receive the correspondence will be numbered "(1)". The rest will be numbered in succession.

Subject Block. The subject block is typed in all caps on the second line below the last line of the previous heading. The subject block is a sentence fragment, or phrase that will give the reader a good idea of what the letter is about. Stray away from abbreviations in the subject.

Types of Correspondence (Continued)

Standard Letter (Continued)

Reference Block. This block is typed on the second line below the subject line. Use a lower case letter in parentheses before every reference. Use references to keep your letter from becoming too detailed.

Enclosure Block. This block is typed on the second line below the reference line. Like references, enclosures are used to help keep letters from being too cluttered with details. Enclosures are identified with numbers in parentheses.

Paragraph. The paragraph format for a standard letter is a lot like an outline: simple paragraph/subparagraph format. The paragraphs/subparagraphs are identified in the following sequence: 1., a., (I), (a), ~., ~., (~), (~). Start all continuation lines at the left margin. All paragraphs are single spaced, with double spacing between paragraphs and subparagraphs. Don't begin a paragraph at the bottom of a page unless there is enough space for at least two lines of text on the page and at least two lines are carried over to the next page. A signature page must have at least two lines of text. (See figure 7-8, page 7-23 of Naval Correspondence Manual).

Signature Block. A letter can be from the Commanding Officer (CO) and signed by the CO or signed by another person with delegated signature authority. All signature blocks have the same basic format: name in all capital letters on the fourth line below the text, starting at the center of the page.

Signature Format. There are three signature blocks that are used.

(1) When the Commanding Officer (CO) Signs. When the CO is signing the letter, you simply type the name (in all caps). The CO decides if you type a first name and initial or just initials.

(2) When the CO is Not Present for Signature. If the CO is on leave, TAD, or otherwise unable to sign a document, the Executive Officer assumes the duties of the CO and is empowered to sign as "Acting". All correspondence signed as the Acting Commanding Officer shows the Acting Commanders name in all caps and the word "Acting" directly beneath his name. Notice Acting is in natural capitalization. Use Acting when the CO is gone and the Executive Officer is taking the place of the Commander temporarily. The Executive Officer must be designated in writing as the Acting Commanding Officer.

Types of Correspondence (Continued)

Standard Letter (Continued)

(3) When Others Sign for the CO. Commanding Officers don't sign most routine correspondence. Rather, others have the authority to sign correspondence for them. This is called "By direction" authority and is the most common of all of the signature blocks. Whenever someone other than the CO is signing for the CO, "By direction" is typed below their name to indicate that someone is signing for the Commander.

Copy To Block. An optional block used to send an information copy of your letter to someone outside your own command that is not already listed in the Via line. Second and Subsequent Pages. The subject line will start on the sixth line of the paper and will be the same as the subject line on the first page. Left and right margins are set at one inch with a .5 inch bottom margin. Second and subsequent pages will be numbered, with the number centered on the page .5 inches from the bottom without punctuation.

See SECNAV M-5216.5 (Naval Correspondence Manual) Chapters 2 & 7

Endorsements

When a letter is transmitted "Via" your activity, use an endorsement to forward comments, recommendations, or information. Endorsements normally transmit correspondence through the chain of command but can also redirect a letter.

See SECNAV M-5216.5, Chapter 9.

Memorandum

The memorandum provides an informal way to correspond within an activity or between Department of the Navy (DON) activities. Subordinate units use memorandums for routine business.

See SECNAV M-5216.5, Chapter 10.

Point/Position/Talking Paper

Point, position, and talking papers are staff action documents that an action officer prepares. They are used to develop and recommend an official position; present key points, facts or positions; advance a point of view; or summarize action.

See MCO 5216.20, page 67-68 & 71-75.

Types of Correspondence (Continued)

Business Letter

Use the business letter to correspond with agencies, businesses, or individuals outside the DOD, who are unfamiliar with the standard letter. It may also be used for official correspondence between individuals within the DOD, when occasion calls for a personal touch.

See SECNAV M-5216.5, Chapter 11.

Electronic Mail

In today's computer driven age, email has become an increasingly popular form of communication. Several important points to remember about sending emails are:

- Email should never take the place of a phone call when the opportunity exists.
- *Never* counsel via email.
- Do not chastise via email.
- Never send email when you are angry.
- Vital information—do not rely on email.
- Email sent does not equal email received.
- Follow-up important email with a phone call.
- Don't put it in email if you do not want everyone to see it.
- Do not send personal information over email.
- Be respectful in tone.

See SECNAV M-5216.5, Chapter 4.

Administrative Action (AA) Form

The AA form was designed to reduce the administrative workload and to standardize certain routine actions. It may be used through normal correspondence channels up to and including Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC). Use of the AA form is in no way intended to replace verbal communications between a Marine and the commanding officer. When a Marine uses the AA form to make an official request and that request is denied, the immediate endorsing senior in the chain of command will personally return the request with the commander's disapproval endorsement to the originator. The immediate endorsing senior will verbally counsel the Marine regarding the denial of the request and forward a copy of the request and disapproval endorsement to the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) (MM).

See MCO 5216.19 (Administrative Action (AA) Form).

Directives

What Directives Are

A directive is a formal written communication that accomplishes at least one of the following:

- Establishes or revises policy.
- Delegates authority or assigns responsibility.
- Assigns a mission, function, or task.
- Issues plans or programs.
- Directs courses of action or conduct or regulates administrative practices.
- Establishes a procedure, standard, or method of performing a duty, function, or task.
- Modifies, changes, or cancels another directive.

Where Directives are Located

Most directives are maintained on-line. A library of mission essential directives that are commonly used will be maintained in the directives control point (DCP) or S-1 of your unit.

Order Identification

An order is first distinguished by an appropriate abbreviation for the command issuing the directive. For example, HQMC is MC; a battalion is Bn. The Basic School is BS.

The letter “O” will follow to distinguish an order from a bulletin. For example, “BSO” indicates that the directive is a Basic School Order.

A “P” may follow next to indicate that the directive is a manual type order vice a letter type order.

If the directive is classified CONFIDENTIAL, a zero, “0,” will precede the standard subject identification code (SSIC), a four or five digit number. A double zero, “00,” preceding the SSIC indicates that the directive is classified SECRET. For example, “BSO P00” indicates a manual type order issued by The Basic School that is classified SECRET.

Every order and bulletin receives an SSIC. This code identifies the primary focus of the directive. SSICs are also used to identify and file other naval correspondence.

Directives (Continued)

Order Identification (Continued)

The code system is divided into fourteen major subject groups. The Marine Corps routinely uses only twelve of these:

1000-1999	Military Personnel
2000-2999	Telecommunications
3000-3999	Operations and Readiness
4000-4999	Logistics
5000-5999	General Administration and Management
6000-6999	Medicine and Dentistry
7000-7999	Financial Management
8000-8999	Ordinance Material
10000-10999	General Material
11000-11999	Facilities and Activities Ashore
12000-12999	Civilian Personnel
13000-13999	Aeronautical and Astronautical Material

An “R” following the SSIC indicates that the directive is applicable only to the Marine Corps Reserve establishment (“MCO P1070R.2”).

Each order must also be assigned a consecutive point number. The consecutive point number follows the SSIC or the Reserve designation. Its purpose is to distinguish between orders issued by the same echelon of command with the same SSIC. For example, “MCO 1560.7” would identify a letter type order issued by HQMC.

When an order is substantially changed or revised, a new one is distributed and a revision letter is placed after the consecutive point number. “A” indicates the first revision, “B” the second, and so forth (“BnO 3570.4C”).

To save money, minor changes may be made with a black ink pen or by inserting a whole new page. Such changes will be recorded on the first page of a letter type order and on the record of changes page issued with every manual type order. This is important because you should never use a directive for guidance which is not current in both revision and change.

Message Identification

Messages are identified by serial numbers assigned throughout the year by HQMC.

Marine Corps Order

The Marine Corps order is the only written communication for establishing or changing Marine Corps policy. An order is a directive of continuing authority or information and/or a permanent reference. It generally requires continuous action. It is directed at overall functions and remains in effect for *nine years* unless canceled or otherwise altered. An order is distinguished in the filing system by the assignment of a consecutive point number that follows the SSIC. The two types of orders are:

- A letter type order, which contains less than thirty pages and is referred to less frequently than a manual type order. It may contain a cancellation date in order to reduce the effective period to less than nine years.
- A manual type order is referred to frequently, has a promulgation page, a change page, a locator page, and is maintained in a separate binder.

Marine Corps Bulletin	A bulletin is a directive that is not of continuing authority because it must have a cancellation date not in excess of 12 months from the date of issue.
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NAVMC	A NAVMC prescribes a method or a specific plan of action for carrying out policy, provides directions or details for operating a program or activity, and assigns responsibilities when there is no implementing MCO. (A NAVMC is the “how to” of policy.)
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ALMAR	An ALMAR is only released from the Commandant and serves as the CMC’s personal communication to all Marines.
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MarAdmin	A MarAdmin is released from HQMC to disseminate all routine (not just administrative) message traffic to all Marines.
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Other Directives

Not all important directives are issued through the Marine Corps directives system. Nevertheless, you must be familiar with the contents of the following publications, which are maintained in the master directives file of your unit:

- DOD Pay and Entitlements Manual.
- Joint Federal Travel Regulations.
- Manual for Courts-Martial.
- SECNAVINSTs: Secretary of the Navy issued instructions on various topics including the Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual.
- OPNAVINSTs: Chief of Naval Operations issued instructions on various subjects.

Marine Corps Order (Continued)

**Other Directives
(Continued)**

The following are not issued nor maintained in your unit's master file:

- Marine Corps technical publications.
- Marine Corps stocklist publications.
- Doctrinal publications such as FMFMs.
- Combat plans and orders.
- Special orders detailing individuals to specific duties or assignments.
- CMC White Letters: Personal messages from the Commandant to his commanders and officers in charge (OICs).

Summary

Today's Marine Corps needs effective writing more than ever before. Our complexity is growing and with it grows the need for writing that helps us cope with that complexity. Writing well can do no harm. Writing well can increase productivity, raise your credibility, and improve overall efficiency.

References

Reference Number or Author	Reference Title
SECNAV M-5216.5	Naval Correspondence Manual
SECNAVINST 1650.1H	Navy and Marine Corps Awards Manual
SECNAV M-5210.2	Standard Subject Identification Code Manual
MCO 5215.1K	The Marine Corps Directives Management System
MCO 5216.19A	Administrative Action (AA) Form
MCO 5216.20	HQMC Supplement to the DON Correspondence Manual

Additional Readings

Reference Number or Author	Reference Title
Government Printing Office	The GPO Style Manual

Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

Term or Acronym	Definition or Identification
AA	Administrative Action
CMC	Commandant of the Marine Corps
CO	Commanding Officer
DCP	Directives Control Point
DOD	Department of Defense
HQMC	Headquarters Marine Corps
OIC	Officer in charge
SSIC	Standard subject identification code

Notes
