

**UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
OFFICER CANDIDATES SCHOOL**



**ACADEMIC PREPARATION
GUIDE**

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THE OCS ACADEMIC PROGRAM

OCS Mission: to educate and train officer candidates in Marine Corps knowledge and skills within a controlled and challenging environment in order to evaluate and screen individuals for the leadership, moral, mental, and physical qualities required for commissioning as a Marine Corps officer.

1. **INTRODUCTION.** OCS accomplishes its mission through six and ten-week programs of instruction (POI) that are designed to quickly train and educate you as officer candidates in the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes you need to be evaluated on for possible commissioning as a Marine Corps officer. Each candidate will undergo a series of progressively challenging assessments that test your ability to comprehend and apply knowledge and skills taught previously. You will be expected to perform well not only as an individual but also while holding leadership positions. Marine Officers are expected to be highly effective learners given the scope, complexity, and variety of tasks they are expected to manage.

Thus, while at OCS, one important skill for you to master (and for us to evaluate) will be your ability to study, retain, and apply required information in a time constrained environment. Although you may have developed good study habits during your academic programs at school, your normal routines may not work here in this new environment. Time management conflicts, staff pressure, and the effects of terrain, weather, and personal comfort (or lack thereof) will combine to challenge your ability to learn.

Tools that you can use to prepare academically can be found in this packet. Use this guide to study and prepare for the academic rigors of OCS. Classes do change from time to time, so do not rely on online blogs or websites not officially affiliated with the Marine Corps or other candidates who have already graduated. Their information may be outdated and will not help you prepare.

2. **PURPOSE.** This document provides candidates with a variety of study techniques and tips to assist in mastering academic subjects while undergoing the rigors of training at OCS.

3. **OCS ACADEMIC EVALUATION.** The academic evaluation component of the OCS program of instruction comprises 25% of your overall evaluation during your time in the program. However, information taught in academic classes lays the foundation for how you will perform and be evaluated during many of the leadership performance examinations you will face. Failure to fully understand the information taught in the classroom and during practical application periods will, without a doubt, negatively impact your performance during leadership evaluations. Everything you need to know to be successful at OCS will be taught and trained formally during the program; however, candidates who invest time and effort in preparing early before arrival generally perform better than those who do not. This guide is not comprehensive and does not intend to provide you with all of the information you will learn and be evaluated on at OCS.

4. **EVALUATION TYPES.**

a. **Written Exams.** You will receive weekly classes on various military subjects required to build your basic entry level knowledge of Marine Corps tactics, history, ethics, and other related subjects. You will be tested weekly on the material you learned in the week or two prior through written exams that will factor into your overall GPA.

b. **Performance Examinations.** Many of the classes will be followed by a practical application in order to reinforce the lessons you have learned in class through demonstration and individual execution. These practical applications will consist of a variety of subjects such as leading fire team and squad level tactics in a field environment. Your ability to combine the lessons learned in class and the skills developed through practical application will prove critical during several performance examinations (the Safe Weapons Handling Exam, Situational Leadership Evaluations, etc.).

5. **DEFINITIONS.**

a. **Terminal Learning Objective (TLO).** The TLO informs the student of what they are expected to learn from the period of instruction. We will require that you show mastery of the subject matter during academic testing and/or during leadership performance evaluations. It is essential that the candidate understands and uses these LOs.

b. **Enabling Learning Objective (ELO)**. The ELO further dissects the TLO and gives the candidate a deeper understanding of the subject matter being presented. The ELO is written to further delineate what the candidate must do to accomplish the TLO. Each ELO has a test question directly derived from it, so this allows you to focus your studies.

6. **SOME BASIC STUDY TECHNIQUES.**

a. A range of techniques may be used to study for an exam, interview, or other similar events. Many of these techniques are well suited for certain applications but not for others. In fact, you may choose to combine several different study techniques that work well for you into an effective system that will help you master the material. In order for you to choose the system or series of study techniques that will be most effective for your individual situation, it is essential for you to consider a variety of factors. However, there are certain fundamental study techniques that you should keep in mind, regardless of the learning style that you find most effective, or the exact situation for which you are preparing.

b. First, anyone studying should identify specific goals and focus on achieving those goals. It is extremely important to define the overall goal and focus all your effort on achieving that goal. For example, if your goal is to pass Exam 2, you should focus all of your attention on studying the topics covered on that exam using the issued exam matrix and ignore anything else that might be a distraction for a period of time. Next, you should attempt to 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 in your own words or establishing parallels between it and other similar topics. Finally, try to vary your studying methods. In other words, try not to look at the material the same way each time. Even if you think you have a solid grasp, try to interpret the information in a different way, come up with another example of how the information can be applied, or change the strategy or learning style you are using to review the material.

5. **TAKING NOTES FROM A STUDENT OUTLINE - PREPARING TO TAKE NOTES**. Before you begin to take notes from the student outline (SO), you may want to follow a few guidelines in order to make sure you are prepared to study without being interrupted. First, you should have all the materials that you need to take notes ready and waiting. These materials may include several sheets of paper/index cards, a highlighter, and pens or pencils. In addition to these basic supplies, you may also want to have an eraser, pencil sharpener, and any other similar materials before you begin taking notes. Next, skim over the SO quickly and write down each key topic that is covered in the SO. This will allow you to identify main ideas that you should expand on while reading. Finally, review your notes from the SO, related SOs, and classroom instruction. This technique may be utilized during designated study periods and while on liberty – studying multiple times is essential for success. Utilize your SO to prepare for upcoming classes. You can read ahead and use the TLOs and ELOs to guide your note-taking.

7. **STUDYING WITH FLASH CARDS.**

a. 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. Usually, each flash card is simply an index card or sheet of paper that has a question, problem, or situation on one side of the card and the answer to the question or problem or the evaluation of the situation on the other side of the card. Flash cards are a very simple but effective way to study a topic. In fact, there are several key advantages to using flash cards to study for an exam, interview, or other similar purpose.

b. First, an individual can use flash cards to test his or her knowledge of a specific topic. In other words, flash cards can identify what you know about a particular topic and what needs further study. At the same time, it allows you to study and memorize the material as you go through each flashcard. Second, flash cards are small and easy to carry so it is very easy to take them anywhere. This allows you to use them to study for an exam, interview, or other similar purpose whenever there is time available. This can be extremely useful for an individual that has a very limited amount of time to study, as it allows you to study between classes, or any other time that you have a break. Finally, flashcards can be split up into groups easily so an individual can keep track of what he or she has studied already and what he or she still needs to study.

c. Flash cards will provide you with an accessible study tool. They will allow you to have the information at hand for any possible down time. By placing the information on 3x5 cards or small sheets of paper it will eliminate the bulky study guide and allow you to have your material at all times that the training schedule will permit. Examples of when to use flashcards are while you are waiting for the PX, haircut, in line at the chow hall, standing in formation prior to giving reports, or while on weekend liberty.

8. **SQ3R METHOD.**

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

(1) Before you actively read, Survey the SO. To do this, look over 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 you are surveying the material. Turn LOs and headings into questions so you are aware of what you need to know. Recall comments the instructor made about the material. Identify what you already know about the topic which may help you allocate study time more efficiently.

(3) As you Read, answer the questions you created in the previous step. Pay attention to bolded, italicized, or underlined words or phrases. Study visual aids such as graphs or maps, re-read sections that are unclear or difficult and ensure you read slowly.

(4) Recite each section after you have read it. Also, ask and answer questions aloud about what you have just covered or summarize it in your own words. Take notes on, highlight, or underline important points from the text and rewrite the information in your own words. Using a combination of reading, reciting, and writing will better the chances of retaining information. At this point, implementation of flashcards or some other form of paper-based note-taking is highly recommended.

(5) The Review process is ongoing. Begin using the SQ3R process several days before your exam to mitigate the need to cram. Review the SO. Formulate Questions as you survey the material. Read the SO. Recite each section, questions and answers, and rewrite notes. Review as necessary and if time permits.

8. **RECOMMENDED READING.** Upon arrival at OCS, you will be issued hard copies of *Leading Marines* and *Warfighting* and given reading assignments that will be followed by guided discussions. These foundational documents provide a common language for Marine leadership and tactical thought, and will enable you to lead more effectively. Prior familiarization with them will enhance your understanding of the material and save you some time at OCS.

a. MCWP 6-11: Leading Marines:

b. MCDP 1: Warfighting

c. MCDP 1-3: Tactics

d. Commandant's Professional Reading List for Entry-Level Officers (Candidates & Midshipmen):

<https://mca-marines.org/resource/commandants-professional-reading-list/>