Introduction to Graduate School Writing and Research

Dr. Sandra Leavitt
Director, Graduate Writing Center
and Thesis Processing Office

Fall 2021
Today’s Take Aways

1. We expect to hear your ideas and voice

2. Military and academic writing are similar and different

3. Writing, thinking, and research are closely linked

4. Quality of your research—and quality of your writing and thinking—depends on the quality of your sources
Expectations

Your voice is important

“Do you agree? Why or why not?”

We must challenge our own assumptions [and] be informed by the facts.... Our Navy benefits from vigorous intellectual debate.

~CNO, ADM John Richardson, Proceedings, 2016
Expectations

You’ll explore serious challenges

You’ll have new ideas, new thinking

NPS is the place to create a complete thought, away from the tyranny of the urgent.

~Col Todd Lyons, USMC, 2019
### Military Writing

1. **Share knowledge** … so all are on the same page

2. **Describe**
   - *Convey* orders, instructions
   - *Record* discussions and decisions
   - *Express* intentions

3. **Persuade** by logical argument and evidence

### Academic Writing

1. **Share knowledge** … show you know … explore, debate

2. **Explain**
   - *Explain* how you did it
   - *Critique* the work of others
   - *Add* new insights

3. **Persuade** by logical argument and evidence
Military Writing

1. **Standard** forms, sentences
2. “BLUF”
   - Topic, scope
   - Recommendations
3. Body
   - Relevant facts, narrowed
   - Competing solutions
   - NOT “Behind the scenes” methods or thinking

Academic Writing

1. **Standard** sections, freedom
2. “BLUF”
   - Topic, scope
   - Claim, thesis, argument
3. Body
   - Relevant facts + unknown
   - Competing explanations
   - YES, “Behind the scenes”
   - Proof
Military Writing
✓ Accuracy
✓ Clarity
✓ Concision
✓ Free of grammatical or mechanical error

Academic Writing
✓ Accuracy
✓ Clarity
✓ Concision
✓ Free of grammatical or mechanical error

Good writing is clear thinking made visible.
~Robert Wheeler
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military Writing</th>
<th>Academic Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brevity</td>
<td>1. Thoroughness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Overcapitalization</td>
<td>2. Capitalization “proper”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Mountains of acronyms</td>
<td>3. Acronym “light”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Plain language</td>
<td>4. Complex language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Institutional” voice</td>
<td>⚓️ ⚓️ ⚓️ ⚓️ ⚓️ ⚓️ ⚓️</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Source credits uncommon</td>
<td>5. Unique writing style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Limited sources</td>
<td>6. Source credits is crucial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Many sources</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sources in the 4-Step Research Process

1. Research Question
2. Hunt & Gather
3. Analyze
4. Write up & Share

MORE SOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS
MORE OF YOUR ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Repeat
What Do Sources Do for YOU?

1. **Provide existing knowledge**
   - Increase accuracy
   - Save time
   - Demonstrate your understanding of what we and you know thus far

2. **Increase the quality, rigor, and integrity of your work**
I. What types of knowledge?

- Research Questions
- Data
- Theories
- Methods
Another Way to Think about Knowledge

1. Descriptions—Who, what, when, where, how
   • What happened? By whom, and to whom?
   • What background and context do we need?
   • What have others studied? How?

2. Explanations—Why
   • How have others explained similar events?
   • Do their explanations make sense?
   • Can we generalize understanding to other similar cases?

3. Opportunities—What can we add?
   • Save time
   • Improve accuracy
   • Demonstrate understanding
Famine’s Link to Conflict: What do we know?

Ireland, Potato Famine (1845–49)
20–25 percent died

Why Ireland exported food as thousands starved

China, Great Leap Forward (1958–62)
40–60 million died

Nigerian Civil War (1967–69) military blockage
100,000 died from combat
1.5 mil died from starvation

Yemen Civil War (2017–18)
50,000 died from starvation after blockade
Why do famines happen?

1. Descriptive Data
   • Definitions
   • Locations, dates, deaths
   • Refugees and IDPs

2. Explanations
   “Famines are caused by acts of God”
   “Famines are caused by poverty”
   “Famines are caused by policy decisions”

3. Opportunities—What’s missing?

Why do governments implement policies that cause famine?
Why do governments implement policies that cause famine?

Psychopathic, revolutionary leaders?
Control of citizens?

Weak states?
Acts of war?

Policy: Where **should** we put our efforts and money?
2. Quality sources increase the quality, rigor, and integrity of your work

- Additional **quality sources**
- **Sources’ reputation** transfers to you
- Models for **academic norms**
- **Reliable foundation** for your analysis
What are “high quality” sources?

✓ Build on established theories and frameworks

✓ Contain trusted and transparent methods

✓ Come from reputable organizations, publishers, speakers, and researchers

Seek peer-reviewed, academic presses, and other trusted institutions (.edu, .gov, .org, .mil)

Be alert to bias!

Think critically, search deeply
Which is the better book?

Princeton University Press, 2015

*Eating People Is Wrong* and Other Essays on Famine, Its Past and Its Future

Cormac Ó Gráda

World's leading authorities on famine

Walker Books, 2011

*Mao’s Great Famine*

Frank Dikötter

Scholar, Univ. London, Hong Kong Univ.

Chinese archives
Today’s Take Aways

1. Hear from YOU

2. Anchor and Graduation Cap

3. Thinking + Research + Writing

4. Sources work for you