

MILITARY BRIEFING GUIDES¹

Following are some suggested approaches to briefings. You must determine the specific format of each briefing according to the purpose and the audience. Some briefings fit neatly into traditional formats; others do not.

We've assembled this guide to assist in preparing a briefing. These guides do not deal with mission briefings, situation briefings, command and staff briefings, or any other derivatives of the five-paragraph field order.

Ask yourself as you create a briefing, "Is this briefing to *inform* (describe facts) or to *request a decision*?"

Based on the purpose and audience, you decide how much information to include, what facts require explanation/interpretation, and how to defend the recommendation. By recognizing these different aspects of your briefing, you can analyze your own thinking process as you prepare. Keeping them separate in your mind will help you remember that just presenting facts is not the same as interpreting those facts. Further, correctly interpreting the problem is not the same as justifying your recommendation.

1. GENERIC ELEMENTS FOR ALL BRIEFINGS

a. *Introduction.*

(1) Introduce yourself to the senior officer and the audience. Early on, if not in the first sentence, summarize the bottom line and the major parts of the briefing. If you employ visual aids, ensure they show the title of the briefing.

(2) Open with a brief thought that is relevant to the briefing and gains the attention of the audience. (Your name and the purpose of the briefing do not accomplish this.)

b. *Development.*

(1) Cover the necessary background material. Follow an organizational plan that corresponds to your major parts and includes enough detail (not too much, not too little) to satisfy your audience. Stick to the subject.

(2) Show how and where you got your information. If you use visual aids, ensure they summarize each major part and, if appropriate, the minor parts.

c. *Conclusion.*

(1) Repeat your bottom line and major parts. Conclude with a sentence that clearly shows the audience you've finished.

(2) Ask for questions and comments.

¹ Taken and modified from "Writing and Speaking Skills for Army Leaders," CGSC Student Text 22-2, August 1998, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/comm-skills/st22-2/index.htm> (accessed July 19, 2007).

2. INFORMATION BRIEF

Information briefings all include an introduction, body, and a closing. The *introduction* contains the bottom line and the major parts summed up in a few short sentences. The *body* includes the discussion of the items, actions and analysis. These help your audience to understand the information you present. The *conclusion* draws together the briefing by recapping the main ideas, making a final statement and asking for questions.

We have reproduced as Figure 1 the format for an Information Briefing found in FM 101-5, page E-5.

3. DECISION BRIEF

Decision briefings, like an information briefing, include an introduction, body, and a closing. The *introduction* contains the bottom line and the major parts summed up in a few short sentences. The *body* includes the discussion of the evaluation criteria, proposed courses of action, and analysis. These help your audience to understand the proposed courses of action you present. The *conclusion* draws together the briefing by asking for and answering any questions, by showing how the courses of action rate against the evaluation criteria, restating the recommendation so that it only needs approval/disapproval, and requesting a decision.

We have reproduced as Figure 2 the format for a Decision Briefing found in FM 101-5, page E-6.

Format for an Information Brief

1. Introduction.

Greeting.

Address the person(s) being briefed. Identify yourself and your organization.

"Good morning, General Smith. I'm Captain Jones, the S3 of the 1st Bn 28th Artillery.

Type and Classification of Briefing.

"This is a SECRET information briefing."

"This is an UNCLASSIFIED decision briefing."

Purpose and Scope.

Give the big picture first.

Explain the purpose and scope of your briefing.

"The purpose of this briefing is to bring you up to date on our battalion's General Defense Plan."

"I will cover the battalion's action during the first 72 hours of a general alert."

Outline or Procedure.

Briefly summarize the key points and your general approach.

Explain any special procedures (demonstrations, displays, or tours). "During my briefing, I'll discuss the six phases of our plan. I'll refer to maps of our sector, and then my assistant will bring out a sand table to show you the expected flow of battle."

2. Body.

Arrange the main ideas in a logical sequence.

Use visual aids correctly to emphasize your main ideas.

Plan effective transitions from one main point to the next.

Be prepared to answer questions at any time.

3. Closing.

Ask for questions.

Briefly recap your main ideas and make a concluding statement.

Announce the next speaker.

Figure 1: Format for an Information Brief²

² Department of the Army, Field Manual 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations*, (Washington, DC, 31 May 1997), E-5.

Format for a Decision Brief

1. Introduction.

Military Greeting.

Statement of the type, classification, and purpose of the briefing.

A brief statement of the problem to be resolved.

2. Body.

Key facts bearing upon the problem.

Pertinent facts that might influence the decision.

An objective presentation of both positive and negative facts.

Necessary assumptions made to bridge any gaps in factual data.

Courses of Action.

A discussion of the various options that can solve the problem.

Analysis.

The criteria by which you will evaluate how to solve the problem (screening and evaluation).

A discussion of each course of action's relative advantages and disadvantages.

3. Comparison.

Describe why the selected solution is best.

4. Questions.

5. Restatement of the Recommendations so that it only needs approval/disapproval.

6. Request a decision.

Figure 2: Format for a Decision Brief³

³ Department of the Army, Field Manual 101-5, *Staff Organization and Operations* (Washington, DC, 31 May 1997), E-6.

DESIGNING VISUAL SUPPORTS

Virtually any presentation gets better with visual support. You can increase the effectiveness of your visuals with these guidelines. Notice we said *guidelines*. If you have a better method, use it.

More and more, the trend in the Army is to use computer generated presentations. The available software we have enables speakers to create colorful slides. This medium is especially useful in auditoriums before large groups. However, the real danger for you is that the visuals become the presentation. As the speaker, you are the presenter. It is *your* presentation.

PURPOSE

Study your outline to decide where you need visuals to illustrate or clarify your message. Once you've identified those places, sketch the idea(s) that best augments your message. Remember, the most effective visuals may not be words and phrases, but pictures and symbols. As you draft each visual, keep the following general questions in mind.

- Relevance: Is it necessary and appropriate?
- Focus: Does it communicate only one idea?
- Organization: Does it have balance and visual appeal--all the right parts in the right places, sizes, and colors--without becoming a distraction?
- Coherence: Do the visuals reinforce your idea(s) or do you need to explain the elements?

MESSAGE

Always limit the amount of text on each visual (whether viewgraphs, computer generated slides (e.g., PowerPoint Presentation) or butcher paper). Just glance at any billboard. The best billboards communicate their messages in about five words.

You want your audience to skim the visual in a glance and return the focus to you. Use a minimal number of words to focus on your message.

Limit each visual to one central idea. It's better to use two or more simple viewgraphs or slides than a complex, cluttered one. Your visuals are too complex if you find yourself spending a lot of time during rehearsal explaining or interpreting it.

Inspect the set of visuals for continuity. Ensure they present a coherent visual message.

In the Army we have a hybrid situation in which visual supports sometimes become documents. The speaker gives out a "hard copy" of the visuals, and these become an unofficial memorandum for record. From the standpoint of communications effectiveness, this custom is risky. We're trying to do two things at once: supporting our brief *and* providing a historical record. The solution to this is to put the details on paper and provide them after the presentation, as appropriate. If you give the packets out before or during the briefing, you'll lose your audience while they look through the packets.

LETTERING

Maintain consistencies in type style, size, format, and borders. When generating visuals by computer, select the simplest typefaces--no extra lines, no curly-cues. Use boldface type for headers and medium for main text. To show emphasis or contrast, use a second typeface or color.

LAYOUT

A horizontal format about 6 by 9 inches is best for viewgraphs and will also maintain the desirable 2 by 3 proportion for slides. Vertical formats usually don't fit conventional screens.

When your visuals include a heading and supporting points, make them more effective with some graphic applications--art, symbol, color, border, etc.

Do you need line drawings or photographs? Try using cutaways or close-ups. Your audience will recognize them quicker than overall views.

Remember to maintain an organizational balance. Don't obscure or distract from the thesis with items of lesser importance even though neatly presented on slides.

Finally, take advantage of "white space" (margins and space between lines of text) to help your reader skim.

COLOR

Think about the effectiveness of the colorful commercials that you see on television, or billboards, in magazines, and newspaper inserts. When they're effective, we can't resist. Good advertisers use the psychology of color to sell ideas, services, and merchandise. Good speakers can do likewise.

- Color can increase an audience's willingness to read up to 80 percent, reduce error of understanding by 15 percent, and accelerate learning and recall by 78 percent (*Audio-Visual Communication*, Nov 78, 14).

- **RED** stimulates. Usually red means stop, danger, or problem, be cautious. It may signal strength, aggression, or warning. This is not a bad color for OPFOR. With red, the eye focuses at a point behind the retina. The eye's lens thickens, bringing the color nearer and making it appear larger. As a result, the eye--and the mind--perceives red as *advancing*. Avoid using red and similar colors like orange for letters and words.

- **BLUE** cools, and it generally appeals to men more than it appeals to women. Just the opposite of red, blue focuses at a point in front of the retina. The lens flattens, pushing the color away. Eyes--and mind--perceive blue as *receding*.

- **GREEN** refreshes and makes a good background color. It signals the positive.

- **ORANGE** activates. It has high attention value without the aggressive potential of red. Avoid using red and similar colors like orange for letters and words.

- **YELLOW** is the subtlest high-lighter and can signal caution.

- **VIOLET** subdues. Be careful--it might lull your audience to sleep.

- **GRAY** can suggest good taste and conservatism.
- **OFF-WHITES** (tan, india, and ivory) offer a change from conventional white.

BACKGROUND

Clear transparencies (viewgraphs or slides) yield a bright, white background. You can also use this clear background when creating computer graphical presentation (e.g., PowerPoint slides). Although acceptable, the glare can hurt readability, especially in a long briefing. Pale blue, yellow, or green backgrounds are much easier on your audience's eyes, reduce glare, and hide specks and smudges.

CONTRAST

From the color wheel (Figure 3), pick colors with appropriate contrast. Notice that the colors opposite each other contrast more while the colors next to each other contrast least. Remember that all colors vary with different lighting, so be prepared to adjust after you rehearse in the presentation room.

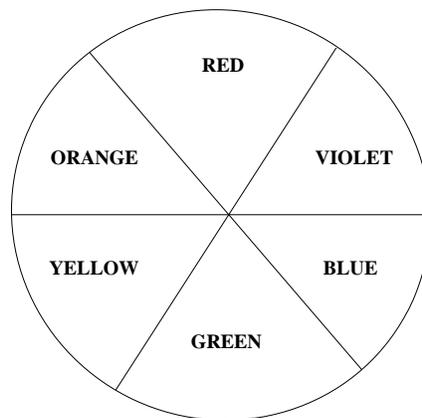


Figure 3: Color Wheel

With state-of-the-art computer technology, the whole rainbow can be yours. So can all the other advantages of modern graphics software: critical alignment, masking, air brushing, color graduation, reducing, enlarging, variable type, fonts, etc. Just remember to be careful to keep your priorities in order. You want to--

- Simplify information.
- Illustrate parts and relationships.
- Support--not distract from--the speaker.

ASSESSING SPEAKING

As a student, you need to understand how your instructors will evaluate your verbal communications. Instructors will evaluate your speaking ability on the same basis they use to evaluate your writing: **Introduction, Discussion, Conclusion, and Style.**

You will find it helpful to focus first on your **Introduction**. Does your attention step grab and retain attention? Have you identified your purpose? Does your thesis unify all the major parts of your speech? Finally, do you introduce the major parts in your introduction?

Next consider the body of your speech, the **Discussion**. Have you clarified, focused, and defined your major parts to achieve the effect you want? Are your assumptions relevant? Do your assumptions support the argument? Do your facts, opinions, and evidence support your thesis? Have you clearly explained the connection between the evidence and your thesis? Do your transitions tie all the parts together and keep your audience's interest? Are your visual aids stimulating and appropriate for the briefing?

Now look at your **Conclusion**. Does it reinforce the briefing? Have you restated your major parts and thesis? Have you coordinated your conclusion with the introduction? Have you verified that you did not introduce new information in your conclusion?

Finally examine your **Style**. Are your words precise and appropriate to the audience? Listen to how you say what you say, your tone, to determine if it is appropriate for your purpose and audience. Is your enunciation clear and your rate appropriate? Do you include pauses? Does your body language reinforce or detract from your speech? Do you maintain control of yourself and the situation? Consider how you have used your equipment and the setting. Does your appearance look professional?