

# Section 1



## EFFECTIVE ARMY BRIEFING

### Key Points

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- 1 The Four Types of Army Briefings
- 2 The Information Briefing
- 3 Four Steps to Effective Briefings

Men who can command words to serve their thoughts and feelings are well on their way to commanding men to serve their purposes.

BG S. L. A. Marshall

From P. G. Tsouras, ed., *The Greenhill Book of Military Quotations*

## Introduction

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**Briefings** are the most efficient and common means to present information to commanders, staffers, Soldiers, or other specified audiences. You conduct briefings when your listeners need information quickly, when they can get together conveniently, and when they need to decide how to act on that information. Briefings are often preferred to written or even electronic communication because they are direct, immediate, and interpersonal. When lives may be at stake and units must carry out the right decisions, most decision makers prefer the immediate physical setting of the military briefing.

While this lesson focuses on the development of briefing skills for leaders, you must keep in mind that communication is a two-way process. The speaker has a responsibility to clearly present the material, and this involves knowing the needs and expectations of the audience. But the listener also has responsibilities—not only to listen, but to provide *feedback* to the speaker to confirm that the message has been received and understood. As you'll learn in the next section, leaders not only speak, they listen!

This section will briefly introduce you to the four basic types of Army briefings. The most fundamental, the information briefing, aims to inform the listener and gain his or her understanding. The second type, the decision briefing, aims to obtain an answer or a decision. A commander or staff officer usually presents the third, the mission briefing—typically in critical situations to reinforce decisions or orders and to provide details and guidance necessary for the mission's success. The fourth type is the staff briefing, focused on ensuring a coordinated or unified effort among commanders and staffers responsible for various aspects of a mission.

You must be able to decide which type of briefing and which techniques to use depending on the situation, the briefing's purpose, the response you want, and your role and mission as briefer.

The ability to construct and deliver an effective briefing is a fundamental leadership action. As a Cadet with the immediate goal of building effective communication skills, you will begin with the information briefing. The goal of military information briefings is to enable sound decisions and problem solving. Therefore, the information must be current, accurate, clear, and credible. It must also meet the needs and expectations of your audience. Your analysis of facts and opinions must be convincing and thorough.

The ability to deliver information clearly and confidently is as much a leader skill as making a motivational speech to Soldiers who are about to depart on a dangerous mission. One of the best ways to become an effective briefer is to study military leaders who are noted for their ability to assess the needs of the audience, adapt information and communication style, and present ideas clearly.

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### briefings

*briefings are a way to present information to commanders, staffers, or other designated audiences—you decide which techniques to use depending on the purpose of the briefing, the response you want, and the briefer's role*

## The Four Types of Army Briefings

There are four types of Army briefings: *the information briefing*, *the decision briefing*, *the mission briefing*, and *the staff briefing*. They are briefly described below.

1. **Information Briefing.** The information briefing delivers information in a form the audience can understand and use. It does not include conclusions or recommendations. It does not require decisions.
2. **Decision Briefing.** A decision briefing obtains an answer to a question or results in a decision on a course of action. It presents the recommended solution resulting from analysis or study of a problem or problem area. Decision briefings vary in formality and detail, depending on the level of command and the decision makers' knowledge of the subject.
3. **Mission Briefing.** A mission briefing's goal is to secure a coordinated or unified effort toward accomplishing the mission. It often involves the exchange of information, the announcement of decisions within a command, the issuance of directives, or the presentation of guidance.
4. **Staff Briefing.** The staff briefing may have characteristics of information briefings, decision briefings, and mission briefings. The purpose of a staff briefing is to coordinate unit efforts by informing the commander and staff of the current situation. The person who convenes the staff briefing sets the agenda. Staff representatives each present relevant information from their functional areas. Staff briefings may involve exchange of information, announcement of decisions, issuance of directives, or presentation of guidance.

## The Information Briefing

The information briefing focuses on the clear and useful communication of facts and information. The information will always have a background: how current it is, how reliable it is, and why you are communicating it—including how it meets the needs and expectations of those you are briefing. Examples of information appropriate for an information briefing include:

- high-priority or time-sensitive information requiring immediate attention
- complex information, including complicated plans, procedures, systems, situations, statistics, and charts requiring detailed explanation
- controversial information requiring elaboration and explanation.

Since the information briefing's intent is to inform the audience as efficiently as possible, you will use a standard format.

### The Format for an Information Briefing

#### 1. Introduction

- **Greeting.** Address the person(s) you are briefing. Identify yourself and your organization. "Good morning, Colonel Jones. I'm Lieutenant Kelly, the Assistant S3 of the 1st Battalion 502d Infantry."
- **Type and Classification.** Explain the briefing's classification. "This is a SECRET information briefing," or "This is an UNCLASSIFIED information briefing."
- **Purpose and Scope.** State the purpose first: Explain your briefing's purpose and scope. "The purpose of this briefing is to bring you up to date on the company perimeter defense plan," or "I will cover the operations plan for FTX Team Spirit."

- *Outline or Procedure.* Briefly summarize the main point, key supporting points, and your general approach. Explain any special procedures (demonstrations, displays, or tours). Example: “During my briefing, I’ll discuss the four 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 sequence of the movement to contact.”

## 2. Body

Arrange the main points in a logical sequence. Use visual aids correctly to emphasize your main and supporting 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 restate your main ideas and make a concluding statement.

# Four Steps to Effective Briefings

Careful preparation is the key to effective briefings, whatever the purpose. Once you’ve been tasked to present a briefing, you should *begin to prepare immediately by analyzing the situation—including your intent—and your audience’s needs and expectations.*

## 1. Analyze the Situation

Without an analysis of the briefing situation and a resulting plan for constructing and delivering the briefing, you will waste time and risk failure. Unlike a document, a briefing happens at a specific place and time. If all aspects of the briefing, including the content and the delivery, are not carefully coordinated, you may not effectively communicate. You begin to analyze the situation by focusing on the purpose, audience, and the occasion by asking:

- What is my intent or purpose for briefing?
- Whom am I briefing?
- How well does the audience know the subject?
- What does the audience expect from me?
- What information does it need?

Before briefing an audience, you must learn about its needs and expectations. Will your audience be relaxed or impatient? Are you a credible presenter or do you need to establish credibility? Are you there to present facts or to make a recommendation? You must understand how your audience’s traits relate to the intent and purpose of the briefing. The purpose determines what kind of briefing you present. The time allocated, audience, and location will help you determine the amount of effort and time needed to prepare. Always check on the availability of physical facilities, visual aids, and other support as early as possible.

Once you have analyzed your intent, purpose, and audience, you should prepare a detailed presentation plan. You should also carefully schedule your preparation milestones and formulate a briefing outline, which you will fully develop during the construction phase. Finally, you initially estimate the deadlines for each task, schedule facilities for rehearsal, and request critiques from others.

## 2. Construct the Briefing

When constructing a briefing, it is useful to follow a systematic process of *researching, organizing, drafting, revising, and proofing.* Here are the major steps in constructing an effective briefing:

### Research

Researching for a military briefing is frequently “capturing what you know” by bringing together the information you have gathered from various sources. Use brainstorming

*A briefing assignment has four steps that correspond to the four activities of the operations process:*

*Plan: Analyze the situation and prepare a briefing outline*

*Prepare: Construct the briefing*

*Execute: Deliver the briefing*

*Assess: Follow up.*

*Always check on the availability of physical facilities, visual aids, and other support as early as possible.*

and mind-mapping to help you collect information focused on your purpose and audience. When researching, you:

- collect material
- ensure you know the subject thoroughly
- ensure you have enough (but not too much) information.

### Organize

In organizing, you sort all the information gained during your research. You then arrange the information to best suit your purpose. You should also answer these questions: Which parts of the information are of major concern? Which are minor? What should come first? Last? What are the logical connections?

When you organize, your objective is to create your main point—your controlling idea—as a simple statement summarizing the key information from your research. Then you should create two to five statements that directly support the controlling idea and effectively cover the key information. These are your “bottom line” and main supporting points, and they should always be stated at the beginning of the briefing.

Test and revise both your substance and organization. Eventually you’ll find the information that’s needed to properly focus your ideas for the audience and answer all potential questions and objections. While organizing, you should also choose your visual aids to suit the situation and begin to consider how you will deliver your information in the time available. In other words, when organizing, you:

- isolate key points
- arrange key points in logical order
- ensure you have supporting data to validate the key points
- select visual aids.

The goal of all this labor is an outline that is easy to transform into a draft.

### Draft

In the draft you put your ideas into words (and onto visuals)—this is your first effort at full expression. Write out whatever you’ve outlined during organizing, but—unless the situation requires it—avoid writing a script. A script tends to make your delivery inflexible. Concentrate on how you will communicate your controlling idea, your main points, and your supporting evidence. Focus on the substance you’ve created and its organization and choose the wording that will best communicate with your audience. Coordinate the text of your draft with your visuals, demonstrations, or other activities.

### Revising, Proofing, and Rehearsing

After letting your draft “cool,” it’s useful to revise your briefing to make sure the vocabulary is suitable for the audience. In this regard, you should replace any jargon that listeners may not understand with terms that are familiar to them. After revising, you should proofread (“proof”) for *both the oral and written components of the briefing*. Check and confirm pronunciation of words, including individuals’ names and place names, and carefully proof all handouts and visuals. To confirm pronunciation and spelling, use standard references such as a current collegiate dictionary and a collegiate grammar handbook.

To ensure the effective delivery of an information or other type of briefing, there is simply no substitute for rehearsing with colleagues who can act the part of the audience and provide you with useful feedback. You should time your rehearsals, and, if possible, rehearse in the location in which you will deliver the briefing. The closer your rehearsal can be to the real thing, the greater will be your confidence and the better your performance under pressure.

### 3. Deliver the Briefing

When delivering the information briefing, a key is to *understand whether you are getting through to your audience*. Therefore, it is critical to maintain eye contact throughout the audience, throughout the entire briefing. A second key is to *be perceived as a credible briefer*. Recognize that as a junior leader, no one is going to expect you to speak like a seasoned senior officer, nor is it appropriate for you to do so. Be confident, but never try to come across as infallible, which others will often see as arrogance. Effective briefers typically combine these traits—they are:

- confident
- relaxed
- articulate
- knowledgeable
- considerate.

While you are delivering the briefing, you must:

- present the subject as intended and ensure that the audience understands it
- be brief
- speak to express your points and information, not impress the audience
- use visuals and other aids to clarify, not entertain
- be ready for interruptions and questions at any point.

### 4. Follow Up

When the briefing is over, it is important to prepare a **memorandum for record (MFR)** to record the subject, date, time, and place of the briefing and the ranks, names, and positions of those present. For an information briefing, concisely provide the content of the briefing. For other types of briefings, you include recommendations and their approval, disapproval, or approval with modification, as well as any instruction or directed action, as appropriate. You should distribute the MFR to those who must act on the information and to those whose operations or plans the briefing's contents may influence.

#### memorandum for record (MFR)

*a report recording the subject, content, date, time, and place of a briefing and the ranks, names, and positions of those present*

#### Critical Thinking

What are some similarities and differences between preparing and delivering presentations in your college studies and Army briefings?

#### Critical Thinking

Divide a sheet of paper into two columns. Label one column "Characteristics of an Effective Briefer." Label the other "Characteristics of an Ineffective Briefer." In the two columns, list and briefly explain what you believe to be five or more important characteristics of successful and unsuccessful briefings. Then analyze your own strengths and weaknesses as a speaker, and think about how to improve.



# CONCLUSION

In the Army, and especially in the rapidly changing Contemporary Operating Environment, a leader must know what's going on and what needs to be done. Leaders must also be able to communicate their intent to others. It is especially critical that you, as a junior leader, be able to efficiently and accurately communicate information to your superiors and your Soldiers—whether that information is the enemy's current location and strength; the commander's intent for accomplishing the mission; or the plan of actions your unit must take upon seizing an objective.

In spite of today's technology, there is no more effective or immediate method of communicating information than the briefing. To develop as a leader, you must develop your abilities as an effective briefer. Consider supplementing the communications skills instruction and practice you receive as part of your ROTC studies with a public speaking course at your college and participation in organizations such as Toastmasters ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)).

Also recognize that development of your speaking and writing skills is complementary when you focus on the Army's "corporate standard" for communication. The standards for Army briefings are essentially the same as for effective Army writing: "clear, concise, organized, and right to the point." To implement the standard, put your main points up front, use the active voice, use simple words and phrases, use shorter sentences and paragraphs, and package your information for quick understanding. Following these guidelines, your briefings will succeed, and you will set the standards for those you lead.

## Key Words

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**briefings**

**memorandum for record (MFR)**

## Learning Assessment

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1. What are the four types of military briefings and how do you distinguish among them?
2. In what way is the information briefing the most fundamental of the four types?
3. What are the four steps you must take to brief effectively?

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