

Lesson 9

Basic Command and Staff Principles



Key Terms

coordinating staff
course of action
echelon
personal staff
special staff

What You Will Learn to Do

- Demonstrate command and staff principles while performing the duties of an earned leadership position within your cadet battalion

Linked Core Abilities

- Communicate using verbal, nonverbal, visual, and written techniques
- Apply critical thinking techniques

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Describe staff responsibilities and three common procedures used to coordinate staff actions
- Compare the three types of staffs and their relationship to the commander
- List the nine-step sequence of command and staff actions in the correct order
- Clarify the scope and purpose of the commander's estimate
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

As commanders or staff officers in your cadet battalion, being prepared to meet the challenges of your position is a major responsibility. Your success or failure may not depend only on your abilities as a leader but also on how well you execute command and staff actions and can work with the subordinate commanders and staff officers of the battalion.

After completing this lesson, you will have a better understanding of command and staff procedures and how they relate to your duties in your cadet battalion. This lesson explains command and staff authority and responsibilities, and the principles underlying delegation of authority, command and staff actions, staff organization and operations, and the sequence of actions in making and executing decisions.

Model Cadet Battalion Organization

Now that you are in a principal leadership position in your cadet battalion, your job may require you to coordinate activities or work in conjunction with the personnel assigned to those positions. To be an effective leader, therefore, you should know all of these positions and their related duties. Studying them will also reinforce your knowledge of the chain of command. These positions are shown in Figure 1.9.1.

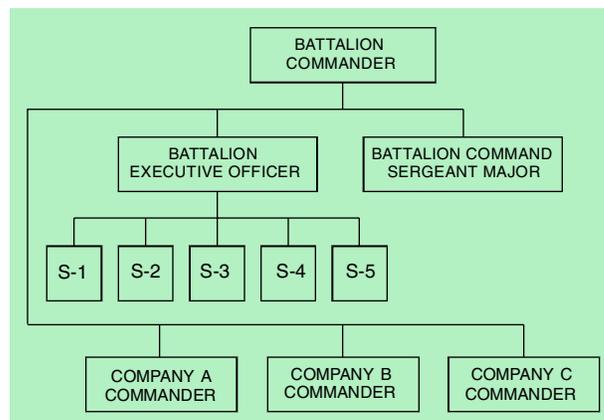
Your cadet battalion may contain additional positions or list different duties for them; however, the information provided outlines a model cadet battalion organizational structure and its associated chain of command.

Command Authority and Responsibilities

Command is the authority that a commander lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment. With authority comes responsibility.

Figure 1.9.1: Battalion organization

Courtesy of CACI and the US Army.



Command Responsibility

Command responsibility is a moral and legal obligation. Commanders alone are responsible for all that their unit does or fails to do. Through a chain of command, commanders hold each subordinate commander and staff officer responsible for all that their unit or section does or fails to do. If it becomes necessary to bypass the normal chain of command, both the commander issuing and the one receiving the order must notify any intermediate supervisors of the situation as soon as possible.

Note

Battalions are the lowest level at which the U.S. Army authorizes a staff.

Importance of a Staff

Commanders must effectively use available resources for planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling people and units to accomplish their missions. No one individual can personally direct, coordinate, and supervise the operation of a battalion-size unit or larger. Regardless of how capable, educated, experienced, or energetic commanders may be, they must have assistance. A group of officers and senior noncommissioned officers provide this assistance. They reduce their commander's burden by assuming responsibility for and accomplishing as many of the routine matters of command as possible. This leaves commanders to serve in leadership roles as intended.

Delegation of Authority

To be totally effective, commanders and their staffs must work as a cohesive team. Staffs achieve this by having a thorough understanding of the policies of their commander. Staff authority varies with the degree of authority delegated to it by the commander. Commanders can delegate as much authority to subordinates as considered necessary, but under no circumstances can they delegate any part of their responsibility. Additionally, the following command functions should remain with commanders.

- **Developing concepts for estimates and plans**
- **Processing and disseminating their guidance and concepts**
- **Ensuring coordination of the effort of the command**
- **Supervising the execution of decisions**

The normal delegation is for staffs to take final action on matters of command policy within their section's jurisdiction. This frees commanders to focus their attention on the essential aspects of command. Authority delegated to staff officers varies with the mission of the unit, the immediacy of the task, and the relationship of the staff section's area of interest to the unit's primary mission.

Command and Staff Actions

Command and staff actions must be accurate and timely. That is, the staff must identify promptly and define accurately the decisive elements of each problem. To this end, commanders organize their staffs to

- **Be immediately responsive to the needs of the command**
- **Remain abreast of the situation and to ensure that they consider all pertinent factors**
- **Reduce the time needed for control, integration, and coordination of tasks**
- **Minimize the possibilities of error**
- **Minimize their requirements for detailed supervision of routine matters**

Staff Authority and Responsibilities

Staffs do not have command authority and are not in the chain of command. The only authority they exercise is over the members of their own section and what their commander delegates to them.

Commanders assign staff officers certain specific functional areas of responsibility. To carry out these command responsibilities effectively, commanders then give each staff section specific duties. When commanders have chosen a **course of action**, it is the duty of the staffs to prepare and issue the necessary orders and to supervise their execution. Staff officers should always issue orders for, or in the name of, their commander; however, responsibility for those orders still remains with the commander. Other staff responsibilities include the following:

- **Securing information and furnishing advice as the commander may require. Staff officers also provide information to other staffs and to other agencies and units.**
- **Analyzing information as a basis for making recommendations to the commander and other agencies.**
- **Preparing the details of the commander's plans and orders. Each staff section prepares its appropriate part of the plan or order.**
- **Translating decisions and plans into orders and transmitting the orders to each command element.**
- **Supervising (to the extent authorized by the commander) the execution of the plans and/or orders. Staff officers accomplish supervision by way of conducting visits or inspections and preparing reports.**
- **Taking other actions as necessary to carry out the commander's intentions.**

The effectiveness of a staff depends on the professional qualifications of its members. Staff officers must possess the qualities of leadership and the ability to apply them in a staff role. They must have a thorough understanding of the organization, capabilities, limitations, and operating techniques of the command. As a rule, experience in a position that is of equal or lesser responsibility to the current or proposed staff position is a prerequisite to the assignment of a staff officer.

Key Note Term

course of action – a decision on how to proceed; a plan

Staff Organization

Good staff organization assists a commander by decreasing the number of routine items requiring decision. Through effective staff procedures, staffs can speed up the processing of information into material useful to the commander and can improve the quality of the product that they develop. Efficient staff techniques minimize possible delays in preparing and transmitting plans and instructions to subordinates.

Note

The U.S. Army General Staff established in 1903 forms the basis for the Army's present staff system.

Regardless of its organization, a staff must apply the principles of unity of command and direction, span of control, delegation of authority, and the grouping of compatible and related activities. Consequently, staff organization depends on the following factors:

- **The unit's mission.** This is the primary consideration for everything that the commander does and for the operation of the unit.
- **Activities conducted by the unit.** The unit's mission and its activities go hand-in-hand. For example, all of the duties and responsibilities that make up the unit's activities—especially those required to accomplish the unit's mission—are fundamental to the organization and functioning of a staff.
- **Emphasis on broad fields of interest.** Regardless of the mission, command interests can be divided into five broad fields: personnel (S-1), intelligence (S-2), operations and training (S-3), logistics (S-4), and civil-military operations (S-5). The emphasis placed on each of these broad fields of interest, and the specialized activities required for each, vary according to the mission and the activities required to accomplish the mission. For example, within your JROTC battalion, the S-2 may also handle public affairs matters, while the S-5 could be assigned as the special project's officer. Although military staffs may vary in organization and specific titles of its staff members, they do possess certain common characteristics. Functional responsibilities are the basis for military staff organization.
- **Laws and regulations.** Army regulations, the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and other directives require special relationships between certain staff officers and the commander.

To be successful, the staff must work together. No staff officer can work alone and expect to get the job done. Each staff officer must actively pursue every scrap of information that will help the commander operate. Staff officers continually exchange information with staff officers from higher headquarters, subordinate unit leaders, and among themselves.

Types of Staffs

Each type of staff consists of three groups of staff officers plus liaison officers. These three groups are the **coordinating staff** officers, **special staff** officers, and the commander's **personal staff** officers.

Key Note Terms

coordinating staff – principal staff assistants to the commander

special staff – assists the commander in professional, technical, and other areas of interest in the command

personal staff – officers who work under the immediate control of the commander

Coordinating staff officers are the principal staff assistants to the commander. Each staff officer specializes in one (or a combination) of the broad fields of interest mentioned for S-1 through S-5.

Special staff officers assist the commander in professional, technical, and other functional areas of interest in the command. The specific number and duties of special staff officers vary at each level of command, and they may also be unit commanders. Special staffs may include the following personnel:

- **Signal officer**
- **Maintenance officer**
- **Logistics readiness officer**
- **Aviation officer**
- **Chemical officer**
- **Provost marshal**
- **Public affairs officer**
- **Chaplain (see Figure 1.9.2)**
- **Surgeon**

Personal staff officers work under the immediate control of the commander. Typical personal staff members include the command sergeant major and, at higher levels, the inspector general and staff judge advocate.

Executive Officer

An executive officer (XO) directs, coordinates, and supervises the efforts of the coordinating and special staffs. The XO's other duties are as follows:

- **Formulating, recommending, and announcing staff operating policies**
- **Keeping the commander informed**

Figure 1.9.2: Special staff members include chaplains

Courtesy of the US Army.



- **Assuming command in the absence of the commander**
- **Reviewing plans, orders, and staff actions**
- **Approving staff actions**
- **Supervising the execution of orders**

Common Staff Procedures

Staff officers use certain common procedures to coordinate staff action. In addition to staff coordination, these include visits and inspections, conferences, briefings, and reports.

Staff coordination is the process of making certain that all pieces of a staff action fit together. The responsible, or action, officer and all other interested staff officers examine and make adjustments to any subactions of the project. Staff officers then determine the proper action within their section's area of interest. Finally, the action officer has the added responsibility to complete the coordination with other commanders and staff sections, as appropriate.

Staff officers make staff visits to obtain information for the commander, observe the execution of orders, and assist subordinate unit commanders. Concerning the first two points, the information that staff officers obtain can indicate to their commander how effectively or efficiently subordinate units are executing command decisions. Concerning the last item, a vital part of the staff officer's job is to discover and help subordinate elements to resolve internal problems. On occasion, staffs may combine staff visits with command-directed inspections.

Commanders and/or staffs conduct inspections to ascertain the condition of the command. Using checklists prepared by the various staff sections, commanders and staffs conduct inspections to collect positive and negative information from which the commander can determine the readiness of the unit to accomplish its mission.

Commanders and staff officers frequently participate in conferences. Conferences often replace the need for staff visits and certain types of correspondence. Commanders and staffs call conferences to accomplish the following objectives.

- **Determine and evaluate facts by exchanging information and ideas**
- **Solve problems (particularly new ones)**
- **Coordinate actions, including arriving at the best possible decision or reaching agreement in a particular area**
- **Formulate policy**
- **Instruct, counsel, or advise**

Staff briefings ensure a coordinated or unified effort by the entire staff. The executive officer usually presides over these briefings. The XO calls on each staff section representative to exchange information or guidance, present matters of interest to the command, or present matters that require staff coordination and decision.

Command and staff channels are two of the channels through which orders, instructions, and information flow within a command.

Command channels transmit all orders and instructions to subordinate units. These channels are commander-to-commander, and all orders transmitted are in the name of the commander.

Staff channels coordinate and transmit information and operating instructions to comparable staff elements and to subordinate commanders. Both in planning and conducting operations, staff officers of a higher headquarters frequently need to contact comparable staff elements of subordinate headquarters. However, a staff officer of a higher headquarters has no authority over the staff of the subordinate headquarters.

Sequence of Command and Staff Actions

Commanders and their staffs often initiate planning an action before they receive a mission. After receipt of the mission, they continue to plan for contingencies that require a command decision. The tools used to assist commanders and staffs in making these decisions are the problem-solving/decision-making processes. Completing actions in a uniform sequence assures commanders that they are making decisions based on all available information and are using staff assistance to the maximum.

Additionally, a uniform sequence makes it possible for staff officers to anticipate the needs of each step. This results in faster and better prepared staff actions. Making and executing decisions involve a series of separate actions.

The following nine steps are those used by commanders and their staffs to arrive at decisions.

Step 1: Mission

Command and staff actions begin with the receipt of a mission from a higher headquarters and/or the development of a mission by the unit commander. The commander then analyzes the mission to identify the specific tasks the unit must accomplish.

Step 2: Information Available

The staff provides any available information to the commander, who also attempts to obtain additional information from the next higher commander as early as possible. After analyzing the mission and reviewing the available information, the commander issues the planning guidance (Step 3).

Step 3: Planning Guidance

The planning guidance is the commander's assistance to a staff in preparing or revising their estimates. This guidance spans more than one step. The amount of planning guidance varies with each mission, the volume and validity of the information available, the situation, and the experience of the commander and staff. The commander does not select a course of action at this time because doing so would prevent objective and unbiased staff estimates.

Step 4: Staff Estimates

Based on the mission and planning guidance, the coordinating staff sections prepare their staff estimates. The special staff, who may also prepare their own estimates, assists them. Coordinated staff estimates result in recommendations as to what specific actions the commander may take to accomplish the mission.

Step 5: Commander's Estimate and Decision

In this step, the commander considers the recommendations of the staff, completes his or her own estimate, and announces a decision. Following the decision (the last step of the estimate), the commander provides the staff with an overall concept of how the commander wants the operation conducted (known as the commander's concept, which is the basis for the preparation of orders).

Step 6: Preparation of Plans or Orders

After staff members completely understand the mission, they carefully analyze the decision and commander's concept to determine what actions the unit must take to conduct a successful operation. From this analysis comes the development of plans or orders.

Step 7: Approval

Staffs normally submit the plans or orders to the commander for approval before submitting them for publication; however, the staff may omit this step based on the urgency of the situation and/or if the commander previously delegated that authority.

Step 8: Publication of Plans or Orders

See Step 7.

Step 9: Command and Staff Supervision

Supervision of the orders must be continuous if the mission is to be successful. This could well be the most important step. Without proper supervision, the best plan may fail. Proper supervision also allows the commander and staff to be constantly abreast of the situation and able to make changes as necessary.

The Estimate of the Situation in the Sequence of Command and Staff Actions

The estimate of the situation is a vital part of the decision-making process. Estimates have been an integral part of military procedures ever since the first man fought his first war. The intellectual and perceptive reasoning that must go into the estimate form the basis for sound recommendations by staff officers and sound decisions by commanders. History tells us that great military leaders invariably adopted a logical sequence of thought in their planning processes, similar to those used in the modern estimate of the situation.

Learning from history

Frederick the Great, in secret instructions to his generals, wrote: “It is sometimes unquestionably necessary to take chances in war, but you avoid these hazards all that you can by prudence . . . so experience and history of all wars tell us. It is a stupendous game of chance wherein he who estimates best wins in the end.”

Napoleon always made careful estimates and usually reduced them to writing. “Military science consists of estimating all eventualities first, then estimating exactly, almost mathematically, the degree of chance. I work constantly; I estimate continually . . . if I appear to be always ready to respond to anything, prepared to face anything, it is because before undertaking anything, I have meditated a long time. I have foreseen all that could happen.”

Commanders develop the ability to make sound decisions by habitually applying logic to each of the many problems that confront them during their careers. If this were not so, eventually commanders would become the victims of their own emotional decisions.

Purpose of the Estimate

The estimate of the situation is an analysis of all factors affecting accomplishment of the mission. It helps commanders to determine the most suitable course of action. Commanders and staffs need only to develop courses of action in sufficient detail to be readily distinguishable for analysis and comparison purposes with other courses of action.

Scope and Nature of the Estimate

The estimate of the situation is a logical and orderly examination of all factors affecting the accomplishment of the mission in order to reach a sound decision. The amount and nature of detail considered in the estimate varies with the level and type of command, the functions of the preparing agency, and other circumstances.

The basic approach used in the estimate of the situation is applicable to any situation, **echelon**, or type of command. Any individual may use it to arrive at a decision. Commanders use it to choose the course of action they want their command to follow. Staffs use it to determine the influence of factors within their particular field of interest on the courses of action under consideration. They also use it to arrive at recommendations for their commander.

The estimate of the situation is a continuing mental process. With each change in the situation, commanders and staffs must revise the estimate and modify the course of action as appropriate. The estimate is as thorough as time and circumstances will permit. It may vary from a short, almost instantaneous process when the requirement for a decision is urgent to a long, complex, and complete process requiring the effort of the entire staff.

Key Note Term

echelon – an arrangement of a body of troops in the form of steps; a section of a military group; an organizational level of importance

Conducting a Meeting

When members of an organization, such as the student government at your school, assemble to transact business, they are conducting a meeting. Within JROTC, your instructors or the chain of command may call on you to organize and conduct a meeting using the proper rules of order (see Figure 1.9.3).

The two types of meetings that you will conduct most often are the regular and special meetings. Hold regular meetings at set time intervals, such as weekly, monthly, or quarterly to discuss matters of routine business. You can convene a special meeting when important matters arise between the regular meetings that urgently require action before the next regular meeting.

The minimum essential officers for the conduct of business are a presiding officer (chairperson or president) and a secretary. The presiding officer conducts the meeting and sees that members observe the rules. The secretary makes a written record of the proceedings. These are called the *minutes*.

The Procedures of Order

When the time for the meeting arrives and sufficient members are present, the presiding officer opens it. An organization may adopt its own order of business (known as a *program* or *agenda*) or it may follow one addressed in its bylaws. Most organizations consider the following order as standard for their meetings:

- Reading and approval of the minutes
- Reports of officers and special committees
- Unfinished business
- New business



Figure 1.9.3: You might be called on to organize and lead a meeting

Courtesy of Corbis Images.

Normally, any member can introduce a legitimate issue at any time when there is no other business for consideration. Members do this through the use of motions. After a member makes a motion and another member seconds it, the presiding officer places it before the assembly for debate. Every member has the right to speak to every debatable motion before the membership votes on it. In most situations, the basic requirement for approval of an action is a majority vote. All members in good standing (not under a disciplinary suspension) have the right to vote. The regular methods of voting are by

- **Voice:** Normal method of voting on a motion
- **Rising:** Verifies a nonconclusive voice vote
- **Show of hands:** Alternative to the rising vote

An organization may use other methods of voting when prescribed by the bylaws. They are voting by ballot (used when there is a need for secrecy of each member's vote) and roll call vote (which has the opposite effect of a ballot vote because it places on record how each member votes).

To close a meeting, either a member can motion for adjournment, or under certain conditions, the presiding officer can declare the meeting adjourned.

Framework

Every organization should specify in its bylaws what officers it requires, how they will be elected or appointed, their terms of office, and any qualifications for holding those offices. The officers that most organizations require for a smooth running assembly are the presiding officer (chairperson or president), vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Other key, nonelected personnel are the sergeant-at-arms and the historian/librarian. Refer to the book *Robert's Rules of Order* for an explanation of the duties and responsibilities of these officers and for other key personnel not listed.

Note

To learn more about *Robert's Rules of Order*, go to <http://www.robertsrules.com>.

The basic reports essential for and during the conduct of a meeting are the minutes (or the report of the proceedings) and the reports by the various officers.

Conclusion

From past military history, the relationship between command and staff actions; staff organization, duties, and responsibilities; and the manner in which a unit successfully accomplishes its missions are very apparent. If you pursued this lesson with the intention of learning the “how” of command and staff procedures, you should have become better qualified to assume the top leadership positions in your cadet battalion.

This lesson ends Unit 1, “Citizenship in Action.” The next unit, “Leadership Theory and Application,” examines many aspects of leadership skill and principles. It also covers specific steps, marches, and squad drills as well as stationary movements.

Lesson Review

1. Why is it important to know how to work with subordinate commanders and staff officers?
2. What tasks might you delegate to subordinates?
3. Name the three groups of staff. Choose one and discuss it.
4. Define the term *echelon*. How does it relate to this lesson?