

## **Catalyst Papers: Guidance to my battalion**

LTC Max Ferguson, 2-14 Infantry

The language below guided my junior leaders as they researched aspects of alpine operations or for their alpine experimentation groups on Rear-D. Each research team paired Lieutenants and Captains with Sergeants, Staff Sergeants, and Sergeants First Class doing research on different alpine topics we all needed to learn more about from communications to sustainment. There were also different winter experimentation groups on Rear-D experimenting with how long it takes to teach a group to cross country ski or how to prepare for winter summits of mountains in the Adirondacks. We would be doing all of these tasks over the upcoming training cycle, so we were leaning forward on building a foundation during the deployment.

So below was the guidance they received. Consider it one snapshot of how to guide junior leaders to write Catalyst Papers – and spark professional discourse.

---

### *Instructions to the leaders in the Battalion*

#### Some guidance on writing [Catalyst Papers]:

- This is about sharing knowledge to help us solve problems and spark conversation and thinking among colleagues. This is about improving the profession. This is about helping the BN, the BCT, and the 10<sup>th</sup> MTN DIV get better at Alpine Operations, something we long have wanted to do, now finally have the momentum for, but we are starting from scratch and don't have the necessary institutional knowledge. YOU are helping us start the necessary and hardest first steps.
- This is not an academic exercise. This is about collecting and sharing important concepts and ideas. Collaborate with colleagues. Reference sources for readers to learn more about a topic or if you feel you don't need to or can't say it any better than the other doc, so just hit the wave tops and point the reader to read more at the other source.
- Don't try to be too proper or stiff. Think what you're trying to say and write that. Avoid fluffy words or jargon for the sake of jargon. This is about transmitting ideas, communicating to an audience, telling them what they NEED to know. Don't over think it and don't be verbose. Get to the point and say it in plain English.
- Feel free to break up these topics into sections or sub topics and designate one of your group members to be the leader writer for that topic. If the paper is really a set of individual papers on a sub topic (ex: Water in the Alpine could easily be its own paper) So if you guys want to divvy up the tasks and attack the problem that way, all good. The outcome product is what's important.
- 3-6 pages is the sweet spot for most white papers using single spaced, Arial 11 font. That's about how much attention span you'll get from most readers before it becomes TL/DR. It can go to 10 pages, but at some point, just break it up into separate papers.

- Your audience is E5 to O3. Leaders should read your papers and learn more about the topic. It should give them the considerations needed to plan and execute these tasks. It should include techniques and best practices for them to apply and the considerations needed to understand when and how they should adapt their actions. The same mountain will require completely different planning considerations from Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. So we can't be prescriptive on how it MUST be done, just help them know what options they can pick from.

#### Open your aperture on where to look for your research:

- Work with our BDE Mountaineer. He has a wealth of personal experience and relationships with military mountaineers across the Army and other units. Use him as a resource to help get you started on where to look. He might already have many of the answers but part of this experience is for you guys to dig into these issues and find the answers, because that process will enrich your understanding of the issues and considerations.
- I encourage you to also reach outside of the US military to the civilian community. That can be the NYS Forest Rangers who do real world Alpine search and rescue operations all summer and winter. They are true experts at many of these tasks. Find other instructors from organizations like NOLS and mountaineering communities. Just do some online searching to find different groups and organizations. You'd be surprised who will reply to your email if you introduce yourself and ask for assistance on this project. Use what researchers call the snowball method where one contact leads to another. Let folks introduce you to their colleagues. You'd be surprised who you get connected with.
- For those with us deployed to CJTF OIR: you don't need to look very far for Mountain Warfare experts. Among our NATO partners on our base here Iraq are *Alpini* (Italian Mountain Troops formed in 1872) and *Chasseur Alpines* (French Mountain Troops formed in 1888). They are the two oldest serving mountain units in the world. Take some initiative and ask French or Italian troops on your bases about how to meet their *Alpini* and *Chasseur Alpines* counterparts and run with it. Trust me, whatever we think we know about Alpine warfare in US Army Doctrine pales in comparison to what these units have refined over more than a century of refinement.
- As another starting point, you can also find a growing library of Alpine and Mountain warfare documents on the 2-14 IN BN Teams Page under Alpine Dragon (Files). As you come across worthwhile docs, please add them to the page, especially if you acquire any foreign manuals and documents.

#### Some suggested steps on how to approach writing:

1. Make an initial outline on what you think will be in the paper. Add every and anything that comes to mind at first then go back and cut/organize it to what makes sense.
2. Start doing your research. Open a word doc and dump in good pieces of info as you find it: quotes, tables, graphics, and add a quick reference/footnote where you found it to go back later if needed.

3. Go back and revisit your outline throughout your research phase as you discover additional topics and see how things group together or need to be distinct.
4. Start writing. It doesn't have to be pretty at first, but know where you're going with the paper. It will evolve, that's ok. Use your outline as an initial guide. Sometimes the first bit is junk that you need to write to clear it out of your head, see it on paper, so your brain can organize your thoughts and get to the stuff you really want to see on paper.
5. My editing technique: Once I complete a very rough draft, I start farming it out for feedback. (I can't see my own mistakes on paper: my brain reads what I'm trying to say, not what I've actually written). Start with buddies who just have a good eye and decent writers. If they want to make changes, just have them make it in "track changes" in word so you can see (and accept/reject) what they did when you review. Have them add comments with comment boxes on the side too if needed. Do this sequentially to friends to help with version control. Sending it out to too many people at once will make it hard to keep track of updates.
6. Once you've done the editing and restructuring, start sending it out to experts in the topic to help you with content. Don't waste their time with really choppy/rough drafts, so wait to get SME feedback for when you have something close to complete. Revise your paper, adjust as needed, and make sure it structured has a logical flow of information. That it builds on ideas and concepts. Takes the reader from A to B conceptually.
7. Once you've gone through this iterative process, then you're ready for me to make the final review. And by that point, if you've followed this process properly, you'll have an incredible grasp of these topics, and you'll be ready to teach other leaders across the BN what you've come to learn.

You'll come to find the reward for this work is the satisfaction of improving our community and the knowledge gained by being forced to write the thoughts on paper. Your work will benefit leaders in the DIV (and across the Infantry) for the next few YEARS for all those that will come across these papers and learn from them.