

“Operation orders do not win battles without the valor and endurance of the soldiers who carry them out.”

—Sir A.P. Wavell
Soldiers and Soldiering

Operations plans and orders provide the medium for the commander to direct the actions of his subordinates by communicating the commander’s intent, concept of the operation, and decisions in a clear, useful, and timely form.

While Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) operations are inherently complex, developing an effective and well-written operation order need not be. The key to developing the operation order is to identify where the various products produced during the Marine Corps Planning Process (MCP) fit in the operation order. (See Figure 1.) Orders development, the fifth step of the MCP, integrates the processes and products produced during the first four steps. As templates, matrixes, and overlays are developed and refined, many can be directly transferred into the operations order. If these completed products are placed in the proper paragraph of the operation order as they are produced, minimal effort is needed to refine and complete the order.

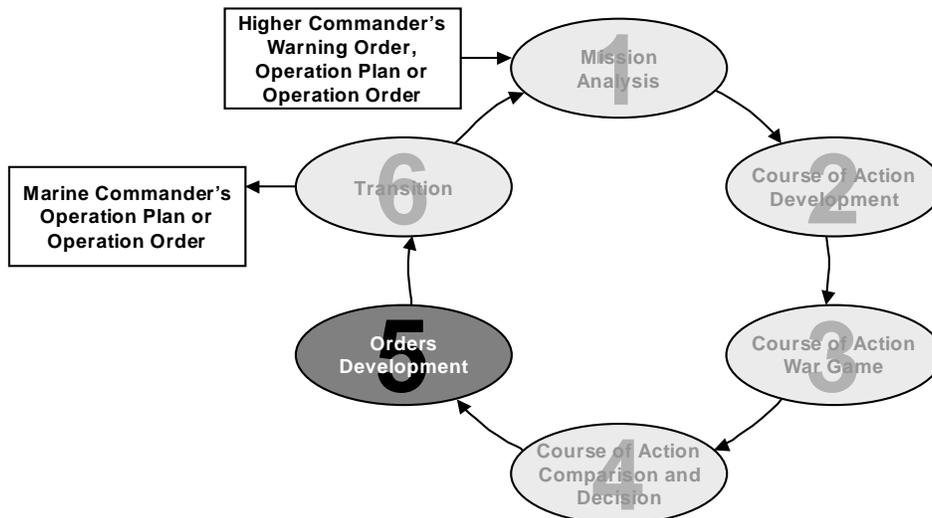


Figure 1. Marine Corps Planning Process.

MSTP routinely sees units challenged in their efforts at producing clear, concise orders. Problems occur when—

- PowerPoint briefings are used as authoritative documents in place of written directives.
- MCP products are not captured for inclusion in the order.
- Information management procedures are not in place to ensure proper “version control” when orders are developed using collaborative processes.
- Internal reconciliation is not conducted to ensure that the basic order and all annexes, appendixes, enclosures, and tabs are complete and in agreement.

Many of these problems can be avoided by using well-defined and routinely practiced SOPs for orders development. The SOP should contain procedures and methods to assist the commander and his staff to expeditiously produce complete and clear orders. For example, an orders development matrix (see

Figure 2) can identify the products needed to build the operation order and the staff section responsible for its production. One current MEU commander reports he relies heavily on his SOP for rapid planning and fast operation orders development.

Title	Responsible Staff Section
Basic Order	G/S-3
Annex A. Task Organization	G/S-3
Annex B. Intelligence	G/S-2
Appendix 1. Priority Intelligence Requirements	G/S-2
Appendix 2. Signals Intelligence	SIGINT Officer
Annex C. Operations	G/S-3
Appendix 2. Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Defense Operations	NBCD Officer
Appendix 3. Information Operations/Command and Control Warfare	IO Officer
Appendix 19. Fire Support	FSC
Tab A. Air Fire Plan	G/S-3 Air Officer
Tab B. Artillery Fire Plan	Artillery Officer
Tab C. Naval Surface Fire Support Plan	NSFS Officer
Annex D. Logistics/Combat Service Support	G/S-4
Appendix 1. Petroleum, Oils, and Lubricants Supply	Supply Officer
Appendix 6. Nonnuclear Ammunition	Ammunition Officer
Appendix 13. General Engineering	Engineering Officer
Annex E. Personnel	G/S-1
Appendix 3. Finance and Disbursing	Disbursing Officer
Appendix 4. Legal	SJA
Appendix 6. Chaplain Activities	Chaplain
Annex F. Public Affairs	PAO

Figure 2. Orders development matrix (sample).

Purpose and Types

In this age of information technology and instant communication, some may believe the operation order is obsolete. Even with these advancements in transmitting information, the operation order first serves as a checklist for the planners to ensure they have addressed all warfighting activities, and second, is an easily recognizable reference for the readers to follow. Marine leaders must always keep in mind that the order is written for those who must execute it, not for those who write it.

Orders should be easily understood by those who must execute them. Effective operations orders communicate the commander’s intent and decisions in a clear and useful format that efficiently directs actions and focuses subordinates’ tasks and activities toward the successful completion of the mission. Orders should only contain new or critical information—not routine information and procedures normally found in standing operating procedures (SOPs). The amount of detail a commander provides in a plan or order depends on the experience of subordinate commanders, the cohesion and tactical experience of subordinate units, and the complexity of the operation. A good order is judged on its usefulness—not its weight.

There are several types of operation orders:

- The “standard” operation order (the most familiar type of order).
- The warning order.
- The fragmentary order (FRAGO).

The primary objective of a warning order is to allow subordinate and concurrent planning. It does not authorize execution unless specifically designated. A warning order may also apply to specific crisis planning directives issued by the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff that requires a specific response from a supported commander. Although a commander can be issue a warning order anytime he deems appropriate, the MCWP 5-1, *Marine Corps Planning Process*, recommends issuing a warning order, at a minimum, after mission analysis and again after course of action (COA) comparison and decision.

The FRAGO is issued when changes occur to the basic order such as emerging enemy situation or new taskings. The important point to remember is that FRAGOs are always based on an existing operation order and never stand-alone.

Operation Order Format

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum (CJCSM) 3122.03, *Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES)*, Volume II, provides over-arching guidance for U.S. forces joint operations order writing. The Marine Corps orders format described in Annex G of MCWP 5-1 closely follows the JOPES orders format with some minor exceptions necessitated by our amphibious nature. For example, the Marine Corps uses Annex U for Information Management and Annex W for Aviation Operations. These annexes are not found in JOPES. Additionally, MCWP 5-1 lists the commander's intent before the concept of operations, while JOPES places the concept of operations first. Also, MCWP 5-1 places the commander's critical information requirements (CCIRs) in Paragraph 3 of the operations order, while CCIRs are not found in JOPES at all.

Operation Plan or Operation Order?

The inclusion of the execution time and date is what separates an operation order from an operation plan. The operation plan will always include *Subparagraph 1.a General Situation*, but this information may or may not be included in an operation order. If the *General Situation* is included in an order, it is usually at the joint task force, component, or MAGTF level. Since the operation plan is based on assumptions, *Subparagraph 1.f, Assumptions*, will always be found in a plan but not in an order. Of course, the reason we write operation plans are to form the foundation of the operation order.

The acronym SMEAC (situation, mission, execution, administration and logistics, and command and signal) is used to build the basic operation order or plan. The five paragraphs of the operation order can be almost entirely written using the products produced during the first four steps of the MCPP. See Figure 3.

Paragraph 1, Situation. Subparagraph 1.a. *General*, deals with the politico-military environment of the operation and is always included in the operation plan. If included in the operation order, it can be a direct lift from the higher commander's paragraph 1.a. Subparagraph 1.b, *Battlespace*, is assigned and delineated in the higher commander's order. Battlespace will be evaluated and if necessary refined during mission analysis (step 1 of the MCPP). *Battlespace* includes not only the area of operations (AO) assigned to the MAGTF, but the AO of higher and adjacent commands. In addition, the commander's area of influence and areas of interest might also be refined and included in *Battlespace*.

As we focus on the enemy, many elements of paragraph 1.c, *Enemy Forces*, can be produced or distilled from the higher commander's order and intelligence products. Although much of the higher commander's focus may be at the strategic or operational level, it can assist the MAGTF commander identify the tactical enemy center of gravity and critical vulnerabilities. Doctrinal and situational templates can help identify the enemy's capabilities and most likely COA. In addition, the commander's battlespace area evaluation and the mission analysis steps also include center of gravity analysis that can be refined and inserted into *Enemy Forces*.

Much of the information for subparagraphs 1.d, *Friendly Force*, 1.e, *Attachments/Detachments*, and 1.f, *Legal Considerations* can be found in the higher commander's operation order. With minor refinement, this information can be placed in these subparagraphs.



Figure 3. Operation order inputs.

Paragraph 2, Mission. This paragraph is simply a direct lift from the commander’s approved mission statement, an output of mission analysis. It is important to note, completion of mission analysis has just provided the shell for the first two paragraphs of the operation order.

Paragraph 3, Execution. Subparagraph 3.a, *Commander’s Intent*, can be written at the end of the COA comparison and decision step. By this time the commander has identified and refined his “vision” along with his purpose, method, and end state for the operation. Subparagraph 3.b, *Concept of Operations*, is derived from the COA narrative and identifies the organization of the battlespace into deep, close, and rear areas, and the organization of the force into main effort, supporting efforts, security operations, and the reserves.

Work completed during mission analysis identifying specified and implied tasks can now be used to write paragraph 3.c, *Tasks*. The operation order must be written to ensure a unit has been assigned to complete each task. Additionally, a review of the decision support template and matrix and the synchronization matrix may uncover additional tasks or requirements. MCWP 5-1 states tasks should be listed in the order of priority of accomplishment. Some operation order writers underline the tactical tasks and include an “in order to” statement followed by the purpose of the task. This “in order to” phrase provides a readily identifiable clue that the purpose will immediately follow. Prior to the commander’s approval, the operation order should be thoroughly checked to ensure no tasks have been buried in any other part of the order such as in annexes or appendices and not included in this subparagraph.

Paragraph 3.d, *Reserves*, is identified in the war game synchronization matrix. Subparagraph 3.e, *Commander Critical Information Requirements (CCIRs)*, are information requirements important for the commander to make timely and informed decision during the execution of the mission. Subparagraph 3.f, *Coordinating Instructions*, are those instructions applicable to two or more elements of the command and are necessary for proper coordination of the operation. This is where the conditions for execution of the operation are established.

Paragraph 4, Administration and Logistics, and Paragraph 5, Command and Control.

These paragraphs are written using information taken from staff estimates developed during the MCPP. Included in paragraph 5, *Command and Control*, are the locations of the higher headquarters' and adjacent unit's command posts. It also includes those command posts that will change locations during the operation, to include where and when the new locations will be. Also, *Command and Control* should include a "succession of command."

Annexes and Appendices. Annexes and appendices are developed from staff estimates developed throughout the MCPP. MCWP 5-1 mentions the operation order usually includes Annex A (Task-Organization), B (Intelligence), C (Operations), D (Logistics/Combat Service Support), J (Command Relationships), and K (Command, Control, Communications Systems). The situation, the commander, and the chief of staff determine which annexes are included in the operation order.

Principal Staff Participation

The chief of staff is responsible for directing the commander's staff during the development of the operation order. He ensures the production responsibilities are clearly understood, determines the type of order and which annexes and appendices (if any) will be written. He sets and enforces the development sequence and associated time limits.

A recurring MSTP observation is the lack of adequate principal staff participation in developing the operation order. Although the operational planning team (OPT) is directly involved in operational planning, they cannot be expected to produce the operation order independently. It is the principal staff that possesses the experience, subject matter expertise, and old-fashioned horsepower to pull those planning products together into a cohesive order.

The principal staff is not only responsible for ensuring their particular annexes and appendixes are completed; they are responsible for the performance of their staff sections and exist to help the commander "fight his command." The principal staff should be in attendance whenever the OPT briefs the commander during the earlier steps in the planning process so they have good situational awareness when they write their portions of the operation order. The principal staff interaction with their major subordinate command counterparts similarly enhances understanding throughout the organization and facilitates concurrent planning prior to issuing the final operation order.

Prior to the commander's approval of the operation order, the chief of staff conducts the orders reconciliation and orders crosswalk. The orders reconciliation ensures there are no internal disagreements or missing information within the order. The basic order must agree with the annexes and appendixes and the concept of operations needs to fulfill the commander's intent. Once the reconciliation has been completed, the orders crosswalk is conducted to ensure the order is in agreement with adjacent and higher headquarters' operation orders. Particular attention should be given to ensure the order coincides with the higher commander's intent. Only after these two processes are completed should the commander approve and sign the order.

Conclusion

A well-written operation order not only ensures all aspects of warfighting have been considered by the planning staff, but also allows subordinates the ability to execute the operation with initiative and a keen understanding of the overall mission. If the operation order is drafted and edited as products are produced during the first four steps in the MCPP, writing the detailed operation order requires minimal additional effort.