



PREPARING

FOR

SUBJECT

Part 1: Pre-course and general course considerations

Soldiers going on a Subject 1 Course have a unique professional development opportunity to demonstrate that they are ready for promotion. It is not just a 'tick and flick' course, but a time to gain new skills, improve themselves as professional soldiers, develop their leadership skills, and learn from and with their peer group.

The following article was sourced from interviews with Warrant Officer and Non-Commissioned Officer Academy (WONCO-A) staff and instructors from all Subject 1-level courses. They have a vast range of experience and knowledge in helping soldiers progress through the All Corps Soldier Training Continuum (ACSTC). Soldiers can gain much from the 52 tips contained in this article that will help them not just pass the course but gain maximum benefit from it.

"What do soldiers need to know before they come on course? How can they best prepare? What do they really need to know about coming on SUBJ 1 Courses?"

Joining instruction

Tip 1. Read it.

The joining instruction (JI) is a lengthy document, but for good reason. The JI provides information that you need to know about the course as well as the course location. It also highlights expectations and provides guidance on

what to bring and what administrative actions are required. The JI specifies essential detail such as a medical waivers (where necessary), and the pre-course submission requirements (your bio and demi-official letter, and other training to be completed). When reading the JI, use a highlighter to mark all responsibilities you have and then mark them off when completed.

Note: Subject 1 prepares you for higher responsibilities. If you are unable to read and comply with a JI, you will struggle to look after other soldiers.

Tip 2. Recognition - if you want to be recognised for prior learning, read the JI so you know which form to fill out and for guidance on the evidence you must produce.

Just sending an email will not cut it. Recognition applications are official evidence of your knowledge, skills and attitudes. Be professional and thorough in your submissions.

Tip 3. Ensure that required items for course listed in the JI are in good enough condition to last the course.

Having to replace items or having an instructor tell you that the item is unserviceable does not reflect well on your professionalism.

Tip 4. If in doubt about what is required from the JI, ask.

You can clarify the JI requirements via your chain of command or contact the Course Manager. Either way, do not waste valuable weeks of pre-course time. Get the matter resolved.

“Soldiers going on a Subject 1 course need to realise that the skills and knowledge they need for the next rank rise significantly. As such, they need to start to improve them beforehand, and this includes starting to think and act like a soldier at the next rank.”

Subj 1 SGT Instructor

Resolve personal matters

Tip 5. Resolve any personal admin issues before attending course.

If you have issues at home while you are on course, you will be focussed on those and not concentrating on course work. Being away from home for a number of weeks can be difficult if you have young children. Support your family members early to prepare them for your absence.

Unit support

Tip 6. Support and mentor junior soldiers to prepare them for a course.

Course preparation for junior soldiers should consist of personal skills in drill, weapons, navigation and field craft. These are foundation skills that, if not to standard, will only make your course more difficult than it needs to be. You should be physically fit, injury free and ready for the rigours of the training. This is important in terms of personal resilience and it reduces the risk of physical injury and mental stress. If in doubt as to what units should assist with, they could read the soldier's JI or ring the Course Manager or Senior Instructor.



Tip 7. Negotiate with your unit to complete pre-course study.

Pre-course study increases your chances of success and your confidence. Particularly for junior soldiers who are less likely to find the time or resources needed to complete pre-course. Units can assist this pre-course study period by proactively checking on how the soldier is going and by providing guidance on how to find the study material as opposed to simply showing them where it is. When you have to carry out research to find an answer, the material is more likely to stay with you than if you were handed the information.

Tip 8. Seek an ‘exit brief’ before you leave the unit to go on their Subject 1 course.

An exit brief ensures that the soldier knows the unit cares about how they perform on the course and enables the unit to provide last-minute motivation. It is also an opportune time to close off on any known issues soldiers may have inside and outside of work.

“Soldiers need to invest their time into the pre-course, invest their time on course (pre-reading the night before) and invest themselves during a class. Soldiers need to arrive on the course with a good attitude. Soldiers with a bad attitude will not enjoy themselves, are less likely to succeed and are at risk of failing.”

Subj 1 WO Instructor

Pre-course

Tip 9. Stay current with current rank all-corps skills.

It is not the responsibility of the training establishment to refresh you on your current rank’s all-corps information during the course. That is the purpose of pre-course revision. You should continue to do your own professional development, maintaining the knowledge and skills from promotion courses. Doing so will not only ensure that you are capable of doing your job, but you are more likely to stand out from your peers and increase the likelihood of promotion in the long term.

Tip 10. Prepare for a Subject 1 course by getting your mindset into that of a student.

If you enjoy studying and learning, you will probably do well. Regardless, you should understand that before a course, effort is required during pre-course to set yourself up for success. Not only does the pre-course provide knowledge that is important on the course, but it also provides an opportunity to rediscover the discipline and routines for successful study habits which will then assist you on course, such as planning your time and space.

Tip 11. Do a self-analysis and know your strengths and weaknesses.

You should spend time working on your weaknesses so that you are more likely to succeed. Doing so will improve your confidence and lower your stress levels. If you are good at ceremonial drill but poor

at operations, you should spend less pre-course time on the parade ground and more time on operations-related doctrine and chatting to your mentor on this topic.

Tip 12. As soon as the course panel is released, start preparing immediately if your name is on the list.

You need to ensure that you have enough time to focus on your pre-course studies and for readying your equipment and uniforms.

Tip 13. It is not enough to just find the pre-course answer in doctrine; you should also be reading the surrounding text to gain a thorough understanding of it.

If you do not build up a body of knowledge in addition to answering the pre-course questions, it will become apparent during section activities (eg incorrect drill movements and having to be taught field craft you should already know). Having your instructor teach pre-course material again wastes time and you and your colleagues will miss out on learning more advanced material. You should be motivated to complete the pre-course (ie fill it in) but also to properly learn it.

Tip 14. Online pre-course training such as the unclassified MOODLE and the classified e-School will give you a superior pre-course study experience.

Whilst e-School will be used for classified subjects (eg operations) on the DRN, the benefits to you of the unclassified MOODLE are that it is accessible from home, the software is interactive, it will provide instant feedback on your performance and you can send queries to instructors in real time. Course staff can track the progress of each soldier by seeing when and how often they log in and how many attempts it takes to get an answer correct. A Subject 1 WO course used this capability for a pre-course for the first time in Sep 15. It is anticipated that MOODLE will be used for all courses mid-next year. It has been proven that the advantages of these changes will improve the desire to learn.

“Have a desire to learn – it infects the others and you will gain a lot more from the course. Maintain a positive attitude and it will help get through the course. Have a sense of humour.”

Subj 1 SGT Instructor



Topics to work on

This section provides topics that instructors have identified which can cause some soldiers problems when on course. Soldiers should reflect on their own experiences and abilities and determine if these are a weakness for them and, if so, put in extra effort before the course.

Pre-course provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate teamwork by helping others to prepare for the same course. Not surprisingly, it is typical that soldiers from combat arms are good at operations and drill, and logistic trades are good at admin. Soldiers who are strong in certain areas should then help others. Obviously, this helps soldiers who are struggling and develops the leadership capabilities of those sharing knowledge.

Tip 15. Operations is a traditionally weak subject on course, so focus on this area.

Aspects of operations that soldiers need to research and/or be assisted with include the use of the Military Appreciation Process and understanding the considerations in deploying a force relevant to the level of the Subject 1 course being undertaken (eg section for

Subject 1 CPL). This includes own and enemy force capabilities.

Tip 16. Soldiers need opportunities to improve literacy skills.

Units could help the 'fighter' to be a writer' by providing opportunities to draft a service document (relevant to rank) and by providing detailed feedback and guidance on how to improve. For example, while a stores request may not normally need a minute, a supervisor could task a soldier to do it for the experience. Request this assistance. Not only will this assist you on course, it will also set you up for success throughout your career. You will gain skills to draft clear and persuasive text. If this support is not available, be proactive and use CAMPUS courses. The same applies to acquiring computer skills; for example, bookmark websites, use spell check in MS Word, and format service documents, and for the higher ranks edit, and insert comments and track changes in Word documents.

Tip 17. Soldiers should be exposed to the Military Justice System (MJS).

You should seek out experiences in dealing with the MJS. For example, acting in prosecution or defence, acting as a recorder for a charge, or participating in unit refresher training.



Tip 18. Public speaking is a very important part of the course and is assessed during presentations and syndicate discussions.

You need to project your voice and be confident. You will also need to control your anxiety and stress as well as any nervous mannerisms. Fake it until you make it, that is to say, just give it a go. Nothing replaces experience to improve public speaking.

Tip 19. Drill is not performed often by many soldiers and so they are poor at it.

Many soldiers no longer have exposure to drill in their unit, with many units no longer having opening and closing admin parades. If this is your situation, you should either ask their chain of command for assistance or find the time to do it yourself. Drill instils a sense of discipline, confidence and teamwork. It also provides an opportunity for the junior commander to assess the standard of their soldiers' dress and bearing.

"Soldiers need to display pride in their corps, trade and conduct. I have heard many soldiers say that "I am just a xxxx (insert trade)", instead of saying it with pride and confidence."

Subj 1 CPL Instructor

While on course...

Tip 20. Soldiers who do not fully understand what is being taught should ask questions.

Many soldiers have some fear that they will appear to be struggling and do not

ask. If you are struggling, be honest with yourself and have the courage to rectify your lack of knowledge. It has been said many times because it is true; there are many other soldiers who are probably thinking of asking the same question.

Tip 21. When you have an issue with homework, you should research it first.

Whether research is through asking fellow trainees or searching doctrine, you should try and find the answer yourself. If you cannot, or you have serious doubts about your information, then you should approach an instructor and present the question to them after explaining the research and your conclusions. This demonstrates that you are closer to being ready for promotion compared to a soldier who asks the instructor what they think and writes that down verbatim.

Tip 22. Manage your time effectively through planning and prior preparation.

You need to prioritise what has to be done, deal with one task at a time and provide a cut-off time so you get enough sleep. By doing this, you will have a greater appreciation of your work demands. Soldiers who plan are less likely to go out on a Friday and Saturday night only to start on their work on a Sunday – not leaving enough time.

Tip 23. Sections need to form close ties quickly as the combined effort of the team is infectious and helps everyone.

Sections who work together well typically have a higher pass rate. To get team culture and break down the barriers, be



proactive on day one of the course and get to know each other. This ensures that you will enjoy the course and learn from each other. You need to combine your strengths (eg corps knowledge) to make up for individual weaknesses.

Tip 24. Avoid becoming frustrated with a team member who is struggling.

If a soldier has a retest, the team needs to work together after hours to help the member through. It is important to encourage soldiers who struggle and not pressure them as they are probably already stressed.

Tip 25. Contribute to syndicate discussions.

Within a syndicate discussion, have an open mind and express your opinion, particularly in group discussions. If you disagree then be prepared to do so and explain in a logical and reasoned manner. Essentially, back yourself. This is all part of showing that you are ready for the next rank and, therefore, deserve to be treated as a soldier of the next rank.

Tip 26. Demonstrate leadership by being actively involved in lessons and syndicate sessions.

Even if you are naturally quiet and lacking in confidence, put your knowledge to the test and speak up. If the course work is a topic to which you have had little exposure, do not stress but understand that the instructor is there to help you, so be actively involved.



Tip 27. Prepare for the next day by completing the necessary exercises and reading.

Preparing for the next day involves more than just ironing your uniform. Review the information from each day so that you are ready to use that knowledge the next day and so it can be recalled for tests.

Tip 28. All soldiers on course should actively network with their peers, not just within their syndicate but with all soldiers on course.

By actively networking with your peers you will have a greater understanding of wider Army and will develop relationships and connections that will help you to get the job done. You will be surprised by how often you come across fellow course members as you move around through your career. If you have

already struck up a friendship on course, it is more likely you will help each other than otherwise. Another advantage of networking on course is that it provides the opportunities for soldiers in trades that are skilled in certain functions to pass on that expertise to others.

Tip 29. Prepare yourself to be receptive to critical feedback.

Many soldiers do not get such honest feedback in their regular lives and may have trouble accepting it when it is given on course. In such circumstances you should look to yourself for fault and not to those around you. It is particularly important to self-evaluate with a staff member who is trying to help the you improve and pass the course. Accept the 'improves' and get on with it.



Tip 30. Instructors teach doctrine, not what you do in your unit.

You must understand that what you are doing in your unit may not always comply with doctrine. Sometimes you will have to bite your tongue and not say “but this is how we do it in our unit” as everyone (instructors included) get tired of this. It will not alter the directed tasks in the training environment. Besides, there is always something soldiers can learn from what is being taught. Keep an open mind.

Tip 31. Soldiers have been and will continue to be removed from course for plagiarism.

Some soldiers have and will continue to fail summative assessments. The fear of this is no reason to consider cheating. What failure should motivate within you is a desire to study and learn. If necessary,

seek help. Soldiers who are caught cheating get the treatment they deserve – they are taken off course.

“Accept that the way you have always done it is not always the only way and is not always right. Accept new ideas, accept there could be better ways of doing things and you could take something back to your unit. For example the IMAP is a planning process that applies to every job, not just war fighters.”

Subj 1 SGT Instructor

Re-tests

Tip 32. If you fail a test, accept responsibility, take it as a learning experience and move on.

Instructors aim to have all soldiers pass the Subject 1 course, but they also have a responsibility to maintain standards. If a you are not up to standard then you are going to be failed. It is then important to accept responsibility for this, to start preparing for more work and to maintain a positive attitude (mental resilience) so that you can pass the next time. Instructors will support trainees and put in a lot of effort to help them achieve a successful outcome.

Conclusion

You can avoid significant stress by ensuring that you are well prepared before the course and during the course. This means completing the pre-course, working on weak areas and studying each night. It also means ensuring that the you plan so that you get sufficient sleep, eat well and can take a bit of time out when needed. It does not mean working very late until just before dawn.

This article was the first of two parts. The second and final instalment of this article will be published in Smart Soldier 44, Feb 16. It will provide tips related to personal considerations while on course, specific tips that are unique to the Subj 1 WO, Subj 1 SGT and Subj 1 CPL courses and instructor considerations.

