TC 7-0.1

# AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

## FEBRUARY 2025

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HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

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# AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

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# Preface

TC 7-0.1, After Action Reviews, provides Army leaders the fundamental processes and procedures to plan and conduct after action reviews (AAR). Users of this TC must familiarize themselves with Army training doctrine as described in ADP 7-0 and FM 7-0.

The principal audience for TC 7-0.1 is all members of the profession of arms. Commanders and staffs of Army headquarters serving as joint task force or multinational headquarters must also refer to applicable joint or multinational doctrine concerning the range of military operations and joint or multinational forces. Trainers and educators throughout the Army also use this publication.

Commanders, staffs, and subordinates ensure that their decisions and actions comply with applicable United States, international, and, in some cases, host-nation laws and regulations. Commanders at all levels ensure that their Soldiers operate in accordance with the law of war and the rules of engagement. (See FM 6-27.)

TC 7-0.1 uses joint terms where applicable. Selected joint and Army terms and definitions appear in both the glossary and the text. For definitions shown in the text, the term is italicized, and the number of the proponent publication follows the definition.

TC 7-0.1 applies to the Active Army, Army National Guard/Army National Guard of the United States and United States Army Reserve unless otherwise stated.

The proponent of TC 7-0.1 is the United States Army Combined Arms Center. The preparing agency is the Training Management Directorate (TMD) of the United States Army Combined Arms Center – Training (CAC-T). Send comments and recommendations on DA Form 2028 (*Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms*) to Commander, United States Army Combined Arms Center – Training and Fort Leavenworth, ATZL-CTD (TC 7-0.1), 410 Kearny Avenue, Building 45, Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-1356, or email trainingdoctrine@army.mil.

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# Introduction

TC 7-0.1, After Action Reviews (AAR), expands on the fundamental concepts of after action reviews as a primary tool leaders use in planning and conducting effective training evaluations as discussed in the Army's training doctrine in ADP 7-0 and FM 7-0. TC 7-0.1 guides leaders to develop AARs that lead training participants in the self-discovery of how to improve task performance. This publication applies to all Army leaders and the three components of the Total Army: the Regular Army, the Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve.

TC 7-0.1 contains four chapters:

**Chapter 1** discusses the purpose of AARs and their general characteristics, establishing a four step process guiding leaders through the execution of a successful AAR. It also includes a discussion of how the AAR process is used in combat situations to quickly and effectively apply lessons learned to improve operational performance.

**Chapter 2** introduces the procedures leaders use in planning and preparing AARs. It discusses the unit's overall approach to evaluation planning and how AARs are used to improve performance weaknesses while sustaining performance strengths.

**Chapter 3** provides a guide for leaders in conducting AARs. This includes introductory remarks, introducing the rules for all participants to follow and the overall agenda for the AAR.

**Chapter 4** gives an overview of the actions that must take place following an AAR. These actions ensure the results of the AAR process are used to continually improve unit performance and that lessons learned are shared across the Army.

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## Chapter 1

# After Action Review Fundamentals

## OVERVIEW

1-1. An *after action review* (AAR) is a guided analysis of an organization's performance, conducted at appropriate times during and at the conclusion of a training event or operation, with the objective of improving future performance (FM 7-0). It includes a facilitator, event participants, and other observers. The AAR provides valuable and timely feedback essential to correcting training deficiencies. Feedback is direct, immediate, and standards based.

1-2. AARs are professional discussions that require the active participation of those trained. AARs enable and encourage participants to discover for themselves what happened and then develop a plan for improving task performance. These reviews provide candid insights into task performance strengths and weaknesses from various perspectives and feedback. AARs focus directly on the commander's guidance, training objectives, and performance standards as indicated on the task training and evaluation outline (T&EO).

1-3. Leaders avoid creating an environment of pointing out failures since AARs are not a critique. The climate of the AAR encourages candid and open discussion of task performance without stifling learning and team building. Soldiers and leaders participating in an AAR actively self-discover what happened and why. Through this process, they learn and remember more than they would from a critique alone. Characteristics of an AAR—

- Are conducted during or immediately after each event.
- Focuses directly on task performance and training objectives.
- Are based on doctrine and published standards.
- Uses leading and open-ended questions to encourage self-discovery and important lessons from the training.
- Allows many Soldiers and leaders, including opposing forces (OPFORs), to participate so that more of the training is recalled and lessons learned are shared across more of the organization.
- Links performance to future training and assigns responsibility for a timeline to improve task performance.

1-4. Another benefit of AARs comes from immediately evaluating training performance and quickly applying sound remedies to improve future performance. Commanders also use AAR results as a feedback tool in assessing unit mission-essential task (MET) proficiency.

1-5. AARs are the dynamic link between task performance and execution to standard. They provide commanders a critical evaluation component to plan future Soldier and unit training. Through the professional and candid discussion of events, Soldiers objectively measure their performance against approved standards and identify specific ways to improve proficiency and establish better techniques and procedures.

## TYPES OF AFTER ACTION REVIEWS

1-6. There are two types of AARs, formal and informal. A formal AAR is resource-intensive and involves planning for and preparing the AAR site, supporting training aids, and supporting personnel. Informal AARs require less planning and preparation and are typically done immediately following a training event. Any AAR—formal or informal—analyzes decisions made during the execution of tasks. See table 1-1 for comparisons.

**Table 1-1. Comparison of formal and informal after action reviews**

| | *Formal* | *Informal* |
|---|---|---|
| Facilitator | Conducted by either internal or external leaders and external evaluators | Conducted by internal chain of command and internal evaluators |
| Duration | Takes more time to prepare | Takes less time to prepare |
| Aids | Uses complex training aids | Uses simple training aids |
| Schedule | Scheduled—leaders identify events and tasks beforehand | Unscheduled—conducted as needed, primarily based on leader assessment following the observed action |
| Location | Dedicated location with automation tools | Conducted at the training site |

## Formal

1-7. Leaders plan formal AARs at the same time they finalize their training event planning (six to eight weeks before execution). They also require the selection and training of facilitators and evaluators. Facilitators are responsible for the conduct of the AAR. Formal AARs require more planning and preparation than informal AARs. They require lead time for site reconnaissance and selection, coordination for training aids (such as terrain models or map blow-ups), and selection, set up, and maintenance of the AAR site.

1-8. Formal AARs are typically conducted at company level and above. An exception is an AAR of crew, section, or small-unit performance after gunnery tables or after a platoon situational training exercise (STX). Squad and platoon AARs are held before the execution of formal company and higher echelon AARs. This allows all levels of the unit to benefit from an AAR experience. It also provides facilitators with observations and trends to address during the formal AAR.

1-9. During formal AARs, the facilitator focuses the discussion of events on training objectives. At the conclusion, the leader reviews key points and issues identified during the training (reinforcing learning that took place during the discussion) and once again focuses on the commander's training objectives.

1-10. Formal AARs:

- Have external facilitators and evaluators.
- Take more time.
- Use complex training aids such as unit products, graphics or combat training centers (CTC) instrumentation.
- Are scheduled beforehand at leader designated events.
- Are conducted at a dedicated location with available automation tools.

## Informal

1-11. Informal AARs are led by designated facilitators, usually within the unit's chain of command and drawn from Soldiers and small-unit leaders at platoon-level and below. At company and battalion levels, facilitators may conduct informal AARs when resources for formal AARs, including time, are unavailable. Informal AARs use the standard AAR agenda.

1-12. Informal AARs:

- Are conducted by internal chain of command.
- Take less time.
- Use simple training aids.
- Are conducted as needed, primarily based on leader assessment following the observed action.
- Are conducted at the training site.

1-13. Facilitators use informal AARs as on-the-spot coaching tools while observing Soldier and unit performance during training. For example, after destroying an enemy observation post (OP) during a movement to contact, a squad leader conducts an informal AAR to make corrections and reinforce strengths. Using nothing more than pinecones to represent squad members, the facilitator and Soldiers can discuss the contact from start to finish. The squad can quickly:

- Evaluate their performance against the mission, task standards, and unit SOP.
- Identify their performance strengths and weaknesses.
- As a team, determine how to improve their performance when training continues.

1-14. Informal AARs provide immediate feedback to Soldiers, leaders, and units as training progresses. Better techniques and solutions gathered during informal AARs are immediately employed as the unit continues training. During lower echelon informal AARs, leaders often collect teaching points and trends they use as discussion points during higher echelon formal AARs.

1-15. Informal AARs maximize training value because all unit members are actively involved. They learn what to do, how to do it better, and the importance of the roles they play in task accomplishment. They then know how to execute tasks to standard. The most significant difference between formal AARs and informal AARs is that informal AARs require fewer training resources and few, if any, training aids. Although informal AARs are part of the unit evaluation plan, they are more commonly conducted when the facilitator feels the unit benefits the most. Providing immediate feedback while the training is still fresh in Soldiers' minds is a significant strength of informal AARs.

## Formal and Informal Training Aids

1-16. As these processes imply, supporting training aids can range from very simple for informal AARs to very complex for formal AARs. Formal AARs utilize things such as a timeline of events, unit graphics, a roll-up of battlefield effects, or in certain instances, a playback of the training event in a battle action summary like the technologies available at the combat training centers. Table 1-2 provides simple examples of these. The unit mission and the degree of planning dictate the need for supporting training aids most appropriate for the AAR.

**Table 1-2. Training Aids**

| *Formal AARs* | *Informal AARs* |
|---|---|
| Terrain models | Ground sketches |
| Digital maps | Pointer/pen/stick |
| Communications recordings | OPORD graphics |
| Large screen displays | Phone/tablet display |
| Photography | Rocks, twigs |
| Video recordings | Colored chalk |

1-17. Personnel involved in AARs include:

- Facilitator. An AAR is unique in that it requires a trained leader to guide participants in recognizing how they can perform a task better. Facilitators follow the procedures outlined in FM 7-0 and this TC to maximize participant feedback and assist the unit in identifying training solutions. Facilitators are typically:
  - Unit leaders (internal or external).
  - Evaluators (internal or external).
  - Observer, Coach, Trainer (OC/T).
- Participants. All personnel involved in training. Includes OPFOR personnel (if used).
- Role Players (optional). Examples include personnel replicating local nationals, belligerents, etc.
- Other evaluators (as needed). May include higher HQ evaluators, sister unit evaluators, etc.

## Training Events and AARs

1-18. At company and below levels, AARs provide immediate feedback to participants and allow leaders to quickly adjust performance and re-execute training events until proficiency is achieved. This is particularly difficult to achieve in higher echelon unit AARs due to the size of the unit, number of participants, and complexity of training events. At company and below, short duration training events often provide leaders the flexibility to use AARs as a means of immediately improving task performance. An example of this is lane training. (See figure 1-1.)

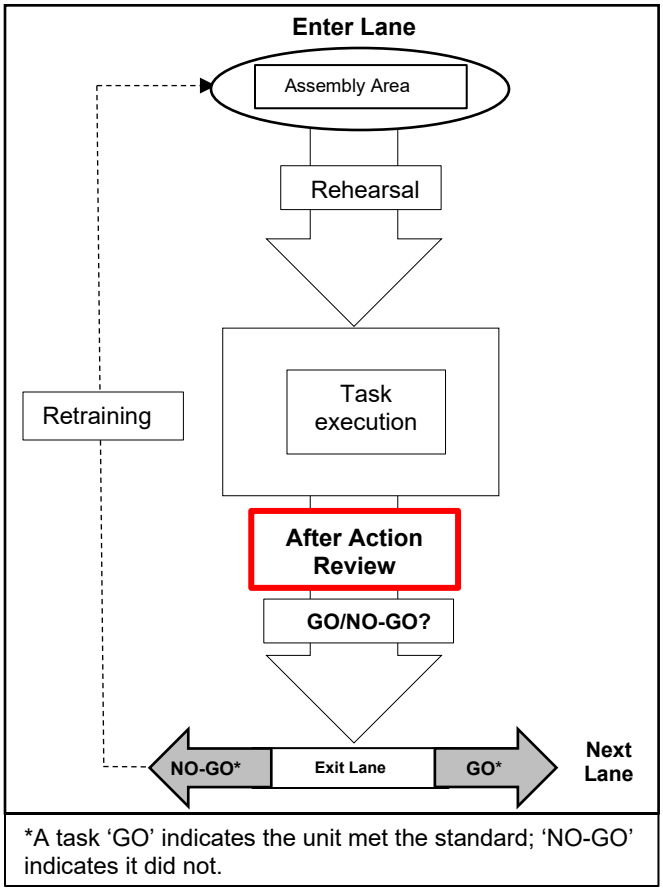



**Figure 1-1. AARs are integral to lane training**

# AFTER ACTION REVIEWS IN COMBAT

1-19. The need to evaluate and assess unit performance and proficiency does not stop when a unit goes into combat. Training on current and emerging tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) is an integral part of combat operations, although limited time and proximity to the enemy may restrict the type and extent of training. Only through training and applying lessons learned does combat performance improve and reduce the stiff penalties combat inflicts on the untrained.

1-20. The AAR is an effective technique to use in a combat environment. An AAR takes little time, and leaders can conduct them almost anywhere consistent with unit security requirements. Conducting AARs helps overcome the steep learning curve that exists in a unit exposed to combat and helps the unit ensure that it does not repeat mistakes. It also helps them sustain strengths. By integrating training into combat operations and using tools such as AARs, leaders increase their unit's chances for success on the battlefield.

## Steps of the after action review process

1-21. Effective AARs, formal or informal, require leaders to plan, prepare for, execute, assess and integrate. AAR planning is part of each training event or mission. Successful leaders understand the unit's mission and the commander's guidance for the training event. During planning, commanders identify opportunities to conduct AARs, assign facilitator and evaluator responsibilities, and ensure time and resources are allocated to conduct AARs. Training focuses on collective and individual tasks to demonstrate proficiency. These tasks require that leaders understand the commander's guidance, intent, concept of the operation, and tasks being trained. At all echelons during training, there are several opportunities to conduct on the spot coaching and lead informal AARs.

1-22. A key component of an evaluation plan is the AAR plan. The AAR plan provides the foundation for successful AARs. There are four steps in the AAR process that guide building an AAR plan. These are:

- Step 1 – Plan.
- Step 2 – Prepare.
- Step 3 – Conduct.
- Step 4 – Follow Up (using the results of the AAR).

1-23. The amount and level of detail needed during the planning and preparation process, depend on the type of AAR conducted and available resources. Chapters 2-4 of this TC provide necessary details needed to execute the four steps.

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## Chapter 2

# Plan and Prepare an AAR

## OVERVIEW

2-1. AARs are a primary component of a unit's overarching training evaluation plan developed for every training event. Detailed evaluation planning must occur before training execution. The focus of this planning is to evaluate the effectiveness of training, and AARs contribute to that process.

## STEP 1: PLAN AN AAR

2-2. In conjunction with the unit evaluation plan, leaders develop a supporting AAR plan for every training event. It contains:

- Who facilitates AARs?
- Who observes and evaluates the training?
- Who attends AARs?
- When and where do AARs occur?
- What training aids/resources are required?

2-3. Leaders use the AAR plan to identify critical places and events to observe task performance to provide the unit with an accurate and complete evaluation. Examples include unit road marches, actions on the objective, maintenance collection points, etc. By identifying these events and assigning responsibilities, unit leaders ensure training is observed and performance recorded at the right place and at the right time.

2-4. AAR plans also designate who will facilitate, evaluate/observe, and control a particular event. The term Observer, Coach, Trainer refers to individuals tasked to observe and record performance for the training exercise as well as to facilitate AARs (when trained and certified). (See figure 2-1 for an example of an informal AAR plan.)

**Facilitator**: 1LT Smith
**Evaluators/Observers:** 1LT Smith; SFC Davis
**Element**: 1st platoon
**Training objectives**: Conduct Support by Fire (07-PLT-3000)
**Who attends**: All participants
**When held**: Immediately following break in contact
**Location**: Vicinity GH44319218, behind 2nd Squad
**Special requirements**: LTC Goode will provide closing comments

**Figure 2-1. Example informal AAR plan**

2-5. To maximize the effectiveness of AARs, facilitators plan and rehearse AARs before training begins. During planning, leaders assign facilitator and evaluator responsibilities and identify tentative times and locations for AARs. This ensures the allocation of time and resources to conduct AARs and reinforces the important role AARs play in realizing the full benefit of training.

2-6. The amount and level of detail needed during the planning and preparation process depends on the type of AAR conducted, and on the resources available to conduct them. AAR planning has several distinct steps that are the basis of the AAR plan. These include:

- Selecting and training qualified facilitators.
- Identifying qualified evaluators/observers.
- Identifying when AARs are occurring during training.
- Determining who is attending AARs.

- Selecting potential AAR sites.
- Determining the best training aids for the AAR.
- Reviewing the AAR plan.

## Designate Facilitators, Select, Train, and Certify Observers/Evaluators

2-7. When planning an AAR, leaders designate a primary facilitator for the AAR. The facilitator has the responsibility for overall coordination and execution of the AAR. They can also serve as an evaluator/observer. Typically, facilitators and evaluators/observers are equal to or above the rank of the evaluated unit leader.

2-8. When planning an AAR, leaders select evaluators who:

- Can perform the observed tasks themselves to Army standards.
- Are knowledgeable on the duties they are to observe.
- Are knowledgeable on unit organization, task doctrine, and unit SOPs.

2-9. When using external evaluators, leaders ensure they are of at least equal in rank to the leader of the unit evaluated. If leaders must choose between experience and understanding of current TTPs versus rank, they go with experience. A staff sergeant with experience as a tank platoon sergeant can observe the platoon better than a sergeant first class who has no platoon sergeant experience.

2-10. Evaluators should not have duties which detract from their evaluator duties. If this is not possible, leaders in the chain of command conduct the AARs for subordinate units. For example, squad leaders evaluate the performance of Soldiers in their squads and limit AAR discussion to individual actions. Platoon leaders or platoon sergeants do the same for squads, company commanders or first sergeants for platoons, and so on. If possible, they avoid evaluating their own duties and tasks.

2-11. Leaders must train their evaluators. Each evaluator is trained and certified to lead AARs for the element he observes and provides input to the facilitator at the next higher echelon. Evaluators are trained in the use of the methods, techniques, and procedures in this training circular. If possible, trainers assign someone with AAR experience to accompany and assist an inexperienced facilitator until proficient. Leaders conduct AARs to help facilitators improve their performance. Inexperienced facilitators observe properly conducted AARs before attempting to lead one. Leaders includes classes on small-group discussion techniques in evaluator instruction.

2-12. The commander responsible for the evaluation is also responsible for certifying and training evaluators (FM 7-0). This means the commander ensures each evaluator is fully trained to observe and render an objective evaluation. This certification is recorded in unit records and signed by the commander for future reference.

## Identify Task Evaluation Standards

2-13. Every individual and collective task has a training & evaluation outline (T&EO) which provides the task, conditions, standards, performance steps and measures, and much more (when evaluating weapons, the weapon's prescribing training circular (TC) provides qualification standards). T&EOs are produced by the task proponent and are doctrine-based. They are available on the Army Training Network (ATN) at https://atn.army.mil. The senior facilitator distributes them to subordinate evaluators who review and use them to focus their observations. The senior facilitator is specific on what their subordinates are to evaluate and the standards of performance the unit leader/commander desires. When possible, the evaluator lists the steps from the task T&EO the unit must accomplish to properly complete the action. By listing each step, an evaluator can readily detect an error, especially in a drill when the actions of one Soldier may affect others.

2-14. The performance steps in each T&EO provide the standard for successfully completing each task and help structure consistent observations. Using the evaluation plan, the evaluator concentrates efforts on identifying critical places and times where and when unit performance is best observed and evaluated. This ensures feedback is directly focused on tasks trained and provides the unit leaders the information needed to improve or sustain task proficiency.

## Scheduling Stopping Points

2-15. Facilitators schedule time to conduct AARs as an integrated part of each training event. When possible, they plan for an AAR at the end of each critical phase or major training event. For example, a leader plans a stopping point after issuing an operation order (OPORD), when the unit arrives at a new position, after it consolidates on an objective, and so on.

2-16. For planning purposes, facilitators allow approximately 30-45 minutes for platoon level AARs, one hour for company-level AARs, and two hours for battalion-level and above. Soldiers receive better feedback on their performance and remember the lessons longer if the AAR is not rushed. Facilitators ensure all key learning points are addressed and do not waste time on insignificant issues.

## Determine Attendance

2-17. The AAR plan specifies who attends each AAR. Normally, only key personnel attend. At times, however, the more participants present, the better the feedback. Facilitators must select as many participants as appropriate for the task and the AAR site. At each echelon, an AAR has a primary set of participants. At squad and platoon levels, everyone normally attends and participates. At company or higher levels, it is not practical to have everyone attend. In this case, friendly and OPFOR commanders, unit leaders, and other key personnel (fire support team (FIST) chief, radio telephone operator (RTO), etc.) are the primary participants.

## Selecting AAR Sites

2-18. An AAR usually occurs at or near the training exercise site. Facilitators identify and inspect AAR sites and prepare a site diagram showing the placement of training aids and other equipment. Designated AAR sites also allow pre-positioning of training aids and rapid assembly of key personnel, minimizing wasted time.

2-19. Ideally, the AAR site allows Soldiers to see the terrain where the exercise took place. If this is not possible, the trainer finds a location which allows them to see the terrain where the most critical or significant actions are expected to occur. If needed, the trainer has a terrain model or enlarged map or sketch and a copy of the unit's graphics so everyone can relate key events to the actual terrain.

2-20. The facilitator makes Soldiers attending the AAR as comfortable as possible (by removing helmets/headgear, etc.), and if possible, providing shelter from the elements (sun, cold, rain, snow), providing refreshments when practicable (coffee, water), creating an open environment where participants can focus on the AAR without distractions. Participants should not face into the sun, and key leaders should have seats up front. For formal AARs, locate vehicle parking and equipment security areas far enough away from the AAR site to prevent distractions.

## Choosing Training Aids

2-21. Training aids add to an AAR's effectiveness. Facilitators choose them carefully and request them well in advance. Training aids must directly support discussion of the training and promote learning. Local training support center (TSC) catalogs list training aids available to each unit. Dry-erase boards, terrain models, and digital maps are all worthwhile under the right conditions. (See Table 1-1.)

2-22. Terrain visibility, group size, suitability to task, and availability of electrical power are all things to consider when selecting training aids. The key is planning and coordination. Only use a training aid if it makes the AAR better.

2-23. To select the right training aids, facilitators should ask:

- What points do I need to make during the AAR, and what training aids assist me making those points?
- Does the aid illustrate one or more of the main points?
- Can I use the actual terrain or equipment?
- Does the aid have any restrictions or special requirements, such as additional generators?
- Are participants able to see and hear it?
- Is it necessary for the discussion or just nice to have?

### Reviewing the AAR Plan

2-24. The AAR plan is a guide and is reviewed regularly to make sure it meets the training needs of the unit. CAUTION: Remember that every change takes preparation and planning time away from subordinate evaluators and facilitators. Changes may impact the quality of feedback.

2-25. The purpose of the AAR plan is to allow leaders as much time as possible to prepare for the AAR. Frequent or unnecessary changes prevent that.

## STEP 2: PREPARE AN AAR

2-26. Preparation is the key to the effective execution of any plan. Preparing for an AAR begins before the training and continues until the actual event. Facilitators and evaluators use the time before the training event to brush up on their knowledge. They must be tactically and technically proficient. Therefore, they review current doctrine, technical information, and applicable unit SOPs to ensure they have the tools needed to observe unit and individual performances.

### Review Key Directives

2-27. To gain understanding of both the focus of unit training and the exercise plan, facilitators and evaluators review the unit's training objectives, mission, orders, TACSOP and unit METL. The focus is on the training objectives evaluators are observing to effectively lead the unit in its discussion during the AAR.

2-28. Unit orders, including OPORDs, warning orders (WARNORDs), and fragmentary orders (FRAGORDs) issued before and during training establish initial conditions for tasks the units must perform. The unit METL provides an understanding of the unit’s overall capabilities in terms of measurable tasks.

### Identify Key Events to Observe

2-29. Evaluators focus their observations on the actions required to achieve the training objectives. To do this effectively, they identify the key events critical to accomplishing each objective. By identifying key events, evaluators ensure they position themselves in the right place at the right time to observe the unit's performance.

2-30. Examples of key events include:

- Issuance of OPORDs, WARNORDs, and FRAGOs.
- Troop-leading procedures (TLPs).
- Contact with opposing forces.
- Resupply and reconstitution operations.
- Intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB).
- Passage of lines.

### Observe the Training and Take Notes

2-31. All unit activities have three phases: planning, preparation, and execution. These phases assist the evaluator in structuring their observation plan and note taking. Evaluators keep an accurate written record of what is seen and heard to record events, actions, and observations by time sequence. This prevents loss of valuable information and feedback.

2-32. The evaluator includes the date-time group (DTG) of each observation to easily integrate their observations into those of other evaluators. This provides a comprehensive and detailed overview of what happened. When time is available, the evaluator reviews their notes and fills in any details not captured earlier. (See figure 2-2.)

**Training Event:**
Date/Time:
Location of Observer:
**Discussion** (tied to task and standards):

**Conclusions:**

**Recommendations** (indicate how the unit could execute the tasks/activity better):

Note: Units may modify this format to their specific needs

**Figure 2-2. Example AAR observation worksheet**

2-33. One of the most difficult evaluator tasks is to determine when and where to position themselves to observe training. The evaluator does not always need to stay close to the unit leader. Evaluators consider locations where observation is best. However, the evaluator does not position themselves where they are a training distracter. At all times, evaluators are professional and courteous.

2-34. Another way to observe training is to monitor unit communications. By listening to radio traffic, evaluators can trace the dissemination of orders and messages and monitor information flow from subordinate units.

### Collect Observations from Other Evaluators

2-35. The AAR plan designates a time, place, or method to consolidate feedback from evaluators/observers. (See figure 2-3.) The AAR facilitator needs a complete picture of what happened during the training to conduct an effective AAR. Therefore, each evaluator provides accurate and timely input. This input comes from multiple sources such as subordinate units and adjacent units.

2-36. The AAR facilitator also receives input from OPFOR leaders, role players, and other observers. These perspectives are often useful in identifying why a unit was or was not successful. During formal AARs, the OPFOR leader briefs their plan and intent to set the stage for a discussion of what happened and why.

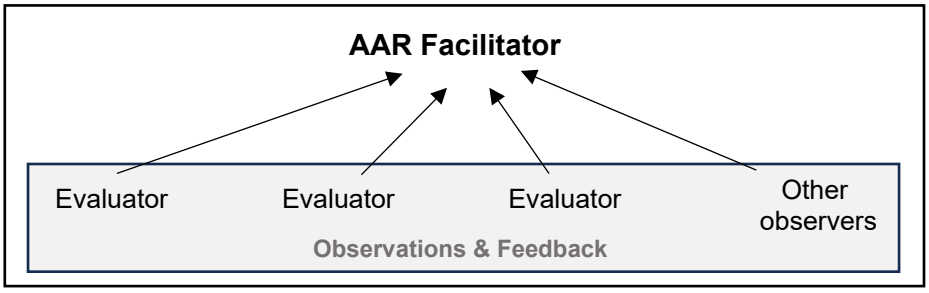



**Figure 2-3. Consolidating AAR Feedback**

### Organize Observations

2-37. After the AAR facilitator has gathered all the information, they arrange information in chronological sequence to better understand the flow of events. Next, they select and sequence key events in terms of their relevance to training objectives, identifying key discussion and/or teaching points.

### Select, Reconnoiter the AAR Site

2-38. The AAR facilitator selects potential AAR sites as part of the overall planning process. They select areas near where the training occurred or where most of the critical events took place. However, they reconnoiter alternate sites in case the primary choice cannot be used.

### Prepare the AAR Site

2-39. The facilitator sets up the AAR site so participants can see the actual terrain when practicable. Horseshoe arrangements allow participants to see the facilitator and training aids and encourage discussion.

2-40. If possible, the facilitator pre-positions training aids and equipment. If this is not possible, they are placed nearby under the control of a responsible individual.

### Rehearse

2-41. After thorough preparation, the facilitator reviews the AAR format, rehearses at the AAR site, and prepares to conduct the AAR. Facilitators then announce to unit leaders the AAR start time and location. Facilitators allow enough time for evaluators to prepare and rehearse while unit leaders account for personnel and equipment, perform actions their unit SOP requires, and move to the AAR site.

## Chapter 3

# Step 3: Conducting an After Action Review

## OVERVIEW

3-1. Once training is observed and evaluated, participants gather at the dictated AAR site. Once everyone is situated, the AAR process begins. The facilitator starts with some type of "attention getter" - a joke, an appropriate anecdote, or historical example that relates to the training, exercise, event, or conduct of the AAR. This method puts participants at ease and helps them link their just completed task performance to the coming discussion.

## AGENDA

3-2. At the start of the AAR, the facilitator reviews the agenda of the AAR to ensure everyone understands what the purpose is, and to ensure participants understand the rules. A sample agenda is:

- Introduction and rules.
- Topics covered include:
  - Review of objectives and intent.
  - Training objectives.
  - Commander's mission/intent (what was supposed to happen).
  - OPFOR commander’s mission/intent.
  - Relevant doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs).
  - Summary of events (what happened).
  - Discussion of key issues (chronological order of events, warfighting functions, key events/themes/issues).
  - Sustaining / improving performance.
  - Safety issues.
- Closing comments (summary).

## INTRODUCTION AND RULES

3-3. The introduction and rules of the AAR includes the following thoughts:

- An AAR is a dynamic, candid, professional discussion of training, focused on unit performance and measured against the Army standards for the tasks trained. Everyone is expected to participate if they have an insight, observation, or question which assists the unit in identifying and correcting deficiencies or maintaining strengths.
- An AAR is not a critique. No one, regardless of rank, position, or strength of personality, has all the information or answers. AARs maximize training benefits by allowing Soldiers, regardless of rank, to learn from each other.
- An AAR does not grade success or failure. There are always weaknesses to improve and strengths to sustain.

3-4. Soldier participation is directly related to the atmosphere created during the introduction. The facilitator makes a concerted effort to draw in and include Soldiers who seem reluctant to participate. The following techniques assist the facilitator in creating an atmosphere conducive to maximum participation and group learning. When covering AAR rules, the facilitator emphasizes the importance of:

- Participants entering the discussion only when necessary – and pertinent to the discussion.
- No one dominating the discussion – everyone is given the opportunity to share their experience/insights.
- Differing thoughts and observations are permissible and encouraged.
- Learning and applying what is learned from the actions to improve future performance.

# TOPICS

3-5. AAR topics provide a sequence of facilitator-led discussions that follow a logical framework leading participants to a common understanding of what happened and how to perform better. This area of the AAR is critical for the facilitator to lead participants toward an agreed upon course of action to implement.

## Review Objectives and Intent

3-6. Training Objectives and AAR Focus: A well-structured training event raises more issues than can be addressed in the time available, so the facilitator coordinates ahead of time with the unit leader to identify three to five topics for focused discussion. Generally, these topics are aligned to the established training objectives for the exercise. The facilitator should begin the AAR by reminding the audience of their training objectives for the event/exercise and reviewing the focus areas agreed to by the unit leader and facilitator.

3-7. Commander/leader Mission and Intent (what was supposed to happen): Using maps, operational graphics, terrain boards, and so on, the commander/leader restates the mission and intent. Then, if necessary, the facilitator guides the discussion to ensure everyone understands the plan and the commander's intent. Another technique is to have subordinate leaders restate the mission and discuss their commander's intent.

3-8. OPFOR Commander's Mission and Intent: In a formal AAR, the OPFOR commander explains his plan to defeat friendly forces. He uses the same training aids as the friendly force commander so participants can understand the relationship of both plans.

## Summary of Key Events (What Happened)

3-9. AARs are more effective when the facilitator establishes a common baseline of understanding of what took place during the training event. Well designed exercises provide ample objective data through concept sketches, detailed timelines, training objectives and evaluator/observer notes. The facilitator and participants determine to the extent possible, what happened during the event, phase or operation. The leader gathers as many views or perspectives (such as from the OPFOR, squad leader, team leader and rifleman) as possible. These varied perspectives help the facilitator to establish a common understanding. Leaders then understand the complexity of an event and work to solve complex, ill-defined problems. Combat training centers and warfighter exercises may provide facilitators more options through AAR playback tools and training devices. An effective facilitator compiles this data, re-checks to verify accuracy and is prepared to back brief the unit on what took place. This ensures that all participants start the discussion with a common understanding of what took place. Without this objective data up front, the AAR risks devolving into a battle of contrasting narratives and opinions.

## Understanding of Root Causes (Why It Happened)

3-10. Once a common understanding has been achieved, the facilitator now guides the review using a series of directed questions intended to open a dialogue between and among participants. The facilitator does not ask yes or no questions but encourages participation and guides discussion by using open-ended and leading questions. An open-ended question has no specific answer and allows participants to reply based on what was significant to them. Open-ended questions are also much less likely to put Soldiers on the defensive. This is more effective in finding out what happened. For example, it is better to ask, "SGT Johnson, what happened when your Bradley crested the hill?" rather than, "SGT Johnson, why didn't you engage the enemy tanks to your front?”

3-11. As a rule, it is more effective to ask direct questions of the more junior personnel in the training audience so that their perspective can be heard and understood by the unit leadership. A good facilitator is comfortable allowing the conversation to expand so that participants are communicating with each other and not just with the facilitator. As the discussion expands and more Soldiers add their perspectives, the facilitator steers the conversation toward key root causes that led to specific outcomes during the training event. Often these key root causes are recorded on a whiteboard or butcher block for all participants to see. If done properly, these root causes emerge organically from the discussion. Remember, this is not a critique or lecture; the facilitator does not tell the Soldiers or leaders what was good or bad. However, the facilitator ensures specific issues are revealed, both positive and negative in nature.

## Discussion of Relevant Doctrine, OPORDs, Standard Operating Procedures or Historical Context

3-12. Once the facilitator feels that the unit has sufficiently analyzed a particular topic, they close out the discussion with a reference to unit OPORDs, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Army doctrine or approved training circulars. This is accomplished with doctrinal teach slides that are prepared before the exercise or by asking participants to read a select passage from a doctrinal manual. The idea is to show the unit how the proper application of the unit's SOP or Army doctrinal principles might have addressed some of the root causes identified in the discussion. In nearly every case, a proper understanding of Army doctrine can provide a better framework for tackling tough tactical problems. In cases where doctrine does not cover a particular issue well, examples from past conflicts in history often provide a powerful teaching tool to highlight the importance of disciplined execution, and the consequences of mistakes.

## AAR Methodology

3-13. There are many approaches the facilitators use to help organize and facilitate discussion amongst participants in the AAR. Leaders consider organizing the discussion using one of three techniques:

- Chronological order of events.
- Warfighting functions.
- Key Events/Themes/Issues.

3-14. Chronological Order of Events: This technique is logical, structured, and easy to understand. It follows the flow of training from start to finish and allows Soldiers to see the effects of their actions on other units and events. By covering actions in the sequential order in which they took place, Soldiers and leaders are better able to recall what happened.

3-15. Warfighting Functions: By focusing on each warfighting function and discussing it across all phases of the training event/exercise, participants can identify systemic strengths and weaknesses. This technique is particularly useful in training staff sections whose duties and responsibilities directly relate to one or more warfighting function. However, facilitators must ensure they are careful not to lose sight of the big picture. They do not get into long discussions about the warfighting functions which do not relate to mission accomplishment. The Army's warfighting functions are:

- Command and Control.
- Movement and Maneuver.
- Intelligence.
- Fires.
- Protection.
- Sustainment.

3-16. Key Events/Themes/Issues. A key events discussion focuses on critical training events which directly support training objectives the chain of command identified before the event/exercise began. Keeping a tight focus on these events prevents the discussion from becoming sidetracked by issues which do not relate to training objectives. This technique is particularly effective when time is limited.

3-17. One of the strengths of the AAR format is its flexibility. The leader could use the chronological format to structure the discussion, then, if a particular warfighting function seems to have systemic issues that the group needs to address, follow that warfighting function across the entire exercise. Once that topic is exhausted, the AAR proceeds using the chronological format. Each technique generates discussion, and identifies unit strengths, weaknesses, and training the unit needs to improve proficiency.

3-18. However, facilitators must remember to:

- Be specific, avoiding generalizations.
- Be thorough.
- Not dwell on issues unrelated to mission accomplishment.
- Focus on actions.
- Relate performance to the accomplishment of training objectives.
- Identify corrective action for areas of weakness.
- Continually summarize.

## Safety Issues

3-19. Safety is every Soldier's business and applies to everything a unit does in the field and in garrison. Safety is specifically addressed in every AAR and discussed in detail when it impacts unit effectiveness or Soldier well-being. It is important to treat safety precautions as integral parts of every operation.

3-20. All incidents or near incidents of fratricide, whether inflicted by direct fire, indirect fire, or close air support (CAS), are discussed in detail. The leader focuses on identifying the cause of the fratricide and assists in developing SOPs and TTPs to prevent it in the future. Regardless of the environment (training or combat), the leader swiftly deals with all fratricide incidents. As soon as possible after the event, an AAR is conducted to discuss the circumstances surrounding the event, using the following discussion points:

- How and why did the incident occur?
- How were friendly personnel and equipment identified?
- What fire control measures were in place where the fratricide occurred and how effective were they?
- How did the commander's risk assessment and overall intent for the mission address the issue of fratricide?

## Immediate Actions and Future Recommendations (The So What)

3-21. The AAR is a problem-solving process. The purpose of the discussion is for participants to discover strengths and weaknesses, propose solutions, and adopt a course of action to correct problems. An effective AAR should produce a consensus on immediate fixes for implementation by the organization and who specifically is responsible for ensuring their completion. It is vital that the facilitator leave time (often 15 minutes or so) at the end of the discussion to summarize root causes, and then ask the unit leadership to identify the immediate fixes that they will prioritize. Most importantly the group should 'pin the rose' on a specific individual to lead the implementation of an agreed upon fix. This is best recorded on a white board for all to see. If the facilitator plans to conduct multiple AARs with the same training audience over the course of an exercise, it is useful to save this record as a starting point for the next AAR. Following this discussion, the facilitator ends the AAR on a positive note, linking conclusions to future training, then leaves the immediate area to allow unit leaders and Soldiers time to discuss the training in private.

## Chapter 4

# Step 4: Follow Up (Using the Results of the After Action Review)

## OVERVIEW

4-1. Nearly as important as the AAR itself are the leaders' actions following an AAR. While the AAR is an invaluable tool in identifying training shortfalls and correcting these, the lessons learned and how they're applied and shared throughout the unit and the Army are critical in improving overall training proficiency.

## IMMEDIATE RETRAINING

4-2. Retraining is immediately necessary to address particularly weak task proficiencies. By applying AAR results, a unit can improve its performance to meet the Army standard. However, the focus of this effort is not to get a 'passing grade,' but to improve Soldier and unit task performance. By the end of an AAR, Soldiers must clearly understand what was good, bad, or average about their performance.

4-3. FM 7-0 requires leaders to schedule time for retraining as a normal part of the planning process. The unit always retrains and performs tasks to standard before progressing to the next level of task complexity. This reinforces the learning process by immediately correcting substandard performance. When there is not enough time to retrain tasks, the leader integrates those tasks into the unit's training plan and reschedules them. As part of this process, leaders ensure that deficient supporting tasks identified during the AAR are also scheduled and retrained.

## REVISE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

4-4. After action reviews may reveal shortfalls, or better operating techniques. If so, unit leaders revise unit SOPs to reflect these improvements and changes. This is a continuous process as the unit learns from performance and integrates what it learned through updates to its SOPs. In this way, unit leaders ensure that lessons learned are captured for future performance.

## EVALUATE THE AAR PROCESS

4-5. Following any training event and exercise, unit leaders review their AAR procedures – in planning, preparing, and conducting AARs. From selecting evaluators, to positioning them to observe training, to facilitator actions, every aspect of the AAR process is evaluated for effectiveness. This process is also valuable in teaching new facilitators the unit's AAR process – and provides feedback to revising unit SOPs.

## INTEGRATE AND SHARE LESSONS LEARNED

4-6. Implementing and sharing lessons learned from AARs is an important final step in the AAR process. Commanders use AARs and lessons learned to shape future training and operations to correct deficiencies and sustain superior performance. Lessons learned from the AAR process are always recorded.

### Recording AAR Results

4-7. Unit leaders ensure the results of AARs are recorded for future review and use. Whether maintaining AAR documentation and results locally in unit files or using web-based systems like the Digital Training Management System (DTMS), this is a vital last step in the AAR process. Just as importantly, reviewing these records after the fact is very important. For example, a unit planning a field training exercise (FTX), refers to all available AAR records and reports prior to the next unit FTX. Some examples of AAR records the unit retains include:

- Formal AAR reports (see below).
- Informal notes and observations.
- Multi-media records of unit performance and AARs conducted during the training. These may include audio and video files; unit graphics; instrumented displays, etc.

## After Action Reports

4-8. Formally recording AAR results is done using after action reports. These are an important collection technique. (See FM 6-0 for more on after action reports.) The report provides observations and insights from lessons learned providing unit leaders an opportunity to reflect on the successes and shortcomings of operations and training, as well as share these lessons with other units and across the Army. Effective leaders use the after action report for building future training plans or for planning future operations.

4-9. The after action report differs from the after action review since it is a written record highlighting unit accomplishments and lessons learned. The after action report works well as a historical reference provided to other organizations preparing to conduct a similar operation or training event.

4-10. The following is a sample content of a brigade-level after action report. Commanders tailor the report as appropriate (See FM 6-0 for more details):

1. Report cover page.

2. Preface or foreword signed by the commander.

3. Table of contents.

4. Executive summary and chronology of significant events.

5. Detailed task organization. Include any significant changes and dates as appropriate.

6. Pre-deployment phase with dates.

7. Deployment and reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) with dates.

8. Relief in place or transfer of authority with dates (if applicable).

9. Operational phase with dates.

10. Redeployment activities with dates.

11. Post-deployment activities.

12. Provide an index or listing of all mid-tour and final unit after action report products, significant command briefings, or reports published separately.

13. Distribution.

14. Appendixes.

# Glossary

Use chapter intro style for glossary introduction.

## SECTION I – ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| **AAR** | after action review |
| **ADP** | Army doctrine publication |
| **CAS** | close air support |
| **DA** | Department of the Army |
| **DOD** | Department of Defense |
| **EDRE** | emergency deployment readiness exercise |
| **EXEVAL** | external evaluation |
| **EIB** | expert infantry badge |
| **EFMB** | expert field medical badge |
| **FTX** | field training exercise |
| **FIST** | fire support team |
| **FM** | field manual |
| **FRAGORD** | fragmentary order |
| **IPB** | intelligence preparation of the battlefield |
| **MET** | mission-essential task |
| **METL** | mission-essential task list |
| **OC/T** | observer controller/trainer |
| **OPFOR** | opposing force |
| **OPORD** | operations order |
| **QTB** | quarterly training briefing |
| **RC** | Reserve Component |
| **SOP** | standard operating procedures |
| **STX** | situational training exercise |
| **T&EO** | training and evaluation outline |
| **TC** | training circular |
| **TLP** | troop leading procedures |
| **TSC** | training support center |
| **TTP** | tactics, techniques and procedures |
| **WARNORD** | warning order |
| **YTB** | yearly training briefing |

## SECTION II – TERMS

**after action review**

A guided analysis of an organization’s performance, conducted at appropriate times during and at the conclusion of a training event or operation with the objective of improving future performance (FM 7-0).

**mission-essential task**

A collective task on which an organization trains to be proficient in its design capabilities or assigned mission (FM 7-0).

**mission-essential task list**

A tailored group of mission-essential tasks (FM 7-0).

**training and evaluation outline**

A summary document that provides performance and proficiency standards for individual and collective tasks (FM 7-0).

**training objective**

A statement that describes the desired outcome of a training event (FM 7-0).

# References

All websites accessed on 7 August 2024.

## REQUIRED PUBLICATIONS

These documents must be available to intended users of this publication.

DOD *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. 04 December 2024.
FM 1-02.1. *Operational Terms*. 28 February 2024.
FM 1-02.2. *Military Symbols*. 28 February 2024.

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Most Army doctrinal publications are available online: https://armypubs.us.army.mil.

ADP 7-0. *Training*. 29 April 2024.
FM 6-0. *Commander and Staff Organization and Operations*. 16 May 2022.
FM 6-27/MCTP 11-10C. *The Commander's Handbook on The Law of Land Warfare*. 07 August 2019.
FM 7-0. *Training*. 14 June 2021.

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Army Publishing Directorate (APD). https://armypubs.army.mil/.
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## PRESCRIBED FORMS

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## REFERENCED FORMS

Unless otherwise indicated, DA forms are available on the Army Publishing Directorate website at https://armypubs.army.mil/.

DA Form 2028 Recommended Changes to Publications and Blank Forms.

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**13 February 2025**

By Order of the Secretary of the Army:

**RANDY A. GEORGE**
*General, United States Army*
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