



COMMON GUIDING PRINCIPLES

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Certain common principles guide education, training, and experience for [force development](#) at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels:

- ★ **Build skill set expertise.** Design education and training programs with the experience and current skill levels of the participants in mind. *Tactical-level* education and training should take into account the relative inexperience and developing knowledge level of young [Airmen](#). Programs for junior Airmen, both officer and enlisted, should focus on individual tasks that gradually increase in complexity and realism. *Operational-level* programs should leverage the skills already developed to broaden the Airmen's perspectives and capabilities, and offer them formal and informal leadership opportunities to enhance their growth. *Strategic* education and training should shift away from functional expertise and look more at leadership and assessment skills, joint and coalition integration, and policy formulation. Every training program should have established performance or competency requirements to measure success in building the required skill sets. It is necessary to maintain a balance between academic concepts, operational reality, and lessons of the past.
- ★ **Prepare for change.** Skills development should keep pace with changing operational environments and resulting changing requirements. Educators should survey training methods outside of organizational bounds (other Services, government, and industry) to stay abreast of new training and education insights and best practices and adapt these methods to the programs for training and educating the force. They should review current doctrine to provide their lessons with the currency that the most recently identified best practices can provide. They should ensure educational programs are relevant using operational feedback mechanisms such as lessons learned, hot-wash sessions, after-action reports, intelligence summaries, and similar current operations tools.
- ★ **Create depth of expertise.** Competence and credibility require depth of experience that provides a foundation for effective [leadership](#). Depth is not gained overnight, but is honed over time. Programs designed to develop leaders should provide the fundamentals that are reinforced by on-the-job training and expeditionary field experience. Challenging duty opportunities normally prove more effective in developing depth of expertise. *Tactical-level* education and training should concentrate on building depth of knowledge and experience in the primary skill and skill-related areas, including

an understanding of Air Force culture and values. *Operational-level* education and training should build on early skills and deepen an Airman's understanding of the complete Air Force employment capability and its interface with joint and coalition partners. At the *strategic level*, education and training polish the leadership of all Airmen and command skills of officers, deepening their joint and coalition warfare and policy-making skills.

- ★ **Train to mission demands.** Training that meets mission needs leverages both training resources and duty experience to maximum effect. Skill expertise should prepare individuals for all tasks they are expected to perform to meet mission demands, and these needs may change rapidly with policy or international events. Mission needs may require functional specialists to train in other areas, including augmenting other Services. Educators and trainers should study the current and perceived future requirements of the operational and warfighting community and craft programs to meet those requirements.
- ★ **Train like we fight.** Success hinges on practicing the profession of arms in the same manner it will be executed on the battlefield or during a contingency. Doctrine gives trainers a clear starting point for creating programs that reflect the realities of today's operating environment. Training programs should be aligned with expected outcomes and provide realistic experience to greatly improve skill competency. Stress; unpredictability; fatigue; night operations; adverse weather; simulated equipment breakdowns; and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear contamination are examples of the challenges our Airmen will face in the field and should be trained to overcome. If training or exercises do not reflect the stress and challenges of actual conditions, then our Airmen will not be prepared when called upon to execute their mission.
- ★ **Make training and education available.** In today's high-tempo world, the opportunities to train or receive education have become more challenging. Education and training should be responsive to this shift. Commanders and supervisors should ensure they provide their people the training or education they need to meet mission requirements and for their own advancement. Educators and trainers should continue to expand the opportunities for training through online or other reachback capabilities. Education and training programs may become shorter or more flexible and adaptive to ensure coverage of the material in an expeditionary environment. Education and training may be more challenging to get while deployed, but should not be neglected for that reason.
- ★ **Validate education and training through wargames and exercises.** Simulation through exercises and wargames can be very effective in terms of time, cost, and experience gained toward preparing Airmen for their wartime and contingency roles. Exercises and wargames are effective methods of building individual experience under controlled conditions. In addition to providing instruction, these also aid in evaluating performance and the effectiveness of other training and education programs. Exercises contribute to training objectives, while wargaming is typically more appropriate for

education in which critical thinking objectives are important. Exercises are also important tools in developing individual skill sets along with organizational capabilities. For example, the ULCHI FREEDOM GUARDIAN exercise provides an opportunity for commanders and staffs to focus on operational and strategic issues associated with general military operations on the Korean peninsula. Wargames offer additional tools for developing and evaluating competencies of individuals and organizations.

While education and training are the foundations for an Airman's development, experience is gained when Airmen apply what they have learned to the Air Force's missions and tasks. The Air Force lessons learned process provides a ready tool for Airmen to obtain insights into the experiences of others, avoiding the difficulty of having to relearn pre-existing elements of knowledge hard-won by others.¹

¹ Air Force lessons learned are available on the Air Force's joint lessons learned information system website: <https://www.jllis.mil/apps/>