

Essentials for Training and ECOM staff

September 18, 2006

Table of Changes

Date	Issued By	Change	Entered by
02/25/10	NNN0ASN/FGN	Review and Final Exam, para 3; Who to notify on Satisfactory Completion	NNN0ASN/FGN

Essentials for Training and ECOM staff

September 18, 2006

By now you are probably at least familiar with the idea that a series of courses have been created to assist new staff members with developing their leadership skills. This course, Essentials for Training and ECOM staff, is a furtherance of those goals.

I. PURPOSE

Why this course? ECOM and Training are probably the two most intense and potentially difficult staff positions in the MARS program. Both require dedication, a good knowledge base, common sense, and persistence to the goals. By the same token, they are potentially the most rewarding jobs one can do in MARS.

The primary mission of MARS is to provide emergency communications. To meet that mission, both initial and on-going training are provided to members in order to establish and maintain a pool of well qualified radio operators capable of handling traffic in a military fashion. Much of ECOM planning and routine training overlap. Indeed, they are inseparable to a great extent. For this reason training staff and ECOM staff must have at least a basic understanding of each other's duties and the challenges each faces.

It is important for students to study the entire course, not just the headings that seem to relate to their particular focus (training or ECOM).

II. INTRODUCTION

The course Essentials for New Staff is a prerequisite for this course. If you have not satisfactorily completed that course please do so before continuing on. This course builds on the basics presented in that course.

Training begins the moment a new Tango member receives their letter of acceptance into the Trial Service program. It never really ends as long as a person is a member of MARS. Nearly all of our training, beyond the trial service period, is repetition. Constant reminders of correct procedures, who to contact, duties of NECOS, and how to handle traffic are all part of it. Some members are easily frustrated by the repetition. Others take it in stride. A few even view it as yet another opportunity to learn and improve their skills. This need for repetitive training is what spurred our training department motto:

It is the repeated folding and forging that makes a high quality sword what it is.

ECOM begins with the very first time a new Tango musters the courage to press the push-to-talk button and check into his or her first net. One doesn't expect much from a new member the first time. Never-the-less, with a bit of coaching they could handle some traffic, and might be called upon to do so.

So, if training and ECOM are so closely intertwined, why are they separate categories? Anyone who has served in either capacity doesn't need to ask. For those of you about to embark in one of these staff positions, you will soon know.

One could say that training deals primarily with procedures while ECOM focuses more on the tactical. Individually they can be rather demanding. Both are a never-ending struggle to work one's self out of a job, theoretically that is.

This course is intended to help break down the tasks of both into manageable bits and show you what the distinctions are. As with Essentials for New Staff, this course is not intended to tell you how to do your job, but rather to provide some assistance in developing your talents in it.

III. TRAINING

1. Overview

Not everyone is suited to this task, but most can handle it quite well if they develop a few skills to help them along the way. Some seem naturally born to teach. Others must work to hone their skills. Anyone can cookbook their way through an on-the-air training course. Most everyone can yell, and say, "do it like I say!", but is that really the way you want to come across?

Understanding that people learn in different ways, knowing how to address errors with members, and presenting on-going training require a bit of thoughtfulness and work. Being a competent trainer takes an understanding of people, how they react, and how to get a point across without being offensive.

Before you panic, you don't have to get your masters degree in education or a PhD in psychology to do this job. If you keep one word in mind you will do fine. That word is Respect.

Think for a moment about diplomats. In the most tumultuous of situations successful diplomats maintain a respectful presence. Without that, all their other skills are useless.

Being a good trainer requires three things:

- an understanding of the materials you are teaching both technically and functionally;
- building good training techniques;
- treating people the way you would want to be treated.

Each time, before you speak, ask yourself, "would I say this if my mother were in the room with me?" "Would I say it this way if Chief MARS were sitting next to me?" Plug in any name you like and ask yourself that question.

Passion for your subject matter and eloquent speaking abilities may help, but they are not key to being a good trainer. In fact, they can become a barrier. Excessive passion can lead to tunnel vision. Too eloquent and the messenger becomes more important than the message.

The real key is respect. You must respect yourself. You need to have respect for the subject matter you are teaching. You must show respect to those you are training. If you disrespect another person they will not respect you. If you repeatedly speak to people in a disrespectful way their lack of respect for you may well turn into loathing.

Respect for yourself means caring enough to do the job right. Be proactive. Allow yourself to be patient with those who make mistakes. Be as pleasant and professional as you can, even when they repeat the same error over and over. Some of us have to work on that on a regular basis.

Respect for the subject matter means you care enough to present accurate information and to look it up before you speak. Find all the relevant facts, not just what seems to support what you think it ought to be.

Respect for those you teach means speaking in an understanding and compassionate tone. Don't be condescending, rude, or offensive. To be other than respectful will become quite apparent very quickly and you will lose the respect of the members you are teaching.

2. Training Plan

Every training plan, every plan of action, requires three key components. They are goals, objectives, and methodologies.

Goals

The goal of training in MARS is to build and maintain a pool of well qualified operators.

The main distinction in MARS between training and ECOM is that training is intended to teach members the correct way to carry out the mission of MARS in terms of net procedures, message structure, traffic handling, following chain of command, and administrative procedures.

The primary goal of ECOM is to develop a plan of action to meet the MARS mission in times of disaster or other emergent need for communications help. It includes logistics and resources assessment; two things that are not part of the Training sector.

Objectives

You will no doubt come up with your own objectives for each training program you develop. One set for Tango members might be as follows:

- The student will develop an understanding of the purpose and mission of the MARS program.
- Students will gain a basic understanding of MARS administration and chain of command policy.
- Students will learn the basic requirements of traffic handling:
 - ✓ creating a message,
 - ✓ checking into a net,
 - ✓ passing a message,
 - ✓ receiving a message, and,

- ✓ how to handle messages for relay or delivery.

Methodologies

This will be the section you will spend the most time on. To be an effective trainer you must have some idea where you are going, how you want to get there, who your audience is, and how best to bring them along to your destination. With the possible exception of math or a foreign language anyone can teach anything, whether they know anything about it or not, simply by having an adequate methodology. A bit exaggerated perhaps, but a valid point none the less.

Methodologies include how you will present your training. Will it be over the air, in a classroom setting, via written study materials, use of audio or video recordings, or some combination? Each of the various settings has it's own unique benefits and drawbacks. Written material, such as correspondence courses, let students self-pace, but lacks the immediate access to the instructor. On-the-air gives more ready access to the instructor, but body language and other visual aspects do not exist. Classroom settings for MARS training are rarely a viable option due to the distances students would have to travel.

Part of methodology is laying out multiple training sessions into units that are more or less self-contained. For example, teach message formatting one time. Focus on sending, receiving, relaying, and delivery in another session.

If sessions are not dependent on each other it is not necessary to have students start with the first lesson in a series. A student is able start anywhere in the sequence so long as they complete seven of seven, or however many you have in the series. This is actually the best way to plan training for brand new members. That way they can jump right in and not feel out of step. If a student misses a session you don't have to scramble to do a make up for them. They simply take it the next time around.

A very important piece of methodology is formulating your materials. Are samples needed? Where can they find them? Will other visual aids or references to visual aids be helpful? Are parts of the material potentially confusing or seemingly contradictory? What concepts will you likely need to repeat several times? Where will further clarification likely be necessary? Be sure to allow for repetitions and clarification when timing your presentation.

Try varying the wording of your repetitions. Have you noticed any point(s) repeated in this course so far? Anything that stuck out? Take a moment now, use your "find" tool and count how many times the word "respect" is repeated just in the first four pages of this course.

One final, but important piece of methodology is having references ready. Be sure to search around for all possible related references, not just the first one you find, or the one that seems to support your view.

One classic example is use of punctuation in messages. NTP-8(D) chapter 6 Para 641 has a long list of punctuation. It even says, "and appear on standard typewriter, teletypewriter, and computer keyboards." It can be easy to use this reference and put characters into a message that will not successfully go through some digital modes.

Now, take a look at NTP-8(D) chapter 8 Para 802. Quite a difference. You can use all the punctuation in Para 641, but many of them you will have to spell out or use the prosign.

Always be ready with references, good ones. If you can't give a reference the student has no reason to accept what you tell them simply on faith. Worse, if you didn't look it up you might actually be teaching it wrong. It's so easy for a rule or policy to get misquoted and evolve into something that simply does not exist. Remember, respect for the subject matter! Respect for yourself!

This doesn't mean you have to spend 80% of your training time citing references. Just have them on hand if a question comes up. That way the student can look it up for themselves and that just reinforces their training.

2. Audience assessment

Assessing your audience is critical in order to properly prepare your presentation. If you don't know who you are teaching, have some idea of what they already know, what they are not likely to be familiar with, or what language they speak, you are stumbling in the dark.

If you present advanced engineering calculus to students who don't understand basic algebra you will lose them quickly. If you use a lot of esoteric terms (language) and your audience has no background in those terms, you will lose them quickly. By the same token, you don't want to concentrate on the multiplication tables to a group of physicists.

Audience assessment is basic to showing respect for your students. If you don't take a few moments to make this assessment the audience will feel offended and disrespected. Don't expect them to want to listen to you in the future. If you speak over their heads it makes them feel stupid and that they should not be here. Another aspect of audience assessment is comparing your own skill level to that of the audience. Things you know so well you take them for granted may be totally foreign to them.

A related mistake is assuming your audience is there for the same purpose you are. Be clear what your presentation is about and why they need it.

For purposes of MARS training you don't have to engage in a lot of heavy-duty assessment. You don't need to give pre-tests, or have biographies on everyone. It's more a matter of keeping the concept of audience assessment in mind so that you teach at their level.

3. Formulate your training material

Form your training plan so as to break down the material into usable bits. If you present too much at one time they will not retain most of it. If you don't present enough they will feel it was a waste of time to show up. Better to present too little though than too much.

Present a key point, explain it, then repeat what the key point is. It is well known among professional presenters that audiences will remember the first thing said and the last thing. They will retain little of what was in the middle. Repeating the key points also engrains them a bit more.

Assess how you present your material. Not everyone learns in the same way. Keep in mind that you may well understand what you said while others may not be quite so clear. In fact, they may have an entirely wrong impression. Consider these two phrases from a police officer's report.

"Jane said Mary got out of her car, walked over to Fran's car, then went to her home."

Did Mary get out of Mary's car or Jane's car? From Fran's car did she go to Fran's home, to her own home, or possibly to Jane's home?

Now consider this wording.

"Jane said Mary got out of Jane's car and walked over to Fran's car. From there Mary went to Jane's home."

This may seem a silly little exercise, but most people speak and write every day in ways that are not at all clear although it was quite clear to them what they meant.

Just as training is an on-going, never ending process, so too is developing your skills as a trainer.

Listen when students ask questions. You may want to consider revamping your material or your format if students seem regularly confused about a particular item. Perhaps the point is confusing and simply needs to be restated in various ways throughout the presentation.

Use examples, within reason. When doing so make the examples positive ones. Avoid the negative. Don't show a bad example and tell students this is not how it's done. They will remember the example, not whether it was right or wrong.

Assess your presentation. Did it seem to you to be too fast or too slow? Do you vary your tone, or is it monotone (thus the word monotonous)? It is a challenge to present technical material and keep monotony down. These common mistakes will lose student attention.

Observe a variety of classroom settings in colleges, police academies, on-the-job classes etc. and you will find one constant in every single class. There are always at least one or two students who will regularly ask questions, if only for the sake of asking. Often this type of student can be frustrating to the instructor, but they do encourage others to ask legitimate questions.

This does not happen on the air. Often students won't ask any questions. No doubt this relates to the fact they can not see you, can't see the other students, and you can't see them. Nor can they raise their hands. When students don't ask questions, don't assume they got it. Pause frequently to inquire if there are questions. If no questions come up then occasionally ask a student a question. Ask them to repeat back some key point.

At all times be respectful. No matter how often you end up addressing something with someone, be respectful, courteous, and kind to them. The moment you get mad, even just stern, you will lose them. If they don't get it or seem not to want to do it the MARS way, that is a matter for the director to handle.

4. Unique Challenges

Additional tools most trainers have at their disposal include a variety of visual aids such as handouts, flip charts, blackboards, white boards, slide shows, overhead projections, and Power Point presentations. Since most of your training is on-the-air you have none of these at your disposal, except possibly handouts. You also lose body language and expression.

Another loss many instructors don't even think about as a training tool is feedback from the audience. You may get questions over the air, but you do not see facial expressions, posture, or the activities of the students to tell you whether they are attentive, bored, you lost them, or whatever else might be going on. Nor can they raise their hand when they have a question.

The only way to resolve this last issue is calling for questions and comments more frequently. Double check your material to be sure it is sufficiently repetitive where necessary without being excessively boring. Vary the presentation of repetitions as best you can to help keep it interesting, or at least different.

How often have you heard, "There's no such thing as a stupid question." Yet many students feel stupid asking questions. The common theme somewhere in a student's mind is, "what if I'm the only one that didn't get it?" "Everyone will know how stupid I am." Asking questions over the air is doubly hard. Their perceived stupidity won't be confined to the other students in the class. Potentially the whole world is listening and will know. Rather than embarrass themselves they simply will not ask.

The best support system you can provide these students is if you, or their Elmer, make contact to see how it's going and if there is anything they have questions about. This should be done on a regular basis, especially early on in their training, or if you find a student is having a particularly difficult time. It's not that our material is rocket science, but some students just don't learn very well by just auditory teaching.

IV. ECOM

Competent execution of an ECOM staff position certainly incorporates all the aspects of a good trainer. Although the tasks of ECOM staff are quite a bit different at times, they dovetail inseparably with training.

An ECOM staff member has two primary functions. One is planning that includes knowing the needs, resources, and determining the limitations of members and MARS resources within the Area of Responsibility (AOR). It includes cultivating outside partnerships, helping the director develop the ECOM plan, and aid in planning for the execution of the MARS mission in times of disaster within the AOR.

The second is coordinating, in advance, MARS operations such as Auxiliary Radio Team (ART) and Station Augmentation Team (SAT) organization, planning ECOM exercises, and coordinating with ECOM staff of neighboring states, the region, and the area for wider area exercises. At times ECOM staff must partner with other staff, such as the state, region, or area FIFTEEN in the event of a joint MARS exercise with Army and/or Air Force MARS.

One critical aspect to keep in mind is that ECOM staff do not have to run the exercises or actual events. They don't even have to be aboard. The most critical part of their job is to have plans arranged. Have things in place so that an ECOM event, actual or exercise, can go forward without depending on any one staff person. It needs to flow in such a way that in the event of an actual incident MARS can fulfill its mission even in the absence of reaching the ECOM assistant, the director, or any other single entity.

What we practice is what we will do. This is a long time watch phrase of the military and law enforcement. It means don't practice one way and expect to act another in the real deal. All practice should be as close to the real thing as possible.

Many years ago a law enforcement agency on the West Coast had several officers involved in a shoot out that rivaled anything Hollywood could invent. Within a matter of a few minutes several officers lay dead. Several of the deceased officers were found with empty cartridge cases in their hand. The conclusion was police departments needed to rethink their firearms training. On the range, officers had been taught to empty the spent brass from their revolver into their hand. This was done to reduce damage to the casings so they could be reloaded. It became clear that what the officers practiced is exactly what they did under the stress of the fire fight.

Don't conduct your exercises such that you insist on directing all the operations, establish the nets, generate all the SITREPS, etc. If you do no one will know what to do, how to do it, or even that they should.

As with training, break down your job into manageable pieces. Determine what resources and limitations the members in your AOR have. Review this on a regular basis. You will have to make everything else work around these limitations. Other limitations may also crop up from time to time. What you want is a basic plan that will provide services to meet the MARS mission the best that we can.

Flexibility should be built in. Don't be rigid in your expectations. If you are, you will no doubt be sorely disappointed both at exercise time and in the event of an actual incident.

Occasionally you might want to plan a bigger operation with other states, regions, outside agencies, or other MARS services. These larger exercises are important, however it's often more productive to run exercises that are short and not too encompassing. This will help in after action assessment. If there is too much to consider it may be impossible to determine wherein the problems actually lie. Where you see the problem isn't necessarily where it originated. Even larger exercises should be viewed with the idea that you are actually testing only certain parts such as the interactions among resources, actual portability, or whatever your action plan wants to look at.

Don't design an exercise then decide what you want to test. That is truly the horse following the cart. Instead, look at what you have not tested lately, decide what you want to test, and build your scenario around that.

As with training, don't get frustrated with the members in your AOR. Things will never be perfect. They will never match up to the expectations you would like to set. It's great to have higher goals, but accept the limitations and understand your AOR may not always live up to your goals. MARS is not a panacea for ECOM. It is one adjunct. A little help is better than no help.

This concludes **Essentials for Training and ECOM staff** training course. It is our hope this course provided a few tools and a little insight into these two all-important jobs in NMC MARS. If you have any comments or questions about this course please feel free to address them to the Assistant to Chief MARS for Training, NNN0ASN. E-mail nnn0asn@navymars.org

Essentials for Training and ECOM staff **Review Quiz and Final Exam**

This course is a self-graded course, on the honor system.

After completing this quiz refer to the answer key and grade yourself. Review the course to find correct answers to anything you got wrong. Once you have found the correct answer to each question you got wrong jot it down.

When finished send a message to your state director (regardless of administrative level you are being appointed to), and INFO your state training assistant. If your staff appointment is to a region or area level you should also include notify the respective director. They will put a copy of the message in your personnel file. Include your full name and MARS personal call sign. This may be sent by e-mail if you do not want your full name in a message.

1. The tasks of Training staff and ECOM staff
 - a. Often over lap
 - b. Require many of the same skills
 - c. Are incompatible with each other
 - d. A and B above

2. If one word could sum up the most important asset of a trainer it would be
 - a. Respect
 - b. Knowledge (of the subject matter)
 - c. Assessment
 - d. Methodologies

3. Every training plan should contain 3 key aspects
 - a. Goals, objectives, and methodologies
 - b. Perspective, goals, quotes from humorous sources
 - c. Respect, assessment, HF propagation projections
 - d. None of the above

4. A good trainer must know this about his or her audience
 - a. Their knowledge of the subject matter
 - b. Their level of experience
 - c. Their ability to comprehend what is being taught
 - d. All the above

5. Important aspects to retaining your students' attention include:
 - a. Showing them respect at all times
 - b. Presenting your topic at a level compatible with their skill level.
 - c. Using language they understand and explaining what may be new terms for them
 - d. All the above

6. To reduce confusion and simplify presentation of material a trainer should
 - a. Consult a professional training plan developer
 - b. Insist students memorize the material in advance
 - c. Break the material down into smaller, manageable bits
 - d. None of the above

7. Based on this course a key element to a student's understanding of the material presented is:
 - a. Background color of the written material
 - b. Language: what you say and how you say it
 - c. Speed with which the data can be downloaded on student's computer
 - d. Propagation on HF bands

8. When faced with repeated training on the "same old errors" one should
 - a. Bang on the table in hopes they will listen
 - b. Yell and make demands
 - c. Threaten to have them terminated from the program
 - d. Maintain a level of respect, dignity, and kindness toward others

9. A new member's training begins with their acceptance into the Trial Service period.
 - a. It ends upon advancement to regular membership
 - b. It is not important after they participate in 3 or 4 ECOM exercises
 - c. It will continue throughout their membership in MARS
 - d. It lasts until the state director says they don't need any more training

10. There are a great many ____ between the duties and tasks of ECOM staff and Training Staff
 - a. Parallels
 - b. Inconsistencies
 - c. Incompatibilities
 - d. Conflicts of interest

11. ECOM and Training are separate staff positions, even though the goals greatly overlap because:
 - a. While similar in many aspects, they are also quite diverse
 - b. ECOM deals primarily with tactics and logistics, Training is primarily procedural
 - c. both require dedication, technical knowledge, advance planning, and a lot of work
 - d. All of the above

12. When developing an ECOM plan things to consider are available resources, partnerships with other agencies, capabilities of members in your Area of Responsibility (AOR), and
- a. Needs of ships at sea
 - b. The limitations of MARS resources within the AOR
 - c. The availability of the National Traffic System in the Amateur bands.
 - d. Capabilities of Army and AF MARS within the AOR.
13. During an exercise or actual incident the ECOM plan
- a. Should require that the respective ECOM staff be in charge
 - b. Must require the respective director be NECOS all times
 - c. should function without need of any particular staff person involved
 - d. should cover in detail every possible contingency of event type
14. When planning an ECOM exercise it is often better to
- a. Make it a big one, test all the possible problems at once
 - b. Wait until the last minute to decide a scenario
 - c. Make it smaller, testing only some elements of the system at one time
 - d. Leave the respective director out of the loop so he or she will be surprised
15. ECOM exercises and expected action in a similar actual incident
- a. Will differ greatly in terms of how MARS conducts itself
 - b. Should differ as little as possible in actions and methods used
 - c. Are both dangerous so exercises should be on paper only
 - d. Require a solid understanding of how the internet works
16. Which of the following is true for you:
- a. I did read and study all of this course as recommended in the introduction,
 - b. I studied only the aspects of my staff position, but will study the rest
 - c. Just guessed at the answers without studying any of it
 - d. Would like a new puppy for Christmas

Essentials for Training and ECOM staff
Review Quiz and Final Exam Answer Key

A minimum of 10 correct is passing.

1. d.
2. a.
3. a.
4. d.
5. d.
6. c.
7. b.
8. d.

9. c.
10. a.
11. d.
12. b.
13. c.
14. c.
15. b.
16. a. should be your answer, do not include this question in grading yourself.