



## Lesson Plan

### Preparing for Command

10 May 2022



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## How to Use this Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is divided into three key sections and an appendix containing supporting material.

The **About the Lesson** section outlines the lesson and identifies requirements for its effective use. Course Directors should use this section to (a) understand the purpose and context of the lesson, (b) learn about lesson pre-requisites, and (c) guide the selection of facilitators.

The **Before the Lesson** section provides details on the preparation required for this lesson, including student prerequisites (if any), recommended facilitator pre-course readings, and guidance on how to prepare the classroom.

The **Presenting the Lesson** section contains the actual lesson plan. It provides the recommended outline, discussion, and slide prompts along with actual *questions* and *recommended language* for the facilitator to use in the classroom.

The **Appendix** includes any required in-class handouts or exercise material.

For more information on how lessons are structured, or how to use them in the course, see the **Course Director's Handbook** or **Facilitator's Resources**.

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# About the Lesson

## Preparing for Command

### Overview

The *Preparing for Command* lesson addresses three of the key areas essential to prepare for flight leadership. This lesson is designed to equip students with broad knowledge and tools necessary to help develop their command-skills prior to taking a flight commander position. The lesson centers on the *person* taking command in an organization and how to personally evaluate strengths. By understanding the skills brought to command the students will be better able to understand where they fit in the organization and where, when in command, they will lead their flight. Knowing the flight's skills and value to the organization will aid in a smooth transition from being a member of the organization to being part of the command team.

This lesson is designed for participants to have a conversation with their squadron commander about expectations of the flight commander and how the flight commander role fits in to the mission prior to this lesson.

### Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Prepare for leadership as a flight commander.
2. Prepare for mission responsibilities as a flight commander.
3. Prepare for unknown and unknowable situations as a flight commander.

### Recommended Prerequisites

- Interview with squadron commander (or equivalent) on expectations of the flight commander and how the flight commander fits into the mission.
- Attend the lesson on *The Role of the Flight Commander*.

### Recommended Time

- 50 minutes

### Recommended Facilitator Qualifications

This lesson is designed for a facilitator with the following minimum qualifications:

1. Subject matter knowledge
2. Command-level experience

Note: Subject matter knowledge can be developed using the information presented in **Preparing the Facilitator** section of this document.

## Before the Lesson

### Preparing the Participant

- Air University Global College, *Flight Commander Discussion Guide* (2022). Each participant must interview their squadron commander (or equivalent) before attending the course. This handout provides key questions, which the participant must answer before the course. The guide also includes assignment guidance for the final lesson of the course (*The Road Ahead*).

### Preparing the Commander

Before the course, the participant' squadron commander (or equivalent) should receive and complete the following actions.

- Air University Global College, *Squadron Commander Discussion Guide* (2022). This guide supports the participant interviews described above. It also provides expectations the commander should have of the participant when he/she returns from the course.

**Note:** These guides are included in *The Role of the Flight Commander* lesson and are also available under the Facilitator Resources on *The Flight Commander's Edge* website.

### Preparing the Facilitator

All student preparation, plus:

- None.

(Optional) Additional deep-dive preparation materials are available on *The Flight Commander's Edge* website.

### Preparing the Classroom

Ensure the classroom provides/is provisioned with:

- Adequate classroom space for separate small group discussions.
- A white board or an easel with butcher block paper.
- Computer and projector (internet connectivity not required).

### Preparing Required Materials

Prepare one copy of each handout below for each student. Do not distribute handouts before the class.

- Air University Global College, *The Challenge of Command Worksheet* (2022).
- Air University Global College, *Preparing for the Mission Exercise Guide* (2022).
- Air University Global College, *Preparing for the Unknown Exercise Guide* (2022).

Handouts are available in the Appendix.

## Presenting the Lesson

**NOTE:** This lesson is designed for up to five (5) groups of participants. Groups should be no larger than five (5) members to maximize participation during small group discussion.

### Introduction (5 minutes)

This part of the lesson introduces the first of three key concepts in the course: preparing self. This section builds on the content presented in the previous lesson (The Role of the Flight Commander) and expands on items leaders should consider before accepting the challenge of command.

#### Slide 1: Preparing for Command

Introduce the lesson.

**Welcome to the *Preparing for Command* lesson. In this lesson, we will examine three key areas critical to your preparation for flight-level command.**

**This lesson provides a holistic look at how you can prepare for command in your specific unit. By the end, you will have a much better idea of what is required from a personal, mission, and situational perspective as you begin your transition.**

#### Slide 2: Lesson Objectives

This slide lists the lesson objectives.

After students have reviewed the lesson objectives, continue.

#### Slide 3: The Challenge of Command Survey

Begin the lesson.

**How do you know if you are ready for command?**

**The key element in your command—the element that will do the most toward accomplishing the mission—is your leadership. If you are an effective leader, you will lead your people to success. You will make fair and firm decisions on their behalf and in the interest of good order, discipline, and the successful accomplishment of the mission.**

**Doing this isn't easy. Before assuming the guidon for your flight, you should first ask yourself whether you are ready to accept the challenge of command.**

**Let's do this now.**

Distribute the **Air University Global College, *The Challenge of Command Worksheet (2022)*** to all participants.

When complete, continue.

**The handout provided asks you 20 tough questions that get at the heart of leadership and your readiness for command.**

**Take a few minutes to consider the questions. Be honest.**

**After you are done, we will continue our discussion.**

Monitor actions for completion. This survey should take about 5 minutes for all participants to complete.

After five (5) minutes, continue.

## Initial Discussion (10 minutes)

The initial discussion reviews the leadership requirements – essentially prerequisites – for good command performance and provides an opportunity for participants to determine personal readiness for command.

### Slide 4: Small Group Discussion

Divide the students into small groups (4 or 5 members) and prompt the students with the following experience.

Continue the discussion.

**How did you do?**

**Most new commanders don't answer "yes" to all of these questions. At least not at first.**

**If you answered "no" to more than a handful of questions, it doesn't mean you need to reconsider your leadership track. It does mean that you need to target your preparation for command-level leadership, perhaps adjust your mindset and behaviors, and be realistic in your expectations of command...with not only yourself, but with your squadron commander, your flight, and at home with your family.**

**In your small groups, consider this question:**

**Why are the items on this list important?**

**Take five (5) minutes to discuss this in your groups and be prepared to share your thoughts with the class.**

Monitor group discussions.

After five (5) minutes, continue.

### Slide 5: Large Group Discussion

Continue the discussion.

Ask one member from each group to briefly summarize their responses to the question:

**Why are the items on this list important?**

**Anticipated Responses:** Answers will vary but should focus on the following key concepts:

- The flight commander is the first line of commissioned officer leadership in the squadron.
- As a flight commander, you are the representative of the squadron commander to your Airmen or Guardians, civilians, and contractors.
- Command is tough, and it requires commitment in greater than any other job in the Department of the Air Force.

- A flight commander's personal preparation will be evident, and carry through, every action taken, and decision made while in command.
- Modeling appropriate behavior is critical to individual performance, good order and discipline, and mission accomplishment.

Participants should end this discussion with a solid understanding that command is different, and that it is important to prepare self in many, diverse areas to succeed.



## Content Presentation (15 minutes)

In lieu of new content, this portion of the lesson uses a structured, flipped-classroom approach to help participants discover key items they need to consider with respect to mission responsibilities as a flight commander.

### Slide 6: Preparing for the Mission

Begin the presentation.

**The next step after preparing yourself (from a leadership perspective) for command, is preparing for the mission. While it is obvious that your flight must be able to accomplish its mission, and there is a large amount of preparation involved in learning specific technical skills for any job, this part of the lesson approaches this topic from a leadership perspective. Specifically, it looks at *preparing for your mission responsibilities as a flight-level leader.***

**Preparing for your mission responsibilities as a *leader* begins with understanding the mission and how your flight helps to achieve it. Specifically, you need to:**

- understand the mission and vision of your squadron,
- understand how your flight supports the squadron’s mission and vision, and
- establish flight’s goals (for your time in command).

**Additionally, you need to be able to articulate these items to others effectively.**

**Let’s do a quick exercise to look at these elements.**

### Slide 7: Preparing for the Mission Exercise

Begin the exercise.

Distribute, the **Air University Global College, *Preparing for the Mission Exercise Guide (2022).***

When complete, continue.

**Until now, you may not have needed to understand nor explain these “big picture” pieces. This, however, is critical once *in command*. This worksheet will help you identify gaps in your preparation, which you must remedy before you assume command.**

**In your small groups, take about fifteen (15) minutes to work your way through the worksheet. Ask questions of your group-mates as you go.**

**In some places, it asks for input from the Squadron Commander Discussion you did before the course. If you don’t have that information, fill in what you can.**

**Don’t linger on the questions. If you can’t easily answer one, circle “Clarification Needed” and follow-up after the course is complete.**

**Remember, this exercise only introduces you to the “big picture” items you need to succeed in the mission – we don’t expect you to have all the answers now.**

Monitor for progress. It is expected that participants will hang up on answering some of the questions on the worksheet. Remind them that this is expected, and that they should circle “Clarification Needed” as a reminder for future follow-up.

After ten (15) minutes, continue.

## Application Activity (10 minutes)

This section of the lesson provides an opportunity to review an exercise guide for later use. The participants explore concepts they need to consider in preparing for known, unknown, and unknowable situations as a flight commander within their small groups. These situations are framed in the context of a strengths-weakness-opportunities-threats (S.W.O.T.) analysis which helps commanders maximize strengths and mitigate weaknesses. By understanding strengths and weaknesses, leaders can better position themselves to respond to potential threats.

### Slide 8: Preparing for the Unknown

Begin the presentation.

**Now that we've looked at how you can prepare yourself for your mission responsibilities, the final part of the lesson is designed to help you manage situations as a flight commander.**

Some situations are known – predictable and likely problems you will face, often due to a weakness of some sort (such as bad training, lack of manpower, etc.).

Some are unknown – threats you can predict, but don't know when they will happen. An organization may face these threats in the future (such as budget cuts, no notice deployments, etc.).

And, some are unknowable – unpredictable, completely off-the-charts problems that you haven't ever thought of.

Leaders must be prepared to handle all these types of situations. A good way to do that is through an analysis technique called "S.W.O.T."

**Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats**

### Slide 9: Flight Analysis Exercise

Distribute the Air University Global College, *Preparing for the Unknown Exercise Guide (2022)* worksheet.

When complete, continue.

Continue the presentation.

**SWOT analysis forces you to understand the current status of your flight, and helps you prepare for the future.**

**All flight commanders should conduct a SWOT analysis as soon as possible upon accepting command.**

**This is a brief introduction to SWOT analysis tailored to the flight level – with the expectation that you will conduct your own exercise within your flight.**

**The template provided is only a guide. Go ahead and take a few minutes to look over.**

**A complete SWOT analysis will take considerable time. This exercise is simply designed to introduce you to the concept and provide a tool you can use later. You should do one of these as part of your Personal Development Plan.**

**Discuss the questions on your sheet in your small groups, and ensure you understand what is required for a SWOT.**

**Take about ten (10) minutes for this review, then we will wrap up the lesson.**

Monitor for progress. Remind them that they are not expected to complete a SWOT analysis in this exercise; rather they should familiarize themselves with the concept and discuss the process for future follow-up.

After ten (10) minutes, continue.

## Lesson Wrap-Up (10 minutes)

There is no separate self-assessment for this lesson as each of the three exercises included prompts for additional review outside of the course.

### Slide 10: What's Next?

Summarize the lesson.

**Today, we've briefly examined three of the key areas essential to prepare for command.**

- **How to prepare yourself for the challenge of command**
- **How to prepare for your mission responsibilities**
- **How to prepare for situations – known, unknown, and unknowable – which you may face.**

**At the end of each exercise, you identified the next steps to ready you for command. Each of you now have information that will help you conduct a SWOT analysis at the flight level. These exercises can be considered a self-assessment of sorts. As you move forward through the course, you will update and improve on the answers to your questions from this lesson. Keep your results – you will need them when you write your Professional Development Plan and brief your commander.**

**Commanders that prepare well in these three areas transition to and have more success than those who do not.**

**Ensure you understand what you are “getting in to” as you take the next step on your leadership journey.**

**And, remember, as a commander, there are always people ready to help you succeed.**

End. Break (10 minutes).

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## Appendix: Required Materials and Handouts

The materials required for this lesson include:

- Air University Global College, *The Challenge of Command Worksheet* (2018).
- Air University Global College, *Preparing for the Mission Exercise Guide* (2018).
- Air University Global College, *Preparing for the Unknown Exercise Guide* (2018).

These handouts, on the following pages, are designed for printing directly from the lesson plan. Ensure you print enough copies for all class participants.

## The Challenge of Command

*Developed by the Air University Global College*

The key element in your command—the element that will do the most toward accomplishing the mission—is your **leadership**. If you are an effective leader, you will lead your people to success. You will make fair and firm decisions on their behalf and in the interest of good order, discipline, and the successful accomplishment of the mission.

Doing this isn't easy. Before assuming the guidon for your flight, you should first ask yourself whether you are ready to accept the **challenge of command**.

Consider the following questions.

The Challenge of Command Survey	Yes / No (Circle one)	
Am I willing to dedicate myself to my unit?	Y	N
Are members of my family willing to assume their roles in helping me create a quality, caring Department of the Air Force community?	Y	N
Is my family willing, if necessary, to be secondary to the unit, squadron, group, or wing?	Y	N
Are my family and I willing to live in a “fishbowl,” open to observation and criticism by subordinates and superiors?	Y	N
Am I physically and emotionally fit to carry the load?	Y	N
Do I have the courage to make tough decisions and stand by them?	Y	N
Am I flexible when dealing with changing situations? Am I willing to risk new ideas?	Y	N
Can I remain enthusiastic and cheerful when confronting seemingly impossible tasks?	Y	N
Am I willing to leave a comfortable office to check or supervise training, maintenance, and other activities of my unit?	Y	N
Am I willing to do my best with what seems inadequate means?	Y	N
Am I confident that I can produce a superior unit from average people? Can I inspire people to achieve outstanding results?	Y	N
Am I willing to take reasonable risks to allow my subordinates to grow and become more productive?	Y	N
Am I willing to let my subordinates be creative?	Y	N

The Challenge of Command Survey	Yes / No (Circle one)	
Am I willing to be accessible to my Airmen/Guardians? Does my manner invite communication?	Y	N
Do I really listen? Can I withhold judgment until the facts are in?	Y	N
Do I like to be with young people? Can I live with their energy, their points of view, and the problems they sometimes face?	Y	N
Am I always willing to accept my people's failures as my own, yet immediately recognize their successes as theirs?	Y	N
Am I able to do many things at one time? Can I manage a complex job?	Y	N
Can I carry out orders as well as give them?	Y	N
Do I really want this flight commander experience? Am I sure that my motivation is more than simply having the command experience entered on my record?	Y	N

Most new commanders don't answer "yes" to all these questions. At least not at first.

How did you do?

If you answered "no" to more than a handful of questions, it doesn't mean you need to reconsider your leadership track. It does mean that you need to target your preparation for command-level leadership, perhaps adjust your mindset and behaviors, and be realistic in your expectations of command...with not only yourself, but with your squadron commander, your flight, and at home with your family.

Take a few minutes to discuss the results of this survey in your groups. Ensure you understand what you are "getting in to" as you take the next step on your leadership journey. And remember, as a commander, there are always people ready to help you succeed.



## Preparing for the Mission Exercise Guide

*Developed by the Air University Global College*

Preparing for your mission responsibilities as a *flight-level leader* begins with an understanding of the mission and how your flight helps to achieve it. Specifically, you need to:

- understand the mission and vision of your squadron,
- understand how your flight supports the squadron's mission and vision, and
- establish flight's goals (for your time in command).

Additionally, you need to be able to articulate these items to others effectively.

Until now, you may not have needed to understand nor explain these “big picture” pieces. This, however, is critical once *in command*. This worksheet will help you identify gaps in your preparation (e.g., clarification needed), which you must remedy before you assume command.

### The Squadron Perspective

Understanding the Squadron's Mission and Vision	Clarification Needed?	
What is my squadron's (or equivalent) mission? <sup>1</sup>	Y	N
What is my commander's vision for the squadron? <sup>1</sup>	Y	N
Can I explain this mission and vision to others in easy-to-understand terms? What will I say?	Y	N

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<sup>1</sup> In your pre-course discussion with your squadron commander, you obtained a copy of your squadron's mission statement. Use that information here.

## The Flight Perspective

Understanding how the Flight Supports the Mission and Vision	Clarification Needed?
<p>How does my flight support the squadron's mission?<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Y   N</p>
<p>How will my flight help the commander achieve his/her vision for the squadron?<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Y   N</p>
<p>Can I explain where our flight fits into the "big picture" in easy-to-understand terms? What will I say?</p>	<p>Y   N</p>

Some flight-level leaders, especially in squadrons with very diverse missions, go as far as to develop their own mission and vision statements. If you do this, remember<sup>3</sup>:

A mission statement should clearly and concisely state a task and a purpose. The task should describe what your flight does. The purpose should tie the mission to a greater goal (e.g., the mission of the squadron). Start by asking yourself these questions: "What are you aiming for?" "What is your overall objective?" "What is it that you desire to achieve and how will you achieve it?"

A vision statement should describe what the future will look like. It should be clear and concise and communicate a sense of purpose—the *raison d'être*—for the flight.

<sup>2</sup> In your pre-course discussion with your squadron commander, you obtained a copy of your squadron's vision statement (if any). Use that information here.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Charles D. Allen, "Chapter 3 Vision" in Stephen J. Gerras (ed.), *Strategic Leadership Primer* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2010), 20-27.

## Flight Goals

Establishing Flight Goals	Clarification Needed?
<p>What are my commander's goals for my flight?<sup>4</sup></p>	<p>Y    N</p>
<p>What are my goals for my flight? Have I integrated my commander's goals into my goals?</p>	<p>Y    N</p>
<p>Can I explain these flight goals, and how they relate to the mission and vision in easy-to-understand terms? What will I say?</p>	<p>Y    N</p>

When you create goals, use S.M.A.R.T. goal-setting method.<sup>5</sup> Ensure your goals are:

- Specific—Goals answer the six “W” questions (who, what, where, when, which, why).
- Measurable—Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress.
- Attainable—Ensure the goal is feasible.
- Realistic—Evaluate whether the team is both willing and able to strive toward a goal.
- Timely—Develop a timeline for goal accomplishment.

<sup>4</sup> In your pre-course discussion with your squadron commander, you ascertained your squadron commander's goals for your flight during your time in command. Use that information here.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Lynn M. List, “Squadron Goals” in Belinda Bazinet (ed.), *Guidelines for Command* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2015), 25-27.

# Preparing for the Unknown Exercise Guide

*Developed by the Air University Global College*

## How can you prepare for “situations” as a flight commander?

Some situations are known	...predictable and likely problems you will face, often due to a weakness of some sort (such as bad training, lack of manpower, etc.).
Some are unknown	...threats you can predict, but don't know when they will happen. An organization may face these threats in the future (such as budget cuts, no notice deployments, etc.).
And, some are unknowable	...unpredictable, completely off-the-charts problems that you haven't ever thought of.

**Leaders must be prepared to handle all these types of situations. A good way to do that is through an analysis technique called “S.W.O.T.”**

SWOT analysis:

- forces you to understand the current status of your flight, and
- helps you prepare for the future.

All flight commanders should conduct a SWOT analysis as soon as possible upon accepting command.



## Flight Analysis Exercise

The Flight Analysis Exercise on the following pages provides a brief introduction to SWOT analysis at the flight level. The template provided is only a guide and should be edited for your flight's unique circumstances.

## Internal Factors

In SWOT analysis, categories are divided into internal and external factors.

Internal factors are strengths and weaknesses. Strengths and weaknesses may include:

- Personnel (availability, in-bound/outbound, current status, etc.)
- Training (accuracy, completion status, funding, etc.)
- Facilities
- Other resource availability (funding, aircraft, weapons, etc.)
- Other factors that describe your mission and how well you perform it.

**Instructions:** Consider the internal factors associated with your flight.

- Some questions may not apply to you, or you may identify more questions than shown.
- Strategize how you will gain this information on your flight after the course is over

My Analysis	Things to Consider
<b>Internal Strengths</b>	What is the flight known for? What is our unique contribution to the mission? How well do we perform our mission? What resources do we have readily available? What do people say about us? What are we doing that no one else is?

My Analysis	Things to Consider
<p><b>Internal Weaknesses</b></p>	<p>What do our customers/leadership dislike about the way we do our mission?</p> <p>What are we doing poorly?</p> <p>What are others doing much better than we are?</p> <p>What resources do we lack?</p> <p>What is the main area we need to improve on <i>right now</i>?</p>

Analysis of internal factors is mainly driven by data. Strengths and weaknesses are observable and measurable. If you do not have adequate data to answer these questions, where can you get it? A comprehensive understanding of strengths and weaknesses is critical to your ability to execute the mission now, and to plan for the future.

Remember, as a flight commander, you control internal factors. As part of your decision making, you should strive to maximize your flight's strengths and mitigate its weaknesses.

## External Factors

External factors in SWOT analysis are opportunities and threats. Often, these factors are out of your control. But, by identifying them, you can plan for outcomes.

Opportunities and threats may include things such as:

- National security issues (war, other operations, etc.)
- Economy
- Market size
- Government behaviors (Congress, the Courts, international agreements, etc.)
- Trends
- Weather

**Instructions:** Consider the external factors associated with your flight.

- Some questions may not apply to you, or you may identify more questions than shown.
- Strategize how you will gain this information on your flight after the course is over

My Analysis	Things to Consider
<b>External Opportunities</b>	What new opportunities due to mission change, new technology, personnel, or other resources are becoming available? How is the environment market changing? What opportunities did we pass, but are still available? What would be the ideal opportunity for us? What other things can we leverage which can be used in our favor?

My Analysis	Things to Consider
<b>External Threats</b>	Who are our competitors? Has there been an increase in competition lately? Where and why? What are our costs/resource utilization? Can we streamline operations? Are customers using less of our services? Are our external suppliers unreliable?

Analysis of external factors is more art than science. While strengths and weaknesses are observable and measurable, identifying opportunities and anticipating threats is based on educated guesswork.

One great approach – get your team together and brainstorm ideas. Consider what the future may hold and then predict how it could affect your flight.

By understanding your strengths and weaknesses, you can better take advantage of identified opportunities, and manage anticipated threats.

Remember, as a flight commander, you control internal factors. As part of your decision making, you should strive to maximize your flight's strengths and mitigate its weaknesses.