

**SUPERVISOR'S  
GUIDE  
TO PREPARING  
ENDORSEMENTS  
FOR  
OFFICER  
PROGRAM  
APPLICATIONS**

**USCG Training Center  
Cape May, NJ**

September 2011

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## AFTERWORD

**T**he CO's endorsement is a major factor in the applicant's success in persuading the selection board he/she has the disposition to make the change from "E" to "O". I hope this handbook makes drafting that endorsement a bit easier.

However, because changes to the *Recruiting Manual*, *Personnel Manual*, and the GoCoastGuard.com web site are made without notice and because ESOs can't routinely review every page of every web site and every publication they consult looking for changes, some information in this guide may be outdated. Official publications and web sites provide the definitive word in cases where there is a difference between them and what I've written in these pages.



## A NOTE ON APPLICANT NARRATIVE MEMOS

**C** GRC has sometimes required that applicants' narrative memos and résumés be double spaced. Although this is not the case at the moment, the requirement has been known to change without any publicity save a statement on the "Officer Programs Check-Off Sheet" (which is also subject to change without notice). So don't be put off if you receive double-spaced versions of these items.

This requirement first went into effect in the Fall of 2007 and, apparently, stemmed from the fact that many applicants were padding their narrative memos and résumés. Allowing them less space in which to extol their virtues ostensibly improves the chances that what they write will be useful to selection boards as they make their decisions.

As of the date of this handbook, military applicants' narrative memos and résumés may be single spaced.

## CONTENTS

Foreword	i
Overview	1
Who Can Write an Endorsement?	5
Endorsement Format	7
Endorsement Contents	9
What the Applicant Must Provide	13
The Interview Report	15
A Note on Applicant Narrative Memos	17
Afterward	19

## FOREWORD

The information in this handbook is taken from official sources including the *Personnel Manual* (COMDTINST M1000.6 (series)), the *Recruiting Manual* (COMDTINST M1100.2 (series)), and the *Correspondence Manual* (COMDTINST M5216.4 (series)) as well as the Coast Guard Recruiting Command's web site, various messages, quasi-official information I've acquired from the Internet, and e-mail exchanges and telephone conversations with various individuals who had the information I needed.

This unofficial handbook is intended to help supervisors of Coast Guard personnel who are submitting applications for the various officer accession programs. ESOs may also find it of use. However, I must insert a caution and a disclaimer.

**CAUTION:** The *Recruiting Manual* and *Personnel Manual* are not always consistent.

**DISCLAIMER:** both of these publications often refer to the ESO's role in this process and refer applicants to the ESO for further information about it. The assumption underlying these referrals is that ESOs have received training on the process, application procedures, what information is

- performance of duties,
- communication skills,
- leadership skills, and
- personal and professional qualities.

## THE INTERVIEW REPORT

**A**pplicants are not required to provide their commands with a copy of the report prepared by the three-officer board which interviews them as part of the application process. And, in fact, it would be impossible for an applicant to do so since one of the items the applicant must provide to the interview board is the command's endorsement.

Even if this were possible, however, basing a command endorsement on the views of the interview board members would reduce the amount of independent evidence the selection board will eventually have when making its decisions as to who to reject and who to accept for the Coast Guard's officer accession programs. By basing his/her endorsement on first-hand knowledge of the applicant, a CO provides the selection board with more useful information.

This doesn't mean commands should ignore everything to do with the interview process. A blank copy of the "Officer Programs Applicant Interview Form" (CG-5527) provides a concise view of the factors selection boards consider when selecting applications. Those factors are:

and is not to be included on the various forms, and have a store of information unavailable to applicants.

### ***This assumption is false.***

The information contained in this guidebook (and in the companion handbook for applicants) which is not taken directly from the sources cited above is what I've deduced from those sources and general knowledge of Coast Guard procedures and policies. My interpretations may not be completely accurate, but in the absence of anything else, I believe they're the best available.

If applicants' supervisors – or applicants themselves – learn anything from CGRC that contradicts what's written in these pages, I hope they'll bring it to my attention so I may make the appropriate corrections.

Andrew Webb  
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## OVERVIEW

**B**its of the various requirements for preparing an officer program application and the command's endorsement to the application are laid out in numerous publications, messages, and on the Internet. Because of this, it is not easy to piece together all those requirements. This has made the application process more difficult than it needs to be, for both the applicant and his/her chain of command.

The purpose of this handbook is to minimize the guesswork related to the process for those in the applicant's chain of command so they can spend time on the actual endorsement rather than on determining what the endorsement should consist of.

This handbook deals only with endorsements for officer programs which accept enlisted applicants. At the moment, these are:

- OCS (Officer Candidate School)
- DCE (Direct Commission Engineer program)
- AVCAD (Aviation Candidate program))

The individuals who draft and review the command's endorsement have no reason to see the many documents the completed application will contain. As a practical matter, there's little in the application that will help the command draft the endorsement.

Knowing various items that are included in the complete application will provide little to nothing of value to those who draft and review the endorsement. These items include the applicant's blood pressure, many forms only a YN at OCS will ever want to see, etc. Indeed, my experience is that providing this information usually just clouds the task at hand: evaluating the applicant's potential value to the Coast Guard as a commissioned officer.

Furthermore, the Privacy Act and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) prohibit all select people with a need to know from seeing much of what's in the application folder unless the applicant wishes to provide it. That is, commands can't require applicants to provide this information without reasons specified by the governing statutes.

## WHAT THE APPLICANT MUST PROVIDE

Applicants are not required to provide anything besides their narrative memo to those who draft the endorsement. The assumption underlying an endorsement is that the person drafting it knows the applicant well. If this is not the case, an interview may be in order. But the verbiage in the endorsement should be based on personal knowledge of the applicant rather than documents.

That said, I advise applicants to provide their chains of command with the items their commands must comment on in their endorsements. These include:

- evidence of their ability and willingness to meet their financial obligations,
- the character standards set out in the *Recruiting Manual*,
- the section of the *Personnel Manual* which describes how average marks are calculated and photocopies of documents that include the information needed to calculate them, as well as those which include the applicant's most recent marks for Performance, Leadership, Military, and Professional Qualities Factor.

I also tell applicants they should probably provide a list of their strengths, similar to what they provide their supervisors at marks time.

- PPEP (Pre-commissioning Program for Enlisted Personnel)

### OCS

OCS is a 17-week training program enlisted Coast Guard personnel who have completed some college may apply to. College graduates may apply for Reserve commissions or temporary regular commissions; non-college graduates may apply only for temporary commissions.

### DCE

The DCE program is not widely known, but it allows enlisted personnel with a bachelor's degree in specific engineering fields to obtain temporary commissions. (According to current written criteria, an enlisted person with an associate's degree may apply for the DCE program. But because most DCE applicants have a bachelor degree, those with only an associate's degree are not competitive.) Upon promotion to LT, they are eligible to request permission to complete their bachelor's degrees via full-time studies at the Coast Guard's expense.

**AVCAD**

The Coast Guard's AVCAD program (what used to be called the Aviation Cadet program) is a means for enlisted servicemembers to attend OCS and then go immediately to flight school.

**PPEP**

PPEP is specifically for regular and Reserve enlisted Coast Guard personnel. Participants in this program attend college on a full-time basis for up to two calendar to complete a bachelor's degree. After that, they attend OCS and receive temporary Coast Guard commissions. While participating in the program, participants continue to receive all the compensation and benefits associated with their rate.

PPEP participants must complete their degrees through resident (as opposed to distance learning) programs and the school they attend must be relatively close, geographically, to the applicant's residence at the time he/she applies for the program.

the *Personnel Manual*, the *Recruiting Manual*, and all other relevant directives and ALCOASTs.

That will give CGRC's staff (which reviews applications for completeness) a quick way to tell if the applicant qualifies. Alternatively, it could cite references instead of the names of the publications in the body like this:

I certify that Petty Officer Washington meets all qualifications for the \_\_\_\_\_ program as set forth in refs ( ) through ( ).

Nowhere do any of the references say specifically which entity is responsible for actually checking DirectAccess, the applicant's PDR, and other documentation so the command can certify the applicant meets the standards. It stands to reason, however, that since the Servicing Personnel Office (SPO) has access to all such documentation it should perform this task on the CO's behalf.

Based on that reasoning, I advise applicants to provide the SPO with a check list of the program's requirements. The CGRC "Officer Programs Check-off Sheet" (<http://www.gocoastguard.com/find-your-career/officer-opportunities/programs/program-forms-and-deadlines>) is as good a guide as any for this purpose. However I also recommend that applicants write on the check-off sheet citations to relevant manuals where they're not listed and where that will help the YNs who actually conduct the review.

personnel the CO has known who have completed the program the applicant is applying to.

3. Any outstanding professional or other qualifications the applicant may possess.
4. A statement of knowledge about the applicant's ability and willingness to meet his/her financial obligations.
5. A statement certifying that the command conducted a review of the applicant's record to determine if he/she meets the character standards described in Article 4.B.1.a. of the *Recruiting Manual*.
6. The applicant's average marks during his/her current enlistment, according to Article 12.B.48 of the *Personnel Manual*, and the applicant's most recent marks for Performance, Leadership, Military, and Professional Qualities Factor.

I've been unable to locate any reference which specifies the format to use in covering these items. However, bullet format seems to me the most logical approach.

Also, even though it is not specifically required, it also seems logical to me that the last paragraph of the endorsement should read something like this:

I certify that Petty Officer Washington meets all qualifications for the \_\_\_\_\_ program as set forth in

### ***Purpose of the Endorsement***

Article 4.B.1.b.1. of the *Recruiting Manual* lays out the purpose of the CO's endorsement:

... Since selection panels do not have access to personnel records and are not aware of NJP, adverse administrative remarks, or other indicators of non-adherence to the Coast Guard's core values, CGRC relies on the CO's endorsement. The CO's endorsement certifies that the command conducted a review of the member's record and that the applicant meets character standards in this article. If the CO rescinds his or her endorsement at any time before appointment, the applicant will be disqualified for that selection cycle.

## WHO CAN WRITE AN ENDORSEMENT?

**A**rticle 4.B.1.b.1. of the *Recruiting Manual* requires this endorsement to come from a commanding officer, (an officer in an O not a W pay grade), rather than an officer-in-charge. Here's what it says:

All packages require a commanding officer's (CO) endorsement. Only one recommendation from a member's CO shall be included in his or her application package. The CO must be a commissioned officer; an endorsement by an officer-in-charge is not sufficient. ...

Unfortunately, the *Recruiting Manual* doesn't say who's supposed to write the endorsement for an applicant who's attached to a unit with an OIC or a non-CO/OIC supervisor, and CGRC has provided no other guidance I've been able to locate.

I've advised applicants in such situations to contact CGRC as soon as they make the decision to apply for an officer program to find out who's supposed to write the endorsement.

sess and then state how the applicant has or lacks those qualities. The "Officer Evaluation Report (OER)" for W-2s through O-2s also provides a good deal of material to draw on when stating the command's views on whether the applicant possesses the qualities a junior officer should possess, taking into account the fact that he/she has not yet received any officer-specific training.

Keep in mind, however, that although the OER is a good guide as to what qualities to evaluate in the text of the endorsement, the endorsement is *not* an OER. If a CO is writing endorsements for a number of applications at once, he/she should not attempt to rank order them (e.g., "my highest recommendation", "highly recommended", "recommended", etc.). ***Each applicant should be considered as if he/she were the only applicant the CO is endorsing, not in relation to the other applicants.*** Remember the purpose of the endorsement: to candidly state the CO's assessment of the applicant's suitability to serve as an officer. "Would I want this person in my wardroom?"

Article 4.B.1.b. of the *Recruiting Manual* requires the endorsement to include several specific things.

1. An evaluation of the applicant's potential value to the Coast Guard as a commissioned officer.
2. An evaluation of the applicant compared with other per-

## ENDORSEMENT CONTENTS

**A**rticle I.B.5.F.2.c of the *Personnel Manual* and article 4.B.1.b. of the *Recruiting Manual* provide some guidance as to what the endorsement should contain.

The endorsement is not meant to be a rehash of the comments section of the applicant's most recent marks. So it should generally avoid comments on the applicant's abilities in his/her rate.

With one exception, the interview and selection boards want to know if the applicant is officer material, not how well he/she has done as a petty officer. That exception is that the board does want to know if the applicant has any outstanding professional qualifications. Generally, then, the only rate-related information that should be included is that which relates to officer duties and qualities, and the applicant's potential as an officer.

The endorsement is meant to be a concise statement of what the command thinks of the applicant and whether the CO thinks the applicant will be a good officer.

One way to approach drafting an endorsement, then, is to lay out what qualities the CO thinks an officer should pos-

## ENDORSEMENT FORMAT

The fact that commands are required to write endorsements for applicants implies there is something to endorse. The specific item the command is endorsing is the applicant's narrative memo. This memo is required by the *Personnel Manual* – “A brief narrative explaining the applicant's reasons for applying ... and [explaining the applicant's] goals as a Coast Guard officer, if selected.”

The fact that the application requires an endorsement also implies the narrative memo must have a *Thru* line. The *Correspondence Manual* has specific rules for the format of endorsements to memos with *Thru* lines.

- The endorsement is *not* be a stand-alone memo from the CO to the Coast Guard Recruiting Command (CGRC).
- This means that the CO's signature or initials on the *Thru* line, with no comments, will be considered insufficient. Although a CO has a right to provide a signature endorsement, and even though approval of the memo is implied by such an endorsement, the absence of comments or a complete endorsement will indicate to the

members of the boards who read it that the command doesn't think enough of the applicant to write anything good about him/her. That is, a signature endorsement will likely be taken as a slap in the applicant's face and as a mark against him/her.