
USCG AUXILIARY PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST 2 (AUXPA2)



PERFORMANCE QUALIFICATION SYSTEM (PQS) STUDY GUIDE

Revised February 2016

Professional Ethics and Perceptions

01 Describe ethics relative to Auxiliary Public Affairs.

Ethics is a set of values that govern how we interact and behave. Public affairs and journalism professionals subscribe to the ethical standards outlined in the Codes of Conduct from:

- Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)
- National Press Photographers Association (NPPA)
- Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)

Coast Guard and Auxiliary PA officers should adhere to these standards.

02 Explain how to avoid conflicts of interest.

Maintain your independence and integrity by not favoring a particular source or journalist, nor accepting gifts or favors. Do not grant exclusive interviews (prohibited by Coast Guard policy).

03 What are the CG Auxiliary policies on accepting gifts?

Don't do it. Although you can cite a number of reasons why gifts might not have an impact on your behavior, accepting any gift could appear to be a conflict of interest.

04 How do you use attribution to avoid plagiarism?

Always acknowledge the original author when using prepared material. Whenever possible, request permission from author or publisher for the right to use the material—with the understanding that author credit will be given.

Release of Information

05 What is the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)?

A law ensuring public access to U.S. government records. Based on the idea that information in possession of the government belongs to the public. Upon written request, government agencies are required to disclose records, unless they can be withheld under one of nine specific exemptions.

06 Name the FOIA exemptions.

Classified material (national security); law enforcement records and judicial proceedings; matters under investigation; information covered by statute; internal agency rules and internal agency memos; trade secrets; bank reports; oil and gas well data; personal privacy.

07 What are the guidelines for release of information.

Coast Guard policy is based on FOIA, which requires release of information not protected by the exemptions listed above. In other words, Maximum disclosure with minimum delay.

Remember: “If you did it or have responsibility for it, then you can talk about it. If not, then don’t.”

The Nature of News

08 What is news?

Daily happenings; something new, unusual, bizarre or controversial. Crime, scandal, sex, death; celebrity exploits; fashion trends; sports and entertainment; inventions and innovations in technology and science.

“News is anything that breaks one of the 10 Commandments” — *anonymous*.

09 Explain what is meant by “news peg.”

The slant, angle or story hook is the reason for the media to publish your story and readers to be interested. The peg makes the story newsworthy. It gives your audience more reason to pay attention and how it connects to the here and now.

Examples: the most, the first, the smallest, the largest, the best, the worst.

10 There are 10 elements of mass appeal that give a story news value. Discuss.

- **Immediacy** (timely events)
- **Consequence** (the “me” factor)
- **Oddity** (out-of-the-ordinary)
- **Emotion** (stir an emotional response)
- **Suspense** (what’s going to happen?)
- **Proximity** (events close to home)
- **Conflict** (drama in real life)
- **Sex** (gender issues)
- **Prominence** (VIP newsmakers)
- **Progress** (new and improved)

11 Why should you write about people rather than “things”?

People are interested in other people. Stories about people who give life to things give a chance for the audience to see what their colleagues, friends and neighbors are doing. Write about the people that make things work.

12 To help develop your news sense, choose three news stories from your local newspaper and analyze. What makes a story news and what doesn’t? Discuss.

Principles of Journalism

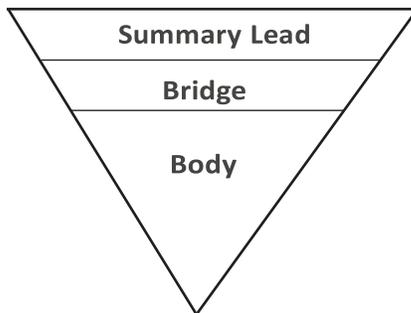
13 Describe a summary lead.

The first sentence and paragraph of a straight news story or news release. Summarizes the story, giving the most important facts first so the reader gets the essential information quickly and clearly.

14 What are the “5Ws and H” of a story?

The Who, What, When, Where, Why and How that identify important story elements and are used in a summary lead (although Why and How are not always immediately answered in the lead).

15 Explain how a news release is structured (writing style).



Stories are written in an Inverted Pyramid format. The most important facts are placed first, then the less and less important information follows.

This traditional formula allows the writer to present story information in a logical order. Fact gathering gives the writer the 5Ws and H...the Inverted Pyramid structure, with lead, bridge and body, gives the writer a proven framework for story construction.

16 What is the purpose of the bridge?

A lead-to-body link, supplying specific information not given in the lead because of the lead's limited length.

17 Why is it important to remain objective in a news story?

Like all journalists, a military journalist must have the reader's trust. Without trust, stories lack credibility and believability. A straight news story must be written from a neutral position—don't speculate, guess or give your personal opinion. Use multiple sources (when you use three it's called “triangulation”).

18 Describe at least two ways to handle attribution in a quote.

Attribution is another important way to develop credibility (and authority). The word “attribution” refers to sources of information.

- **Direct quote.** A word-for-word statement from your source with the statement enclosed with quotation marks.
- **Indirect quote** (paraphrased statement). Relays the same information but does not use quote marks.

Always attribute opinions and policy change statements.

19 *What is copy editing and why is it important?*

A careful review of story copy to correct errors: facts, spelling, dates and figures, style, grammar, policy/security restrictions, libel, fairness, attribution, objectivity. Is your story clear and complete? Is it well organized and does it “flow” well? Good copy editing will help you conquer the problem of inaccuracy.

20 *What are the ABC’s of news writing?*

- Accuracy
- Brevity
- Clarity

21 *Demonstrate good use of the Associated Press Stylebook in a release you have authored.*

22 *Demonstrate good use of the Coast Guard Public Affairs Stylebook in a release you have authored.*

The Photo Release

23 *Summarize the steps in writing a photo caption*

- Gather information. Dig deep for interesting background information and unusual facts. Answer the 5Ws—then get descriptive details that go well beyond these basics.
- Write.
- Copy edit.

24 *Once you’ve written your caption, what’s a good way to “test” it?*

Read caption out loud. Listen for any rough spots. If it’s hard to read and understand, REWRITE the copy.

Check content carefully. Does caption ID everyone pictured and have the names right? (Including correct spelling). Are there any unanswered questions?

Does it explain key points of interest in photo, or merely echo what is obvious in the image? Make sure lead is in present tense and is a “grabber.”

25 *Outline six guidelines for writing effective captions.*

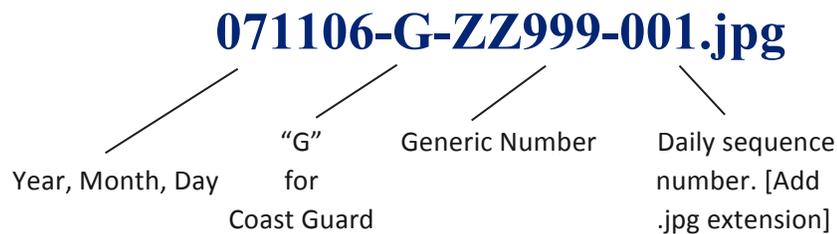
- Write in active voice and use action verbs.
- Use present tense in lead to enhance immediacy of photo.
- Be specific...don’t leave reader guessing.
- ID all primary photo subjects and be clear as to who is who.
- Don’t make up facts or quotes.
- Double check—triple check—your information.

26 *If a photo is to grab attention, have meaning and something to say, it must communicate using five essential ingredients. These are:*

- Subject
- Lighting
- Composition
- Perspective
- Technical quality

27 *What is the Coast Guard's VIRIN photo identification system? How is a VIRIN number structured?*

The Visual Information Reference Identification Number (VIRIN) is the standard for all military visual imagery. Each VIRIN consists of four data fields separated by hyphens as follows:



Media Relations/Interviews

28 *Explain why the Coast Guard needs the media and vice versa.*

The mass media provide a valuable service by informing the public about our operations. They need dramatic news of Coast Guard activities; we need an informed public. The mass media provide the means for us to reach the vast American audience.

29 *What does the media want from you as an Auxiliary public affairs officer?*

(1) Clear, concise information; factual, accurate and free from hype or bureaucratic spin. Avoid using cryptic Auxiliary acronyms or military terminology. Nor should you mention the name of your unit commander in every story you release. (2) Eye-catching still photos with complete captions. (3) And for TV...action-packed video, if possible.

30 *Discuss a few general guidelines for taking media queries.*

Remember, the press is not your enemy. You are the subject matter expert... that's why they want to talk to you. Stay calm. Answer questions accurately and think before you answer. If you can't give an answer, explain why. Always follow up if you promise to get back to a reporter.

31 *You are to be interviewed about the Auxiliary and your local flotilla. Discuss how you would prep for this interview.*

Have fact sheet of background info that summarizes your talking points. Know boating safety Command Messages (see below) and practice these out loud. Anecdotes and personal opinion are OK since this is a “feature” interview rather than a press conference or crisis situation interview. A few interesting anecdotes can liven up interview—but don’t just start telling “sea stories.” Anticipate the 5 most likely questions; the 5 toughest questions.

32 *What are Command Messages?*

Positive position statements on an issue. Examples: “Life jackets save lives... wear your life jacket.” “Safe boats save lives...get a Vessel Safety Check.” “Sober boaters save lives...don’t drink while on the water.” Weave in a Command Message whenever possible in response to questions.

Other position themes:

- Training
- Education
- Teamwork
- Good neighbor
- Dedication
- Preparedness
- Care, concern
- Force multiplier

33 *What steps do you take just before going on camera?*

Review your talking points and Command Messages. Check your uniform and be sure to present a sharp, professional appearance. No hat or dark glasses. Relax. Make interview an informal conversation with reporter. Avoid CG acronyms and “Auxiliary-speak.”

34 *Discuss non-verbal communication and what non-verbal behavior you should avoid while on camera.*

This is communication without words. Attitudes, interest, emotion, fear, confidence...all can be communicated wordlessly. Thus, watch your body language during an interview (posture, gestures, eye contact and/or distracting movements). Speech also contains nonverbal elements, including voice quality, emotion and speaking style, so speak clearly and confidently.

35 *In a news conference where you are involved in the release of information, how can you maintain control?*

Set ground rules and stick to them. Have a time limit. Let reporters know what subjects are off limits and only answer questions pertaining to the issue at hand. Prepare a short opening statement before taking questions. Use the pause (before speaking, take a moment to think about response). Stop talking when you’ve finished your answer. Remember your position statements.

36 *Outline a few other guidelines for release of information in this situation.*

- Never say “No comment.” Tell why you can’t answer.
- Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.”
- Avoid personal opinion. Don’t guess or speculate.
- Tell the truth and be accurate.
- Don’t respond to comments you haven’t seen or heard. Tell what your unit is doing.
- Keep answers short—to about 10 second sound bites.
- Don’t accept terminology you don’t agree with. Explain the correct terminology and use it.
- If you’re not the subject matter expert, or the right person to respond, refer to proper source.
- Make sure your responses do not violate Coast Guard policy.
- Never talk to reporters “off the record.”

37 *Always respond to questions with the “3-T’s.” What are they?*

Tell the truth. Tell it all. Tell it now.

38 *If you are asked a question where the interviewer voiced inaccurate information about your unit, what should you do?*

Work with reporters to resolve errors. Simply give the correct facts in a professional, courteous manner.