

Armor Branch Update

Understanding the Army Selection-Board Process

by CPT Adam L. Taliaferro

Preparing for a board begins with understanding how a Department of the Army (DA) selection board is conducted. A straightforward way to understand the board and deliberately prepare for it is to “know the terrain,” “know the board member” and “know yourself.”

Know the terrain

The Army board process is fair and objective. The DA Secretariat for DA Selection Boards is the organization that plans, coordinates and executes Active and Reserve Component promotion, command, school and selective continuation boards for officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs). Among the Secretariat’s major efforts are all Active Component promotion selection boards from sergeant first class to major general; Central Selection List for colonel and lieutenant colonel command, battalion and brigade-level command sergeant major; and key-billet positions in two-star headquarters and higher. The Secretariat also supports special selection panels, including the Voluntary Transfer Incentive Program, broadening opportunity programs and Active-Guard Reserve selection.

The critical member in the execution of these boards is the DA Secretariat board recorder. Board recorders interface with the Directorate of Military Personnel Management (DMPM) in Army G-1, Human Resources Command (HRC) and the voting board members to ensure a successful board outcome.

Boards conducted within the DA Secretariat use the Army Selection-Board System (ASBS), a computerized system that allows the board members to easily view and assess files. ASBS uses a scoring system that ranges from 1 through 6, with a + or – available for greater fidelity of votes between 2 and 6. The highest score a candidate can receive is 6+, and the lowest is 1. For example, in a board of 10 members, the highest score a candidate can receive is 60 with 10 pluses.

Rumors of board members wheeling and dealing are simply not true. There is no discussion allowed between board members, with the exception of general-officer boards. Files appear in random order to each board member, and board members vote at their own pace. Lastly, each board member’s score carries the same weight, no matter his or her rank or professional background.

Evaluations should be written to clearly communicate to the board, not to the rated individual. Evaluations allow board members to assess an individual’s performance and potential for promotion or selection. Evaluations should be written in a way that distinctly communicates the considered individual’s potential. Certain trends can send an unclear message to the board, such as:

- Percentages that do not correlate to the senior rater’s profile;
- Repeated use of the same or similar senior-rater narratives for multiple evaluations;
- Narratives that do not match the duty description; and
- Inconsistencies between the senior-rater narrative and box check.

Know the board member

On average, each board member will spend about two to three minutes on each file. That may not sound like a lot of time, but each board member has his or her own individual voting philosophy, paired with the board memorandum of instruction, that allows him or her to clearly identify key information to assess each candidate’s file for selection. If you practice by evaluating your own evaluations, you will find that you can readily evaluate a file in two to three minutes.

On any given selection board, DMPM provides a legally approved matrix that covers composition for the particular board. The board will have a mixture of operations, force-sustainment and operational-support officers with varying backgrounds and experiences. There may be only one Armor officer board member; most board members evaluating your file will not have an Armor background.

NCO boards are similar but differ in that the board is broken into panels, with specific panel members voting on certain career-management fields (CMFs). For example, a master-sergeant promotion board will be divided into 11 Active Component panels. The 19-Armor CMF and 15-Aviation CMF are voted in the same panel, with aviation and Armor sergeants major as board members and a colonel as panel chief, who is also a voting member of the board. The branch of the colonel rotates between Armor and aviation every other year.

For the U.S. Army Sergeant Major Academy training and selection board, the panels are consolidated from 11 to five. One panel will consider Armor and Cavalry master sergeants for selection in addition to field artillery, aviation, air defense, military police, engineer, public affairs and chemical NCOs, with only one 19-CMF sergeant major as a board member. As in officer boards, most board members evaluating your file will not have an Armor background.

Board members have the ability to view your entire file, minus the restricted portion, but they tend to focus on the senior-rater narrative, the senior-rater box check, senior-rater population size, rated officer's duty description and rater narrative. The lowest rank for an officer to sit on a board is lieutenant colonel, and the lowest-ranking NCO to sit on an enlisted board is sergeant major. Most of our board members are highly qualified, extremely experienced and have reviewed or written hundreds of evaluations, and they can see right through the fluff, vagueness and discrepancies sometimes seen in evaluations.

Evaluation write-ups should have universal language any board member could understand. Elaborating on branch-specific items – such as gunnery or reconnaissance operations – does not send a clear message to all board members on why the individual should be selected. Evaluations that provide officer or NCO numeration in relation to their peers greatly help the board in understanding the individual's performance and potential. Understanding how a leader performed relative to his or her peers sends a clear message, regardless of the board member's branch or background. Some boards are viewing more than 4,000 files during the board – when your file appears, you do not want that time being spent wondering what your senior rater was trying to communicate.

Know yourself

Your DA photo is your handshake to the board. It is the first thing the board member will see when viewing your file, and it sets the tone. Appearing unprofessional – whether looking overweight, not shaven, having a wrinkled uniform or not being in your Army Service Uniform – can have a detrimental effect on the evaluation of your total file.

View your myBoard file (MBF) and update your information. Your MBF provides you the information the board members will see. The board will sync ASBS to iPerms the morning of the board, so everything that is in your file will be seen by the board. Take the time to ensure your documents are accurate. Record-brief information should accurately reflect what is on your evaluations. Having entries like “known loss,” “overstrength,” etc., on your record brief can send a message to the board that you either don't care about your career or failed to take the time to ensure your file is accurate.

Letters to the board president should only be used by exception to explain unique circumstances. Letters explaining your awards, why you should be promoted or personal background can be seen as self-serving and send an unfavorable message to the board. For example, an officer who has been in Advanced Civil Schooling for the past three years and has not received an Officer Evaluation Report (OER) may choose to write a letter to the board explaining the period without an OER. When in doubt, speak to your assignment branch and trusted mentors to solicit their advice on including a letter to the board. If you submit a letter, it will be placed in your file.

HRC recently posted a mock-board leader professional-development (LPD) presentation at https://www.hrc.army.mil/site/assets/ppt/exportable_mock_board_pro_development.ppsx. Armor Branch strongly recommends that you take the time to review the video. LPD opportunities are also available at the DA Secretariat to actually see a board room and vote-template files, and board recorders are available to visit units to conduct board-process LPDs. The Armor Branch goal is to help you understand the promotion process to make yourself as competitive for your board as possible.

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Acronym Quick-Scan

ASBS – Army Selection-Board System

BCT – brigade combat team

CMF – career-management field

DA – Department of the Army

DMPM – Directorate of Military Personnel Management

HRC – Human Resources Command

LPD – leader professional development

MBF – myBoard file

NCO – noncommissioned officer

OER – Officer Evaluation Report