

# INPUT GUIDE

## MORE EFFECTIVE WRITING

What two players of a particular game say to each other in a casual conversation is not necessarily the proper way to express the same tactical points in a formal article. Remember that, sooner or later, every reader of *Captain's Log* reads almost every page, even if just for light pastime reading, and this is your chance to get other players interested in *your* favorite game.

Also, formal publication requires formal presentation of the facts and points being made. Below are some examples which came about while I edited *F&E* tactical notes, but the principles of good writing apply to all articles about any game.

If we really like, want, or need your article, we'll fix this for you. If you're trying to improve your chances of being selected, you might want to do it for yourself.

### Just What Did You Mean?

**Bad:** Be careful to remember that crippled ships cannot retreat when planning this.

**Better:** When planning this, be careful to remember that crippled ships cannot retreat.

**Why is this better?** Because it puts the key parts of the sentence next to each other. There are so many words between "careful" and "when" that readers cannot connect them and might well assume that "crippled ships cannot retreat during the planning phase".

**Bad:** If this happens, you can...

**Better:** If your path is blocked, you can...

**Why is this better?** In the original (much longer) text, the discussion of "the path" was three sentences earlier and a casual reader might have been unable to figure out what particular "this" might be happening.

**Bad:** The Coalition has to continue directing on the PDUs until the ComPot goes down.

**Better:** The Coalition has to continue using the very inefficient directed damage attacks on the planetary defenses (which do not count against command limits) until the Hydran combat potential is reduced.

**Why is this better?** First, it uses entire words instead of shorthand abbreviations (directing, ComPot), making the data more accessible to the casual reader who might never have played *F&E* (but who might start if the article gets him interested). Second, by adding a few extra words (inefficient, command limits) you make sure those who have not played *F&E* can grasp the point you are making.

**Bad:** These are fairly uncommon, perhaps one per decade in the entire Lyran Empire will be observed.

**Better:** These are fairly uncommon, perhaps one per decade will be observed in the entire Lyran Empire.

**Why:** The first version makes one mentally wonder if you are observing the anomaly or the Lyran Empire.

### Avoid Using Slang

Here are some examples (from *F&E*) of the use of "gamer shorthand slang" which are easily understood by committed gamers but will certainly confuse the casual reader:

**Bad:** Place SNs in these hexes.

**Better:** Place Snipe-class frigates (SNs) in these hexes. This also applies to many (ok, let's just say all) game unit designations including SB, BATS, DN, and so forth. This makes it much easier for a casual reader to grasp what you are trying to com-

municate and to maintain his interest.

**Bad:** Retreat into the off-map.

**Better:** Retreat into the off-map area.

**Best:** Retreat into the off-map area where he cannot follow.

**Bad:** Put at least one reserve here.

**Better:** Put at least one reserve fleet here.

**Bad:** The Klingon ComPot in this case...

**Better:** The Klingon Combat Potential in this case... This also applies to many (ok, let's just say all) game terms such as BIR, DirDam, ComPot, and the like.

**Bad:** Stop the Coalition from directing on those ships.

**Better:** Stop the Coalition from using directed damage on those ships.

**Why is this better?** Formal English, as opposed to slang, is more readily understood by the casual reader who is not a die-hard player of *F&E*, but who might become one if intrigued by the article. Slang and jargon is, ultimately, just an expression of laziness between people who know everyone present is familiar with the terms and would be bored if they were spelled out. For the casual reader, however, fully grasping the point requires just a few extra words of clarification.

Let's be fair and point out some confusing "insider" writing from recent *SFB* submissions:

**Bad:** I had a brick on the #2 shield.

**Better:** I had a brick of reinforcement on the #2 shield.

**Best:** I had maximum reinforcement on the #2 shield.

**Why is this better?** Because non-*SFB* players think that a brick is a rectangular piece of hardened clay, and while the term is commonly used in *SFBOL* chatrooms, many (if not most) *SFB* players are not familiar with it. While they might figure it out from context, they might also just stop reading.

**Bad:** I fired A30 and C20 at him.

**Better:** I launched the plasma-S from the A-launcher and the plasma-F from the C-launcher at him.

**Why is this better?** Because only the players of *SFBOL* know what A30 means, and because seeking weapons are "launched" not "fired" (which applies to direct-fire weapons).

**Bad:** I fired two standards at him.

**Better:** I fired two... I don't know. What *did* you fire? Phaser-1s? Non-overloaded disruptors? Type-I drones? Ok, this is a pet peeve which we have mentioned more than once, but we keep seeing players use this term (and different players mean different things by "standard") and it's just very confusing. Please be more precise in telling us just what you are firing ... or launching.

We don't want *Federation Commander* players to be left out of the writing advice, now do we?

**Bad:** I rotated boxes from Shield #1 to Shield #2.

**Better:** I used rule (3C3) to move five boxes from Shield #1 to Shield #2.

**Why is this better?** Because the imprecise term "rotate" confuses people about what you did. "Rotate" sounds like you moved the whole shield, and the word "rotate" is not used in the rule itself. Giving the rule number lets people (say, *SFB* players who would love to do this in *their* game) find the details in the free online download rulebook, but there is enough information in the sentence to grasp the point being made without reading the rule.

### Just How Tense Are You?

Some modern writing uses "present tense" such as:

"The Marines load up on ammo while the captain studies..."

This is just wrong, and annoying, and we never, ever do this, so if you send a story this way, expect to get it back with a fairly terse note to fix it.

The correct form would be: "The Marines loaded up on ammo while the captain studied...."

Yes, we know that some author started doing that in his more recent novels. We also know that it's how "screenplays" are written. We don't care. It's not a good way to write things out.