

**United States Marine Corps
Commandant's Professional Reading List
Marine Leader Discussion Guide**



MCDP 1 Warfighting

Foreword by General Charles C. Krulak, 31st Commandant of the Marine Corps

Preface by General A. M. Gary, 29th Commandant of the Marine Corps

Introduction.

Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1, *Warfighting*, encapsulates the foundational philosophy which distinguishes the US Marine Corps and is required reading for Marines of all ranks. It provides an authoritative basis for how Marines engage in and prepare for conflict. *Warfighting* is read, re-read, discussed, and debated at all USMC formal PME schools and throughout the operating forces.

Preparatory Work.

Your expectation, as the “guided discussion leader” should require all participants to read the entire publication. Additionally, you may assign other MC publications to augment your discussion. And, as the discussion leader, you may require all participants pre-read this discussion guide and respond to each question in writing before the guided discussion begins.

Overview of the Book.

The book is broken down into four chapters which distill perspectives in a natural progression on the nature and theory of war, preparation for war, and conduct of war.

Chapter 1 focuses on the fundamental characteristics which define war. Most prominent among them is the unpredictable nature of war, characterized by uncertainty, friction, and disorder. War is fundamentally a human struggle in which the moral and mental aspects carry greater importance than the physical. An understanding of these ideas is a vital prerequisite to understanding the rest of *Warfighting*.

Chapter 2 examines several aspects of warfare which determine the form it takes in any given conflict. Four key components to this section are the relationship between politics and the spectrum of conflict, time as a dimension of conflict, the

creation and exploitation of opportunity, and the integral relationship between centers of gravity and critical vulnerabilities in time and space.

Chapter 3 examines the ways the Marine Corps must shape itself to be a capable warfare organization, particularly in regard to its culture and training. Here, *Warfighting* gives direction to force planning and doctrine, and it illustrates key linkages between training, education, and personnel management and how they translate to organizational effectiveness in expeditionary environments.

Finally, Chapter 4 of *Warfighting* ties everything together into a vision of how the Marine Corps approaches conflict at any level, acknowledging the chaotic and fluid nature of the modern battlefield and the need for utilizing tempo as a weapon. The style of warfare described therein is called maneuver warfare, which is based upon rapid, flexible, and opportunistic maneuver in time and space, oriented on the enemy system, both psychological and physical. This approach to conflict requires trust at all levels between senior and subordinate, and the Marine Corps leverages decentralized command and control through concepts such as mission tactics, commander's intent, and main effort to support initiative and ensure victory. Considering this publication was first written in 1989, this chapter's emphasis on the concept now known as mission command was well ahead of its time.

Warfighting is meant to be read cover-to-cover to provide Marines with a common philosophical understanding of war that will inform further, deep study. As such, it adopts a descriptive approach holding that it is far more important to understand the essence of warfare and command than it is to prescribe certain principles of war. These principles are a common feature of military doctrine, but were deliberately rejected by MCDP 1's authors in an effort to create a timeless philosophical doctrine. While MCDP 1 does not explicitly discuss the role of the Marine Corps or mention contemporary concepts such as information operations or multi-domain battle, it has proven applicable to these areas and the wider spectrum of conflict in peace as well as war. Consequently, *Warfighting* continues to dictate our approach to the profession of arms and our moral, mental, and physical preparations as individual Marines and as a Marine Corps.

Guided Discussion Design.

There are no set number of questions for a specific discussion guide. The number of questions should be based on participant's level experience and attention span. Your goal, in guiding the discussion, is to keep each the discussion

simple, relevant, and current to Marines PME responsibilities. Encouraging Marines to think and communicate their view of what the book means to them is what is important.

Guided Discussion actions and questions. Each question should be asked in an **open ended** format with the intent of generating responses based upon a Marines' perspective.

1. Is war an art or a science? Why?
2. Compare and contrast maneuver warfare and attrition warfare styles.
3. Why is the defense the inherently stronger form of warfare?
4. From what sources does MCDP 1 draw most heavily?
5. What are the characteristics of maneuver warfare?
6. Compare speed and focus to characteristics of maneuver warfare.
7. Do you believe self-study of the art and science of warfare is at least equally important to maintain physical condition – and should receive at least equal time? Is that what we practice?
8. Does our assignment policy support developing tactical experts? Will our Professional Military Education overcome any shortcomings?
9. Based upon what is stated in MCDP 1, what is your understanding of centers of gravity (COG) and critical vulnerabilities (CVs)?
10. Do COGs exist at the tactical level?

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