

Chapter 5

Practical Application

*“I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand.”*⁵

Confucius

Practical application is the actual hands-on, skill-development part of training. It should follow as soon as possible after instruction. There are three levels of practical application—

- Learning tasks for the first time (initial training).
- Meeting training standards (proficiency training).
- Practicing previously learned training standards (sustainment training).

INITIAL TRAINING

Initial training introduces Marines to a task. The initial stage of practice should follow the presentation, while information is still fresh in a Marine’s mind. This way, Marines will begin practice with a clear idea of the task to be performed because the task has just been explained and demonstrated to them.

Performance Steps

Initially Marines perform relatively small steps rather than completing entire training objectives. Marines practice each step until they can perform all the steps properly and in the correct sequence. Each task in the MCCRES or ITSS can be initially trained step by step.

Control

Leaders control step-by-step practice. They supervise each of the Marines' actions because they want Marines to know the correct way to perform the task. During this stage of practice, Marines must be able to concentrate on performing the task without worrying about failing. After Marines understand the basic steps, they are allowed more freedom.

The environment is also controlled to simplify initial training. Too much realism at first can detract from the training task and make coaching difficult.

There are many areas where step-by-step practice on almost any individual or collective task or drill may be conducted. These places can include barracks, classrooms, parking lots, motor pools, athletic fields, local training areas, and reserve training centers. See appendix D for more detail on training areas.

PROFICIENCY TRAINING

Once Marines know the task's steps and when to perform them, they concentrate on performing the entire task to proficiency. During proficiency training, Marines perform tasks repetitiously until they can meet the training standard. During this stage, Marines are taught the relevance of this task to other tasks.

Requirements

Since Marines have already learned the task, they usually do not need a detailed presentation of basic information. A simple demonstration may be enough to refresh their memories. Marines are then required to—

- Practice to the standard. Marines increase their speed, accuracy, output, or quality of work until they achieve the training objective standards.
- Practice under more realistic conditions (e.g., Marines practice at night while wearing protective equipment or while working on difficult terrain). With each new practice session, training becomes more challenging.

Techniques

During proficiency practice, leaders turn Marines' mistakes into effective training tools. If Marines in a unit fail to use proper light and noise discipline at night, a leader can point out that they are revealing their position and providing a target for enemy direct and indirect fire. Mistakes in practice are acceptable, if—

- There is no risk of injury to Marines.
- There is no danger of damaging equipment.
- The mistake will not waste time.
- The mistake will not erode confidence.
- The trainer is ready to critique the mistake and turn it into a learning experience.

During practices, trainers demonstrate authorized field expedients. For example, if the authorized radio antenna is broken, a field expedient antenna can be made from available materials (e.g., field wire, rope, and wood). Good field expedients are based on correct procedures and a solid understanding of the proper way to perform a task. Field expedients should not be discussed until Marines have demonstrated proficiency on the basic task.

During crew or small unit practices, leaders are key planners. They conduct the training and participate as members of the crews or units during task performance. If the leader participates in the task performance, then the next higher leader or a peer leader must observe, evaluate, and critique the actions of the crew or small unit. For example, if a squad is practicing a movement to contact, the platoon sergeant or platoon leader observes and critiques as required, the company commander then observes and critiques platoons during the platoon practice. Leaders should always participate in the critiques of their Marines.

Some practice is conducted on the job. This is true when the unit performs its missions on a daily basis; e.g., aviation and combat service support units. Leaders must remember that Marines are never fully trained until they can perform to standard under combat conditions. Until Marines meet the standard, trainers must carefully observe, coach, and critique as needed.

SUSTAINMENT TRAINING

General

Sustainment training ensures that the task is practiced and peak proficiency is maintained. During sustainment training, leaders raise the level of realism until the quality, speed, stress, and environment come as close as possible to actual combat missions. Collective training in this stage of practice is more efficient and effective if individual crews, squads, or sections have already achieved proficiency through earlier practice. The crew, squad, and section tasks in the MCCRES, as well as battle drills and STXs, are designed to train Marines and their leaders to function effectively as teams.

Techniques

Leaders add realism and complexity to the situation as rapidly as possible. The nature of the task or drill and Marine proficiency dictate the setting. For example, a squad leader training Marines on patrol formations talks to his/her troops and uses a sand table or chalkboard to reintroduce basic formations.

Marines then practice formations on a parade field or a vacant parking lot to learn team relationships. The open practice area allows the leader to observe and critique individual and group performance. Success under such conditions gives Marines confidence.

After mastering formations in an open area, the squad moves to a more realistic terrain. The squad leader gradually adds combat loads, pyrotechnics, and other elements of realism. Since Marines have already mastered the basic formations, the squad leader can concentrate on how terrain and a simulated enemy situation affect the tasks. If timing is a factor, time standards are also mastered at this stage.

At this point, the squad leader is ready to practice leader tasks as the functioning participant leader of the squad. Doing this may limit the squad leader's objectivity as an evaluator of squad performance. The platoon leader or platoon sergeant must now assume the primary evaluation responsibility for the squad. Still more practice follows to prepare the squad for an exercise against an OPFOR using the multiple integrated laser engagement system (MILES), if available.

During collective training, units must perform MCCRES tasks to standard. If they do not perform tasks to standard, they must continue to practice until they can perform the tasks to standard. Additional practice must occur immediately and under the same conditions. Leaders also determine if certain Marines, leaders, or subordinate units need additional training on selected individual tasks before more collective training is conducted.

When training in a realistic setting, leaders usually work on more than one task at a time. For example, Marines practice clearing a minefield while performing in an NBC environment. The limiting factor is the amount of activity taking place. Practicing too many tasks at once can cause confusion. If this happens, reduce the number of tasks being practiced and get additional leaders or assistant trainers to help with the practice.

Realistic practice should emulate how Marines and leaders will be structured to perform the job or during the mission. The leader plans and conducts the training, positioning himself so he can coach and critique subordinate leaders. Subordinate leaders coach Marines whenever possible, interrupting them

briefly and infrequently. Sustainment training emphasizes critiques, which leaders conduct jointly. Critiquing occurs after the practice has ended or at some natural break in the action.

