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Writing to a Selection Board

The FY06 selection board season is getting underway, and as always, it prompts a flurry of last-minute correspondence. Here is guidance on how to write effective letters to a board.

One may ask, does writing a letter to a board improve one's chances for promotion? Possibly, but only if it provides important missing information. In most cases, the best letter to a board is no letter at all. Sailors who review and correct their official records in advance do not need letters. Nonetheless, there are times when a letter is important.

Limit correspondence to only those items that are relevant to the promotion decision, such as missing fitness reports (FITREPs), awards, photographs, Naval Reserve Qualification Questionnaires (NRQQs), etc. Third-party correspondence (e.g., a letter of recommendation) is permitted, but only if the officer submits it as an enclosure and requests it be reviewed (third parties may not communicate directly with boards, by law.) Do not include copies of AT orders, travel claims, letters of designation as assistant wardroom mess treasurer, etc. Briefers are required to view every page in a letter to a board. To my knowledge, the record is 121 pages. That officer probably didn't fare very well in the voting.

If there are unusual circumstances in one's career, or if the OSR/PSR doesn't look right, or there are gaps in service,

write a letter of explanation. Keep it brief, and to the point. For example, "I was in the IRR from 1999 to 2001 while providing full-time care to my aged parents," is a reasonable explanation of a gap in service. "I did not request a command assignment as a CDR because I supervise 500 people in my civilian job, and could not devote the necessary time" (might help, might not.) "My performance decreased in 2002 because we had quintuplets." Don't blame anything on the dog, however. An experienced mentor can help identify what can be explained in a letter, and what is simply a matter of record.

Include a cover letter in proper Navy format (some board members are sticklers for this) with appropriate enclosures. Ensure every page contains the correct social security number – preferably in the upper margin. Do not staple correspondence or put sheets in fancy plastic folders – recorders have to scan each page, and this just slows them down. In the cover letter, include birth date in yyyymmdd format – the customer service center (CSC) uses this to activate the personal page on the Stay Navy Web site.

Recognize that any correspondence sent to a board does not update the official record. After the board adjourns, all correspondence is destroyed. Therefore, do not send original documents. Moreover, send copies of board correspondence to the appropriate address to ensure updates are made to the official record.

Correspondence must arrive by the board convening date. See "Get Thee to a Selection Board" (November 2004) for FY06 reserve board dates, or find them at <www.bupers.navy.mil> by clicking on "Selection Board," then "Reserve Officer Promotions." For those who like to mail tax returns at 23:59 on 15 April, note that last-minute correspondence may not reach

a board in time. Additional security measures at BUPERS result in mailroom delays of up to two days. Sending letters by certified or registered mail may incur additional delays. Even FedEx packages have to route through the mailroom. Thus, if mailing at least ten days before the board, the most cost-effective means is first class mail. Although not well advertised, BUPERS will accept last-minute faxes for board correspondence. The fax number is 901-874-2664. Recognize that the line may be quite busy in the last few hours before a board.

Send correspondence to:

President, FY-06 Reserve (Grade)
(Competitive Category) Promotion
Selection Board
Board #xxx
Navy Personnel Command (NPC)
Customer Service Center PERS-00R
5720 Integrity Drive
Millington TN 38055-3130

Because there are nearly 90 boards each year, it's extremely important to include the correct board number on the envelope and the cover letter. Board numbers are listed on the Web page mentioned above. Verify receipt of letters by contacting the Customer Service Center at 866-827-5672 (DSN 882-5672) or <CSCmailbox@navy.mil>.

Effective letters to boards can make a difference. Be brief; write succinctly. Keep to the point. Avoid redundant or superfluous information. Mail early. Floss daily. Ensure your record can be presented in the best possible light. And don't forget to invite me to your wetting down party. Good luck!

Next month: How to update and request copies of your official record. ↵

Do We Have Your Current E-Mail Address?

We take pride in our ability to provide our members with up-to-date legislative, promotional, and retirement information affecting you. With our mass e-mail broadcast, we can immediately keep you informed. In order to receive these updates, please send us your e-mail address to <membership@navy-reserve.org>.