

# ALIGNING EXPECTATIONS

## How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

2015 National Planning Community of Practice Training

4 June 2015



3

Significance of the concern

4

Recommended action to resolve the concern



U.S. ARMY



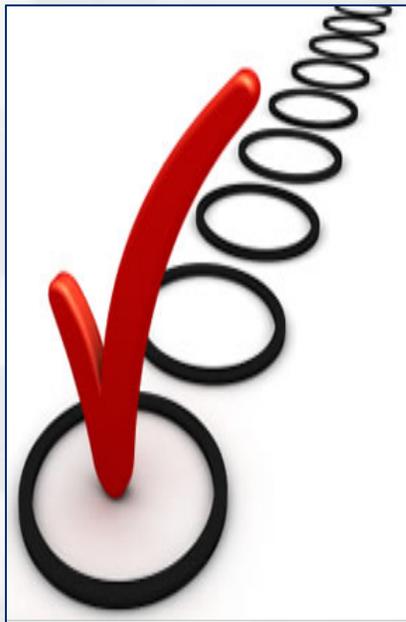
US Army Corps of Engineers  
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# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## Learning Objectives

Participants will become familiar with the:



- ✓ Requirements for and use of the 4-Part Comment Structure
- ✓ Five key components of an effective comment response
- ✓ When and how to document discussions between the PDT member and reviewer
- ✓ What to avoid when writing comments and responses



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## Application Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ Participate today in quick and fun interactive exercises to apply and reinforce the learning objectives
- ✓ Share key take-away points and concepts with their respective offices and fellow team members

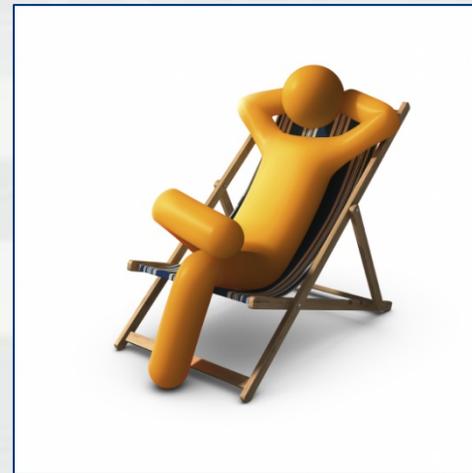


# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## BLUF: Why should I care?

Effectively written comment and responses:

- Improve the quality of your products, decision making, and project implementation
- Save you time and funding
- Minimize schedule delays due to prolonged review engagements
- Make your life a little bit easier ...  
...and less stressful



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## ...and in addition

Effectively written comments and responses also promote communication and transparency, which:

- Minimize potential misunderstandings between PDT members and reviewers
- Document review history so that previously raised concerns are not rehashed over and over
- Inform decision makers as to how concerns were resolved
- Result in an accountable and professional public record



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## How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

# Components of Comment-Response Record

There are four basic components of a comment-response record:



\*Optional, Use when appropriate

This session focuses on how to effectively write the first three components.



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## 4 Part Comment Structure

- 1 Clear statement of the concern
- 2 Basis for the concern
- 3 Significance of the concern
- 4 Recommended action to resolve the concern



The Foundation for Effective Review  
Comments & Responses



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# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## 4 Part Comment Structure

### Concern

- Be clear and succinct
- What is the problem to be resolved?

### Basis

- Cite the appropriate law, policy guidance, procedure, or state of practice if possible

### Significance

- Not just High/Med/Low
- Explain how the concern could affect product quality, decision making, or project implementation

### Recommendation

- Be specific
- For example, what additional analysis are needed or where should the report be revised



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## 4 Part Comment Structure



- A quality comment is of value regardless of the source.
- The 4 part comment structure is required for ATR and IEPR; however, it is strongly recommended for any review.



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## Effective Responses

So What about those Responses?



## How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

# 5 Key Components of an Effective Response

Clear statement of agreement or disagreement with the comment

Address all stated concerns and actions

Provide information relevant to the concern, including supporting rationale

Summarize pertinent discussions with reviewer or other subject matter experts

Describe how the concern has been (or will be) addressed in the document



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## Effective Responses: What to Avoid

- Expression of personal opinions or perspectives
- Use of personal pronouns
- Criticism of an individual rather than responding to the concern
- Becoming defensive
- Unsupported statements
  - *Provide policy or technical basis*
- Ambiguous statements
  - *Be specific and direct, allow reviewer to react*

Do not include



How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## Effective Discussion Documentation

And the Discussions?



## How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

# When and why to Document a Discussion

### Reviewer

- **When:** Prior to writing a comment.
- **Why:** To seek clarification or additional information to better identify or describe a potential concern.

### PDT Member

- **When:** Prior to writing a response.
- **Why:** To seek clarification about a comment OR if the PDT member does not agree with the comment.

### Reviewer

- **When:** During comment backcheck.
- **Why:** To seek clarification about the response or to resolve disagreement.



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## Key Components to Discussion Documentation

Clear statement of point of confusion or disagreement

Concise description of how issue was resolved

Description of any actions taken (or to be taken) and citation of revision location in the documents

Explanation of when/how the issue will be elevated if not resolved

Inclusion of supporting policy/technical methodology & subject matter expert (SME) consultation



## How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

# Discussion Documentation: What to Avoid

- Verbatim record of back and forth discussion
- Expression of personal opinions or perspectives
- Criticism of an individual
- "Agree to disagree" statement; acceptable outcomes are the concern was:
  - *Resolved to the satisfaction of all parties*
  - *Determined to not be substantive after discussion*
  - *Elevated for resolution*

Do not include



# How to Effectively Write and Respond to Review Comments

## Common Best Practices

- ✓ Use the 4 part comment structure
- ✓ Be succinct
- ✓ Be professional
- ✓ Be respectful
- ✓ Focus on improving the products, decision making, and project implementation
- ✓ Review proposed comments and responses to ensure consistency

