



**Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Entire Text

**Identify the Griffith/Sun Tzu's mission (task and purpose) in writing this book.**

Although the title implies that it deals with strictly military strategy, *The Art of War* touches on more than just how to fight and win battles. It also serves as a guide to national strategy, describing when to fight wars, why to fight them, conditions for victory, successful military administration, and the use of espionage. The advice was designed to be generic; listing every strategy for every situation is impossible. Instead, *The Art of War* created a set of simple maxims that could be applied to virtually any circumstance.

This edition of *The Art of War* was translated by S.B. Griffith in 1960. As the backbone of military thought in Asia, Griffith felt that an updated translation was long overdue.

**What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Sun Tzu believed the purpose of war was to advance the goals of the state. A smart ruler would use strategy and espionage to undermine his enemies before it came to armed conflict. If it came to war, the ruler would continue to undermine his enemy and create conditions for victory. The general – a righteous person, appointed by the ruler as a protector of the state – would make use of terrain and deception to set up conditions for victory. The general's forces would concentrate at an enemy weak spot and break through, capturing key objectives, ideally, intact.

**The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

*The Art of War* is extremely relevant and, along with works like von Clausewitz's *On War*, helps form the intellectual backbone of modern military thinking. Specific points, such as maneuver warfare, attacking enemy weak spots, orienting the enemy, speed, and the importance of an officer's character, form the basis of USMC doctrine. Sun Tzu is quoted several times in MCDP 1 *Warfighting*, which serves to underscore how influential *The Art of War* is. It is especially influential in Asia, particularly in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam; to understand their military thought you must start with Sun Tzu. So long as the United States has interests in Asia, *The Art of War* is relevant.

**Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.**

1) It is hard to know if Sun Tzu actually existed, or if he actually wrote *The Art of War*. What is clear, however, is that whoever wrote *The Art of War* was from the Warring States period in Ancient China.





**2) War exists to further a state's goals.** A state's goals usually involve the capture or control of land, people, or resources. These goals should be taken intact and undamaged. Doing so preserves their value, helps reduce hostility, and conserves military resources. If conflict does not further political goals, do not fight.

**3) "All warfare is deception."** Harass, aggravate, and trick your enemies. Keep them off guard, be unpredictable. Hide your status, find out theirs: **"know thy enemy and know thyself."**

**4) Terrain:** Sun Tzu places great emphasis on terrain. As the most static element of warfare, proper use of terrain is essential for victory.

**5) Maneuver, concentration, and weak spots:** The point of terrain and deception is to fool the enemy into spreading his troops out, placing them in positions that allow you to move and concentrate your forces against weak spots. Victory is not about killing every enemy soldier, but capturing objectives swiftly and intact.

**6) Planning:** Victory should not come about through hard-fighting or sheer luck. Instead, a commander should attack the enemy strategy with a solid plan. A well thought out plan is flexible and falls into place effortlessly.

**7) "No country has ever benefited from a protracted war."** War drains the treasury, damages the economy, and kills many. Be swift, use maneuver and deception to capture objectives quickly. Consider the impact economics and logistics will have on military operations.

**8) The importance of the general:** Commanders are chosen by their superior to lead troops and to protect the state. They should be wise, courageous, patient, strict, and ruthless. A general fights for the state's interest and enforces rule of law.

### Discussion Questions:

- *The Art of War* is almost 2500 years old. Is it still relevant to modern warfare? In what ways?
- Can *The Art of War* be applied to other forms of war, such as Naval, Amphibious, Air, or Electronic Warfare?
- Sun Tzu makes many references to ancient measurements and equipment: chariots, crossbows, spears, suits of armor, *li*, gold pieces, etc. Does this mean his points are no longer relevant? What if you replaced those with modern concepts – supply trucks, gasoline, Kevlar helmets – are his assertions still valid?
- *The Art of War* is deliberately flexible and generic—is it too generic? Does it lack nuance? Did anything get left out? Should things be added?
- How does Sun Tzu compare with other military philosophers, such as Thucydides, von Clausewitz, or Liddel Hart?





- Although a great deal of Sun Tzu forms the basis of USMC doctrine, what doesn't? How does *The Art of War* differ from *Warfighting* or other MCDP handbooks?
- *The Art of War* is written primarily for rulers or generals— is it relevant to the individual soldier or officer? How so?

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith

Introduction pt. I – The Author

#### **1. Identify the author's mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The *Art of War* begins with a brief history of Sun Tzu and his accomplishments. Griffith's introduction calls that history into question, and attempts to determine if Sun Tzu actually existed and when *The Art of War* was written.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

The *Art of War* is considered to be from the "classical" age of Chinese history (551-249 B.C.). Many Chinese scholars, some as far back as 1000 A.D., have questioned the accuracy of this claim, as well as the credibility of Sun Tzu's biography. In particular, the themes, attitudes, and references made in the *Art of War* single it out as being from the Warring States period (453-221 B.C.).

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

Very little; knowing that *The Art of War* was composed during the Warring States period helps provide some context, but does little to alter its interpretation.

#### **4. Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.**

Authors during the Warring States period would often attempt to make references to ancient events or concepts. The primary reason for this was to gain credibility, as ancient works were seen as having wisdom or authority. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the *Art of War* begins with the history of Sun Tzu and his victories. It is clear that the size of armies, the formations, the weapons, armor, and attitudes references by Sun Tzu in the *Art of War* are from the Warring States period. The lack of cavalry implies that this would have been from before 320 B.C., which was when cavalry became commonly used. Therefore we are able to conclude that *The Art of War* was written around 400-320 B.C., most likely by one knowledgeable individual.

#### **5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

#### **5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**





### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Introduction pt. II – The Text

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

Griffith attempts to determine if the ancient editions of *The Art of War* were different from contemporary editions and, if they were, in what ways were they different.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

The *Art of War* is first mentioned in 100 B.C. as part of the Chinese Emperor’s Imperial Library. It was listed as having 82 chapters and 9 rolls of diagrams. When it is mentioned again by the commentator Ts’ao Ts’ao in A.D. 200 there are only 13 chapters. This huge gap implies that there is a lot of material missing from *The Art of War*. Mistakes in cataloging on part of the Imperial Library and/or the fact that written works were printed on bamboo reeds could have accounted for the disparity in chapters (i.e. 82 bundles of bamboo transcribed as 82 chapters). Other works as far back as 300 B.C. paraphrase, directly reference, or comment on *The Art of War*. These references are similar enough to the current edition to imply that the modern version is close, if not identical, to the original version.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

The modern translation’s faithfulness to the original text is important, but not especially so. The modern edition – well over 200 years old – is still the standard in China, as well as for translations such as this one.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

1) When *The Art of War* was first catalogued, all books were written on bamboo sticks. Assuming that *The Art of War* was the same length it is today, it would have required well over one thousand bamboo sticks to record it. Since this would have been over 60 feet long and required an ox-cart to haul, it was probably broken down into smaller sections or rolls of bamboo sticks. It is possible that *The Art of War* was broken down into 82 rolls and mislabeled as being 82 chapters.

2) Despite the issues authenticity, the large numbers of commentators, references, and allusions imply that there is some form of literary continuity between the older Ts’ao Ts’ao edition (which may have been shortened or altered), and the Sun Hsing-yen edition, from which the present translation is based on.

#### **5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

#### **5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**





### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Introduction pt. III – The Warring States

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

To provide some context to *The Art of War* by describing the era in which it was composed.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

In the previous chapters, Griffith was able to prove that Sun Tzu existed during the Warring States period, due to the many references he made to Warring States-era concepts. This chapter elaborates on that by showing what kinds of social and political forces led to the development of the *Art of War*.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

Though it gives a brief look into the complicated politics of Ancient China, and establishes a context for *The Art of War*, it is not especially relevant. However, it does provide a good look at the conditions which led to the establishment of modern China.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

The Warring States period (453-221 B.C.) was defined by conflict between the great powers of Ancient China. The use of iron and the creation of infrastructure on a large-scale allowed these states to create vast political and military administrations, which were then brought to bear on their neighbors. Constant warfare made “itinerant sophists” – essentially, traveling military consultants – a profitable business. Pushing various schemes, plans, and strategies, these sophists created several schools of military thought. It was out of these conditions that *The Art of War* emerged.

#### **5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

#### **5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**





### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Introduction pt. IV – War in Sun Tzu’s Age

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter provides further context by describing warfare in the Warring States period.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Griffith looks at warfare prior to 500 B.C. and contrasts it with the drastic changes that took place during the Warring States period.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This chapter provides the underpinnings of *The Art of War*, particularly the Warring States-era emphasis on maneuver, deception, and flexibility. These concepts form the basis of *The Art of War*, and help form the basis of modern maneuver warfare. <sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

1) Prior to the Warring States period, war in Ancient China was mostly a ritualistic dueling between lords. War was prohibited during certain times (planting, harvesting, etc.) and was conducted by nobles for limited objectives. Because combat revolved around chariots and poorly trained peasants, very few changes in tactics or strategy were developed.

2) The Warring States period saw the establishment of large, professional armies. Instead of nobles, qualified generals took leadership positions. Likewise, the nucleus of this new army was the well equipped, professional soldier, supported by specialist units of light infantry or heavy shock troops. This period also saw rapid technological changes, particularly use of iron weapons and the invention of the crossbow.

3) Changes in army composition led to changes in tactics. The “orthodox” force would attack, pinning or distracting the enemy while the “special” or “unorthodox” force would attack a weak point, usually the flank or rear. This implies an emphasis on deception, flexibility, communication, and maneuver warfare. Additionally, since a professional army cost a lot in terms of time and money, additional emphasis was placed on morale, welfare, and the fair treatment of troops.

#### **5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

#### **5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> For example, MCDP 1 *Warfighting*





### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Introduction pt. V – Sun Tzu on War

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This section serves as a summary of *The Art of War*, and highlights Sun Tzu’s main points.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Griffith summarizes the key points of Sun Tzu, with special attention given to his views on the relationship between war and government, the need for deception, and the importance of the general.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

As an overview, the entire chapter has relevance; specific points include:

**1) War is “a grave concern of the state” and should not be entered into lightly.**<sup>1</sup> States should study and understand war, as it can alter or destroy the state.

**2) If entering into war, measures should be taken beforehand to ensure that it is easier to win. A bloodless victory is better than a decisive victory that kills many and destroys equipment. A swift victory is important, as extended fighting drains both the troops and the state that supports them; “no country has benefited from a protracted war.”**

**3) All warfare is based on deception, hiding intent as well as troops.**

**4) Maneuver:** the fixing, or “cheng” (orthodox) force, and the striking “ch’i” (unorthodox or indirect) force. One pins or distracts the enemy, while the other hits a vulnerable area. Both are flexible; the cheng, if necessary, can change to the ch’i. Similarly, an attack becomes a defense, defense turns into an attack.<sup>1</sup>

**5) The importance of a competent general in making decisions:** attacking when victory is possible, staying mobile, thinking of factors other than military force (i.e. position, morale, food, diplomatic/political considerations), and being able to alter or manipulate situations.

The ideas summarized in this chapter help form the basis of USMC military thought.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

See #3





**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> Compare to Clauzewitz: “politics by other means”

<sup>1</sup> This can be seen, for example, in MCDP 1 Warfighting, pages: 40-49 or 69-84

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Introduction pt. VI – Sun Tzu and Mao Tse-Tung

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how Sun Tzu continues to influence Chinese military thought, especially that of Mao Tse-Tung.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Mao Tse-Tung read Sun Tzu as a young man. The ideas put forth in *The Art of War* served as the basis for Mao’s campaign against the Japanese and Chinese Nationalists, and are evident in his written works, such as *On Guerilla Warfare*.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

The last part of the chapter is the most relevant. It deals with how the Chinese reacted during the end of the Civil War, and briefly goes into detail about the Chinese conduct in Korea.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

1) Mao read many classics in his youth, including *The Art of War*, as well as several authors who drew inspiration from *The Art of War*.

2) These works served as the basis of Mao’s strategy. Griffith cites several examples where Mao paraphrases or quotes *The Art of War*. Mao’s combat record is also telling: Mao was skilled at deception, intelligence, subversion, and making use of terrain, all hallmarks of Sun Tzu.

3) Sun Tzu formed the basis for Mao’s military thinking; Mao’s thinking formed the basis for modern China. To better understand Chinese military thought, we must look at Mao’s strategies and the works that shaped them.





**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

**Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation - Biography of Sun Tzu

**1. Identify the author's mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter establishes credibility by providing Sun Tzu's background.

**2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Sun Tzu was an accomplished general. Three anecdotes, one about concubines, the others about his descendants, serve as an introduction.<sup>1</sup>

**3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

The anecdotes about the concubines demonstrate the importance of discipline, while the tales of Sun Pin (one of Sun Tzu's descendants and possible author of *The Art of War*), highlights how Sun Tzu's doctrines can be implemented.

**4. Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.**

1) Sun Tzu served the King of Wu. To demonstrate his skill as a general, Sun Tzu ordered many of the King's concubines – not skilled in war – to form companies. When the concubines would not follow orders, he had the concubines in charge beheaded. This sufficiently motivated the other concubines to follow orders and made them a cohesive unit. The King was impressed and made Sun Tzu a general. Sun Tzu went on to win many victories.

2) Sun Pin, a descendant of Sun Tzu, was betrayed and exiled from Wei. After winning the trust of the King of Ch'i, Sun Pin served as one of his officers. The King of Ch'i soon intervened in a war between Chao and Wei. Sun Pin was able to convince the King of Ch'i to bypass the Wei army and attack the Wei capital, saving the Chao and defeating the Wei.

3) Later, Sun Pin acted as an advisor when Ch'i went to war in defense of Han. Drawing from *The Art of War*, Sun Pin used deception and terrain to set an ambush and kill the Wei commander.

4) Because of his victories, Sun Pin, Sun Tzu, and *The Art of War* became well known.





**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> Griffith questions the factual accuracy of these anecdotes.

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter I – Estimates

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The author sets out to demonstrate why war should be studied, what factors should be looked at before going to war, and general strategies for a successful war.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

War should be fought for clear political objectives. Before going to war, a ruler should estimate and examine various factors; if competent, the ruler or general should be able to determine chances for success. Don’t engage unless you have some chance of success.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This chapter covers two areas: “military” and “national” strategy. Both are relevant, especially for strategic-level decision makers (i.e. generals, admirals, and politicians). The last half of the chapter (verse 17 and onward) can also be applied at the tactical level.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

**1) “War is a matter of vital importance to the State”:** much like Clausewitz, war is a matter of state policy and should be used and thought of as a tool of politics.

**2) Five Elements:** when preparing to go to war, examine the morale, climate, terrain, commander, and doctrine/organization of the enemy. By making a skilled, thorough, and unbiased evaluation, a general should be able to determine victory or defeat

**3) Qualities of the General:** wisdom, sincerity, humanity, courage, strictness

**4) “All warfare is based on deception”:** hide your situation while trying to ascertain theirs. Confuse, anger, and embolden your enemy. Strike where they are weak, avoid their concentration of force.<sup>1</sup>





**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> Compare to the US World War II strategy “hit ‘em where they ain’t”

**Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter II – Waging War

**1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The author outlines broad guidelines for conducting war on a strategic scale.

**2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

The author places his emphasis on the strategic aspects of war, particularly logistics and economics.

**3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This chapter deals with strategic (and/or operational) level concepts, such as logistics, economics, and goals of war. Consequently, these concepts are especially relevant in large scale operations.

**4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

**1) Logistics:** Waging a war will require large amounts of men, chariots, and supplies. This will add up to almost 1000 gold pieces a day and will quickly drain a nation’s treasury. A smart army learns to live off the land, especially the enemy’s territory. Ruined equipment, worn out armor, broken weapons, lame or dead draft animals, and useless supply wagons will account for 2/3 of government expenditures. <sup>1</sup>

**2) Economics:** “Where the army is, prices are high...” This leads to the establishment of a black market and damages the local economy.

**3) Victory:** “Victory is the main object in war” and “there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited;” wars should be swift have clear, achievable conditions for victory.





**4) Motivation:** the potential to capture booty gives the soldiers a personal stake in the battles and motivates them. Anger is also a useful for motivation.

**5) Prisoners:** treat captives well, as it may reduce their incentive to escape or rebel. Well-treated captives may join your side.

**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> Although the reference to chariots, fodder, gold pieces is out of date, is it still relevant? If instead of “chariots” we used “humvees” or “trucks,” “dollars” for “gold,” and “gas” for “fodder,” is Sun Tzu that far off?

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter III – Offensive Strategy

### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The purpose of this chapter is to outline offensive strategies, with emphasis on political-military interaction and “national strategy” (as opposed to “military strategy”).

### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

The author assumes war has a social or political goal. A smart ruler would attempt to achieve these goals with as little violence as possible, instead opting to undermine enemy strategy. Killing people and destroying property is often counter-productive to political goals; many political goals are about capturing or controlling people or property. In order to ensure success, a ruler should choose a wise, righteous general to carry out his wishes. Once selected, this general should not be interfered with.

### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This section is very relevant, especially the parts on attacking the enemy strategy, political-military relations, and independent command. His points about use of troops and circumstances for victory are also relevant.

### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

**1) Capturing an objective intact:** “To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.” Capturing a state, an army, a unit, or a soldier is preferable to killing or destroying it. This keeps





its resources and infrastructure intact and potentially gives you equipment or personnel to make use of. “Your aim is to take All-Under-Heaven intact. Thus your troops are not worn out and your gains will be complete.”

**2) Strategies for victory:** It is best to attack and disrupt the enemy’s strategy before it comes to violence. “He who excels at resolving difficulties does so before they arise.” The next best strategy is to disrupt the enemy’s alliances, to isolate them, and force them to back down. The next best option is to attack and destroy the enemy’s army. This is potentially dangerous, as war is unpredictable, and a general may win, but still have his troops badly damaged and unable to respond to other threats. The worst policy is to attack cities, as sieges tend to be drawn out and costly to the attacker.

**3) Using troops:** If greatly outnumbering the enemy, surround or attack them. If twice their size, divide them. If equal, engage them. If less than equal, be able to evade the enemy. If much weaker, withdraw and avoid contact.

**4) Relationship with the Ruler:** A competent ruler will not interfere with military matters. Instead, a wise ruler will choose a skilled, fair general to fight for him. “...A sovereign of high character and intelligence must be able to know the right man, should place responsibility on him, and expect results.”<sup>1</sup>

**5) Circumstances for victory:** a talented general knows when to fight and when to withdraw, knowing how to use both large and small forces, presents a united front (morale), is patient, and free from interference. “Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”

**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> Compare this to the concepts of “mission command” or “commander’s intent”

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith

Translation – Chapter IV – Dispositions

### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter departs from the national, strategic-level guidance of previous chapters and begins to discuss doctrines for offensive and defensive strategy.





## 2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?

Defense and offense are two sides of the same coin. Skilled defense is hard to beat but only offense can win wars. A smart general sets up a strong defense and waits for the enemy to make a mistake. Once a mistake is made, the general attacks with an abundance of strength. These should not be hard-fought battles, but concerted strikes at areas set up for victory.

## 3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:

The author's relative emphasis on defense, offense, and the use of force to hit specific, vulnerable targets has direct relevance to the USMC maneuver warfare and centers of gravity concepts. Though often overlooked, this chapter also highlights the importance of the general's character and humanity, an important theme in *The Art of War*.

## 4. Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.

**1) Defense:** When weak, stay on the defensive. A wise defense is strong; get into a strong position and wait for enemy weakness. A skilled defense makes use of terrain, deception, and concealment. Defense will not win wars.

**2) Offense:** When strength is abundant, attack. A good offense moves quickly, makes good use of terrain, and is aggressive. Though a strong defense can be unbeatable, you cannot win a war with defense alone—eventually you must attack.

**3) Conditions for victory:** A battle won by luck or through hard fighting proves nothing. A wise general creates conditions for victory *before* troops fight ("he conquers an enemy already defeated"). Every decision made should be deliberate and should set the enemy up for annihilation.

**4) Righteousness:** A wise general follows the *Tao* ("the Way"). He cultivates his humanity and maintains law and justice. This leads to successful policies and helps maintain his government.

**5) Elements of War:** measurements of space, estimation of quantities, calculations, comparison, and chances of victory. A general must first look at terrain and distance, numbers of troops, qualities of troops and equipment, compare them, and estimate chances of victory. After an estimate has been made, the general then decides on an offensive or defensive disposition.

**6) Water Metaphor:** Water flows from an area of high concentration to an area of low concentration. It has no permanent shape; it takes the shape of its location. An army should be like water: flowing into areas of weakness, being flexible, and adapting to the terrain.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare to "surfaces and gaps."





### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter V – Energy

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter deals primarily with how to manage troops.<sup>1</sup> It also deals with use of troops in a tactical sense, such as how to attack.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

The management of troops is hierarchical. A general manages a few subordinates, each of whom manage a handful below them and so forth. Command and control is centralized; no unit moves without orders. Individual officers shouldn’t exercise initiative, but rather fall into place according to the general’s plan. All successful plans make use of an ordinary force to suppress the enemy, and an extraordinary force that defeats them. There is no way to simply tactics beyond the ordinary and extraordinary forces.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This is an interesting chapter. Many concepts, such as the ordinary and extraordinary forces have relevance on tactical, operational, and strategic levels (suppression, flanking, fire and maneuver, etc.). This chapter is also relevant because it shows the differences between Sun Tzu (and Chinese thought) and USMC doctrine, especially regarding command and control.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

**1) Management:** Control of many is like control of a few; a general doesn’t command his entire host, but a few of his subordinates who issue orders down the chain of command. Battle is chaotic and proper use of signals is important to ensure no units advance or retreat without authorization. This implies tight discipline and centralization; though a ruler gives his general free reign, individual officers do not exercise independent action. Being able to be flexible or give the appearance of weakness confusion requires a great deal of preparation and discipline.

**2) Ordinary and Extraordinary Forces:** the fixing, or “*cheng*” (ordinary or orthodox) force, and the striking “*ch’i*” (unorthodox or indirect) force. One pins or distracts the enemy, while the other hits a vulnerable area. Both are flexible; the *cheng*, if necessary, can change to the *ch’i*. Similarly, an attack becomes a defense, defense turns into an attack. This works on both a strategic or tactical level.<sup>1</sup> These concepts are meant to be as generic as possible. Sun Tzu makes it clear that one cannot come up with doctrines for every single circumstance; rather then try, simplify them down to *ch’i* and *cheng* (“In battle there are only normal and extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless; none can comprehend them all.”).





**3) Orienting the enemy:** create a situation where the enemy must conform, entice them, create a false vulnerability.<sup>1</sup>

**4) The Boulder metaphor:** a skilled general does not rely on his subordinates to win, but creates situations where the situation unfolds as he wants: “Therefore when using troops, one must take advantage of the situation exactly as if here were setting a ball in motion on a steep slope. The force applied is minute but the results are enormous.” Individual officers shouldn’t exercise initiative. This is because smart general will have maneuvered them into a situation where they can’t lose.

**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> It covers a lot of ground in a few maxims: organizational management, communication, command and control, etc.

<sup>1</sup> Example: suppressing element and a flanking element.

<sup>1</sup> See *Warfighting*, pg. 76

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter VI – Weaknesses and Strengths

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter deals with deception and initiative and how to use them to achieve victory.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Initiative and deception are the most important aspects of battles. In order to set up situations where troops can be successful, a general must keep the enemy off balance, forcing them to respond rather than dictate the pace of battle.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This chapter deals heavily with initiative, surfaces and gaps, and shaping the enemy, key concepts in *Warfighting*.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

**1) Initiative:** Get to the battlefield first and have time to rest and prepare. Force the enemy to move, to behave in ways you want. Do not let the enemy do the same to you. Give them some





incentive to act how you want them to. Keep them off balance and appear at places where you are not expected.

**2) Deception:** Sun Tzu places great importance on deception, particularly on hiding your dispositions from the enemy while learning theirs. This keeps them uncertain of your intentions, and forces them to spread their troops.

**3) Concentration:** The reason for deception and initiative is to allow you to concentrate the maximum number of forces against an enemy weak point. Attack the enemy where they are weakest.

**4) Flexibility:** Again, the water metaphor: flow into cracks, from strength to weakness, take no discernable shape, adapt to enemy tactics.

**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> specifically, pg. 76-84, 91-92

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter VII – Maneuver

#### **1. Identify the author's mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter deals with transporting and employing troops, with extra attention given to logistics, command and control, and use of terrain.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

The ultimate goal of war is to capture objectives intact of undamaged. War is not specifically about killing, but outmaneuvering the enemy, crushing weak spots in order to achieve your objectives. The key to this strategy is moving indirectly, avoiding obvious routes, to catch the enemy by surprise. A smart general also pays attention to human factors like determination, anger, hunger, and morale.





### 3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:

As a chapter on maneuver, this naturally holds great relevance to concepts like maneuver warfare and surfaces and gaps. It also acknowledges the human factor in war, a key concept in *Warfighting*.<sup>1</sup>

### 4. Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.

1) **Be indirect:** Maneuver is difficult and dangerous, but it gives a chance to evade and surprise the enemy. To do so, one must march indirectly. Give the enemy some bait and then take the indirect route to catch them off guard. This confuses them and allows you to concentrate forces in areas they do not suspect.

2) **Logistics:** do not move your entire army and abandon your camp. This will lead to the loss of your supplies. Similarly, do not take everything with you, as this burdens you down.

3) **Use local guides to acquaint yourself with local terrain and conditions.**<sup>1</sup> Send talented officers ahead with the guides to scout terrain and enemy dispositions. This prevents a marching army from falling into unexpected pitfalls (literally and figuratively).

4) **Command and Control:** proper use of signal flags, drums, banners, and torches prevents units from acting out of concert. Harmony is important; dissonance and disobedience must be prevented. This implies a strict hierarchy and lack of initiative on the part of individual officers.

5) **The Human Factor:** Morale is the backbone of the army. Mental, morale, and physical factors influence battlefield performance and a skilled general will see that those factors are used to maximum advantage. Fight a rested, supplied, or well-fed army against one that isn't. Avoid his elite troops or obvious feints.

6) **Do not completely surround an enemy or threaten to annihilate enemy troops.** Give them an escape route. An enemy that is surrounded becomes desperate and will fight to the death. Since the purpose of war is to capture objectives intact, giving the enemy an out, an alternative to death, allows for capitulation or surrender. This makes it possible to capture objectives with a minimum of violence.

<sup>1</sup> pages 13-17

<sup>1</sup> This could also cover translators, regional experts, or local experts. Sun Tzu only mentions it once, but the large amount of commentary implies this is a key concept





### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter VIII – The Nine Variables

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter deals with situational variables, contingencies, and decision making.<sup>1</sup>

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

War is fluid and a general cannot prepare for everything. There are variables and contingencies that a general must evaluate in the field. There are times when following them is advisable, and times when it is not.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This chapter is relevant but has less direct overlap than previous chapters.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

**1) A general doesn’t always have to listen to his sovereign.** When a general sees an advantage, he ought to take it. It is more expedient to act now than to wait for permission. This, however, seems only to apply to generals; junior officers do as they’re told. Mission planning is not part of the equation.

**2) Orienting the enemy:** knowledge of the nine variables allows a general to control events and use troops effectively.

**3) The five contingencies:** avoid obvious ambushes by taking the long route. Do not encircle an enemy and force them to fight to the death. Avoid attacking cities if there is the possibility that they are well-supplied, well-informed, or well-defended. Avoid taking ground that will be hard to defend or brings no advantage. The orders of a ruler should be followed only as necessary; expediency is more important. These are contingencies because they vary from situation to situation and are judgment calls on the part of the general.

**4) Statecraft:** injure and intimidate the enemy to keep them submissive. Talk them up, give them a multitude of offers, keep them constantly occupied and off guard.

**5) Readiness:** do not assume they will attack, but prepare for it always (“When the world is at peace, a gentleman keeps his sword by his side”).

**6) Flaws in a general:** recklessness, cowardly, quick-tempered, delicate sense of honor (similar to quick-tempered), and compassion. A reckless general can be outmaneuvered and killed. A





cowardly general is hesitant and will lose the initiative. Quick-tempered or delicate generals are quick to anger and defend their good names. They are easy to provoke and lure into traps. A compassionate general is unwilling to take casualties to gain advantages.

<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu doesn't specifically elaborate as to which points are the Nine Variables. Griffith mentions in a footnote that they are most likely verses 2-7. The rest of the chapter is devoted to elaborating on those points.

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter IX – Marches

#### **1. Identify the author's mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This chapter contains a number of maxims about how to behave in various terrains and interpretate various circumstances. It could be thought of as a tactical handbook and an intelligence primer.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

There are proper ways to use troops depending on terrain and situation. These situations often give clues as to the enemy's presence, such as plumes of dust or tough talk from enemy diplomats. A competent general can gather intelligence from these clues.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

Aside from serving as a decent guide as to how to use terrain, it also discusses the importance of intelligence. This section has more relevance to the tactical-level commander than previous chapters.

#### **4. Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.**

##### **1) Terrain is the most important factor, and determines offensive and defensive strategies.<sup>1</sup>**

Terrain is static; troops must conform to it, not the other way around. Subtle messages from terrain, such as swaying trees, dust clouds, or birds rising in flight, are signs of enemy activity. Being able to read these subtle messages gives a general the advantage.

2) Enemy envoys often carry messages other than what they are saying. Read between the lines.

3) By observing the enemy, the terrain, and messages from envoys, a skilled general is able to gain insight to the capability and intent of the enemy.





**4) On Intelligence:** “In war, numbers alone confer no advantage. Do not advance relying on sheer military power...It is sufficient to estimate the enemy situation correctly and to concentrate your strength to capture him. There is no more to it then this.”

**5) Commanding troops:** Do not punish troops before their loyalty is secured. Loyal troops should be disciplined, otherwise they are worthless. Command them properly and be consistent with instruction.

**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> Even with modern equipment like radios and airplanes, terrain and climate dictate the nature of battle. Modern examples would be Stalingrad, Vietnam, or the Iraqi desert.

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter X – Terrain

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The purpose of this section is to outline the six types of terrain and six conditions for defeat. It differs from the previous chapter in that it deals more with the context and situation of the terrain then the actual climate or topography.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Sun Tzu believed that it was impossible to list every type of circumstance or doctrine. Instead, he sought to simplify things into a set of generic principles that could be adapted to the situation.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This chapter, like all chapters of *The Art of War*, is relevant. Specific concerns include the emphasis on the commander’s character, discipline, and the officer’s relationship to the state. The six types of ground and six conditions for defeat are useful guides, but can be confusing given the previous (and following) chapters.

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

**1) Ground is classified as one of six types:** accessible, entrapping, indecisive, constricted, precipitous, and distant. These have little to do with the specific climate or features of the terrain,





but by the effects it has on a general's offensive and defensive strategies. In particular, ground determines how easy it is to advance and retreat.

**2) The six conditions for defeat:** If the army is out of harmony – officers are weak, the troops are ineffective, the leaders hot-headed, the general morally weak, or the commander inept – the army will fail.

**3) A general must be balanced.** The general must know when to ignore orders from a sovereign, how to treat his men fairly, how to keep them disciplined, and must not be selfish ("...Good commanders are both loved and feared"). The general is the protector of the state and should not be concerned with glory or fame.

**4) Awareness of the enemy and of thyself:** Though something of a cliché, this represents the ultimate generic statement and sums up Sun Tzu nicely: **"Know the enemy, know yourself; your victory will never be endangered. Know the ground, know the weather; your victory will then be total."**

**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter XI – Nine Varieties of Ground

### **1. Identify the author's mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The purpose of this chapter is to give a commander some idea how to use different locations to his advantage.

### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

Like previous chapters, Sun Tzu assumes that there are too many variables to list every single situation. Instead, he defined ground by how it effects the employment of troops. Troops should be placed in this terrain without knowledge of what is going on. Ignorance prevents overconfidence or fear, and forces troops to fight for their lives. Even though kept ignorant, take proper care of troops. Put troops into ground that favors them and strike something the enemy values.





### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

Like other chapters, this information is relevant, as it gives a broad overview of terrain and is useful on strategic, operational, or tactical levels. It is also worth noting the emphasis on speed and flexibility.

### **4. Identify the author's specific and implied conclusions.**

1) The Nine Varieties of Ground represent the location and situation of the ground, as opposed to the topography or climate. This includes considerations like politics, such as allies and proximity to neighbors, logistics, communications, or morale.

2) Proper use of the Nine Varieties of Ground will keep you strong and the enemy off balance.

3) If the enemy is strong, attack something of value to them and they will alter their plans to stop you. If they are allied, divide them, break them apart, and conquer them one at a time.

4) **"Speed is the essence of war."** Be swift, keep them off-balance, and react before they do.

5) Treat troops properly. Make sure they are fed properly. Win their trust. Keep them ignorant. Know when to push them and when to give them rest. Keep them motivated. Put them in situations where they must fight or die and they will fight hard for their lives.

6) **Flexibility:** "Should one ask: 'can troops be made capable of such instantaneous coordination?' I reply: 'They can.'"

7) A general should be flexible and keeps his plans secret, even from his own officers. He should change his plans subtly, so that few notice the difference. He should alter his routes, his routines, and his marches so that no one, even his own men, know what he doing.

**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

#### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter XII – Attack by Fire

### **1. Identify the author's mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

This short chapter gives some guidance on how to use fires to support attacks against the enemy. The last part of the chapter also touches on the political use of war.





## 2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?

War is the domain of the state and is used to achieve political goals. These goals should be captured intact, with a minimum of violence. Often, these political goals mean gaining control of people or resources. Capturing them intact allows them to be exploited; destroying them renders them useless. Since war kills and destroys, and should only be used as a last resort. If war is necessary, fire is useful for distracting or destroying the enemy.

## 3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:

The last section of the chapter echoes von Clausewitz: war is a political tool.<sup>1</sup> The rest of the chapter – use of fire – is questionable relevance. “Fire” in this context refers to burning enemy troops and equipment. This differs from “fire” in the modern context, which refers to attacks from guns, artillery, etc.<sup>1</sup>

## 4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.

- 1) Fire is effective for disrupting the enemy, particularly their supplies and equipment.
- 2) Proper equipment, timing, and weather are necessary to use fires correctly.
- 3) A smart general co-ordinates his fires to coincide with an attack. The fire will distract and disperse the enemy, allowing the attack to do maximum damage. Fires must be timed so as not to hurt one’s own troops.
- 4) Winning battles and capturing objectives is important, but a ruler must capitalize on these gains. A ruler should not go to war over flights of fancy, personal grudges, anger, or resentment. **War is meant to further the interests of the state.** If it does not further the interest of the state, a ruler should not go to war.

## 5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:

## 5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:

<sup>1</sup> See also *Warfighting*, pg. 23, “War as an act of policy”

<sup>1</sup> There is some overlap, however. Points about correct timing and following up properly make it a good analogy for artillery fire. The ordinance analogy is especially relevant if discussing napalm or white phosphorous.





### **Book/Section**

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Translated by S.B. Griffith  
Translation – Chapter XIII – Employment of Secret Agents

#### **1. Identify the author’s mission (task and purpose) in writing this section.**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the five types of spies and how they may be used.

#### **2. What does the author assume to be true in order to accomplish his mission?**

A smart general uses spies for more than just information: disinformation, destabilization, and the establishment for Fifth Columns. When a general marches off to war he should have already created conditions for victory. Wars cannot be won without information. Therefore, spies are an essential part of war. The way to turn spies is to bribe them.<sup>1</sup> Once turned, a spy can then recruit others to your cause.

#### **3. The part which holds the most relevance to what I/we do is:**

This chapter stresses the importance of intelligence (specifically, what we would now call “human intelligence”). This is a broad guide to the use and recruitment of human intelligence assets, and is relevant on all levels of operation, from low-level tactical intelligence gathering to national-level espionage activities.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. Identify the author’s specific and implied conclusions.**

1) A general who runs off to war without information will bankrupt his nation. A skilled general will have “foreknowledge” of the enemy and will be able to win. The only way to get foreknowledge is through the use of spies.

2) There are five types of spies. Used together they are able to paint a clear picture of enemy dispositions. Bribes and rewards vary depending on the type of spy. Use established spies to recruit other spies.

3) All spy operations must be kept extremely secret. To ensure secrecy, spies must be evaluated for their loyalty, truthfulness, and ability. If a spy is driven by wealth you can still make use of them, but be wary, as they may have been bribed by the enemy.

4) **Universality:** “There is no place where espionage is not used.”

5) The human element: To successfully attack an enemy objective, be it an army, a state, or a leader, you must know the names and dispositions of all key personnel (commanders, staff, bodyguards, etc.).





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**5a. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we accept or agree with the following:**

**5b. With respect to the authors conclusions, I/we reject or disagree with the following:**

<sup>1</sup> The use of blackmail or ideology for recruiting spies is not mentioned.

<sup>1</sup> Example: a company commander winning over local tribal leaders, who share information; stealing ICBM deployment schedules

