



Defense Primer: Military Officers

Grade and Rank

The armed forces are hierarchical organizations with clearly defined levels of authority. The different levels for officers are defined in law and called *grades*, while *rank* refers to the order of precedence among those in different grades and within the same grade (e.g., someone who has been a Major for three years outranks someone who has been a Major for two years; see 10 U.S.C. §741). However, it is common for the term rank to be used as a synonym for grade. Pay grade is an administrative classification that determines certain rates of pay, but it is sometimes used to indicate grade as well. For example, a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy may be referred to as an O-4. See **Figure 1**.

Numbers and Roles

Officers make up about 18% of the armed forces, with enlisted personnel making up the other 82%. Officers outrank all enlisted personnel. **Table 1** below lists the number of active duty officers in each pay grade.

Warrant officers (pay grades W-1 to W-5) perform highly technical or specialized work within their career field and also, in the case of the Army, serve as helicopter pilots. Warrant officers constitute about 8% of the officer corps.

Company-grade or junior-grade officers (pay grades O-1 to O-3) typically lead units with several dozen to several hundred personnel, or serve as junior staff officers. They make up about 56% of the officer corps.

Field-grade or mid-grade officers (pay grades O-4 to O-6) typically lead units with several hundred to several thousand personnel, or serve as senior staff officers. They make up about 36% of the officer corps. There are statutory limits on the number of officers in these grades (10 U.S.C. §523).

General or flag officers (pay grades O-7 to O-10) may lead units or organizations with several thousand to hundreds of thousands of personnel or serve as staff for the largest military organizations. General and flag officers make up just under 0.4% of the officer corps. There are statutory limits on the number of officers in these grades (10 U.S.C. §525-526a).

Insignia



























































As shown in **Figure 1**, each officer grade in the armed forces has distinctive insignia, typically worn on the sleeve, shoulder, collar, and/or headgear (caps, berets, etc.).

Table 1. Active Duty Military Officers by Pay Grade (as of September 30, 2020)

Pay Grade	Services				Total
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	
O-10	17	9	3	16	45
O-9	47	38	17	51	153
O-8	93	64	31	93	281
O-7	138	106	38	135	417
O-6	4,002	3,293	659	3,292	11,246
O-5	9,029	6,771	1,949	9,820	27,569
O-4	16,057	10,691	4,009	14,309	45,066
O-3	27,144	18,783	5,917	20,758	72,602
O-2	12,264	6,865	3,867	8,415	31,411
O-1	9,850	7,150	2,789	7,356	27,145
W-5	551	87	111	0	749
W-4	1,949	405	303	0	2,657
W-3	3,640	758	577	0	4,975
W-2	5,527	631	920	0	7,078
W-1	2,674	8	260	0	2,942
Total	92,982	55,659	21,450	64,245	234,336

Source: Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center.

Figure I. Pay Grade, Grade, and Insignia of Officers

Paygrade	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
WARRANT OFFICERS				
W1	Warrant Officer 1 	USN Warrant Officer 1 	Warrant Officer 1 	NO WARRANT
W2	Chief Warrant Officer 2 	Chief Warrant Officer 2 	Chief Warrant Officer 2 	NO WARRANT
W3	Chief Warrant Officer 3 	Chief Warrant Officer 3 	Chief Warrant Officer 3 	NO WARRANT
W4	Chief Warrant Officer 4 	Chief Warrant Officer 4 	Chief Warrant Officer 4 	NO WARRANT
W5	Chief Warrant Officer 5 	Chief Warrant Officer 5 	Chief Warrant Officer 5 	NO WARRANT
OFFICERS				
O1	Second Lieutenant 	Ensign 	Second Lieutenant 	Second Lieutenant 
O2	First Lieutenant 	Lieutenant Junior Grade 	First Lieutenant 	First Lieutenant 
O3	Captain 	Lieutenant 	Captain 	Captain 
O4	Major 	Lieutenant Commander 	Major 	Major 
O5	Lieutenant Colonel 	Commander 	Lieutenant Colonel 	Lieutenant Colonel 
O6	Colonel 	Captain 	Colonel 	Colonel 
O7	Brigadier General 	Rear Admiral Lower Half 	Brigadier General 	Brigadier General 
O8	Major General 	Rear Admiral Upper Half 	Major General 	Major General 
O9	Lieutenant General 	Vice Admiral 	Lieutenant General 	Lieutenant General 
O10	General 	Admiral 	General 	General 
WARTIME ONLY	General of the Army 	Fleet Admiral 		General of the Air Force 

Source: CRS adaption of Department of Defense web page: <https://dod.defense.gov/About/Insignias/Officers/>.

Relevant Statutes

10 U.S.C. §§101(b), 523, 525-526a, 741, 742.

Other Resources

Department of Defense Instruction 1310.01, Rank and Seniority of Commissioned Officers, August 23, 2013.

CRS Products

CRS Report R44496, *Military Officer Personnel Management: Key Concepts and Statutory Provisions*, by Lawrence Kapp
 CRS Report R44389, *General and Flag Officers in the U.S. Armed Forces: Background and Considerations for Congress*, by Lawrence Kapp

Lawrence Kapp, Specialist in Military Manpower Policy

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