

Updated June 4, 2024

# 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 9% 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 55% 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. The number of officers in these grades is limited by law (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. The number of officers in these grades is limited by law (10 U.S.C. §§525-526).

## 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 March 31, 2024)**

Pay Grade	Service					Total
	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Space Force	
<b>O-10</b>	14	8	3	13	3	41
<b>O-9</b>	47	37	18	42	5	149
<b>O-8</b>	109	52	29	77	7	274
<b>O-7</b>	103	107	37	99	11	357
<b>O-6</b>	3,738	3,100	711	3,132	229	10,910
<b>O-5</b>	8,589	6,614	1,948	9,222	724	27,097
<b>O-4</b>	15,689	10,487	3,950	13,296	1,156	44,578
<b>O-3</b>	25,935	18,245	6,147	20,436	1,236	71,999
<b>O-2</b>	15,016	7,341	3,487	6,840	541	33,225
<b>O-1</b>	6,178	6,659	2,706	6,657	529	23,269
<b>W-5</b>	563	71	111	na	na	745
<b>W-4</b>	1,717	459	282	na	na	2,458
<b>W-3</b>	3,179	785	588	na	na	4,552
<b>W-2</b>	5,891	716	805	na	na	7,412
<b>W-1</b>	4,178	29	534	na	na	4,741
<b>Total</b>	91,486	54,710	21,356	59,814	4,441	231,807

**Source:** Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center. **Note:** Air Force and Space Force do not have Warrant Officers.

Figure 1. Pay Grade, Grade, and Insignia of Officers

Paygrade	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Space Force
<b>WARRANT OFFICERS</b>					
W1	Warrant Officer 1 	USN Warrant Officer 1 	Warrant Officer 1 	NO WARRANT	NO WARRANT
W2	Chief Warrant Officer 2 	Chief Warrant Officer 2 	Chief Warrant Officer 2 	NO WARRANT	NO WARRANT
W3	Chief Warrant Officer 3 	Chief Warrant Officer 3 	Chief Warrant Officer 3 	NO WARRANT	NO WARRANT
W4	Chief Warrant Officer 4 	Chief Warrant Officer 4 	Chief Warrant Officer 4 	NO WARRANT	NO WARRANT
W5	Chief Warrant Officer 5 	Chief Warrant Officer 5 	Chief Warrant Officer 5 	NO WARRANT	NO WARRANT
<b>OFFICERS</b>					
O1	Second Lieutenant 	Ensign 	Second Lieutenant 	Second Lieutenant 	Second Lieutenant 
O2	First Lieutenant 	Lieutenant Junior Grade 	First Lieutenant 	First Lieutenant 	First Lieutenant 
O3	Captain 	Lieutenant 	Captain 	Captain 	Captain 
O4	Major 	Lieutenant Commander 	Major 	Major 	Major 
O5	Lieutenant Colonel 	Commander 	Lieutenant Colonel 	Lieutenant Colonel 	Lieutenant Colonel 
O6	Colonel 	Captain 	Colonel 	Colonel 	Colonel 
O7	Brigadier General 	Rear Admiral Lower Half 	Brigadier General 	Brigadier General 	Brigadier General 
O8	Major General 	Rear Admiral Upper Half 	Major General 	Major General 	Major General 
O9	Lieutenant General 	Vice Admiral 	Lieutenant General 	Lieutenant General 	Lieutenant General 
O10	General 	Admiral 	General 	General 	General 
<b>WARTIME ONLY</b>	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/>. The U.S. Coast Guard, which normally falls under the Department of Homeland Security, uses the same names and insignia as the Navy.

### Resources

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

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

CRS Report R44496, *Military Officer Personnel Management: Key Concepts and Statutory Provisions*.

CRS Report R44389, *General and Flag Officers in the U.S. Armed Forces: Background and Considerations for Congress*.

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