**CHIEF OF DEFENCE FORCE ESSAY COMPETITION CHECKLIST**

1. Submitting a good essay for the Chief of Defence Force Essay Competition (CDFEC) can be daunting. The ideal essay should be original and engaging, well-researched and organized, easy to read and understand, and contain important insights for the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). It must also distinguish itself from the hundreds of other competition entries. As such, the following checklist contains some tips as to what the judging panel looks for in a winning essay. While it is not exhaustive and much of it is standard essay writing advice, it will help writers avoid some of the common mistakes that may diminish an otherwise exemplary submission and scuttle its chances of winning.

2. Overall, please bear in mind the following points when submitting your entry:

a. Essays should be on subjects relevant to the SAF. Your chosen subject should have some applicability to SAF operations, doctrine, culture or practices.

b. Essays should be well-researched and referenced following proper scholarly practice, similar to *POINTER* articles. Viewpoint essays based solely on personal reflections or experience are not encouraged.

c. Essays should be the standard *POINTER* article length of between 2000-4000 words in order to be sufficiently detailed and concise.

3. Research. When researching your topic, try to be comprehensive in your review of available sources. Find out who the authorities on the subject are, read up on their works and make reference to them in your essay. Aim to convince the reader that you know what you are talking about and that you have considered the views of others in your argument.

4. Avoid sweeping and unsubstantiated statements. Back up all contentious claims with references. Familiarity with the subject matter will help you identify what is controversial and what is common knowledge. Be wary of using popular military “myths” such as the Maginot Line or Fortress Singapore in your argument as they are simplifications of complex historical events and thus vulnerable to criticism.

5. Be accurate in your facts and quotations. In addition to plain factual errors, misinterpreting or misattributing statements made by other writers will damage the credibility of your argument.

6. Be critical in your use of sources. Do not take everything you read at face value, ignore contrary evidence or use sources out of context—the credibility of your argument will suffer. Prominent works on a particular subject are often reviewed by other experts—following the criticism of a particular source and any clarifications by the author can give you a better appreciation of its reliability and relevance to your thesis.

7. Plagiarism, intentional or otherwise, is a serious breach of intellectual ethics and will reflect poorly on your character and academic discipline. Be sure to properly quote and cite any sources you use, following a proper citation format. *POINTER* uses the *Chicago Manual of Style* endnote format for references.

8. Analysis. Essays are more than simple reports or book reviews—aim for a strong and compelling argument. The rest of the essay should be devoted to supporting this central thesis in a clear, logical and concise manner.

9. Every point made and source used should be relevant to your argument. In particular, avoid reiterating facts and figures tangential to your main thesis—provide a reference instead.

10. Avoid contradicting yourself. Try to address and resolve any conflicting evidence referenced in your essay.

11. Be original. Giving a broad overview of the available literature on a particular subject or military campaign is insufficient—your essay must contain some new insight or information that distinguishes it from the crowd.

12. Specify how your argument and subject are applicable to the SAF. Identify and detail potential lessons for SAF personnel. Avoid making the essay overly technical—your thesis should not require specialist knowledge to comprehend.

13. Presentation. Consider your essay’s title carefully—an appropriate and catchy title will engage the reader and create a good first impression. This especially pertinent if your essay originated as a term paper—avoid using your research question as the title.

14. Proofread your essay for basic grammar, spelling, punctuation and typographical errors. Obvious mistakes are unprofessional and detract from the reading experience.

15. Structure your essay with a clear introduction, body and conclusion to facilitate reading. Individual points should be separated into their own subsections.

16. Write in a simple, direct style, use short sentences and avoid flowery language. Be concise where possible—get your point across quickly and convincingly. Do not use slang, abbreviations, acronyms or technical terms without proper explanation.

17. Use the active over the passive voice—it is simpler and more authoritative. There is also no need to use “I think” or “in my opinion” as by default everything in the essay is assumed to come from you.

18. Avoid using too many or overly long quotations from other writers. References should be made to support rather than substitute for your own thoughts.