

Reflection Journal: The Journey from Proposal to Performance-Ready Capstone

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14 May 2025

Today was a turning point. Dr. K reviewed my capstone proposal and didn't just approve it, she praised it. She said my objectives were exactly what she was hoping to see, and that gave me a sense of validation I didn't realize I needed. There's a fire in my chest right now, because this topic isn't just academic for me. It's personal. I've seen too many leaders stumble when it comes to program design, and I want to give them something they can actually use. I feel excited, but also overwhelmed. I know the path ahead is going to demand consistent effort. Still, I've committed to showing up each day, starting today. Two hours of research turned into four because I was in flow. I ended the night revisiting the NSCA principles, I want this foundation to be solid.

16 May 2025

The more I dive into the NSCA's training residuals and pacing methodologies, the more I realize how much of what's taught in the Army is based on habit, not science. That's frustrating, and motivating. I want this course to bridge that gap between what Soldiers are doing and what actually improves performance. But building that bridge is no small task. I feel like I'm juggling twenty things at once, storyboarding, scripting, sourcing, and questioning every design choice. I'm trying to align everything to Gagné's 9-events while also making it practical for Soldiers. It's a delicate balance. My imposter syndrome crept in a little today, am I really the right person to be designing this? But then I remembered why I started: I've been on the receiving end of bad training, and I know I can do better. Today's lesson: I don't have to know everything. I just need to commit to learning and improving every day.

18 May 2025

I focused on content sequencing today, mapping out the flow from the pre-course video to the in-person hands-on activities. It took me longer than expected, three hours just disappeared. But I'm proud of the outcome. For the first time, I feel like the unit is taking shape in a way that feels authentic. I inserted a coaching phase that's grounded in peer feedback, because Soldiers learn best when they learn together. I caught myself second-guessing the length of each segment, do I really have enough time for reflection at the end? Do I need more time for the assessment activity? Those questions are uncomfortable, but necessary. They force me to look beyond what's convenient and

toward what's effective. I also noticed that I feel much more confident working on the facilitator guide than the learner materials, probably because I identify more with instructors than learners right now. That's a blind spot I need to address. This project isn't just about what I know, it's about how others experience what I design.

20 May 2025

Burnout whispered in my ear today. I didn't want to open the storyboard file. I didn't want to look at any more pacing charts. But I did it anyway. Two hours turned into one, but it was enough. I revised the intro section to make the learner feel more like they're part of the mission, not just checking boxes. I added intentional language like 'you will apply' instead of 'you will learn.' It's subtle, but it matters. I kept thinking about my time on active duty, how often we rolled our eyes at forced training sessions that felt like busywork. This project cannot be that. It has to connect. And I have to be okay with the fact that perfection is not the goal, progress is. I'm learning that design is as much about emotional labor as it is about intellectual rigor. I'm tired, but proud. And that's enough for today.

22 May 2025

Today I reviewed my storyboard alongside the IDE737 Capstone Guidelines. I'm seeing how crucial alignment is, not just alignment between objectives and assessments, but between intentions and execution. My objectives say one thing, but I caught parts of the storyboard not fully supporting them. It's frustrating to revise something I already spent hours on, but it's necessary. This process reminds me that instructional design is iterative, not linear. I also reflected on how much I'm learning about pacing, not just for the program, but for myself. It's tempting to push through everything in one sitting, but I've been more effective when I respect my own capacity. Today felt productive, but also calm. I'm growing into the kind of instructional designer who listens, both to the data and to their own gut.

24 May 2025

I worked on refining my demo video narration today. Writing for a script is completely different from writing for a guide or storyboard. The tone has to be confident but human, informative but engaging. I rewrote it three times. What surprised me was how much this part of the project brought out my storytelling instincts. I pulled from real military experiences to shape the example and it made the narration come alive. That felt good, like I was connecting the academic with the real. I caught myself getting emotional while writing the closing prompts for learner reflection. This isn't just about a 2-mile run. It's about identity, resilience, and owning your growth. I didn't expect this much personal investment, but I welcome it.

26 May 2025

The peer feedback rubric is done. This was one of the most mentally exhausting parts of the project. I wanted it to be objective, but not robotic, something that encourages growth, not just compliance. I used verbs like 'identify,' 'apply,' and 'customize' to move the focus toward action. There were moments I doubted my phrasing, was I being too harsh? Too vague? Too idealistic? Eventually, I realized that no rubric will ever be perfect, but it can always be honest. What I'm learning is that evaluation isn't about being punitive. It's about helping people see what they couldn't see before. Today I felt mentally sharp, but emotionally spent. This work is demanding, but it's also some of the most meaningful work I've done.

28 May 2025

I reviewed my flowchart today and noticed some inconsistencies in how learners transition between events. I had originally assumed they'd move seamlessly, but in practice, the gaps were visible. I added transition prompts and clarified sequencing with stronger language, less 'next you will' and more 'now apply.' The facilitator notes also needed more scaffolding. I had to remind myself that not every instructor will think like me. That realization pushed me to explain more, simplify less. It's humbling to write for someone else. But it also sharpened my empathy, an underappreciated design tool. I feel more responsible now, knowing that someone will one day use this to lead real Soldiers. It's not just a product, it's a promise. And that weighs heavy, in the best way.

30 May 2025

I revised the practice scenario assessment rubric today. I leaned heavily on NSCA standards and pushed for specificity in progression logic, HR zone accuracy, and personalization. The more I edit, the more I realize how easy it is to default to generalities. I keep asking myself, will this help someone lead better training? That question has become my north star. I added more room for reflection, both self and peer. What's striking is how this project has pushed me to clarify my values. I don't just want Soldiers to pass a PT test. I want them to feel capable, informed, and accountable. That's what this capstone is trying to teach under the surface. I'm still surprised at how much of myself is in this project. But maybe that's the point. Instructional design isn't neutral. It's personal. It's lived. It's taught.

1 June 2025

I spent most of today refining the learner guide. What started as a checklist turned into a layered support system. I've designed it to guide not just performance, but understanding. I walked through it as if I were the learner, and immediately saw where my assumptions had failed them. So I slowed down, added examples, and clarified steps. I made sure cognitive and reflective strategies were embedded. There's something satisfying about building something with the learner in mind, like I'm setting them up to succeed, not just complete a task. But it's also exhausting. The weight of responsibility feels real. What I

put in front of these Soldiers needs to function, period. No filler, no fluff. Just clear, actionable learning. I'm starting to understand that being an instructional designer means thinking like a strategist and empathizing like a teacher.

3 June 2025

Today, I focused on the pre-course homework video integration. On the surface, it's just a 10-minute instructional video, but it sets the tone. I scripted key points around heart rate training zones, pacing, and NSCA residuals. But I also added moments that invite the learner to reflect on their current running habits. I want this to feel like a personal call-to-action, not just a requirement. After recording a rough voiceover and walking through it, I felt proud. This isn't just content, it's a mindset shift. I spent extra time making sure the calculations were accessible for non-math people, because I've been that person. Clarity matters. Precision matters. I'm also starting to notice that I care more about this project than any other academic assignment I've done. And that's how I know it's aligned with my purpose.

5 June 2025

Peer assessment took center stage today. I revised the partner evaluation flow to be more than just checking boxes. I added narrative spaces, areas where peers could explain their rationale for feedback. It felt like a risk, opening the door to subjectivity. But Soldiers don't grow from scales alone, they grow from dialogue. I included reflection prompts to help partners process their differences in perspective. This part challenged me emotionally, too. Feedback in the Army is often transactional or tied to rank, not growth. I wanted this to break that mold, to be human, not hierarchical. I realized how important peer interactions are to learning. Today's lesson: design can build culture, not just deliver content. That responsibility is both energizing and heavy. I'm choosing to carry it.

7 June 2025

I reviewed the full course structure today, flowchart, content hierarchy, events, assessments. It was the first time I saw everything together, and it was... sobering. There are gaps. Not in effort, but in flow. Some transitions felt disjointed, some activities lacked proper setup. It was hard not to be discouraged. I've put so much into this. But design isn't about ego, it's about experience. So I took a deep breath, walked away for 30 minutes, then came back and made the changes. I clarified instructions, added connectors, and streamlined content delivery. And I ended up with something better. Today reminded me that feedback isn't failure, it's refinement. This is the work. And I'm still here for it.

9 June 2025

The debrief and reflection portion of the session has evolved so much. Today I added structured prompts for instructors and learners. I want the end of this unit to be just as powerful as the beginning. Too often, courses end with rushed Q&As or vague 'any thoughts?' I want closure. I want application. I want people walking out of this session

with a plan, not just a grade. So I added three core prompts: What did you learn? What will you change? What surprised you? They seem simple, but I've learned that the right questions unlock deeper learning. Designing this part made me reflect on how many training events I've been through that ended in silence. I don't want that here. I want engagement to the last second. Today was thoughtful and rewarding.

11 June 2025

I spent today finalizing the Instructor Assessment Rubric. Each criterion had to be tight, clear, and rooted in evidence. I emphasized accuracy in HR zone calculations, progression logic, application of training residuals, and reflection quality. No fluff. No ambiguity. Just results that matter. Creating this rubric was strangely therapeutic. I imagined instructors using it in the field, seeing Soldiers grasp the why behind the run. And that made it real. This isn't just coursework anymore. It's a resource. A tool. A vehicle for leadership. And I don't take that lightly. Today, I felt competent. Not just creative or passionate, competent. And that meant everything.

13 June 2025

My birthday today. I spent the morning on a walk reflecting on how far I've come, not just in this capstone, but in my journey as a leader and learner. This project has become a mirror. It reflects who I am, how I think, and what I believe about training. I've been stretched in every way: intellectually, emotionally, professionally. And I wouldn't change any of it. This isn't just a grade or portfolio piece, it's legacy work. It's what I want to leave behind in the systems I've been a part of. I paused today to celebrate, not with cake, but with clarity. I know who I am. I know what I bring. And I know what's next. Gratitude doesn't even begin to cover it. I'm proud. I'm grounded. And I'm still building.

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15 June 2025

I reviewed my instructor slide deck today, and realized I had overloaded it with too much text. I stripped it down, leaving only key visuals and prompts. Less is more. Slides aren't instruction, they're support. I reminded myself that the real learning happens in dialogue, in feedback, in practice. This adjustment made the session feel more human, more grounded. I tested it aloud and it flowed better. I also rewrote one of the sample calculation walkthroughs after realizing it might confuse learners with less math experience. These small changes feel like nuance, but they're what separates usable instruction from forgettable content. I ended the night re-reading learner objectives. They still hold up. It's a relief to see the consistency between what I set out to do and what I've built. It feels like alignment, internally and externally.

17 June 2025

I dove into the reflection worksheet today. This is where the learner owns their experience. I didn't want generic questions. I wanted the learner to wrestle with their growth, what surprised them, what they would change, what patterns they noticed. I added space for short-term goals and one bold commitment they're willing to try. I thought about Soldiers I've coached who didn't need more workouts, they needed more clarity. So I structured the reflection prompts to guide them back to themselves. This

worksheet might look like paper, but I know it's powerful. When done right, reflection changes behavior. I felt deeply connected to the learners while writing today. I've been where they are. And this is what I wish I had.

19 June 2025

I did a final sweep of the facilitator guide. This document holds it all together, it's the operational manual for execution. I clarified time blocks, added coaching cues, and bolded key reminders. I inserted a section for how to handle partner imbalances, what if one Soldier comes in unprepared? Realistic scenarios, real-time guidance. That's what makes this guide more than a formality. I added one final quote at the top: 'Train with intent, lead with precision.' It felt right. I can feel this project nearing its end, and it's surreal. I'm proud, but also hyper-aware of everything I've put into it. This guide is my voice, long after I'm gone. I hope it speaks clearly and stands strong.

21 June 2025

I worked on the pacing chart visual today. It's the kind of thing people might overlook, but I know it matters. Color-coded, easy to scan, and aligned to weekly training structure, it's clean now. I tested it on someone unfamiliar with training science, and they understood it in under 30 seconds. That was a win. I also added QR codes to a few of the handouts so Soldiers could access video support or digital calculators. This wasn't required, but I kept asking myself: What would I want as a learner in the field? Design isn't about boxes checked, it's about experiences shaped. Today was about polish and performance. I feel like a finisher now, not just a builder. That's a good place to be.

23 June 2025

Today was the big test, I walked through the entire course as if I were the learner. No skipping, no shortcuts. And it held. The transitions worked, the materials were cohesive, the prompts aligned. I took notes on minor tweaks, like simplifying one formula and reducing wordiness in the pacing logic slide. But overall? It felt solid. This is the kind of course I would've wanted as a junior leader. Something real. Something actionable. Something that respected my time and taught me something new. I had a moment of emotion mid-way through, this course isn't just instructional. It's transformational. And that realization made every late night worth it.

25 June 2025

I finalized my website page for the capstone project. Writing the narrative wasn't hard, it poured out. I framed it not as a class but as a mission. I explained the need, the design approach, and the intent behind each piece. Uploading the files felt like publishing a part of my heart. There's something intimate about it. This wasn't just a class deliverable. It was a declaration of everything I've learned about performance, leadership, and design. I checked every link twice, rewatched the demo video, and clicked publish. Done, but not

done. Because this will live beyond me. And I'm okay with that. I showed up, I built it, and now it stands. Proudly.

27 June 2025

I did a final review of the instructor assessment rubric after Eric Harder's peer critique. He validated most of it, but flagged a few criteria that needed clarity. He reminded me that what seems obvious to a designer might not be obvious to a facilitator on the ground. So, I cleaned it up, added phrasing like 'demonstrates logic in recovery selection' and removed redundancy. It reads smoother now, and it matches the flow of the course better. Eric's insight was gold, firm, grounded, practical. His peer review reminded me that the Army is full of talent, and we need to tap it more often. I thanked him, sincerely. His stamp of approval meant a lot. Iron sharpens iron. And I know this capstone is sharper because of him.

29 June 2025

I took today off from editing and just reflected. I journaled. I looked back at my first draft of the storyboard, and honestly laughed. The growth is undeniable. The structure, the clarity, the confidence, it's all evolved. But more importantly, so have I. I started this project with a desire to create something 'good.' Now I just want to create something that serves. That sticks. That sparks change. This capstone has taught me how to trust my voice, refine my thinking, and take pride in precision. I'm not done yet, but I'm no longer afraid of the process. I welcome it. I'm stronger because of it.

1 July 2025

Final file packaging today. Everything from rubrics to visuals to written reflections was double-checked, formatted, and zipped. The digital portfolio looks cohesive now. It flows. It's not just professional, it's personal. I included a short intro video welcoming users to the course and why it matters. I want people to feel that this isn't academic fluff, it's mission-critical design. The download links are active, the PDFs are clean, and I added a 'last updated' footer for accountability. I feel complete. This capstone is the culmination of my values, experience, and design philosophy. I don't just see content, I see impact. And I'm ready to share it with the world.

5 July 2025

Two Soldiers I served with years ago asked to preview the course. I gave them access and held my breath. Their feedback? 'This feels real.' That was everything. They pointed out one spot where I could clarify volume vs. intensity, and they were right. I made the fix within the hour. But more than that, I felt seen. They understood the vision, the intention. They got it. I've spent so much time building this in a vacuum, it felt good to finally connect it to the people it's for. That external validation wasn't required, but it sure as hell made a difference. I'm re-energized. The finish line is near.

7 July 2025

I focused today on writing out a short user manual for instructors who might access the course independently. This guide walks them through how to launch the session, adapt for different group sizes, and troubleshoot common issues. I remembered the many times I was handed a course with no context, just a PowerPoint and good luck. This won't be that. Not on my watch. I used plain language, action steps, and built-in cues for improvisation. Instructional design should empower, not confuse. That's what I want this guide to do. It's short, tight, and to the point. And it might be the thing that keeps a good facilitator from stumbling. Feels like armor for the instructor. That matters to me.

9 July 2025

I finally completed my metadata tags and alt-text for accessibility today. It's not glamorous work, but it's the work that makes everything more inclusive. Every diagram, every chart, every button, documented and labeled for screen readers. I also added printable versions of digital-only resources, just in case someone doesn't have tech access. This isn't about checking boxes, it's about reaching every learner. No Soldier should feel excluded because of a format issue. That's the hill I'll die on. I'm learning that real design is rarely loud, it's silent, supportive, often invisible. And it's those pieces that often make or break the learning experience. Today felt like quiet, purposeful progress. The best kind.

11 July 2025

I added an optional group activity variation today. It's a competitive design challenge where squads compare and justify their running plans. This wasn't in the original scope, but it felt necessary. Some learners thrive in pressure and peer-driven scenarios. By letting them defend their logic in front of others, I'm reinforcing transfer and deep processing. It's a risk, some instructors may skip it. But the option exists, and that flexibility is power. It also brings energy to the end of the session before the final debrief. Design isn't just about content, it's about cadence. Today I feel like a conductor, not just a creator.

13 July 2025

Almost there. I did a final polish on the peer feedback rubric and cleaned up every file for clean download. No typos, no inconsistencies. Everything speaks the same language: clarity, purpose, action. I created a final checklist for instructors that mirrors the one I used for myself. Full-circle moment. I also took time to reflect on what this project taught me. I've grown not just as a designer, but as a communicator. I know how to take complexity and make it real. And that's something I didn't always know I could do. This isn't just a capstone, it's a declaration. I am who I say I am. And this proves it.

19 July 2025

I archived every draft, every rough outline, every Post-it note used throughout this process. It felt ceremonial. I labeled folders, updated dates, and backed everything up twice. I wrote myself a letter I'll open in five years, reminding me of the work, the struggle, and the pride I feel today. This capstone is done. But I'm not. This journey has just begun. I've found something in myself, discipline, clarity, courage, that will carry into every future project. Instructional design isn't just what I do. It's who I am now. And I earned every word of that.