Literacy — Glossary

Plain-language definitions of every term you need. Not a test; a flashlight. If a term shows up in a doctrine or module and you forgot what it means, this is the page to flip to.

The market and the money

Appropriation — The legal act of Congress that says "an agency may spend this much money on this purpose." The starting point of every dollar that reaches a pursuer.

Agency — A federal department or organization that spends money and runs competitions (for example, the Department of Defense, the Department of Health and Human Services, NASA). Your pursuit is always with an agency, never with "the government" in the abstract.

Contract — An agreement in which the government buys goods or services from you. Governed by federal acquisition rules.

Grant — An agreement in which the government funds a mission or program you carry out. Governed by federal grants policy, not by acquisition rules.

Cooperative agreement — Like a grant, but the agency is substantially involved in the work alongside you.

Other Transaction (OTA) — A faster, more flexible agreement shape used especially for prototypes and advanced research. Not a standard contract and not a standard grant; the rules are looser by design.

Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) — The body of rules that governs how the government buys things. If a pursuit is a contract, the FAR is the rulebook.

Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS) — The Department of Defense's add-on to the FAR. If the FAR is the government's rulebook, DFARS is the Pentagon's chapter of it, and defense RFPs invoke both.

The identifiers and registries

SAM.gov — The System for Award Management, the master federal registry. You register here (free) to become eligible to receive federal money, and here is where contract opportunities and awards are published.

UEI (Unique Entity ID) — The 12-character code (for example, `YCBDVKN1A9G7`) that identifies your organization in federal systems. Replaced the old DUNS number in 2022. Free from SAM.gov.

CAGE code — The 5-character Commercial and Government Entity code (for example, `20DS8`) used by the Department of Defense and NATO systems to identify your organization.

NAICS code — The 6-digit North American Industry Classification System code (for example, `541512`) that describes what industry you are in. NAICS codes determine small-business size standards and eligibility for many set-asides.

DUNS — The old Data Universal Numbering System, retired in favor of the UEI. You will still see it in older documents; it is the UEI's predecessor.

CPARS (Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System) — The federal registry where agencies record how you actually performed on completed contracts — on quality, schedule, cost control, and management. This is the evidence base of your past-performance record, and evaluators read it when they judge your past performance in a new competition.

The documents

Solicitation — The umbrella word for any official document in which an agency announces a need and asks for responses.

RFP (Request for Proposal) — The full competition document for a contract buy. Contains the statement of work, the evaluation criteria, the deadlines, and the submission rules. The big one.

RFI (Request for Information) — A market-research document. The agency is shopping and gathering intelligence, not awarding. Responding is low-cost and builds relationships.

Sources-sought notice — A market-research notice (usually on SAM.gov) in which the agency announces a coming requirement and asks who in the market can do it. No award happens. Responding is low-cost, builds relationships, and often telegraphs a formal solicitation 90–180 days away.

RFQ (Request for Quote) — A request for pricing, usually for simpler or off-the-shelf buys. Price-led.

BAA (Broad Agency Announcement) — A solicitation shape used mainly for research. Instead of a precise specification, the agency publishes a broad area of interest and invites ideas and proposals — a call for ideas, not a call for one specific thing. Common with research agencies and SBIR/STTR funders.

NOFO (Notice of Funding Opportunity) — The grants-world equivalent of an RFP. Announces a funding opportunity and how to apply. On federal grants, published on Grants.gov and SAM.gov.

IDIQ (Indefinite-Delivery / Indefinite-Quantity) — A standing contract with a ceiling; the agency places individual "task orders" against it over time. You win the vehicle once, then compete for the orders.

GSA Schedule — A Multiple Award Schedule (MAS) vehicle offered by the General Services Administration. Being on a Schedule means agencies can buy from you without a new full competition.

Task order — An individual purchase placed against a standing vehicle like an IDIQ or a Schedule.

Statement of Work (SOW) — The section of a contract solicitation that describes the actual work to be performed.

Performance Work Statement (PWS) — The section of a performance-based contract that describes the work in terms of the results to be achieved, not the step-by-step method. Where a SOW often prescribes the *how*, a PWS leaves the how to you and judges you on the outcome.

CDRL (Contract Data Requirements List) — The schedule of data deliverables a contract requires — reports, manuals, drawings, plans — each with its format, frequency, and due date. If it is on the CDRL, you must deliver it; if it is not, the government may not pay for it.

DD-254 (DoD Contract Security Classification Specification) — The Department of Defense form that communicates security-classification requirements to a contractor and, down the chain, to subcontractors for classified work. When a pursuit involves classified information, the DD-254 is how the government tells you the classification rules.

Evaluation criteria — The factors, with relative weights, that the agency commits to using when choosing a winner. The most important section of any solicitation.

Amendment — A change to a published solicitation. Always watch for them; they can change requirements and deadlines.

Section L — The part of a federal RFP that tells you exactly how to respond: the volumes, the page limits, the format, the required content, and where to submit. Section L is the rules of the game; Section M is how you'll be judged.

Section M — The part of a federal RFP that states the evaluation factors and how they will be used. (Section L states what the offer must include and how it must be formatted. These letters come from the standard FAR layout.)

The small-business universe

SBA (Small Business Administration) — The federal agency that administers small-business programs and certifies eligibility for them.

Small business set-aside — A competition restricted to small businesses. By law, a portion of federal contracting is reserved this way.

HUBZone — The Historically Underutilized Business Zone program, for businesses in designated low-income/underutilized areas (and meeting SBA eligibility rules). Certified businesses get set-aside and evaluation preferences.

8(a) Business Development — An SBA program for socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses, offering set-asides and mentoring.

WOSB / VOSB — Woman-Owned Small Business and Veteran-Owned Small Business programs, offering set-asides for certified firms.

SBIR — The Small Business Innovation Research program: a phased path for small businesses to develop and commercialize research funded by agencies. Phase I is a feasibility award; Phase II is the main development award; Phase III is commercialization (no SBIR money).

STTR — The Small Business Technology Transfer program: like SBIR, but the small business must team with a nonprofit research institution (a university or a lab). The research partner is a required part of the team.

The pursuit discipline

Capture — The pre-proposal work: learning the customer, building relationships, gathering intelligence, deciding and shaping whether to pursue. Done before (and during) the proposal effort.

Bid / no-bid — The early, strategic decision about whether a pursuit is worth pursuing at all. A disciplined "no" is a professional outcome.

pWin (probability of win) — A disciplined estimate of your chance of winning a pursuit, typically scored from several weighted factors. Combined with value, it produces the pursuit score.

Price-to-win — The price that is low enough to be competitive and high enough to be real. Set against your cost floor and your estimate of the competitive range.

Compliance matrix — A checklist of every requirement in the solicitation, tracked to prove the response satisfies every "shall."

Color team — A structured review of a proposal at a defined milestone, named by color. Pink reviews compliance and coverage early; red reviews persuasiveness against the evaluation criteria; gold reviews executive alignment and pricing; white-glove is the final production check.

Blue team — In some proposal methodologies, a structured strategy review held before production: reviewers role-play the customer and the competition to pressure-test the win strategy. It is the strategy-side cousin of the writing-phase color reviews.

Black hat — The adversarial final review: a reviewer (or an AI critic) attacks the proposal the way a determined rival would, hunting for claims a competitor could exploit and score down. The safeguard against over-optimistic self-assessment before submission.

Gate — A checkpoint in the pursuit pipeline where work pauses for a judgment call against criteria set in advance. Proceed, proceed with conditions, or stop.

Past performance — Your record of having delivered similar work before. One of the strongest signals evaluators use. This is why delivery (Doctrine 03, stage 8) feeds the next pursuit.

Relevant experience — Past work similar to the requirement in size, scope, and complexity. Evaluators care less about whether you have done work and more about whether you have done *this* work; relevance is what turns past performance into a win.

Capture plan — The written plan for winning before the RFP exists: the win strategy, the customer map, the teaming posture, the discriminators, the engagement plan, and the pricing posture. The deliverable of the capture phase, reviewed at the capture-readiness gate.

Win theme — A customer-benefit message — usually three to five of them — that the whole proposal repeats until the evaluator cannot miss it. A theme is only a theme if it is something a competitor cannot credibly claim; otherwise it is a baseline, not a theme.

Discriminator — A specific, concrete, verifiable fact that proves a win theme and gives you an edge competitors cannot credibly match — a named outcome, a measurable result, a unique capability. Discriminators are the evidence behind the themes.

Ghost theme — A message aimed at a competitor's known or suspected weakness without ever naming them: you state your strength in a way the customer recognizes as the competitor's gap. Requires real capture intelligence; a ghost theme with no evidence behind it is posturing.

Storyboard — A section-by-section blueprint of a proposal volume produced before the writing starts: for each section, the message, the evidence, the graphics, and the compliance requirements it must satisfy. The bridge between the outline and the draft.

Orals (oral presentations) — A live presentation of your proposal to the evaluators, required by some solicitations. The oral is the proposal in person: themes, discriminators, and pricing must match the written submission exactly, and the people on stage should be the people in the proposal.

Debrief — The agency's post-decision explanation of why you won or lost. On a loss, it is the single highest-information source you will ever get: the customer is effectively handing you competitive intelligence. Your job is to listen and take notes, not to argue.

OCI (organizational conflict of interest) — A situation in which a firm's other work or relationships could bias its judgment in a procurement or give it an unfair competitive advantage — for example, writing the requirement and then bidding on it. An unmitigable OCI is a hard disqualifier; agencies screen for it (FAR 9.5).

Teaming and the team

Prime contractor — The company that holds the contract with the government and is directly accountable for the whole performance. A prime may keep a portion of the work and subcontract the rest.

Subcontractor — A company that performs a portion of the work under a prime, with no direct contract with the government. Subcontractors are part of the prime's team and appear in the proposal's teaming narrative.

Joint venture (JV) — Two or more firms joining forces for a pursuit, either as a formal separate entity or a contractual arrangement. Used to combine capabilities, share risk, or qualify for set-aside eligibility. The joint venture itself is the bidder.

Mentor-protégé — An SBA program in which an established firm mentors and develops a small business; an active agreement can open access to set-aside contracts the protégé could not win solo.

The price and the cost volume

Best-value — An evaluation approach in which the agency may pick a higher-priced offer if its technical superiority justifies the difference, using the stated criteria and trade-offs. The opposite pole from LPTA.

LPTA (Lowest Price Technically Acceptable) — An evaluation approach in which, once the offer is technically acceptable, price alone decides the winner. No credit for being better than acceptable; the discipline is to price the minimum that will pass.

Cost volume — The proposal volume that contains the price: the labor categories, hours, rates, other direct costs, travel, and the line items (CLINs) they roll into, plus escalation and indirect rates. The technical volume promises; the cost volume prices — and the two must tell the same story.

BOE (basis of estimate) — The written justification behind a cost number: what the estimate is based on, how it was derived, and why it is reasonable. A cost volume without a credible BOE is an opinion; with one, it is a defensible price.

Labor category — A defined job role with a standard hourly rate used to build a price — for example, "Senior Systems Engineer" at a set rate. Labor categories are the unit of both staffing plans and cost volumes.

CLIN (contract line item number) — The numbered lines that structure what the government is buying and paying for: each CLIN names a product or service, its quantity, and its price. The skeleton of the contract's bill of materials.

The frameworks

ORBITAL — The seven-axis business structure for a pursuit: **O**bjective, **R**esources, **B**udget, **I**ndicators, **T**ransport, **A**ctivities, **L**ogistics.

DREAM — The engagement approach: **D**iscover, **R**elate, **E**mpower, **A**dvise, **M**otivate.

GROWTH — The production arc for a single pursuit: **G**auge, **R**esearch, **O**rganize, **W**rite, **T**arget, **H**ealth.

SuperNova — The nine-stage strategy framework in the Launchpad program family: the full arc from DREAM → ORBITAL Plan → STARTUP → Ops → LAUNCH → GROWTH → Mission Control → Event Horizon. A seed idea becoming an operating entity.

Dream → ORBITAL → World — The growth lifecycle: a seed idea becomes a structured pursuit with momentum, which becomes a fully realized enterprise.

The fellowship and the Launchpad

The Launchpad fellowship teaches the same doctrine as a leadership program. If you meet these terms there, this is what they mean in the language of this course.

Curiosity Research Corporation — The organization (curiositycorp.org) that runs the Ignite Curiosity boot camp and the SPARK Learning System. In the ecosystem, it is the fellowship-side home of the same doctrine this curriculum teaches.

Ignite Curiosity — The universal boot camp program of Curiosity Research Corporation: the entry point where a newcomer first meets the discipline before climbing the Launchpad ladder.

SPARK Learning System™ — The learning method used across the fellowship: **S**eek, **P**lay, **A**pply, **R**esearch, **K**now. Five moves a learner makes, in order, to turn a spark of interest into working knowledge. (SPARK Method; delivered in SPARK Sessions.)

SPARK Sessions — The structured learning sessions in which the SPARK method happens — a regular cadence in which learners Seek, Play, Apply, Research, and Know a topic together.

Launchpad — The fellowship program family — the "Innovator's Launchpad" ladder of five levels: **L1 Explorer → L2 Builder → L3 Architect → L4 Networker → L5 Leader**. Each level is a stage of increasing mastery over the same doctrine. The college course and the Launchpad are two doors into the same building.

Legacy Track — The Launchpad track for experienced professionals, with three programs: **The Ignition** (professionals 50+, nine modules from Findings through Legacy Builder), **The Ascension** (executives: Orbit / System / Galaxy Commander), and **The Transcendence** (stewardship and pinnacle).

C.A.S.E. (Cognitive Acquisition Systems Engineering) — The Launchpad discipline for engineering the systems and processes of acquisition — including AI-assisted capture, proposal, and audit — as a designed, learnable system rather than a craft.

A.N.D.R.O.I.D. Ops™ — The Launchpad "harness" framework: the operational discipline of running a pursuit or an organization as a repeatable, well-oiled machine, with the machinery swappable underneath. In the Legacy Track it is module M7, "The Harness." (The letters are the trademarked framework name.)

Constellation — The executive-level framework in The Ascension for leading a family of pursuits and organizations — the set of "bodies" you command and the relationships among them, seen from the commander's seat.