

Literacy — The Industry Standard Canon

The standardized vocabulary of this profession. When a capture professional and a proposal professional from different companies — or different countries — need to talk, these are the terms and references they share. Learn the canon and you can walk into any room in this industry and speak the language.

This curriculum is deliberately concept-first and stack-agnostic (Doctrine 08): it teaches durable ideas, not software. But the discipline itself has a body of standard vocabulary — the terms, the reference works, and the professional certifications that define what “professional” means in business development and proposal management. This page names that canon: the **Shipley business-development lifecycle**, the **APMP Body of Knowledge**, the **FAR/DFARS** rulebooks, and the **certification landscape** that sits on top of them.

The canon, named

Four pillars make up the standard vocabulary of this discipline:

1. **The Shipley business-development lifecycle** — the widely used model of how winning work actually works: *marketing* → *capture* → *proposal* → *negotiate* → *award*. Shipley Associates is the consultancy (in practice since the 1970s) whose capture and proposal methodology gave the profession its most common vocabulary — capture plans, win themes, discriminators, ghost themes, color teams, the compliance matrix. This course, and the wider doctrine it teaches, paraphrases that methodology in its own operating vocabulary rather than reproducing it verbatim.
2. **The APMP Body of Knowledge** — the reference standard of the **Association of Proposal Management Professionals** (APMP), the international professional body for bid, proposal, and capture professionals. The BOK is the shared framework and terminology for the profession — the closest thing the field has to a common textbook. Its vocabulary is the vocabulary this course uses: the pipeline, the gates, the review sequence, the volumes.
3. **The FAR and DFARS** — the *law* of the market, as opposed to the *method* of the practitioners. The **Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR)** is the codified rulebook for how the government buys things; the **Defense Federal Acquisition Regulation Supplement (DFARS)** is the Department of Defense’s supplement. Where Shipley and APMP tell you how to *compete well*, the FAR/DFARS tell you how the competition is *legally run* — and they bind the agency as much as the offeror.
4. **The certification landscape** — the professional credentials that let a practitioner prove they know the canon.

The Shipley book canon, as taught sources

Shipley Associates is more than a methodology — it publishes the books that codify it. This curriculum names the canon by title so a student can find the primary source behind any concept, and maps each book to the module(s) that teach it:

Shipley book	What it teaches	Where the curriculum teaches it
Winning Business	The fundamentals of the business-development profession: how winning work actually works, from market to award. The whole-doctrine view.	Doctrine 01 (where the money lives), Doctrine 03 (the pursuit pipeline), and the BD-lifecycle map on this page.
The Shipley Capture Guide	The capture discipline: capture plans, win strategy, win themes, discriminators, ghost themes, customer engagement, and the capture gates up to readiness.	Doctrine 09 (capture and competitive strategy), DL 210 (capture & pursuit pipeline), GE 630 (competitive & market intelligence, intelligence-into-strategy), and the graduate capstone's capture plan.
The Shipley Proposal Guide	Proposal production: the compliance matrix, annotated outlines, storyboards, the color-team sequence, the four volumes, and submission.	Doctrine 02 (solicitations), DL 302 (proposal production & compliance), GE 640 (proposal management & color-team leadership).
The Business Development Process Guide	The BD lifecycle and its gates: how a pursuit moves through marketing → capture → proposal → negotiate → award, and where each gate sits.	Doctrine 03 and Doctrine 04 (gates and governance), DL 210 (the seven-gate capture lifecycle).

Shipley book	What it teaches	Where the curriculum teaches it
Pre-Written Sections	A library of reusable, pre-vetted proposal language — the past-performance narratives, capability statements, and volume sections a professional adapts rather than writes from scratch.	DL 302 (past-performance narratives, volume drafting) and the machine-side “pre-written” library that the alignment map indexes — the same idea as the reusable-language bank a professional organization keeps.

The discriminator rule, in the canon’s own words. Shipley’s guidance for a pursuit is **three to five discriminators** — enough to move the evaluator’s score, few enough to be repeated until the evaluator cannot miss them. The quality-over-quantity caution survives exactly as this course teaches it: a discriminator is only a discriminator if it is unique, defensible, and backed by evidence — and a claim your competitors could equally make is a baseline, not a discriminator.

The BD lifecycle, mapped onto this course

The Shipley lifecycle is the industry’s one-line description of the whole pursuit: **marketing → capture → proposal → negotiate → award**. It maps directly onto the pursuit pipeline this course teaches (Doctrine 03):

Shipley BD lifecycle	What happens there	This course’s pipeline stage
Marketing	Know the market, segment it, decide where you play	sense → qualify
Capture	Identify the opportunity, decide to pursue, build the win strategy, engage the customer	score → pursue
Proposal	Turn the capture position into a compliant, persuasive submission	design → audit → submit
Negotiate	Orals, discussions, final proposal revisions, price negotiation	(post-submit corridor)

Shipleys BD lifecycle	What happens there	This course's pipeline stage
Award	Win or lose — then deliver and learn	deliver → learn

The industry also describes the lifecycle as a set of **gates** — decision checkpoints with entry and exit criteria. The standard gate ladder, at concept level, is:

1. **Market segmentation** — where you play.
2. **Opportunity identification** — what to watch.
3. **Pursuit decision** — the pre-RFP bid / no-bid call.
4. **Capture readiness** — the review that opens proposal production.
5. **Proposal planning and production** — compliance spine, color teams, volumes.
6. **Submission mechanics** — the final assembly and portal delivery.
7. **Post-submission** — orals, negotiation, debrief, lessons learned.

You will recognize these as the same checkpoints this course teaches as gates and governance (Doctrine 04): the industry's gate ladder and the course's gates are the same idea in the profession's standard vocabulary. When a practitioner says "we're at gate 4," they mean the pursuit has finished capture and is deciding whether it is ready to be written.

What the certifications certify

The credential ladder exists so organizations can trust that a practitioner actually knows the canon. The two names you will meet:

- **APMP certification.** APMP's certification program is the internationally recognized credential for bid, proposal, and capture professionals, assessed against the Body of Knowledge. The ladder runs from **Foundation** (entry-level knowledge of the discipline), through **Practitioner** (applied mastery) and **Capture Practitioner** (focused on capture and pursuit work), to **Professional** — the senior credential, earned through demonstrated leadership and measurable impact on the profession. Optional topic-specific micro-certifications exist for narrower skills like executive summaries or competitive price-to-win.
- **Shipleys certification.** Shipleys Associates runs its own training and certification ladder built on its method — core coursework in capture planning, proposal writing, and proposal management, with a star-based certification for those who demonstrate correct application of the method in real work. Shipleys is also an APMP-accredited training organization, so its courses can count toward APMP credentials.

Two honest notes for the student. First, the certifications test the *vocabulary and method*, not a tool: a certified professional in 2000 and one today would

recognize each other's craft instantly, which is exactly the durability Doctrine 08 promises. Second, certification is a signal of discipline, not a substitute for it — a certified team that skips its capture gates still loses, just more professionally.

Past performance: CPAR, the rating behind the narrative

Past performance is not a vibe and not a set of self-written references — it is a **rated, recorded, official government assessment**, and it has a name: **CPAR** (Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting, filed through CPARS, the Contractor Performance Assessment Reporting System).

- **What it is.** For each contract above a threshold, the government writes a structured assessment of how the contractor actually performed — against criteria such as quality of product or service, schedule, cost control, management, regulatory compliance, and business relations. Each criterion gets a rating and a narrative justification, and the whole assessment becomes part of the contractor's official past-performance record.
- **Who fills it.** The **contracting officer** is the assessor, with input from the **contracting officer's representative (COR)**, the program manager, and — because the process is a two-sided conversation — the **contractor**, who gets the chance to review the draft and submit comments before it is finalized. As a future pursuer you will sit on the contractor side of that conversation, so you should know what the government is rating and how to read a rating you disagree with.
- **How it feeds capture.** Past performance is a scored evaluation factor in source selection. The CPAR record is the evidence behind the offeror's **past-performance volume** (the proposal's Volume III): the narratives that turn delivered work into *proof*. It also feeds the **bidder analysis** the capture team runs before committing — the “past-performance questionnaires” and reference checks an offeror expects to fill out about partners and subcontractors, and the record an agency checks when deciding who is credible to receive an award.
- **Where students practice it.** DL 302 (week 9) drafts a past-performance narrative with a quantified outcome — the prose version of a CPAR rating; DL 303 (week 11) maps what a firm's delivered work would prove in the record; Doctrine 07 frames delivery → past performance → the next pursuit; and the capstone's past-performance volume asks for exactly the “delivered work as evidence” a CPAR record backs up. The literacy page **How the Machine Learns** also introduces the **past-performance narrator** — the machine-side skill persona that drafts these narratives from the delivered-work record.

Why the canon matters to this course

The reason this curriculum teaches the canon by name is the “one doctrine, two renderings” architecture that frames the whole wider ecosystem: the same

doctrine is rendered for humans (this course) and encoded for machines (the machine-side doctrine). The standardized vocabulary is the shared language between the two — when a human says “gate,” “color team,” “discriminator,” or “compliance matrix,” the machine must mean exactly the same thing. The canon is what guarantees that.

So treat this page as the vocabulary anchor for the whole course. When a doctrine chapter uses a term — capture, win theme, color team, past performance, debrief — the profession’s standard meaning lives here, and the detailed working reference lives in the glossary and the specialized literacy pages. And when you are ready to see how the machine side of this doctrine speaks the same vocabulary, **How the Machine Learns** is the page that opens that door.

One practice loop

1. Take any doctrine chapter you have read.
2. For each italicized or bolded term, ask: *is this Shipley’s vocabulary, APMP’s vocabulary, the FAR/DFARS vocabulary, or the course’s own?*
3. Say the BD lifecycle out loud — marketing, capture, proposal, negotiate, award — and place the last pursuit you studied on it.

You now know not just the ideas, but the language those ideas are spoken in.