COMPANION GUIDE TO ONLINE TRAINING

Use alongside the online lessons at fortunefavorsthepreprepared.com/pln-07-landing/

PLN-07 — GOTWA
PRE-MOVEMENT ACCOUNTABILITY PLANNING
STUDENT COMPANION GUIDE

The Five-Point Contingency Plan

Reference tables and worksheets for building a pre-movement accountability plan.
8 lessons | 5 worksheets | quick reference card

Edition v1.1 | 2026

Semper Paratus, Semper Gumby

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PLN-07 GOTWA — Pre-Movement Accountability Planning

Companion Guide to Online Training

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This guide is not standalone.

It contains condensed reference tables and blank worksheets only. The instruction, the worked examples and the knowledge checks live in the online lessons, and this guide assumes you have completed the lesson before you turn to its chapter. Support the development and availability of these courses by subscribing to my Patreon.

ONLINE TRAINING ACCESS

The eight lessons of PLN-07 are delivered online at fortunefavorstheprepared.com/pln-07-landing/. Lessons unlock in sequence; each one opens when the one before it is complete. Your progress is stored in the browser you study in.

INSTRUCTOR-LED GROUP TRAINING

PLN-07 is written to be delivered to a family, a mutual assistance group, or any other group that sends people out and expects them back. For group delivery, work Part II as a session: every member builds a card for a movement they will actually make, then briefs it to another member and takes the read-back. Enquiries to fortunefavorstheprepared@protonmail.com.

How to Use This Companion Guide

Complete the online lesson first.

Every chapter in Part I opens with "Reference for Lesson N" and condenses that lesson into tables you can consult later. Read cold, the tables will look like a list of terms. Read after the lesson, they are a memory aid you can work from at the door.

What this guide contains

Part	Contents	Use it for
Part I	One chapter per online lesson. Condensed reference tables only.	Refreshing a point you have already learned, without re-reading the lesson.
Part II	Five blank worksheets, reproducible for personal, family or group use.	Building an actual plan for an actual movement.
Part III	Glossary, quick reference card, doctrinal sources, open items.	Looking up a term, or cutting out the card to carry.

Required workflow

Order matters.

1. Complete the online lesson, including its knowledge checks.

2. Turn to the matching chapter in Part I and read the reference tables.

3. When you reach Lesson 07, fill Worksheet 1 for a movement you will genuinely make.

4. Brief it to a real person and take the read-back before you leave.

5. Score yourself with Worksheet 4 after you return.

This guide will not teach you the course.

The reasoning behind every table — why two clocks rather than one, why a read-back rather than an acknowledgement, why an escalation ladder rather than a single call — is in the lessons and is deliberately not repeated here. A student working only from this guide will produce a plan that looks complete and does not function.

Guide Map — What to Reference When

When you need…	Turn to…
The five points and what each one answers	Part I, Chapter 2 — the framework table
To judge whether your destination is specific enough	Part I, Chapter 3 — the precision ladder
To set a trigger time that will not fire on ordinary lateness	Part I, Chapter 4 — the three clocks and the four states
To decide who your plan holder calls, and in what order	Part I, Chapter 5 — the escalation ladder
To work out what each side does if something goes wrong	Part I, Chapter 6 — the two-sided actions table
The card format, and how it changes for a child or a vehicle	Part I, Chapter 7 — card fields and variants
To score a plan you have built	Part I, Chapter 8, and Worksheet 4
A blank card to fill in now	Part II, Worksheet 1
A card to cut out and carry	Part III — Quick Reference Card
A term you do not recognize	Part III — Glossary

PART I — QUICK REFERENCE

Chapter 1 — The Accountability Gap

Reference for Lesson 01.

What a departure sentence delivers

What gets said	What the listener can do at the four-hour mark
A rough return time only	Nothing defined. They must invent a response and judge alone whether it is an overreaction.
A destination and a time	Still nothing defined. Silence is ambiguous and no threshold separates the readings.
A route, a time, a threshold and a named sequence	Act, at a defined moment, without needing to judge whether it is warranted.

The three costs of no plan

Cost	What it looks like
Delay	Hours pass between "they are late" and "somebody should call". Daylight is the usual casualty.
The wrong response	An unbriefed person goes looking — a second person into the same conditions, and the one who knew anything leaves the place responders will come to.
The false alarm	A threshold set inside ordinary variance fires on nothing until its holder stops believing it.

Chapter 2 — The GOTWA Framework

Reference for Lesson 02.

Letter	The point	The question it answers	Addressed to
G	Going	Where is the departing party going?	Describes the leavers
O	Others	Who is going with them?	Describes the leavers
T	Time	How long, and when should the people staying stop waiting?	Instructs the stayers
W	What	What should the people staying do if the party does not return?	Instructs the stayers
A	Actions	What does each party do if something goes wrong while separated?	Instructs both

The brief is finished when it is repeated back, not when it is said.

Ask for a specific time and a specific first action, in the other person's words.

What it is not

Not this	Because
A schedule	States what you expect. Says nothing about what to do when the expectation fails.
A check-in	Reports that things are fine so far. Silence is only information if somebody was told what it means.
A route card	An input to a response, not a trigger for one.

Chapter 3 — Going and Others

Reference for Lesson 03.

Precision ladder for Going

Level	Contains	Ground it leaves
Area	A general place name	A region. Any search starts by re-interviewing your plan holder.
Corridor	Start point and route	A trail or road that can be worked in one pass.
Segment	Start, route, turning point, return leg, vehicle and where parked	A section of a known loop, confirmable at the start point.

The plan is whatever they are holding, not whatever you are doing.

If you change route and cannot tell them, you have not adjusted the plan — you have invalidated it silently. Get the change to them, or do not make it.

Others

Record	Rather than	Because
Every person by name	A headcount	A name tells responders who to look for and tells your holder who else to call.
One clause on capability	Nothing	A child, a medical condition or a slower member changes what a delay means.
"Nobody" when solo	A blank	Solo removes every internal option; the holder becomes the primary mechanism, not a backstop.

Chapter 4 — Time

Reference for Lesson 04.

The three clocks

Clock	Belongs to	What it does
Turnaround	The moving party	Fixes when you stop going out and start coming back, reached or not.
Expected return	The moving party	An estimate. Useful for planning the evening; does no work in the plan.
Trigger	The party staying	The threshold at which waiting stops and the What sequence begins.

The four states

State	Starts at	What the holder does
Expected	The estimated return	Nothing. This is not an alarm.
Late	Shortly after	Nothing formal. Casual contact if easy. No decisions.
Overdue	The trigger time	Begin the escalation ladder at rung one.
Action	The escalation time	Notify the named agency and hand over Going, Others and Time.

Sizing the gap.

Wider than your ordinary variance on this kind of trip. Narrower than the window in which help is still useful. Both edges bite.

Chapter 5 — What

Reference for Lesson 05.

Rung	Fires when	The action
1. Attempt contact	The trigger time passes	Call and message on every channel carried. Note the time of each attempt.
2. Check the obvious	Contact fails	Check the start point if close. Call one or two people the party might be with.
3. Notify the named contact	The obvious checks come back empty	Call the second person in the plan. A second head, not yet an emergency call.
4. Escalate outward	The escalation time, or at once on any evidence of trouble	Contact the named agency. Hand over Going, Others and Time.

What the holder will be asked

They will ask	It comes from
Who is missing, names and descriptions	Others
Where they went, by what route, from where	Going
When they left and when they were due	Time
Vehicle and where parked	Going
Communications carried, and any medical condition	Others
What contact has been attempted, and at what times	The holder's own notes from rung 1

Name the authority, and say it aloud.

A brief delivered to everybody is a brief assigned to nobody. One named holder. For a group, also state who may commit the group's people to a response.

Chapter 6 — Actions

Reference for Lesson 06.

What happens	The moving party	The party holding
Injury or a stop	Stabilize, attempt contact, stay put and be findable at a named point.	No change. Run the ladder as briefed.
Communications fail	Continue the briefed route. Do not improvise a route to chase signal.	Treat silence as absence of information. Move at the threshold, not before.
Conditions turn	Turn back or move to the nearest briefed point.	Expect lateness. Hold the threshold. Note conditions.
Trouble at the home end	On return, go to the agreed fallback before assuming anything.	Get word out. Leave a note at the agreed message location.

Cross-references.

Communications planning — primary, alternate, contingency, emergency — is covered in the COM series. Rally point selection and linkup procedure are covered in NAV-05. This course needs only one named fallback and one named message location.

Chapter 7 — Writing and Delivering the Plan

Reference for Lesson 07.

Field	Contains	The test
Going	Start point, route, destination, turning points, direction, vehicle and where parked.	Could a stranger begin narrowing ground from this alone?
Others	Every person by name, plus one clause on anything that changes what a delay means.	If one person walked out, would you know which name was still missing?
Time	Departure, expected return, trigger, escalation. Check-in schedule if long.	Are the expected return and the trigger two different numbers?
What	Contact attempts, obvious checks, second person with number, agency with number. Any instruction not to follow.	Could the holder execute rung one without asking a question?
Actions	What each side does on trouble. Fallback and message location for the home end.	Does it say anything at all about the party that stayed?

Delivery

Step	What it is
Say it	Read the five fields aloud, in order. Ninety seconds. A field you hedge on is not finished.
Get the read-back	Ask what time they start calling and who they ring first. Their words, not yours.
Confirm acceptance	Ask directly whether they are willing to be the person who makes that call.
Place the copy	With the holder, and in one fixed location known to the household. Not on the dashboard.

Variants

Movement	What changes
Solo	Others reads "nobody". Tighten the trigger, add route detail, treat the holder as primary.
With a child	Trigger comes in sharply. An adult holds the plan; give the child the reciprocal.
Vehicle	Named roads and direction, plus vehicle description and plate. Trigger can be tighter.
Group	One named holder, said aloud. Written card. State who may commit the group’s people.

Chapter 8 — Practicum

Reference for Lesson 08.

Self-scoring standard

Complete or not complete. No partial credit — a half-answered point behaves like a missing one when somebody tries to act on it.

Point	Complete when	Not complete if
Going	A stranger could begin narrowing ground.	It names an area, or relies on the holder knowing the ground.
Others	Every person named, plus a capability clause.	It gives a number, or omits a factor that changes urgency.
Time	Expected return and trigger are two different clock times.	There is one number, or the trigger sits inside your ordinary lateness.
What	The holder can execute rung one without asking a question.	It is a single heavy action, or requires looking something up.
Actions	It addresses both parties, with a fallback for the home end.	It addresses only the party that leaves.
Transfer	The holder produced a time and first action in their own words.	They said they had it. Agreement is not evidence of transfer.

What usually fails on a first attempt.

Going written for somebody who already knows the ground. Time with one number in it. Actions blank or one-sided. The read-back skipped because asking felt awkward.

PART II — WORKSHEETS

Reproducible for personal, family or group use.

Specimen Card

A completed card, for reference while you fill in Worksheet 1 opposite. Not a worksheet — do not write on it.

Field	As actually written on the card
Going	Bear Creek trailhead off County Road 12. Up the main canyon trail to the falls, then the east fork back down to the road. Gray Ford pickup, plate 4KJ-8802, parked at the trailhead.
Others	Me and Dana Ruiz. Nobody else. Dana has a knee that slows her on descents, so we are slower coming down than going up.
Time	Left 08:15. Turnaround 14:00 whether or not we reach the falls. Back at the truck by 16:30. If you have not heard from me by 18:30, start calling. Outside help by 20:00.
What	Call and text me, then Dana on 555-0148. If neither answers, drive to the trailhead and see whether the truck is there. Then call my brother Sam on 555-0192. If the truck is still there at 20:00, call the county sheriff on 555-0100 and read them this card. Do not walk in after us.
Actions	If we are hurt or stuck we stay put at the falls or on the trail and do not leave the route. If you have to leave the house, go to Sam’s and put a note inside the shed door.

It is not tidy, and it took four minutes.

Neatness was never the standard. Every field passes its own test from Chapter 7: a stranger could narrow ground from Going, Others names two people rather than counting them, Time carries four numbers, What could be executed by somebody who has never met Dana, and Actions addresses both parties.

Worksheet 1 — GOTWA Card

One movement. Fill every field before you leave. Apply each field's test from Chapter 7 before moving to the next.

Field	Entry
Going	
Others	
Time	
What	
Actions	

Briefed to: _____ Read-back taken: _____ Copy left at: _____

Worksheet 2 — Setting the Clocks

Work top to bottom. The trigger is not a guess — it is derived from the two lines above it.

Line	Your entry
Departure time	
Turnaround time	
Expected return	
My ordinary lateness on this kind of trip	
Trigger time (later than expected return by more than your ordinary lateness)	
Escalation time	
Check-in schedule, if the movement runs over a day	

Worksheet 3 — Escalation Ladder

Complete every cell. Any blank is a decision your plan holder will have to make alone, at the worst moment.

Rung	Who does it	Name and number	What they say
1. Attempt contact			
2. Check the obvious			
3. Notify named contact			
4. Escalate outward			

Instruction not to follow (if any): _____

Who may commit the group's people to a response: _____

Worksheet 4 — Practicum Self-Score

Score after you return. Complete or not complete — no partial credit.

Point	Complete?	What was missing
Going		
Others		
Time		
What		
Actions		
Transfer (read-back)		

What I will change on the next one: _____

Worksheet 5 — Standing Plans Register

For movements you repeat. Build the card once; only Time changes on most occasions.

Movement	Holder	Trigger	Card kept where

PART III — APPENDIX

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Escalation time	The later time at which the plan holder contacts an outside agency.
Escalation ladder	The pre-decided sequence of proportionate actions the plan holder works through.
Expected return	The time the departing party estimates it will be back. An estimate, not a threshold.
Fallback location	Where the party that stayed goes if it has to move, and where the returning party looks.
GOTWA	Going, Others, Time, What, Actions. The five-point contingency plan.
Message location	An agreed place where the party that stayed leaves word if it has to move.
Plan holder	The one named person who receives the brief and is responsible for acting on it.
Read-back	The holder restating the trigger time and first action in their own words.
Trigger time	The threshold at which waiting stops and the escalation ladder begins.
Turnaround time	The time the moving party turns back, whether or not it reached its objective.
Trip plan	The civilian equivalent of GOTWA, left with a reliable person before departure.
Variance	How late you ordinarily run on a given kind of trip. Sets the floor for the trigger.

Quick Reference Card

Cut out and carry, or copy into a phone note.

	GOTWA — before anybody separates
G	Where am I going? Start point, route, turning point, vehicle and where parked.
O	Who is with me, by name? Anything that changes what a delay means?
T	Back when? Trigger when? Two numbers, not one.
W	If I am not back: who do you call, in what order, and what do you tell them?
A	If it goes wrong for either of us: what then? Where is the fallback?
✓	Now tell me: what time do you start calling, and who first?

Doctrinal Sources

Source	Publisher	Relevance
TC 3-21.76, Ranger Handbook (19 September 2025)	Headquarters, Department of the Army	Paragraph 7-14 and Table 7-1 — the five points and the question each answers. Primary source.

ATP 3-21.8, Infantry Rifle Platoon and Squad (January 2024, Change 1)	Headquarters, Department of the Army	Paragraph 7-15 and Figure 7-2 — contingency planning within patrol operations.
MCWP 3-11.3, Scouting and Patrolling (17 April 2000)	United States Marine Corps	Contingency plans issued before a leader's reconnaissance; actions on contact.
Trip Planning Guide and backcountry trip plan templates	United States National Park Service	The civilian equivalent: a written trigger stating when to initiate search and rescue.
Float Plan	United States Coast Guard	The reliable-person model and the overdue-notification chain.

Open Items

Recorded here rather than resolved, per the project's flag-before-fixing rule. These do not affect the content of this guide.

Item	Status
Printed workbook	Product page not yet live; no order link in this edition.
Lesson numbering	The course one-pager numbers lessons 1–8; the online lessons use 01–08.
Doctrinal source files	TC 3-21.76 and ATP 3-21.8 are cited above and are pending addition to the project library.