

What this is. A free, open method for running a space-crisis tabletop exercise (TTX) at your own institution — no software to buy, no consultant required. It is the same method Diplo Space uses for its immersive scenarios, written down so any desk, delegation, or classroom can run one. Released under Creative Commons (CC BY): use it, adapt it, keep your results. A tabletop is not a test with a right answer; it is a rehearsal that surfaces the decision — and the thing you wish you'd had in writing — before the crisis is real.

1 What a tabletop exercise is (and is not)

A tabletop exercise puts a small group of people around a table (or a video call) and walks them through a crisis one step at a time. Each step — an *inject* — adds a new fact, and the group talks through what they would do. There are no winners. The value is in the conversation: who owns which decision, where the information gaps are, and what authority is missing. A good TTX ends not with a score but with a short list of things to fix before the real event.

It is not a lecture, a slide deck, or a technology demo. If someone is presenting for more than a few minutes at a time, it has stopped being a tabletop.

2 The five ingredients

1. A verified scenario. Anchor the exercise to something that really happened, or plausibly could. Real events carry authority and stop the room from arguing about whether the premise is fair. Diplo Space anchors every scenario to the public record.

2. Roles. Assign each participant a specific seat — the emergency-management coordinator, the grid operator, the aviation duty officer, the communications director. People decide differently when they own a chair. Aim for four to six roles.

3. An inject schedule. Three to six timed developments that escalate the situation. Each inject should force a decision, not just deliver news. Hand them out one at a time; never let the room see the whole arc in advance.

4. A facilitator. One person who is not playing a role, whose job is to keep time, deliver injects, and ask the one question that matters at each step: *who owns this call, and by when?*

5. An after-action record. The deliverable. Ten minutes at the end, capturing three things: what decision was hardest and why; what information or authority was missing; and what should be written down before the real event.

3 How to run it (90 minutes)

0:00–0:10 — Set the room. State the ground rules: no wrong answers, speak from your role, decisions over debate. Read the opening situation aloud.

0:10–1:10 — Work the injects. Deliver each inject, give the room eight to twelve minutes, and close each one by naming the decision that was (or was not) made. Keep moving even if a decision is unresolved — the unresolved ones are the findings.

1:10–1:30 — After-action. Go around the table once. Capture the three after-action questions. Do not solve them in the room; record them.

4 Writing good injects

An inject is one short paragraph that changes the situation. The best injects (a) force a decision under incomplete information, (b) create tension *between* roles rather than a shared problem, and (c) escalate — each one should raise the stakes or narrow the time available. Avoid injects that merely add detail; every inject should make someone choose.

Example (from a GPS-denial scenario): 'It is now 40 minutes in. Aviation reports position errors on approach paths; the grid operator reports timing alarms; a local broadcaster is asking your communications director whether the city is "under attack." You have not yet confirmed a cause. What do you say publicly, who says it, and what do you tell the other sectors?'

5 The after-action record (template)

Capture these in writing and keep them — they are the entire point of the exercise:

- Q1. Which decision was hardest, and who owned it? Was that ownership clear before the exercise, or did it have to be worked out live?
- Q2. What information did you need and not have? Who would have had it, and what would it have taken to reach them in time?
- Q3. What authority was missing? Was there a decision no one in the room had the power to make?
- Q4. What should be written down — a procedure, a contact, a threshold — before this happens for real?

6 Adapting a Diplo Space Field Note into a tabletop

Each Diplo Space Field Note is built to become a rehearsal. The note gives you the verified scenario and the stakes; the 'Questions for policymakers' section is a ready-made starting set of injects. To convert one: take the note's central event, assign the four-lens (diplomatic, informational, military, economic) actors as your roles, and turn each policymaker question into an inject that forces those actors to answer it together, under time pressure.

Pairings: *When GPS Lies* → a GPS-denial tabletop; *The Grid Has a Heartbeat* → a timing-loss cascade; *The Crowded Orbit* → a debris-event response; *Who Owns the Traffic Lane?* → an operator-to-operator conjunction.

About this method. This toolkit is the open, written-down version of the scenario method Diplo Space uses for its facilitated immersive tabletops. It is a public good, released CC BY and never sold as software, so any institution can run a rehearsal without us. Structure adapted from established open exercise-design practice (including the NATO StratCom COE tabletop-construction guidance) for the orbital-crisis context. Diplo Space, Inc. is a Virginia 501(c)(3) organization (EIN 99-1402470) and takes no policy position; a tabletop surfaces the decision, it does not recommend one.

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