Fleet command in Eve is built into 3 subsections – the command tree, the command bonuses, and the act of command itself. Whilst it is entirely possible that one man can do all of these things, they are often split up to different tasks simply because of the complexity of getting all of the (in game and out of game) skills trained high enough to perform each role well.

The Command Tree

The Leadership skills, or more specifically, Leadership, Wing Command and Fleet Command are the primary skills for the command tree section of this guide. This is fairly straightforward in that a fleet is made up of squads, which are grouped into Wings, and these wings are grouped into a single Fleet.

A squad can be managed by a character with a high enough level of the Leadership skill, up to 10 members can be included as part of a squad (including the leader character himself) with 2 characters per skill level.

A Wing Commander can control up to 5 squads under his command, for a team of anywhere between 11 and 51 pilots, and a fleet commander can control up to 5 wings to allow for a cohesive team of up to 256 members flying under the leadership of a single pilot.

As well as the command tree itself, the squad can have several 'booster' characters with the ability to provide boosts at the fleet level, wing level, or squadron level – depending on the skill of the fleet commander and others under the command chain, you can have up to 1 fleet booster, 5 wing boosters, and up to 25 squad boosters.

There is also a 'boss' option, who has the overall control of moving people within the fleet, and can re-arrange squads etc. to suit their desires and make all the fleet broadcasts – typically the boss character is also the highest ranking character in the fleet, but at times the most experienced character who can handle the fast pace may be made the de facto leader of the group, and the fleet commander may only be there to supply the fleet bonuses that they have trained for if they have little combat experience.

A final option which is used only as an indicator and provides no tangible bonuses is to mark someone as a scout. Whilst this does not grant them any specific 'powers' over the fleet, it can make identifying the forward and rear lookouts much easier.

Fleet Bonuses

The primary benefit of getting into a fleet is that of providing bonuses to the pilots under the command of the fleet, the fleet bonuses are what set aside a fleet from a collection of pilots who gather on a voice comms system to fly independently for instance.

The first thing to keep in mind is that in order to get any bonuses from the fleet, there needs to be an unbroken chain of command in place. For a squad member to get a bonus, they need to have a squad leader, and conversely, for that squad leader to get their bonuses to apply, they need squad members – therefore a minimum of 2 pilots are needed

before squad bonuses will apply – for a solo pilot, they are all but wasted skills.

The ability for a higher level character in the squad getting their skills applying to themselves, and applying to those underneath them also rely on their subordinates having the correct skills. A Fleet booster can in theory give their bonuses to up to 256 pilots as long as the link is unbroken between the Fleet Commander > Wing Commander > Squad Leader > Squad Member chain. If there is any break in that chain, there will be no boosts provided below that link. This link is maintained by the character filling that link having sufficient skills to control that many members of their respective teams.

Note that the fleet and wing boosters don't need to be the fleet commanders and wing commanders; they can be any character in the fleet. Their bonuses will apply to any they are intended for as long as there is a fully maintained command chain – this means that the higher up level is correctly skilled, and the fleet are all in space in the same system. As an at a glance view, it is possible to see if the appropriate boosts are being applied by looking at the fleet window – a red cross shows that the boosts are not applied, and a green tick shows the bonuses are being applied. If the fleet commander only has level 1 skill then the bonus will be applied 'up the tree' from where the booster is situated as long as the wing commander is bonused (if a squad member is the designated booster) and will not apply 'down the tree' to any other wings due to the fleet commander's lack of skills. The same applies for wing boosters. Squad boosters only apply to the squad that the booster is situated in and do not travel up the tree beyond the squad leader.

There can only be one of every boost applied, and the highest boost takes priority. This means that should the fleet booster have perfect skills, and the fleet is correctly set up, the wing and squad booster roles would be unnecessary as it would be impossible to improve upon the level given to the entire fleet (when discussing the first stage of boosts). In practice, this is rarely the case however as there are several factors to keep in mind:

1) The skills take a long time to train up to an acceptable level
2) There are certain ships (fleet command ships and capital industrial ships for instance) which get boost bonuses to specific boosters, and may take the pilots skill beyond the 'skill point theoretical maximum'
3) There are mindlinks which improve on the boosts, but only one of these can be fit at any one time, as they all occupy slot 10 in a character's head.
4) The boosts beyond the low level leadership skills become very specialised, and up to 21 individual boosts can be applied via skills and warfare links – no one character can offer that many boosts simply because a ship will not allow that many warfare links to be mounted.

With this in mind, it is often desirable to give the highest skill level bonuses to the fleet booster, and have specialised wings and/or squads with specific roles based on their bonuses they can offer.

The Bonuses

Each character can train in 5 low tier command trees – Siege Warfare, Skirmish Warfare, Information Warfare, Armoured Warfare and Mining Foreman. The Leadership skills itself also gives a fleet bonus as well. These skills all provide a bonus of 2% per level, giving a potential bonus of up to 10% (see later in this section for a full list of the bonuses.)

As well as these base skills, there are advanced skills (high tier) on top on top of these,

such as the 4 specialist skills and mining director. These allow the use of Warfare links which provide additional bonuses when they are mounted in a highslot module on a ship which can use them (typically battlecruisers, command ships, carriers, motherships and titans) as these have a high CPU requirement to fit the modules, and the ships designated to use them get bonuses to reduce this value.

These offer 3 additional bonus options as well as the base skill to give 21 possible gang boosts that can be applied (leadership, 5 low tier skills and 15 high tier module based bonuses.)

These skills are modified by the appropriate specialisation skills which increase the bonus by 100% per level after the first level, essentially the bonus given by the warfare link module (typically 2%) as a multiplier with the specialisation skill to give up to a 10% bonus for any active link module that is used in space.

These module based bonuses can be further improved by training the 'warfare link specialist' skill which improves module bonus by 10% per level, so at level 5 the 10% bonus would be increased by 50% to give a 15% base level. Note that this has no effect on the leadership based bonus, or the low tier skills.

This can be further improved again by utilising an implant known as a mindlink. This is specialised into one of the command trees and gives an additional 50% bonus to the active module warfare link bonus, and a fixed 15% effect of the appropriate low tier skills (which amounts to a 50% bonus as level 5 of both the low tier skill and high tier skills are needed to fit the mindlink anyway)

This means that for a typical 2% boost module, when fully trained up and fitted with a mindlink, the boost could be as high as 22%, which in many cases is as good as fitting bonus module for every single member of the fleet. Note that it is possible to get 3% and 4.5% base warfare link bonuses on some skills, and the percentages will increase as appropriate.

The number of simultaneous warfare link modules that can be active is limited by the ship. Battlecruisers for instance can only use 1 module at a time, whereas fleet command ships can use up to 3 at the same time. Titans can activate up to 5 (1 per skill level). As well as the innate skill bonuses, there is a midslot module which can be added to allow 1 additional warfare link to be activated per module equipped, these are known 'Command Processor I' – as at the moment, there are only 3 warfare links per category, it is impossible to get full bonuses for fitting more than 3 modules, as the mindlink implant can't be used for 2 categories of boost type.

The final bonus that can be applied to these warfare links are the racial fleet command ships, which provide a 3% bonus to the racial warfare link type – Caldari with Siege Warfare, Minmatar with Skirmish Warfare, Gallente with Information Warfare, and Amarr with Armoured Warfare. The ORE ships (Rorqual and Orca) have a 5% bonus per level to the mining director associated links.

Full Bonus List

Leadership – 2% Bonus to Targeting speed
Siege Warfare – 2% Bonus to Shield capacity
Active Shielding – 2% Bonus to Shield Booster speed and Shield Transfer speed
Shield Efficiency – 2% Bonus to Shield Booster and Shield Transfer capacitor need.

Shield Harmonisation – 2% Bonus to Shield resists
Skirmish Warfare – 2% Bonus to ship agility
Evasive Manoeuvres – 2% Reduced Signature radius
Interdiction Manoeuvres – 3% Boost to range of Propulsion Jamming modules
Rapid Deployment – 2% Boost to Afterburner and Microwarp Drive speed.
Information Warfare – 2% Bonus to targeting range
Electronic Superiority – 2% Bonus to strength of electronic warfare modules
Recon Operation – 2% Bonus to range of electronic warfare modules
Sensor Integrity – 3% Bonus to sensor strength of all ships
Armoured Warfare – 2% Bonus to Armour Hitpoints
Damage Control – 2% reduced capacitor need for armour repair and remote armour repair
Passive Defence – 2% increased armour resistances
Rapid Repair – 2% increased speed of armour repair and remote armour repair
Mining Foreman – 2% Increased mining yield
Harvester Capacitor Efficiency – 2% reduced capacitor need for lasers and gas/ice harvesters
Laser Optimisation – 2% reduced duration for mining lasers and ice harvesters
Mining Laser Field Enhancement – 4.5% increased range of mining lasers and gas/ice harvesters.

Fleet Command In Practice

The actual act of commanding a fleet of players has very little to do with in game skills, and is much more related to out of game man-management skills, and courage/calmness under pressure.

I do not have enough experience of high level fleet command to suggest I'm an expert compared to those who have months or years of practice at it, but there are a few key pointers to remember:

1) You should be the voice in command of the fleet – your word should be law. This should be made clear from the very start, and if you say do something, it should be done – even if it means sending an occasional pilot to their death. Death is only a tiny problem in Eve, and having a sacrificial lamb can occasionally be useful – for baiting traps for instance. Of course, don't let the power go to your head and be blind to common sense – be sure to listen to sensible advice if it is offered, no one is an expert at everything.

2) Decide how you are going to control the fleet – using the in-game notifiers (target, warp to, assist etc.) can be very useful for those who may not speak your native language fluently, and are very hard to misunderstand. If you want to simply speak the orders, make sure that everyone has their full attention on you, as you don't want to make an order to move away and find that half of your fleet are sitting still scratching their head wondering what you had just said. Remember that the in game broadcasts are very useful when designating targets as it means that the fleet simply needs to pick the target from the announcement rather than searching for them in space.

3) The decision to take an active part in the fight is entirely up to the fleet commander. Especially with low experience, there can be a lot of information to process, and including the actual combat as well can be overwhelming. A fleet commander can sit in a stealthed ship fairly secure in the knowledge that they are safe from harm and can dictate the course of the battle from relative safety. If the fleet commander also has good skills for the boosting role, they can also assist with that – though note that warfare links can't be used whilst stealthed.

4) The choice of voice comms system should be a very important decision. The integrated Eve voice system provides very high sound quality if there is enough

bandwidth available to the users (not much of an issue with modern broadband connections) but suffers in that if someone crashes from Eve, they will lose voice communication ability until they are re-joined with the fleet. A third party application (Teamspeak or Ventrillo are the commonly used tools) does not suffer from this, but it is possible to find that some members of the fleet will struggle to use the third party applications and this may cause problems during the operation if problems aren't solved at the start.

5) Prepare for the worst. Everyone can have connection difficulties, and anyone can be killed. Make sure that you have nominated backups for key positions and ensure that everyone understands who these backups are if the primary role holders should not be available. If during a fleet operation one of the key operatives is killed and is forced to leave the area, make sure that the remainder of the team won't crumble without leadership. It could be a good idea to prepare a fall back point ahead of departure where everyone can muster, a mid point between the location and the start of the operation is always good as it can allow a cloned replacement to get back at around the same time as the main group gets back to the rally point.

6) Plan the operation. There is no need to go in blind – even if your operation is just 'camp gate X and prevent anyone from entering' you should know what to do if someone does get through and have an alternate plan in mind – perhaps having an intercept squad to chase after loose ships etc. Keep game mechanics in mind – if you find that the intercept squadron can't chase a gate runner because they have a combat flag which prevents them jumping, this will mean that the operation has essentially not met it's objectives.

7) During combat, it is essential that correct communication discipline is maintained. If this means muting persistent background chatterboxes then so be it. Only the fleet, wing and squad commanders, and scouts if relevant should be speaking, so there is less chance of missing an important command.

8) Make sure your squads are arranged to play on their strengths. There is no use having a squad with 9 close range blaster ships and one long range sniper (unless of course, you are only running with 1 squad and thats part of the plan) – the same with the scouts – they will very rarely be in the same system as the action, so will not get many of the boosts applied to them – make sure they are not designated boosters, and keep them to one squad so there are as many people getting the boosts as possible.

9) Make sure you are scouting both in front and behind. You don't want to be caught blind sided by an opponent who worked their way around you to come in behind.

10) Stealth ships are essentially mobile bookmarks. One of their strengths is to move unseen behind opponents and wait at a suitable warp-to distance so that the fleet can arrive on top of the opponent, or at whatever their optimal range is. Your opponent will probably be trying this tactic too. Having bookmarks prepared ahead of time for the optimal locations for potential engagements and safe spots is also a good idea if it's possible.

11) All ships should be focus fired on – a ship with 1% hull can still provide 100% of the damage it is doing whilst it is alive. Due to the nature of resistances and sustainable tanks, its likely that 2 ships will take longer to kill 2 separate targets than 2 ships will take to kill 1 target then move on to the second. If you have plenty of damage dealers, Electronic Warfare ships can be left to secondary targets, concentrating on your opponents DPS first, but if you have a lower DPS gang, make sure that Electronic Warfare ships are dealt with as quick as possible – they are frequently weak, but can turn the tide of battle. Logistics ships can be a nuisance as well, but they have all of their abilities removed by application of

Electronic Warfare, and they often have very minimal damage protection, so can be removed from a fight very quickly. If your opponent is using a very hard to kill ship, such as a Drake or a Tier 3 battleship or Command ship, these are usually left until last – they are good at absorbing damage, but don't deal it too well compared to the more focused attack ships. Keep in mind that some use this assumption to their benefit and fit for low tank, high damage fits, for example a HAM Drake which is fairly paper thin, but can dish out good damage at close range – be sure to keep an eye out for opponents out of their 'anticipated' range.

12) If you are partaking in lowsec or 0.0 warfare, keep an eye out for any frigates moving off from the crowd – they could be preparing to launch a Cyno field and bring capital ships into the fight. When in a system where a capital ship is a possibility, it should always be kept in mind.