

Top Mistakes of New Intelligence Analysts

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A few years ago (O.K., ten years ago), I read an unsigned article named The Art of Intelligence Analysis (excerpted from Studies in Intelligence, Fall 1986), from the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency](http://www.cia.gov). While searching the CIA website, I could not find if it has been declassified. Oh, dear. I remember reading it as I was starting my intelligence career. The article's aim was to be a blueprint on how to do analysis. But it also highlighted **common pitfalls of new intelligence analysts**.

Since then, I have matured in my intelligence career, trained and coached new analysts while observing these and other common mistakes made by intelligence virgins or more to the point *when newcomers start doing intelligence analysis*. This is my take on the topic.

Academic vs Intelligence work

Usually, the intelligence newbie starts off his career after many years of college or university. Academic work is different from intelligence work. Often, the manager overseeing the new analyst has to de-program his pupil from years of academic oriented work.

Here is a list of **differences between academic and intelligence output**:

CHARACTERISTIC	ACADEMIC	INTELLIGENCE
Focus	On the past	On the future
Time Frame	Plenty of time available Can produce complete information	Time is a luxury Must deal with incompleteness of information
Nature of output	Short on conclusions	Begins with conclusions and follows on the implications
Orientation	Detailed proof of argumentation	Characterizations and essential information
Requirement	Broad Essay Laying on the facts	Answer specific questions and go beyond the evidence
Subject	Topic	Issue
Interest	Personal selection of topic	Essential requirement from decision makers Imposed selection of issue
Consumer	Academic experts No decision	Generalists who need to make

	needed and no responsibility	decisions on real-world situations
Essentially	Should be for a good grade	Should be <i>useful</i>

Table 1: Differences between Academic and Intelligence output

Tendencies

Along with the tendency for new analysts to reflect the academic part of table 1 when they hand in their work, there are other mistakes that a typical newcomer would do:

- Starts researching before asking the right questions that need answering and fails to identify what is required
- Spends too much time on research and too little on analysis
- Recites facts instead of interpreting facts
- Forgets to state what is known and what is rumour
- Does not clearly present the bottom line or what is the essence of the analysis
- Produces a data dump instead of a concise analysis needs to begin with the conclusions and explore the implications
- Concentrates on the past and does not try to anticipate the future
- Fails to understand the importance of a deadline

Where to go from here

If you are managing a few analysts that need some coaching out of these tendencies, there are a few things you can do to help their evolution into seasoned analysts:

- Do an initiation briefing stipulating that failures, like those mentioned, will likely happen and are normal
- Communicate your organizations sense of mission and vision
- Explain clearly the difference between academic and intelligence writing
- Present the intelligence analysis process clearly and thoroughly
- Provide positive reinforcement to help cope with early failures

Competitive and business intelligence is a growth industry right now. This growth means that many more managers are trying to cope with a higher proportion of new analysts entering their organizations. While attempting to cope, after some time, many managers are ready to conclude that analysts are born, not made. This idea may have some truth to it, albeit somewhat extreme. We all know that there is no substitute for experience and the maturation of an analyst has no magic formula mostly trial and error, with efficient coaching.

This short guide, hopefully, has helped you starting thinking that maybe, some new analyst may be rescued And for those newbies who are entering our line or work, dont despair, as you can see, new intelligence analysts can be drilled if there is fertile ground.



