Self-Assessment Tool for Intelligence Analysts

Cognitive biases are systematic errors in thinking that affect the judgements and decisions of every analyst. This checklist helps you identify and counteract the most common biases before finalising any intelligence product.

COLLECTION & SOURCING BIASES

Confirmation Bias

Favouring information that confirms existing beliefs while discounting contradictory evidence.

- ■ Have I actively sought out disconfirming evidence?
- ■ Did I weight all sources equally before forming a view?
- ■ Would I reach the same conclusion if the evidence were reversed?

Availability Bias

Overweighting easily recalled or recent information over statistically representative data.

- ■ Am I relying on the most memorable cases rather than the full data set?
- ■ Have I checked base rates and historical frequency?
- ■ Is recent reporting distorting my overall assessment?

Anchoring Bias

Over-relying on the first piece of information encountered when making estimates.

- ■ What was my initial estimate, and how much has it influenced my final judgement?
- ■ Have I genuinely reconsidered my position as new evidence arrived?
- ■ Did I adjust sufficiently — or just make minor modifications?

ANALYTICAL PROCESS BIASES

Mirror Imaging

Assuming adversaries or other actors think, value, and behave as we do.

- ■ Have I considered the subject's cultural, organisational, or ideological context?
- ■ Am I projecting my own logic onto their decision-making?
- ■ Have I consulted subject-matter experts on this actor's worldview?

Groupthink

Suppressing dissenting views to maintain group consensus and harmony.

- ■ Were all team members free to voice alternative views?
- ■ Did anyone play devil's advocate or formally challenge the consensus?
- ■ Would a new analyst looking at this reach the same conclusion independently?

Premature Closure

Accepting the first satisfactory explanation without fully evaluating alternatives.

- ■ Have I formally considered at least three competing hypotheses?
- ■ Did I use ACH (Analysis of Competing Hypotheses) or a similar structured technique?
- ■ What evidence would change my assessment, and have I looked for it?

Vividness Bias

Placing excessive weight on dramatic, emotionally salient, or graphic information.

- ■ Is this piece of information weighted by its analytical value or its emotional impact?
- ■ Would this evidence carry the same weight if reported in dry statistical terms?
- ■ Am I being influenced by how information was presented rather than its content?

REPORTING & COMMUNICATION BIASES

Hindsight Bias

Believing, after an event, that you predicted or 'knew' the outcome all along.

- ■ Am I accurately recording my pre-event confidence levels?
- ■ Am I using past events to retroactively validate methods that weren't actually applied?
- ■ Would my assessment have been the same before the event?

Satisficing

Accepting a 'good enough' answer rather than continuing to search for the best one.

- ■ Have I exhausted reasonable collection avenues?
- ■ Is this the best explanation, or just the first acceptable one?
- ■ What would it take to find a better answer — is that effort justified?

Politicisation Bias

Shaping assessments to align with expected or preferred policy outcomes.

- ■ Would my assessment change if the decision-maker preferred a different outcome?
- ■ Have I reported uncomfortable or inconvenient findings without softening them?
- ■ Is my language precise and unambiguous, or has it been softened for palatability?

How to Use This Checklist

Stage	Action
Before drafting	Complete Section 1 (Collection & Sourcing Biases) when reviewing your raw material.
During analysis	Work through Section 2 (Analytical Process) as you develop your key judgements.
Before publishing	Complete Section 3 (Reporting) immediately before finalising any product.
Peer review	A second analyst should independently complete this checklist on high-stakes products.

Need a Different Format?

- A printable A4 worksheet version is available on request.
- Email: info@theintelanalystacademy.com.au with the subject 'Cognitive Bias Checklist — Format Request'