

Quality Assurance for Intelligence Products

Use this checklist before finalising any intelligence product — from a one-page tactical brief to a full strategic assessment. Each section addresses a common failure mode in analytical writing.

STRUCTURE & FORMAT

Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)

- The key judgement or main finding appears in the first sentence or paragraph.
- The reader can understand the essential message without reading the full document.
- Supporting detail follows — not precedes — the main point.

Logical Flow

- Each paragraph has a single, clear topic sentence.
- Paragraphs follow a logical sequence (context → finding → evidence → implication).
- Transitions between sections are smooth and purposeful.
- The conclusion restates the key judgement — it does not introduce new information.

Appropriate Length

- The product is as short as it can be without losing essential meaning.
- Executive summaries are no longer than 10% of the full document.
- No padding, throat-clearing, or repetitive phrasing.

CLARITY & LANGUAGE

Plain Language

- Sentences average fewer than 20 words.
- Jargon and acronyms are defined on first use.
- Active voice is used wherever possible.
- Passive voice, where used, is deliberate and justified.

Precision

- Every claim is specific — no vague terms like 'some', 'many', 'a number of'.
- Dates, figures, and measurements are exact where available.
- Estimative language terms (likely, probable) are used consistently per the style guide.
- No weasel words that obscure rather than express uncertainty.

Tone

- The tone is objective, measured, and professional throughout.
- No emotive language that could be seen as advocacy.
- No sarcasm, rhetorical questions, or colloquialisms.
- Recommendations (if included) are clearly distinguished from assessments.

EVIDENCE & SOURCING

Evidence Quality

- All key claims are supported by cited evidence.
- Evidence quality is assessed (reliable/credible/unverified) and noted.
- The difference between fact and inference is clearly indicated.
- No unsupported assertions or logical leaps.

Source Attribution

- Sources are cited according to organisational standards.
- The sensitivity classification of each source is correctly applied.
- Caveats on source reliability are included where relevant.
- Raw intelligence is not reproduced verbatim without authorisation.

Information Gaps

- Key intelligence gaps are identified and stated.
- The impact of those gaps on analytical confidence is noted.
- Collection recommendations are included where appropriate.

ANALYTICAL STANDARDS

Key Assumptions

- Core assumptions underpinning the analysis are explicitly stated.
- Each assumption has been tested against available evidence.
- The impact of a wrong assumption on the conclusion is acknowledged.

Alternative Analysis

- At least one credible alternative hypothesis has been considered.
- The basis for rejecting alternatives is documented.
- For high-stakes products: a formal devil's advocate review was conducted.

Confidence & Uncertainty

- A confidence level (high/moderate/low) is stated for all key judgements.
- The basis for that confidence level is explained.
- Uncertainty is communicated clearly — not hidden or minimised.

FINAL REVIEW

Grammar & Mechanics

- Spelling and grammar have been checked (including spell-checker limitations).
- Consistent tense throughout (present tense for assessments is standard).
- Numbers, dates, and proper nouns are formatted consistently.
- Acronym list is accurate and complete.

Classification & Handling

- The correct classification marking appears on every page.
- Handling caveats (REL TO, NOFORN, etc.) are correctly applied.
- The document is not over- or under-classified.
- Distribution list matches the document's classification.

Need a Different Format?

- A Word (.docx) editable version is available on request.
- Email: info@theintelanalystacademy.com.au with the subject 'Writing Checklist — Format Request'