

# HOW TO DO GOOD ANALYSIS

Analysis, like many skills, is a personal process. With experience, each analyst discovers the best way that he/she prepares, drafts, and hones analysis. Nonetheless, there are seven basic steps to all analytic projects.

1. **ASSESS** what your decisionmakers need.

Put yourself in their shoes.

Think of the scope of the topic and key questions to answer.

Determine what the reader *really* needs – not just what is requested. Don't pander.

2. **GATHER** your information, **ABSORB** it, and **CHALLENGE** it.

Take only the level of notes that you need to establish landmarks in your data.

Don't build your information linearly; build it more like a Christmas tree.

Critique your sources as you read; ask how they're influencing you.

Mark questionable information.

Make note of information gaps.

3. **LOOK FOR PATTERNS** in your information.

Find common points and parallels in your data.

Ask again if your sources lean one way or other.

Identify gaps again.

4. Formulate your **HYPOTHESIS** and build your **ARGUMENTS**.

Draft your thesis.

Write sentences capturing your main points.

Marshal facts to support your arguments.

Start building your paragraphs. (Tick formats work well.) Keep them soft, non-linear.

## Basic, Simple Structure

- Grab attention and give BLUF
- Identify drivers – explaining what's happening and why
- Say where things are headed
- Name "wildcards" if meaningful
- Hit the reader between the eyes with the implications

5. **TEST** and **BUILD** the bond between your hypothesis, arguments, and facts.

Ask yourself honestly if your thesis holds up.

Reorder data and make adjustments for maximum strength.

Go gather more information to test and strengthen your case.

Adjust, adjust, adjust.

6. And then ... focus on **LANGUAGE** and **STRUCTURE**

Polish the thesis sentence and check it for consistency with arguments and facts.

As you prepare the written product, check the structure of sentences and paragraphs.

7. Take a **BREATH** and **REPEAT** steps 4 and 5 until you're happy.