

Capstone Assessment/Analysis Project for Undergraduate National Security and Strategic Analysis (NSSA) Certificate

As the Capstone activity for the NSSA Certificate candidates must demonstrate the ability to analyze a paper or brief, write an analysis paper, and prepare a briefing paper based on the analysis.

"Complete a **field analysis or research analysis project** related to national security, strategic analysis or intelligence analysis as at least a 2 credit independent study course. Complete either a or b below as part of this requirement.

- a. An analysis paper based on work in an approved internship or
- b. An analysis paper based on an independent and faculty directed research project."

The "research analysis project" is satisfied by completing the three activities as described below.

- An analysis of four articles in your field of study based on guidelines below in Part I.
- Write an analysis paper as described below in Part II.
- A briefing paper as described in Part III, using the Part II analysis paper, then completes the capstone analysis project requirement.

As a guide to the paper and brief, notes are included (Part IV) from a presentation by Ms. Patti Bolten, Head of Analysis for the African Mission of the CIA.

Part I: Analyzing an Article or Brief¹

One important way to understand an essay, article or paper is through the analysis of the parts of the paper and its structure. If you truly understand the structure as they interrelate in an article, you should be able to understand the thinking of the author. Below are nine steps that will allow you to understand the structure of an article. They include the essential elements of thought necessary to write a good paper or article. You may choose papers in your area of study or choose from a file of articles available for assessment at the NSSP office at 3019 Mesa Vista Hall.

Here is a template to follow in writing your analysis of an article:

- 0) State the title, author(s) and the citation.
- 1) The **main purpose** of this article is _____
Here you are trying to state, as accurately as possible, the **author's intent** in writing the article. What was the author trying to accomplish? Is it to provide understanding, to present judgments and/or to offer actions?
- 2) The **key question** that the author is addressing is _____

¹ Taken and adapted from *The Thinker's Guide to Analytic Thinking*, 2010 Foundation for Critical Thinking Press www.criticalthinking.org page 28-9

Your goal is to figure out the key question that was in the mind of the author who wrote the article. What was the **key question addressed** in the article, e.g. "Can ISIS be defeated?". This can be related to (but different from) a hypothesis the author makes such as: "An ISIS war can be won with massive foreign support and troop intervention" or an assumption "Foreign ground troops invariably shorten wars".

- 3) The most important **information** in this article is _____ .
You want to identify the key information the author used in the article to support the main arguments. Here you are looking for **facts, experiences, and/ or data** the author is using to support the conclusions.
- 4) The **main assumptions** underlying the author's thinking are _____
Ask yourself: What is the author **presupposing or taking for granted**? The assumptions are generalizations that the author does not think have to defend in the context of writing the article, and they are usually unstated (they may be wrong.).
- 5) The **key concepts** we need to understand in order to understand the arguments in this article are _____
What are the **most important ideas** that you would have to know to understand the author's line of reasoning? Briefly elaborate what the author means by these ideas, e.g., the concept of a "Regional conflict" by which the author means us to understand that "Multi-participant regional conflicts are complex dynamical events."
- 6) The **main implications** stated from the information and assumptions are _____
Identify the **statements or results** the author draws that are fully supported by the underlying assumptions, information, and facts presented in the article. These precede and lead to key judgments or main conclusions below.
- 7) **Consequences if we accept** the author's line of reasoning include _____
What consequences are **likely to follow** if people accept the author's line of reasoning? Here you are to pursue the logical implications of the author's position. You should include implications that the author states, and also those that the author does not state.
- 8) **Consequences if we fail to accept** this line of reasoning include _____
What consequences are likely to follow if people **ignore the author's reasoning**? The author should have alluded to these alternative implications or counterarguments and why they are not good options.
- 9) The **point of view** presented in this article is _____ .
How is the author **looking at the question**? Is it from a government perspective, a think tank, an NGO, a national interest, an advocacy group, etc. Is the author an academic, a politician, a government official or agency, or an neutral analysis expert?

- 10) The article provided clear **understandings, conclusions, key judgments, and/or recommendations** that _____

Were the stated overall conclusions, judgments, recommendations, or actions clear and did they **follow from the main implications**?

Part II: Capstone Analysis Paper

This is a longer analysis paper which is then used to prepare the final briefing paper (Part III). The analysis paper should be 10 pages at least plus bibliography. The elements (Part I) in the analysis above should be readily discoverable by an objective reader. This is a more typical academic research paper.

Sections of the Capstone Analysis Paper:

A. Abstract

- Identifies the concern or question.
- Includes a statement covering the basis for analysis and the information/facts used.
- States clearly MAJOR implications, key judgments, conclusions, and/or recommendations or possible courses of action.

Several strong tight and focused paragraphs. All that is really needed to understand your paper.

B. Background or Context:

- Summarizes the question and issue, the various points of view on the topic and explains how they have led to the question driving the inquiry (What?)
 - Clearly states a good relevant question (based on the requirement question)
 - The guiding question is not limited to “yes” or “no” or “either/or”
 - The guiding question asks how, why, should or the extent to which
 - Conveys a clear idea of who you are answering the question for
- Explains why this issue is important, and what is at stake; addresses relation to other bigger or more important issues (Why and so What?)

A page at least - half a page at least for each of the two main bullets above.

C. Method and Analysis Development :

- States the analysis purpose - is it for information only, to give judgment(s), and/or to suggest possible action(s).
- List any underlying assumptions or working thesis. If needed point out any concepts needed for the analysis.
- Discuss your method (any analysis tools) and what type of information you have access to.
- Information for the analysis: Describe the key information and the gathered facts relative to the issue. Why are they the best available. (e.g. experts, data, types of intelligence, doing background/historical work, etc.)

A least three pages – at most one for the first three bullets in this category and at least two for the last most important bullet.

D. Implications

- Claims and expected results: Explains the implications with regard to this question and how the assumptions, information, facts and methods support the implications.
- Challenges anticipated counter-arguments: Are there other implications that could come from the information and analysis and what counterarguments are there to them? Most often this is due to different assumptions and understanding of the underlying concepts.

One page for *each* major implication and for each major counter position. Order from most important to least (but still important).

Part C and D are often merged taking each major implication and counter implication in turn. So facts, information, etc can be followed by an implication and an analysis of the implementation and then a second implication with facts etc first presented to support it. Then each counter implication is presented in that fashion.

E. Conclusions, key judgments, and course of action the analysis supports.

- State the main conclusions and key judgments of the assessment and be sure they are adequately justified. What might be implications of action or non-action if a course or action is suggested or is part of the issue? Implications should lead naturally to conclusions or key judgments or to possible actions.

Generally less than one page unless there are multiple judgments to cover.

F. Annotated Bibliography

Divides sources by genre

- At least 10 sources (no Wikipedia, no About, must be books or articles from reputable journals, other open sources, or documented experts)
- Demonstrates that you have collected and reviewed relevant sources to the extent that you are able to write authoritatively on the analysis being done on your topic.
- Websites OK if it is clear (or if you explain the context), such as "official site of the Y organization" or "Blog site with authored article by X" It is better here to cite the author and then use the blog as the published source. When possible go to the source for information instead of a third party.

G. Other features of your analysis paper.

- Audience: Write to an appropriate audience as identified in the Introduction.
- Title: Very important to describe the topic and issue to catch attention to the analysis/assessment.
- Mechanics: Twelve page maximum, page numbers, 12 pt font, Times New Roman, Double-spaced, one-inch margins.
- Language and Grammar: Use Skrunk and White, *The Elements of Style* or similar.

Part III: Capstone Analysis Briefing Paper

The briefing paper is a short distillation of your longer analysis paper from Part II. The brief is meant to be used for a decision maker to understand your question and your analysis. **You are to take your paper in Section II and cut it down and modify it to LESS than three pages plus bibliography.**

Sections of the Capstone Analysis Briefing Paper:

A. BLUF: "Bottom Line Up Front"

- Opens by identifying the concern or question in one sentence.
- Gives a one sentence statement covering the basis for analysis and the information/facts used.
- States clearly only the MAJOR key judgments, conclusions, and/or recommendations or possible courses of action.

One strong tight and focused paragraph. This replaces your paper introduction.

B. Background or Context:

- Summarizes the question and issue, the various points of view on the topic and explains how they have led to the question driving the inquiry (What?)
- Explains why this issue is important, and what is at stake; addresses relation to other bigger or more important issues (Why and so What?)

Two paragraphs – one for each of the two main bullets above.

C. Method and Analysis Development :

- List any underlying assumptions or working thesis. It may point out any concepts needed for the analysis.
- Information for the analysis: Describe the key information and the gathered facts relative to the issue. Why are they the best available. (e.g. experts, data, types of intelligence, doing background/historical work, etc.)

Multiple paragraphs – at most two for each bullet in this category

D. Implications

- Claim and expected results: Explains the implications with regard to this question and how the assumptions, information, facts and methods support the implications.
- Challenges anticipated counter-arguments: Are there other implications that could come from the information and analysis and what counterarguments are there to them or what status might they have for the issue. Most often this is due to different assumptions and underlying concepts.

One paragraph for *each* major implication and for each major counter position. Keep to a few implications and order from most important to least. As in the analysis paper, sections C and D are often merged with a set of facts and an implication together and then with the process iterated.

E. Conclusions, key judgments, and course of action supported

State the main conclusions and key judgments of the assessment and be sure they are adequately justified. What might be implications of action or non-action if a course or action is suggested? Implications listed above should lead naturally to conclusions, key judgments, or to possible actions. The most important conclusions should be also stated in the BLUF.

F. Bibliography (not always part of a formal brief but used for background as the analysis is developed and reviewed)

- Include key information sources only on which the implications and hence the conclusion depends.
- This should be a partial list from the larger analysis paper.

G. Other features of your analysis brief.

- Audience: Write to an appropriate audience as identified in the item B above.
- Title: Very important to describe the topic and if possible your main conclusion.
- Mechanics: Three page maximum, page numbers, 12 pt font, Times New Roman, Double-spaced, one-inch margins.
- Avoid ANY unnecessary verbiage. The goal is how much content you can pack into 2-3 pages in a coherent and complete analysis brief.
- Bullets are good for emphasis in listing facts, information, implications, and judgments and take less space.

Part IV: Writing an Analytic Assessment²

These notes are to help guide good analytic writing for assessment of an intelligence question or issue. They are to be used as a guide and checklist for your assessment/analysis paper and briefing document.

1. Analytic Writing

- Understands the needs of different customers.
- Displays in-depth expertise and analytic thinking.
- Encompasses different perspectives and explores all angles.
- Makes a persuasive argument.
- Is precise, concise, and easy to read.

An analytic message draws on expertise and insight to answer a question that has many possible and probable answers.

2. What Question Are You Answering?

An intelligence question (IQ) identifies a substantive issue and links it to your customer's interests.

An intelligence question:

- Can be answered by reporting and analysis.
- Is open-ended (not yes or no).

² Notes from Patti Bolten, 12/12/14

- Is future-oriented.

3. **Examples of Intelligence Questions**

- How does Mars’ attempted procurement of additional illudium phosdex affect its space modulator weapons program?
- How will President What effect will Warbania’s new security policy have on regional terrorist groups?
- Smith’s death affect stability in Warbania and its neighbors?

4. **Expand the Intelligence Question**

An expanded IQ helps to guide the analyst’s research and the paper’s organization.

- What sub-questions need to be considered in answering the main IQ?
- How should the sub-questions be ordered to tell the story in a logical way?

5. **Expanded IQ Example**

IQ: How does Mars’ attempted procurement of additional illudium phosdex (IP) affect its space modulator weapons program?

Expanded IQs:

- How much IP has Mars attempted to procure?
- Why or for what purpose is Mars attempting to acquire IP?
- What else can IP be used for?
- What does the acquisition of IP mean for its space modulator weapons program?

6. **Now What?**

Generate hypotheses to answer the intelligence question.

- Four to six hypotheses is a manageable range.
- Avoid three—you may find yourself with a variation of “gets better, gets worse, stays the same.”
- Use the expanded IQs to help you organize and outline your paper.

7. **Analytic Writing Tells a Story**

			So What	
What/Who, threat	Why, why now?	Impact? Changes?	Outlook, what’s next?	US implications or opportunities

8. **Analytic writing provides judgments, not just facts.**

Key Judgment = What + So What

9. **Analytic?**

Analytic?

Melissa Jones is the new Minister of Finance. She had been Deputy Minister for nine years. She received her PhD from the London School of Economics and has held steadily more responsible government jobs since.

Better?

Melissa Jones, the newly named Minister of Finance, probably will have little influence despite her

credentials. President Sanchez's chief of staff last month told US diplomats that Sanchez does not trust Jones.

- Jones had been Deputy Minister for nine years and received her PhD from the London School of Economics.

10. **Be Concise**

Trim needless modifiers and wordy phrases such as:

- Serious crisis.
- Future prospects.
- General consensus.
- Actively pursue.
- Relocate elsewhere.
- Actually will.

11. **Avoid Data Dumps**

- Use your best evidence—not all of it.
- Make sure every detail is necessary to explain or support your judgment.

12. **Keep Sentences Short, Use Active Voice**

Basic sentence structure: subject—verb—object.

- President Sanchez told his defense minister to deploy the missiles.
- Start sentences with the main actor.

Avoid “There is” and “There are.”

13. **Analytic Titles**

- A strong title gives the paper focus by capturing the analytic message in a few words.
- The title provides the first, and often only, chance to grab the attention of readers.

14. **Title Captures the Bottom Line**

- What and So What.
- Title is analytic—not bland or melodramatic.
- Draws in reader and sets expectations.
- Conveys sense of change, movement, warning, or opportunity.
- No questions, puns, or humor.

15. **Example - Convey Information and Message**

Mars: Cell Phone Tower Identified. **Fact**

Mars: Cell Phone Tower May Play Role in Space Modulator Program. **Analytic message**— but is it enough?

Mars: Cell Phone Tower Probably Intended to Relay Space Modulator Test Data. **Analytic message**

16. Structuring a Judgment/Conclusion Paragraph

Judgment—the topic sentence or lead sentence.

- One per paragraph.

Evidence and reasoning.

- Sufficient to support the judgment.
- Clearly linked to judgment.
- Arrayed logically.
- Credibility of evidence is clear from source attributions.

17. Organizing an Analytic Paper

- Moves forward from what's happening now to what will happen next or from what is known to what is unknown.
- Follows a journalistic question-and-answer format.
- Groups like things together.

18. Logical Sequence Example

A cruise ship sank. - **The What**

It got too close to the beach. - **The Why**

Some passengers were killed and injured. The ship is leaking fuel. - **The Impact**

Investigations will determine the role of the captain. - **The Outlook**

New rules for cruise ship captains and passengers are expected. - **The Implications**

19. “What”

What's happening now?

- Sets the stage.
- New trend or development.

The Warbanian military is emerging as a regional military power.

20. “Why” or “Why Now”?

Why is it happening? Or, why now?

- Back story/context.
- Root cause.
- Factors causing trend to develop.

Because of the military's successful insurgency campaign.

21. “Impact” or “Response”

What is the impact so far? What has been the response?

- How it is playing out.
- Recent reactions to the development.

The military is beginning to show signs of strain.

22. “Outlook”

What is likely to happen next?

- Probable outcome.
- Likely scenario.

11-20-15

- The “so what.”

Warbania is likely to face trade-offs between domestic and regional priorities.

23. “US Implications” or “Opportunities”

What does this mean for US interests?

How can the United States shape the outcome?

- The “so what.”
- Leverage points, ways the United States could influence.

International assistance probably would help Warbania manage competing priorities.