Twitter Thread by Aaron Berman



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Recently I shared tips I learned writing for and editing the President's Daily Brief, with Star Wars examples. People seemed to appreciate them, so everyone loves a sequel, right?

■

1/n

First, here's the original 101 list.

To give proper credit, this is based on training every CIA analyst gets, and on guidance from many, many former mentors and colleagues. It's similar to journalism, and I use a version in tech policy.

https://t.co/S6TFHqD0pT

2/n

> Here's my list:
>
> 1. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)
> 2. Be simple and format clearly
> 3. No value-laden language (Twitter users please learn this!)
> 4. Convey uncertainty clearly
> 5. Keep a bunch of other stuff in mind too
>
> 2/n
>
> — Aaron Berman (@AaronDBerman) June 28, 2022

Now here's my 201 list, which will be illustrated with a broader universe of sci fi examples:

6. Write for your customer
7. Use precise language

8. Support your argument
9. Opportunities, recommendations, and predictions

3/n

6. Write for your customer

Write what THEY need to know, not what YOU want to say.

This means you have to:
- Know who you're writing for
- Know their priorities
- Know what they know
- Time your work smartly

4/n

Say you're writing about new blasters on TIE fighters for Admiral Ackbar.

- Does he need to know these details, or is one of his commanders a better customer?
- Say Ackbar does need to know, but he's busy trying to destroy the new Death Star. Maybe wait and write later...

5/n

What if you've got the right customer, but they don't want to hear your message?

This does NOT mean you avoid telling "truth to power". But you might have to get creative.

6/n

For example, the senior officers couldn't convince Captain Picard to blow up the Enterprise-E, to ensure the Borg wouldn't stop first contact.

But Lily Sloane got through to him with a well-timed Moby Dick reference.

7/n

7. Use precise language

Say exactly what you mean. This is really hard to do while also following tip 2 (be simple and format clearly).

8/n

GOOD: "The Cylons can pass as human and are spying on us via relationships with unspecified senior government officials."

NOT GOOD: “The Cylons have spies among us.” It’s missing something…

9/n

8. Support your argument

After you put your “bottom line up front” (see tip 1), don’t forget to include specific sub-arguments and evidence. No one’s going to just take your word for it.

10/n

Do this in an “inverted pyramid”.

It’s called an “inverted pyramid”
because the broadest point
is at the top, and the
supporting points
are below

https://t.co/qT0W3ESwdZ

11/n

Bottom line: “What you think is reality is actually an illusion, a Matrix constructed by machines to distract your brain and turn humans into little more than batteries.”

Who’s going to believe that?

12/n

So add some supporting evidence:

- “Remember when that agent made your mouth disappear?”
- “You saw that black cat twice? Deja vu is a glitch in the Matrix.”

13/n

Also address contradicting evidence, to make sure your argument is sound:

- “Agent Smith is lying to you, and you’ll see for yourself if you take the red pill.”

14/n

9. Opportunities, recommendations, and making predictions useful

There’re some big differences between intelligence “opportunities” and policy “recommendations.” Also, predictions can be

useful without being right.

But I'm tired so will save this for another time.

/END