

# Intelligence Debriefing: From Terminology Development to Modern Tool

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## Introduction

Debriefing is a structured review process commonly used in the military, healthcare, academic, and even business domains to extract or reveal specific information from individuals based on past events. The debriefing techniques and the source's intentions may influence the information collected by intelligence personnel. Thus, the structure and format of any debriefing depends on its intended objective.

In considering the military applications of the debriefing process, we must acknowledge its historical background. In the early days of World War II, U.S. Army Brigadier General and historian Samuel Lynn Atwood Marshall was tasked with documenting combat events. Reconstructing events solely from historical data was difficult, so the designated collector interviewed Soldiers who took part in the battles. This offered an excellent opportunity to gather critical information and assess mission results. After action debriefing became a standard course of action when the intelligence gathered from these interviews proved beneficial to future warfighting strategy.<sup>1</sup>

## Terminology Development

An introduction to debriefing terminology is necessary to understand its meaning in context with its implementation goals. This overview offers a broad perspective of the terminology's development and influence on our understanding of debriefing techniques. The definitions presented here provide a general understanding of debriefing terminology and the recognition of debriefing as an adapted human intelligence (HUMINT) technique.

Intelligence-related military literature from the last century defined debriefing as “questioning of individuals who are sources of information in a strategic or operational environment. This is done to obtain usable information in response to command and national level intelligence needs.”<sup>2</sup> While this definition presented the general aim and subject of debriefing, it simultaneously raised other considerations for military intelligence personnel and compelled a more detailed description. The definition was supplemented by identifying debriefing subjects: “The primary categories of sources for debriefing are military personnel (such as patrols), personnel who have been in contact with HN [host nation] personnel, business people who may have worked in the areas of interest (AOIs), and foreign personnel such as refugees and local inhabitants.”<sup>3</sup>

In a 2005 Directive, the Department of Defense expanded the debriefing discussion to define debriefing as “the process of questioning cooperating human sources to satisfy intelligence requirements, consistent with applicable law. A source may or may not be in custody. His or her willingness to cooperate need not be immediate or constant. The debriefer may continue to ask questions until it is clear to the debriefer that the person is not willing to volunteer information or respond to questioning.”<sup>4</sup> For the first time, a definition introduced debriefing sources as willing subjects. This was a breakthrough in the perception of debriefing as an effective tool for gathering intelligence, as practitioners realized the importance of cooperation and consent. Subsequently, socio-psychological considerations began to play a vital role in the conduct of debriefing, which contributed to developing

specific techniques that strengthened the effectiveness of debriefing methods. This added a new dimension to the evolving definition of debriefing, to include the “systematic questioning of individuals to procure information to answer specific collection requirements by direct and indirect questioning techniques.”<sup>5</sup> Supporting explanations such as “systematically covering topics and areas with a voluntary source who consents to a formal interview”<sup>6</sup> and “the process of using direct questions to elicit intelligence information from a cooperative detainee to satisfy intelligence requirements”<sup>7</sup> amplified the evolving definition. The military intelligence community further identified primary source categories such as friendly forces and civilians, “including refugees, displaced persons (DPs), third-country nationals, and local inhabitants.”<sup>8</sup>

Collaboration between the source and the collector is a fundamental element of debriefing. It allows decision-makers to decide whether the source’s personal situation may influence their willingness to cooperate. “Typically, refugee sources do not require immediate extraction of intelligence. Later on, these sources may be willing to contribute information. This may be due to the personal situation which may include being in custody or detained.”<sup>9</sup> The search for suitable and cooperative sources drove the development of human source operations activities. From this point, practitioners started recognizing debriefing as a sophisticated process organized in a formal, planned manner.

While this approach to information sources improved the chances of obtaining accurate and required information regarding the adversary’s attitude and intentions, it necessitated employing only trained, educated, and certified personnel.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the responsibility for developing a positive relationship with the source and creating a friendly atmosphere became the collector’s primary responsibility. Collectors had greater flexibility in scheduling meetings with the source, considering the time and place of arranged meetings from the source’s perspective<sup>11</sup> to “maximize the quality and quantity of information obtained.”<sup>12</sup>

Because debriefing often gathered information from Soldiers after missions, it provided opportunities to develop future courses of action and reduce mistakes. It also allowed practitioners to employ the more positive aspects of their missions, which became recommendations and standards. This approach and its benefits carried over into the civilian sphere, with applications in education, business, and healthcare. From this perspective, debriefing was perceived as “a discrete moment in the qualitative data collection process where a research manager sits with a data collector (or data collection team) to discuss the tenor, flow, and resulting findings from a recently undertaken data collection activity”<sup>13</sup> and “focused conversations usually led by a facilitator (‘debriefeer’) with learners (‘debriefees’) that typically occur directly following

a simulation experience to reflect on aspects of the simulation, exploring and addressing learner’s needs.”<sup>14</sup>

These definitions appear compatible with military goals and highlight the importance of the data collection process. Moreover, immediate action is fundamental to preventing data collection delays and degraded data quality. Similar to the military approach, Roxanne Gardner noted in her 2013 paper that “debriefing provides opportunities for exploring and making sense of what happened during an event or experience, discussing what went well and identifying what could be done to change, improve and do differently or better next time.”<sup>15</sup> This approach includes the collection process and data analysis, similar to an after action review. Many civilian domains are trying to build their debriefing models by adapting military lessons learned collection techniques; meanwhile, the military intelligence branch is investigating tactics and techniques to strengthen the effectiveness of intelligence collection. From this perspective, the collector seeks knowledge of specific value from the debriefing.

In his 2016 study “The Value of Debriefing,” William M. Duke proposed two aspects of knowledge: explicit and tacit. He noted that explicit knowledge includes data that can be written or stored, while tacit knowledge consists of data kept in the back of peoples’ minds.<sup>16</sup> The availability of tacit knowledge requires added measures and precautions for its exploration. Intelligence use involves employing measures such as an analysis of the approach to the source, cultural considerations, the mental condition of the source, and the availability of trained personnel.

NATO influenced the development of the current, more modern definition of debriefing. As the definition evolved, the historical record in *the Official NATO Terminology Database* introduced debriefing as “the systematic questioning of a willing individual to obtain information of operational or intelligence significance.”<sup>17</sup> During the NATO terminology approval process, however, the intelligence community promoted a more modern definition: “In intelligence usage, the formal and systematic questioning of consenting individuals by personnel trained in human intelligence in order to gather information of intelligence value.”<sup>18</sup> This rewording emphasizes the relevance of the intelligence descriptor and expands the previous description of debriefing into a *formal* and systematic process. In April 2023, this more modern definition obtained NATO Agreed status.

## The Cognitive Debriefing Model

In his 2020 study *Human Sources, Managing Confidential Informants*, John Buckley presents a common approach to debriefing. He proposes a modern debriefing style, presented in the following tables. The process is broken into 5 stages, further divided into 22 steps. Each table introduces one of the five stages; the first column reflects the steps included in

the stage, and the second column lists a description of activities and advice to consider for each step. The third column provides supportive advice adapted to HUMINT from civilian domains such as education and healthcare.

**Stage 1.** This stage includes all preparatory activity before the planned meeting with the source. This stage should focus on training HUMINT personnel in social competencies that emphasize adapting to the situation. Collectors' personality traits determine their ability to acquire these necessary social competencies. For example, HUMINT personnel should be

able to correctly interpret the source's statements and behaviors and react with empathy. The ability of collectors to project an appropriate emotional response significantly impacts the scope of their ongoing relationship with the source.

When it comes to physical barriers, collectors should consider the physical arrangement of the meeting place, such as their choice of seats, seating arrangements, and adequate room lighting, as well as other equipment (e.g., furnishings and décor) conducive to a suitable debriefing climate.

Table 1. Stage 1: Prepare and Plan<sup>19</sup>

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	ACTIONS AND ADVICE FOR HUMINT COLLECTORS
<b>RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify the state of the collector/source relationship, including the welfare and productivity perspective.</li> <li>○ Assess the source's current behavior.</li> <li>○ Identify unresolved matters from previous meetings.</li> <li>○ Determine options for dealing with identified problems.</li> <li>○ Decide a future course of action.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assess the collector's expertise and familiarity with conducting experience-based debriefing activities.<sup>20</sup></li> <li>○ Consider factors that can influence engagement in the activity.<sup>21</sup></li> <li>○ Study the source by analyzing and learning about their behavior patterns, level of access, any previous contacts, interests, occupations, etc.<sup>22</sup></li> <li>○ Address preliminary considerations adequately so they do not hinder or prevent the source's full participation in the debrief, regardless of how well planned.<sup>23</sup></li> <li>○ Consider a source's developmental needs and characteristics. In keeping with the tenets of developmentally appropriate practice, collectors must be aware of and responsive to their sources' cognitive development, emotional maturity, and life experiences.<sup>24</sup></li> <li>○ Assess your adaptability to the given source.<sup>25</sup></li> </ul>
<b>INTELLIGENCE REQUIREMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify the expected information.</li> <li>○ Develop specific questions for the source.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assess the source's knowledge and skills relative to the topic.<sup>26</sup></li> <li>○ Begin with identifying the intended objectives.<sup>27</sup></li> <li>○ Think, "What do I need to know to accomplish the mission?"<sup>28</sup></li> </ul>
<b>EQUIPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Decide what supportive equipment to take for the meeting.</li> <li>○ Determine meeting expenditures.</li> <li>○ Determine source expenditures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide access to the instructions and materials needed.<sup>29</sup></li> <li>○ Consider the physical characteristics and accessibility of the meeting space.<sup>30</sup></li> <li>○ Devise a coherent, achievable plan with the data available.<sup>31</sup></li> </ul>
<b>OPERATIONAL PLAN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Determine how the source will come into physical contact with the handler.</li> <li>○ Determine where and how the activity will take place.</li> <li>○ Identify defensive surveillance involvement.</li> <li>○ Give the source instructions regarding the time and place of the meeting.</li> <li>○ Confirm the source clearly understands details related to the meeting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Select the specific participatory strategy and plan the activity upon which the debrief will be based.<sup>32</sup></li> <li>○ Create a safe debriefing space. When the source perceives the debriefing place as physically and emotionally secure, they can feel free to participate despite facing difficult and unfamiliar challenges.<sup>33</sup></li> <li>○ Cultivate a positive climate. A positive environment fosters source engagement, encourages cooperation and collaboration, and improves outcomes.<sup>34</sup></li> <li>○ Focus on describing models and attributes of exemplary performance, identifying and elucidating incremental steps that lead to success, and formulating plans for revising one's actions during future activity.<sup>35</sup></li> <li>○ Assess the amount of available time.<sup>36</sup></li> <li>○ Write a draft of reflection and discussion that will guide the source through each debrief phase.<sup>37</sup></li> <li>○ Plan the operation in a detailed, organized manner.<sup>38</sup></li> <li>○ Break plans down into smaller, shorter-range plans.<sup>39</sup></li> </ul>

**Stage 2.** This stage provides substantial guidance for the collector and concentrates on the first minutes of interaction with the source. It includes advice for building rapport with the source, guidance the collector should provide to the source, and an explanation of what collectors should expect from the delivered information.

The ability to interact effectively with another person is critical to productive debriefing. It influences the effectiveness of initiating and maintaining contact, the success of bilateral negotiations, and the final decision to terminate the relationship. Making sources aware that they are completely understood and demonstrating empathy increases the likelihood of building deep trust with the collector.

Table 2. Stage 2: Engagement<sup>40</sup>

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	ACTIONS AND ADVICE FOR HUMINT COLLECTORS
ENTRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Initiate initial physical contact between source and collector.</li> <li>○ Use effective non-verbal communication.</li> <li>○ Think about the manner of greeting.</li> <li>○ Determine who will do what and say what.</li> <li>○ Determine who will sit where and the impact space/proximity will have.</li> <li>○ Plan provisioning of refreshments and ambiance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Personal appearance and demeanor are relevant aspects. The source will also evaluate and judge the collector.<sup>41</sup></li> <li>○ Introduce themselves.<sup>42</sup></li> <li>○ Be polite.<sup>43</sup></li> <li>○ Dress appropriately to the source and the location.<sup>44</sup></li> <li>○ Investing a few minutes to review the qualities of effective cooperation and the expectations for participation in the debriefing will help ensure a positive experience for everyone.<sup>45</sup></li> </ul>
SECURITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Be alert from the initial entrance. The primary concern is when contact begins.</li> <li>○ Think about the source's immediate security concerns.</li> <li>○ Focus on factors to regain the source's safety in the event of a detrimental occurrence.</li> <li>○ Maintain awareness of available time for the meeting.</li> <li>○ Plan a valid reason for attending the meeting and provide a rationale for this event.</li> <li>○ Ensure the source has a locked phone.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Adapt to different personalities and all types of locations, operational rhythms, and environments.<sup>46</sup></li> <li>○ Tell a credible cover story.<sup>47</sup></li> <li>○ Be alert at all times. Constantly assess the value and veracity of information, the source's behavior, and its influence on the security of the environment where the encounter occurs.<sup>48</sup></li> <li>○ Assure the source that the discussion is confidential.<sup>49</sup></li> </ul>
RELATIONSHIP AND WELFARE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Build rapport.</li> <li>○ Build source-centric relations.</li> <li>○ Concentrate on the forthcoming tasks and review the conversation, if needed.</li> <li>○ Think about the mood of the source judgment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tailor the discussion to match the unique parameters or demands of the activity, objectives, and the developmental needs and attributes of the source.<sup>50</sup></li> </ul>
AGENDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Determine what information must, should, and could be obtained.</li> <li>○ Execute the intended course of the debrief, including different things planned to debate.</li> <li>○ Avoid topics that cause stress to the source, and postpone if necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Meet the goals set for the encounter.<sup>51</sup></li> <li>○ Keep the initiative during the encounter, and avoid irritation or anger if the meeting does not go as expected.<sup>52</sup></li> </ul>
EXPLANATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Present a detailed explanation of the interview process.</li> <li>○ Present an explanation of the Reporting Everything technique and its meaning.</li> <li>○ Encourage the source to provide details that lie within their knowledge.</li> <li>○ Use encouraging phrases.</li> <li>○ Illustrate the depth of expected descriptions (i.e., people, events, things).</li> <li>○ Note non-verbal communication exhibited by the source.</li> <li>○ Do not pressure the source. If the source feels pressured to give more complete information, it could damage their self-esteem. (They may be tempted to omit the topic or introduce limited information).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Providing the source with basic rules for the debriefing can improve psychological safety and prevent potential problems.<sup>53</sup></li> <li>○ Help the source to develop a rich and detailed, collective understanding of what happened during the event<sup>54</sup>—establish a shared mental model.<sup>55</sup></li> <li>○ Interrogatives such as who, what, when, where, why, and how, also known as the Five Ws and an H, or as journalists' questions, provide a simple framework for generating open-ended discussion prompts.<sup>56</sup></li> <li>○ Introduce the debrief by explaining the overall purpose, how it relates to the objectives and goals of each phase, and how they will be conducted.<sup>57</sup></li> </ul>

During this stage, making a positive first impression on the source is crucial, so the collector should make every effort to appear trustworthy. This requires a wide range of body language skills and the ability to control posture and facial expressions to reflect the source's expectations. The collector must adapt to the source by credibly mirroring the source's body language and manner of speaking; it is also essential to recognize how much feedback the source is willing to accept. Thus, the collector must recognize and interpret the source's habit patterns, behaviors, vocabulary, and even their manner of dress.

In his 2014 *Journal of Neuroscience* article, psychologist J. B. Freeman noted that trust in unknown people is determined subconsciously and instantly based on facial expressions.<sup>58</sup> His research highlights the significance of a collector having a predisposition to perform tasks related to conversations with another human. A high level of interpersonal skills gives the collector a distinct advantage and is based on an awareness and desire to obtain information from the source.

Self-presentation significantly impacts the effectiveness and course of a conversation. First impressions determine the source's initial attitude toward the collector, and maintaining the source's trust guarantees the success of the chosen debriefing strategy. Distrust, however, may cause the source to withdraw and resort to confabulation out of fear for their safety.

It is also important for the collector to ensure that the source tells them everything. The collector should explain the *reporting everything* technique to the source, who should understand that sometimes even trivial information makes sense and is valuable. Even small pieces of information the source provides can affect the operational environment.

**Stage 3.** This stage, which implements socio-psychological aspects and skills, forms the bulk of the debriefing process. Here, collectors use specialized techniques and methods to gather information. The collector should demonstrate conscious action to build trust with the source. They should strive for a situation where the source will enjoy the dialogue and believe they have made the right choice in speaking with the collector. The collector should show interest not only in the content of the conversation but also in the source as a person.

Elicitation, a widely used marketing technique, is a primary aspect of conducting effective debriefing. It consists of extracting criteria about the source's value system and then redirecting the conversation through skillful guidance and stimulation to a specific area of the collector's interest. Selection of the motivational criteria allows the collector to build an information-gathering strategy based on positive knowledge gained during the debriefing and negative values the source manifests. This technique lets the collector keep control of the situation while paving the way for future conversations.

Verbal communication barriers between the collector and the source carry a risk of failure to achieve the desired result. Barriers such as incomprehensible linguistic content, problematic speaking pace, or ambiguous language can present challenges and may distort events described by the source. By using the paraphrasing technique—repeating what the source has just related using different words and phrasing—the collector can confirm that the source's intentions are consistent with their feelings and the way of understanding what they heard. This technique clarifies ambiguous language and confirms whether the information obtained is consistent with the source's original meaning. Paraphrasing also reassures the source that the collector is actively listening, encouraging the source to engage on a deeper level and actively participate in the conversation.

The collector should speak at a pace that allows the source to understand what they are saying. Speaking too slowly or too quickly could disturb the flow of the conversation, negatively affecting not just the conversation itself but the quality of the relationship between the collector and the source. The collector should tailor their mode of speech to the source. Using sophisticated vocabulary may negatively affect the source's self-esteem and could result in a hostile attitude and a desire to break off the relationship. At the same time, the collector must take care to avoid oversimplification—the source may perceive this as condescension, with the same negative outcome.

Depending on the situation, collectors may use different types of listening, such as cognitive, critical, and empathic:

- ◆ Cognitive listening uses systematic, targeted questioning to gain deeper information, explanations, and organization of the content.
- ◆ Critical listening analyzes content, opinions, facts, arguments, and their meaning. In this case, the collector must assess the source's credibility through the criteria of the consistency and logic of the presented facts.
- ◆ Empathic listening views the perceived environment from the source's perspective through understanding and use of shared emotions.

Another important technique is active listening, which includes remembering, understanding, engaging, reacting, exchanging ideas (which also establishes cooperation), effort, time, and the ability to overcome perceived barriers. Barriers to active listening include hearing problems, information overload, running away from the topic, personal biases, intense emotions, noise, and physical, physiological, and psychological conditions. Active listening is the collector's responsibility, and they should demonstrate that by having a positive attitude toward the source, maintaining an open posture, and evincing self-control and patience. Maintaining eye contact,

Table 3. Stage 3: Accounting<sup>59</sup>

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	ACTIONS AND ADVICE FOR HUMINT COLLECTORS
<b>CONTEXT REINSTATEMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Memory recall—debrief the source where the event occurred and under similar circumstances when possible.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The source should picture the place of the event as clearly as possible.</li> <li>○ The source should envision everything that happened at the time of the event.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Allow the source to feel they have control over the topic and manner of discussion.</li> <li>○ Determine the amount of time sufficient to discuss each event.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Prompt the source to provide an objective account of what happened, their unique point of view, descriptions, and observations regarding other involved parties.<sup>60</sup></li> </ul>
<b>FREE RECALL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Allow the source to recount information without interruption.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage the source to start where they want.</li> <li>○ Make no effort to separate the events.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Do not interrupt or interject during the conversation. Inappropriate collector behavior can break the source's concentration and reinforce the undesirable perception of domination.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Once a collector interrupts, the source cannot retrieve the same information.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Be empathic.<sup>61</sup></li> <li>○ Be a good listener.<sup>62</sup></li> <li>○ Read the source's body language and pay attention to the above requirements.<sup>63</sup></li> <li>○ Give the source time to deal with reactions and emotions.<sup>64</sup></li> </ul>
<b>QUESTIONING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Employ non-confrontational methods.</li> <li>○ Ask subtle rather than blunt questions (poorly structured questions confuse the source and damage their trust).</li> <li>○ Avoid closed and leading questions.</li> <li>○ Use open questions that guarantee more accurate and complete answers, encouraging further recall and leading to more specific questions.</li> <li>○ Ascertain the provenance of information. Clarify how the source obtained the information and how it might influence source perception.</li> <li>○ Ask all questions relevant to one event at a time. Do not jump from event to event.</li> <li>○ Collect the known information along with the unknown.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Examine the similarities between the information provided and that which is already known.<sup>65</sup></li> <li>○ Avoid outbursts or displays of impatience, as these may cause a source to lose respect for the collector and become less willing to convey the information.<sup>66</sup></li> <li>○ Objectivity may cause unconsciously distorted information analysis and prevent the collector from using questioning techniques effectively.<sup>67</sup></li> <li>○ Use questions to stimulate reflection and expose the source's thinking processes.<sup>68</sup></li> <li>○ Incorporate clear objectives into each event.<sup>69</sup></li> <li>○ Ask open-ended questions to facilitate discussion and foster reflection and self-assessment.<sup>70</sup></li> <li>○ Be patient after posing questions and use silence effectively as a tool, allowing it to take place as needed. Silence during the debriefing is precious for the participants.<sup>71</sup></li> </ul>
<b>VARIED RETRIEVAL AND CLARIFICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use different techniques depending on the context of the debriefing:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Perspective change: Let the source retell the event from a different perspective (i.e., view from a different place or another set of eyes).</li> <li>○ Temporal order change: Let the source tell the story backward from the end, starting from the most salient point.</li> <li>○ Retrieval prompts: Let the source act out what happened or draw out the location, then collect additional information using the source's sketches as an aid.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Ask the source to consider the five senses (hearing, seeing, smell, taste, and touch). This will help refresh the event details.</li> <li>○ Let the source imagine what involved persons looked like or how their names sounded. This can draw out more details.</li> <li>○ Assess gathered details and clarify any anomalies. The collector should take ownership of the lack of clarity to avoid threatening the source.</li> <li>○ Do not spend too much time on any one specific topic. Doing so allows the source to assess the importance of this knowledge to the collector.</li> <li>○ A second collector should interject when a piece of missed information is spotted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Act as a conversational guide and ensure that the relevant issues (e.g., objectives) that occurred during the simulation event or were identified a priori are discussed and that the debriefing conversation flows smoothly and does not go off track.<sup>72</sup></li> <li>○ Analyze the relationship between the information and skills used during the debriefing content.<sup>73</sup></li> <li>○ Use higher-order cognitive and critical thinking skills to clarify the lessons learned.<sup>74</sup></li> <li>○ Draft a timeline describing the events in the order in which they occurred.<sup>75</sup></li> <li>○ Create a diagram depicting the individuals involved and what each of them did or said.<sup>76</sup></li> <li>○ Use the circular questions technique to track behavior patterns, generate new information, and foster perspective-taking (relation and description from third person perspective).<sup>77</sup></li> </ul>

Table 3. Stage 3: Accounting (continued)

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	ACTIONS AND ADVICE FOR HUMINT COLLECTORS
<p><b>CONFIRMATION AND COMMENT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Confirm that the collected facts are understood correctly.</li> <li>○ Inform the source that your narration can be interrupted with any new information or if there are any errors.</li> <li>○ Systematically summarize the details and try to follow each event in order.</li> <li>○ Stop speaking and actively listen if the source interrupts the narration.</li> <li>○ Add commentary to ensure the source understands the facts and feels involved.</li> <li>○ Invite the source to add their opinion. The source has expert knowledge that can be useful from an intelligence perspective.</li> <li>○ Discuss with the source any intelligence requirements not answered by the gathered information, as well as previous tasks or requests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify the information provided and compare it to the objectives.<sup>78</sup></li> <li>○ Close the session by summarizing the main points discussed.<sup>79</sup></li> <li>○ Recap the topics addressed in the encounter.<sup>80</sup></li> <li>○ Allow the source to analyze and self-correct the information provided.<sup>81</sup></li> <li>○ Provide the source with feedback to improve future performance.<sup>82</sup></li> </ul>

mirroring the source’s non-verbal communication, and discernment in seeking clarification are effective supplements to active listening.

Collectors can use active listening techniques interchangeably to create favorable conditions for obtaining information. These techniques include—

- ◆ Adjusting to the source: maintaining eye contact and offering physical cues such as nodding the head and brief positive vocalizations in response to the source’s statements.
- ◆ Comprehension check: confirming with the source that the collector correctly understood the information.
- ◆ Interview: asking the source specific questions to clarify meaning and eliminate confusion.
- ◆ Emotional acceptance: displaying empathy to reassure the source that their feelings are valid.
- ◆ Involvement level of the parties: determining the source’s level of investment in the conversation and the likelihood that they will maintain interest.
- ◆ Source testing: using several types of questions (e.g., topical, follow-up, nonpertinent, repeat, and control) to verify the integrity of the source’s information.
- ◆ Approbation: offering approval and encouragement of the source’s behavior and views.
- ◆ Juxtaposition: asking questions to compare information the source provides against information the collector already knows.
- ◆ Point of the matter: following the key facts of the conversation and returning to them if the conversation strays.

- ◆ Paraphrasing: summarizing what the source has said and repeating it back to them in the collector’s own words.
- ◆ Editorial changes to presented facts: making statements containing facts that the source has not provided to reveal inconsistencies and untruths.
- ◆ Alternative: the collector’s impartial response to the presented facts and descriptions without consideration for the source’s narrative.
- ◆ Counterproposal: presentation of the opposite perspective to force the source to reveal the real reason for their actions.
- ◆ Source impeachment: calling the source’s integrity into question in the hope that this will push the source into a defensive posture, thus offering more details to prove their reliability.

Only some of these techniques are desirable from a debriefing perspective; however, depending on the source’s behavior they can nevertheless be useful to the collector.

**Stage 4.** Known as the “progression stage,” this stage is primarily concerned with source development and focuses on the source’s ongoing ability to gather information. Collectors must consider the source’s situation as a fundamental influence on their attitude toward information expectations. At this point, the collector and source should address the context of the information the source provides, the collector’s feedback on the importance of the information, and the source’s efforts to transfer the information. This stage is a suitable time for the collector to advise the source on how they should conduct themselves in the future to maintain safety and create the opportunity to provide information of intelligence value.

Table 4. Stage 4: Progression<sup>83</sup>

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	ACTIONS AND ADVICE FOR HUMINT COLLECTORS
CONSULTATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Determine what the source could and should do next.</li> <li>○ Maximize information to assess source safety.</li> <li>○ Listen carefully to what the source can or cannot achieve.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Co-debriefing</i><sup>84</sup> includes the potential for collectors to complement each other's styles, provide a larger pool of expertise and viewpoints, and cross-monitor and manage source expectations and needs.<sup>85</sup></li> </ul>
TASKING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tasking is fundamental to a productive source relationship.</li> <li>○ Ensure the source agrees to the task/request.</li> <li>○ Be clear regarding task priorities.</li> </ul>	
EQUIPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Equip the source with the necessary skills.</li> <li>○ Train the source in the operational aspects of their role.</li> <li>○ Record training in the contact note.</li> </ul>	
RECOGNITION AND REWARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recognize the value of the source's information and the effort made to obtain it.</li> <li>○ Address the source's motives concerning self-esteem and sense of belonging to a team.</li> <li>○ Discuss rewards or reimbursements.</li> <li>○ Give the source clear information regarding the impact of the information they provided. The source should see the positive aspects of their efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emphasize that all contributions to the discussion, no matter how small or from whom, are beneficial and contribute to the collective understanding of what happened and what it might mean.<sup>86</sup></li> <li>○ Articulate complex situations and concepts, behave believably and consistently, follow through on any promises, and refrain from making promises that cannot be kept.<sup>87</sup></li> </ul>

Table 5. Stage 5: Closure<sup>88</sup>

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY	ACTIONS AND ADVICE FOR HUMINT COLLECTORS
RAPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Concentrate on personal and social issues relating to the source.</li> <li>○ Lightening the source mood.</li> <li>○ Show genuine concern for the source's well-being.</li> </ul>	
FUTURE CONTACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Offer the source a tentative agreement on when the next meeting will occur.</li> <li>○ Gain agreement from all parties on the next contact.</li> <li>○ Remind the source to get in touch immediately if they encounter sensitive information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Set up a future meeting with the source.<sup>89</sup></li> </ul>
SECURITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Comment on any matters related to the source's safety.</li> <li>○ Make sure that the source has no security concerns.</li> </ul>	
EXIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Activities should not draw the eyes of a third party.</li> <li>○ Allow the source to leave the location first if the location is a public place.</li> <li>○ Return to the place of work securely.</li> </ul>	




**Stage 5.** In this final stage, which concentrates on report-building details and security measures, the collector ensures that the source is secure following the meeting and that there are no concerns about their pattern of life before the next intelligence activity. Third-party suspicions aimed at the source may also target the collector, which can have a detrimental effect on intelligence operations.

## Conclusion

A hybrid approach to debriefing could positively affect the research and development of modern debriefing tools. The new debriefing model appears more generic in its approach to the source and allows the collector to adapt the most effective tactics and techniques during debriefing. The proposed model should encourage researchers in this direction, especially regarding intelligence applications.

The cognitive debriefing model demonstrates the importance of structured consistency in ongoing HUMINT activity. Moreover, it highlights the complexity of debriefing, which includes organizational and execution aspects. This approach is compatible with the latest terminology and fulfills its core demands.

The model presented here employs soft socio-psychological skills, which are the main pillars of this type of intelligence activity. The intelligence community should implement these skills into the training domain and consider them when recruiting HUMINT personnel. 

## Endnotes

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