How to Become a **Mouthpiece** for the People

A Manual for

Investigative Journalism

with Case Studies from South East Europe

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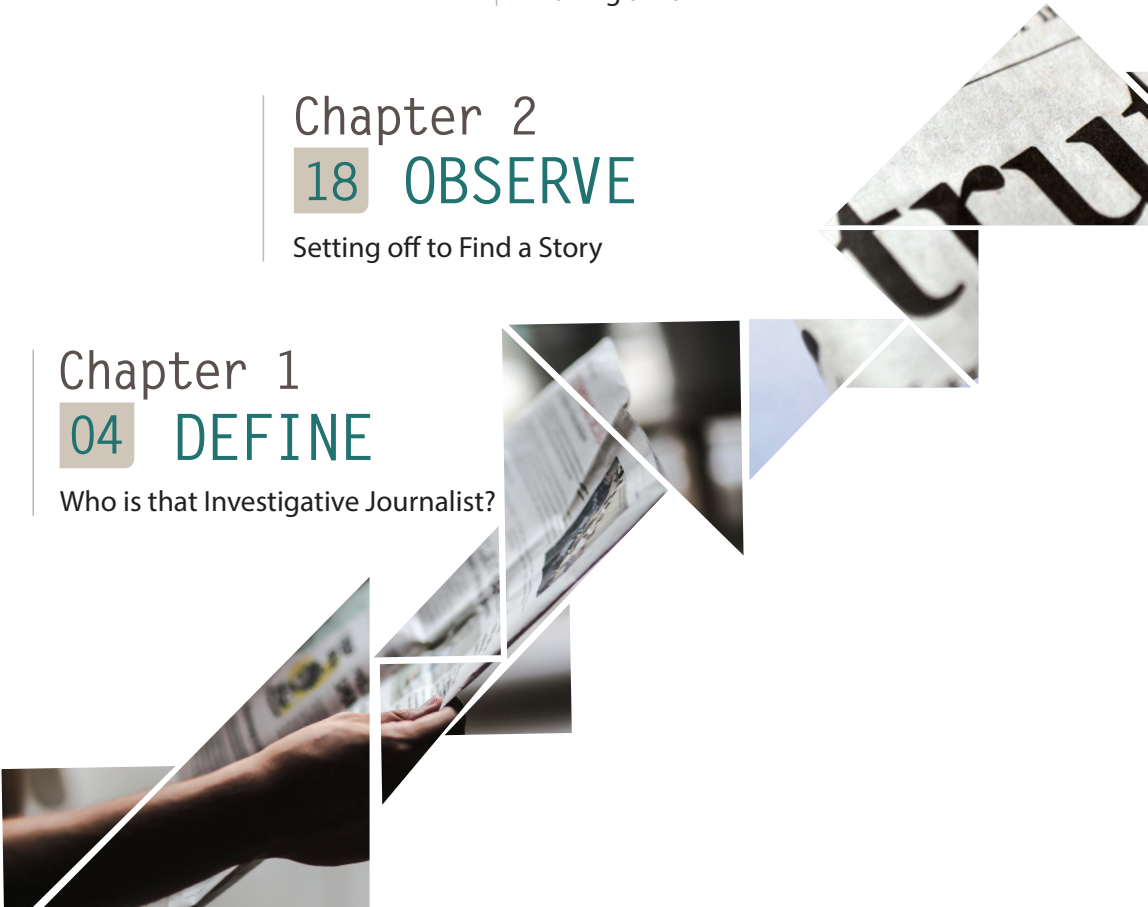
WHO IS THAT INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST?

This chapter defines the practice of investigative journalism, its mission and objectives. It reflects upon the differences between investigative and routine journalism. The chapter also discusses the skills and personal qualities of investigative journalists and specific topics and approaches appropriate for investigative reporting.

How to Define Investigative Journalism?

Investigative Journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters go in-depth to investigate a single story that may uncover corruption, review government policies or of corporate houses, or draw attention to social, economic, political or cultural trends. An investigative journalist, or team of journalists, may spend months or years researching a single topic. Unlike conventional reporting, where reporters rely on materials supplied by the government, NGOs and other agencies, investigative reporting depends on material gathered through the reporter's own initiative. The practice aims at exposing public matters that are otherwise concealed, either deliberately or accidently.

Investigative journalism requires the reporter to dig deeply into an issue or topic of public interest. 'Public interest' refers to a quality whereby a community will be disadvantaged by not knowing this information, or will benefit (either materially or through informed decision-making) by knowing it. Sometimes, information that benefits one community may disadvantage another. For example, forest-dwellers can demand better prices if they know the market value of trees that logging companies want to fell. Of course, the logging industry does not want this information revealed, as tree prices will rise. An entire country need not be affected by the story and indeed, 'public interest' is often differentiated from 'national interest'. Latter term is sometimes used by governments to justify illegal, dangerous or unethical acts or to discourage journalists from reporting on a significant problem.

Investigative journalism is not instantaneous. It develops through recognised stages of planning, researching and reporting, and has to adhere to accepted standards of accuracy and evidence. The base of an investigative story is the pro-active work of a journalist and, where resources permit, his or her team. After receiving a story tip, journalists develop hypotheses, plan additional research, decide on the relevant questions, and go out to investigate them. They must compile evidence by witnessing and analysing answers for themselves, such that they go far beyond simply verifying the tip. The final story should reveal new information or assemble previously available information in a new way to reveal its significance. A single source can provide fascinating revelations, access to insights and information that would otherwise be hidden. But until the story from that source is cross-checked against other sources – experiential, documentary and human – and its meaning is explored, it does not classify as investigation.

| RESEARCH | MEET | ASK | WRITE |

Investigative reporting calls for greater resources, team work and more time than a routine news report. Many stories are the result of team investigations. But this poses problems for small, local and community publications with limited time, money, staff or specialised skills. A journalist may need to seek grants to support an investigation and learn to tap the skills of individuals outside the newsroom to help with specialist expertise.

Congolese Journalist Sage-Fidèle Gayala puts forward the arguments for and against team work:

It can be productive to work in a small team, where you have established that each participant has a useful specialisation. One can do the investigation on the ground, another can specialise in research and compiling documentation and the third in writing up the story. A team has a good chance of working quickly and breaking a story in a timely fashion. But we must also recognise that many newsrooms in the countries where we work are not clean. Newsroom players can be drawn in many ways into the traps laid by industry, business or policy-makers, whether these involve threats or 'buying' journalists. Even many of our newspapers themselves have dubious origins, having been given start-up funding by one interest group or another. Editors are primary targets, and sometimes the main offenders, and when working in such a context a young journalist will have great difficulty in completing an investigative project.

Are investigative journalists detectives?

If referring to the skills detectives employ, the answer is 'yes', journalists are detectives. Every investigative story starts with a question. The journalist researches the question to formulate a hypothesis about its answer and social meaning. He or she then does more research: following paper trails, conducting interviews that may sometimes feel more like interrogations, and putting together a mass of evidence – some of which is extremely detailed or technical.

Journalists apply recognised standards (related to those used in a court of law) as to what counts as valid evidence and whether it adds up to conclusive proof. Because laws of defamation exist, the standard of a journalist's investigation and fact-checking should not differ from those of a detective putting together a prosecution case.

Sometimes, what really should be asked is: 'Is it ok for investigative journalists to behave like detectives, including working undercover and using techniques such as hidden microphones and cameras?' The answer here is more complicated. Investigative journalists – including some of the best – do use these techniques. But it is worth remembering that the scope of a detective's undercover work, and the rights of citizens being investigated by the police, are usually governed by legal framework. Journalists rely on their own ethics and are not exempt from privacy laws. So, in order to ensure ethical journalism and to avoid prosecution, investigative journalists need to carefully consider each situation before they act in this way. Hidden cameras and recorders only add to a store of raw evidence and do not substitute for analysing, checking and contextualising this evidence and constructing a meaningful story. A huge amount of evidence is available in publicly accessible documents, if you simply know where to look and how to put it together.

While investigative journalists and detectives are similar in many ways, they also conduct work that differs. Sometimes the purpose of journalistic investigations is not to prove guilt but simply to bear witness. Detectives stop when they can prove who committed the crime. Investigative reporting goes further than simply finding an answer. It gathers the right facts and gets the facts right. It reveals the meaning of the story, and shows a pattern in events, actions or evidence. Thereby, investigative stories explain the context and subtleties of an issue, rather than simply pointing a finger at the accused. It is by reaching this degree of depth in their work that investigative journalists can minimise concerns about their objectivity.

Certainly, investigative reporting, which has been called 'the journalism of outrage', does not seek to produce an artificially balanced account of two sides of a story. Instead, this practice is more concerned with being certain about the story that will be presented. There should be no equivocating about 'We may be wrong' or 'We might be misinterpreting'. If such doubts still exist, the investigation has not gone deep enough, and the story is not ready to be published. There are never only two sides to a story. And balance in an investigative story comes from explaining these many facets and conveying not only what happens, but why. A detective leaves the explanation of mitigating circumstances to defence lawyers; an investigative journalist explains the full context.

In another sense, investigative journalists also act as scientists. Their methods require keeping an open mind until they have amassed enough evidence to support a story idea. That means not ignoring contradicting evidence, and being receptive to changing conclusions if evidence points in a different direction. In all those ways, journalists' work resembles the scientific process where researchers put forward a hypothesis and test it to know whether it is correct.

Investigative journalists are also managers. On big, long-term projects that involve deep research, investigative journalists need to work with other team members and experts to stick to the story plan. For that, these individuals need to master clear communication and teamwork.

Myths about investigative reporting

myth 1   **It is glamorous and can be career-defining to the point of celebrity.**

Perhaps this is why the people on the cover of 'All the President's Men' are **not** the Watergate journalists but the actors who played them: Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman. So wake up! Reality shows that investigative journalism is hard, humdrum and sometimes dangerous work.

myth 2   **Journalists are bigger than the stories they report.**

Investigative journalism is a public service, not an ego trip, and being an investigative journalist gives you no right to flout professional ethical standards.

myth 3   **The investigative journalist is a kind of Lone Ranger.**

From a film-making point of view, it is practical to have one hero because action can revolve around a single individual. In reality however, investigative journalism is not sustainable unless it is a team effort.

myth 4

Investigative journalism is mainly driven by the private media.

Partly, this is true. But there are also well-known examples where government-owned media have undertaken ground-breaking investigations against government.

myth 5

Investigative journalism focuses only on bad news.

The priority for communities and the media that serve them is to discover and correct wrongs. But investigative journalism also has a role in uncovering positive news. For example, counteracting unbalanced, negative images of people or communities could form the basis of real and good investigative stories. Besides that, it is this type of investigative journalism – also known as 'muck-raking' – that makes the public unhappy. Simple scandal-mongering may have no purpose beyond appealing to people's nosiness about the private lives of others. To be worth investigating, a scandal must go beyond personal misbehaviour into issues that truly affect the public interest.

myth 6

Investigative reporting is simply good reporting.

This definition comes out of the traditional view of journalists as 'watchdogs', whose mission is to sniff out wrongs, point fingers at those to blame, and report in a way that brings about change. And that is certainly part of their role. It is important that corrupt individuals are stopped. But if an investigative report does not look beyond the criminals to the faulty system that permits such behaviour, it has simply cleared the ground for a new crop of crooks to do exactly the same thing (and has possibly taught them how to do it better). An investigative story needs to identify underlying problems and alert those who can close exposed loopholes. If those in power fail to do so, a further investigative story is needed to find out why. So, while investigative journalists must draw on all the skills of good reporting – observation, research and the determined pursuit of answers – these criteria alone do not completely define their work, nor make it distinct from other professions.

Why do Investigative Reporting?

Investigative journalism can be time-consuming, expensive and risky. And often, investigative journalists need to convince their editors that it is worth undertaking when day-to-day events can produce a perfectly satisfactory newspaper. So why is investigative journalism worthwhile, and what are the primary objections to it?

In transitional countries, the owners of newspapers may believe investigative journalism to be a product of 'Western' culture, and it would not work in a developing country. But this practice does not always require extensive time and financial resources. There are examples of watchdog reporting where journalists have generated great investigative stories based on sheer determination and commitment.

Gavin MacFadyen, Director of the UK-based Centre for Investigative Journalism, made the point cogently:

When serious investigations appear, people talk about it. Many know, driven by word of mouth. Sales rise, viewing figures climb, programmes acquire real credibility and more importantly still they achieve a loyal following. When news really affects people, they talk about it and they will follow it. This seems to be true in most countries. It also affects the culture of the press. Editors and producers become more sophisticated practitioners, or more combative, knowing how to use media law to enable rather than put the brakes on exposure, building viewers and readers by more aggressive reporting.

Furthermore, investigative journalism helps build democracy. Reporting that never investigates beyond official releases allows those in power to set the agenda. And this type of news is made from the top down. Democratic principles, including popular participation, accountability and transparency of government, fail when media does not ask tough questions or provide information and analysis that investigates beyond the claims and counter-claims of competing factions. For the life of democracy, investigative journalism is the right thing to do.

How to Be(come) a Great Investigative Journalist?

◣ Passion

To investigative journalist Evelyn Groenink passion is the most important quality:

Most investigative journalism is a thankless endeavour, time- and energy-consuming that will get your editor impatient and powerful people annoyed with you. If you like a stable income with regular promotions, if your deepest wish is a management position with matching salary and if you enjoy being invited to dinners and parties given by VIPs in your country or community, then investigative journalism is probably not for you. But if you enjoy challenges, have a passion for truth and justice, and want to serve your readership or audience with stories that matter, regardless how much time and energy it costs you – and even if some powerful people will end up with maybe less-than-friendly feelings towards you – then, by all means, go for it!

◣ Curiosity

Asking questions is where investigative journalism starts. The questions can be about events in the news or about things you see or hear about in your everyday life.

◣ Initiative

Many newsrooms operate on limited resources and all run on tight deadlines. So an investigative idea mentioned at a news conference will not always be instantly adopted, particularly if it is uninformed and vague. Investigative journalists need to take the initiative, do their own preliminary research and shape the idea into a solid story plan. If the newsroom is still not interested, further initiative in identifying support (such as an investigative grant) for the work might be needed.

◣ Logical thinking, organisation and self-discipline

Investigative reporting takes time and, because of the legal risks it often carries, fine-grained verification. So you need to become a careful planner to make the best use of your time, be obsessive about checking and re-checking facts and make sure the story fits together.

► Flexibility

An investigation can take unexpected turns. Sometimes, the first question turns out to be a dead-end or opens the door on a far more interesting, but less obvious, question. Investigative journalists need to be prepared to rethink and redesign their research when this happens and not stay wedded to their initial ideas.

► Team spirit and communication skills

Movies often portray the investigative reporter as a 'lone wolf'. Sometimes, there are situations where secrecy is so important that a story cannot be shared with others until certain safeguards are in place. But very often the best stories come out of a co-operative effort that uses all available skills in (and even outside) the newsroom. For example, think about the successful work of the 'Spotlight' team, investigating the cases of child sex abuses by Catholic priests. An investigative story may call upon knowledge of anything from science and health to economics and sociology, and no single journalist, however broad their knowledge, can be an expert in all these areas. Good contacts and networking form part of this teamwork. Good communication forms another part, ensuring that the team understands the story's purpose and the standards (accuracy, honesty, confidentiality) expected by everyone contributing to it.

► Well-developed reporting skills

This does not necessarily mean having a degree in journalism, but rather having enough training and experience to know how to identify sources, plan story research, conduct good interviews (and sense when an answer does not ring true), and write accurately and informatively. Additionally, journalists need to know when they are out of their depth and should have the humility to ask for advice or help. If you are relatively inexperienced, good team work will help you to tap into the skills of others when the unexpected happens.

► Broad general knowledge and good research skills

Understanding the context of the investigation can help avoid dead ends by identifying relevant facts and questions. However, if the investigation leads into an unfamiliar area, investigative journalists must be able to familiarise themselves with the background, conventions, terminology, role-players and issues of that area quickly. The ability to have an informative

conversation with an expert, use search engines, or locate and skim-read useful books are all vital here. Above all, they must read everything, whenever they have the time. A bit of background might already be useful for the story.

▶ Fairness and strong ethics

Investigative stories may put the security, jobs or even lives of sources at risk. They are also susceptible to putting their subjects at similar risk if reckless accusations are made. So an investigative reporter needs to have strong, thoughtful personal ethics to ensure that sources and subjects are treated respectfully and – as far as possible – protected from harm. In addition, newsrooms that support investigative stories need to be guided by ethical codes and have a process in place for discussing and resolving ethical dilemmas. Sometimes, public trust is your best protection, and this is lost if you behave unethically.

▶ Discretion

Gossip does not make good investigative reports. Loose talk can put the investigation – and lives of those involved – at risk. In addition, it can tip off commercial rivals who will then scoop the story or alert interviewees before you get a chance to talk to them. In a range of ways, talking too much can sabotage the story.

▶ Citizenship

Investigative journalists are often attacked as 'unpatriotic'. However, investigative journalists are motivated by their concern for the public interest and work on stories that help make their communities better.

This chapter defined investigative journalism and explained its importance for the public interest. It underscored how it is not always easy for investigative journalists to convince their editors to support an investigative story. This mainly depends on how promising the story's findings could be. Therefore, the upcoming chapter will discuss how to find a story and ensure that you are not following false clues or tips.

State-Of-Play of Investigative Journalism in South East Europe

By Miranda Patrucić

Investigative journalism is one of the best tools to fight back against organised crime, corruption, and abuse of power. This is especially true in regions like South East Europe where corruption has eroded all aspects of society for decades and other democratic institutions besides an active press remain weak.

In recent years, however, established media outlets have noticeably retreated from quality investigative journalism. Financial pressure and lack of funding are partly to blame, but often a growing timidity to tackle investigations has resulted from the sway of political interests or businessmen close to ruling parties wield over media outlet owners and their editors. Skilled journalists displeased by the conflict of interests and determined to maintain independence have left mainstream outlets to form new investigative reporting centers or to join existing ones.

These centers are flourishing and are responsible for much of the important investigations into corruption at top levels of government: collusion between politics and special interests, bribery, public spending, and theft of national resources.

Not surprisingly, the powerful and influential are striking back against these self-appointed watchdogs. The idea of being held accountable and answerable to informed citizens apprised of their dishonesty and incompetence holds little appeal. So they have worked to turn journalists into public enemies.

There are many cases where investigative reporters in the region are openly harassed by officials who regard them as enemies of the state. Government-controlled media outlets are utilised to scrutinise the private lives of journalists and to denounce or ridicule them. The powerful also harass investigators through the courts with frivolous lawsuits that are nonetheless expensive and time-consuming to fight. And finally, regional reporters have been verbally threatened and physically attacked.

These efforts may be having an effect opposite to what the powerful intend. Journalism except in war has seldom been difficult or dangerous in South East Europe. Instead of compliant silence, the result is that there has never been more investigative journalism.

Journalists have discovered the power of collaboration. Many have joined a growing community of investigative journalists through membership in global networks such as the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ,) and the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). A number of regional networks, notably the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) and European Investigative Collaborations (EIC), have formed to share risks, resources, and information.

The new unity among colleagues is in large part due to technologies that have enabled secure and efficient communication and exchange. ICIJ and OCCRP have developed collaboration platforms on which journalists compare notes, share findings, and report together in secret and in real time.

Global investigative journalism conferences and numerous European and regional events have given journalists wider opportunities to meet face-to-face, learn to trust each other, and to discover stories together. Criminals long ago figured out how to transcend borders, and journalists in different jurisdictions have found out that they are targeting the same criminal rings if not the same types of schemes. Such cross-border exchanges were not possible before and have led to more sophisticated reporting on subjects like money laundering, smuggling, and arms dealing.

Importantly, journalists in the region have gotten better at their jobs. Training and cross-border exchanges of skills are largely to thank. The BIRN Summer School, as one prominent example, brings some of the best international trainers into the area to teach journalists advanced reporting and new technology skills. There is increased demand for trainers to visit newsrooms and for fellowships that allow journalists to spend time in foreign newsrooms or in the field with experts on particular topics.

South East European journalists are also teaming up with NGOs to gain more attention and clout. The two camps feed each other with

information, assist each other in gathering and verifying evidence and then in distributing reports. The collaboration increases the clout of each. These kinds of joint campaigns have been especially well done by investigative reporting center in Serbia (CINS) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (CIN) working on abuse and exploitation of tenders and public spending.

Journalists have focused in on collecting data and creating databases they then open to the public. For the first time citizens are getting detailed glimpses into everything from politician's assets to spending on special interest subsidies. The painstaking work done by data reporters has become source material for ongoing reporting on governmental and business wrongdoing, putting together information never before collected or put together in one place.

Collaborations and data journalism have brought numerous international awards and prizes to the region's journalists.

The Serbian Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (KRIK) received the prestigious Global Data Journalism Award for an online database tracking the assets of Serbian politicians. BIRN Macedonia's database, Foreign Investments Uncovered, was shortlisted for the same award. CINS in Serbia took a European Press Prize, the European equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize, in 2017 for reporting on corrupt officials.

Better writing and storytelling also contributes to increasing attention being given to investigative journalism out of South East Europe. Reporters are increasingly fluent in English as well as their native languages and thus are more easily grabbing international attention. They are also paying attention to new, non-lineal, digital ways to tell stories, to explain complex business machinations in lively and comprehensible ways, and to connect high-level corruption with bad roads, struggling pensioners, and poor school children of their countries. Graphics have gotten colorful and animated. CINS created an interactive game 'The Good, The Bad and The Corrupt' to make learning about corruption in public procurement fun. CIN produces short videos about each of its investigations with the aim of hooking Bosnian viewers.

Only a few years ago, South East Europe was a backwater in the world of journalism, the profession decimated by wars and poverty

that scattered practitioners and shut down media outlets. In that devastation traditional journalism disappeared, to be replaced with a new cutting edge version that has been shaped by technology and adaptations inspired by international trainers. The tables have turned. South East European journalists are increasingly being seen as experts to copy and learn from.

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CHAPTER TWO

SETTING OFF TO FIND A STORY

Every story starts with an idea, and this chapter will explain where these ideas can originate. They can be inspired by newspapers, talking to sources, meeting influential people, or keeping an eye on a broad range of new developments. This chapter will also focus on social network sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and the significant role they play in monitoring news breaks and leads. Investigative journalism is all about pushing yourself out of your comfort zone, exploring the unknown and taking calculated risks. Above all, one must read, read and read, and keep your eyes and ears open!

How to Find a Story?

Most stories develop from a reporter's own areas of interest, from questions raised in an earlier story or from current events. It could be inspired from something read somewhere, or it may stem from personal experience, a conversation or a chance remark by somebody. Here, it is important to understand that it is not easy to generate good story ideas consistently and at every time. It might be even the toughest part of a journalist's job.

First, there is the romance factor: Budding investigative journalists often begin their professional journey with fantasies of being approached in dark alleyways with confidential documents. Once the contents are revealed, a resulting story makes the front page, with, if all goes well, a byline in bold print. Praise, recognition and awards follow. And sometimes it does happen that way. Watergate began with an anonymous tip-off that ultimately led to President Richard Nixon's resignation. But generally, anonymous phone calls or top secret documents about political corruption are rare and need to be checked extremely well. Watergate is cited not only because it is well-known, but because of the inspired and determined work conducted by the reporters involved. It is also a great story of political skulduggery at the highest level!

Second, a journalist is never off-duty. They have to keep their eyes open and notice blocked drains on the road as they travel to work; long queues at the passport office; the rudeness of the nurse at the clinic. There may be more story ideas than seen at the first glance, requiring an investigation and some probing. Keep an ideas section in your notebook and jot down everything you observe or the questions that arise! Better: Record them on your mobile!

Third, reporters complain 'I don't have enough evidence!' even after visiting the site of a story, talking to people and recording details. But this is already evidence. Something that happens to you is no less valid as the starting-point for a story than something that happens to someone else. The advantage is you know it is happening because you experienced it. Reporters are their own best witness, and it is always preferable to have first-hand experience and observation to help in shaping a story – backed up by detailed notes taken at the time. Never rely on memories! A mobile phone with a powerful camera is a huge advantage. So photograph that leaking sewer as soon as you see it!
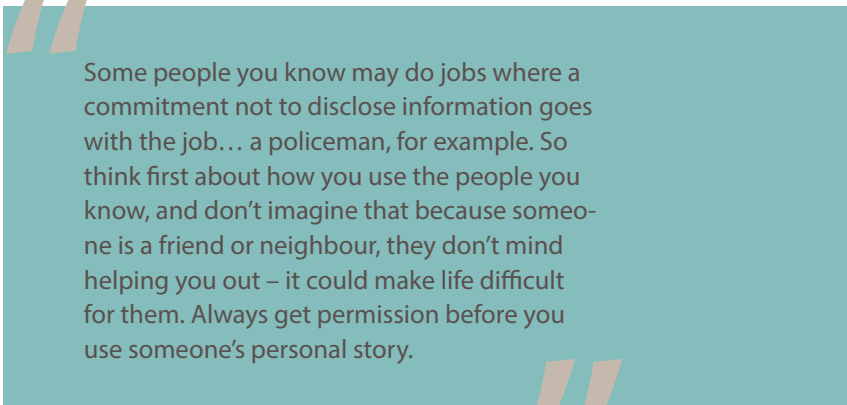
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The personal factor

Two problems could arise while working on a story idea: First, feelings may get in the way of conducting a balanced investigation. You may be so angry about the behaviour of public officials that instead of uncovering the story and presenting facts, the story goes on to blame and accuse. This is where journalists need to confront their own behaviour and feelings to ensure no bias seeps into in a fact-driven story.

The second potential problem is that individual experience may not be representative. You are only one person, so it's useful to get an understanding of how many other people are similarly affected. Did you experience certain treatment because you are a journalist or a man or a woman or an educated person? Do others, or have others, experienced the same treatment? Does a problem happen every day or was today different? The way to overcome this potential pitfall is to broaden the reporting beyond one single case. Writing about personal experiences is an opinion column, not an investigative report. To make it a proper report, seek reasons, understand the context and talk to different people to ensure your final story represents something more than merely your personal grievance.

These same advantages and disadvantages apply to the people you know and work with. Their experiences are real but may not be representative and may be biased by personal feelings. Additionally, steer clear of information conveyed by friends who may not have directly experienced an issue or problem, instead offering: 'I have a cousin who knows a woman who was asked for a bribe at the airport'. Unless the woman has a name, an address and can be interviewed, this is just rumour or urban legend. So again, experiences can be starting points for a good investigation – but only starting points.

Additionally, note the following advice of the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ):

> Some people you know may do jobs where a commitment not to disclose information goes with the job… a policeman, for example. So think first about how you use the people you know, and don't imagine that because someone is a friend or neighbour, they don't mind helping you out – it could make life difficult for them. Always get permission before you use someone's personal story.

Dealing with gossip and rumour

No medium is better at generating urban legends than 'roadside radio', the fast-travelling gossip and anecdotes of street traders, taxi drivers and passengers, golf course caddies, people close to politicians and policemen, land brokers and patrons in bars and cafés. However, gossip and rumours can alert us to real trends and changes. The media is often accused of 'agenda-setting', or telling readers what they ought to be interested in, but rumour also sets its own agenda. Journalists have to keep their eyes open for clues to stories and their ears alert to the issues people are discussing. Is the disappearance of girls the result of trafficking? Have people begun abusing a new type of homebrew? Has a well-known businessman suddenly stopped spending money, or a top policeman begun socialising with the criminal elite? Roadside radio will tell you about all these developments, and many of the tales will be true. But journalists should ask themselves why people believe it. What does it tell about our times and our country? What have people gossiped about on Facebook?

The first step has to be to confirm the validity of the rumour. Always check with sources that are in a position to know. Then, check with the local police station about reports of missing girls and with doctors on cases of alcohol abuse. Ask employees of the businessman how his enterprise is doing and ask financial analysts about market trends. Look at whether these individuals have sold assets recently. Observe policeman at play. Only once a rumour has some substance, can the planning of the story begin.

Evaluating tip-offs

Many stories that expose wrongdoing start with a tip-off. For example, a contact in the police department knows about a car-theft racket involving the commissioner; a vengeful ex-spouse phones the newspaper she subscribes to, denouncing her tax-evading former husband; a politician tells a friendly editor about an untoward relationship between a company tendering for a government contract and a member of the tender board.

But this information may not be everything that it seems. It may be untrue and designed to set one up. It may be only a partial truth, tailored to serve someone else's agenda. And, true or not, it may be an attempt to set the reporting agenda for you.

The first thing you must do with a tip-off is question it:

- Is this a subject that I would have written about if I did not get the tip off?
- Is the topic an issue I feel passionate about?
- Has a truth been unearthed here that is really in the public interest?

If information can be corroborated, then in the example of exposing the police commissioner and his car racket, your answers would probably be yes, yes and yes.

Corruption – a topic with two sides of a coin

But how would you answer in the case of the tender board member or the tax-evading ex? Exposing another allegedly corrupt individual may not have a major impact on social justice and the public interest more broadly. This is likely to be the case in countries where corruption and evading taxes are systemic in state structures and endemic in the behaviour of some social groups. Journalists often argue that by exposing one wrongdoer, others will 'get a fright' and the battle against corruption will be advanced. There is at least some truth in this. The danger of exposure will deter some aspiring robber barons and a small amount of money may be saved. And as it is taxpayers' money, the public does indeed have a right to know. But press exposure of countless corrupt individuals has shown little significantly impact on systemic corruption, as it is ingrained in all structures and transactions – and sometimes even in the structures that have been created to fight corruption.

But if journalists can use one instance of corruption to highlight flaws in the system that make tax evasion and bribery easier, that story may have significant impact. If investigative journalists can link the impact of tax evasion to the lack of resources for clinics, they can explain a public problem rather than simply bemoaning it. And if the way factions and parties use anti-corruption finger-pointing to take the spotlight away from their own misdeeds, these journalists have informed readers about the hidden processes of their country's politics.

Other clues to stories

Reading widely is the most important source of story ideas and the best way to improve your professionalism and writing skills. If you are serious about your beat, reading everything published about it is a professional duty and base for a professional career in investigative journalism. Without reading, journalists would not have a good understanding of how systems and processes are supposed to work, and therefore what it looks like when something goes wrong. Do not spend time simply processing the information that happens to come your way, but rather continually seek out new information to broaden your own knowledge base!

Brant Houston, former Executive Director of Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), reminds readers of IRE's Investigative Reporter's Handbook that local newspapers carry many seeds for investigative stories. Behind every paid legal notice lurks a story, whether it deals with wills, name changes, foreclosures, auctions, tenders, seized properties or unclaimed property. Local newspapers also carry interesting reports on new construction or government projects and even local court cases. You may find the name of your school bus driver in a drunk driving case, or the name of a financial officer in a shoplifting case.

What journalists do far too infrequently is to follow published stories. Reader surveys and focus groups invariably show that readers love follow-ups. They want to know what happens next, why it happened or what the story is behind terse daily news. Look especially for news stories that neglect to ask 'why' or seem to focus narrowly on only one aspect of an issue. Look also for alternative ways of covering obvious or regular stories, such as global or national commemorative days.

Official and NGO reports often look dull and daunting, and many journalists see reading these as a routine task rather than a source of exciting stories. But if you read their contents carefully, you can often uncover new and challenging information that can kick off an investigation.

Although scarce resources or geography may limit your access to overseas publications and websites, investigative reporters should use whatever channels they can to keep up to date. The various information services of embassies and non-governmental organisations often have free reading rooms or libraries, often with Internet access. If there are no alternatives, journalists should get into the habit of visiting these whenever possible.

If you access the Internet regularly, look for news sites and social networks, as Facebook or Twitter, where you will come across views and counter views. Twitter feeds provide basic information and the latest news about a wealth of current issues. This is especially important in an area such as health or science,

where the state of accepted wisdom can change quickly. Some journalists in underdeveloped areas were still writing stories about the lack of effective treatments for AIDS years after antiretroviral drugs had been tested and put into successful use in Europe and the US. These journalists simply did not have access to this information, and/or had no access to the Internet. It took these journalists much longer to move public awareness toward this vital health issue: the right of access to these drugs and the various ways they are blocked.

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How to Verify Hints, Rumours and Facts?

Journalists have to investigate all sides of a story, and that includes examining party factions and tensions, and the conduct of the accuser as well as the accused. But how can tip-offs, gossip, personal experiences or other forms of research be verified?

Two sets of important questions must be asked when gathering information gleaned during web-based research. The first is: Who has written this, what are their credentials and what are their motivations? Anyone can post almost anything on the web, Twitter and Facebook, from genuine experts to wishful thinkers, lobbyists paid by commercial or political interests or commoners. That is why evaluating the reliability of information is a must.

The second important question is what public information is available about the individual who posted the tip? Investigative journalists should try to understand their life story, education, the directorships they hold, etc. Check their Facebook account and their tweets. When a new enterprise is mentioned, investigate the main players. Also cross-check links between their colleagues, rivals or relevant figures in government. If the new agriculture minister also sits on the board of a major grain trading company, is this legal? Even if it is permitted, surely there is a conflict of interest. Discovering such links could provide useful insights for a potential story.

Any reports of scarce supplies – like petrol, land or scholarships – can suggest the possibility of corruption in the allocation of those resources. Asking questions, such as who are the gatekeepers of these supplies and how the allocation mechanisms are supposed to work, can help identify potential corruption, where scarcity is turned into someone's personal gain. By checking websites closely, investigative journalists can get an idea of what information these individuals have revealed and how much they are hiding.

It is fairly easy for a prominent state official or politician to access or create documentary 'evidence' that seems to underpin false or partial allegations. Documents can be forged by anyone with access to official letterheads, a computer and a photocopier. But even if they are real, documents can be carefully selected to paint a partial, half-true picture, with other crucial documents strategically omitted.

At times, documents can be so complex or technical that non-specialist journalists cannot understand them and need to rely on a source's expertise. Such documents should be discussed with independent experts, such as accountants, lawyers or doctors. But even seemingly simple documents are prone to misinterpretation. Sometimes an allegation turns out to be true, but the misconduct

may be relatively insignificant. When corruption allegations fly as commonly as mosquitos, journalists have to be very careful not to fall victim to the agendas of informants trying to use them to neutralise rivals, remove obstacles and realise their own ambitions.

Another form of routine investigation is regular conversations with contacts in various fields. Establishing a good relationship, one that will produce fruitful news before other reporters are alerted, requires regular contact with sources without a set agenda. If you only contact sources when you need them, they will begin to feel used. This is called 'working' your contacts. But stories from these sources will not automatically jump out and wave at you. You will have to be creative and inquisitive to find good story ideas.

> **Investigative journalist and professor at INSEAD, Mark Hunter, and his Dutch colleague, Luuk Sengers, provide some advice:**
>
> We gather information to get a story out of it; we don't work on stories simply to gather information. You want to stir emotions. You want your readers to get angry, to weep, to become determined to change things. Otherwise, what is the point of spending so much time collecting evidence, risking your life and your relationships? People are real characters in your investigations, not just quotes.

How to Generate a Concrete Story?

A word like 'corruption' can cover a multitude of sins. So, the journalist must determine whether the investigation is about fraud (lies and false information), rule-breaking, nepotism (giving a job, contract or favour to a friend or family member), bribery, negligence, inadequate controls, or deliberate wrongdoing?

The criteria of a good hypothesis (and we will return to this in the next chapter) is that it must be provable (or disprovable) through investigation using concrete facts. A vague, undefined idea cannot be proved or disproved. That is why it is important to be clear and concrete when coming up with story ideas. There is a difference between a businessman stealing tens of millions from a miners'

pension fund to finance his luxury lifestyle, and a secretary who awards her office coffee-machine contract to her sister-in-law. When you pitch a story, you will need to be able to describe your investigative methods. Even at this early stage it is worth thinking about it. It will provide you with an early alert about legal and ethical dilemmas to be resolved; for example, if you may need to work undercover.

Headlines are crucial

Initial background research will either confirm the starting hypothesis, or suggest an alternative. It is possible that one may even have found the opposite of what expected to find! But on this basis, you – not your editor, not your source, but you – can now sum up your story in a concise, punchy working headline. This may not be the headline the story ends up with, but it is a good way of holding on to the focus of the story. It will help to pitch the story and may even help to think creatively about how the story can be presented by a news organisation. Of course, you can and should modify it as you find out more; you are getting there!

> **'Doctors killing babies' versus '"Saved" babies sick on the streets'**
>
> Mark Hunter, a journalism professor, discussed how he was instructed to 'get the story' on doctors in American hospitals 'killing off' premature babies. But he found that this lead was completely incorrect. A new law in the US, inspired by the conservative religious-fundamentalist lobby, ruled that even infants, who were so premature and weak that they required constant, painful, invasive medical procedures, had to be kept alive. Babies, who lacked the physical ability to survive before the law has been adopted, were now subjected to operations, tubes, drips, tests and other operations. Doctors were actually saving many more premature infants than ever before in history. Unfortunately, most of these babies were growing up into chronically sick, severely disabled toddlers. Additionally, another conservative-inspired law had simultaneously cut social spending. Now almost no free support services existed for disabled children from poor homes. Many of these 'saved' children then vegetated on the streets. And Hunter ended up with the opposite headline, which was only mildly less shocking.

Communicating ideas

To avoid wasting time in a story follow-up, it can be useful to think in terms of 'minimum' and 'maximum'. As soon as there might be a story, it is worth communicating with other newsroom players who are likely to have a role in the investigation. This is an essential part of team-building, managing a project through good working relationships. By communicating with trusted colleagues and decision-makers as soon as a story starts shaping up, the foundations for a powerful team and good treatment of your project on publication's pages will already be established.

Use common sense:

- Communicate discreetly and do not boast wildly about the upcoming story in a general newsroom meeting. Office doors sometimes need to be closed!

- Select team members carefully – people you can trust to be discreet themselves.

- Do not give away every detail of your work – it is still only a proposed story that needs more checks. Therefore, make the status of the shared information and the need for discretion very clear.

After having sorted out hints, rumours and tip-offs, you probably want to begin as soon as possible with the investigation. However, before starting your research, you should first plan how to proceed. What are the first steps, and what do you have to keep in mind before and during the investigation? The next chapter will shed light on these questions.
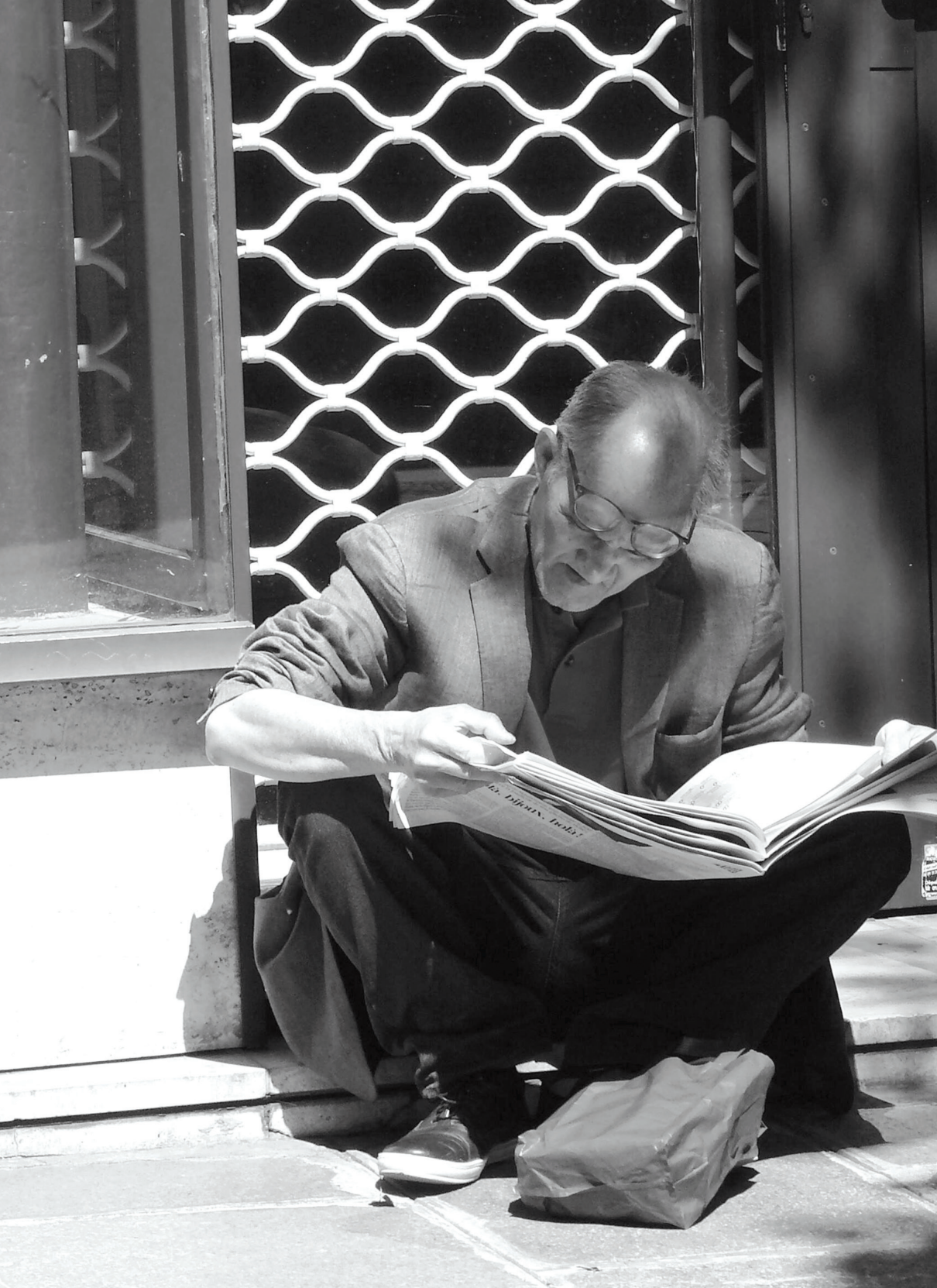
Why do we investigate and how do we develop a story? Two examples from the Center for Investigative Journalism Serbia (CINS)

By Branko Čečen

Serbian governments come to power with two campaign messages: anti-corruption and anti-crime. The Corruption Perception Index, however, has been stagnant in Serbia for years. But how do we prove whether the state tackles corruption or not?

The brains started working: we, the team of the Center for Investigative Journalism Serbia (CINS), knew *what* we wanted to prove, but *what* would count as proof? In this case, we decided that the benchmark to go by must be the final results of anti-corruption activities of the state – court verdicts against perpetrators. This seemed straightforward enough – we would ask courts for documents about the cases and verdicts and show how many were there. But what kind of verdicts, and which courts? Soon enough, we learned that the criminal code contained six different titles for offences that are definitely corruption and another four titles for offences that are potentially corruption but not necessarily. And there are many, many courts in Serbia, over 150. And what about the cases not yet in court? We had to ask both police departments and prosecutors' offices (over 100 new addresses) about the number of reported cases, the ones still under investigation, the ones dropped, and so on. The number of verdicts alone means nothing if you do not put it in an adequate context – the numbers of reported cases, prosecuted cases, and those that ended in some kind of plea bargain. Only that way we could show the citizens the true efficiency of the fight against corruption – how many cases were reported, how many prosecuted, how many ended with verdicts, and how harsh these verdicts were. Things were obviously becoming more and more complicated and the amount of work anticipated grew and grew until it became the most demanding project we, as CINS, have ever attempted. We recalculated resources (persons, time, money, skills, special knowledge needed, administration), added 10 percent safety margin for unexpected circumstances, and went to work.

Fortunately, we have been practicing data journalism for years and had previously constructed databases on different topics, so we knew what the job would entail. But, this was big.

We had to file more than 800 FOIA requests; the database grew to over 23,000 individual entries and the entire team worked on it for eight months. In essence, we were able to prove that the state does not only fail to fight corruption, but that it actually encourages it in a certain way: in a three year period (2013-2015), of over 6,000 persons reported to police, close to 3,000 were charged. The total number of convictions was approximately 1,500 (some persons received more than one), but only 232 of the sentences were not suspended. Most sentences were either at the legal minimum, or below the minimum. In lower courts, where most trials took place, 80 percent of sentences were suspended. Even the few prison sentences handed down were mostly served as house arrests.

And what about the other campaign promise, tackling crime in Serbia?

When investigating organised crime, citizens are best served if we prove a specific case. Our work is most valuable if there is a public official involved – organised crime corrupts every society.

We have been investigating groups of football hooligans for quite some time. They are, in fact, strong organised crime groups dealing and smuggling drugs, rarely prosecuted and almost never sentenced to prison. We were in the process of investigating the most prominent group with alleged ties to public officials, when three men came to beat up the director of one of the most important sports clubs in Serbia – FC Partizan. They beat up the director's driver, then entered the building while making rude gestures for the benefit of the security cameras, looking for more victims. The video of the event leaked online and became viral. It was the cruelty of the beating and the open contempt for the cameras that infuriated the citizens.

For several months before the event, CINS had a very difficult time obtaining evidence in connection with a very problematic business scheme. New leadership had taken over of FC Partizan, and most of the young players changed managerial representation and moved to

a single agency. The problem was that the two owners of the agency were a suspected member of an organised crime group and the best friend of a general secretary of the Serbian government. Football, business and politics came together in a single story, and the camera-happy hooligans were connected to the crime group in question.

So where was the problem? Connections of actors to the deal where laundered through several layers of corporate ownership involving both companies in Serbia and off-shore entities. The connections between the main players had to be proven. Most of the state institutions, as they often do in Serbia, started shutting down for our FOIA requests as soon as the investigation started.

It took many documents to connect the dots and prove the entire story, but three were particularly important. One came through a FOIA request. For the second we had to use the 'back door' – there is always a document about a paper at another institution. It took talking to three other institutions and two months of work, but we eventually obtained what we needed. The third one took personal contacts and a brave source. We landed a story that went straight to the heart of the problem, at the peak of public interest.

But what were the consequences? Two very different stories, connected only by electoral promise of the government, had to be done in two very, very different ways – one by data mining (for

more information on data mining see chapter 5), other by classical investigative 'digging'. One took eight months and the entire team, the other four months and two journalists. Were there any consequences for the government from the corruption story? Not really. Unfortunately, other media just ignored the story and the struggle against corruption continues in Serbia. Was the sport agency we named investigated by the authorities? No. It continues to operate.

So why do we bother? Well, if the public prosecutors' office isn't doing its job, is that reason enough for us not to do ours? We think not. If we stop doing our job, it is even more improbable there will ever be positive change. In the end, we publish evidence which would hold up in court. Perhaps one day some prosecutor will do something about it. It is important to not get frustrated and to try to find new stories which one day will have some effect.

The funny thing is – the jury of the European Press Prize (EPP), one of the most prestigious journalistic awards in Europe, found our stories to be a winner – we received the EPP for investigative journalism for 2017. Furthermore, we received total of nine different awards in 2017, so even if things in Serbia are grim, someone is watching, analysing and validating good work. There are citizens who crave good investigative stories and appreciate it, and sometimes awards come your way.

3

CHAPTER THREE

MAKING A PLAN

This chapter will walk you through the different stages of planning an investigative story. From asking yourself questions and probing sources, to pitching a story and preparing a budget, each example in this chapter shows that planning is imperative for any investigative reporting project. It will also introduce how to recognise reliable sources and shape a story's details into an interesting narrative through evidence-based reporting.

How to Plan an Investigation?

You cannot move from an idea straight into an investigation. Your idea is just a starting point. Because investigative stories carry a heavy social responsibility – and various legal risks – you must be sure your reporting is as thorough, accurate and comprehensive as possible. Because media work is a team effort that requires significant resources, you also need to ensure that there is good communication with colleagues and access to the materials needed to carry out the project. For all these reasons, you need to carefully plan how each stage of the story will unfold.

Where your idea originated will be one factor that shapes your work plan. If the idea came from your own observations, or from anecdotal evidence, you need to be sure that these individual experiences really represent a broader trend or issue. If the idea came from a tip, you must check its authenticity, reliability and possible motives of the source even before you move forward. But even if you find that your sources are impeccable and initial facts irrefutable, the first stage of the process is turning your story idea into a tightly-focused hypothesis or question that your investigation will prove, disprove or answer. However, this initial stage of the plan is never set in stone; it needs to have sufficient flexibility to cope with new information and new directions that your investigation may uncover.

Very often, a story will begin with a broad idea that will allow for investigating a wide (and probably unmanageable) universe of topics. Thomas Oliver, investigative journalist and former managing editor of the American newspaper Atlanta Journal-Constitution, notes: 'Projects tend to become all-inclusive and sometimes exhaustively cover everything one ever wanted to know about a subject. This is a weakness, not a strength.' A good technique for developing and refining this idea is to write your way into it. Try to compose a story summary – a paragraph that describes what the final story will look like. This is a way of opening newsroom minds to the story and sketching out a range of possible explanations. It also helps you see whether the story is best framed from a local angle, or whether it has regional or national implications. At this stage, consider the following questions:

- What has been happening? Why should your readers care?

- Who are the actors involved? How did they do it? What are the consequences?

- What went wrong? How did it go wrong? Why did it go wrong? What are the consequences?

| RESEARCH | MEET | ASK | WRITE |

- What is the news? What is the story? What are keywords associated with the story?

- What is the rationale? Who will benefit or suffer if the story is published? Will the story facilitate debate about societal values or behaviour? Will the story highlight faulty systems or processes?

Answering these questions will help you think about how a story can be told and identify a direction for the investigation.

> For example, in the case of a big outbreak of diarrhoea after water services have been privatised, you could frame the story about how people find water when they cannot buy it from a private company (keyword: affordability), or you could write from the perspective of visiting the water plant to look at the adequacy of safety checks (keyword: cutting corners). Careful consideration of these questions can help to put the spotlight on the values that underlie the story. This is also the point where priorities, such as public interest, are examined and may shut down stories that are simply exposed for the sake of exposure. In your framing of the story, avoid loose terminology that could be interpreted in different ways! When you have collected all the evidence you need, you will be able to return to these questions and tailor your writing in the appropriate direction.

From the idea to a hypothesis

After thinking about a story idea more carefully, you must turn these initial thoughts into a specific hypothesis or question that your story can answer. A hypothesis or question – short or long, one sentence or two sentences – helps you to decide what evidence will be relevant and what constitutes proof.

Additionally:

! It will make the work manageable by providing boundaries and goals.

! It assists in communicating and 'selling' the idea to others.

! It allows you to budget time and resources more accurately.

! It provides criteria of relevance for collecting evidence.

! It lays the foundation for a coherent final story.

Each story idea can generate multiple hypotheses or directions for the final story. For example, there can be two hypotheses for the poverty, privatisation and water-borne disease story:

(A)   Privatisation has made buying water too expensive for the poor, so they draw water from unhealthy free sources, leading to an epidemic.

(B)   Private water companies are cutting corners, and standards of water safety are falling, leading to an epidemic.

But you need to evaluate these hypotheses critically: What assumptions do they rest on, and are you certain of the validity of the assumptions? Both these hypotheses rest on untested assumptions about the source of the epidemic: A assumes that 'unofficial' water supplies are at fault; B assumes that the water plant is careless about standards. You may actually need to look at both possibilities because both these hypotheses rest on a deeper question: Where did the epidemic start?

A far better hypothesis would therefore be:

(C)   The recent epidemic of water-borne disease in X municipality either originated from the privatised water supply or from unofficial water sources.

This refined hypothesis allows you to go back to your story outline, and tailor an investigation that is clearer and balanced:

(D)   There has just been a major epidemic of water-borne diarrhoea in X municipality, where water is privatised. This story will try to find out how that epidemic started. Was it because people cannot afford to buy private water and are using polluted streams and wells instead? Or was it because the private water company has dropped standards of purity at its plant to cut costs? We will talk to scientists about the causes of the epidemic. We will follow members of a poor community on their daily search for water and visit the plant with an independent expert to look at their safety standards. When we have established how the disease got started, we will look at what needs to be done to prevent a recurrence.

Once you have developed a clearly defined hypothesis, you need to create a research plan, including finding sources, developing criteria of proof, deciding on a methodology, creating a timeline and developing a budget. The following sections of this chapter will provide an overview of how these steps are planned. The upcoming chapters of this guide will then provide a detailed look at how each of these steps is executed.

Sources

After coming up with a concrete idea, creating a hypothesis, source mapping is the next stage of the investigative reporting process. You will need to identify who the key actors in the story are and any documents that record their actions. Many public records show what governments, hospital staff, corporations, mafia and corrupt politicians have been up to. Various sources can help prove your assumptions and either verify or refute your original hypothesis. For every detail, always use the two-source principle, which means you rely on two independent sources to confirm the same information. These sources will serve as background experts; make sure to add their contact details into your address book. These sources can either be primary or secondary sources.

These are sources that provide first-hand evidence or relate direct experience. For example, a patient who bought drugs from a nurse via a hospital back door would be a primary source who is able to lend that specific experience, but is not able to attest to what nurses are generally doing behind the scenes. A foreman at the water plant, who was told to do purity checks once a month instead of once a week, is also a primary source. So is a bank statement of a cabinet minister that clearly shows a payment from an international arms company. Primary sources – as long as you have verified them and made sure they are authentic – are the most valuable sources because they provide direct proof. Often, they are also the hardest to find. People with relevant experience may be reluctant to go on the record because they fear being victimised, and documents, like bank statements or hospital records, may be kept confidential or even restricted by privacy laws.

1
Primary Sources

2
Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include all kinds of published materials, including organisational reports and second-hand accounts ('I had a friend who…'). Secondary sources are valuable, particularly for establishing context and background, helping to explain issues and providing leads to good contacts. However, any evidence you draw from them – as well as the person they originated from – should be checked and verified.

Additionally, you can differentiate between three types of source material: human, paper and digital (web).

(a) Human sources

Many sources fall into this category: direct role players, eyewitnesses, experts and interested parties, eager and reluctant. Be sure you understand the status, credentials and motivations of the people you approach. If you are working on the water privatisation story, the representatives of anti-privatisation organisations will be able to provide a great deal of information and strong opinions of the opposing side. But that information will come from a particular position, and representatives of organisations are often speaking on behalf of much larger groups of people. When they summarise group views, they may organise and edit community opinions in ways that change or exclude important aspects – sometimes quite unintentionally. Therefore, you need to seek a wide variety of viewpoints. If you are speaking to people from a community, be sure your selection of voices is demographically representative: Women, men, young, old, from various income and interest groups. Human voices give your story authenticity and make it come alive; for that reason, never to base a story on paper or electronic sources alone.

(b) Paper sources

These can include books, newspapers and magazines, official records and business documents, such as contracts and bank statements. This may include 'grey' material, or material that is widely circulated but may not have ever been published (e.g. studies commissioned from private organisations, academic dissertations) or which may be officially confidential. Very often, it is paper sources that will provide the proof you seek. We call this 'following the paper trail'.

But investigative journalists face problems when seeking paper evidence: Perhaps the journalist does not know if the evidence exists, or perhaps public records are disordered and difficult to search, or perhaps there are no freedom of information laws that allow the media to conduct paper searches. One key concern are officials who may stall this process because they fear that information will be used against them or the government. One important piece of initial research in an investigative story is to discover what documents are used in the field you are investigating, where and how they are stored, and how they can be accessed. If advance permissions are necessary, you will need to do this early in your research, since official permits can take weeks and months to come through. Do not overlook obvious paper sources: directories and phone books.

> **Veteran American investigative reporter Bill Gaines credits his ability to research documents with his success:**
>
> 'I was able to get stories that other people missed because I went to the places where you could find the documents.' And very often, Gaines found what he was seeking in public documents, not by raiding secret files. He found the home of an important source by searching property records and nailed a company for corruption because of something they had written when filing a business registration.

(c) Digital sources

These include information on the web and digitally stored records. Searching for these sources does not require extraordinary skills. The amount of information available online is dazzling but, as with any other source, you need to verify where the information came from, as well as their credentials and possible motives. You need to check what officials are writing about themselves, and how friends and family describe them. But do remember that the web is relatively uncontrolled: Almost anyone with access can post almost anything, including complete fabrications. In addition, web information often stays online for a long time; sometimes long after it has become outdated. Always check the most recent sources first. For further help, download a free copy of the *Verification Handbook* published by the European Journalism Centre (EJC). It provides tools, techniques and step-by-step guidelines on how to deal with digital content.

(d) Crowd-sourcing

This new tool combines human and digital sources. It involves media outlets drawing readers to investigative stories by inviting them to contribute.

SOURCE	Useful for	Strengths	Possible threats
H U M A N	_Giving life and authenticity to a story	_Interviewing does not require hi-tech resources _Accounts of first-hand experience make a story convincing	_People have biases, prejudices and may lie _May only provide anecdotal evidence (ensure your sources are representative) _People may be victimised for talking to the press (think about how to protect them)
P A P E R	_Providing hard evidence _Providing history and context	_Secondary sources broaden background research beyond what you can tackle yourself _Primary sources (e.g. bank records) are 'on-the-record' and reliable	_May be protected by privacy laws, censorship etc. and hence, hard or slow to access _May need specialist knowledge to understand _Can produce a 'dead' or over-academic story with no live voices
D I G I T A L	_Can do all of the above, depending on what is being retrieved	_Can 'do it all' from your computer, including accessing sound and video _Information is posted fast and from a huge range of national and international sources	_Can produce a dead story _Security threats of the Internet _The verification of the huge amount of rumours and hoaxes in the Internet can be difficult

To obtain data sources that are difficult to access, there may be laws in place to help you, like the Right to Information Act in India, the Promotion of Access to Information Act in South Africa or the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance in Serbia. In every country, these laws differ not just in their titles but also in their content, which makes global advice on legal regulations difficult to give. But remember that you should conduct some research about the laws in your country before you start your investigations.

Creating a network of sources

Your research may produce complex or even contradictory results about the best sources for your story. Build up a 'contacts tree' or mind-map until you find the people you need. For the planning process, you should make an advance list of the sources that you will use to obtain both evidence and background information.

On your mind-map, draw arrows to connect sources and intend background expertise with findings that support them. Draw other kinds of connections – for example, jagged lines – between pieces of evidence that introduce contradictions or puzzles. Contradictions are often the most fruitful, explore these – constantly asking 'Why?' – and you will find that the story idea grows not only legs, but wings! However, investigations take time and require a lot of patience. While one can easily get frustrated, it is important to stay focused on the subject and remain guided by the core role of journalism: serving as the watchdog of society and offering a voice to the voiceless.

Mark Hunter and Luuk Sengers provided the following hints on effective data mapping and keeping story information organised:

- Create a **chronology** that describes events (dates, places, who was there, what was said, what was done); keep this information in a consistent format so you can instantly find the facts you need

- Create a **list of sources** with their contact details (and keep this information secure)

- Create a **to-do list** of people who might know something about the project and whom you still need to contact, with their contact details

- Draw up **diagrams of the relationships** between the various people involved

- Make a **list of key documents**, indicating those you have and those you still need

- **Index your documents**, and if you work with a computer, create hypertext links to full electronic versions

- **Highlight facts** that have been firmly established

- Note the **status of other information** you have

- Always keep a **notebook** with you to jot down ideas

Adequacy of proof

Once you have listed likely sources for the evidence you need, you have to decide what will count as proof for your hypothesis or an adequate answer for your question. Will it be enough to prove that the water plant now does fewer quality checks than it used to do? Or do you also need to find out what the consequences of fewer checks were? The best investigative reporters do not only assemble evidence that supports their hypothesis, but also evidence that contradicts it. For instance, a government official who is already very rich may be unlikely to waste his time performing a service for a $10,000 bribe. Considering contradictory evidence is the best way to avoid the 'wishful thinking' trap. Keep questioning yourself at various stages about reliable and complete evidence, types of sources, number of sources, and what could invalidate or disprove your evidence. Which pieces of evidence will require the most careful and detailed checking? Can you deal with this during your research?

Be careful with the notion of 'proof'. It is very rare to find absolute proof of something – the 'smoking gun', as it is called. Sometimes you may be able to assemble enough evidence to only speculate that your hypothesis is correct. This is very similar to how criminal charges require proof 'beyond reasonable doubt', whereas civil charges only require a 'balance of probabilities' weighed toward one side of a case. As long as your final story makes it clear whether you are presenting proof or probability, you may still have a story, even without watertight proof. But you will need to be very careful how you write it.

Methodology

It is not always easy to find necessary sources or documents right away. In these cases, a journalist might have to devise creative methods to obtain them. We tend to associate methodology with academic activities, but it simply means the approach that you will use to carry out your research. Based on the range of methods available, you need to plan a rigorous combination of documentary research, live interviews, site visits or observations, and other approaches. You will need to decide which sources to use, how much time to devote to each, what cross-checking procedures will be used, and how you will proceed through these stages of work.

You should always been looking for evidence that will substantiate your hypothesis. You can do this indirectly by building up the picture of a context, background, history or climate in which certain things are more likely to have happened. But you can do this most efficiently by getting relevant evidence from your sources.

An important part of methodological planning is thinking ahead to the possible obstacles you may encounter. Suppose you cannot obtain access to a particular document or a key source refuses talk to you. What is your Plan B? How can you put together alternative evidence that will provide support or proof of equal weight?

As soon as you have determined your methodology, you can construct a timeline for the investigation and your budget. The timeline is your estimate of how long the investigation will take: How many hours will you spend in archives, interviewing, searching the web and writing?

As well as the time consumed by various tasks, two other important factors in constructing your timeline are deadlines and competition. If the story has already been commissioned or diarised, work backwards from the submission deadline, and schedule necessary interviews and research within your timeframe. If, on the other hand, you are pitching the story to an editor, work from your starting point, so that your pitch indicates the date your story will be ready. Negotiation is usually part of this process, but if you have worked on a timeline, you will be able to negotiate the time you need.

If the story concerns a 'hot' topic of public concern, it is possible that competing media are also chasing it. If you know this, it may be necessary to speed up your work in order to publish first. But investigative reporting should not be rushed or skimped; doing so can lead to legal consequences. With a timeline in front of you, you will be able to decide the earliest point at which something coherent and substantial can be published, even if it is not yet the complete investigation.

Budget

The other important estimate that your project plan will need is a budget. How much will the investigation consume in terms of money and resources? Elements to consider when putting your budget together include travel costs, accommodation and meals (you might also need to provide hospitality for your sources), fees for expert advisers, translators, transcribers or service providers, fees for conducting archive or record searches or getting notarised copies of documents, communication costs (phone, Internet) and photographic costs. If you are working in a team also think about heads (e.g. a project manager), workshops and fieldtrips that will need to be included in your budget.

For many small media organisations in developing nations, budgets are tight. The kind of investment major US papers make in investigative projects would be enough to keep the whole newspaper running for a year. In these circumstances, you need to be creative about identifying other sources of support. A good starting point is international donor organisations. Sometimes they have areas of interest that coincide with your investigation. However, beware of donors who push towards their own priority issues. If they are not the same as your own, do not waste time on donors that will not support you. Another possibility is crowdfunding. Fundraising money for general journalistic projects or publications working in the investigative journalism sector has become more popular, but also more difficult.

An overview of potential fellowships and more information about crowdfunding as well as examples of successful projects can be found here:

@ gijn.org/resources/grants-and-fellowships

@ fij.org/grant-application

@ gijn.org/resources/crowdfunding-for-journalists-2

Most journalists agree that it is not a good idea to pay sources. The lure of payment can encourage sources to tell lies and exaggerate. Even worse, payment can be used later to retract or discredit the evidence when a source claims that they only provided information because they were offered money. Moreover, paying for stories does not reflect well on your publication's ethics or your own investigative skills. However, in exceptional circumstances, a paper may compensate a source for working time lost when giving an interview, or for travel or other costs. But even here it is important that both parties are clear what the payment

is for, and to pay a low, 'normal' rate for the expense. Remind sources that they are not doing you or your paper a personal favour by providing information; rather, they are helping an affected community or society at large.

Bribing an official to gain access is also disreputable. But in some communities, officials have developed a culture of demanding small favours (e.g. 'dash', 'cool-drink') for doing anything – including opening their offices in the morning! In such climates, you may be unable to work without oiling the wheels of official-dom. Yet, you risk compromising your whole investigation through these trivial payments. However small and routine they are, they are still considered as bribes if the official reveals to his bosses or rival media that you paid them. You should develop a strategy for dealing with these kinds of demands: Think each one through in relation to its circumstances – could you justify it (most importantly, to your readers) if it was challenged later? It is always better to try and secure cooperation by explaining the importance of your work and building allies.

Pitching the story

If your publication or station has assigned you a story, all the planning just described is the first stage of your investigative process. But if you are a free-lance journalist, the planning provides the information you need to create a really convincing pitch for an editor. A pitch is a short presentation that ex-plains what the story is about and attempts to persuade the editor to run it. It needs to contain the following elements:

- A revised story outline
- Why the story is right for this particular paper or readership
- A brief account of approach and methodology
- A timeline
- A budget

Some media outlets will also expect you to be able to contribute to a dis-cussion of how the publication should present the story – pictures, graphics, etc. – while others leave such issues to editors and designers. In any case, bear in mind that the publication might not like your story. For this reason, it's important to pitch only the most essential information and avoid presenting milestone findings, so you will be able to pitch your story in another news-room.

How to Manage Time in the Planning Process?

Having a better idea of how you plan your story and especially your sources, you can now start your first lines of investigation. But there are still some aspects you should consider as you proceed.

Prioritising

Especially in the beginning of an investigation, you might feel that you need get through as much reading as possible. But this is not always the best strategy. Reading is slow and – especially if you are doing Internet research – you may have identified not a few, but a few hundred, relevant references. Therefore, only skim-read background information! Make sure your Internet search has not been too wide (putting quotes around the key words will give you only those articles that include them all). Bookmark any web references that look interesting, so you do not have to spend time later searching for them again.

And do not waste time chasing one elusive expert. Contact as many of the relevant people on your phone list as you can. And go back to individuals you talked with when you were developing the story and ask any new related questions. At this stage, you need to search broad rather than deep.

Make a mini-timetable; decide how important each segment of the research is, and how much time you can afford to spend on it. Never waste extra time chasing up just one elusive person, document or figure – find another way to get what you need.

Analysing, re-defining

You have skimmed the background research and have had a number of very interesting phone interviews. And you have visited the district and seen the situation for yourself. Unfortunately, your hypothesis has changed. Never be afraid to redefine your story in the light of new information! Flexibility is one of the most important principles in conducting a good investigation. Do not cling rigidly to your original idea and try to force the new facts to fit it.

After this background has been established, next it is time to deepen your re-search and discard what is irrelevant. It hurts to discard work you have done. But you must. File old notes, as they may prove useful for a future story. Look for meaningful official comments and retrace your steps to the most interest-ing sources and references. What you are looking for is concrete, specific evi-dence to replace abstract assumptions. And here is where you will deepen your understanding of the subject. You do not want to be hit with a legal suit. Forget anything you cannot verify. Look for conflicting points in your notes – can they be reconciled? And what do your 'biased' sources have to say about it all? Try to get all comments on-the-record. Check, cross-check and check again.

As you proceed, inform your editor about what is happening so he or she may need to re-plan space or place this different story on another page. You should do this as early as you can. Also, flag the risk of defamation and other legal issues with your editor. To protect you both, your editor may need to forward the finished story to a lawyer for advice.

How to Build a Team?

If you decided to investigate a story as a team, there are additional necessary steps that need to be planned: The first is to decide on a project manager. This person will be an extremely important element because the task will be to ensure sufficient and relevant input from all team members and to assemble it all together. The second step is to initiate a workshop where the whole team can brainstorm subject matter and emerge with a clear to-do list.

You should also decide on a format for this process:

? How to troubleshoot when necessary input does not materialise?

? When and how do the team members liaise together?

? When, how and how often does the project manager liaise?

? What is the editing, revising, feedback and correcting process at every stage of the investigative process?

? How to troubleshoot when necessary input does not materialise?

? How to get everyone to agree on final results?

? Which costs will be refunded?

? Will the team eavesdrop, go undercover or pay for documents if needed?
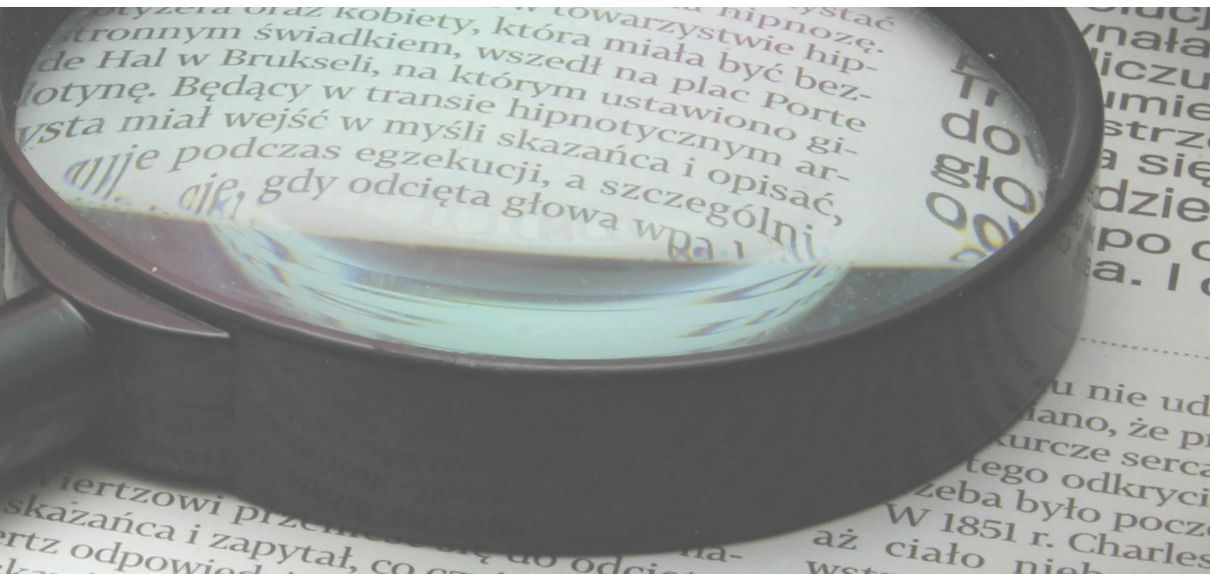
Furthermore, roles must be clearly defined so that conflicts of interest are avoided. In the case of a team member simultaneously serving as a board member, these persons will need to recuse themselves from board decisions pertaining to the team's investigation. Also, the relationship and decision-making process between the project manager and the organisation's leadership needs to be clearly established; contracts need to be signed between the project manager and the organisation's leadership and also between the latter and the team's members.

Aside from these organisational steps, a team should familiarise themselves with the subject matter: Does everyone understand the ins and outs of, and questions surrounding the investigation? What is the team's interest in this matter as members of the public? Revisiting good investigative journalism practice in this workshop is crucial; it will determine the quality of the end result. Best practice and ethics should be a part of this discussion, too. An initial working hypothesis should be developed and to-do lists drawn up of required background information and sources.

During the investigative process, viability of the subject and achievable goals are determined by the project manager; the working hypothesis is revised; (new) sources are identified and more detailed and corrected to-do lists are communicated to the team. The project manager will target a 'minimum' story as the outcome of the project. A 'minimum' story is one that, at the very least, will broaden the public's understanding of a local issue. The manager should also communicate – either upon request of the team or per his or her own initiative – centrally accessed expertise and updates about the team's progress in such a way that creates synergy. Furthermore, the project manager decides how to use the input from different team members.

If you decided to investigate a story as a team, there are additional necessary steps that need to be planned: The first is to decide on a project manager. This person will be extremely important element because he or she has to ensure sufficient and relevant input from all team members and has to assemble it all together. The second step is to initiate a workshop where the whole team can brainstorm subject matter and emerge with a clear to-do list.

SPOTLIGHT

The findings of the so called 'Spotlight Team' are a good example for a regional, one newsroom team discovery.

In 2002, the journalists of the newspaper 'Boston Globe' found out that several cardinals and bishops in the Boston Catholic Archdiocese had covered up the sexual abuse of children by priests. Only after their reports in the United States other media houses started digging and investigating similar cases in their region and country.

The investigation was filmed and released in the movie 'Spotlight' in 2015.

VS.

PANAMA PAPERS

The so called 'Panama Papers' are a good example for an international and overwhelming investigative journalism cooperation.

For one year almost 400 journalists from more than 80 countries investigated as a team the data leak of a Panamanian law firm. Eventually they discovered that politicians, athletes, criminals and others use offshore accounts in Panama for illegal purposes. Over 11 million documents have been analysed – a single journalist would never have been able to handle this entire material by himself. This example shows that the size of the team depend on the data amount and the involved journalists.

Finally the results of one of the biggest financial scandals were published 2016 in different media houses and languages around the world.

The Panama Papers

By Miranda Patrucić

'Hello. This is John Doe. Interested in data?'

The recipient, Bastian Obermayer, head of investigations at the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, said he was.

This simple message was a beginning of an avalanche that, a year later, would become known as the Panama Papers. 'John Doe' gave Bastian about 2.6 terabytes of data – more than 11 million internal documents – from Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca – that contained information on more than 214,000 anonymous companies set up around the world.

The sheer amount of data was too big for a single newsroom. So the German newspaper did something that goes against the usual competitive spirit of journalism. They decided to share.

Süddeutsche Zeitung turned to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalist (ICIJ), a Washington D.C.-based international network of investigative journalists and media organisations to arrange the collaboration. My organisation, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), was among the first invited to join.

Soon the biggest leak in history became the biggest journalistic collaboration to date.

On April 3, 2016, 400 journalists from more than 100 media organisations in over 80 countries published hundreds of stories. And that was just the beginning. The leak was so rich in information that new stories are still being published to this day.

The investigation brought many challenges. To even start reporting, sophisticated technological tools were needed. The files came in variety of formats, including emails, PDFs, spreadsheets, and even some old formats no longer in use. Most were unreadable and unsearchable. ICIJ's Data and Research Unit spent months preparing the files. They used different free or open-source tools to extract the data,

index it, and make it searchable for journalists. Finally, the files were uploaded on a sharing platform called 'Blacklight' for all the partners to use. To help with the analysis, Mossack Fonseca's internal database was visualised using 'Linkurious', a database visualisation tool.

ICIJ organised two big planning meetings, one in Washington D.C., and the other at the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* headquarters in Munich. This is where we learned how to use ICIJ's unique tools, got search tips, decided on the publication deadline, and discussed various leads – but also developed relationship with other reporters. And most importantly we learned to radically share.

For the project to succeed, reporters needed to leave their journalistic instincts and egos aside. The story was too big for any single reporter to tackle, so we needed to work together as a team.

The Panama Papers files gave us unique insights into how offshore system works. But finding stories in millions of files was an arduous undertaking.

The files revealed the secrets of some of the world's most powerful and corrupt people – politicians, celebrities, athletes, criminals, and businessmen.

But there were also many dead ends: promising leads that would remain just that. It was difficult to confirm the identity of the people whose names were in the files. And even when we found an interesting name – an official or an official's family member, a businessman, a crime figure or a celebrity – it didn't mean we had a story. Often, after reading hundreds of files, we would end up only with the fact that the person of interest owned a particular business. Telling the story required going beyond the leak.

One of the Panama Papers stories I'm most proud of is about the first family of Azerbaijan and their secret mining empire. The leak showed that the president's two daughters were behind a network of offshore companies used to take control of some of the country's richest gold, copper, and silver deposits.

But the story wasn't just about offshore ownership. As we were reporting the story, mine workers were out protesting and pleading

for help from the government and president. The mining company that employed them suddenly closed, leaving them without pay. What they didn't know is that the president's daughters were their employer. Their story showed how offshore secrecy affects the lives of ordinary people.

The impact of the Panama Papers has been profound. It brought down the prime ministers of Iceland and Pakistan and embarrassed dozens of dictators, corrupt politicians, and criminals. Tax authorities worldwide recovered more than 500 million US dollars. And the law firm itself closed down in March 2018.

But the most important consequence was the decision by the UK to make its overseas territories, including some of the most secretive financial centers like British Virgin Islands and Cayman Islands, establish public registers of beneficial owners of the companies registered there. The decision is a major step toward global transparency, ending anonymous companies and tacking tax avoidance, and corruption. It is one of the best examples of journalism making a difference in the world.

And if you ever wondered what happened inside Mossack Fonseca after the release of the Panama Papers, well guess what! Mossack Fonseca was leaked again and now we know the aftermath. On June 20, 2018, reporters begin publishing new stories revealing the chaos behind the scenes, clients responding with panic and fury, and the firm scrambling to control the damage.

Notes:

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CHAPTER FOUR

TECHNIQUES FOR DATA SECURITY

Investigative journalists gather and produce a great deal of information during their research, most of which is stored on mobile or computer devices. When handling digital data, it is necessary to be aware of how to protect information and fend off security threats. One main concern during an investigation should be to ensure communication with sources is safe at all times. This chapter will discuss digital security threats and introduce various software and tools to support a secure working environment. It focuses on common computer systems (Mac, Windows) and smartphones (Android, iOS).

After planning your research and identifying relevant sources, you probably want to start your investigation as soon as possible. But there is one more step to consider before the research can commence: data security. By investigating a controversial hypothesis, you may experience tension with individuals on the opposing side, who may ultimately want to manipulate or spy on your research. Ask yourself: Who would be interested in preventing your investigation from becoming public? What means do these individuals possess (that you do not)? Is your research based on human or digital sources? Which security tools should you use to protect your work?

It goes without saying that your sources should take security precautions as well. Ensure they are aware of security tools to protect themselves from infiltration. Nevertheless, be aware that there is never 100 percent security. You can only make it hard, expensive and lengthy for an opponent to access your device and the information stored on it.

The following chapter will provide an overview of security strategies that will help protect your devices. There will be examples of apps and software you can use. Before installing any (here suggested) software, check the latest version of each application or tool since the Internet is always changing. And do not be too cheap! The market offers free and paid versions of software. Check which programme suits your needs best, and then decide which version to use. We recommend to check the availability of open-source software that allows other IT experts to look into the code ensure its security. Potential security leaks will usually be detected very fast in open-source software, especially compared to private software that usually does not display their code, meaning no one but the owner can check for security threats.

Password security

To unlock a phone or your computer, you usually need to enter a password. To log into your Wi-Fi router or your email programme, you need a password. Even when encrypting your data, you will be asked for a password. Therefore, a strong password is the major step toward protecting your data. The more often you change your password, the better protected you are. The password used to enter your devices or to log into (messaging) accounts should be changed at least every three months. The password of your Wi-Fi router should be altered twice a year. For any other function, change the password at least once a year.

Some advice on creating a strong password:

▸ Use different passwords for each account

▸ Never use a word that can be found in a dictionary

▸ Never use names or birthdates of family members, friends or pets

▸ Aim for longer passwords, a strong one has about 15 characters

▸ Include random lowercase and capital letters, special characters and numbers

Most people have difficulty remembering complicated passwords. An alternative is to use passphrases like: WIw8,mlbtmcitt ('When I was eight, my little brother threw my cat in the toilet').

There are various websites to help you test your password and provide an indication of how long a regular home computer or a very fast super computer would need to crack it. One such a website is password.kaspersky.com. Entering your real password on sites like these opens you up to security risks, so check the strength of one that is similar to it.

If you cannot remember every password for all your accounts, use apps like KeePass or Safe in Cloud. They store passwords for you safely, encrypt the information and are only accessible when entering a (very strong) master password. These tools usually include a password generator, too. You will also find similar tools in the respective app store of your mobile phone.

Aside from password storage and protection, the use of one time passwords (OTP) is also highly recommended. These passwords are only valid for one session and are used in addition to a standard password, which is known as 2-factor-authentication (2FA). This technique is comparable with a TAN generator that banks use to make financial transactions. The OTP is either sent via text message, generated through a smartphone app as Google Authenticator (Android/iOS), Authenticator Plus (Android) and 2STP Authenticator (iOS) or via a special token. A lot of common services like Facebook, Gmail or Twitter offer OTPs already. Some alternative email service providers (i.e. mailbox.org) offer such an option of 2-factor-authentication. A frequently updated list of services using OTPs can be found at twofactorauth.org.

Data at rest

Before getting into further detail about popular security tools, it is important to understand the different ways data is used and stored on a device. Experts distinguish between '**data at rest**', 'data in use' and 'data in motion', sometimes also referred as 'data in transit'.

The term 'data at rest' implies all data stored on a device is not moved actively. Instead, the data can be found on the hard drive, server, archives or databases. When protecting long-term stored data it is essential to monitor who has access to your information or folders on your network.

The first step is changing the password of the administrator. Sometimes, there is no administrator password present or just a really short one. This allows hackers to enter the device easily. The second step is to refrain from regularly using your computer with administrator rights. Windows systems especially give the normal user all rights automatically. Set up a new admin account on your computer and use it only if necessary. Limit user rights of your normal account to a minimum. This can protect you from malware because you do not have the right to install applications anymore. It is furthermore not recommended to have guest user accounts in order to prevent others from misusing the rights of the account.

Encryption

The next step will be to encrypt your device and the data on it. Encryption means to encode messages or information that only authorised persons can read if they have the correct password to decrypt the file. Therefore, use a strong password to prevent hackers from cracking into the system easily. Be aware that encryption does make your device operate slightly slower than usual.

Hard drive encryption

Imagine a big gate in front of your house defending strangers from entering. This gate is only safe when you lock it with several chains from the inside. This gate is like your hard drive. Encrypting the hard drive puts protective 'chains' on your computer that make it difficult for hackers to enter. To ensure that the chains are strong enough, use AES 256 – one of the most successful encryption methods to date. Other recommended software products to encrypt your hard drive are VeraCrypt (Windows) or FileVault (Mac).

Data encryption

After encrypting your hard drive, you automatically locked the data on it, too. It is only necessary to encrypt the data if you want to be double secured. This result also prevents potential spies from accessing or to reading documents on your device. Recommended software products for data encryption include Bitlocker and VeraCrypt (Windows), FileVault (Mac), or Crypto Disk. It's also possible to pack files together in one encrypted archive using 7-Zip (Linux).

Encrypt your phone

As mobile phones are often used as computers today, it is also very important to encrypt your phone and the documents on it. The iPhone is already encrypted when buying it, and you do not have to enable this function. However, Android users will need to encrypt their phones manually.

USB encryption and backups

A USB device is another place journalists store information and data, so these devices need to be protected similar to computers and phones. You might also use a USB to backup these primary devices. It is recommended to make various copies of your information in case something goes wrong with your data. Make sure to use different devices to store the copies, to make a backup and encrypt the different backup devices or files.

Data in use

'Data in use' refers to the active data on your device that are continually changed as documents or payments. They are often stored in the random access memory (RAM) or the cache. This chapter discusses the various security programmes and functions to protect this information.

Firewall, antivirus and host intrusion prevention

It is very important to enable the firewalls on your device. These firewalls control the information that connects to the Internet, and they work like bouncers at the entrance of a bar. Each firewall decides whether each 'guest' is allowed to enter or to send details to your network. Each unlocked door would allow malware to enter your device and easily do harm. On most computers, you can enable the firewalls on the system yourself, and it is recommended to use external protection software, like McAfee, BitDefender or Kaspersky.

It is also possible to enable firewalls on your mobile phone with external software like NoRoot Firewall or NetGuard (Android) and Norton (iOS).

After having regulated data exchange with Internet sources, it is essential to protect your device from malware that can monitor your activities or to gain access to important information, like your passwords. Antivirus software looks for these malware, blocks and erases them. These programmes are not only essential for your computer, but also for your mobile device. Recommended software products for the computer are ESET, Kaspersky and BitDefender (Windows and Linux) or Microwold, BitDefender and AVG (Mac). Tools for the smartphone are Avast Mobile Security (Android) or Norton and Lookout (Mac).

Most people have heard about the first two applications and have installed at least one antivirus programme. However, to guarantee the full protection of data in use, it is also important to apply host intrusion prevention (HIP). This additional preventative measure monitors the system and the network to ensure all processes are legitimate and notifies the user if there are any policy violations. To discover malware, the HIP compares your current user patterns with your regular usage habits of the programmes. One provider offering this security software is McAfee.

At first glance, the task of installing all these recommended security programmes may seem daunting, but there are software programmes that provide all three tools in one. These multiproducts are recommended because a worst case scenario could be installing three single programmes that enable each other. Examples for combined tools for every system are McAfee, BitDefender or Kaspersky. Keep in mind that each year various organisations and magazines test different providers ranking their security and effectiveness. Before buying a package, research the current best malware protection provider.

Surfing anonymously

One underestimated risk is the Wi-Fi router. A hacker could crack into your router and gain access to your entire network. Therefore, make sure you have changed the first given Wi-Fi password, making it as strong as possible. Afterwards, encrypt the Wi-Fi. The safest encryption method at the moment is WPA2, so make sure that you are able to use this function when encoding your information. If you are not sure how to encrypt your router, your service provider should be able to help. However, the most secure method to connect to the Internet is through a LAN cable. It is highly recommended to use this technique when working from home.

As soon as you have secured your router, it is time to think about your Internet research. During your investigation, you will probably use the Internet to get background information or find potential sources. Searching sensitive topics could already make you more susceptible to spies monitoring your activity. Therefore, it is essential to encrypt your browsing to protect your research, your future sources and yourself.

There are two methods to surf securely while also allowing you to bypass censorship: You could either use VPN (Virtual Private Network) or proxy servers that make your location invisible. VPN is like a tunnel that pretends you are in a different network.

A simple way to use a VPN is to install software, most of the times you are able to choose between applications for the smartphone, the computer or the browser. When the VPN is activated, you will be able to select a location where you pretend to be. Some recommended VPN providers are ZenMate, CyberGhost or ExpressVPN. But be aware that most VPN providers do not offer their services for free. Payment details will be saved, and you will leave some traces even when using this online browsing method. An alternative, but more complex, possibility is to set up your own VPN.

One well-known proxy network is TOR (The Onion Router). While using the TOR browser, you surf with another IP address. This is possible because TOR is a network of encrypted computer connections. Every user has an access point to this network. After routing through three or more of these servers, a user reaches the exit. This is the IP address this person uses officially.

However, it does not mean that you cannot be traced. In November 2014, the FBI and other European services de-anonymised 17 people who misused TOR for criminal activities. However, operations like this are very intensive and expensive. So, there is a small risk that secret services use methods like this to track average citizens or journalists as long as they do not sell weapons or share child porn. But be especially careful if you operate in a country with a very low press freedom standard and a well-equipped secret service.

The TOR browser is also available as a smartphone app for android devices (Orfox and the add-on Orbot). iOS user looking for proxy browsers should enter Onion Browser.

Using clouds

Although public clouds as Dropbox, Google Drive or OneDrive are free and easy to use, you should avoid them for sharing sensitive files, photos or other data. You have no control what happens with your documents in the cloud, and you are dependent on the provider keeping your information secure.

An alternative cloud-based solution with an automatic encryption of the stored data is BlauCloud. The service is based on the open-source cloud solution ownCloud. As the data is stored in Germany, users benefit from the restrictive German data security law. But even this more secure method means you are entrusting the host with your data. A better way to store data remotely is to create your own private cloud through a NAS (Network attached Storage). However, a NAS is not free or inexpensive.

Physical storage

When handling top-secret documents, you may not always have digital copies. In this case, consider scanning every file and storing them on a hard drive or a USB device. Remember to encrypt these sensitive files. Your next step is to find a good hiding place for these devices in case you are being followed or spied upon. Good hiding places do not have to be safes or bank locker. You could also use USB devices which are so small that they fit into pens, earrings, bracelets or in other objects. Just be creative where to put your sensitive information, and do not forget your chosen hide-out!

Disable camera and microphone

Using respective software, third parties can monitor you through the camera on your devices and listen through internal microphones. The easiest way to prevent misuse of your camera is to put a sticker over it. This might seem silly, but a hacker will be preventing from viewing your activities, and you are able to decide more easily when to use the camera by taking off the sticker. Another option is to disable the camera function on your computer. Bear in mind that you will need to enable the functions each time you want to use either the camera or the microphone and that these threats similarly apply to your smartphone.

▷ How to erase data

If you believe you are being followed and you want to erase all the data you have on your computer, consider the following advice: Do not only use the delete function on your computer; it cancels just the reference but actual documents may still be stored on your hard disc and can easily be restored by a third party. This technique is the same for flash drives, like those used in digital cameras. By all means, overwrite your data. It is recommended to use tools like Eraser, Secure Eraser (both Windows) or Super Eraser (Mac). These programmes use different matrix to overwrite the file with various numbers that make it impossible to restore the original file.

Furthermore, it is highly recommended to regularly wipe and to reinstall any software on your devices (at least twice a year). Make sure that you do not just format your hard drive, but that you overwrite the data for the same reason as you overwrite your files. You can use the recommended tools for this process as well.

Data in motion

This section is extremely important for the communication security of investigative journalists. Here, we explain how to protect 'data in motion', which refers to information that travels from one network to another, like that used in emails and text messages. The following security tools try to avoid third parties from intercepting and changing information before it arrives to the recipient.

▷ Emailing secure

Using common email providers like Gmail, Yahoo or Hotmail is very dangerous for an investigative journalist because most email applications offer little security and privacy standards. Tools like Gmail are attractive for hackers because these sites are so popular. Consequently, it is necessary that you secure the transportation and content of your email. This happens through two stages:

Before using any email service, check the availability of

1) Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) or

2) Transport Layer Security (TLS).

Do not use mail provider that does not offer these services. SSL and TLS ensure the encryption of your emails via online transmission from one server to another. However, the email will be stored as a non-encrypted pure text file on both of the servers. This means that server administrators can access your emails, read them or change them.

For the encryption of the content of an email, Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) offers a very secure solution. If you encrypt your emails via PGP, no one except the recipient can access it. The bad news is that it is not easy to implement, and therefore not widely employed.

Despite these limitations, PGP is a cryptographic system generating two keys, a public one and a private. Simplified, the public key is needed to encrypt the email, the private key to decrypt it. The public key, as the name indicates, is accessible by everybody, whereas the private key is only owned by the user. If you want to send a PGP-encrypted email to another person, you need his public PGP key to encrypt the email. You get this key either from the recipient or from a public key server. The receiver can open it with his private key and its respective password. To use PGP, your email client has to support the service.

Recommendable email clients are Thunderbird or the popular Microsoft Outlook that offer add-ons for PGP. If you want to use PGP with a different email client, like Gmail, try Mailvelope. However, be aware that with these common email providers, PGP cannot hide the sender, recipient or the subject of the email.

Another recommended email provider that offers an end-to-end encrypted service is ProtonMail. The service is designed as a zero-knowledge system, using client-side encryption to protect emails and user data before they are sent to ProtonMail servers. The servers are located in data-secure Switzerland, the encryption is based on SSL, PGP and the code is open-source. The difference between Thunderbird and the similar tool Evolution is that ProtonMail is an actual email provider and not only a client.

Texting secure

The latest communication trends avoid email altogether and rely on instant messengers like WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook Messenger, Viber or Snapchat. In few seconds, you can send information or documents around the globe. Providers like WhatsApp may advertise their end-to-end encryption; however, none offer total security. Generally, it is dangerous to share confidential information using messengers. Some other text messaging applications offer a more secure end-to-end encryption, like Signal, Telegram or Wire, which work for both iOS and Android.

More information about these applications can be found at whispersystems.org.

Using public devices secure

Try to avoid public devices. It is easier to ensure secure communications on your own devices, and you do not know who used a public device previously or what malware it may have installed on it. If you have to use a public computer, bring with you a bootable USB device. This device will work like a temporary operating system that allows you to work on the public computer without using its own functions. The content will be saved in the RAM, in the short memory of the computer, and is only valid for a single session. When you shut down the computer, there will be no data or activity saved on the public device.

Booting a device is also recommended when you want to use a different operating system. For example, you can install a Linux system on a booted USB device; after booting from the stick on your Windows computer, you will be actually working on a Linux system. But remember, there will be no data saved on your computer. Creating a bootable USB device is not easy, and if you decide to use this method, you should watch tutorials in the web.

You should also avoid free, open Wi-Fi connections, as you similarly do not know who is logged-in to the same connection and whether that person is trying to do you harm. When connecting into free Wi-Fi, use VPNs at all times to surf in the Internet. This provides at least minimal levels of privacy.

SEC

Secure Alternative: LINUX

Linux is an alternative operating system for computers and smart-phones that is mostly used by computer scientists. Specialists have identified it as one of the most secure operating systems available. Modern distributions can be installed and used as easily as other operating systems. Common distributions are Ubuntu, openSUSE, Debian, Mint and Elementary OS.

The particular advantage of Linux is that it is free, open-source and flexible to configure. Because everyone can help source code errors and security bugs, they will be unveiled and fixed faster than in other operation systems. And, because the system is not as widespread as Windows or Apple, there are fewer viruses on the Linux platform. Every year, Linux publishes their list of the best Linux distributions.

Links for the distributions can be found here:

Best security and can be used for an USB device:
@ tails.boum.org

Best looking:
@ elementary.io

Popular and good for laptops:
@ ubuntu.com

User-friendly:
@ opensuse.org
@ linuxmint.com

Good for servers:
@ debian.org

URITY

How to Make a Secure Phone Call?

Always try to speak with your source about classified information in person. Phone conversations can easily be intercepted by a third party, so avoid confidential topics at all costs. Popular services like Skype do not guarantee end-to-end encryption. And even tools like WhatsApp, Wire or Signal encrypt phone calls between two devices, they do not provide a 100 percent guarantee.

Once you have arranged a place to meet your source, leave your phone at home or shut it off and take out the battery to ensure the device is offline. Additionally, you can use a Faraday Cage Phone Case which blocks electromagnetic signals. The Edward Snowden method is to put the device in a refrigerator to guarantee privacy of a conversation.

Furthermore, you should limit the apps on your phone. Each time you install an app, it asks for access to specific functions, data or information on your device. It is therefore necessary to restrict apps' permission when at all possible. Within the privacy settings, iOS and Android offer to disable the allowance. But bear in mind that the app will not work without the access permission.

> Please note:
>
> The accompanying website of this manual
> **investigative-manual.org**
> offers additional links to explanatory videos and
> further information regarding data security.

In sum, the goal of this chapter was to underscore the importance of a secured working environment and to make clear that there will never be a 100 percent security during an investigation. The provided information shows how to contact your source safely and what should be considered before meeting with an informant. You are now prepared for the following investigative steps that will be outlined in the following chapters: how to find out about all the aspects of your investigation, how to ask your source the right questions at the meeting and which interviewing techniques are best for obtaining the information you need.

Notes:

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CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

This chapter will discuss the basic research skills an investigative journalist needs to start with work. Journalists need to be aware of, and proficient in, certain tools basic to their craft: data mining and mapping, knowing how to follow a paper trail and computer-assisted reporting. It is also important that investigative journalists have basic numeracy skills because some stories require the analysis of quantitative data.

How to Access Information?

In many countries, government or private sector information is kept away from the public, shrouded in Official Secrets Acts, Terrorism Acts or simple unwillingness of public officials. It took seven years, from 2000 to 2007, before a number of European governments finally succumbed to freedom of information pressure on the issue of business subsidies. In order for the European public to find out where state subsidies for businesses were going, committed journalists in six countries had to work together and sort through court cases to secure the release of the information. The results were more than worth it: The list of main recipients of state subsidies turned out to be headed by captains of industry and members of royal families. They, rather than small or struggling businesses, had received millions of pounds and Euro of taxpayer money to subsidise their already highly profitable enterprises.

Open-record laws exist in almost all countries, but it remains a struggle to use those laws effectively. Journalists will always have to work hard to get the information they need. A law only means that a door can be opened; you still have to find your way to the door and knock until it actually opens. And you need to understand relevant laws in detail to do that.

If you live in a country that does not have open records law and are possibly still plagued by the existence of an Official Secrets Act, you probably struggle every day to get any public or private sector information at all. You may be further frustrated by civil servants who will only give you documents in exchange for money, knowing that you will not otherwise be able to access them. How do you avoid paying for documents if there is no other way of getting the information that we need? The long, hard way is struggling through access to information legislation and practice.

RESEARCH   MEET   ASK   WRITE

If your country does have Freedom of Information (FoI) laws, the following general principles should guide your attempts to access information:

▶ Find out what has been published in semi-official or specialist contexts on the subject, and try to find a mole that will let you see relevant documents.

▶ Always check first whether the information is already 'out there'. Limited-circulation published papers sometimes contain summaries and even extracts from supposedly secret documents.

▶ Use FoI provisions as a last resort. If you can demonstrate that you have genuinely tried every other channel, this strengthens your case for demanding the document.

▶ Plan ahead: FoI procedures can be slow, and you are very unlikely to get a document you need by tomorrow. Therefore, identify and approach the right information-holders.

▶ Make precise requests for named (or numbered) documents. Asking for 'everything you've got on...' will not get results.

▶ Document your requests and the responses you receive very carefully. You may need these records to prove that the authorities are deliberately flouting FoI laws and may have something to hide.

How to Build your own Database?

Investigative journalism is based on understanding how systems work or supposed to work – that is likely how you have found your story and planned investigations thus far. To get answers, frame your questions in the following manner: How is this process or system supposed to work? Who is supposed to do what, when and how? How is the process documented and recorded? What standards or benchmarks will be in place, how are they established and who enforces them? The more detailed and comprehensive the answers will be, the better you will be able to judge where and when things may go wrong.

Additionally, it is important to keep track of the chronology in your investigation. This does not mean that you have to present your story in a chronological way, but rather that you 'pin' found facts on a timeline of the events. This will help you to build a clear picture of what came before and after, and what happened simultaneously.

You will also need to differentiate between qualitative and quantitative knowledge. Quantitative is about placing numbers on the map. For instance, how many quality checks does a certain medicine need to undergo? What is the level of pollution in a water body? How has city crime trended over the past five years? Very often, it is the figures that can turn a small local story into a major national investigation by providing concrete evidence, like school dropout figures in your community that may also resonate with the entire country.

In contrast, qualitative mapping is about people, events, reasons, motivations, feelings and arguments. In many places around the world, it is hardly possible to access quantitative or written records simply because there are not any. But there are two other ways to investigate issues in such a document-poor environment: through use of your own observations and structured interviews of relevant people. This is how you can build your own database. Keep in mind that starting with an issue often leads you to a person or group of people, but profiling databases works also the other way around: a piece of land or a street address can lead you to the owner.

To organise all the researched information, there are electronic project management tools that allow you to create a database of interviewees, knowledgeable contacts, informants and their areas of expertise. It should contain a catalogue of questions, fact-sheets to help you record established facts as well as assumptions that still need to be proved, plus hyperlinks to relevant documents, facts, statistics, databanks, minutes and interviews. Evernote is very popular among journalists but not secure enough to store classified information. Keep in mind security when choosing a management tool.

Structured interviews

When profiling a person, your newshound instinct might hope for the best, which is often the nastiest story. But real facts are what you need. How do you get a 'feel' for another human being? You may start with examining a person's assets and the personal history. Talk to people who know or have worked with this individual. How is the person described? Faced with such evidence, you may begin to doubt if you are on the right track with a nasty headline. But beware of 'inner circle superlatives' – you should not immediately trust every reference.

Structured interviews do not merely mean talking to people in journalistic interviewing style, although you will have those kinds of conversations, too. But you need to develop a systematic process for building your own databases and statistics, derived from what people have experienced or witnessed. You need to use structured interviews that compile a list of standardised questions you will ask all interviewees (although you will also add extra questions flexibly if something new comes up in an individual conversation). Because there are no written records you can compare to sources' oral statements, it is vital that you compile information that is quantitative in nature.

This practice allows you to conduct a mini-survey, and works as follows:

(1) Compile a comprehensive list of questions that can establish likely facts. For example, ask sources if they can remember when something first happened. In this way, you can assess when a certain problem started (e.g. rapes or assaults by strangers, crops dying, road deterioration, disappearances of local people), its possible causes (e.g. people might say things like 'It was at the time when X also happened'), and others' responses ('We decided to move to town X').

(2) Ask all sources the same standardised set of questions.

(3) Ask the questions precisely, seek concrete details and record the answers accurately. This is one kind of interviewing where closed-ended questions can be useful for getting definite answers, although you also need to seek more expressive and nuanced responses, too. Collectively, these answers can be used to build your own database.

Paper trail

More information in your database may come from paper trails. The phrase 'paper trail' is a metaphor derived from the school racing game where a leader ran through the countryside dropping bits of paper and the following group tracked him as fast as they could by following his trail. A paper trail works the same way in investigative journalism: You identify documents you need to support your hypothesis and develop a strategy to access them. The process involves using one document to lead you to the next relevant document. Then, you follow the paper trail back to look for links between your findings.

Jot down everything in these starting documents that you think may be relevant. This could, for example, include a person's CV that says he was a security officer for a mining company in an area affected by civil war. It could be that the CV does not document this individual's gaps in employment. This is where basic numeracy skills come in. By adding the number of years worked at various jobs, and the total years reflected in the employment record to see if there is any un-documented time. You may find work or company records that indicate whether a person left a position suddenly. This would lead you to look for more documents about that person's workplace history. You might find that the human resources department recorded a complaint of theft or fraud against the person. You could follow that bit of the trail to look for police, court or prison records about that person, and so on. In other words, you use one document to lead you to another and provide confirmatory evidence.

Once you have distinguished between relevant and irrelevant documents, you will need to exercise empathy. Put yourself in the subject's shoes and picture possible scenarios: What might he or she have done? Would it make a difference if he or she chose option A or option B? This will help you avoid wild-goose chases. If after a five-year period abroad, someone was appointed to be a presidential 'consultant', it does not make sense to look for papers about that person's history in the president's office. The appointment probably happened behind closed doors based on a simple, short-term contract with few details. Instead, it is likely to be more productive to look for information overseas, where the person purportedly stayed or to try to track their cross-border movements.

Much of the paper trail can often be followed through public-record documents, though you may need to use creative source-cultivation skills to access privately-held papers. Many journalists think that using libraries and archives is simple. They are indexed alphabetically, so you just look for the person's name. However, it often is not as simple as that. If you work with computerised records, entering a name will pull up relevant results – often alongside a lot of irrelevant ones. But

in many, especially undeveloped, countries public records are physical documents stacked in a dusty room. You have to negotiate with the gatekeeper who controls access to this room and find out how the documents are indexed and how to use the index. Doing so can save a great deal of time and energy.

Very often, searching for public-record documents, such as birth certificates or driver's licences seems like the best way to start. But online news databases can also be surprisingly useful for searches about people. Most local newspapers are available online; do not ignore them. Every office has its own website; individuals have blogs and social media accounts. If a person of interest uses his or her real name, a news search can turn up court cases he/she may have been involved in or tangential information, like their attendance at a university function. News also often contains massive amounts of profiling and paper trail information, like details on local buildings (e.g. banks, companies, government offices), paid legal notices (e.g. wills, name changes, marriages, funerals, foreclosures, auctions, tenders, seized/ unclaimed properties), and arrests and convictions. Each of these fragments of information provides a piece of the jigsaw puzzle you are trying to solve.

To sum, you follow a paper trail by:

» Web-searching, visiting archives and persuading sources to speak with you until you have assembled whatever documents you can find about the person.

» Mapping these documents using the data-mapping techniques and looking for gaps, contradictions and inconsistencies.

» Thinking about what documents could fill the gaps or resolve the contradictions – and start investigating these.

Computer-assisted reporting (CAR)

A journalist who engages in computer-assisted reporting uses a computer to gather or analyse information for a news story. In particular, the Internet has dramatically increased the scope of information available to reporters and the ability to organise, retrieve and analyse it. Search programmes have revolution-ised finding data on the web. Some of the best known are DuckDuckGo and meta-crawlers, which search four or five search engines at the same time. The trick to efficient web-searches is to select keywords and phrases with enough precision to exclude results that are irrelevant. You can set your search preferen-ces to get the maximum results. On DuckDuckGo, you can filter time, region, and language or use research methods to limit the number of results for each search.

Keywords provide a simple way of narrowing down your focus, but often, keywords alone are not enough. Say you are researching information about a man named John Smith. Simply typing in John and Smith into a search engine will generate every document where both of those names appear, likely hundreds of thousands of documents. To avoid drowning in these search results, you should identify unique features of the John Smith you are looking for, like his hometown or profession. Always remember when conducting Internet re-search, to close any revealing tabs and remove compromising information if you plan to use a screen grab that could be shared publicly.

It is better to build your own database in a structured, searchable way that works for you. When you save documents from the Internet or save transcripts of interviews or notes, do so in a way which will allow you to find information again easily. Try using the aforementioned project management tools for this purpose.

Lastly, bear in mind the following ethical considerations to practice computer-assisted reporting:

! If possible, publish detailed references or links to sites where original documents can be read; be transparent about the data you find and use.

! Verify your data very carefully, including checking the date of the information.

! Draw correct conclusions from statistical and numerical data; your readers may not be able to do the calculations and have to trust your math.

Some researching tricks can be found on researchclinic.net.

How to Mine your Database?

Data mining is arguably the most objective process to help you arriving evidence. Think about which lead is more likely to put you on the right track: a complaint from one hospital patient about thieving nurses or a database from the Health Ministry on disciplinary hearings and dismissals as a result of complaints about theft over the last five years? As with all information, you should always be mindful that even statistics can be manipulated and used to misinform, but efficient 'mining' of databases has exposed immensely important stories over the last decade.

International data can provide even more relevant results. For example, development aid donors sometimes publish reports on how they spent their money in any given year. By collecting such data from donors that are active in your country and analysing them, you can tell stories with headlines like 'Donors (to our country) spent most aid money training our civil servants'.

Database mining does not always have to be about finances, either. Social network analyses have produced stories on terrorist networks, political party supporters, and the most influential and richest people in particular communities. These networks can be members of a certain profession, a geographic community or prominent people in a political party. You can combine data on how much they earn, who they work with and meet that paints a social network picture, which tells you something about their influence in society.

It is important to compile all necessary data yourself using the databases of journalists' and other organisations. In their databases, journalists or organisations store information, sometimes tagged by topic. These databases can contain articles, researches, studies and also contacts. Those data can then be used to obtain more background research. In the US and Europe, investigative journalists have established centres that produce databases for mining that journalists around the world can use.

Nicar in the US, for example, collected data on Guantanamo Bay detainees and has made this database publicly available:

nicar.org/downloads

How to Deal with Numbers?

Much investigative journalism is qualitative: It looks at why and how things go wrong and who might be responsible. But almost every investigative story has quantitative data as well. How big was the deficit? What are the statistics on illegal fishing in your country? How many patients are turned away from clinics each year?

This means that you need to know how to tell a big number from a small one, and how to make sense of numbers through a few simple calculations like percentages. Most people do not become journalists because they really love numbers. But numbers are not difficult, and in fact, are essential to investigative storytelling.

Many people who believe they have no skill with numbers actually use them in quite sophisticated ways every day: budgeting for living expenses, determining if a season train ticket is a good value or negotiating a pay increase. The way many schools teach numeracy and math has contributed to a fear of 'mathematics' in perfectly numerate people; they have simply not learned to connect the practical applications of numbers with the abstract science of math.

The good news for journalists is that numbers in the media focus mainly on application and have a strong qualitative slant (for example, in understanding who collects statistics, how and why). But you start by understanding the basics. For example, if you want to check out a clinic nurse's official job description and work efficiency, you can employ experts who help you create a timetable of a 'typical day' in this profession.

Then, via observation and interviews, you can find out:

? What tasks occupy most time? Do the nurses use short-cuts? What are they? Are nurses faced with too many tasks to fit into their schedules?

? How does a nurse's job description relate to the average number of patients that visit a clinic? How long does the work take per patient?

Similarly, if you need an air sample analysed, you can find out what pollutants are in the air, and ask a medical expert whether these are dangerous and what levels of exposure will damage health. Match the levels against the air purity regulations in your country. You may find that this problem started a long time ago, and the figures have not changed much over time, or that similar 'peaks' seem to occur fairly regularly or even that that figures are lower now than they

used to be! The journalist's job is to interpret these numbers and determine whether the problem has become bigger or simply more noticeable. But numbers alone are not enough. The context – why is the problem more noticeable now? – may be where your story lies.

Weather statistics are some of the longest-collected numerical records in most countries. In Africa, for example, they were among the first statistics the colonial authorities recorded, and can be traced back even further by community oral history traditions on floods and drought. In many Asian countries, there is also a dedicated database that documents weather patterns. In South East Europe, official weather records can be dated back to the end of the 19th century. So you may want to investigate whether weather conditions such as climate change, floods and drought are really unprecedented in your country. You can compare and analyse data for fluctuations in weather patterns.

The point is, always be on the lookout for how data can contribute to a story. Sometimes people will come to you with tips, but often you must discover the stories yourself. Story ideas can come from what you read, overhear or even from a press release. Press releases are not designed to be placed under statistical scrutiny – or at least, that is what their authors hope. But often press releases provide key information and may lead to bigger stories. Good investigative reporters do not let any possible story clues escape. However, be sceptical about numbers, graphs or and other forms of quantitative data. It may first seem like data present a unique compelling story, but good investigative reporters should question the methods used to generate data, like how a survey was conducted, how a sample selected, who funded and published it and whether it would be in their best interest to leave out any salient details?

Samples and comparison group

Bald numbers tell you very little. They assume meaning as part of the whole population that they are drawn from. 'Four out of five doctors' may sound impressive, but supposing only 20 doctors out of the thousands practicing in the UK contributed to the results, 16 doctors are not very impressive. They are not very representative of how doctors across the entire country might think or behave.

There are more criteria a representative survey has to meet. In the doctor example, journalists should ask whether the survey conducted at various cities or hospitals in order to capture different opinions around the country. Which method was used to collect the answers – telephone, online or a face-to-face interview? Have all age and gender categories been captured with the survey? These are just a few examples; the criteria that journalists should consider when questioning the survey validity will vary depending on the topic and results.

Interpretation of graphs

To interpret figures and graphs, always first look at the legend! With graphs, you need to understand the scale and the starting point. It is easy to make a small change look dramatic by increasing the scale and starting only with the section of the figures that show the change. Be sceptical with fractions or percentages when interpreting graphs. Keep in mind the previous information about samples and the comparison group.

Sometimes, two sets of figures seem to follow the same pattern. However, this does not prove that they are necessarily related to one another or that there is a cause-and-effect relationship. Children get bigger as they get older. Their language skills improve as they get older, around the same rate. But that does not mean that physical growth improves language skills! Again, you need to carefully read graphs and charts to assess why a relationship is being suggested. Is there valid research on a similar or comparable area to support the relationship? Likewise, just because something happened after something else, does not automatically prove that the first event caused the second. Data alone cannot prove anything. Research requires an examination of the context, ruling out other possible causes and identifying the precise mechanism by which the first event may cause the second.

At this point, you have gathered information, possible names for potential sources and built up your databases. The next chapter will explain how to identify good human sources and how to gain insight into what these sources know.

Case study 'Skopje 2014 Uncovered': How to create a useful database

By Ana Petrusheva

When BIRN Macedonia initially started documenting 'Skopje 2014', it was searching for an answer to a question that was repeatedly asked by the public without a response: 'how much the entire project costs'. Buildings and dozens of monuments rose but the silence of the institutions only led to rumours and speculations. The authorities initially said it would cost 80 million Euro but it was clear that this amount did not account for everything that was built. Estimates ranged up to 500 million Euro. The massive makeover project was launched soon after the right-wing party VMRO DPMNE came to power in 2006, led by Nikola Gruevski with the intention of giving the capital a neo-classical new look that would validate the country's claims of past links to ancient Macedonia and Alexander the Great. Some journalists had attempted to document the costs for separate buildings but most efforts to obtain public documents resulted in nothing but silence, officials and institutions ignoring calls for transparency.

The project was controversial for multiple reasons: not only due to the cost of it but also on the grounds of aesthetics (introducing neo-classical style in the 21st century), the quality of the construction, and the ideology behind it – the attempt to impose a national identity that would paint Macedonians as descendants of Alexander the Great.

The database 'Skopje 2014 Uncovered', compiled over an eight month period and published in July 2015, revealed that the Skopje revamp cost about 560 million Euro, not 80 million originally claimed. The database contains all sums, contracts, suppliers, names of companies and authors as well as investors of the project, and thus reflects the actual total expenditure.

Since 2015 the database has been constantly updated. By early 2018 the cost of 'Skopje 2014' had shot up to 684 million Euro.

The investigation covers more than 130 objects, all financed with public money with main investors being the Ministry of Culture, the General Department for Joint and Common Works, the Skopje Centar

Municipality, the City of Skopje as well as other municipalities and joint stock companies with state shareholders.

The investigation is based on data procured through the Access to Public Information Act, the official website of the Public Procurement Bureau, the 'Skopje 2014' audit and a joint report by the government, the Skopje Centar Municipality and the Ministry of Culture, presented after the 2013 local elections.

During the investigation, BIRN submitted almost 150 public information requests in the search for data on the project. Almost all institutions complied, though most missed the thirty-day deadline.

The documents obtained by BIRN show that more than 300 legal entities and physical persons have participated in the grand makeover of the capital, while over 30 different institutions have contributed funding to the project out of the state budget.

The database, published in Macedonian and English (skopje2014.prizma.birn.eu.com) documents in detail each of the 28 buildings, 34 monuments, 39 sculptures, four bridges, five public squares, fountains, an triumphal arch, a Ferris wheel worth 18 million Euro, multi-storey parking garages, dozens of facades as well as costs for maintenance and lighting.

Apart from basic information about each structure, the database provides users with information about the costs, the investors (different government institutions), the designers, and the construction companies. It also offers the option to download available documents.

The database also provides summary data about the top contractors and designers and shows that one construction company has won contracts worth one third of the entire project, with an amount over 200 million Euro, while one individual sculptor has contracts worth nearly three million Euro.

In addition to the summary data, the database facilitates easy search and cross-analysis of the data by users seeking in-depth information on public money spent on the project.

The database has served as basis for numerous investigative reports by BIRN and has exposed multiple cases of abuse, corruption, and

breach of procedure. Since 2017, Macedonia's Special Prosecutor's Office (SJO) has been investigating the making of 'Skopje 2014'. Apart from showing that the entire projects is seven times more expensive than originally estimated, the database revealed that more than two thirds of the total amount spent for construction went to five companies. The company that won one third of the total budget of the project, over 200 million Euro, had built the new headquarters of VMRO DPMNE, known as the white palace. In addition to the database, BIRN investigations revealed links between the NGO that donated monuments and the government.

The 'Skopje 2014 Uncovered' database has won the most prestigious awards in the country, the Nikola Mladenov award for investigative journalism, and the EU award for investigative journalism, and is recognised the sole reliable source of information about the project 'Skopje 2014', both in Macedonia and abroad.

Notes:

CHAPTER SIX

PSSST... INSIGHT - KNOWLEDGE

Human sources are some of an investigative journalist's biggest assets. If one builds trusting relationships with good sources, they can lead to big scoops. This chapter discusses how to build these relationships and win the source's trust so they are willing to share information. Part of this process is about being able to tell the difference between a subject expert and a fraud. The other part involves identifying lobbyists and spin doctors who try to influence journalists with their own agendas.

Finding, developing and maintaining sources are crucial for an investigative journalist. The most important, reliable and vivid sources are usually witnesses, people with first-hand experience or are otherwise directly involved in a story. You identify witnesses by combing through the names of people present at the scene, or simply buttonholing those while you are there. If people claim to have been present or involved, you must verify that they were. If a witness has experienced the story, he or she would likely be a valuable asset to you. When reporting on what you have observed at the location of a story, you become a very important witness yourself.

And each story you write should expand the scope of your network. Often, this happens organically in the course of reporting. But if you are working on a specific project, you should be proactive in building a network of highly relevant and credible sources. Do not neglect your journalistic colleagues; they may have valuable personal connections, but if rivalry on a story is intense, you may not wish to share story details.

You can also search for people publicly associated with your story subject. Consider organisations like sports clubs, religious organisations or charities. Remember that such people, because they are in some kind of relationship with the subject, may have a disposition or attitude towards him or her. Factor this into your enquiries. Look for people who were previously associated with the subject: Ex-partners in business, former spouses, employees, doctors, teachers, or former police or army officers. People with whom the subject was in a known dispute or in litigation can also be very important witnesses, but, again, remember that their emotions and attitudes will colour what they tell you. Development researcher Joe Hanlon calls this 'finding the woman who knows'.

Evaluating sources

People bring you tips for a range of reasons, many of which have nothing to do with helping investigative journalism or exposing wrongdoing. The same may be true when you approach a source. Personal grievances, circumstances or beliefs may colour what they say, leading them to exaggerate some aspects or stay silent about others. Some sources may be over-eager to be helpful, and give answers they think you want to hear. Your background research on the source may shed light on some of this; your observation of how they behave while they talk to you will also help.

People sometimes make honest mistakes and forget details. For both these reasons, you need to verify everything through a third, independent source. Evidence should all point in the same direction (but only rarely will it be exactly the same) from two sources who have not learned it from one another. If you cannot find a second source, or there is simply no time, you may have to confide in your audience that, 'it was impossible to confirm the statement.' Too many unconfirmed statements, claims and allegations in a story will weaken it and compromise your integrity as an investigative journalist.

But suppose your second source provides conflicting information rather than confirmation? In this case, you should inform your audience of both positions, or integrate the conflict between them into the story: 'The interior ministry said armed men crossed the border; the defence ministry described them as un-armed.' If some details do not fit into the story you were trying to tell, you simply cannot ignore them; your own credibility and professionalism are at stake here. Journalists with a distinguished track record and extensive contact networks, such as Seymour Hersh, may sometimes have relied on a single source. Very few are in that league.

Whoever you will talk to, at the most basic level, you need to find out whether the person is who he or she claims to be. Can they prove where they work, their address, their family details, military record, passport, ID or driver's licence? If a source has a history of crime, personal difficulties, mental illness, financial problems, violence or fraud, you will need to be particularly sceptical about what they tell you. If a source resists, there are probably strong reasons for hiding the information, and you need to factor this into your judgment about whether you can trust the information they provide.

Only when you know what you are looking for will you be able to assess the quality of what you get. Does the source provide a complete explanation or set of evidence? Could you piece it together in any other, equally plausible way, and come to a different conclusion? Where are the 'holes'? Is the source's experience likely to be representative of experiences in his or her community? Is it up-to-date, or did it happen so long ago that things may have changed and details are misremembered?

Experts

There are experts on almost everything: historians, research scientists, lawyers, engineers and many more. When dealing with corporate affairs (e.g. the activities of multinationals), it is particularly important to identify the right expert, like someone who works for the company that is the subject of your investigation. But a great deal will depend on how this person obtained their expertise, and whether or not they were involved in something that triggered your investigation. Experts in different, but related areas may provide fresh insights into your subject. A lawyer, a police officer, a doctor or even an interrogator may be as useful to your story on human rights violations as a human rights campaigner.

However, not all experts have equal status or are equally reliable. So look for recommendations from other journalists you trust; research the person on the Internet. Find out who they do their research for, since scientists funded by commercial concerns may share the same biases as lobbyists. Look at what criticisms their work has drawn, and remember that both praise and criticisms happen within the contending ideas of a particular discipline.

Even reliable experts (or expert reports) need to be interrogated. If several experts disagree, you must find a way of presenting these differences in context, so they make sense to readers. If the weight of expert opinion stands strongly on one side, it makes sense to heed the expert's advice, but you also may be proven wrong. When experts are evenly divided, you owe it to your readers to explain that. For a long time, the media presented the debate on global warming as evenly divided. Only later did analysis of reports reveal that many of the 'experts' debunking global warming were paid spokespeople from energy lobbies. In fact, the overwhelming weight of scientific evidence has, for many years, signified that global warming is happening and is dangerous.

In most countries with a functioning federal government, government departments and experts are regarded as some of the most reliable sources of information. There is a long history of

apparent impartiality in scientific reports, accurate minutes of meetings, court proceedings and registrations. But in major and controversial stories, this can prove to be a naive and dangerous assumption. A state-employed expert is just as likely to be right or wrong as any other expert – and in some cases may be under pressure from the government to present information in a particular light. As with other sources, consider the context and possible motives when you weigh the information these expert sources provide. However, these insiders are often extremely knowledgeable and assuming they are always biased is just as detrimental as assuming they are always correct and impartial. Just like information from non-expert sources, verify all information they give you using a second informed source. It is also sometimes possible to ask a government department for an unofficial or off-the-record briefing from one of their specialists, and this can provide extensive background, although you cannot quote it in your story.

We tend to think of international bodies as sources of written reports and policies only. But they can also provide useful contacts, both in their home country and in the countries in which they operate. They are under no obligation to help you, but are often extremely sympathetic if approached correctly, particularly if your enquiries relate to an issue where they have strong interests. But precisely for this reason, donor bodies (like all other organisations) and other types of agencies have their own policies and principles, and are often firmly guided by these policies or backing organisations. Research will allow you to put their comments and information in context and judge whether you also need to conduct a balancing interview with another source.

Sometimes, you can 'shake out' contacts by letting it be known that you are working on a topic, or already possess certain information. You can do this informally, by using your networks of contacts; sometimes by publishing a preliminary story on the investigative project. At that point, new people may volunteer additional information, or previously reluctant sources may come forward to 'correct' your story. Always weigh the pros and cons of this tactic carefully, as it can backfire. An equally possible outcome is that you alert people to your scrutiny, and they rush to hide evidence, silence sources or take pre-emptive action against you!

If you cannot find an expert to backup your story that does not mean you cannot move forward. You may be wrong – or you may simply be asking the wrong expert, or the wrong questions. Including a diversity of opinions in your story shows you have an open mind and may prompt other experts with different views to come forward.

Whistleblowers, gatekeepers and door-openers

Sometimes, reading can lead you to 'whistleblowers' (discontented employees with dirt to share on their organisation). Many companies, organisations and government departments in the developed world have unofficial electronic meeting 'rooms' where critical opinions and information can be shared. But do not use information from these sites directly in your story. You need to verify that the whistleblower is genuine and can support their claims; try to confirm the presented evidence by meeting the source in person.

The most useful contacts are those within an organisation who can save you the moral dilemmas and risks of 'going underground' yourself. Gatekeepers are often literally that: secretaries, receptionists and door security officers who can let you into a place or tell you who else goes in and out. Do not make the mistake of paying attention only to high-ranking officials; try to establish good professional relationships with everyone. Gatekeepers also play a symbolic role; controlling access to information rather than physical entry. Remember that gatekeepers, such as workers in banks, credit departments or government bodies, will have signed confidentiality clauses as part of their employment contracts, and are legally bound not to disclose information. Do not seek their help for frivolous reasons, and always keep your relationships with them discreet, so that their identities are protected to the best of your ability.

One very useful question in any investigation is 'Who has this information?' Often, information has multiple gatekeepers. Think laterally: If the Ministry of Health refuses to give you a document, perhaps another governing body has access to the same document, for example the World Health Organisation, a health NGO, a university researcher working in this field, or a sympathetic member of the parliamentary health sub-committee. Surveyors are inside contacts that may not have any sensitive knowledge, but can tell you who is who, who is important and who makes decisions.

Door-openers are the people with influence. If they like you, or believe your work is worthwhile, they can persuade others to talk to you. Door-openers may be respected elder statesmen or far less senior, but trusted, individuals in an organisation or social group. Sometimes, a traditional leader is the door-opener for his or her community. These are the people who others listen to when they say: 'This journalist is ok; you can talk to him or her'. Identify these individuals through your background research and cultivate relationships with them whenever possible.

Spin doctors

We call official spokespeople and lobbyists 'spin doctors': They are paid to make their employer's case and put the most positive interpretation – 'spin' – on events. But it is not always easy to spot the spin doctor. Obviously, the minister's press liaison officer is one. But what about journalists who are secretly paid to promote a certain cause or a party? What about story packages covertly fed to the press by official or commercial sources working underground? Or 'experts' actually paid by a commercial company to promote certain products? And material anonymously fed on to unvetted websites? All of these unconventional spin doctors are increasingly used to promote causes, big and small. For example, the US government used a commercial company to 'manage' the public image of the Gulf War, and its CEO proudly described himself as an 'information warrior'.

However, it is easier to deal with an acknowledged spin doctor than with fake news. You know that the minister's spokesperson is paid to gloss over problems and spotlight achievements. Only the most unskilled will actually lie because it is easy to disprove lies with minimal research. And thorough preliminary research coupled with good interviewing techniques can shake evasions and misleading emphases. Remember, spokespeople are just doing their jobs, as you are doing yours.

Besides official spokespersons, governments – and quite a few large corporations – have intelligence agencies trying to covertly advance their bosses', and sometimes their own, objectives. The US government used its intelligence agencies to plant stories in the media about Saddam Hussein's 'weapons of mass destruction' which, as it turned out later, he did not possess.

Planting stories is daily routine for secret services, which run entire departments aimed at influencing the media. They often spy on journalists to find out what investigators know, they even attempt to recruit them (in some cases, successfully). But just as often, they feed journalists (often spectacular-sounding) information with the objective of spinning them, and through them, the public. Be very, very cautious when someone seems all too willing to 'help' you with important tapes and documents, even if their motivations sound plausible.

Evelyn Groenink, who founded the Forum for African Investigative Reporters Network, investigated the killing of Dulcie September, a representative of the African National Congress in Paris in 1988. In this case, the French secret services planted many false reports in the newspapers 'identifying' foreign killers to obscure their own role. Groenink was once promised '300 hours of tape-recorded conversations' with a known French arms dealer by a 'businessman who

had been duped'. The source seemed to have a reasonable motive for going to the press: revenge after having been defrauded. But when Groenink started asking questions about the massive amounts of money, time, surveillance opportunities, plane tickets and network of contacts that the 'defrauded victim' appeared to have at his disposal, the source disappeared – to London, where he lived and, Groenink suspects now, worked for the UK government or the UK arms industry.

As a rule of thumb, it is always better to find sources yourself than to allow them to find you. A 'deep throat' who claims that you must meet in a dark alley and never tell a soul about the meeting because 'they are after him', may very well be a part of 'them'! Particularly with 'hot' stories, you will very often encounter sources that are reluctant to speak to you, who insist that what they tell you is off-the-record, or will not agree to be named. You, by all means, need to know who the person is. If you do not have details about your source's background, you will not know what type of information they are qualified to speak about. The most risky source is an unidentified voice on the end of a phone line – even if deep throat did initiate Watergate.

How to Protect Sources?

Investigative reporting can sometimes be risky, particularly in countries where political issues can be sensitive and journalists can be arrested or even killed. So, often working discreetly (if not actually 'underground') is important. It is your responsibility to alert your source to any potential danger that could result from the story being published – but also to point out to them the social benefit and public interest of the disclosure. Only when you have discussed both these aspects can you say the source gave 'informed' consent to being named in the story. Make sure the source understands the risks of meeting you, discussing the story over the phone or in emails.

Do not discuss matters related to the source where you can be overheard, bugged, tapped (phone calls) or hacked (emails). Remember, it is very easy to track phone records, including cell phone calls, and to use routine tracking signals to locate you. Switch off your phone and remove the batteries before going to meetings that need to be secret. Ensure you keep any notes or records relating to the source in a safe place; perhaps with a third-party who is not connected to the investigation.

Open, identified witnesses, who talk to you without ambiguity, is the only effective way to counteract the spinning, lies, errors and crimes of the great and

powerful. So you need to take time to get that. However, you cannot force some-one to speak to you or go on the record. You need to understand the reasons behind their hesitation; don't be afraid to ask them. A good question is: 'What might happen if your name became known?' Sometimes, the reason is perso-nal fear: an undocumented migrant will be deported if her identity becomes known; a senior civil servant may be fired or even imprisoned; the person living with HIV may be attacked by his community. Explain to your source, before any information has been exchanged, that you may have to share their identity with some other people. Discuss how you will hide their identity, including how you will refer to their location, background, status or even gender. Accept your source's requirements for certain information to be off-the-record or for backg-round only – though you can try to make sure your editor and other colleagues involved in the story understand this, too. Your editor may ask you to disclose the name of the source. When you do this, make it absolutely clear that this information must go no further than the editor's office. This is the single most important principle governing relationships between reporters and sources. If you have given a commitment to conceal someone's identity, you must honour it; even if that means you end up in jail. But never make promises to a source in advance that you cannot keep; it is better to use an anonymous or off-the-record source than carry the moral responsibility for a tortured or dead one.

Bear in mind that in many countries, reporters and editors are tortured to reveal the names of sources. And since media offences in these countries often fall under criminal rather than civil law, verdicts may turn on your sources of in-formation, and refusal to reveal these may count as obstruction or contempt of court, and carry a prison sentence. You need to devise your own limits on how far you are prepared to go to protect a source before you even embark on the investigation.

Sam Sole, Mail & Guardian, Johannesburg:

My worst experience as a jour-nalist was to have a source assassinated, because the sour-ce had a lot more information than he provided for me, but he wanted to test the waters. He did not want his identity revealed, but of course all the people he was involved with did not have much difficulty to work out who he was and he got wiped out. So, maybe as a source it's better that you don't feed things in dribs and drabs, so that there's no reason to kill you, or you take the risk rather of using your name so that any action that is taken against you subsequently is very clearly in response to your whistleblo-wing action. That's the other side of source protection.

However, protecting your source from harm is one of the only reasons for using a nameless source in your story. Anonymous sources are hard to monitor, can encourage inaccurate reporting and will certainly cause readers to have less faith in the story. But they may also provide first-hand, insider knowledge, important confirmation or leads to additional evidence. Make your final decision based on the specific circumstances of your publication, the source and the story. Come to an agreement with the source about how you will refer to them in your story, and make their description as explicit as it is safe. 'An environmental scientist working with the forestry ministry' is better than 'a scientist' – unless he or she is the only environmental scientist that the ministry employs.

Protecting yourself

Laws that protect journalists – or lack thereof – vary from country to country, as does admissible as evidence in court. But it is your responsibility to know the law, understand the risks you undertake and their possible consequences.

Decide wisely where a good meeting point for you and your sources could be. Is it better to see each other in public or in a private environment? Should there be people and noises around or is a hidden, abandoned place better? Also consider if the area is video surveilled. If you are afraid that someone could overhear a sensitive conversation, meet in a loud surrounding. Noises make it hard for others (and bugging devices) to listen what you say!

However, keep records – in written notes, on a computer, or as sound or video recordings – they must be as accurate as possible, dated and filed in such a way that they can be recovered when necessary. Be crystal-clear about whether the source is in a position to have the information he or she claims. Also probe the source about what he or she has really seen, or knows and/or is prepared to say, their motives, and keep a detailed log of what the source actually says – full words, not paraphrases, or a tape, if you can persuade them to make one. Make sure you fully record all interactions with your source, including what you may have discussed around payments requested or made. Keep receipts connected with story expenditure.

Ensure a transparent and honest relationship with your sources. Never lie to them or mislead them for any reason. Do not make promises you cannot keep, or predict consequences that may not happen. Do not get so personally attached to your sources or involved in their problems that you cannot maintain professional distance.

You must make every effort to ensure you are being told the truth. So treat their information, however critical it is to you, with professional coolness and normal scepticism. Verify their personal details, and be suspicious of any parts of the story they try to hide. Ask difficult questions. Be prepared for unexpected stalls and problems in your relationship with them, and always interrogate what has gone wrong. There is no such thing as a perfect witness, and you do not want to be surprised later by information about a source you had not previously known. Beyond what you may have mutually agreed for source protection, resist any suggestion that your source has a right to control the content of your article or broadcast.

Affidavit

One form of protection for both you and your witness may be a legally-recognised, signed, witnessed statement: an affidavit. Important people often have large egos, and the same personality traits that makes these people individualistic and bossy in dealing with you, may be the traits that possessed them to 'stick their neck out' and come to you with information.

This kind of legal statement, initialled on every page and signed in the presence of a lawyer, is acceptable to courts in most countries and has important legal consequences. It signals that your source is willing to appear in court and provide evidence, if required. An affidavit should be given to a trustworthy lawyer for safekeeping. If your story results in legal challenge or action, the existence of the affidavit makes clear to anyone challenging it that your source is prepared to reveal him- or herself if offered the protection of the court. It also protects you if your source later retracts the story.

Dealing with threats and intimidation

If your 'culprit' is very powerful and dangerous, you may want to avoid a personal confrontation and opt for sending questions to his or her office instead. It may be better if you do not enter their territory, or make your face too familiar to their allies. This type of interview will not be as good, but you will remain alive to write the story.

Find out, before you embark on such stories, what support or protection your publication or organisation can offer you. If you are a freelancer, ensure that you set up some support structures of your own.

Asking a powerful person or entity for a comment on a grave issue can lead to legal, as well as physical, threats. Legal threats may be designed to make your editor drop the story. But if your facts are sound, try convincing your editor that these individuals often do not launch the defamation suits they threaten. First, they often already have bad reputations which will weaken their case in court (this applies, for instance, to companies involved in arms trade) and second, a court case could bring out, in a privileged context where you are free to reprint it, all the evidence they are trying to conceal. If you are dealing with individuals who operate in intimidation, prosecution or with any other kind of threats, look to these organisations for help: Committee to Protect Journalists or Reporters Without Borders.

After having evaluated the selected sources and considered the threat to meet with the person, it is time to conduct the actual interview. The next chapter will discuss how to plan interview questions, how to behave during the interview and elaborate on crucial rules for success.

7

CHAPTER SEVEN

ASKING THE RIGHT(!) QUESTIONS

Interviews comprise a key element of journalism, investigative or otherwise. But the former requires more preparation, better understanding of your story and research on your source, so you can ask questions accordingly. Investigative journalism can be sensitive, controversial and even damaging to reputations, if not destroying them altogether. That is why it's important to hone interviewing skills that prepare you for what types of questions to ask, how and in what order. There are also ethical issues to be considered when interviewing.

An interview, like other acts of communication, is a two-way process. The results depend as much on you as on your interviewee. A good interview has the feel of a conversation. Everything you do or say forms part of a planned strategy to get the answers you need.

Prior to the interview, you should thoroughly research the story subject and your source's connection to it. Research should include documents providing background details that will help in framing the proper questions and seeking detailed explanations. Go where the problems are and plan interviews with a range of people. Otherwise, you risk becoming dependent on a few people or sources far from the scene of action. For instance, you will find out more about how employers prey on employees when you go to a place where farm-workers, industrial workers or others are being evicted. You are unlikely to get such 'meat' in the office of an NGO located in a big city. Use data mapping to relate what you find on the ground to policy papers on the subject, or to commitments and budgets. Compare your findings with what has happened in similar places, or even at different times in history. This advance preparation will enable you to ask relevant questions and elicit the information your story needs.

Getting people to talk

Depending on the purpose and circumstances of the story, you may be able to do a 'walk-in' (although often people consider this rude) or 'phone-in' with someone who has a personal story to tell. If you are consistently blocked from seeing one source you would like to speak with, you may try a 'stake-out', otherwise known as hanging around in the person's office waiting room or lobby, or at a public event where you know the person will be present. However, this strategy can backfire, and it is important that you do not behave as though you are ambushing them. Simply introduce yourself politely and let them know you would welcome an opportunity to talk. When there is likely to be suspicion, you may need an intermediary 'door-opener' from the person's network. Any interview request to a company, organisation, government or parastatal body will likely require a formal approach, usually through a press office. In all cases, be polite.

RESEARCH | MEET | ASK | WRITE

You may find it useful to rehearse a very short introductory speech that covers all the main points before making a phone call or meeting someone. At this stage, you should think about at what point you plan to reveal to them that you are a journalist. In what circumstances would you conceal your profession and pretend to be something else (e.g. a sales representative)? How would you build up that 'role' convincingly?

Work out how to turn the person from a casual meeting into a source that you could contact again in the future. Draw up a plan and list issues to discuss. What would interest the person? How can you encourage the source to discuss the issues in the workplace? Would your approach be different for a senior civil servant or a barman? How? Never underestimate the intelligence of people who do apparently routine jobs! And be specific and realistic about the time commitment you will need – 15 minutes will be a long time for a government minister, but a person who has experienced trauma might need an entire day before they open up.

If a source asks you to provide questions in advance, you may have to do so. But this is generally not considered good practice. See if you can send a broad outline of the topics you hope to cover. Advance questions – except sometimes to experts, who may simply need time to collate specialist material – will produce a stilted, artificial interview. And always reserve your right to ask follow-up questions for greater detail.

It may also happen that a source refuses to meet you but provides a statement. You will have to discuss with your editor the most appropriate way to deal with this in your story. The *Centre for Investigative Journalism* suggests the standard BBC formulation: 'We asked for an interview but no-one was available, although the following statement was faxed to us,' followed by the statement in full.

When a source is willing to speak with you, choose a suitable venue. A person's home or office gives them a small psychological advantage – it is their 'turf' – but may also put them at ease and lets you see them in context. Your office gives you the psychological advantage but may be far too public to give them any sense of security. Think about the nature of the interview and whether it would be most successful in a public or discreet location, the mood you want to set and about the surrounding noise, which may preclude you from recording the conversation.

For formal interviews, confirm details with a phone call, email or fax, so the interviewee cannot later say he or she 'forgot'. Do not wait for secretaries who promise to 'get back to you'. Allow for a reasonable time for a response, then call back. Be persistent, but do not be a nuisance.

Plan questions in advance

Structure your interview in a way that, even if the interview is largely unsuccessful, you will still retrieve some of the information you needed.

1. Warm up (establishing a human relationship or a mutual bond)

2. Basic information, including confirming known facts

3. 'Soft' questions

4. 'Hard' questions

1
Structure

Estimate how much time the source will need to feel comfortable opening up. However, try to keep the early phases of the interview short and light – compatible with cultural courtesy requirements – and get to the point as swiftly as you can. Make sure your interview follows a logical structure by first establish the information you will need to ask more challenging questions later on. Your questions must be easy to understand, clear and to the point.

A group of shorter questions that build on one another is better than a long rambling question where your source could potentially get lost. Practice these questions in advance. Avoid multi-part questions, like 'Minister, are you aware of tender irregularities, did you supervise the process and why did so and so get the contract?' You will only get an answer to one part – usually the part your source actually wants to discuss.

2
Early Phase

Avoid double negatives, as these introduce unnecessary confusion. For example:
'Isn't it true that you didn't pay the money back?'
Such questions can prompt either an answer about the money, or the truthfulness of the statement.
'Is it true that you did not pay back the money?' is much simpler and clearer;
'Did you pay back the money?' is even better.

3
Negatives

4
Basics

Include confirmation questions. These are questions to which you know the answer. They will help cover the basics, and give you a sense of the accuracy of your source. If your interviewee is bemused by the simplicity of the question, do not take offence. You do not need to but you can explain – 'Readers need this in your own words, not mine.'

Be aware of the difference between closed questions (in other words, those that invite a yes, no or one-word answer) and open questions (those that encourage a source to expand on their ideas). Mix open and closed questions, and use closed questions only for deliberate goals.

5
Open vs. closed

Equipment

Check any equipment you plan to use before the interview. Ensure your recording and writing equipment is in working order and always carry spares (pens, recorders, batteries, SD card, etc.). If you need the interviewee to sign a release form for the use of anything gleaned at the interview, be sure to have one with you. This is particularly important for long interviews that will need to be cut into a broadcast. It is not necessary for corporate or political spokespersons – by definition of their job, they agree to the interview and to its use by you in whatever way you decide. However, they do have the right to complain if they do not like the way you have presented it.

How to Behave at the Interview?

Journalists often suffer from their own 'bad press'. They are said to be nosy, sensationalist, out to destroy people's reputations, working for the opposition, preventing hardworking people from their duties and lacking respect. Sometimes, these accusations are well-founded. The way to counter these negative perceptions is to behave decently and ethically. Do not be rude and do not demand things that are unreasonable. The more you behave in a way that implies 'I can phone you at any time of day and night and you just have to give me what I want', the more you encourage hostility from the rest of society.

Most people like to believe that they are good and honest. So why not begin by relating to your source on this basis? Phrasing questions in ways such as: 'I would really like to understand how this works', or 'Please help explain the problem for the benefit of the community', 'Please work with me on this because the pollution is killing children' can often produce good results. In many cases, sources will help a journalist if they can be convinced that sharing information is in the public's best interest.

This is not just a matter of strategy: Despite grandiose labels such as 'The Fourth Estate', no journalist was democratically elected to monitor the actions of public officials. Journalists are part of civil society, and in that sense, share the responsibility of making sure the state serves its citizens. In this position, journalists do have privileged access to channels of mass communication entities such as newspapers or broadcasting stations. Especially when they are working to expose hostile corporations or corrupt politicians, using methods such as making covert tapes that skirt or even break laws, it is important that journalists use methods that are pleasant, sincere, transparent (at least as transparent as possible).

To ensure that you do not overstep your role as a journalist, always ask yourself:

? What if I was the person I am investigating? How would I see the world, how would I see the role of journalists?

? How accountable am I?

? Would I succumb to the same temptations that I am investigating against others? What would stop me?

? Where are my checks and balances?

Ground rules for the interview

rule 1   ## Arrive on time

If you arrive late, you will alienate your source, lose time, waste time apologising and may spend the first moments of the interview breathless and unable to focus.

rule 2   ## Dress appropriately

While rules of dress are more relaxed than they used to be, you do not want to alienate your source on first impression. Dress in a way that will fit in with the context, show appropriate respect and be neutral enough to send no messages about your lifestyle or views.

rule 3   ## Choose where you sit

If necessary, use the needs of your recording device as an excuse (e.g. 'It will pick up sound better here...'). You need a position where you can maintain eye-contact, but sitting directly face-to-face can feel too confrontational. Rather sit level, opposite, but at a slight angle to your subject. Avoid obstacles between you, such as piles of books or the lid of an open laptop. A soft sofa makes it hard to write and too easy to relax.

rule 4   ## Maintain appropriate eye contact

You will always have a better conversation with someone if you can see one's facial expressions. This may be difficult if you are taking notes, but remember to look up occasionally and always when you are asking a question. If you simply read from your questions, your source may suspect that you are new to interviewing, not confident, or not really paying attention to what the source is saying, which can be taken as a sign of rudeness and contribute to their willingness to engage.

rule 5   ## Be conscious of body language

Be aware of body language (yours and theirs). Defensive gestures and posture can signal evasion and are a good clue to where you may want to push the questioning harder. Look also for signals of when a source may appear hurt, relief, humour, anger or boredom to either build on or counteract.

rule 6 On or off the record

'On-the-record' means you can use all information the source tells you. 'Off-the-record' means you can only use the information in a way that allows the source remain unidentified. And 'background only' means do not use this at all; it is just to help you understand the context. These on- and off-the-record conventions are not legally binding, but they are common courtesy between journalists and sources. Confirm with your source whether the interview is on- or off-the-record and the expected timeframe. Ensure informed consent to publish stories about sensitive topics. If the interview is informal, choose your moment to get out your notebook or tape recorder and say: 'Do you mind if I record our discussion or take notes?' If the interview is formal, get going quickly and make efficient use of your time. Be aware that taking notes or recording may intimidate some sources. Do not conceal recording devices, but try to write or record non-intrusively, and explain 'this will help me to get your answers right' if they seem nervous or ask about it.

rule 7 Always take notes

Note-taking keeps you focused and allows you to record gestures, surroundings and expressions that the recorder may not capture. It is also a backup if anything goes wrong with the recording. Note accurately, and distinguish between quotes and your own observations and analysis.

rule 8 Ask neutral, open questions

Take a tip from psychologists. Avoid questions that reveal how you will feel about the answer – avoid questions like: 'Wasn't this a shocking abuse of power?' and instead ask: 'How do you feel about using power in this way?' You may be seeking to understand your source's motivations, but directly using the word 'Why?' can come across as accusing or incredulous. So ask these 'Why' questions indirectly. Instead of: 'Why did the press reports make you angry?' ask, 'You said those press reports made you feel angry. Tell me more about that.'

rule 9 Silence is not a bad thing

Let the source answer your question, then pause before moving on to the next. You do not need to fill gaps in conversation. If the

interviewee needs time to think about an answer, let them have it; if they need time to recover their emotions, just wait quietly before asking, 'Shall we go on now?'.

rule 10 Look interested, be interested

During your interview, you should be in a constant state of interaction with what you hear; write down responses in your notes and use them to generate additional questions. Ask yourself: Is this the answer I want? Do I understand this? How will I use this? Once the interview is over, it may be very difficult to go back for a second one. If you have done your research but the source is not telling you what you had expected, do not panic, give up or change the subject – go with it. Respond to their new perspectives and ask follow-ups. Do not try and shoehorn a source into a preconceived story. The surprise might turn into a better story in the end. If it does not, you can later return to your original theme. Do not get aggressive with your source, even if the interview isn't going as well as you hoped or the interviewee is rude.

rule 11 Respect time

Keep an eye on the clock, pace your questions and when you reach the end of your agreed time, ask: 'Do we have time for X more questions?'
As you wrap up your interview, confirm with the interviewee what will happen next. 'The story will be published on Thursday'. But do not make promises you cannot keep, like allowing them to see the story before it is published.

rule 12 Tell the story as it is

Good journalists will use sources' material honestly. Obviously, you should not tell lies about what was said during the interview. Nor can you alter the sense of a question or reply after the interview is over, by 'taking a quote out of context'. Be especially careful when you have to move answers from the sequence in which they occurred in the original interview. It's easy to distort truth accidentally through clumsy juxtaposition. Tell your story, and then give the response of those the story concerns. Audiences are intelligent; they will know where the truth lies.

How is investigative interviewing different?

The basic principles of planning, preparation and informed, flexible questioning apply in all interview situations. But an investigative reporting project puts different demands on your skills and requires a different emphasis in your approach. Timing is one of these differences. Think not only about whom you will interview, but at what stage in the investigation it would be best to interview them. Because investigative reporting contexts are different, you may more likely to encounter hostility, defensiveness, reticence or evasion from your sources because interview topics tend to be bigger or more sensitive. For this reason, you will use a different strategy, and your questioning technique will achieve different goals.

◤ Appropriate timing

When should you confront the main characters in your investigation? Too soon, and you will warn them to escape (or seek an injunction) before you can publish your story. Too late, and they may already have fled, or will have developed pat answers or legal evasions for your questions. As such, you should seek ample evidence (documentary support) and wait for an appropriate time to conduct your interviews.

◤ Vulnerability

Even if your story is not fully complete or correct, you may be 'on to something'. In these situations, your requests for comment will alert the powerful people or institutions that you are investigating into their activities, and to them, you may represent trouble. They may respond in all kinds of ways. A simple denial is the easiest to deal with, but keep digging. Just as likely are threats – direct physical and legal threats or more subtle forms of intimidation through third parties (often your editor or publisher), and pre-publication lawsuits. The word 'defamation' will be central in these exercises, yet actual defamation suits often do not manifest.

◤ Discretion

Investigative reporting aims to uncover what is not known. This may be the result of deliberate lies or of a consensus of silence. For example, the cabinet minister who told a lie to the parliament or the society that chooses not to discuss the trafficking of young, poor girls in its midst. The uncoverings are always likely to be startling, if not shocking. This means tasks like setting up your interview, may need to be handled very sensitively. If you reveal from the outset

what you are seeking in an interview, sources may refuse to speak with you. If you choose too public of an interview venue, you may put your interviewee in danger.

Think twice before you ambush a source. For example, asking for an interview on one subject and then bringing in another, or 'door-stepping' an executive, which means trying to interview them as they leave their home or office. It might look good on someone else's television programme, but it might go horribly wrong for you. A media-savvy public figure will know how to duck un-expected questions, or make you look like a crass bully, and all your effort and preparation could come to nothing.

◣ Strategising interviews

There are three possible strategies for an interview. In an informal or simple background or fact-finding interview, questions throughout your discussion all stay at a modest level of difficulty. They do not become more important, sen-sitive, or difficult to answer as the interview progresses. In interviews about a personality profile, questions begin with quite a narrow focus on the individual. Where did they go to school? Whom did they marry, and why? How do they begin writing their poems? These are sometimes closed questions, filling in im-portant facts about the subject's life. But your readers are also interested in the subject's views. So the interview will become broader as it progresses: What do they think of the state of the modern novel? Do they believe in literary prizes and what do they think of this year's crop of nominees? Like a trumpet, this type of interview questioning starts narrow and becomes wider, asking more open questions as the interview progresses.

An investigative interview often follows the opposite strategy. It starts with the big, general issues, (e.g. 'What is the process for awarding government tenders?' 'Is the process satisfactory?' 'How does government monitor it?'). And, as questions progress, they become more detailed and focused. The final, hardest questions in an investigative interview are quite often closed or even leading: 'Did you ignore tender processes in the case of this particular contract? Why?'. You ask these questions last because this is the point where a source may shut down and refuse to answer further questions. The interview is structured like a funnel – it starts broad and ends narrow.

During the investigative interview

◣ It is about the answers you want

Your aim is always to get the story, not to 'win'. Adopt a cool, unflustered stance, taking as much time as you need. The key objective of interviews should always be to get information and answers – your questions are simply a means to an end. Any emotional signal you emit – a raised eyebrow, a shrug, a smile – may be picked up by your source. You are human, so this may reflect your response. And on TV, a wooden face makes boring viewing. But be careful, and know the boundaries. An outburst reminds sources their words are 'on trial' and may make them more guarded in their responses; provocation may lead to a dramatic row or a fruitless walk-out; your aggression may be presented as so inappropriate it makes you look bad. Try to keep your responses deliberate rather than spontaneous. Remember, if someone provokes an argument, it saves him or her from having to answer your questions.

◣ Get to the point

Sources' answers are more important than your meandering questions, so do not ramble, and do not interrupt. An experienced politician or businessperson has probably conducted hundreds or thousands of interviews. Their time is precious, and if they want to avoid the question they will. They understand that if you succeed in exposing problems they facilitated, they may lose face, position, money and sometimes their careers. Read the situation and the person carefully, and if your attempts to wrap up a question softly do not seem to be working, just come straight out and ask it. If their answers are not easy to understand, rephrase your question, and try again. Some sources need to order their thoughts and will be happy to try again. Listen carefully to the reply – does it really answer your question? If not, you must try again. To ensure you are certain of what your source is saying, you can repeat their answer back to them ('So what you are saying is...?').

◣ Get a complete answer

When your interviewee does not want to give precise answers, they may use words like 'recently', 'a few', 'many', or 'decisive action'. In those cases, you should follow up with questions that elicit more specific answers, like 'When?', 'How many?', 'Can you estimate the number' or 'What exactly will you do?'. The same goes for closed answers. 'Yes' or 'No' can be used by an interviewee to put an end to a line of questioning. Sometimes you will want more information and need to open it up again: 'Did you sign the contract?' 'Yes' 'Can you explain your motives for doing so?'.

Carefully analyse each answer before you move on. Skilled interviewees may give you answers that sound like what you want to hear, but when you reread your notes, you may see that they have dodged the question. You ask: 'Have you sent drugs to the clinic in X District?'. They reply: 'Of course all appropriate procedures for that clinic have been followed.' This sounds like a ‚yes‘, but it does not necessarily provide the information you directly asked. You should follow up with 'What drugs were sent?', 'On what date were they sent?', 'What confirmation do you have that they were sent?' 'Do you have confirmation they arrived?'. If you do not understand the source's answer, say so. Admitting your confusion is better than pretending you understand out of embarrassment. You can say, 'Our readers or viewers might not get that. Can you explain it again in simpler terms?' Alternatively, use the rephrase technique: 'If I understand you correctly, Minister, you are saying XY. Is that the case?'.

◤ Paperwork and referrals

Be sure to have copies of any press releases, documents, studies or photographs available during your interview, so you may refer to them in the event the interviewee says something unexpected. Keep your tape recorder and your brain engaged. They will provide a record of events after your discussion ends. If appropriate ask permission for follow-up questions.

◤ Don't fall for flattery

This is an interview, not a friendship. You are there to discover information, not to be patronised. When someone tells you: 'That's a very perceptive question,' they are not offering you a compliment, but rather buying themselves an extra few seconds to think about their answer.

After the investigative interview give the source a chance to vent. Surprisingly often, it adds insight. Then ask if there is anything they would like to ask you, which is both a courtesy and a final opportunity to explain how and when the story will be published. Always end the interview with the following question: 'Is there anything else I should have asked you?' or 'Is there anything you would like to add?'

◣ Commitment

'You did say you would let me see the story before publication, didn't you?' Do not be so preoccupied with packing up and leaving that you agree to show your source a story prior to publication. Stop and clearly explain your understanding of any such conversation: 'No, actually I said you should contact my editor if you wished to discuss that. Here are the contact details.' Media-savvy sources will use these last, rushed minutes to slip in that request, so beware of being 'door-stepped' yourself!

◣ Don't neglect final thoughts

There is often a moment at the end of the interview when the source becomes more comfortable and his or her guard is down. Use this time to check any terms, titles or names that came up during the interview itself. Always ask for a phone number or email in case you want to clarify some pieces of information later, and leave your contact information or card for them. Do not neglect final courtesies. Thank them for their time. This is important, even if you have been stonewalled and insulted. Try to sound as if you genuinely do appreciate their willingness to speak with you.

If the interview was used to help background information, or has been friendly in tone, ask if they can suggest other sources who may lend additional insight. Being able to use this person's name as a reference may open new doors for you.

◣ Check, clarify notes immediately after interview

Re-read your notes as soon as you leave the interview. This is the time when your short-term memory works best. If you leave the notes until the next day, you may forget what the tailed-off scribble actually stood for, or what you urgently needed to double check. Fill in gaps in your notes and indicate where you may have to do follow-up interviews.

How to Deal with Spin Doctors?

'Spin doctors' (official spokespeople and PR officers) play an increasing role in the interactions between reporters and public figures. Sometimes, they will even sit in on an interview or provide an advance list of topics that must not be raised.

> Dennis Barker, a former reporter with the UK Guardian newspaper, received the following insights about spin doctors from a British government spokesman (who, not surprisingly, preferred to remain anonymous!).

The excuses they give you may be true. But they are still excuses, and you are still entitled to challenge them. 'If you cannot tell me, who can?' is a useful question here. Very often, the authority you are questioning may be under orders from above, may not have been given certain information. In other words, when they stonewall or defend, they are only doing their job. That is the spokesperson's problem, not yours. Governments cannot allow themselves to be criticised even when they are at fault, except in very exceptional circumstances. Give the spokesperson a chance to put a positive message alongside the negative one and he or she may be more open.

1

2

Reporters are concerned with issues that civil society thinks should be important. If they are not significant to the government, that is a very legitimate concern. Ask: 'Why can't you discuss this?', 'Why is the government not more worried about this?' A reporter's priorities may not be the government's priorities. Government may have 'larger concerns'. What makes spokespeople most uncomfortable is being asked about specifics; they see their job as avoiding these.

Aggressive, novice reporters are easier to satisfy than well-informed, experienced and cool-headed journalists. Spokespeople hope that reporters will not follow through and will be satisfied with generalities. 'The minute they think: "There isn't a headline in this", you can see them consciously lowering their level of interest.' In other words, an important 'spin' technique is to downplay news to deflect reporters who are looking for sensation. Journalists who focus on simply finding out new information and persevere even if the facts sound boring, may well get a good story.

3

4

If you are told your information is incorrect, do not assume it is. Be prepared to say 'If I am wrong, I apologise but...' and ask a follow-up question containing well-researched facts to back up your assertion. If they return the question, bounce it back. Some spin doctors will deflect your enquiry with a question of their own: 'Is it true that the Minister is still having an affair while being married?',

'Why are you journalists so obsessed with this issue?', 'Ms Spokesperson, you must know that nobody is interested in the views of journalists. I'm here to ask the questions our readers need answered. And we have been flooded with letters about the Minister's marital status, so...?'.

5

If you feel your question has not been answered, persevere: 'I do not fully follow that answer. Would you go through it again?' or 'I am not sure you have answered my question fully'. This is a polite way of saying it has not been answered at all. 'Do you prefer not to answer that question?' 'What is stopping you from answering?' 'What might happen if you told me?' 'Who can give me that answer?'

6

Think of varied ways to approach tough questions: Sometimes the best way to ask for difficult information is simply to ask it. But if you are fencing with a skilled spokesperson, you may find that more subtle approaches sometimes work where the direct question will simply be refused. Here are a few suggestions, warn them, and give them a platform: 'Perhaps you have read the reports suggesting... Did you...?', 'I know this is an unpleasant issue, but our readers expect me to raise it...', 'Help me to set the record straight...', 'In parliament, the opposition said you...', 'Would you like to comment?'.

Use a source's refusal to answer as part of your story

If a source is unwilling to answer at all and says so, you should have prepared and rehearsed for this eventuality. In a sound recording for television or radio, their refusal to answer, whether directly said or indirectly implied, will be heard and can be skilfully used in your edit. In print, you can write: 'X declined to answer questions about…'. What you write should not interpret the failure to respond – just report it. The meaning of the refusal is for your audience to judge.

A point-blank refusal to answer questions that are legitimately asked may prompt you to abandon the interview. Sometimes this can be effective. 'I am really sorry, Mr Minister. I had not anticipated that I might not have input from you on these issues, which are at the core of my story. I will now only have my observations and the experts' and witnesses' comments to work with. Shall I just say that there is no comment from you?' At this point, an

intelligent interviewee may decide it is better to say something than to be cut out of the story altogether. But if they refuse to cooperate, leave politely.

If you are told in advance that certain questions will not be answered, it may still be better to put all your questions regardless, and make this clear. This is especially true in broadcast. Both your interviewee and your audience know that you did at least ask. If you do not, you are open to the criticism that the question was never put. Your interviewee may well claim later that he 'would have' answered if only he had been asked. This makes you look bad.

Distance the controversy

▷ Many governments have become involved in the activities of terrorists. How do we handle this? You can ask sources questions like, 'My interviews so far have produced conflicting views on whether…?', 'My editor insists I do not leave without asking you…?'. Shake the tree, but do not lie, or identify other sources. For example, you may say: 'It might interest you to know that another source told me he saw you…' or 'There is a rumour you have but we all know how unreliable rumours are.' 'What are your proposals for…?'

Covert interviewing

▷ Most media outlets have strict rules on covert recording, and it is illegal in some countries' legal codes. Nevertheless, it may sometimes be the only way to get the evidence you need. Practice is vital! If you have a secret camera strapped to your chest, the pictures will not be much use if you can see only sky or pavement. If sounds are muffled and inaudible, you have wasted your time and resources. Covert interviewing is not nearly as easy as TV crime dramas make it appear. As well as technical expertise, you need an interviewing

style that will encourage the people you talk to and convey the information you need. This can sound so stilted and artificial that it will reveal your strategy.

If your source suspects you might be secretly recording and asks you outright, you are bound to say no to protect yourself. But that can lead to difficulties in using the material. If you deny that you are recording the coversation, you can legally be held to have 'induced' the person to continue, in the belief there will be no record of the conversation. British media lawyers would be reluctant to agree to the use of the material, unless there was overriding public interest. Lawyers in many other countries would agree.

How to Deal with Reluctance and Fear?

Interviewees have many reasons for refusing to answer your questions. Above, we have discussed how to deal with defensive 'spin', but often, people have real and good reasons to fear talking to the press. In many countries, 'disloyal' media and their informants face harassment or worse. In addition, your interview subjects may have undergone trauma that they are reluctant to relive, or fear stigma in their communities from private information that they disclose to you. Gentle persistence may pay off, but often the best way to persuade a reluctant source to speak with you is to use a door-opener.

Find out what the source fears, and provide as much reassurance as you can in order to conduct an interview. This may mean confirming any safeguards with your editor before you have the interview – because you must not make promises you cannot keep.

Obtain informed consent to publish

'Informed consent' does not simply mean asking a source, 'Do you mind if we publish what you say?'. It means that your interviewee understands the potential consequences of publication, the risks, and the safeguards that can (and cannot) be put in place, and agrees to publication fully informed. Do not scare people, but do not conceal possible consequences from them either. Your story becomes stronger with the more people willing to 'go public' and contribute information to it. These conversations help cement your relationship with sources and have truthful conversations, even if some identities end up being concealed.

Empathy, not sympathy

Comments such as: 'Oh, how dreadful. You poor thing!' disempower your sources and may make them feel weak and helpless. Provide a safe space for interviewees to share their story. A neutral, open listening style and time for the person to gather their thoughts or master their emotions, are needed. Give regular, encouraging feedback. Nod, say 'Yes, go on...' or 'Tell me more'. If it is culturally appropriate, there is nothing wrong with reaching out a reassuring hand to pat the person's arm. Let your human instincts guide you.

Stop writing

Sometimes a source's preoccupation with your note-taking can be oppressive. If the questioning enters sensitive territory, just listen. You can make notes later.

Show respect

Do not rush questions, and do not exploit a source's answers by sensationalising. Try to put yourself in the shoes of the interviewee and make sure that your questions are not insensitive.

Be rigorous

Despite the need for sensitivity, you still need to ask difficult questions. Just because someone tells you they have been a victim of torture, does not necessarily make it true. Be wary of people who exaggerate. Make it clear that you cannot advance their case if you are not confident in the accuracy of their story, and do not neglect the cross-checks you would do with other types of interviews.

Be aware of denial

People lie, or tell half-truths, for different reasons, and not necessarily bad ones. Denial is a recognised psychological state, where people bury some truth about themselves because it is too harsh to face. So, for example, someone in denial may be unable to tell you they were raped or witnessed the rape of others.

Asking the right questions determines whether you have story or not. But even though gathering all the information is fundamental of an investigative story, it is as much more important to write about it comprehensively for your audience. The next chapter will discuss how to select and sort the information you collected into a compelling story.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WRITING THE STORY

A brilliantly investigated story may fall flat if it is not well organised and written. It must be credible to the reader, and therefore facts must be updated and timely. Using quotes from relevant and prominent people that confirm the thrust of your investigation will lend gravitas to your story. Graphs, charts and diagrams may also be useful in helping the reader understand more complex aspects of your investigation.

8

DEFINE | FIND | PLAN | PROTECT

After all your hard investigative work, when you think your revelations will have an impact, ask yourself: Do I really have a story to tell? The question arises from how you have developed and wrote the story, which is crucial to an otherwise exceptional and brilliant investigative report.

For a story to really influence readers, you need to think over the heart of your reporting and express the most powerful images. To capture readers' attention, the Senior American journalist Stephen Franklin suggested to 'create a highly personal lead, a beginning that sets the scene powerfully. It is important only to provide the most basic details. You will unravel the complete details later on.' But it is also imperative to honestly write what you have found. Do not try to create images that may not blend with your story, or seek to sensationalise the event or incident. Winning your audiences' trust is essential and a beginning with a narrative that seems untrue will damage this effort.

Once you have presented all information, you conclude the story by summing up your findings and substantiating them with facts. An ideal investigative story has absolute proof – the 'smoking gun' – that the wrongdoers have indeed caused the problems you allege. But very often, investigative stories that sound convincing actually do not make sense because writers have been loose with their words, their evidence or how they link this evidence together. Even worse, some of these poorly constructed implications are also likely to be defamatory.

Be accurate

‣ **Definitions and examples:** Define jargon and complex terms for your audience, and stick to the same definition throughout. Also make the abstract concrete through the use of examples.

‣ **Unproven generalisations:** Understand the meaning and the differences between terms such as 'most', 'many', 'some', or 'few'. Differentiate them appropriately. Be very careful with the distinction between 'most' and 'many', and even more careful about saying 'all' or 'none'. Is something 'the reason' or 'one of the reasons'? Is it 'always' or 'often'? Make the general specific by citing concrete instances, and quoting named individuals.

‣ **Supporting arguments:** Carefully support all statements and with concrete details. Do not attack a person when you ought to be criticising an idea. Stick to discussing facts and arguments. Let readers make up their minds whether

favours have motivated action or inaction. Sometimes you have to show and tell to be crystal clear about your message (and to avoid defamatory interpretations). Conclude the story with a summarising sentence.

▶ **Quoting authorities as proof:** List pros and cons, and treat them in a balanced way. It is also important to focus on the reasons behind authorities' actions. Why did someone say something? Talk to a range of relevant sources, not just one, to help with background research and quotes.

▶ **Prejudice, stereotypes or emotions:** Avoid stereotypes, positive or negative, and keep your language neutral and treat all sources and subjects with the same healthy scepticism. Cite evidence for what you say. It is possible to write an accurate and convincing investigative story based on the weight of evidence, rather than single, clinching proof. However, proof is better – if you can find it. But solidly assembled evidence can do the same job. When you have a great deal of evidence, make them tight and explicit, perhaps by returning to your sources and having them explain issues in greater detail. You may also need to establish a better context. This will provide your audience with information about the environment in which actions and consequences took place. It adds information about whether those involved had means, motive and opportunity to do the things you allege.

Paragraph writing

Each paragraph is a mini-story. Paragraphs take one aspect of your overall investigation and explore it fully, breaking down the big theme into parts that are manageable for the audience. It starts with a 'topic sentence' that tells the reader which aspect you are dealing with, or how it links to what has gone before. Then, each paragraph should provide the following:

(a)	Evidence (details, quotes, facts and figures)
(b)	Definitions or explanations
(c)	Context, history, comparison or contrast
(d)	Cause or effect
(e)	Arguments for and against
(f)	Analysis or suggests consequences

Reporters working for daily newspapers often quickly discard the childhood habit of planning and writing stories in paragraphs. This is because newspapers rarely print their stories in the original paragraphs; sub-editors break up paragraphs to create extra lines, or merge them together to save space. Do not worry about that. The paragraph is an essential building-block of every story. Plan and write in paragraphs and let the sub-editors deal with layout issues later.

Writing the story using quotes

Use quotes to make a point, not to tell the complete story, and to add information, not merely repeat it. Avoid using quotes to convey basic, factual information. Use them to show your conversation with sources, but not as a substitute for your analysis about what sources have told you.

> Especially in an investigation, it is important to use the exact words people gave you. The exceptions are:
>
> ◤ What someone has said is hard to understand, or holds them up to ridicule and does not add to the 'flavour' of speech.
>
> ◤ Profanities and obscenities if your publication does not permit these.
>
> ◤ Filler words like, 'look', 'you know', 'I think'. They are unnecessary; they add nothing.

Attribute all quotes carefully and provide a source's citation for anything you did not observe yourself. In an investigative story, you have to be even more careful than usual about attribution, because readers will judge the worth of your evidence partly by its source. Also make clear where a new speaker enters your story. If, for some reason, you cannot attribute, explain why: 'The company would fire me if they knew I had shown you this,' said the interviewee.

Keep in mind when using quotes to ensure that you select and introduce them properly:

- The line preceding a quote should help the reader understand what is coming next.

- Your introduction to the quote should build toward the same message.

- Quotes add value; do not choose sources' direct words that add nothing, and do not be repetitive.

- Stick with 'he/she said' to describe speech. Other words ('asserted'; 'claimed'; 'argued') may add unnecessary spin, or ('refuted', 'rebutted') may be misunderstood by readers. Only when you are sure it is accurate can you use a term that adds flavour.

- When you paraphrase, do not spin. Keep the sense and tone of the original source. If the spokesperson says 'We do not have a budget,' do not paraphrase into, 'She said her company was not prepared to spend on this,' which implies attitude, not merely the financial situation.

Draft and rethink

By this stage, you should have sorted all your material into sections, and assembled all the quoted material and research information. Now is the time to write your first draft. Many people misunderstand the purpose of a first draft; it is not the complete story as it will finally appear, but a sketch, which will allow you to see how the story looks and identify any further work you need to do. At this stage, you do not need to worry about elegant introductions, neat conclusions or polished language. Here, you are writing not editing. All you are doing is putting your material together on the page.

Story structure and styles

There are three basic structures for story content, whether investigative, hard news or feature:

(1) Chronological – in which the story unfolds through time; sequence and actions are the material of the investigation

(2) Narratives – following a situation through a period of time; following the actual investigation as it unfolds or

(3) Processes – in which the story revolves around issues and arguments (depending on the specific story)

You begin the writing process by sorting material into sections: The issue, who is affected, the conflicts and discoveries you make. On a relatively simple, short investigative story, these sections with an introduction and conclusion may make a perfectly satisfactory plan for the final story.

In investigative writing, literary flair takes second place to ensure it is the issues and facts that are the focal point for readers. There are a number of different ways to shape your material into a story; a number of 'recipes' and approaches that writing coaches suggest for investigative stories. Your material is longer and more complex than a typical hard news story and giving it shape and structure gives your readers a pathway through complex information.

The three most common investigative story structures are:

(A)   The 'Wall Street Journal' formula which involves:

    1. Starting with a person or situation to set the scene between the case and the issues,

    2. Broadening out from that individual case to deal with the bigger issues, through a 'nut graph' that explains the link between the individual and the larger issue,

    3. Returning to your case study for a human, striking conclusion.

(B)   'High Fives' developed by US writing coach Carol Rich who suggested the following five sections:

    1. News (What has happened or is happening?)
    2. Context (What is the background?)
    3. Scope (Is this an incident, a local trend, a national issue?)
    4. Edge (Where is it leading?)
    5. Impact (Why should your readers care?)

This structure requires the ability to write good transitions so that the five elements fit together. Otherwise, it can feel like five shorter stories that appear one after another. But it can make an excellent structure for a long story on the web where you need to break an extended narrative into manageable sections, so readers can browse.

(C)   **The Pyramid**

Whereas the traditional approach to a hard-news story was the 'inverted pyramid' (main points first; less important supporting material added later), investigative reporting turns the pyramid structure right-side up. You have the entire story to build up to the punch, leading the readers through the discoveries you have made:

1. So you start with a summary of the story's theme

2. Foreshadow some of what you will discover

3. Walk step by step through your investigation, keeping the suspense alive and building the story towards the most shocking or dramatic discovery, just as if you were writing the story of a scientific break-through or a mystery novel

4. Save the most important, dramatic information for last

Each of these recipes borrows a little from the toolkit of the fiction writer. You are not creating fiction, but you are employing techniques from literature. And this makes sense because every journalist is a storyteller. Seeing yourself as a teller of good but true stories in the foreground is the basis of the modern approach to news-writing we call narrative journalism.

> **According to author Susan Eaton,**
>
> narrative writers carry the authority of all the work they have done. They have considered the sequence and the puzzle pieces. They've considered everything from several perspectives. They've read the academic literature. They've crafted the story that puts all this together in a way that makes sense for readers. They've put the pieces together in a sequence and created a meaning. (…) Doing this is what grants you the authority not necessarily to say which policy is better (…) but more specifically to name the heart of the matter. (…) This is very different from editorialising (…) you envision yourself as a guide helping people navigate through confusion.

Both descriptions make it sound as though the narrative approach was made for investigative journalism. One caution, though. American investigative journalist Danny Schechter, in his film about US coverage of the Iraq War, *Weapons of Mass Deception*, noted a key problem with the storytelling approach: By focusing on individual's tales, the narrative approach made it possible for some US news media to ignore highly contentious bigger issues and arguments. This does not devalue the narrative approach. It merely serves as a reminder that like any other writing technique, storytelling needs to be used consciously and skilfully within the appropriate context.

Some of the tools narrative journalism includes:

▶ **Portraits and scene-setting:**
   If you choose the Wall Street Journal approach, you will need to have a keen eye for detail throughout the investigative process. You must describe your key source or scene in a way that feels real and convincing for readers. This does not mean documenting everything in painful detail (you do not have space), but rather, selectively choosing a few authentic, telling details to enrich your story.

▶ **Hints, clues:**
   While writing an investigative story, it is also important to provide your audience with hints or clues at the beginning about where the story will lead. You will particularly use these if you adopt the pyramid structure. You give just enough detail to keep readers interested, until you unveil the story's final findings.

▶ **Pace, structure, words:**
   It is also important to remember that pace matters in writing. Every narrative move, the structure and words you choose will determine how fast or slowly your story proceeds. Short sentences and words speed things up. Longer sentences slow them down. Giving a large amount of technical information in one solid paragraph will force readers to go more slowly, even if the sentences are short. Unnecessary, overloaded background and context will bring the story to a dead halt, long before you have finished telling the story. Always ask yourself: Does this add value or merely extra words? Cut language that the story does not need.

If you read your story to yourself, you will feel the pace and flow of the narrative. But you will also be able to feel where the story becomes not merely slow, but daunting and difficult. You ear is your best editor and will tell you when you have lost your natural human voice as a writer, or where your language is long-winded, complex, incorrect or in other ways causes your reading to stumble. Write the story conversationally, as you would speak it, so readers can identify with your voice. But since speech involves elements like tone, gesture, eye contact and expression, which are not conveyed through writing, you will need to revise your work. Correct grammar and punctuation add the tone, emphasis and nuance to writing: They do the job on paper that hands, eyes and face muscles do when spoken.

▷ Thinking visually

One way to find the imagery and dramatic moments you need for a narrative approach is to think visually: consider the images and illustrations you will need for the final story, even if layout and design are not your responsibility. Like developing a provisional headline (even where sub-editors write the 'real' headline), such activities help you to focus on your story theme and ensure your story adheres to it. If you plan for a chart of certain facts, it will allow you to leave the rather boring list of the same facts out of your story.

However, thinking visually can also help your final story in other ways:

- ◤ It helps with pitching your story because it gives advance warning of any maps, charts, graphs or images that might be needed

- ◤ It assists teamwork by aiding layout people and those who place stories on pages

- ◤ It especially helps your teamwork with photographic colleagues, laying the basis for conversations about what the best images for the piece would be and where you can draw on their expertise

- ◤ It puts images in your head which you can then 'paint with words', such as for example, a scene-setter introduction

- ◤ It helps you communicate better with readers, who often learn far more from a well-chosen image or a striking chart than from text alone. An image, says the proverb 'is worth a thousand words'.

Links and conclusions

Every story needs to begin and end well. The beginning and the end are the strongest parts of any piece of writing. A good introduction pulls readers in and gives them a frame through which to view the whole story. Most studies show that if the introduction of a story is not appealing, readers will not carry on, regardless of the topic. Similarly, the ending is the one idea that readers take away from the story.

Ways to begin include:

A portrait or scene-setter

A summary of the story theme in one short sentence (not the whole story)

The results or impact. Then you can track back to tell how it happened.

In all cases, do not make the reader wait too long to tell them what the story is about. A good rule of thumb is that no more than 10 percent of a story should be introductory material. But do not think of this – to use a textbook term – as a 'delayed lead'. Your story begins where it begins and that does not have to be with a list of facts. Your conclusion should work the same way.

Satisfying endings include:

Tie up loose ends (what happened to the characters or what will happen next)

Summarise the theme once more to remind us why we are interested

Create a 'kicker' (a sting in the tail that makes people think)

Emphasise context. Put the issue back into its setting and remind readers of hopes, constraints and linked developments

Go back to the people we met at the beginning, and let them have the last word

Never write a conclusion just for completeness, and never tell the audience – even in different words – that 'only time will tell'. You are the investigator and you destroy readers' confidence in your authority if you shrug the story off without providing a definite resolution.

Equally important for stringing your story together are the transitions: The way the story moves from section to section and paragraph to paragraph.

The most useful techniques for creating a unifying narrative are:

Mention the topic regularly

Use extended metaphors to tie ideas together and make them vivid. For example, you could discuss the environment as a human body, where all the parts have to work together

Use an image, an object, a proverb or something adaptable for your investigation that runs like a thread in the story

These simple words can be extremely powerful in keeping the reader with you as you track a complex argument. Use lots of signpost words to indicate whether one paragraph follows on from the previous one ('And'), changes direction ('But'), is a consequence ('So'), follows after ('Then'), and so on

After you write your initial draft, your story likely is not perfect yet; it is a long-run story, so one important thing to do at the finalising stage is to check that information collected early in your reporting process is still valid and has not been contradicted by later discoveries. Equally, new facts, scientific reports or test results may have emerged. It is worth repeating your web-search. That lump of text from the two leaflets still makes for heavy reading. You could pull it out of the story into a box or a sidebar. However, the best stories are re-drafted more than once. Editing your writing is not an extra, a luxury or a chore; it is part of the process of writing the best possible story you can. If re-drafting and editing alone become oppressive, find a colleague or team member to help move the editing and critiquing process along. Good ideas come from teamwork.
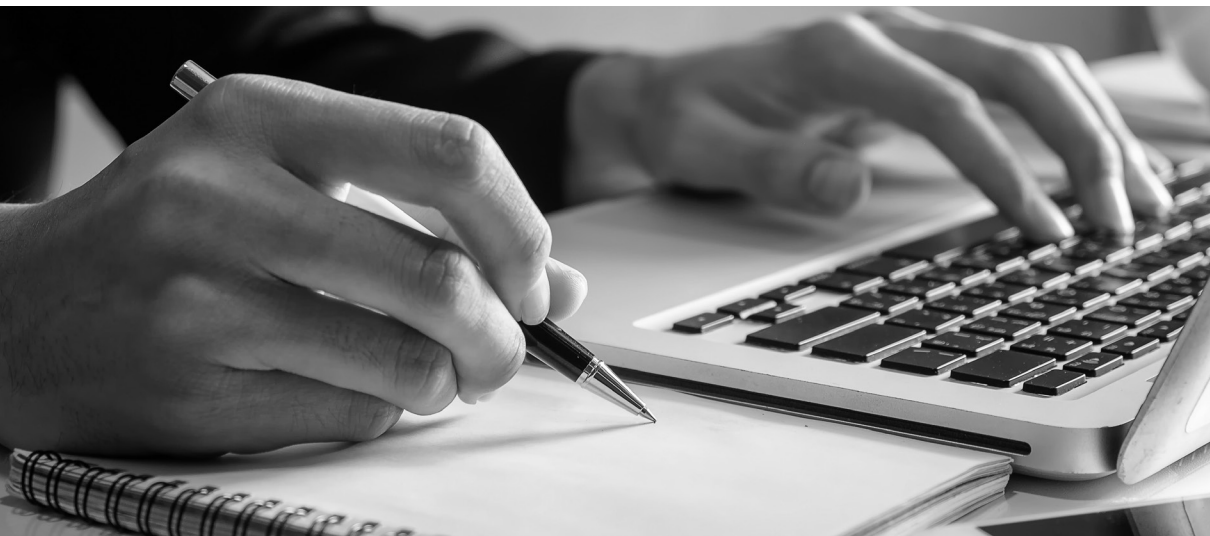
How to Write for Broadcast?

NOTE: *This is not a complete guide to broadcast scripting, but it provides some hints on how to use language and construct a good narrative for a broadcast investigation.*

All broadcast stories are accompanied by video footage or audio quotes. The same picture or quote can tell many stories, depending on its context. The purpose of surrounding commentary is to make sure the audience fully understands your story.

An intelligent text can make viewers see even a very conventional image or humdrum quote in a new light. On radio, the script written around the recorded quotes sets the context most powerfully. But on TV, pictures comprise about 85 percent of a story's impact. A good text does not always compensate for boring pictures or quotes because the audience has not been 'grabbed' and will turn away. In both cases, you need to construct your story around the pictures or recorded quotes. This is called 'writing for the ear', 'writing to pictures', or 'writing to sound'.

> Start with the ground report that you have captured in your camera. Then use carefully selected words in your own commentary and transitions to:
>
> **(a)**   Underline the most important aspects of the story
>
> **(b)**   Provide balance where the pictures or quotes only show some aspects
>
> **(c)**   Select and emphasise the things you want the audience to pay attention to
>
> **(d)**   Connect different images or quotes, explaining how they move through time
>
> **(e)**   Contextualise the images or quotes
>
> **(f)**   Put a 'spin' on the images or quotes by adding extra meaning or interpretation (but do not distort the information or take it out of context!)

The announcer or reporter can – and should – be diligent about these priorities. But that does not mean that he or she should be constantly interposed between the viewer and the news, forming a filter or a barrier. Where you have real up-sound of a person saying something relevant to your story, always prefer that to a station voice standing in front paraphrasing.

The difference between a broadcast and a print media includes:

▶ When audiences read something, they can always skip back and read it again if they have not understood; a broadcast is one shot only that can fly past viewers.

▶ When reading, mistakes jump out and are there every time a reader turns back a page. In a broadcast, audiences either notice mistakes the first time – or they never will.

▶ When audiences reading, there are clear signposts – like headlines, captions and paragraphs – to help find the way around the page. In the middle of a broadcast, it can be difficult for new viewers to figure out what is going on.

▶ Readers can leave reading to go off and do something else. When they come back they can pick it up again where they stopped without missing anything. This cannot be done with broadcast unless the segment is recorded or available on the web.

▶ Broadcast news offers the viewer more evidence for what it says (e.g. up-sound, pictures) that may make it more credible ('It must be true: I saw it on TV'). For the same reason, it can distort the truth more powerfully.

▶ Broadcast news exists only through time – except for podcasts, there is no tangible 'object', like a newspaper, to handle.

▶ It is harder to concentrate on broadcast news because it literally flashes past your audience. So viewers are more likely to pick up an impression than a detailed memory – which is why the nature of the whole package is so important.

▶ Broadcast news does not need high-level literacy, but it may demand good general knowledge to make sense of varied, fast-moving packages.

▶ Broadcast news often look or sound slicker than a grey newspaper page. Although it may take longer to read, the reader will acquire more detailed information from a written story.

For all these reasons – the nature of the broadcast medium and the way the audience consumes it – broadcast scripting requires a very different linguistic approach than that employed in print media. But regardless of the medium, you are fighting limited time or space to convey a significant number of facts. Try to find one 'star fact' or idea that will immediately grab your audience, and use this to start your investigative package.

Notes:

FOR

▲ more tipps and further links,

▲ case studies from Asia, Africa
and South East Europe,

▲ exercises and

▲ further readings

please refer to our website

www.investigative-manual.org

about us

The Investigative Journalism Manual (IJM) is a project of the Global Media Programmes of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). Involved are the Media Programmes in Johannesburg (Sub-Sahara Africa), Singapore (Asia) and Sofia (South East Europe).

The IJM is designed to equip journalists with core investigative reporting skills and to support watchdog journalism in difficult environments. The results of their work will strengthen existing democratic institutions or serve as a catalyst to establish democratic structures where there are none. The manual is an update to the guide published by KAS Media Programme Africa eight years ago, which was accessed by some 30,000 visitors annually. The great success of the first version was the reason for KAS Global Media to revise and internationalise the chapters.

Investigative journalists often operate in extremely challenging environments, and some are designed specifically to thwart them. The manual is intended to help reporters facing such challenges as repressive media laws, so-called anti-terrorism regulations, the culture of non-transparency and limited resources. Relevant case studies, which will be updated continuously, are provided.

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The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a German political foundation. It is a global advocate for the promotion of democracy and the rule of law, as well as the enforcement of the human rights. For that reason, KAS supports the development of a free and independent media, political parties, parliaments, and social groups through training and further education. The success of a society depends on stability, efficiency and openness of its elite. KAS supports responsibly minded future elites, both nationally and internationally.

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