Notes on
Investigative Journalism

November 2018

List of issues

How to Define Investigative Journalism?
Broaden the definition of investigative reporting
Are investigative journalists detectives?
Myths about investigative reporting
Investigative reporting is simply good reporting.
Why do Investigative Reporting?
How to Be(come) a Great Investigative Journalist?
Differences between conventional journalism and investigative journalism
Choosing a story for investigation
Last and first, follow your passion: two aspects
Is the story worth it?
Steps in investigative reporting
Steps 1: Broaden the definition of investigative reporting
Steps 2: Build institutional support for your project
Step 3: Build and maintain sources
Step 4- Educate yourself about your subject
Step 5- Look for Documents
Step 6 - Get Out of the Office and Observe
Step 7- Assess, Assess, Assess
Step 8- Verification and Confirmation
Step 9- Tackling the Big Story: Organize Your Material
Step 10 - Investigative Reporting in Daily Journalism

Excerpts on Investigative Journalism

How to Define Investigative Journalism?

Nazakat, Syed & the KAS Media Programme. 2016. *How to Become a Mouthpiece for the People: A Manual for Investigative Journalism*. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Media Programme Asia, 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 proactive 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.
pp. 5-6

Are investigative journalists detectives?

Nazakat, Syed & the KAS Media Programme. 2016. *How to Become a Mouthpiece for the People: A Manual for Investigative Journalism*. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Media Programme Asia, Investigative Journalism.

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, like blasphemy, 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. pp.6-8

Myths about investigative reporting (pp. 8-9)

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.

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.

p.10

How to Be(come) a Great Investigative Journalist?

(pp. 11-13)

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, no matter 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 one 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, when-ever 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.

Hunter, Mark Lee, et. al. *Story-Based Inquiry: a Manual for Investigative Journalists.* UNESCO: 2009 p.9

Differences between conventional journalism and investigative journalism

CONVENTIONAL JOURNALISM	INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM
Research	
Information is gathered and reported at a fixed rhythm (daily, weekly, monthly).	Information cannot be published until its coherence and completeness are assured.
Research is completed swiftly. No further research is done once a story is completed.	Research continues until the story is confirmed, and may continue after it is published.
The story is based on a necessary minimum of information and can be very short.	The story is based on the obtainable maximum of information, and can be very long.
The declarations of sources can substitute for documentation.	The reportage requires documentation to support or deny the declarations of sources.
Source relations	
The good faith of sources is presumed, often without verification.	The good faith of sources cannot be presumed; any source may provide false information; no information may be used without verification.
Official sources offer information to the reporter freely, to promote themselves and their goals.	Official information is hidden from the reporter, because its revelation may compromise the interests of authorities or institutions.
The reporter must accept the official version of a story, though he or she may contrast it to commentaries and statements from other sources.	The reporter may explicitly challenge or deny the official version of a story, based on information from independent sources.
The reporter disposes of less information than most or all of his sources.	The reporter disposes of more information than any one of his sources taken individually, and of more information than most of them taken together.
Sources are nearly always identified.	Sources often cannot be identified for the sake of their security.
Outcomes	
Reportage is seen as a reflection of the world, which is accepted as it is. The reporter does not hope for results beyond informing the public.	The reporter refuses to accept the world as it is. The story is aimed at penetrating or exposing a given situation, in order to reform it, denounce it or, in certain cases, promote an example of a better way.
The reportage does not require a personal engagement from the reporter.	Without a personal engagement from the reporter, the story will never be completed.
The reporter seeks to be objective, without bias or judgement toward any of the parties in the story	The reporter seeks to be fair and scrupulous toward the facts of the story, and on that basis may designate its victims, heroes and wrongdoers. The reporter may also offer a judgment or verdict on the story.
The dramatic structure of the reportage is not of great importance. The story does not have an end, because the news is continuous.	The dramatic structure of the story is essential to its impact, and leads to a conclusion that is offered by the reporter or a source.
Errors may be committed by the reporter, but they are inevitable and usually without importance.	Errors expose the reporter to formal and informal sanctions, and can destroy the credibility of the reporter and the media.

Choosing a story for investigation

Beginning reporters often ask: “How do you select a story to investigate?” Not infrequently, they have a difficult time finding one. But as one of my students once said, “Material is everywhere.” The problem is seeing it. Luckily, there are many ways to notice a story that calls for investigation. One is to watch the media. In general, it is a good idea to monitor a given sector, so that you can begin to identify patterns, and thus realise when something unusual occurs. If you finish a story and think, “Why did that happen?”, the odds are good that there is more to investigate.

Another is to pay attention to what’s changing in your environment, and not take it for granted. The great Belgian reporter *Chris de Stoop* began a landmark investigation of the traffic in women after noticing that the Belgian prostitutes in a neighbourhood he crossed on his way to work had given way to foreigners, and wondering why.

A third is to listen to peoples’ complaints. Why must things be that way? Can nothing be done? Anyplace where people gather – village markets, Internet forums, dinner parties – you will hear of things that sound strange, shocking, or intriguing.

Finally, do not look only for things that involve wrongdoing. It is often more difficult to do a good job of reporting on something that is going right – to understand a new talent, or a development project that met its goals, or a company that is creating wealth and jobs. Identifying the replicable elements of success, or “best practices”, is a valuable service to your viewers.

Remember: Especially when you are starting out, there is no such thing as a small investigation. The skills needed for an inquiry in a distant village are the same skills that you will need later in the capital. That is not a theory, it is our experience. Use the stories that appear where you are now to begin building those skills. Do not wait until you are involved in a high-stakes investigation to learn what you are doing.

p.11

Last and first, follow your passion:

There are two aspects of this principle.

The first is what we call the “broken leg syndrome.” We call it that because, until one of us broke his leg, he never noticed how many people limp. In general, we do not notice phenomena unless we are already sensitive to them. So allow your existing passions to sensitise you to stories that no one else seems to take seriously.

The second aspect is that if a story does not fascinate you, or outrage you, or give you the intense desire to see something change, you should give it to someone else. Likewise, if you are an editor, pay attention to whether your reporter is treating an investigation like a mere task. If so, take back the assignment and give it to someone else.

Why? Remember: Investigation involves extra work. If you don’t care about a story, you will not do that work. Of course you will have to use your critical mind to get it done; of course your manner must remain professional in all circumstances. But if the story does not touch your passions, one way or another you are going to fail with it.

p.11

Is the story worth it?

Too many investigations have been done for the wrong reasons. Though passion matters, vengeance is a passion, and some reporters and publishers use inquiries to accomplish a personal vengeance. Though investigations are hard work, some of them are done only because they are the easiest stories available. And far too many investigators never ask whether a given story is important to their viewers, and why.

So ask yourself the following questions when you assess whether or not a story is worth the work it will require of you: How many people are affected? (We call this “the size of the beast”.) How powerfully are they affected? (Quality matters as much as quantity here. If just one person dies, or his or her life is ruined, the story is important.) If they are affected positively, can the cause be replicated elsewhere? Or, are these people victims? Could their suffering be avoided? Can we show how? Are there wrongdoers who must be punished? Or at least, denounced? Is it important in any event to tell what happened, so it will or won't happen again?

This is how one of us looks at it: The world is full of suffering, and much of that suffering is useless, the result of vice and error. Anything that lessens suffering, cruelty and stupidity is worth undertaking. Investigation can further that end.

Try to put that service first, rather than simply making use of it to advance your career. Never forget that investigation is a weapon, and you can hurt people with it – deliberately, or by your own carelessness. (Not enough is made of the fact that Woodward and Bernstein of Watergate fame, by their own admission, destroyed the careers of several innocent people along with Richard Nixon's.) In the course of your career, you are going to be the best and the worst thing that ever happens to some other people. Be careful about which role you play, and for whom, and why. Take a good look at your own motives before you investigate others. If the story is not more important for others than it is for you, you probably shouldn't be doing it.

In the course of our careers, we have done hundreds of investigations. In every one, at some point, someone walked up to us and said: "Why are you asking all of these questions? What are you going to do with this information? What gives you the right?" If we didn't have a good answer to that question – and saying "the public has a right to know!" is not a good answer – the investigation was finished. Usually, we said something like this: "What is happening here is important, for you and others. I'm going to tell that story, and I want it to be true. I hope you'll help me."

Whatever you say at a moment like this, you'd better believe it, and more important, it has to make sense to whoever you're talking to. People hate journalists, and one of the reasons is that they distrust our motives. We expect you to help change that, too.

p.12

Steps in investigative reporting

Fleeson, Lucinda S. (ND). *Ten Steps to Investigative Reporting*. International Center for Journalists. pp.5-26

Steps 1: Broaden the definition of investigative reporting

Don't limit yourself! Investigative reporting includes more than stories that expose corruption and criminal activity. Important and suitable topics include stories that explain how systems work or fail, or reconstruct a complex event. Reporters at many newspapers have found that readers have a great interest in how things work, what is going on, how it may affect ordinary people. Investigative reporting may be defined as stories that:

- Contain original work, not leaked investigations from law authorities;
- Show a pattern of systemic problems, not just one isolated incident affecting one individual;
- Right a wrong;
- Explain complex social problems.
- Reveal corruption, wrongdoing or abuse of power.

These are some of the topics over the last 20 years that have formed the basis of good investigative projects:

- How the nuclear power industry was creating reactors without having any place to store the waste;
- How a family decided to take an aging, comatose parent off the life support systems in a hospital;
- How a squad of police dogs bit and mauled citizens suspected of the most trivial of crimes;
- How a private high school pretended it was so broke that it could not operate its computers while its directors invested millions of dollars of school funds in a coal mine and other business enterprises;
- How the mentally ill were no longer confined to state hospitals but instead wandered the street homeless;
- How the Defense Department hid millions of dollars in expenditures in a so-called "Black Budget," using the claim of national security to keep secret ordinary expenses as mundane as toilet purchases.

People care enough to sit down and spend 30 minutes reading a long and compelling story. So part of the fight for all of us is to convince owners, publishers and editors that good stories that take time are worth doing.

Steps 2: Build institutional support for your project

Investigative reporting is seldom done alone. It is a cooperative effort that depends on great individual perseverance by pioneering reporters, but they need support and encouragement from editors and publishers, who ultimately make the decision to publish or not. Many news outlets have special investigative teams, which include editors who act as coaches throughout the reporting process and then marshal the paper's resources to get the story into print. Building support for investigative reporting is an evolutionary process at news organizations. Usually individual reporters begin the process with breakthrough stories. For instance, at *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* such a breakthrough story was published in 1977: "The Homicide Files," by two young reporters, William Marimow and Jon Neumann. It was a textbook story that is now taught in journalism classrooms. The story reported that Philadelphia police were beating and illegally coercing innocent men—often poor and defenseless—to confess to murders. Some suspects were later proved innocent. Other suspects were set free when their confessions were judged illegal. The story resulted in a change of the system at the police department. It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and brought the newspaper acclaim. The reporters became editors and role models, helping dozens of other young reporters.

Those first stories are the hardest. Eventually, the newspaper gains experience in how to pursue tough stories and also enjoys the rewards: a sense of purpose; respect; acclaim; sometimes prizes; the sense among the journalists that they are doing their best work.

A conducive environment encourages reporters to tackle difficult subjects. Hallmarks of successful investigative news organizations include:

- Willingness to expend resources: relief from other responsibilities when warranted; travel; special projects editors; library resources and research help;
- A mentor system with role models;

- Editors willing to commit space for important stories. Newspapers in the United States have a longer tradition of institutional support for ambitious project reporting, but it has been a slow process.

Building support for investigative reporting is an evolutionary process

Beginning in the 1960s, “sunshine laws” required public meetings to be open to citizens and reporters alike. Libel protection and freedom-of information laws were enacted that created a culture of access to information. A strong professional community for investigative reporters also has encouraged reporters, who formed their own association, Investigative Reporters and Editors, to share published articles, techniques and offer moral support.

Tips for pioneers

Reporters seeking to convince their editors to pursue a project often must do the initial work on their own time. Once the reporter is convinced that a solid story exists and can be successfully reported, then he or she needs to sell the editors on the idea that more time and money are worth investing. At this point it is important not to oversell a project and promise more than can be delivered. Develop at least a minimum story that can be published if the ambitious project cannot be completed.

Step 3: Build and maintain sources

Develop contacts with a wide array of people who have useful information. It may take a long time — even years — to establish a relationship of trust with news sources. But you can begin, today, to identify types of people with whom you can develop ongoing relationships. Some of these people’s names will never appear in the newspaper, but they can provide information that may turn into stories. They may act as sounding boards for ongoing issues. These contacts may include clerks in government offices, government officials, community leaders, attorneys, police officers, business representatives, firemen, friends — virtually anyone. Other people may never give you a useful lead about a story but can become part of a reporters’ bank of interview sources to provide quotes on specific news stories. These may include government officials, attorneys, politicians, hospital officials, and public relations representatives.

Independent observers and experts are also useful contacts to develop. These may include university professors, authors, pollsters and researchers at public policy institutions.

A reporter needs to evaluate a source's reliability and whether the information was obtained first-hand or is third-hand gossip.

The goal is to interview sources on the record

Many newspapers have policies that news articles must rely primarily on quotations and material from on-the record interviews in which the source is identified by name and title. Use of confidential or anonymous sources should be limited. Too frequent use of anonymous sources can undermine a newspaper's credibility, as readers question whether the sources are fictitious. It is also risky, as many people are willing to provide negative information anonymously, but won't stand behind it themselves because it can't be proved. Many newspapers, for instance, require that a high-level editor must approve the use of an anonymous source before publication.

When a reporter promises confidentiality, his or her word functions as a written contract, so it is a promise that needs to be considered carefully. Reporters have gone to jail rather than reveal their sources. Reliance on anonymous sources can become a bad habit, both for the reporter and the source. Savvy officials try to elicit confidentiality when it is not necessary. Beginning reporters in particular fall into this trap. Often a source can be brought onto the record by simply saying: "I'm interviewing you in your official position and need to have this on the record." Sometimes a reporter has to refuse to listen to something off the record.

Use of confidential sources should be limited.

When a reporter talks to a source, there can be several levels of confidentiality: off the record, not for attribution, deep background and various other confusing categories, which are defined in varying ways. What is important is that no matter what the terminology, the reporter and the source are in agreement on the conditions of how the material is to be used. These conditions are worth discussing explicitly with the source.

Two independent sources

In order to ensure accuracy, many newspapers have a policy prohibiting publication of controversial information unless it is verified by at least two independent sources of information. This is especially true when dealing with anonymous sources. A recent incident at the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* illustrates why many news organizations have decided to never, ever, put anything into the newspaper unless it has been verified with another source.

Common Definitions:

Off the record:

The identity of the source cannot be revealed. Nor can the information be used until and unless it can be confirmed independently.

Not for attribution:

The source can be quoted but not attributed in a way that can identify him or her. How the quote is to be used can be negotiated. For instance, the quote can be identified as from "a participant in the negotiations," "a high-level government official," "a member of Parliament who asked not to be identified," etc.

In 1996, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, in the home state of President Bill Clinton, published several stories about the investigation of the president by Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr. Much of the information came from an anonymous source, who worked directly with the Office of the Independent Counsel and whose reliable information had led to several accurate and good stories. In early 1997, the source told a reporter that Starr had convened mock jury trials to present evidence that the Clintons were involved in perjury and obstruction of justice. The mock juries, said the source, voted to acquit the President of all charges. The story ran on Page One, on Feb. 15, 1997. The reporter could not confirm the report with a second source, but his editors decided to print the story anyway. The next day it was vehemently denied by Ken Starr and the newspaper had to print a retraction. The result was that the newspaper had printed an erroneous, very embarrassing story.

Attribution and plagiarism

Reporters frequently ask about using material from other newspapers, magazines and publications. How much can they use? Common practice among some reporters is to "lift quotes" from one publication and use them again in their own stories. It may be common, but it is lousy journalism. Several U.S. reporters have been fired for lifting quotes. Other publications may provide useful background, but material needs to be checked before using it. If there is no better alternative to borrowing a quote, then it should be attributed to the original publication. For example: "I'm through with politics," Mayor Brown told *The Daily News.*

Step 4- Educate yourself about your subject

A reporter needs to become an expert on the project subject.

One of the first steps is to check the news clips on the subject, ideally in his or her own news organization's library. This is still one of the most basic and important research tools, yet many reporters, particularly beginners, don't do it. Sometimes news articles will be available on the Internet, or on CD-ROM, but often, particularly in emerging countries, articles are available only in old fashioned hard copies, sometimes filed only in chronological order.

A reporter needs to immerse himself in other published materials as well, including other newspapers, books, magazines, newsletters, industry journals, government reports, reference books, and doctoral theses. This previously published material is a vital first step in the research process to familiarize reporters with their subject and to construct a map to follow for additional research.

However, previously published information must be independently verified by further reporting.

The Internet has become a vast resource available to anyone with computer access. It is valuable and dangerous, filled with original documents as well as second-hand gossip. Reporters need to distinguish between what is good, solid, original material and what is second-hand and must be verified elsewhere. Printed library sources should not abandoned. *Who's Who*, the encyclopedia, even the telephone book offer valuable information. Sometimes it is easier and faster to open a book.

Create your own files

As a project progresses, the reporter needs to build his or her own file of materials to keep for later reference. Public relations handouts, news releases, original documents, clippings, magazine articles, business cards and other material should be added to the file as it is collected for easy reference later on when the reporter needs to quickly pull facts, dates, spellings or other specifics. As a reporter develops expertise over several years, the files grow in value.

Consider using an Excel spreadsheet with detailed fields to keep track of who and what you know. When was the last time you talked? How did you meet him/ her? Who else does s/he know that would be useful? What conference/ meeting will s/he be attending in the next few months?

Depending on how much data you start to track, there are a number of database programs that may prove useful as well. (Excel is a spread sheet, and not a database tool.) Database programs have a steeper learning curve, but chances are good that you already have a place to start on your current computer. On a PC, look to see if you have Microsoft Access installed. On a Mac, you may have FileMaker Pro already in your applications list. If you have access to a scanner, consider making a digital copy of every receipt, every document and every critical piece of information you find. This ensures that you have at least one backup if something should happen to your physical files. In addition, there are ways to track all of these files, add notes with your reporting and thoughts, and easily link relevant pieces together – without changing the original document at all. Some people may be reluctant to store important files on their computers because of security reasons. You can password protect your documents online – both Microsoft Word and Pages, for Macusers, along with all the standard office programs, allows you to password protect your files. You should feel safe - as long as you remember your password!

What is the standard?

Often investigative projects document how a system *doesn't* work properly. The reporter needs to find how a good system operates, for comparison purposes. For example, if reporters are researching a story about how the weather reporting system is failing, it is important to find out how good systems operate in other cities or other countries. Find out if there are international standards or industry regulations.

Step 5- Look for Documents
There May Be More Available Than You Think

Original documents provide the best, most reliable evidence. They can be quoted directly, although they should be attributed to their source. Valuable documents do not have to be secret, leaked reports. Some examples of common public documents:

- Corporate registry documents with date of incorporation, annual financial reports, names and addresses of directors and the history of the company.
- Reports filed by publicly traded companies with the local securities regulatory authority. Often these statements are required to disclose negative developments within the company, such as pending lawsuits.

Company annual reports, which often include audited financial statements about profit and losses.

- Company public relations brochures and reports, which often give names, addresses and include public promises about company plans.
- Bills before parliament.
- Census data.
- Medical records.
- Court and police records.
- Individual records, such as identity cards, birth and death certificates, diaries, letters, and photographs.

Even in countries with laws that do allow reporters access to government information, many reporters find that obtaining government documents can be an arduous process that is greatly facilitated by having a personal relationship with a willing source.

But even in the most restricted societies, there may be more available than most journalists realize. Many new economies are building new data bases with computer access, some of which are already online. With such rapid changes occurring every day, more and more information will likely be available within your lifetime, if not in the next few years.

The records alone rarely make a story —they often need to be brought to life with interviews and direct observations.

Some important reminders

- Often the documents are not enough alone. Journalists unskilled in financial accounting may need a financial expert to interpret material. • Sometimes the data is old and must be updated by either requesting more current information from the source or waiting until new material is publicly filed.
- Financial reports and company materials are excellent briefing material for later research and interviews.
- When people come to you with tips, don't be afraid to ask them how to document them, and get them interested in helping. After all, they are talking to you because they want the information to get out!

Step 6 - Get Out of the Office and Observe Make Your Story Come Alive!

Direct observation is one of the most powerful tools we have as reporters, but it is underused.

Reporters need to get in the habit of closely observing their surroundings, both for news stories and in-depth reports. Often journalists are eyewitnesses to events attended by few people. One of the functions of their articles is to describe what happened and what the scene or people looked like. Direct observation should be used for non-news events as well because descriptions often are important elements of the story. Consider the power of descriptions of gaunt, starving children; demolished buildings after an earthquake; or empty market stalls in an impoverished city. Sometimes these descriptions are more important than official statements. This kind of detailed description is the basis of all good writing, whether in novels, literary classics or journalism. All share the ability to draw the reader into a setting and a story. But in order to do it, a reporter must be out of his office and at the scene; interviews must be in person.

First-hand observation of a scene has many advantages:

- Large amounts of reporting can be done quickly, on the spot, while memories are fresh and people gathered. For instance, a reporter on the scene of a fire can quickly find a dozen eyewitnesses and interview them there instead of trying to find their names and addresses to telephone later.

- By making the first-hand observation, the reporter does not have to rely on second-hand accounts by untrained observers who may lack objectivity.

- Direct observation can be used to verify or amplify other information. It is often crucial to understanding the story. For instance, if an investigative project examined the sale of a former military site, the reporter would quickly grasp aspects and details of the story simply by visiting the site. A story about a Roma village would be incomplete unless the reporter visited the community and described the village, living conditions and its inhabitants.

- On-site reporting offers rich detail and texture that can make the story lively and interesting. Description evokes a scene and allows the reader to see, hear, touch, smell, even taste what happened. Details and descriptions lend color, mood, vividness to an account for both painting a word picture and establishing a you-are-there credibility. During interviews, note the subject's surroundings, facial expressions, tone of voice, even silences.

- First-hand observation cannot be repudiated or easily covered up. For instance, a *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter observed Russian troops firing on Chechen civilians—an incident later denied by officials in Moscow. The correspondent was able to report the shootings because he saw it himself.

- Sometimes we need a guide to help us see. For a story on a new virus, a reporter might look through a microscope and have a scientist explain what is revealed. For a story about alleged damage to oil paintings or sculpture, an art conservator may be needed for an expert evaluation.

On-site reporting offers rich detail and texture that can make the story lively...

Once we are in the habit of observing, it then becomes important to select relevant detail. For instance, descriptions of clothing, hair or eye color may not tell us anything about a subject's personality, but if we mention that a scientist is wearing a lab coat spattered with chemicals, this adds to the portrait. The challenge is to write an evocative description without using adjectives or summary descriptions. If the site is an old building, phrases such as "old and in need of renovation" do not tell as much as specific details such as: "the building is covered with pigeon droppings, the windows are broken, a door hangs by one hinge." Reporters should not put themselves into the description, with opinions or phrases such as "it reminds me of my Grandmother's attic." Avoid judgmental descriptions such as "ugly" or "beautiful." How many senses can you appeal to in your writing?

Step 7- Assess, Assess, Assess

Projects, particularly those with ambitious range, can go on forever, and the reporter can get lost. There is always the risk that the project becomes too big, too diffuse, too vague. A good habit to develop is to regularly evaluate: Should the project continue or move ahead? Should it be published now? Should we drop the project permanently?

Project reporters should regularly ask themselves: What is the maximum story? If we can't prove that, do we have a good minimum story? For example, a reporter may begin to study citizen complaints that telephone billing records are vague, do not itemize charges, and are filled with inflated costs. A maximum story might be that the company charges most customers high rates that are assigned randomly, while giving friends, relatives and favored clients reduced fees. A minimum story might be that numerous customers have complained that telephone bills are vague and incomprehensible. Examples of local telephone bills could be compared to itemized bills from successful telephone companies operating smoothly in neighboring countries.

Step 8- Verification and Confirmation

The Confrontation Interview

Findings from in-depth reporting are often not welcomed. The reporter needs to convince people to respond to findings before publication. This means making repeated telephone calls to arrange an interview, sending registered letters if there is no response, perhaps even showing up on someone's doorstep. There are several reasons for getting a response. It is the decent and fair thing to do. If unflattering information is going to be printed in the newspaper about someone, it is only right that the person has a chance to tell his side of the story. A response may include some sound and unanticipated explanations. Or the person may correct information that is just plain wrong. Sometimes a person gives a reporter more and better information. At times the response is a short denial, which also needs to be included for fairness. A confrontation interview occurs when the reporter goes to his subject and reviews the findings. It is important to remember that such a review needs to be complete and thorough, covering each fact that is going to be published in a complex story.

Preparation for the confrontation interview

- Before you start, decide what you need to get out of the interview. Make a list and perhaps script in advance some of the most difficult questions, and rehearse them with a friend.

- To arrange the interview, it is sometimes necessary to reveal the purpose of your visit, but it isn't always necessary to reveal too much. Helpful phrases include: "I'm doing research on this subject." "I've assembled a report, but it isn't complete without your view. I really think this deserves an interview in person with you."

- Assume nothing. Use this as an opportunity to check material from second-hand sources. Most people are only too happy to help ensure that information about them is correct. Don't neglect basic questions such as: What is your title? How long have you been in this job? What is your degree? From where?

- Ask the question over and over if you have to get an answer, or return the subject to the question you asked.

- You need a full response, both to the thrust of the information, and also to the specific details. Review specifics, even if you have to introduce them by saying, “For the record, I just want to go over these cases with you.”
- Sometimes a simple question, such as “What happened?” elicits a valuable point of view.
- Don’t judge the response as good or bad, just note it, or ask for elaboration. The more they talk, the better.
- Make sure you understand the spirit of the response as well as the exact words — remember, you’re not trying to trick the person into a mistaken word, you’re looking to incorporate their point of view!

Ask the question over and over if you have to get an answer.

- Ending the interview is a good time to set the stage for a return: “I may need to check facts or spellings or get amplification on some points. If I have any question about the material or need clarification on certain points, I would like to call you.”

- Go back again and again if necessary.

Step 9- Tackling the Big Story: Organize Your Material

Big stories can be packaged dramatically in ways that also help the writer organize material. Packaging can enhance readability and presentation.

Useful tips:

- Organize reporting and writing into case studies of separate incidents. In a story about police abuse, for instance, 12 incidents of abuse are reported and written, one story at a time. They can be presented all together in one large report, with a simple organization: an introductory, summary beginning, followed by documented cases. Consider an occasional series, particularly if publication pressures prevent a reporter from saving his material until he can present it in one big story. In this format, stories are presented as they are finished over a period of several weeks or months. A logo signature for each of the stories alerts readers to the common theme.

- Consider breaking out sidebar stories, charts, maps and other graphic presentations, such as chronologies of important dates in the story, or a list of main characters.

- Share documentation with the reader. Original letters, photographs, transcripts or other documents can be exciting visual aids and also enhance credibility. Consider a sidebar or small box about how the story was written with pictures of the reporters and photographers and their backgrounds.

Step 10 - Investigative Reporting in Daily Journalism

Make the Time

Reporters frequently complain that they aren't given time by their editors to develop ambitious investigative reports. There is really only one answer to this problem: make the time. Sometimes investigative reporting means making an extra phone call instead of being content with only two or three. Do the daily assignments that must be done, then use spare time for your own project. Often the very best stories come from a reporter's routine rounds on his or her beat, talking to people, following the news, discovering a weird or unusual event and then seeing if the same sort of thing has been happening over and over again. For instance, if a fast-food restaurant serves contaminated food, it's a good story. If five restaurants in the chain serve tainted food, it is a more important story. And if 25 restaurants serve contaminated meals, then it has become a systemic problem.

Often the very best stories come from a reporter's routine rounds...

These are the kinds of stories that come from the reporter, not "top down" ideas from editors who sit in the office and contemplate big issues. What it takes is a reporter who covers a beat, becomes an expert on a subject, and is not afraid to ask sources, in the normal course of events, what they consider their biggest problem or their most serious issue.

Investigative reporting requires an attitudinal adjustment, so that we are always reminding ourselves: think big; incorporate enterprise stories along with the routine news stories; never assume that documents are unavailable; develop relationships with sources and experts who can help you; interview many people with various points of view. If we can do all of this, then we will produce the kind of work that inspired us to become journalists.