Investigative Reporting

A toolkit for Reporters

Investigative Reporting: A reporter's toolkit

If reporting exists for any reason, it is to hold authority accountable. Investigative reporting serves society by providing the scrutiny that uncovers the hidden story, provides the primer for change, and promotes accountability in all levels of government. At its core, investigative reporting involves good reporting skills, solid writing skills and – most importantly – time.

This toolkit is designed as a living document to guide Egyptian reporters in developing, writing and producing investigative reporting stories and series. This toolkit is intended for print and online reporters, but the lessons are much the same for broadcast reporters. As you use this toolkit, feel free to add, subtract and to send suggestions to CIPE. Investigative reporting is different every time. Happy hunting!

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INTRODUCTION

Investigative reporting largely grew from the efforts of "muckrakers" at the turn of the 20th century. The work of authors, like Upton Sinclair's "The Jungle," which exposed unsanitary practices in the meatpacking industry, provided the blueprint for modern investigative reporting. An emphasis on looking into the activities of government, industry and where the two come together has continued to form the crux for investigative reporting. In the United States, the Watergate investigation and subsequent resignation of President Richard M. Nixon is considered the watershed moment in investigative journalism.

These past investigations are more than history. Looking at the work of Sinclair, Bob Woodward and Seymour Hersch, to name a few, provides a road map for current journalism and future journalists. Investigations proceed from some key assumptions and obligations and are undertaken with a specific set of goals.

First, from earlier investigators we find a common assumption about the duty of a reporter. The primary obligation in each of the cases was to look at an element of society – meatpacking, wiretapping, spending, etc. – and to ask the question "Why?" Why is it this way? Why did this happen? Why did we allow this item, but not another? The question why is the most valuable tool in any reporter's arsenal.

In each case, the investigations started with an idea. Those ideas are almost always based on some suspicion. Healthy skepticism is crucial for a career as a reporter. Skepticism goes into overdrive when dealing with investigations.

The best investigative reporters are the ones who don't take "no" as answer or an end. Rather, they view "no" as just another entry point in determining where to ask the next question or where to go next when comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.

Fairly early in the process, the investigators shared their work with editors. Bouncing ideas off of fellow professionals is a great starting point. Work in journalism lends itself to a certain competitive camaraderie. It also reinforces the need to keep communication open through the various levels of an organization. The reporter who attempts to conduct an investigation without involving editors is doomed to either fail or compromise the work so thoroughly as to render it useless. This helps promote buy-in for the time and resources needed to conduct an investigation. It also helps cultivate the allies required to make a successful investigation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WHY?

Since asking "Why?" and "So what?" are so critical to performing investigative journalism, it's also important to ask those same questions before even considering an investigative project. Many reporters live happy, albeit dull, lives without ever investigating.

Many journalists have happy, albeit incomplete, careers without looking into investigative reporting. Many publications keep readers informed, albeit only somewhat, without ever publishing an investigative piece.

However, those people and publications are failing to meet their mission and to realize the ultimate worth of their work. At its core, investigative journalism performs a public good. Done well, it holds authority accountable. Even done poorly, it validates journalism's role as a watchdog of government. In capable hands, it proves the ultimate value of journalism. A great investigative journalism piece is unlikely to change the world. However, it may make the world want to change. This possibility to effect change is the lifeblood of investigations.

I had a student ask me why I teach investigative reporting and why he should even bother to take the class. I asked him where he saw himself in journalism in 10 years. He didn't answer. So I described a scenario where he had gone from an enthusiastic young scribe to a bitter, cynical old timer. He had gone from wanting to change the world to filing yet another story on a car crash and working on a feature about a couple's upcoming 50th wedding anniversary. It simply sounded dreary.

Investigative reporting, I said, is the stuff that makes reporting worth doing. It allows us to explore the hidden and question the seen. It gives reporters the chance to invigorate careers. It opens the halls of power to all. It is a great equalizer and a chance to shine. It is a protection against becoming stale and a chance to use your unique voice to create work of meaning, purpose and passion.

It was one of my favorite soliloquies. The student still didn't take my class, but I don't regret the exchange for a moment. I meant my words on that day, and I mean them as I write today. If journalism is a calling, then this is the most important piece of that calling.

Fundamentals

We mentioned the key elements elsewhere. Without some fundamental curiosity and a well-ingrained need to perform acts of journalism, investigative journalism doesn't happen. There are a number of other steps along the way that need to happen to ensure a successful investigation. Some of these are internal items and processes. Others involve external communication. Goal setting and the ability to set scope each form a part of the process. In this section we breakdown each of the component parts and explain how they relate to the whole.

"Why" is the place we start every investigation. We may be considering questions on what do we want to know, what will meet a public good, what do we need to know and who knows what, but we start all investigations with "Why?"

Much of what we know as journalism is focused on the "what." News coverage, particularly breaking news coverage, lends itself to "what"-based work. "What happened?" is often the first question asked of any breaking news event. Who was involved, how it happened, where it occurred and when it happened, form the basis for most news coverage. Why it happened may be determined in a few simple steps in initial news reporting. Taking for instance this lead from a fictional industrial accident:

"PORT SAID – Four men were injured at a dock here when more than a dozen 30-kilo gas cylinders fell off a pallet they were unloading Thursday morning."

The "why" of the story is the falling gas cylinders. While this is the simple and immediate "why" answer, it raises far many more questions, and each of those questions points to an area that might be investigated. Why did the cylinders fall? Why were the men in such a position to get injured? Why were they loading in the morning? Why this type of cylinder? Why this size?

Just looking at these five "why" questions, we arrive at a host of possible investigations. Why did the cylinders fall? Was this because of some flaw in the manufacture of the pallet, the packaging of the cylinders or the lifting of them on to the ship? Answering these questions raises issues in quality of manufacture, workplace safety, work rules and oversight, and production cycles.

Why were the men in such a position to get injured? Was there any oversight of the dock? If so, who was in charge? Were the men wearing any safety equipment? Is this equipment required or even available? Did they take any actions to cause the accident or to mitigate the damage? Now we are dealing with issues of management, dock safety, maritime rules for loading and what, if any, federal rules for supervision of lading.

Why were they loading in the morning? Had the loaders just started a shift? Had they just finished a shift? Were they working double shifts or around-the-clock to meet deadlines? Was the material of the sort that can only be loaded in the morning? Were there some delays in the shipping that led to this loading in the morning? Are there external pressures on the shipper, the shipping company or elsewhere in the supply chain that led to this calamity? Trying to answer these questions opens up investigations on the handling of hazardous or pressurized materials, the timing of work shifts and crew fatigue, mandates for break time, the challenges of "just-in-time" delivery, and the need to load cargo in a certain order for shipping.

Why this type of cylinder? Was this the only type available? Is there a history of failure? Have others reported similar problems? Are there any alternatives? Finding an answer for these items leads to a look at the transportation industry as a whole, the processing and shipping of industrial materials, regulations and regulatory history, and the possibility that this was not the best way to ship.

Why this size? Is this a common size (30 kilos) for shipping the material within the containers? Were there alternatives? Are these normally loaded on a palette? Is there a reason a cargo container was not used? Is the size of the container related to the volatility of what is held inside? Where would this size container go and be used? This last batch of questions covers some of the earlier areas, but adds to it the need to ask questions on industrial uses of such containers, alternative shipping methods, expenditure decisions, and looks at the elements of modern shipping.

All of these questions may lead to investigative stories and many of them may lead to dead ends. The key for journalists is to ask these initial questions. From there, it is possible to see a myriad of investigations. The worst transgression for a journalist is to stop asking these questions. While these questions were based on a hypothetical situation, the same rules apply in any investigation. Asking why is the bedrock for starting an investigation.

Documents can provide the base and often provide the scope for investigative reporting. Documents can illuminate and quantify a story in a way that human sources cannot. Finding the right document is the investigatory equivalent to mining gold. There is a lot of ore to separate in finding the most valuable metal. Still, the time to smelt is worthwhile for completing an investigation. An investigative reporter has to proceed with the mindset that "There is always a document." The Watergate reporting came from police arrest reporters. Other investigations have come from letters, certificates, government reports, financial data, affidavits, court filings, and the list goes on.

William C. Gaines has written that documents allow reporters to check on the validity of tips as well as point the way to what will become longer term work. Reporters, Gaines notes, also build stories by finding and matching documents. An example of this can be seen in comparing what a municipality, business or agency plans to spend in a year, i.e. the planned budget, with what it actually spent, as seen in an annual report. As Gaines notes, many reporters are diligent in following the creation of a city or state budget, but few check back more than a year later when the annual reports become available (Gaines, 2008).

In every case, reporters should be looking for the most original source or primary source document. Analyze the source of each document. What is the motivation behind the organization producing the document? A think tank on economic policies will likely have a far different agenda than a government agency producing a mandated monthly report.

Always seek primary documents and avoid secondary. A news reporter from The Times of London is a great starting point in looking for background and sources related to a topic. The story is not, however, an acceptable source for reporting. Look at where The Times reporter found data or documents. Those are the locations where a reporter needs to start. Don't assume the initial report was correct and don't repeat mistakes others made. Seek primary sources.

In my reporting, this often means taking a good look at the fine print in any hard copy or electronic copy source. Where did this come from? Even when I see that a report came from the U.S. Census Bureau, I will check to see where the bureau came up with its data. Was this the original work of the bureau, or did it come from some other agency or even a non-governmental organization. This has led me to census reports that originated in the Department of Commerce, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the American Medical Association, and a handful of other locales. Scrutinizing documents can mean the difference between success and failure.

Not only must a reporter have faith in the existence of necessary documents, but recognize that the documents may come in many different forms. Not only are they in hard copy, but increasingly in electronic form. When seeking documents, be sure to look for items that may be included in a variety of formats. Also attempt to get the most manageable document possible. You are going to be doing reporting work with the items you gather. Get them in a form that works best for you.

This belief led to an investigative report on the occurrence of preventable deaths in nursing homes. Working in Tulsa, Oklahoma, at the time, I was teamed with a reporter to build a database on death certificates. In that state, death certificates are a public record, but no reporters had done any work compiling this information. We found the data was kept in hard copy (paper) form and most of it contained a host of codes added by the Oklahoma Department of Health. We took those paper documents and mined each death certificate for critical information, such as location, cause, overseeing physician, age of deceased, and other items easily gleaned from the work. We built an electronic database.

We still were unsure of what our story might be. Honestly, who wants to read about a database on death certificates? So, we started querying the data. We sorted data by location, cause of death, age, etc. Ultimately, these queries brought up several unusual causes of death and a higher than expected number of deaths at nursing homes. Acknowledging that your heartiest residents do not generally need daily nursing care, we still find the number of deaths surprising. Looking closer at the data, we started asking questions about the cause of death specific to nursing homes. We discovered a number of deaths caused by bed sores, exposure to the element and sepsis. Contact with health care experts allowed us to ask the "why" question about the nature of these deaths. Physicians told us that these would fit in the category of preventable death:

A death via bed sore simply met that the person was not receiving enough care and attention. This was the moment that led to our series investigating preventable deaths in nursing homes. Using another set of documents, the licensing material that described how many people a home could treat, we were able to narrow our search to the nursing homes with the highest per capita number of preventable deaths.

Armed with our data from the documents, we started our interviews. These documents led us to people and those people led us to more sources. This progression also points to the importance of triangulation. When working on a news story, any news story, the ability to gather data and comments from a variety of sources leads to more thorough reporting. The same holds true in investigations. There, however, the collection of document sources and people sources leads to an interesting interplay. Documents lead to people and people lead to documents.

For instance, in writing on the mining damage in the Tar Creek in northeastern Oklahoma, one of the critical issues became the presence of Native Americans within the mining lands. Members of the Quapaw tribe had been relocated to this area. When lead and zinc discoveries were made on their property in the early 1900s, a number of Quapaw entered into contracts with miners. In 1921, the U.S. government stepped in and declared a number, about two dozen, of the contracts void because the Quapaw members listed on the contracts were not able to speak English. Instead, the federal government took over the contracts through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and promised to provide protection of the Quapaw's financial interests.

By the time mining ended in the 1970s, there were hundreds of tons of mining waste, known as chat, spread on the ground and piled into mountains around the mining communities of Picher and Cardin. Questions about who owned the chat, with its high levels of lead waste, become a public health concern and, later, a concern about relocation. By the late 1990s the Environmental Protection Agency – the U.S. federal entity charged with environmental protection – officially estimated that more than three-quarters of the land covered in chat was owned by the Quapaw whose interests were being protected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

As a reporter, I started to research property records, attempting to determine exactly who owned the property. I used copies of property records from the County Court house, earlier scientific studies and residents' comments to build a colored map of the area. In it, I found that individual Quapaw owned about 40 percent of the chat-covered land, and the tribe owned nothing.

While the documents were helpful, they were not enough to produce a story. In separate interviews with representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Quapaw tribe, I asked about property ownership. In each case, I also shared copies of my map and some of the documents used to build that map. Based on those items, the Environmental Protection Agency revised its official claim from 75 percent down to "approximately 50 percent." The Quapaw tribe also claimed to have recently bought a parcel of the tainted land, but declined to go on the record with an exact location. In each case, the documents led me to people, and they either led me to documents – the EPA pointed to its early claim of 75 percent – or lead to change. The comments also allowed me to complete a story that contained what the documents stated and what the people said. It gave readers as full a picture as possible and let them make an informed decision on what might be the truth.

Each of the cases mentioned have resulted in stories, but in reporting, that is not always the case. Sometimes tantalizing possibilities go nowhere. Sometimes a great project turns into more work than one person could do in a lifetime. Most of the time, they are somewhere in the middle. This, however, leads to a critical point in reporting: consideration of outcomes and the "Go/No Go" decision.

"Go/No Go" Decision

Each investigation should start with an initial "sniff" test: Something smells funny. As soon as you have determined there is a funny smell, do a little background research. Look at past reporting on the topic, company or individual. Consider investigations that have been done elsewhere or by others on similar topics or areas. You might even conduct an interview or two on the topic as a means of furthering your understanding and possibly modifying the goals of your investigation.

Once that background is complete, you are ready to make a statement on the likely end product of your work. In the best-case scenario, you will produce an investigation that draws laudatory comments from your public and peers, and effects change. In the worst-case scenario, you will produce a thorough, readable feature on your topic, industry or individual. The one thing your investigation cannot produce is no story. The "no story" investigation is the sure path to never doing another investigation. Imagine explaining to your boss that you invested months of time, resources and energy into an investigation that produced nothing. You will not be doing another investigation.

Instead, try to put yourself in a position where you can quickly define the possible scope of your investigation. Be optimistic, but keep in mind that you will need a fallback that includes writing an in-depth feature article. Even if it does not uncover significant wrongdoing or bring about change, the investigation will provide a story that needs to be shared with readers and viewers.

Staying on track can be helped by crafting a prospective story budget and setting several points for "Go/No Go" decisions. A story budget should include a main story and a list of possible sidebars. It should have some suggestions for ways to illustrate the stories (photos, graphics, etc.) and a timeline for preparing the work. Share this with your editors early and caution them that it may need updating as you work. All investigations are prone to some metamorphosis once reporting begins. There are no certainties in investigations, and if we could predict all the stories, we wouldn't need to bother reporting. However, the reporting is still critical, and the act of reporting creates new possibilities and challenges. Below is a story budget of an investigative series on questions surrounding academic credentials of full- and part-time faculty members. This investigation was conducted by Metropolitan State College of Denver journalism students in spring 2008. Note that the budget includes story slugs, story descriptions, possible illustrations and the author or authors attached to the story.

Story Budget

MAINBAR: The University of Southern California is more than happy to tell you how Will Ferrell and Reggie Bush received their degrees there. Denison University in Ohio will tell you that Michael Eisner, Hal Holbrook and Jennifer Garner all were once students where you could potentially be a student. The University of Denver jumps at the opportunity to inform you that Condoleezza Rice gained her education there. LUTHYE (no art)

CLEARINGHOUSE: With the fast paced life Americans live, how willing are they to give up some of their rights for convenience? The National Student Clearinghouse is a company that is taking a convenience and turning into a headache. BROWN (needs photo; Registrar?)

DIPLOMAMILLS: You've seen them. The messages in your inbox advertise diplomas in a matter of weeks for a few hundred dollars: a master's degree for $180, a doctorate for $250. It's not only too good to be true; it's too good to be legitimate. BAILEY (with MILLSLIST as graphic)

ACCREDITATION: Reputable accreditation agencies put institutions through extensive certification processes to validate the credibility of colleges and universities, and a student's diploma. TYLER (no art)

STAFF BOX: Lists sections staff. Graphic element.

STUDENTREAX: Students respond to the lack of credentials and the inability to verify from private universities. STAFF (I know Luthye is listed, but I think we may need multiple people to get this one.) (Must have photos of some students, probably as mugs.)

BADACTORS: Here are the people whose institutions say they did not graduate, or are lacking a degree for financial reasons. BELL (coordinating with comments from others) (photo needed)

B.A.G.: The graphic detailing where everyone came from to teach at Metro. Includes list of Clearinghouse members with non-responders highlighted. TYLER

CLEANBILL: These are the departments or programs that stood out for their clean bill of health. PARKER (photo would help.)

INTERNATIONAL: Hiring professors with degrees from foreign countries represents a special set of challenges. STEPHEN & JOHNSON (no art)

HR: Metro adds a full background check to the list of requirements needed to become a professor or gain promotion. Professors are not happy. WEATHERLY (Needs a photo.)

CREDENTIALS: Here are the safeguards the college has in place to make sure that French horn at the front of the room holds an advanced degree before it begins squawking. BROWN (Art?)

PARTTIMERS: More than half of the professors teaching at Metro this semester are part-time. Why are there so many? WEATHERLY (Needs art. Why not get a photo of a part-timer teaching?)

CHEATING: When creating a resume for a new job, it is easy to stretch the truth about some things that may not be true about past jobs and experiences. Why do we lie? RIVERA

COORDINATION / DESPERATION: Metro State currently employs more than 500 adjunct faculty members. That is, people who may only teach a class or two that have experience in the field of study. What happens is a jam and a few more spots need to be filled? Does desperation play a key role in hiring at this point? BELUE & MOBERLY

The above example is a thorough budget of a series that involved 14 students checking into the credentials of about 1,000 instructors. This copy of the budget came less than two weeks before the series was scheduled for completion. However, even at that late date, assignments were still shifting and the fate of some stories remained in question. The finished series used most of the stories listed above, but right up until the moment production was complete, changes were being incorporated.

Changes point to the next necessity of investigations. Along the way, set the possibility for "Go/No Go" decisions. Usually these are based on a timeline and help you determine what you will be able to accomplish in your investigation and whether the budget you prepared is realistic, needs revision (They all do!) or unworkable. Making "Go/No Go" decisions is a powerful part of turning planning into finished work. Without it, deadlines can slip, stories can get lost and, particularly on larger stories or ones with multiple authors, coordination can fall apart.

At the simplest level, the decisions can be made on a story-by-story basis and then carried up to a larger level. A project with a large number of "No Go" stories may indicate some fundamental problems in reporting, writing or original data. A project with an overwhelming number of "Go" decisions may indicate that investigative subject was not as compelling or was easier to cover than expected. In action, the "Go/No Go" decision is similar to a checklist for news stories. It might look something like this for each story on your proposed budget:

Go/No Go Checklist
[ ] Is your story newsworthy?
[ ] Have you answered the readers' main questions?
[ ] Is your story complete?
[ ] Do you have the required number of sources? (Usually at least three.)
[ ] Do you have at least one authoritative source? (Usually at least one.)
[ ] Have you included appropriate sources for fairness and balance?
[ ] Have you included documents as evidence? Are they all from primary sources?
[ ] Have you shared critical information from documents with human sources?
[ ] Does the story contain a clear theme and news?
[ ] Is the lead backed up in the story?
[ ] Are claims in the story backed up?
[ ] Is this the story as proposed in the budget?
[ ] Have you tailored the story for its intended audience?
[ ] Have you attributed quotes and information correctly?
[ ] Have you developed it logically?
[ ] Does each paragraph develop a single idea?
[ ] Does the story flow well? Do you have transitions that guide readers?
[ ] Is your writing clear and concise? Can readers understand your words and sentences?
[ ] Are all opinions attributed to a source? Has the writer kept out of the story?

Listing these points also indicates the importance of reporting fundamentals and good writing. However, their primary use is as a checklist for the work. Wherever the writer can put a checkmark indicating an affirmative answer and a "Go" decision, the story is in good shape. A story without many checkmarks indicates a "No Go" decision. Those latter stories should either be dropped or rewritten or perhaps seek some additional reporting.

Armed with the basics – the ability to ask "Why?", the faith in primary documents, triangulation, story budgets, and the "Go/No Go" questions – the first steps to a successful investigation are in place. Equipped with these tools, we have the essentials. Those won't be enough, but they are to investigative reporting what the hammer and screwdriver are the toolbox.

Tool Sharpener No. 1: Honing your starting points

Considering what you have read, it's time to look at the starting points for your investigation. Investigations can start based on simple events or complex ideas. Begin your work with a look at those first questions.

1. What is the "Why?" question in your investigation? Do you have a clear idea on what you hope to investigate and where you might seek sources for this investigation?

2. What role does your passion for the topic play in your decision to pursue this area? While passion is not critical to an investigation's success, it can go a long way. You will be spending a great deal of time on this work. If you can feel some love for it, that time will be better spent.

3. Have you answered the "So what?" questions? As you put your reporting together, ask yourself why the questions you are asking matter. Is the work you are putting together both interesting and relevant to the topic under investigation? Hopefully, the answer to both is yes. If it's not, perhaps you need to change your reporting or the focus of your investigation.

4. Consider the "Go/No Go" checklist in the toolkit. Is it sufficient for what you are doing? Are there other areas that you might add or items that you would want to subtract? Feel free to modify the checklist. As above, make it relevant to your work.

LAW AND INVESTIGATIONS

In ancient Athens, Plato argued that truth is best reached through a rigorous discussion from which no fact or argument is withheld. He believed that such discussion is essential if a government is to serve its people well. Investigative reporting hails from the Athenian tradition of free expression and free speech as a means to ensure the maximum participation in government and the best government possible. Investigative Reporting often gives voice to the voiceless. Along the way, it creates some challenges in ethical and legal realms.

Foremost among those concerns is libel. Historically, libel was merely reporting that damaged the reputation of a person or, in particular, a government. Licensing, bonding and taxes were used as press controls through the centuries. Over time, the notion that the reporting must also be false was added to the definition. More recently, in the 1960s, a seminal case in the U.S. Supreme Court added the idea of "actual malice" to the definition of libel when reporting on a public figure, public official or person who injected into a public controversy.

Because investigators work on potentially explosive topics, here's a quick explanation of what to watch for in reporting and how to avoid libel. To prove libel there has to be a connection to each of three points:

First, the material is defamatory either on its face or indirectly.

Second, the defamatory statement is about someone who is identifiable to one or more persons.

Third, the material must be distributed to someone other than the offended party; i.e. published.

In application, courts have taken a very broad view of what constitutes publishing. It's more than just putting words on a page and sharing those words with an outside party. The publishing definition includes broadcasting, video dissemination, online publications, blogging and e-mail. The definition cuts across all boundaries in presentation to include news, sports, entertainment and even advertisements.

After seeing work that meets the fundamental three conditions, courts have applied two tests to the reporting. The first looks at whether a statement was known to be false at the time of publication or broadcast. The second test depends on the status of the person suing for libel. For a private person, negligence in reporting is all that has to be demonstrated to proved libel. For a public person or public official, the complainant has to prove "actual malice" or a reckless disregard for the truth by the reporter in order to prove libel. This higher standard is unusual in courts world wide.

The strongest defense against libel is the truth. However, knowing the truth and proving it in court are two different matters. Publishers, broadcasters, reporters and editors have found this to be the most trying aspect of a libel suit. In attempting to meet this standard, reporters traditionally have relied on documents, official declarations and other judicially privileged material as a shield in such claims. Judicial proceedings, i.e. court actions; legislative or public proceedings; or other public records, such as the items found in a county clerk or recorder's office; are great aids in a libel defense.

The most common causes of libel suits are the sort of items that investigative reporters need to watch closely. They include carelessness, exaggerated writing,inadequate verification, and the failure of reporters to talk to a defamed person. My advice for reporting students looking to avoid their day in court is to fall back on the three "C's" of copy editing: Challenge the copy, check the copy, and change the copy if necessary. In challenging the copy, I ask the question of "How do we know this?" If I can't find a ready answer, I may have a problem. When checking the copy, I seek other sources that might verify or negate any point made. Finally, if necessary, I change the copy. This often means I either drop an item from a finished story or project, or I look for other ways to say the same thing or, in the worst case, I find a way to write around this hole.

In practice, this typically means that I print a copy of my work and underline each fact on each line in red. Then I take my copy and in the margins of the paper and write which sources provided that fact and any sources I used to try and verify that fact. If I have

three or more sources on any fact, I tend to stop the reporting work on that item at that point. If I have fewer than three, I try to find additional sources. In some cases, there is only one source. At that point, I have to evaluate whether I feel comfortable with the fact reporting and the source. It is a difficult balancing act. So far, it has been a successful balancing act.

The Egyptian Constitution's affirmation that Egypt is a Muslim nation adds another set of challenges in investigative reporting. The legal code's mixture of Islamic and civil law, based on the French statutory code, gets further complicated by the guidance and precedents of the Court of Cassation and the Supreme Administrative Court (Glasser, 2009). In addition, reporters are working in an environment with large, state-controlled media and nascent independent media.

As an investigative journalist, my concerns would come from the various sections of Egyptian law that criminalize putting out "false news harming the reputation and interests of the country (Glasser, 2009, p.193). It's not that reporting would necessarily move to that level, but the broad language of "false news" (Who determines what's false?) opens up a number of avenues for prosecution of investigative journalists. It is conceivable that accurate reporting could be seen as damaging to the reputation or the interests of the nation. At that point, a single falsity, even a misspelled name, could lead to prosecution. While this puts a premium on fact-checking, it has an understandably chilling effect on potential investigations.

In addition, an amendment to Article 179 in March 2007 gave "authorities power to arrest people suspected of terrorism, search their homes, intercept their mail, and tap their phones without a court order. (Glasser, 2009, p. 193)" On its face, this amendment would not seem to be a critical issue to journalists. However, states around the world have a history of malleability in their definitions of terrorists. An investigative journalist working on stories that harm state interests could be considered a terrorist by the state. I found no evidence of this in a search of Egyptian news coverage since the amendment. However, my search was limited to English-language publications.

Tool Sharpener No. 2: Legal Challenges

Holding authority accountable and investigating wrongdoing is the highest calling of journalism. Even noble intentions, however, do not ensure protection from legal action.

1. As the work begins, what are your legal concerns?

2. What sort of protective steps are you taking to avoid libel accusations?

3. How are you gathering data and keeping notes? Will these be available for use in fact checking later?

4. Have you allotted time and resources for fact checking before the investigation appears?

5. What sort of minimum standard will you set for yourself in the number of sources you need in verifying controversial material?

6. Do you plan to consult with a lawyer during any part of the reporting? Editing? Presentation?

STORY BUDGETS

If you have no idea where you are going, then any map can help you get there. In investigative reporting, it is critical to have at least some idea. The best map to use is a story budget. It carries the road markers, important destinations and scenic overlooks along the trail.

Without it, the investigation may prove useless and lost. If you can plan ahead of time when stories will be running on what dates, your publication will be far more effective in having a complete product with in-depth reporting that covers all angles.

Newsrooms work off of story budgets similar to the one shared earlier. Staffs will have a budget of what stories will be in the next edition. The budget also includes how many pages will be needed for the edition, typically broken into the sections of the newspaper, as well as requests for art, non-narrative elements or photographs.

As an editor, it is important to know what your investigative reporters are working on; what stories they are writing, what art will be needed, and when the stories will be ready for print. As a reporter, it is even more important to at least have an idea of what your stories will look like when they come to fruition.

Putting together a budget for your publication on a section by section basis is the easiest way to keep everything organized. The same applies when setting the budget for your investigative project. Treat it like its own section or broadcast. Start its budget with the top, or most important, story and work your way down. This way you know exactly how much space to allot for each story and subsequently each section.

Knowing how long reporters' stories might be is the first step to planning a useful budget. Going back to the Port Said accident investigation example, your reporter should be able to give you an estimate how long a main story will be, and that will help you figure out how much space should be allotted. Carry this process through to include sidebar stories that illuminate lesser, but still important, aspects of the investigation. Be sure to include the possibility of illustrations, photos and graphics coordinated with your stories.

Ideally, the budget should be a spreadsheet of sorts that contains relevant information for each story. To keep a budget updated, editors should ask for relevant information for each story. Here are some basics that reporters should be aware of for each of their stories.

1. A slug for the story, a short name or single word title for each story.
2. The reporter who will be writing the story, including contact information.
3. A brief, two or three sentence, description of the story.
4. The time, date and place of the story.
5. A tentative deadline.
6. Ideas for art — photo opportunities, graphics that can be used, non-narrative elements.
7. Anything else that may be important or specific to your publication.

Whatever you chose to include in the budget, there are several ways budgets can be discussed. For a large publication, with reporters dealing with the same editor edition after edition, it makes sense to have a sectional budget meeting. For instance, the news section editor would sit down with each reporter and fill out a story budget for the news section. The same would happen for other sections, including a budget for your investigative work. Then there would be a section editor meeting where a complete budget would be built by putting the different sections together. This way, an editor-in-chief can see a finished story budget instead of hearing each story pitched and recorded.

At a smaller operation, one with only a handful of reporters and a couple of editors, it makes sense for everyone to sit down together and build a budget as a staff. This way each member of the staff can have input. Reporters know and editors suspect that a budget can also be a powerful tool in guiding investigative work. The person who makes that first innovative step is often well on the way to getting his or her ideas to triumph.

A caution in using story budgets comes in the danger of making their contents punitive. A story budget should be a fair representation of what can be prepared, written, photographed, etc. With this in mind, it does not make sense to put stories on a budget that cannot, or most likely will not be completed. Of course, not all will go as planned; stories can change or fall through. After all, this is still news that we are covering. If it stayed exactly as we predicted, then it would be necessary to either find a story with actual news, or to go into a different line of work, perhaps financial advising on insurance sales.

Tool Sharpener No. 3: Budgeting Time

Once an investigative idea has received the OK to proceed, prepare the first budget. Be sure to include possible main stories and sidebars. Also, consider what graphics and non-narrative elements might be used. Attempt to organize the hypothetical look of your finished project. Be open to changes in the budget as you progress.

1. Prepare a sample budget to go with an investigative series you plan to do. Be sure to consider how many parts the series will be and include contingencies for stories that fail to materialize and stories that prove to be better than expected.

2. Take the budget you just prepared and write one based on the best-case scenario. Assume that every wrong you uncover will be worse than you expect. Assume that every source you need will be available, talkative and worthy of quoting.

3. Take the first budget you prepared and write one assuming everything goes wrong. Assume the story does not turn out as planned. Assume that problems are less than anticipated and sources are difficult, if not impossible, to find.

4. Compare your best-case and worst-case budgets. If the worst-case budget results in no story, you need to reconsider your investigation. If your best-case budget results in a series that you wouldn't want to read, reconsider your investigation.

5. Look at an investigative series. Deconstruct that series by writing a story budget based on what appeared in print or online. What lessons do you take away from other investigations?

DATABASES

Investigative reporters need to learn how to use databases and need to be comfortable building such collections of data on their own. Databases provide devices for coordinating, tracking, fact checking and future coverage.

The coordination aspect of databases is fairly obvious in the "Go/No Go" and the Story Budget sections. In each of those areas, effective source databases make it much easier to see what stories to pursue, which stories may prove particularly difficulty, what reporters and editors expected in the stories, when stories might be finished, and the list goes on. Suffice to say, a database is a highly useful tool when more than one person works on an investigation. It also provides a method for tracking work, sources and the status of stories.

For instance, I often think of databases as collections of data by government, non-governmental groups and private agencies. These collections allow those groups to track their work and can be highly useful in reporting. Often, however, I use simple database programs as a means of recording sources. Names, titles, contact information, and contact dates are some of the items I will track. A source database helps me keep track of who I identified as possible sources in a project, whether I talked to them, when I talked to them, how I talked to them, and how I can get in touch with them again. Simply keeping up with the mounting list of names scratched on notepads, sticky notes and napkins can become overwhelming and time consuming.

Not only do source databases help me with tracking while reporting, they make a wonderful resource when fact checking starts. I often add columns to my simple databases so I can put a mark and a date to denote contacts or attempts to check on information sources provided me earlier. This is not always critical, but it provides some safety and confidence when double- and triple-checking items in the final hours before an investigative project is shared with the world.

Once built, source databases can take on a life of their own. Electronic recordkeeping makes it easy to add or subtract sources. It also makes it easy to identify possible sources for future work, or contacts that need to be made after a story has been published. Research we did on Commercial Financial Services Inc.'s collapse in 1998 led to creation of a large source database. Three reporters built and used the database while conducting their investigation. Along the way, this searchable collection helped reporters draw connections between principals in the company. As the series need publication, reporters used the source database in checking facts. Finally, in the year or so after the series the list was used for contacting sources used in the original series, those unavailable at the time and to keep track of new possible sources.

Learning to use databases does not require learning a new language or training a mind to work in a new direction. While high-powered software exists to allow storage of more complicated data in a searchable format, it is not crucial for investigative reporting. A source list can be kept to fewer than a dozen columns of data. Even on larger databases, such as a list of code violators tracked by a department, simple software allows the reporter to search for information.

Information contained in a database built from state records can prove to be a powerful tool. A database we built based on enforcement actions taken by the state's environmental quality division in Oklahoma allowed us a view into the division's most significant actions. We collected eight years of data, and by the time we were done querying it we know the largest fine recipients in the state, the most common reasons for fines, and the type of environmental pollution transgressions that did not result in fines. This information formed the basis of our interview with the director of the environmental quality division. He noted in the interview that he had been the head of the division since its creation, and he had no idea about the largest fine recipients.

Any time there is a document – and, as noted earlier, there is always a document – it is possible to build a database. The only restrictions are time, your willingness to seek data and the format in which the data is maintained. The growth of digitized systems makes it easier to track any thing. This doesn't mean that an investigator won't eventually build a database off of paper copies. While the initial time investment is steep, it's worth having because of the ability to search the data easily and quickly.

Tool Sharpener No. 4: Building Your Own

Databases do not need to be complicated. They are tools that anyone can use to examine and aggregate information. They can be the greatest ally to an investigation.

1. Since a source database is likely a necessity in your investigation, what information do you plan to include in it?
   Take a moment to consider the headings for each section.
   Jot those down on a piece of scratch paper for use later.
   Or, better yet, type them into a spreadsheet program.
   There is no reason you can't start applying items in this toolkit today.

2. Prepare a possible investigative budget. Where might you look for sources?
   How would you illustrate your project?

FINDING SOURCES

If you are building a database, you better have some data. If you break sources down into their simplest component parts, you have three types: primary, secondary and people. We will quickly dispense with secondary sources because of their numerous limitations. Then the next part of our toolkit will look at primary sources – documents, and people sources.

First, there are secondary sources, and they serve a vital role in providing you with background and leading you to primary sources and people you might need in your reporting. In the category of secondary sources I include all other reporting done on a subject that you choose to cover. News stories in newspapers, magazines, online and over the air are all secondary sources. A secondary source is one that contains reporting from a party other than yourself for work on news other than your project.

For example, any coverage of the hypothetical Port Said accident would all fit in the category of secondary sources. Stories from the Associated Press, MENA, an Al-Ahram newspaper, Nile TV, Al-Jazeera, etc., would all be secondary sources. Such sources are great for finding names of people involved in a news event. They are great for finding a mention of scholarly work or a government report. However, do not quote or paraphrase these works.

The number one reason is because reporters are expected to do original work in their reporting. It is not your job just to regurgitate something that has appeared elsewhere. You are reporting, which means the work should be original. Second, you don't know how well the reporter did on the first story. Repeating the mistakes made by another reporter does not shield you from angry editors and readers. For the sake of your credibility, it is better to do the reporting yourself, especially in an investigation, than to write "according to an Associated Press report" in your finished work.

Instead, try to glean as much information and as many sources as you can from such work. It starts you down the path and helps show you where to look when trying to turn an idea into a great project. I have often used other news reports to help me locate people and the title of documents I never knew existed. In 20 years of reporting and editing, I can only think of three or four occasions where I quoted a secondary source, and none of those involved investigations.

Primary Sources

Documents are primary sources. As mentioned in the discussion on triangulation, they lead you to people and people lead you to documents. The interplay helps build stories that are factually accurate and credible. Documents can be dull. They also can be a lot of fun. Here are definitions on what makes a primary source, and some of the steps I take in looking for documents.

In general, a document can be anything, but here are some of the family groups I created to help sort my work:

• **Legal:** such as parking tickets, arrest warrants, bail, bounty amounts, court filings, lawsuits, legislative proceedings, meeting agendas, new legislation, statutes, etc.

• **Business:** such as annual reports, tax filings, market data filings, market reporting, tenders, security registration, tax stamps, proxy statements, and stock certificates among them.

• **Vital statistics:** such as birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, diplomas, commendations, etc.

• **Generic:** such as receipts, bills of sale, bills of lading and the like.

• **Government:** particularly census data, demographics, mandated reports, special reports, research findings, audits, analysis and their ilk.

• **Educational:** includes research reports from institutions of higher education, academic research, white papers, monographs, items in peer-reviewed journals, etc.

• **Think tanks:** which includes works such as position papers and independent commission findings. Many non-governmental organizations can be included on this list.

• In addition to each category, it is possible to include press releases from any entity on the list of documents to use. Plus, electronic versions of documents or electronic-prepared correspondence, such as e-mail, should be included among the collection of documents.

The list above is merely a partial set, but you can already see that it is a rich, varied point of research. Books, papers, maps, photographs, tape recordings and e-mail, are just some of the items to consider in your quest for primary documents.

In any investigation, government documents are a likely starting place. As taxpayers, we all pay for the cost of the creation and maintenance of these documents. Because of this, it seems reasonable to seek documents from government in doing your reporting. Those documents can range from campaign financing reports to population counts to audits to a list of when monthly meetings are scheduled. If a body, not necessarily a state or federal body, but any body, spends 1 Egyptian pound in the course of its operation, then it should have to account for that pound. The accounting of how an entity behaves as a custodian of public money is a matter for the public. It's a reporter's duty and obligation to seek answers to the question of whether money is being well spent.

In general, I tell reporters to seek documents with the assumption that they exist and they are to be made available for public inspection. In the United States, reporters are aided by the federal Freedom of Information Act, which covers documents produced by all federal entities, and open records and open meetings acts, which cover documents produced by state and local entities. Egypt does not have the same history of legislative action. However, I offer the same advice to reporters in Egypt: Ask for documents. Ask for them in whatever format they are kept. Put the onus on public officials to explain why public work cannot be shared with the public.

In an ideal situation, a document will be available in an easy to use electronic format. Many agencies are eliminating the amount of paper documents in favor of electronic recordkeeping. As a rule, if a document can be kept in hard copy, it can also be recorded in an electronic format. However, this does not mean that documents will always be available in an electronic version. And even an electronic record may come in a format that is difficult to decipher. Plus, departments within one agency may operate on

recordkeeping systems that are not compatible with one another.

There is also the possibility that all documents will be kept in hard copy only. This can be an impediment in reporting, but generally only in terms of time. Data entry is a slow process and it is open to transcription errors. The plus is that having the hard copy makes for a ready backup and a method of double checking the finished work. Also, it's harder to deny a paper document.

The pitfalls of documents are obvious – they can be dull. They don't speak. Even scintillating, crucial information from a document is unlikely to come to life on its own. As reporters, it's necessary for us to aggregate information and to bring it to life. In general, paraphrase the information from documents. Extensive quotes from documents rarely add to the reporting.

The one area where I encourage reporters to make an exception is when dealing with numbers. Be as exact as the documents in the numbers you provide. This is especially true when comparing budget expenditures to actual expenditures. Precision is priceless. Getting the exact numbers into copy helps give readers an idea of the scope of the issue being investigated. The one caveat is to try and find the right number and to avoid over saturating your writing with numbers. Try to limit the number of numbers in a paragraph. It is better to get the most important number rather than to overwhelm the work with a multitude of numbers.

As an example, consider an investigative story on how a college or university spends its budget. State support, student tuition, research grants and intellectual property may all contribute to the institution's income. Those funds then go to pay for instruction, facilities, student services, capital projects, security, maintenance and an array of other needs. The budget will contain line after line of items detailing expenditures in each area. Comparing budgets from year to year can become a swirling array of numbers. While it may be exact to note that expenditures on security for Fictional University changed from $3,436,219 for staffing, $37,018 for transport, $121,614 for communications equipment and $17,805 for overtime in 2008 to $3,679,918 for staffing, $40,303 for transport and $31,056 for overtime, while dropping to $26,404 for communications in 2009, it's not much fun to read or simple to comprehend.

Instead of making it harder for the reader, simplify. Note that the security expenses for Fictional University in 2009 "increased 4.5 percent over the previous year to $3.77 million." This percentage increase may be the crux of your investigation. The investigation may be looking at why personnel costs, both in staffing and in overtime costs increased after the university installed a new communications system in 2008 designed to help better manage security. If that was the case, then the percentage changes in both the staffing line item (up 7.1 percent) and the overtime payments (up 74.4 percent!) might be key areas to highlight. Whatever you use, please note that it is far easier to digest numbers that have been put into context and compared by the writer, rather attempting to read and do the math simultaneously.

The language in documents can also require translation. Reporting is more than a regurgitation of the specialized language within a field, agency or business. Avoid embracing the alphabetic soup of bureaucracies. Knowing the SOP for the ROP 2200 GMT is TMI. Working as a journalist, you may be aware that SOP is the "standard operating procedure," the ROP is the "run of the press," GMT is Greenwich Mean Time and TMI is "too much information." You wouldn't want to use any of this jargon to say, "The press run starts at 10 p.m."

While the example is an obvious abuse of language of the level that no self-respecting journalist would make, this type of statement comes when reporters move out of their comfort zone. It's easy to write that the Ministry of Health is requesting a "fiduciary enforcement action" against a hospital for charging "underserved, indigent population" a "disproportionately high fee" for "routine preventative health maintenance care," because that is how a Health Ministry document will describe the incident. However, it's much easier to understand when you scrutinize the terminology and report that "hospitals are being fined for charging poor people too much for regular checkups."

Don't feel that you have to adopt the language of documents or bureaucrats. Ultimately, you are reporting to the public, and it is critical to comprehension that the reporting is kept simple. Adopting a new jargon is easy. It's also usually a mask for the reporter. It allows a reporter to hide behind technical language to avoid actually understanding what is being reported. Callow reporters, in particular, suffer from this malady. They seem to operate under the assumption that it's not critical to understand what they are writing. As long as they use enough big words and learned terms, their reporting will sound intelligent. I argue that this is a fallacy. How can you effectively tell a story if you don't understand it? Don't let the jargon in documents defeat your reporting purpose.

Tool Sharpener No. 5: Dealing With Documents

Documents provide an important tool in quantifying an issue, in qualifying a problem, verification and triangulation.

1. What type of documents might you use in your investigative project?

2. Where will you find these documents?

3. In what format do you hope to find these documents? How much time and what resources will be devoted to gathering, deciphering and maintaining these documents?

4. What laws, sources or traditions might aid you in securing documents? How reliable are any of these sources?

5. What role, if any, will secondary sources play in your project? Will you quote any of these secondary sources? If so, why?

6. Once you have built a collection of documents, will you share them with the public by putting them online for others to search?

People Sources

After you have the documents you need for reporting, you are going to have to find some people to bring the story to life and to give the items in your documents context. No matter how fantastic your data is, your investigation will succeed or fail based on your human sources.

Without people, and specifically the right people to provide illumination, rebuttal and/or confirmation, your investigation will fail. I can say this with confidence because I failed to meet this requirement in an environmental cleanup series I wrote while in Tulsa, Oklahoma. You can see this at:
http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?articleID=031216_Ne_a1_smelt

In my experience, Internet searches and the increasing availability of public databases online has made searching for people easier than ever before. With a few keystrokes, I can do the work that used to take private investigators weeks to complete. Of course, this convenience comes with a new set of drawbacks. The ability to easily access data has led to invasion of privacy complaints and legal changes in what is available online. Callow reporters have also run into trouble with a "trust the Web" mentality. The pervasive thought that if it's on the Web, it must be legitimate, gets proven wrong at every turn. In the same way that a textbook can have a typo, information found on the Web needs some additional verification.

A simple validity test for information found on the Web is to check into an area you already know. I sometimes use my name, a company name or an event I know well as such a check. I plug that information into a search engine and see what comes back. The results quickly demonstrate that every item found on the Web needs verification. Looking for the original source remains paramount.

With the notion of verification in the back of my mind, one of the most fertile grounds I have found for sources is to hunt through the annals of academic writing. There appears to be an academic journal available on almost every topic. These journals exist to share research and add to the body of knowledge. Publishing in them is a necessity to most professors, especially newly minted ones.

As a reporter, academic journals are the perfect testament to the relationship between documents and people. Because the items in academic journals undergo peer review

– they are read and accepted into publication by other scholars – they are treated as primary documents. In addition, finding an appropriate journal article also gives you the name of an author or authors who are seen as experts on the topics. These academics, unlike many of the people sources you made, generally want to talk. Some talk because it helps them build their professional dossiers. Others talk because they are grateful someone found their research valuable. Regardless, most academics are easy to locate because their names and employing institution are included in the title of their work.

The explosion in newsgroups and professional links provides another entryway in finding people sources. I encourage my reporters to log onto PRNewswire and look at the services provided to journalists. Here, they find experts who are looking for a chance to comment in their area of expertise. Admittedly, they are talking because a public relations professional is either a) hoping this will be used to advance the cause of a client, or b) because the expert hired the public relations person to help raise the profile of the expert and/or the expert's topic. Still, I find this a useful source when looking for experts in an area that I haven't covered or looking for an area where I need to do deeper coverage.

Experts provide an authoritative voice but, like documents, they have limitations. Experts are rarely directly involved in the events or experiences of the people affected by the item you are investigating. They may be able to provide background, statistics, models, language and an outside voice for the proceedings, their work may be too clinical to bring the story to life. Fortunately, we often have those people on our source list. They may have given us the tip that led to this story. One of my mentors once explained to a class of journalists that it takes more than one person to make a trend. An angry man alone in the woods is not a story, but two angry men in the woods is the start of a movement. Go looking for those angry men.

If this is like most investigations, you probably met or were approached by a source early in the process. Go back to those people. Interview them. Talk to their friends, neighbors and relatives. Ask them for other people they know who are affected. Use the human network to help you link people to the problem. Keep in mind that you want to find people representative of what led you to conduct the investigation in the first place.

If you don't have a human source that prompted the investigation, experts won't be enough. The classic method of reporting would be to first burn some shoe leather. Go to the area where your issue is having impact. If you were writing about the hypothetical Port Said accident, start talking to people around the port. Have them guide you on where you might find sources. If you were looking at the problem in health care service, start spending time near the hospital. More than anything else get out of the newsroom. The news is not there, but out in the world.

Along with getting out, get on the phone. Work old sources and contacts for ideas and names of people in other areas related to your project. A retired engineer led me to another retiree who led me to a gold mine of documents when reporting on the mining waste in the Tar Creek area. This second person also knew a number of people who had lived in the mining area all their lives. His help led me to a treasure trove of sources. My first two contacts came from phone calls.

Don't be shy about asking for help. You can ask other reporters for suggestions when looking for sources, but don't be afraid to ask readers for help. With electronic means, you won't have to put up posters around the city asking for people to call you. Blogs, newsgroups, discussion boards, queries on a Web site, even messages on social networking sites can provide a starting point.

As you work down the list, it doesn't hurt to look how others have handled the issue. You are not the only reporter to put out an investigative series. Read and view other investigative work. E-mail questions to reporters about how they found people for their work. Take their advice and see how it might work for you.

If none of these methods seems to be working, trying writing a news story on what you already know. While working on our investigation of the collapse of Commercial Financial Services Inc. (CFS), David Fallis and I wrote a couple of stories about items we had uncovered in some of our early work. People at CFS had closed ranks when financial problems surfaced, so we weren't getting many comments from outside of the company's public relations people or a handful of executives authorized to speak to the media. After our first small story, however, we were hit with e-mails and phone calls from present and former employees. They soon went into our source list, and several of them provided information and comments on our work that helped shape our series.

The CFS experience also pointed to the care reporters have to take in dealing with the agendas of sources. Some of the people working for the company painted an overly rosy picture because they feared for their jobs and the business's survival. Former employees, especially those laid off when the company got into financial trouble, were almost gleeful in telling stories of mismanagement, mistreatment and other improprieties. Be sure to keep the vantage point of sources in mind and apply the same skepticism to each source, even the one that provides you with the one document that proves your reporting assumptions correct. In fact, be especially careful with that most helpful person. "I believed them because they gave me what I wanted" is a poor defense in any court.

The man on the street is the final option for a people source. This is the equivalent of betting on the longest shot in a horse race: You may be a big winner, but you are more likely to lose. I discourage reporters from doing "man on the street" interviews in project reporting. Too often, a reporter has to explain the topic to the man on the street just to get a response. While this sometimes works in breaking news or even looks at policy, it really works in an investigative series. Shining light on a topic generally means most people don't know much about it. If they don't know much about it, how can they effectively comment?

The one exception might come when your investigation looks at an issue that strikes a large group of people or a very specific group. If you were looking into the finances of Fictional University, interviewing students on the impact of budgeting decisions could provide fruitful comments. Although they don't prepare the budget, how the money is spent does affect them. In the same vein, it might work well in an investigation on health care costs to talk to anyone who uses the system. On a topic that touches on so many lives, you are likely to find at least a few informed and possibly impassioned comments to help bring your story to life.

Now that you have a story budget, documents, databases, people sources and a slew of check marks in the "Go" box, it is time to move further into the tactics of your reporting. The next several sections look at skills, approaches and sources related to conducting investigations in specific areas. Following that discussion we start looking at putting together finished stories, approaches to writing those stories, and ways to ensure accuracy and readability in the finished work.

Tool Sharpener No. 6: Who Are These People?

The quality of your human sources will make or break your investigation. Without a human voice, your audience will have a difficult time connecting to your work. Humans are social animals. They also have a need to see themselves in the work. If you cannot provide them with that experience, you will have difficulty in delivering the message of your investigation.

1. Who are your human sources? Do you have at least three human voices in each story?

2. Have you included comments from experts in the area?

3. Have you sought authoritative voices (decision makers)? Have you sought expert voices?

4. Do you have comments from people directly affected by your topic?

5. Have you shared documents with your sources? Where the primary documents and human documents disagree, have you explained that disagreement to yourself? Will you be able to explain it to readers?

6. Have you sought comments from opponents of the issue? How many sides have you covered?

7. Have you included sources to bring diverse voices to your work or did you merely round up the usual suspects?

8. Have you quantified the impact of your investigation topic on people?

INVESTIGATING BUSINESSES

In investigating a business or industry, there are scores of documents to consider. There's corporate data, overall economic activity and items specific to each industry.

The government is often the first clearinghouse for much of the data. For business, the document search would also need to include looking at the exchange market, federal filings related to taxes or taxing status, annual reports, overall market conditions, regulatory bodies and internal communication.

Then there are the people. You have managers, executives, external communications, press releases, public relations personnel and other employees. You have industry analysts, financial advisers, and trained academics. You have ex-employees and critics. You have competitors and regulators. You may also have retirees and founders.

Then there's the nature of the business. Is it a private company? Is it publicly owned? Is it government owned? Is it some combination of those three? Are the owners domestic or international? Is this business in an emerging field, or a maturing industry?

Sorting through these takes the overarching strategy discussed earlier in the toolkit and some specific tactics. In this section, we look at those tactics related to a business. While business seems like a finite topic, the diversity under that umbrella means that no one approach will work for all business investigations. It's often necessary to use what bits apply and to seek new avenues for areas that don't fit this formula. We start with the area that generally produces the most documents and most potential stakeholders in the reporting, publicly traded companies.

Public Companies

Public companies offer ownership shares, represented in stock, and often provide financing shares, in the form of debt, traded in an open public market. These markets attempt to force a high degree of public reporting, particularly on financials, to give investors a better idea of the risk and possible reward in their investments. Public companies tend to produce the most extensive paper trail, but even that trail is not always sufficient to bring issues such as fraud to the attention of the public, market or investors.

When investigating a public company look at that paper trail. Public companies will be reporting to market regulators, shareholders, ratings agencies and others. This creates a stream of reports that makes it easier for an outsider to understand what is going in inside a business.

Start with the annual reports and proxy statements. These documents detail financial performance in a 12-month period. Some companies will work on a calendar year and others a fiscal year. The only constant is that a report will be prepared for the market at the end of a four quarter period. The markets – traders and shareholders – rely on financial performance as a measure of the worth and risk in a company. The annual report is intended to give financial highlights that can be compared business-to-business and industry-to-industry.

Most markets, either through market regulation or federal mandate, have a standard reporting form for the annual report. This sets minimums that must be contained in the report. These are the numbers of the report. As noted elsewhere, the word "numbers" can be enough to scare away most reporters. Investigators, however, cannot afford to be most reporters. Read the numbers and footnotes with data tables. These will help provide context for what is being reported.

Numbers need a story, and companies know this. Most annual reports will also contain a narrative. This will likely include a letter from a chief executive officer, as well as descriptive passages on how the business performed and where it sees the opportunities for growth. The narrative is illuminative not only for outlining company successes and goals, but also for what it chooses to ignore. A corporation that spends an inordinate amount of time discussing revenue growth may be doing so to cover a decline in net income. A business that talks about "re-focusing on core products" is likely admitting

that it failed in trying to expand a product line or is getting ready to sell off some underperforming assets. The annual report is a roadmap, but it is written in a code with some devious twists and turns.

Along with the annual report, look for the company's proxy statement. The proxy statement is supposed to go to every shareholder. The statement is a way of voting for corporate initiatives and board of directors members at an Annual General Meeting. Companies recognize that few shareholders will appear in person to vote on these matters. So, the proxy statement is used to get those shareholders to vote for a slate of candidates and actions. Those candidates and policies in the proxy statement usually come with a recommendation from senior managers at the company. Most of the verbiage in the statement exists to maintain the status quo.

Proxy statements also carry a short bio on board members. This can be a gold mine of information when backgrounding a source. The information generally notes whether this is an independent board member, his or her corporate background, and any other boards the person represents. It can help provide links between people and companies. Plus, the proxy statement notes what compensation board members receive, along with compensation for senior management. These items aid in drawing a more complete picture.

Going back to the Port Said accident, the annual report and proxy statement might provide invaluable help. What if a conglomerate involved in the accident was a public company. A check of the annual report might note that stevedoring revenue fell in the previous year. Or it might point out that the company recently started leasing new cranes, or replaced older hauling systems. Deeper checking might reveal that one of the board of directors is also sitting on the board of a maritime firm that does a lot of business at the port. Look for the little links that lead to people who will help tell this investigative story.

Next, look at the other documents prepared for regulators and the marketplace. Have federal regulators ever fined the company? How did it do on its most recent inspections? When did the latest safety inspection occur? Reporters need to look at who oversees a company and the types of regulatory actions taken.

For instance, I would start with reports to market regulators. Public companies in most markets have to report their largest shareholders and when those shareholders start

to add to or subtract from their holders. Beneficially owned shares, those stock holdings among senior management, also must be reported. When significant moves are made by such shareholders, they can indicate confidence or concern in the business. There are also quarterly reports to consider. Although less comprehensive than annual reports, they help tell the story of a stock's volatility in the market place. Look for them all and read them.

Ratings agencies and financial advisers offer another source. Any company that issues bonds needs a rating. The higher the rating, the more stable the bond, thusly, the safer it is to make a loan to a business. Bonds provide a steady source of income, so don't be shy about seeking recent ratings report. Of particular interest, look for reports that note a change in the rating, either up or down. A bond rating change has a substantial impact on a company's access to credit. These reports are written in obtuse language that rarely reveals the problem, but does hint at why a ratings change occurred. Although financial advisers have a product to sell, they can also be useful sources when dealing with public companies. I suggest cultivating sources there. Most have connections to analysts tracing business and industry that you are covering. They want to share their expertise. While they do most of their sharing with others in investments, the journalist phone call often gets returned. Make that call.

Licensing, taxing and other regulatory bodies form the last of the easy-to-access sources for public companies. They also provide a bridge to the other firms under consideration: private and government-owned businesses. Operating licenses may be required depending on business and jurisdiction. Searches here start with articles of incorporation. The information here includes the date of incorporation and who filed the incorporation paperwork. The names included may be company officers or the attorneys who filed the paperwork. Partnerships and limited partnerships may be required to file some of the same paperwork.

Because the availability of business records varies wildly by jurisdiction, here is a list of possible records compiled by Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc. (Houston, 2009).

• Business licenses and fictitious business name records. The first may be required for a business to operate. The second includes a listing of the business' name and the people behind the business. The information also includes the date of the business's formation and how the company is organized.

• Property assessments of the structures and property owned by a business The assessment provides the value of these items for tax purposes. Records on assessments include the name and address of the person responsible for paying the property tax.

• Local tax collection records provide further detail on how much was levied in property taxes and what was paid. This could also include tax money returns through redevelopment funding vehicles such as tax increment finance districts, which essentially reward a new business with the tax revenue that business generates during a set time after its start-up operation. (Houston, 2009, p. 309).

Tool Sharpener No. 7: What's Public?

It's impossible to overemphasize the importance of transparency in business. The easier it is for a potential investor to see how a company, an industry and a market works, the easier it is to make investments. Because of this, public companies produce reams of data. Much of this data is shared with investors and the public.

1. Does the company you are investigating have a market for its stock? If so, you are dealing with a public company. This increases the odds in your favor that there will be some paperwork to support the business.

2. Before you go any farther, have you looked into legal action involving this company? Court filings in other cases may lead to critical information.

3. How well do you know the business you are investigating? How comfortable a are you with the jargon of the industry in which this business operates? Have you cultivated sources who could look at the items you discover and help you decode them?

4. Who sits on the company's board of directors? Would any of them be good interview choices?

5. What is the company's principal business? How does this relate to your investigation?

6. What is the relationship between the business and politicians? Have any legislative changes been made to accommodate the company you are researching?

Private Companies

Less data is available on private companies, because they do not have the same reporting requirements. They are not publicly held, i.e. there is no market for trading shares in the business, so there are none of the same reporting requirements. Financial conditions of private companies have to be estimated from contracts, especially those with government and public businesses, or by analyzing other offerings, such as bonds and debt.

Investigating private companies introduces more uncertainty to the equation. It does not, however, diminish the need for reporting on these companies. Reporters are rewarded for coming up with creative approaches to building records to track corporate performance. Old-fashioned reporting, the simple ability to talk to corporate insiders and former workers, provides another entry point into these activities.

In looking at privately held companies, which we define as not only sole proprietorships and partnerships, but any firm without a market for its stock, we found the great challenge in time. Because there is no ready database for information on these businesses it takes longer to build an investigation here, and it often requires the development of specialized language and an understanding of the milieu in which the company operates.

As an example, consider asset-backed securities. These were financial instruments created by financial advisers in the 1990s to allow Commercial Financial Services Inc. (CFS), and any like minded company, to bundle debt it was collecting on and offer it to investors. To understand these bond instruments, reporters had to first understand the business of debt collection.

In the mid '90s, CFS bought bad debt from credit card companies for pennies on the dollar. For instance, it might pay 15 cents on a dollar's worth of debt that was 90 to 120 days past due. The credit card companies would take CFS's offer because it was cost effective to let an outside company take on the burden of collecting this debt. CFS would make money on the transaction as soon as its collections rose above that 15 cent mark. Over time, CFS developed a reputation for collecting more from this bad debt than the collections industry average. Sometimes, it was significantly more. Eventually, CFS started bundling these bad accounts and offering those bundles as bonds based on CFS's ability to collect on those debts. This new type of bond received favorable ratings from bond evaluators and attracted investors. Eventually, the company sold $1.6 billion in bonds.

Questions started to rise over CFS's ability to collect on those bonds. This led to an anonymous letter to ratings agencies saying collections rates were being inflated. The ratings were yanked, the cash pipeline vanished, and CFS went bankrupt. Over about a six month period, CFS went from booming to insolvent. The company closed its doors and laid off its workforce on 3,900.

Before we could effectively report on the company's financial woes, we first had to understand its business. As a private company, much of what we sought as reporters was not readily available. However, we used news coverage, corporate press releases and interviews to background CFS. Over time, we developed additional contacts within the company and from a host of former employees. (See "Research Resources" for more on this investigation.)

One of our great leaps forward came in the bankruptcy filing. Bankruptcy court, which is designed to preserve equity in businesses, was a blessing. The filings contained a trove of information that most reporters did not take the time to read. Those filings helped provide a framework for investigating the company.

Along with court filings that involve a private company – not just bankruptcy, but lawsuits, employment law activity, injury claims, etc. – it's also wise to look for who the private company does business with. If the company gathers contracts from public bodies, the amount of those contracts should be a public record. In addition, private companies may be involved as clients, service providers or partners with public companies. Looking for those links within a public company's filings can help explain the scope of a private company and even hint at its revenue.

I've mentioned the disgruntled voice as a tool in investigations, but let me suggest that it is also an excellent idea to cultivate a relationship with someone in finance. An accountant, banker, broker, even a corporate attorney can give you insight on the business you are investigating. Even if your source has no connection to the business or industry, that person can provide background information and help you test the items you discover. Sometimes that person may wind up being an on-the-record source. In other cases, they may make a great sounding board. Regardless, it's important to try and cultivate the sort of relationship that allows you the chance to share information and ideas with someone whose expertise lies outside of the news room. This is beneficial in any reporting, but especially in investigations.

Government Owned

The proliferation of government-owned businesses around the world is a two-edged sword for the investigative reporter. On one side of the blade is the importance that these companies generally hold to the operation of the government and the nation as a whole. On the other side is the wall of secrecy erected to protect the value of that company.

Getting a grasp on something so integral to a nation's economy often takes an outside-in approach. To understand how that business operates and where there might be a need for investigation, it's sometimes best to look at how similar businesses fare in public trading elsewhere in the world. By understanding how the fundamentals of a company and industry work in a radically different ownership structure, a reporter may come to better understand that operation within the government-controlled sphere. If nothing else, it posits a new line of questioning, and it can provide a reporter with another perspective on the business.

Because of its critical nature and government ownership, there is also the possibility for more documents than found in other businesses. Changes in corporate strategy and changes in financing a government-owned business often means that legislation must be enacted. This governing legislation can lead a reporter in a direction for investigation. The particulars of legislation and the role of power and tradeoffs inherent in most parliamentary systems can create a flood of paperwork documenting how a business is operating and how those operations may change.

The above, however, is the most sanguine view. Governments have a habit of protecting decisions from public scrutiny. This is especially true when dealing with companies credited for providing a nation's economic lifeblood. Secrecy may be the operational norm.

Don't, however, be discouraged. Operating a business of any type requires some form of recordkeeping. Even when those records are not prepared for the public, they are needed for internal controls and soliciting external funds. People have to prepare, handle, read and enact the policy based on these records.

Once again, this means a return to burning shoe leather seeking people and leaving voice messages and e-mail notes when you find someone. Don't be too proud to walk

through the front door and start talking to people. It may not yield a source that moment, but leaving business cards with as many people as possible can lead to that one person with records and a willingness to talk.

In looking at any type of company, don't forget to check with the one source that might know the business you are investigating well, but is likely to have a skewed view: the competition. Working furiously and focusing narrowly can mean that many business managers don't have a great deal of information about other competitors. This seems especially true in dealing with small businesses. However, as the business gets larger, there are likely to be more people within the business looking at competitors.

We found this to be true when investigating a private company that provided hospice care. This private business had operations in multiple states in the central U.S. When we first heard questions about the quality of care, we started talking to others in the field about standards. They offered up examples of care minimums.

One competitor offered a training manual from his business to give us an example of what to expect from the business we were investigating. Later, this provided a necessary component when a former employee of the company under scrutiny produced a training manual for our benefit. This manual and the care standards it recommended formed a key component in interviews we conducted. (See "Research Resources" for a glimpse at the investigation.)

Tool Sharpener No. 8: Making the Private Public

Reporting on private companies is the most challenging and, in many ways, the most rewarding aspect of business coverage. It takes cultivation of human sources and an exhaustive quest for documents to provide the depth of coverage needed in investigations. However, revealing the untold story can effect change.

1. Does the private company or government-owned business intersect with public companies? If so, what are those relationships?

2. If it's a private company, who are the key decision makers? Have you talked to them in the course of your investigation? If not, be sure to talk to them now.

3. Has the private company sued or been sued? If so, the lawsuit can provide details on the business and point you in the direction of possible sources.

4. What are the standards for the industry in which the private or government-owned business operates? How well has the business done in meeting these standards?

5. How do similar businesses operate in other countries? Can you compare and contrast these operations?

6. Who are their friends? Who are their enemies? Who are there competitors? Have you talked to these people/businesses?

7. Again, have you shared the documents you unearthed with the human sources and recorded their reactions? Have you included sources for balance?

Business-to-Business

No area of investigating more thoroughly proves the adage that a reporter is only as good as the sources in a story. You can be a great writer, a masterful researcher, and a dedicated journalist, but your ability to tell the story of businesses defrauding other businesses will depend entirely on your ability to connect with an insider and cultivate that source.

An investigation of how businesses deal with one another succeeds on the strength of one party in the business-to-business relationship being aware that they are getting a bad deal. Even toxic business relationships do not always come readily apparent. Plus, in situations where two companies are working together for mutual benefit, commonly called collusion, it may be impossible without a subpoena or an aggrieved insider to break the story.

Investigating business-to-business dealings requires a source with knowledge of the relationship between the companies and some proof of how that relationship is harming one of the businesses or doing damage in the marketplace. In the United States, we have seen collusion play a significant role in the creation of investigative reporting. Trusts formed among railroads, sugar companies, and oil refiners allowed companies to keep prices artificially high – to the benefit of company profits – and limit competitors' access to the marketplace. Reporting on the impact of trusts ultimately led to Congressional action to break up the collusion. However, it took decades of work for this to happen. And, claims of collusion have continued to be difficult to prove even for prosecutors, let alone reporters.

While collusion can be difficult to crack, fraud between businesses can be covered once one of the parties realizes they are getting a poor deal. As a reporter, the challenge comes in verifying the damage and testing the veracity of documents that prove this damage. It can be maddening. Journalists are not experts on business or business relationships. Contractual obligations wind up in courts of law where attorneys can argue over terms and language used. This is the caveat of covering business-to-business fraud. How you are going to prove who is being harmed and the level of that harm is the toughest task.

Ways to prove that harm are to talk to outside experts and others in the industry scrutinized. Say, for instance, someone claimed their construction business was being

harmed because their supplier was selling them defective bolts. While it's possible to guess that there is a machine in the world that provides stress tests on bolts and can tell what sort of stress a bolt should handle before failing, journalists don't have the time to become experts in bolt stress. Instead, seek experts in universities and colleges who teach about structures, design or metallurgy. These expert sources can provide validity to a claim, or show the claim to be unfounded. Plus, because they are unlikely to have a direct fiscal interest in any of the companies involved in the story, they can provide an outsiders perspective to the issue. Having a neutral, third party eases many of the concerns about proving fraud or other bad dealings.

Talking to another party within the same industry can provide a similar test of validity. The challenge comes in finding someone with the specialized knowledge of the topic at the core of the matter, but without the potential conflict of interest. In the example of the bolts, another construction firm might be a great place to start. Someone working in the same field would be expected to have some experience with the bolts and the construction process and might provide a learned opinion on the quality of the bolts. This person might also be compromised by supplier and competitive pressures. The source may compete with the other construction company and see a benefit in telling a reporter that the bolts were either fine – and there is no story – or that the bolts are defective and the other construction company should have known better than to use them. Or, the construction firm may face another pressure. They may be getting their bolts from the same source and prove reluctant to point out that the quality of the bolts was substandard.

Proceeding with this type of investigation means getting those outside issues addressed early. Investigative reporters are some times left with the choice of either not pursuing a story or accepting that the story they pursue may boil down to a series of claims and counterclaims that the reader or viewer will then have to sort out. This is one of the difficult tradeoffs in the quest for finding truth. Reporters have to accept that they won't always arrive at that destination.

For a business-to-business investigation to be meaningful, scrutinize everything. If an insider tells you something is wrong, ask why. If data fails to live up to your "sniff test," follow your instincts. Keep in the back of your mind the notion that there must be something wrong, because you wouldn't have been approached otherwise. While movies and popular myth make it appear that offended parties are constantly going to the news media to resolve differences, this does not happen in business.

Businesses, even those locked in competitive death matches or with decades of sour relationships, tend to keep their problems out of the news. In fact, they work to limit outside comment and to keep those in their employ from discussing such issues. When someone decides to break ranks and come to the news media, keep a healthy skepticism about why this break was made. Consider who gains and who loses if you write a story. If the motives still seem altruistic, then pursue the investigation. If they don't then you might be wise to hang on to the data and let some time pass. Sometimes you will find yourself with the seeds of a great investigation, but not necessarily the one you thought you were getting or that your source thought they were bringing you.

Caution, verification, and sourcing are crucial in a business-to-business investigation. Missing on any of them can cost in reputations, credibility and legal fees.

TELLING THE STORY

By now, you have put so much time into the planning, research, interviews and reporting of your investigative project that it seems almost unfair to say that you are less than half-way done. Unfortunately, it's true.

The next step, writing the investigative series, will make your project a success or failure. As a rule, great writing can improve a weak project, and weak writing can damage a great one. However, lousy writing and a weak investigation never leads to a worthy final product.

Knowing that it's critical, and that there are as many writing styles as there are grains of sand in the Western Desert, I am going to recommend a writing approach that I have found useful and applicable in each investigation. While it can be overused, it's an approach that remains flexible and appropriate as a starting point.

The representative profile, also known as the focus structure (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2004), is a method of writing a news feature. It works well for introducing an investigative topic by explaining how the issue under investigation affects a specific person's life. Perfected by "The Wall Street Journal," it uses the story of one person to tell the story of a larger group. Conversely, a reporter can take a large issue and then seek an individual confronting that issue as a way to personify the topic. Either way, one person's trials become representative of what the larger group is facing or may face.

A representative profile, regardless of the subject, has a series of common features. At its base, there has to be a profile person, a larger social issue, details, someone similar to the profile person, and expert commentary. Typically there is an anecdotal lead involving the profile person, a "nutgraph" that signals the switch to the larger issue, and a conclusion that brings the story back to the profile person and hints on what may come next.

On to that frame, writers place some or all of the following items:

- Foreshadowing is an element of the story that hints at later elements. This often appears in the nutgraph. It might be used to make it clear that the person in the lead is just one of many people facing the same issue. It tells the reader that there is some larger issue. In screenwriting and playwriting, this is often called "laying pipe." This is when a writer is indicating something that seems mundane at the time but later become critical.

- Anecdotes are the smaller stories that are used to tell larger stories. Writers seek these to explain facets of the person being interviewed or to help humanize the story. Look for these to come in three- or four-paragraph episodes that highlight little points in big issues.

- Nutgraphs answer the "So what?" question of the story. When the news is not in the lead of the story, it appears here. The nutgraph is normally only one paragraph long and shows the link between the profile person and the larger issue (Brooks, Kennedy, Moen, & Ranly, 2008, Brooks et al., 2004, Brooks, Pinson, & Wilson, 2003).

- Dialogue and monologue are the direct quotes from sources chosen for the story. Dialogue, a discussion among two or more people, is uncommon, but not unheard of in reporting. Sometimes having several people talk and simply reporting that discussion can advance the story. Monologue is the more common direct quote or quotes from a single source. In each case, the direct quotes go beyond exposition's ability to tell the story.

- Scenes appear only in longer work. They are a collection of anecdotes or dialogue or both that describe a larger happening. For instance, an investigation based on the Port Said accident might use the chronology of events on the day of the incident as a scene in the middle of the larger investigative project related to those events.

- Tiebacks help writers bring cohesion to their work. Tiebacks are the children of foreshadowing. They reference readers to earlier happenings and normally appear in the conclusion or the body of the story. They are particularly common when the profile person appears in the story after the nutgraph.

Gathering these elements, it's possible to arrange the representative profile into a common outline. Typically the feature starts with an anecdotal or descriptive lead of three to six paragraphs, with most covering no more than four or five paragraphs. Next, write a nutgraph linking the larger issue and the profile person. Foreshadowing appears fairly early as anecdotes, dialogue and monologue fill in additional details of the story. In longer stories, particularly the main stories in investigations, scenes unfold. A tieback or several tiebacks connect the earlier foreshadowing and give the story continuity. At the end, a conclusion of three to five paragraphs looks forward for the profile person or the issue and occasionally both.

This approach is powerful because it's fairly easy to understand and mimic. This ease has led to some overuse. Plus, although easy to diagram, it takes work to master the representative profile. It also takes more space to tell the story in this form than in a straightforward news story.

When applied in investigations, I encourage reporters to use at least four human and four primary sources within this frame. The human sources should include the profile person, someone like the profile person, at least one expert in the field and a fourth source of the writer's choice. The four primary documents used should be either challenging or affirming the comments of sources in the story and must be relevant to the topic. Stories are built with the details from all the sources. The profile person should appear in the lead and in the conclusion.

CHECKUP TIME

With the principal writing complete on the investigative stories, it's now time for fact checking, copy editing and making sure the non-narrative elements (photos, graphics, information boxes, video, etc.) are mated to the copy. With the host of fellow professional photographers and editors surrounding the work, the last moment that a reporter can feel some control and commiserate responsibility is in fact checking.

At some news operations, there is a formal process of fact checking in which the reporter's stories and notes are turned over to fact checkers. Those individuals then began the process of combing through notes and stories. They contact sources and double check databases used in the work. They provide an outside set of eyes to scrutinize the work.

I have never worked in such an organization. In my career, the job of fact checking fell to the author, with sharp-eyed, cynical editors providing a chorus of additional questions. Along the way, I learned a great deal about fact-checking from a fellow reporter, David Fallis. Now an investigative reporter with The Washington Post, Fallis introduced me to his method of fact checking while we worked at the Tulsa World. I have followed his blueprint ever since.

Once the stories survived the initial writing draft, and often while copy and content editors wrestled with the work, we would print a hard copy version of the stories. We would go through the stories and underline each fact in each line. We would include names, titles, numbers, dates, and any other detail that could be contested. Once we had underlined each item, we would go through our source database and our notes. In the margins at the end of each line we would mark the source for that fact.

In an ideal situation, we would have three or four sources for a fact. Once we hit that level of verification and triangulation, we felt a high confidence in those items. Next, we would have some facts that came from fewer than three sources. This would start an evaluation of the sources. Was this from a human source? Was this from a person in

a position of authority? What might have been that person's motivation in sharing this item? How high was the potential for us to be misled? How would it affect the story if we dropped this point? If it came from a document, was it from a legal document, such as a court filing?

Some of the questions were easy to answer. Some, such as our potential to be misled, were much harder to answer. We had to make some suppositions and play out scenarios. We had to do all of this on deadline.

Often, this search would take us back to those fundamentals of "Why?" and "So what?" that had prompted the work. Sometimes, despite our checking, we would toss sections that we would have liked to have included, but simply could not verify.

Ultimately, we tried to make sure that the finished work was accurate. We wanted to be sure as well that our work did not raise more questions than it answered. This helped us limit our guess work. While it brought occasional moments of anguish "Augh, how could you cut that sentence!" it also led to airtight series work. I have to credit using this system among the reasons we never faced libel suits from any of our reporting work. We eliminated many of the spots where we could have been wrong.

FINAL STEPS

With fact checking under way, we reached the end of the journey as reporters. From that point, our job became one of advocates for our stories. We would look at ways to more effectively tell the stories through the non-narrative pieces we accumulated. We would argue with editors over the need for more space. And, if all went well, we would start work on plans for our next investigation.

When the stories went to publication, we would then hope for the next part of the series: follow-up stories. If your work is holding authority accountable, it has the potential to effect change. One of the ways to measure that effect is through reader response and official comment. One of the worst feelings in the world is to produce an investigative series that appears to have no impact.

This lack of response is part of why I consider the Superfund series mentioned earlier a failure. Despite working as hard on this as any work I have ever done, the Superfund series generated no letters from readers, no calls from decision makers, and less than a half-dozen e-mail comments. For a multiple day series covering a topic that consumed more than $160 million and was found in 14 places around the state of Oklahoma, this was a pathetic response rate. It taught me a valuable lesson in the need to have stories that people can see themselves in and relate to, but it was still a failure.

Instead, the hope is that printing the investigative series is not the end, but the beginning. Going back to our fictional Port Said accident, an investigative series there could have an impact in legislation, workplace safety, corporate policies, insurance rates, shipping rates, public perception and product oversight to name a few. As an investigator, there would be few things more satisfying than to see a series that informs and encourages action. As my colleague Kenn Bisio reminds me and our students: "Your work may not change the world. But, it may make the world want to change."

Hopefully, armed with the lessons in this toolkit, you are now better equipped to start making some of those changes possible.

Tool Sharpener No. 9: Electronic Toolbox

A reporter's greatest strength comes from his or her ability to generate sources and to be able to contact those sources when needed. As part of this investigative toolkit, each reporter should build an electronic reporter's toolbox. Each reporter needs to keep this toolbox up to date and available for use on projects and day-to-day reporting. This toolbox should be a cumulative effort. It should start small and grow as the weeks pass. Older items may be discarded if they are no longer useful. The key to the toolbox is the need to develop and keep useful tools.

Below is a starter kit. These are some sites that your author found useful as a reporter. Feel free to include them in your toolbox. More importantly, feel free to build your own electronic toolbox.

www.anywho.com – a handy phone book Web site.
www.census.gov – this is a must for any trend story or any demographic work.
www.ire.org – the IRE contains a number of useful databases and helpful reminders for all reporters.

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CASE STUDY

By Mesbah Qotb

The Economic Advisor to
Al Masri Al Yum Newspaper

Limited Access and the Ambitions of Investigative Reporters

Egyptian journalism can never reach the level of development and coverage that it aspires to unless economic reform becomes a reality. However one cannot just accept this fact if one is keen on achieving both the advancement of the press and political development. The legal, procedural, realistic, material, technological and organizational restrictions that curb journalism in Egypt are well known to all. Yet Egyptian journalism could play a better role in promoting political change and in developing itself to become a true engine for progress and a tool for revealing facts and serving the readers which is its primary task.

Drawing from my personal experience I shall briefly comment on concealing information and how it impedes the work of journalists and the progress of journalism in general, and investigative reporters in particular whose basic role is to expose corruption in the government departments as well as in public and private companies, and to monitor the efficiency of macro and micro economy and reflect their true state accurately to all stake holders. I shall also offer some tips to journalists to bypass these restrictions and limitations so that they may present to their readers genuine worth while information.

Forms of Deterioration in Accessibility to Information

Some Egyptian government agencies and departments used to present to the public a number of very important reports. However these reports are no longer available and their distribution is extremely restricted. Examples of these reports are:

1) The annual report of the Department of Public Security which was usually presented in a press conference at the end of March of every year. Copies of this report were distributed to journalists, and it included a summary in English covering the most indicative crime rates in Egypt (including a section on economic crimes).

In time, the press conference was cancelled and the distribution of the report was restricted to some security high officials and some research centers such as The National Center for Sociological and Criminological Researches. This latter used to place its copy in its library. But a few years later this copy also disappeared and only a very limited number of people could see it. Every now and then some piecemeal figures on crime would be announced in the form of a press release given by the Chief of the Police Department, that the police forces have uncovered certain crimes of tax evasion or misdemeanors and arrested the perpetrators, or providing other similar information that does not allow for drawing a full picture of political security or for forming an informed opinion.

2) The annual report of the Egyptian Ministry of Justice covering all lawsuits that have been considered by all the various degrees of Egyptian courts, their rulings and the percentage of execution of these rulings in crimes, misdemeanors and other civil disputes, including Hesba and disputes related to proving filiations and others, as well as the number of cases considered by each circuit, the number of judges, of district attorneys and councilors etc.

3) The annual report of the Egyptian prison department, which disappeared years ago when its published data showed the area occupied by each convict to be one and a half tiles.

4) The annual report issued by the Socialist Public Prosecutor which was presented to the Peoples Assembly every year (before the recent Constitutional amendments abolished this office) and which was announced in a press conference. But getting a copy of this report has become very difficult, while it is well known that the office of the Socialist Public Prosecutor shall continue its work for a while longer.

5) The annual report of the Administrative Control Authority which is the body responsible for controlling corruption in public institutions. This report has also disappeared for years now. No one can now tell how many cases have been investigated by the Public Funds Control authority, what was the result of such investigations, how many cases have been dismissed and why.

6) The annual report of the Illegal Profiteering Office. This report has only recently disappeared.

7) The two annual reports on the performance of the two social Insurance Funds (for civil servants and the employees of the public and private sector, for businessmen for themselves and for expatriate Egyptians). This report is not announced in any form, and some get it by exerting tremendous efforts, although it deals with assets worth L.E. 300 billion. The absence of such a report leads to the spread of false data, information and figures thus inflicting more political damage on the government that by far exceeds the release of such reports. But no one seems to care.

8) The annual report of the Tax Authority which reveals the volume of the tax collected from each district or region, and the number of taxpayers in each. It is worth mentioning here that no one seems to care about the discrepancies and non conformity of the figures of the Commercial Register and the figures of the Tax Authority. While the figures of the first show that there are 4 million commercial establishments registered, the figures of the latter show that there are only 2.5 million files for taxpayers. However this report too has disappeared 15 years ago although it surely exists and its data is available at the Tax Authority.

Other Forms of Limited Access to Information

There are other important reports that are either no longer available, or no longer publicly announced or had their structures altered, or have been depleted of their content to the extent that any researcher or scholar would not be able to understand or predict a certain trend from the superficial data presented in them. I am afraid that this applies to the annual report of the Capital Market Authority which deals with the violations committed by some brokers, the penalties enforced on them, or the reports against them submitted to the Office of the Prosecutor for Financial and Commercial Affairs, as well as the report of the Central Bank of Egypt.

It must be mentioned here that demands never cease calling for the publication of the report of the Central Authority for Public Accounts covering the accounts of public sector departments and government agencies which it submits to the Peoples Assembly and which assesses the financial performance of these bodies. In fact the report of this Central Authority for Public Accounts concerning some government departments was never discussed in the Peoples Assembly. This situation must come to an end.

Dr. Mahmoud Mohie El Dine, the minister of investment had started a new tradition by announcing a summery of the report covering every public sector company. But he soon stopped due to what was later called the misuse of the press and some politicians of the data mentioned in these reports, an issue which requires wide range public discussions. We may go as far as to call upon the Press Syndicate to prepare an independent report (other than that presented to its general meeting) revealing the obstacles that obstruct the work of journalists, the violations committed by some journalists or newspapers, the complaints that have been presented to the syndicate, issues of disputes pertaining to libel, slander and insult as well as proposals to solve the newly emerged problems. Such problems include the conflict of interest in cases where journalists carry out some commercial activities related to the activities of the government departments whose news they cover, and the growing number of journalists who have been employed as advisors to those government departments, while some times actually doing nothing, and the stand of the syndicate regarding all these issues. I would like to add here that the reports of the Supreme Council of Journalism dealing with the professional performance of journalists are worthless.

Types of Gray Blackouts

Gray blackout means concealing data and information by resorting to crooked ways and means due to the lack of understanding of the importance of providing such information to journalists so that they in turn could present it to the public. We are not referring here to data that is intentionally concealed for the purpose of profiteering or for achieving illegal gains or for promoting corruption.

1) The frequency distribution of deposits with banks is never revealed, a fact that is vital to the public and does not in any way violate the confidentiality of banks. Similar data from the Postal Authority is also never made known. Therefore any study on the saving behavior of the Egyptians and the impact of the economic change and consequently social change on such behavior, and the increase or decease of the wealth of the different social strata can never be accurate. Moreover the frequency distribution of loans is also never revealed.

2) The number of defaulting companies in Egypt or the volume of their debt is never announced or made known, nor the rules for the settlement of such debt. It must be mentioned here that the funds at banks whether local or private or foreign are public funds, as banks use these funds which are the deposits of Egyptian citizens to settle these debts. Therefore the public is entitled to know the rules that govern such settlements and to question their fairness and equitability. Companies that are about to default or about to announce their bankruptcy are also never known regardless of whether they are listed with the stock exchange or not, and even the declared financial statements of the listed companies are worthless.

Moreover the reports of the Capital Market Authority, the only body responsible for controlling both listed and non listed companies prepared by its Account Control Unit, reveal no worthwhile information. Although some data may be available on listed companies nothing is known about the credit worthiness of non listed companies. We believe that the solution to this problem lies in establishing credit rating companies to determine the credit worthiness of every financial institution in Egypt so as to avoid the errors that have been revealed by the international financial crisis, and which basically resulted from the errors of credit rating companies. Moreover new mechanisms must be established to make auditors that conceal the grave status of companies whose accounts they audit accountable. Above all, rules of good governance should be applied, to improve the accountability of auditors and financial managers.

One of the most authoritative and influential posts in Egypt are the financial manager of private companies who are under no control and keep serious issues quite hidden. These managers not only conceal the financial problems which their companies are encountering but they sometimes go as far as to falsify the financial statements.

3) No one can accurately know the number of lawsuits of bankruptcy that are filed in Egypt unless one goes to every Court of First Instance in the country, and there is one such court in each governorate, but more in Cairo and Giza Governorate. It must be mentioned here that the activities of the National Committee for Economic Legislations have been suspended. The task of this committee was to draw a new and independent law for bankruptcy and schemes of composition, and the basic purpose of this new law was to change the way defaulting debtors are treated and to stop dealing with them as criminals. Another purpose of that law was to differentiate in legal treatment between stock corporations and individual enterprises such as a supermarket, for example, as the law does not recognize any differences between them. According to many official sources, the present cabinet believes that allowing investors to get out of the market is even more important than inviting them in. But this cannot be achieved except through a new bankruptcy law. What is really sorrowful is that the Ministry of Finance has been entrusted with carrying on with the activities of this committee, but it shall probably start from square one as is customary in Egypt, although the Committee for Economic Legislations had already taken large strides on the path of drafting this law, the law of information and the law of arbitration.

4) The Investment Authority prohibits the distribution of the acts of incorporation of any enterprise except to the relevant parties, although these acts of incorporation do not include any confidential information but only the statute of the company. This form of the acts of incorporation is in 64 articles, of which nine are changed with each company. This means that at least those general articles of the statute of any company may be published until the nine remaining articles are prepared in their final form. Yet the main argument of the Investment Authority for not declaring such data is that Arab investors in particular do not like to disclose the type or volume of their investment. Unfortunately there is no government authority that is authorized to review the rules for this information blackout, to question its logic, or to change it as times and circumstances change.

5) The foreign trade sector is a maze of blackouts and contradictions. No one knows why ports do not issue, either separately or collectively, an information report on the amounts and value of the basic commodities which are imported weekly, or the rates applied by the custom evaluation department so as to put an end to rumors and speculations. Moreover the Import Export Control Authority has stopped issuing its annual report that covered data on violations committed by export or import companies or the names of companies that have been removed from the register of commercial agents or importers or exporters. Data on the trade in free trade zones, both exports and imports are also concealed. Hence the real value and volume of smuggling cannot be known. Moreover data on trade with Israel is also unjustifiably concealed from all except of some selected companies.

Data on foreign trade placed by the Central authority for Public Mobilization and Statistics on its web site is full of errors. The head of this authority declared that the reason for the inaccuracy of this data is due to the fact that the customs authority, the only source for such information, does not provide the Central Authority for Public Mobilization and Statistics with accurate data, and electronic linking between both authorities has not yet been achieved.

6) The Criminal Law of Egypt criminalizes bribery that takes place between a private sector company and another private sector company. (Basis of this law are found in the Penal Code). The Bureau of Investigation of Crimes Committed against Public Funds is supposed to investigate such crimes. But we have not heard for years that such cases were investigated by this bureau in spite of the numerous complaints and reports that it receives in this respect, although Dr. Ashraf Gamal El Dine, head of the Institute of Directors, has declared in a recent meeting organized by CIPE on April 8, 2009, that a report of the United Nations asserts that 60 percent of corruption occurs in dealings between private sector companies. It seems that the government of Egypt is not in the least concerned dealing with corruption in the private sector, nor with the issues related to bids and tenders in private sector companies, and it monitors only tenders and bids in public sector or government companies, although the rules governing bids and tenders are extremely defective, the most flagrant defect being the ungrounded cancellation of tenders and transferring them to negotiations with the presenters of the least prices. The government concern in such issues of tenders is only manifested when the share of the public sector in the capital of a private sector company is 25 percent or more. For in such cases the Central Accounts Authority would monitor the performance of the company concerned, regardless of whether this authority had monitored the developments in this company's management of its funds.

7) For no clear reasons no one knows the prices of our government exports through long term contracts. The most famous of these are the gas exportation contracts. The government's pretext for not announcing such prices is that other countries do not do so. This is not true, and it is illogical that the government commits itself to the sale of a raw or crude material or a service to a foreign party for twenty years or more without any amendment in the prices. In twenty years governments change and yet such contracts are not discussed publicly, let alone approved by the National Assembly. For the march goes on and the public opinion "barks." What is really appalling is that the Egyptian newspapers never publish the prices of raw or crude materials, nor the amount exported, then the prices, to the astonishment of all, are announced by Rueters. This may perhaps be due to the strong relation of the latter with the foreign partner in production. But it is no longer acceptable that such information remains undisclosed to all not even to the national news agency and the Middle East News agency.

8) For no clear reason the allocation of land is never announced, nor the location of such lands, nor the purpose for its allocation, nor is there accurate data on the number of new building licenses, nor an index for the prices of land or real estate, nor the number of housing units sold.

9) No one in Egypt knows the real correct figure for the salaries of ministers or high officials or civil servants, and the reason behind the flagrant discrepancies between them. No one knows the correct figures for the salaries of high management officials in large private companies included those listed in the stock exchange. Journalists as well as accountants know well that the declared figures for the salaries of those persons are only announced to satisfy the members of the general meeting of the company. But there are many ways to bypass these declared figures, such as granting the members of the boards of directors allowances for attending the board meetings that may be as much as L.E. 1,000 per meeting, or granting them an allowance for traveling to attend the board meeting, while such a meeting may be held in a room next to their offices.

10) In Egypt any businessman who has been convicted and hence his company removed from the Commercial Register, could establish a new company in another governorate and register the new company, as there is no electronic connections between the Commercial Registers in the different governorates. This explains why one person may deceive people and carry out acts of fraud in the different governorates without being caught.

11) Finally the Egyptian cabinet never declares any information following any meeting that the prime minister holds with any official whether national or foreign, although the principle of equal opportunity and disclosure necessitates declaring the deals which the government concludes, without jeopardizing the confidentiality of the deal. It is very sorrowful that the Department of Journalism at the cabinet has a few months ago placed external journalists in a back office so as to prevent them from meeting the prime minister before or after any meeting that he holds sufficing by the declaration or press release to be given by the official spokesman for the government. Such a press release is always "Fat Free" as it is often called by journalists. Moreover most ministers in Egypt are not aware of the importance of informing the representatives of listed companies of the information which a minister may disclose when meeting with a Rotary Club for example, or when going on a tour, or when meeting with a foreign delegation. It is of prime importance that an official from the Ministry of Investment (Capital Market Authority) immediately inform all the representatives of listed companies of the information which the minister or high official had announced in that meeting which may reflect the intention of the ministry to issue a decree or a decision that may affect them so that all investors may be equally informed. Dr. Abd El Fattah El Gibali, head of the Economic Unit at Al Ahram Center for Political Studies, has often stated in many forays that the blackout placed on the national budget lacks transparency. He has called for the necessity of activating both popular and parliamentary control over it by seriously and carefully discussing it. However, unfortunately many members of the Peoples Assembly do not even get a copy of the report of the Central Audit Authority.

During our tour in the training course we shall recognize together some ways of deception and of blocking out information practiced by some governmental departments, a matter that definitely affects both national economy and the community on the one hand and the credibility of a journalist on the other. But we shall also see that journalists do not benefit from the information available to them, a matter that results in presenting reports, investigations dialogues, interviews and news stories which are full of grave errors. We shall also see how journalists sometimes do not abide by the Code of Ethics issued in 1996.

For example there is data available on the internet on privatized companies, on the Social Insurance Fund, on public funds in general, as well as on the activities of government departments, and on administrative investigations related to violations of the rules and laws by some government officials. Most government departments now have a web site. Although most of these web sites are weak, insufficient and incomplete, yet they could

serve as a source of basic information that could be very handy for journalists when they are preparing news stories or investigative reports. A quick review of a pack of newspapers and magazines would clearly show that journalists do not make use of the data available to them on the web, as these newspapers and magazines would be full of mistakes, and of course I mean the unintended ones.

Practical Advice

Each one of us has his own techniques and tricks to obtain the information that he needs for his work as a journalist. We all know of the professional Code of Ethics which we should respect and not violate. We are also morally committed not to stress pass our limits or else we could be committing an act of breach of faith or misusing the information which we may have accidentally obtained, or using crooked means to obtain information, or harming our sources to attain a vocational victory. Some times a journalist may use crooked means to get information, and at the same time he would not be brought to court or be legally accountable but at the same time he would be violating the values dictated to him by his conscious. It is also well known that in journalism there is a gray area that is only assessed according to one's own conscious. We may even venture to say that the status of a journalist is measured by his commitment to virtue while at the same time producing excellent stories.

Drawing from my personal experience, I advise you to establish strong relationships with legal firms, with accountants and with consultants of major companies, particularly listed companies. I also advise you to follow up major law suits both civil and criminal, particularly the ones in which joint stock companies are involved, as they are a major source of information that cannot be obtained otherwise. On your computer have a file on the companies with or without simple classification including basic date on each company, then build this file up, Remember that B.R gives simple data on each company when giving a press release, Keep this press release you may need it later. Do not lose your contact with B.R. at the same time do not relinquish your professional commitment. Remember that advertisements sent to you could be another excellent source of information. Moreover international companies operating in Egypt depend on the branches of B.R. Therefore maintain your good relationship with them you may get a tip as to the arrival time of their chief executive. From time to time go to the Public Register offices and see reports about their activities regarding the registration of the sale of real estates to Arabs or foreigners. The Public Register also offers basic and important information for a fee of only 4 Egyptian pounds to whoever asks for it regarding

the registration of any company. You can also ask for a certificate showing the name of any company, its address, its capital, the date of its incorporation, its activity, the names of its founders, and their shares. The Commercial Register does not give copies of the Acts of Incorporation of a company except against a court order or ruling, or permission from the Prosecution or to the parties concerned. A proposal is now under consideration to include in the Commercial Register data on court rulings issued against a company or against its major shareholder, or even against any shareholder. There is also a plan to link all commercial registers in all the governorates by electronic means.

A journalist must also get all the papers that are distributed in an open meeting, as well as documents that are thrown away, or drafts that are used to prepare the final recommendations of a meeting. It is well known that the preparation of the final declaration of a meeting or conference starts on the very first day or even before. Drafts of such final documents always come in handy. Sometimes there is more than one draft for an address or press release to choose from. Try to get them. Do exert an effort to establish good relationships with younger staff, messengers, drivers and others in the departments whose news you cover. Visit the libraries of these departments and see their annual or periodical publications, and try to get them before they are published if possible. Be a regular reader of the official gazette. Meetings and publications of business associations, particularly women associations provide a wealth of information on the political and economic status of the country. Never overlook the publications of trade unions and see which one of their leaders they trying to put in the lime light. Read the magazines of elite groups, such as "The Diplomat" published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the magazine published by Egypt Telecom, the magazine published by The Arab Contractors Company, and the Central Audit Authority.

Keep an eye on any establishment or trade union that is preparing for elections. Keep the election campaign flyers or distributed material. Leave your business card with some guards, taxi drivers and postmen, they may prove to be an excellent source of information. Contact high officials who have retired or left their posts for any reason immediately upon leaving their post and get from them the information that they could not give you upon their appointment to such posts. Do not embarrass them so that others may not be intimidated and avoid you. The list of advices cannot be exhausted. I know each one has his ways and means of getting the information that he needs for his story or report. I knew a journalist who could see with his ears a rare quality of course. One final advice, do not forget public service offices receiving complaints, or the messages left in holy shrines. The late Dr. Sayed Oweis had conducted an excellent study on the

plights and sufferings of the Egyptians by examining these messages of complaints or requests left at those shrines, such as Imam Shafie Shrine at El Tonsi area. I shall not tell you of the necessity of going through other newspapers and visiting web sites, for this is already known to all of you. When invited to a seminar do not only examine its papers, but the audience as well. Try to find members of the middle management in an organization, those who are not in the lime light. Get their telephone numbers, and try to establish a relationship with them, as chances to meet them are rare but they could be of help to you in the future. It is difficult to meet those people, but it is easier to meet high officials or ministers, or executives of companies particularly in open meetings. Remember that Egypt, in spite of all what is said about information blackout, is still an open country. I am sure that many of you have visited Arab countries and seen for yourselves how it is difficult to get any news of the elite there unlike Egypt.

Do not forget to see the reports issued by the Ministry of Administrative Development on integrity, transparency and combating corruption, and the reports of the Ministry of Planning on the follow up of the implementation of the plan, and the reports of the Central Bank, and its web site. Visit the web sites of capital markets, for they are a wealth of information. Finally remember that knowledge is not only power but is also a trust. The interests of the country, its sovereignty or safety are not protected by the law or by intimidation, but by the integrity of a journalist, by his neutrality and by his absolute commitment to maintain a strict balance between the right of the public to know and his duty to safeguard national interests in its true sense. Information that may affect capital markets must be made known to all at the same time in spite of the obstacles that may come your way. Be sure that you shall overcome them, for you seek the truth and endeavor to serve people. Once you have gained people's confidence and trust they shall not let you down, nor will journalism if you truly and sincerely serve it.

The Legal Environment in Egypt in which Journalism Operates

It is of prime importance to understand the legal provisions elated to public freedoms and the freedom of the media and journalism as provided for in chapter 3 of the amended constitution enacted in March 2007.

Article 45 of the amended Constitution provides that "The law shall protect the inviolability of the private life of citizens. correspondence, wires, telephone calls and other means of communication shall have their own sanctity and secrecy, and may not be confiscated or monitored or inspected except by a legally substantiated court warrant, and for a definite period, and in accordance with the law."

Article 46 provides that "The state shall guarantee the freedom of belief, and the freedom of practicing religious rites."

Article 47 provides that "Freedom of opinion is guaranteed. Every individual has the right to express his opinion and to publicize it verbally or in writing, or by photography or by other means within the limits of the law. Self criticism and constructive criticism are the guarantees for the safety of the national structure. "

Article 48 provides that "Freedom of the press, printing, publication and mass media shall be guaranteed. Censorship on newspapers is forbidden as well as serving them notices, suspending or canceling them by administrative measures. In a state of emergency or in times of war a limited censorship may be imposed on the newspapers, publications and means of mass media in matters related to public safety or for purposes of national security. The enforcement of all such measures shall be in accordance with the law. "

Article 49 provides that "The state shall guarantee for all citizens the freedom of scientific research, literary, artistic and cultural works and shall provide the necessary means to promote them."

The Constitution provides in Article 1 of Chapter 1 entitled - The State - that "The Arab Republic of Egypt is a democratic state based on citizenship. The Egyptian people are part of the Arab nation and it works for the realization of its comprehensive unity."

Article 2 provides that "Islam is the religion of the state, and Arabic is its official language. Islamic jurisprudence is the principal source of legislation."

Moreover the Constitutional Court has established, as mentioned in a paper prepared by Ahmed Mohsen, a lawyer, some important principles related to the freedom of the means of mass media, the most important of which is that freedom of expression is the basic freedom, and freedom of expression of one's opinion is the basis of any democratic system. Freedom of expression includes by its nature freedom of expression of wrong ideas.

Thus according to legislations and legal provisions the environment in which journalism operates in Egypt is perfect.

As to the relevant legislations, the most important and pertinent of which is the Press Law no. 96 for 1996 which provides in its Article no. 9 that "No restrictions shall be imposed to restraint the right of flow of information, or to obstruct a citizen's right to knowledge and information provided that non of such freedoms violates national security, the defense of the homeland and its sovereign interests."

We cannot deal here with all the restrictions and limitations enforced on the freedom of the press and of journalists whether they are investigators or reporters, as this needs volumes, and many studies and research papers have dealt with this issue. There are other restrictions provided for in the law of publications, in the emergency law, in the law for the preservation of the official documents of the state, in the law of the bureau of public investigations, and in the law prohibiting the publication of any news related to the armed forces, and the law of civil servants (which criminalizes any disclosure of any data or information by a public servant except with the approval of his boss. This law even prohibits civil servants from expressing their opinions regarding public issues). Some provisions of the Penal Code, as well as the law allowing for the formation of political parties constitute further restrictions on journalists, investigative reporters and editors.

A general observation with regard to all these legislations is that the provisions of the Constitution are in many cases by passed and depleted of their progressive content by referring in any provision governing any right to the law, and then the law itself would be drafted in such obscure phrases that are easily interpreted to tie the hands of any reporter or journalist, let alone any ordinary citizen who is deprived of his right to access the information he wants. Meanwhile the laws of Egypt include no provision that penalizes a person who conceals information that should be made public. Even the law of the Press itself which provides for the right of a journalist to information does not determine the means or mechanisms by which he can get the information he wants.

Furthermore some government departments discriminate against certain newspapers.

Restricting the freedom of the press are practiced in full force. Therefore journalists shall continue to demand their freedom. Hence what we shall be dealing hereunder is the criteria that have been long established in many communities and therefore it is no longer acceptable or even logical that Egypt does not adopt them as well.

For example there are many restrictions preventing any judicial public or private entity or individual from owning or issuing a newspaper. There are numerous obstacles that prevent joint stock companies from issuing papers. A license for issuing a newspaper may be suspended after the death of the person in whose name it was issued. There are laws that allow for the imprisonment of a journalist in cases related to publication, in spite of the clear cut promise of the President that no journalist shall be imprisoned for something that he has published. There are still several cases of Hesba (soliciting good and advising against evil that harms the community) that are under consideration by courts. These cases are related to religious issues or issues pertaining to public morality or public virtue. This is usually done when a person files a law suit before the Administrative Court requesting the suspension of a certain publication if it is published by an administrative body, or sends a complaint to Al Azhar, the highest religious authority, against a certain book, Al Azhar would then refer the complaint to the Islamic Research Authority, which would in turn prepare a report on the book and send it to the Public Prosecutor with a recommendation for censoring it. Although the opinion of this Research Authority is only consultative yet the Public Prosecutor usually follows the recommendation and orders the censoring of the book and requests the court to confiscate it. In other instances a person my file a civil law suit before a Summery Court requesting the discontinuation of showing a film or a play just because he thinks that it damages public morality or infringes on it.

There is no solution to these numerous cases of Hesba filed by any one claiming that he seeks to preserve public morality and public virtue except by a legislation that prevents filing such cases except by a person who has a direct interest, that is if the poem or film or play affects him in person and directly.

Furthermore the relationship between the regime and journalism is tense and the government resorts in many cases to arbitrary interpretation of laws and legislations to penalize some of the opposition writers and journalists. Moreover the intervention between the power of the authority and of money imposes implied or overt pressure

against journalism. Then there is also the domination of the government over the "national" newspapers, in spite of the fact that those national newspapers are supposed to be serving all the Egyptians, as they are funded by the tax payers.

In spite of all these above mentioned obstacles yet conducting good and worthwhile investigative reporting is possible, in fact it is even necessary. All those above mentioned obstacles are surmountable but the real problems which an investigative reporter faces come from within the newspapers where they work.

They are not allowed sufficient time or granted sufficient funds. Some times the reporter himself or even his newspaper loose interest when such an investigation lasts for a long time. It must be mentioned here that journalists in the Levant countries who are considered the pioneers of Arab journalism admit that the Egyptian investigative reporters are quite distinguished in their work.

Provisions in the Egyptian Law Dealing with Libel and Slander

Article 302 of the Penal Code provides that "Any one attributing to another any of the acts provided for in Article 171 herein shall be committing an act of slander if these acts are punishable is true and would cause his fellow citizens to disrespect him". The law does not differentiate in penalizing acts of liable and slander whether the words used are quoted from another statement or are pronounced or written by the person himself, or whether it is in a direct or indirect form and whether these accusations are in the form of questions or in the form of sarcastic praise. This issue is however debatable according to Mr. Samir El Bagouri, the lawyer, for some believe that an act of libel would occur whether the acts attributed to a person are punishable by the criminal law or the administrative law, while others believe that it would occur only if the acts attributed to a person are punishable by the criminal law only.

The law provides that the existence of criminal intention in an act of slander is of no importance. That if the slandered is well intentioned it is no excuse for his act, but such an act is only acceptable if it is directed against a civil servant or a representative of the people in a slander is related to this person's job and is limited to a certain incident only. However all such statements or allegations have to be substantiated or else the person giving them would be penalized for libel. Thus, the Egyptian law allows for criticism provided that it pertains to a real incident that is relevant to public interest, that it is exclusively relevant to such an incident, that the words and phrases used in stating or reporting it are appropriate and that such criticism is well intended. The Egyptian law differentiates between slander and insult, for the first is relevant to incidents, but the latter is relevant to defaming one's honor. The law also differentiates between these crimes of libel and slander and defaming the reputation of a person or insulting him or his family. Imprisonment is still the applicable punishment for such crimes.

Finally there is the violation of personal privacy. It is well known cases of libel are considered by misdemeanor courts and are appealed by Misdemeanor Courts of Appeal. The rolls of both courts are full to the extent that some times a court would consider 200 cases in one session. After the Misdemeanor Courts of Appeal, there is the Court of Cassation which is the highest judicial authority, and to which cases of libel may be referred. It is worth mentioning that those who file such cases of libel do not do so to receive the fine provided for by the law, but do it to intimidate those who criticize them. However some tabloids are professionally devoted to pursue slander and insult, and use crooked ways and means to proceed with them for the purpose of intimidating and blackmailing, as they are well aware that a person who is defamed has neither

the time nor the means to pursue law suits before courts, and may prefer the safe way out by keeping silent and refraining from filing law suits so that those tabloids may not continue with spreading rumors about him. I believe that the only solution to such a situation would be the establishment of a non governmental organization to fight blackmailing those defamed persons and to defend them against those tabloids.

APPENDIX A: Research Resources

This section contains a list of Web sites that investigative journalists may want to bookmark and to visit. Rather than litter these throughout the toolkit, sites and their Internet addresses are bundled here. These sites include possible resources, starting points and samples of others' investigative work. Because electronic sources change so quickly, and because availability varies by location, this section will be regularly updated after the initial presentation in 2009. Please feel free to contact the offer at sschafe5@mscd.edu with updates and suggestions.

Duff Wilson's Reporters Desktop (A great reference site for any reporter)
www.reporter.org/desktop/

PRNewswire (Good for linking you to experts)
www.prnewswire.org

The Reporter's Committee for Freedom of the Press
www.rcfp.org

Reporters Without Borders for Press Freedom
www.rsf.org

Investigative Reporters and Editors Tip Sheets
www.ire.org/resourcecenter/tipsheets.php

Open Secrets (Follow the money in politics)
www.opensecrets.org

Society of Professional Journalists (Good for checking on work done by others)
www.spj.org

PACER Federal Courts Search (Charges a small fee to look at U.S. Federal Court filings)
Pacer.psc.uscourts.gov

GuideStar Non-Profit Registry (Tracks non-profit filings)
www.guidestar.org

Securities and Exchange Commission (Filings for publicly traded companies in the U.S.)
www.sec.gov

Capital Market Authority (Egypt's approximation of the SEC)
www.cma.gov.eg

Bureau of Economic Analysis
www.bea.gov

U.S. Census Bureau
www.census.gov

Department of Agriculture
www.usda.gov

The Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov

U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov

National Center for Education Statistics
http://nces.ed.gov/

Coverage of the hospice care provider
http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=13&articleid=001015_Ne_
a1level&archive=yes

Coverage of the CFS collapse
http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=11&articleid=19990601_cf_
a1thefall&archive=yes

Business-related sites to consider
www.business.com
www.corporatesearch.net
www.powerreporting.com
www.fool.com
www.howstuffworks.com/stock.htm

No one starts a career in journalism with the hope of doing more math. However, that doesn't free a reporter from needing to know something about math, or to at least feel comfortable dealing with simple equations. Consider however stories on job growth, population change, cost of living, unemployment, the stock market, trends, and budgets; they all require numbers.

The first rule for journalists is to check every number. Make sure those numbers are correct, in the same way you look for the right word, the right source and the right fact. For numbers, this means performing some basic math. Usually, it means checking addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Some times it advances to figuring a percentage or finding an unknown.

It's the last bit, percentage change and solving for an unknown, that sends most journalists screaming from the room. If you feel the need to set aside the toolkit and walk away, do so now.

As you quickly noted, the toolkit is still here and math still matters. So, let's deal with some simple rules to help you navigate the language of numbers. We'll focus on percentages, percentage change and percentage points because they cause the most trouble. Avoiding those problems start with an understanding of what percentages are.

The word "percentage" comes from the Latin Per Centum, which means per hundred. So 50 percent really means 50 per hundred or 50/100, which is 50 divided by 100, or 0.50. So far, so good? Remember that any time you run across a percentage, just move the decimal two places to the left, i.e. 50 percent equals 0.50, 75 percent equals 0.75, 100 percent equals 1.00, and so on.

There's a secret to understanding percentages and it's one word: Of. In math lingo, "of" means "multiply." A bonus word is "is", which means "equals" in equations.
All right, let's apply some of this. If you invest $10 with a securities company and your year-end statement shows your account is 50 percent "of" your original investment, what "is" your current wealth? If you triple your money, did you increase your wealth 300 percent?

No. If you triple your $10 investment, you've increased your wealth 200 percent. You now have $30, but the increase is $20. That's 200 percent. This leads to the weird concept of percentage increase. A percentage increase means "how much more" you have of something. For instance, if your boss shakes your hand and tells you that you will now be making 150 percent of your old $10 hourly salary, you get $15 an hour. Instead, ask your boss for a 150 percent raise. That means you would make $25 an hour.

Here's the formula for percentage increase:

$$\frac{\text{(New number - Old number)} \times 100}{\text{Old number}} = \text{Percentage Increase}$$

So if your $10 salary increased to $25, this is the size of your raise:

$$\frac{(\$25-\$10) \times 100}{\$10} = \frac{\$15 \times 100}{\$10} = \frac{\$1,500}{\$10} = 150 \text{ percent}$$

That's all you need to know about calculating percentage increases, except for one little item. Don't use rounded numbers with percentage increases. Here's why. Say a municipality's budget is $4.7 million, up from $3.7 million the past year. Using the formula above, we would wind up with a 27.3 percent increase. However, I fudged those numbers a bit. I used rounded numbers. The old budget was really $3,651,001. The new one is $4,748,988. Using the formula:

$$\frac{(\$,748,988 - \$3,651,001) \times 100}{\$3,651,001} = \frac{\$1,097,987 \times 100}{\$3,651,001} = \frac{\$109,798,700}{\$3,651,001} =$$

Percentage increase of 30.10 percent.

As you can see, 30.10 percent is different from 27.03 percent. In fact, one number is right, and the other number is wrong when describing the change. That's why you don't use rounded numbers when you figure the percentage increase. Always seek the original numbers and ensure the accuracy of your work.

There's one more common trap in dealing with percentages. Let's say that that 55 percent of the eligible voters cast ballots in the 2005 election. Now let's say that 60 percent vote in the 2009 election. Automatically, you see that has a 5 percent increase. However, it's wrong. You can't make the comparison between the two because the component parts changed. In the four year period, some people died, some moved overseas, some become eligible to vote, some went to prison, etc. What you can say, however, is that the number increased by 5 percentage points. Without knowing the population comprising the two samples, it's not possible to make a more specific comparison.

Other Math

Here are some simple formulas and explanations for other math elements that you might face. Averages are computed by adding each individual in a group and then dividing by the total number of items in the group. For instance, the average of five numbers -- 4, 6, 8, 9 and 13 -- is 40/5=8. Average is sometimes referred to as the mean.

Sometimes averages or the mean can be misleading. Take the example of a company president who makes $200,000 and the four employees who each make $20,000. This leads to an average salary of $56,000 ($280,000/5=$56,000). While the mean salary is interesting, or even lucrative, the median salary is a better example of what people make in that office. The median is the middle number in a series. Half of the values are greater than the median and half are less. In the office example, the median salary is $20,000. (The series contains $200,000, $20,000, $20,000, $20,000 and $20,000. By working to the middle you find the median.) When you use the median in your work, be sure to explain to readers that it represents the halfway point. If the median price of a home is $280,000, then half the homes cost more and half cost less.

Occasionally, reporters deal with numbers that are so large that it is easier to explain them as rates. To do this means comparing a larger number to a smaller number. Property taxes are commonly expressed as a rate. These are usually expressed as taxes per $100 of assessed property value. If the tax rate is $1.25 per $100 assessed value on a house valued at $100,000 then the tax bill would be computed by multiplying the tax rate by the assessed value. In this case, it would be: ($1.25/$100) x $100,000 = property tax; $0.0125 x $100,000 = $1,250. The homeowner would face a $1,250 tax bill on a home valued at $100,000.

Finally, always check your numbers. Challenge the numbers in your stories in the same way that you would challenge your words. Making mistakes with numbers are every bit as damaging to a reporter's credibility and the credibility of a news organization as misquote, a misstatement or using the wrong word in a description. Don't just accept numbers on faith. Give them the same scrutiny as the rest of your work, and don't be afraid to do the math.

APPENDIX C: Ethics of Coverage

No discussion on journalism is complete without considering the ethical ramifications of the work. Investigations are no different. We all think we have an ethical compass that guides our decision making as reporters, producers and editors. However, our individual codes can be difficult to define and come under scrutiny from those outside the news organization.

Into this rugged terrain stepped Bob Steele, an expert on journalism ethics at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. Steele has written regularly on ethics in the past two decades. He developed 10 questions to ask about ethics. I used them as a reporter and I share them with my students each semester. I find them a useful starting point for any journalist. Here there are:

1. What do I know? What do I need to know?
2. What is my journalistic purpose?
3. What are my ethical concerns?
4. What organizational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?
5. How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process?
6. Who are the stakeholders -- those affected by my decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate?
7. What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel if I were in the shoes of one of the stakeholders?
8. What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short term? Long term?
9. What are my alternatives to maximize my truth telling responsibility and minimize harm?
10. Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?

These questions can be applied anywhere in the process on building a story. At the conception of the story, consider where the idea came from, the source possibilities and your goals in telling the story. While reporting, consider the 10 questions as you gather information and bring together the pieces of your project. When presenting the work to the public, these questions can help guide you in putting together headlines, adding photographs and graphics, and considering whether what you print is as close to the truth as possible. Finally, consider the ethical actions after the stories are shared: How do you respond to reader feedback? Do you correct mistakes?

Because investigators do more than just react to events – they are often attempting to explain what caused the event or the ramifications of a series of items – they can draw intense scrutiny. Having a metric like Steele's to guide your work may not eliminate the attention, but it does give you a defensible point.

Bankruptcy

When a company seeks court protection from its creditors. A business may file bankruptcy to restructure or to liquidate. In either case, it's a distressed business. Bankruptcy is particularly bad news for shareholders. As shareholders, they have an ownership stake in the company. In a bankruptcy filing, they join the ranks of unsecured creditors. This puts them at the lowest level in receiving some return from the company if it restructures or liquidates. Bondholders, by comparison, have a secured claim, which provides a better chance of some return on the bond investment.

Beta

Measures how a stock should perform relative to the rest of the market. The ideal Beta would be 1, meaning that an individual stock would behave exactly as the market behaves. This, however, is not possible because of the number of variables in a market. The closer to 1, the more likely the stock is to rise and fall with the market.

Bonds

This is a loan to a company. A business, public or private, may issues bonds to get access to capital. The bond buyer offers money for the bond issuer. In return, the bond issuer promises to pay back the amount of the bond plus interest, with the interest normally falling at set quarterly or annual periods. Bonds have a maturity date, and must be repaid by that date.

Depreciation

Over time, an item may lose value. As it wears out, the item's loss of value is expressed in terms of depreciation. Accountants use depreciation on a balance sheet to explain how an asset, such as a factory, machinery or a type of technology, will lose value.

Dividend

When net income reaches a certain level, the board of trustees may decide to issue a dividend to shareholders. This is a means of spreading the wealth from successful operation, and a way to reward shareholders for buying shares in the company. Dividends are normally awarded on a quarterly basis. However, companies do not have to issue a dividend, and many do not.

Earnings

Generally reported on a quarterly basis, these represent a measure of a company's success. For publicly traded companies, this number is often reported in terms of earning per share. Simply put, this is total income minus total expenses and synonymous with profit. They are the simplest way to measure a company's economic success during a set time period.

Income

Represents what a business makes in the marketplace. Generally this is represented as gross income and net income. Gross income is a report of a company's money-making ability over a time period, usually a quarter. Net income is gross income minus expenses. Net income compared from one quarter to the next or year to year is a frequent measure of a company's performance.

P/E Ratio

This is a measure of a company's stock price compared to its earnings per share. This is one of the most popular ways to value a public company because it is easy to understand. If you buy stock at a P/E ratio of 12, say, then it will take 12 years for the company's earnings to add up to your original purchase price: 12 years to "pay you back." That's assuming that the company is already in its mature stage and earnings are constant. Of course, investors say a company with a high ratio may be in a growing stage. While the ratio may look large today, the company's growth may significantly change the ratio in a short time.

Ratings

Bonds have a rating based on the probability of default. Default is the inability to make interest or principal payments. The higher a bond is rated, the lower the risk. The lower a bond is rated, the higher the risk. The top-rated bonds are called investment grade. The lowest rated bonds are called junk bonds.

Stocks

This is an equity stake in a company. Shareholders are buying an ownership percentage. This entitles them to certain decision-making opportunities with the company, usually the selection of members to the board of trustees for the company. In addition, it allows them to receive dividends when the company does well. Shares also have a value in a marketplace. Where there is sufficient interest, stock exchanges appear.

APPENDIX E: Name the Business

During three previous trips, several Egyptian journalists and consumers of Egyptian journalism have attempted to explain to me why private companies are not named in news stories. Ultimately, the argument boils down to naming the company is considered the equivalent of providing a free advertisement or commercial for that business. The reporter who uses such a name is considered suspect and editors wonder what money changed hands before the name went into the copy. Instead, euphemisms are adopted to cover such cases.

Ignoring for the time that most investigations are likely to reveal something a company wouldn't like to share, and are thusly unlikely to see any commercial benefit, there are problems with the euphemism compromise in terms of clarity and the impression it makes on news consumers, plus the question such practices unnecessarily raise. When writing about an investigation of unscrupulous spending practices at a privately owned university, it might be possible to describe it as "the institution near kilometer marker 43 on the Cairo-Isamailya road" and assume everyone knows the context of the story well enough to know what the reporter is covering.

Let me admit, I don't know that there is a private university anywhere near that marker on the Cairo-Ismailya road much less that there might be any wrongdoing there. So, as an outsider, I'm lost and unlikely to read much more or watch more on the investigation. This would also be the case for any Egyptian news consumer without an encyclopedic knowledge of Egyptian higher education. So, now that reader is confused. The confusion does not get better as the reporter continues to work that "the institution near kilometer marker 43 on the Cairo-Isamailya road" euphemism or some derivative of it into the story. The whole work becomes awkward, and readers don't like awkward.

Readers also don't like stories that raise more questions than they answer. The first question for a reader in seeing such a euphemism is "Why was this used?" This question leads inevitably to a consideration of what was gained or what was lost in not naming the private institution. Who is the publisher trying to protect and why? Why can't you tell me the name? Is it the school I think it is? If so, why or why not use the name? Who benefits from this decision?

These are all fine and reasonable questions posed by people using the greatest problem solving device of all time, their brains. However, it does the investigative reporter no good to have readers or viewers considering their work and then asking more questions than the stories can ever possibly answer. After carefully sifting for the minute details and key facts that make an investigation worthwhile, subbing in a euphemism that leaves readers and viewers guessing and needlessly questioning the work is foolish.

Ultimately, it's not a reporter's job to occlude reality. We are here to shine a light. Diffusing that light so it doesn't hit on one point damages the credibility of the work. Name names. Call a spade a spade. If "Schafer University" has no internal accounting controls and is misusing tuition funds, then say so. As a reporter, you would want to quantify how much money is being spent, who is spending it, why it's being misused and who stands to benefit. Noting that it is "Schafer University" and not some other private school gives the work accuracy and validity. There is no crime in noting the names of the companies involved. The greater crime is in confusing readers and viewers. Our work deserves better. Name names.