



Resource book on

# Investigative Journalism

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ISBN: 978-955-1281-47-2

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Resource book on  
**Investigative  
Journalism**

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# Preface

A village is serviced today by more than 30 officials attached to state agencies. What do they do? Does their service meet the needs of the people? Is this array of service delivery agencies essential? What better alternatives are available? How can the lives of people be affected by the decisions made on international procurements? How come there are medicines and food on shop shelves with expiry dates very close or lapsed? These are among the hundreds of questions that go un-asked and un-answered.

Meanwhile, in a complex world where commercial, political, social and cultural interests and relationships blur boundaries, the difference between what is right and wrong, what is acceptable and unacceptable, requires constant re-defining based on justice and rights- based, open discussion. It is through healthy skepticism and critical debate that ideas can be refined to improved ideals which will guide people to better levels of governance, justice, and contentment. A bored or disengaged public is the best fuel for corrupt governments to thrive. This can only exist where the public's curiosity has died or been compromised.

Investigative journalism as a profession has the ability to search diligently and systematically to inform the public about what's taking place in the public domain that influences their well-being and interests. Evidence-based reporting requires a diligent process to yield acceptable results, results that will be internalized for action by the readers, viewers and listeners. Without this fuel, the "engine" of democracy will cease to run effectively. In that, journalistic tools can help to inspire and energize people to see, understand and act in their best interest.

As this is a vital need for democratic development on post- war Sri Lanka, Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL) and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Sri Lanka (FES) have joined in promoting investigative journalism (IJ). TISL has incorporated the IJ training and capacity development program in its Strategic Plan 2011 - 2015 as it is a key factor to successfully fight corruption. FES is convinced that IJ will spark discussion on the quality of governance in Sri Lanka and, as a consequence, increase the inclusiveness of Sri Lankan society.

The success of this joint initiative depends on the quality and relevance of the news reports that will be produced by those trained on the program. It is this quality and relevance which will finally encourage citizens to mitigate corruption, strengthen integrity and improve the quality of governance.

The team has put in place a robust process with plenty of introspection, critical feedback from the profession and technical support to ensure quality products. The three products (I) the Resource Book on Investigative Journalism (II) the Handbook on Investigative Journalism and the (III) Training of Trainers' Manual encompass the know-how that will be used in the training of journalists in their noble craft and will be shared with our South Asian counterparts.

We wish the users of these products every success and invite critical feedback from the readers for improvements of future editions.

Wijaya Jayathilaka PhD  
Executive Director  
Transparency International Sri Lanka

Joachim Schluetter  
Resident Representative  
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

August 2011, Colombo

# Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the contributions of all the Sri Lankan reporters and editors who attended workshops in January and April, 2011 to share their ideas on investigative reporting, offer examples of outstanding work, and help refine the content and final form of this, the first ever Investigative Journalism manual written for the Sri Lanka media.

Among those I wish to thank are Ms. Sharmini Boyle; Ms. Manique Mendis; Mr. Lakshman Gunasekera; Mr. Namal Perera; Mr. Kamal Liyanarachchi; Mr. C Dodawatta and all the regional journalists who contributed to this process.

This manual also draws heavily from previously published material, produced for reporters in other post-war societies, particularly Africa, Cambodia, the Balkans and the Middle East. The story-based guidebook produced by *'Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism'* was particularly helpful. These publications testify to the kindred spirit, courage and passion of investigative reporters everywhere.

In addition, I wish to especially thank Mr. Sanjana Hattotuwa, founder and Editor of <http://www.groundviews.org>, for his contribution to the chapter on electronic trails and for the compilation of a mini-module on the topic for future use and Mr. Lasantha Ruhunage for the selection of Sri Lankan case studies in investigative journalism.

I extend my warmest appreciation to Dr. Wijaya Jayathilaka, Executive Director of Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL), for his guidance and support. I am also thankful to the TISL IJ team, Ms. T Kalaimagal, Mr. Shan Wijethunge and Mr. Ananda Jayasekera. And a special vote of thanks to Mr. Joachim Schluetter, Sri Lanka Resident Representative-Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), for the unflagging support, both conceptual and financial, that made this Resource Book possible.

The greatest possible thanks goes to the woman who was the driving force behind this project, an indefatigable investigative journalist herself who never gave up on this project: Ms. Dilrukshi Handunnetti, TISL's Director - Advocacy, National Consultant-IJ Program and former investigations editor

at *The Sunday Leader*. She contributed the chapter on human sources, provided crucial insight and support, and generally made everything happen.

Many investigative journalists from Sri Lanka have suffered to tell the truth through investigative reporting. Some have paid with their lives. This manual is dedicated to them.

Ralph Frammolino

Media consultant and former Los Angeles Times investigative reporter

Colombo, Sri Lanka

August 2011



# How to Use This Resource Book

This Resource Book is designed to walk the reporters, especially those in the regions, from the start to finish of an investigative journalism story or a project.

By following the chapters in sequence, reporters and editors will learn how investigative reporting is different from conventional journalism and what it takes to construct a high-impact report.

The Resource Book includes the steps of finding an investigative story idea, following source trails—human, paper and electronic—to writing or producing a final report on a variety of platforms. It also addresses a crucial but often overlooked subject of how gatekeepers and media houses can support and manage investigative reporting projects. Where possible, this Resource Book draws upon real-life examples from Sri Lanka and elsewhere in South Asia. It also includes an appendix that serves as a useful compilation of codes/ guidelines, tip sheets and other investigative journalism resources.

In addition, the Resource Book is accompanied by a separate, pocket-sized “Handbook” for reporters who are in the field.

The Handbook serves as both reminder and practical guide—recapping highlights from the Resource Book while offering a number of prompts, tick boxes and lists intended to keep the reporter focused on the investigative hunt.

A word about gender: Rather than rely on awkward phrases such as “he or she,” this Resource Book will use masculine and feminine pronouns interchangeably when referring to Sri Lankan reporters and editors.



## Section One

# The Discipline and Craft Of Investigative Reporting

## Chapter One

# Investigative Reporting: What and Why?

Journalism satisfies one of humankind’s oldest yearnings—the need to know.

Anthropologists have traced this need back to ancient cultures, where primitive villagers showed as much interest in what was happening around them as they did in finding food, water, and shelter. With the evolution of time, this “need to know” became even more important to societies as people became more aware of rights, participatory processes and generally, about democracy.

The concepts of governance and democracy are not new to South Asia. One of the most important treatises in political science, titled *Arthashastra*, was introduced in the 4th Century BC by Kautilya, also known as Chanakya and Vishnugupta. Kautilya served as an advisor to the first Mauryan Emperor, Chandragupta, when he produced an organized and codified treatise on governance and economy. Considered a pioneer in political science, Kautilya and his work predates that of Niccolò Machiavelli by about 1,200 years.

*Arthashastra* dealt with virtually all aspects of governance in a monarchical state in which the king was viewed as the protector of *dharma*, but not the sole interpreter of it. It clearly referred to the separation between secular and ecclesiastical power and included polycentric arrangements that help check the rise of absolute power.

Sri Lanka has been a democracy since 1931. Meanwhile, democracy has swept through more than 60 countries in Eastern Europe and parts of Asia since the 1970s. Propelled by the Internet, democratic movements have continued to spiral through Islamic countries—Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Bahrain.

With each turn toward democracy, citizens who once had no control over their political futures now possess the power to choose governmental leaders through voting. But to do this, they need accurate and timely information about current events. Journalism fulfills this vital mission. As described in *The Elements of Journalism*, its primary purpose is to provide the information citizens need to be free and self-governing.

For the most part, conventional journalism includes “breaking news” about human tragedies and natural disasters, routine coverage of official statements and actions, such as remarks by the President or laws passed by Parliament. Conventional journalism largely reacts to the news agenda set by nature and authorities. The overwhelming majority of newspaper and broadcast stories represent conventional journalism.

Investigative journalism is different.

A product of social movements during the early 1900s in the United States, investigative journalism is more aggressive and activist. By exposing the wrong-doing of the powerful, investigative reporting is one of the most potent sources in a democratic society for keeping public officials in check and curbing the excesses of governmental and other institutions. For this reason, practitioners refer to it as “watchdog” or “gotcha” journalism, “muckraking” (“digging up dirt”), and the “journalism of outrage.”

Not surprisingly, as conventional journalism has spread to new democracies, investigative reporting has been soon to follow. Reporters and editors who once acted as mouth-pieces for authoritarian regimes are now grazing records and conducting dozens of interviews to expose the criminal ties of local businessmen, or to trace the route of bootleg cigarettes across national borders. They report with a mission - to unearth information that others want to keep secret - and use it for a purpose to cure civic problems.

**Specific characteristics:** Investigative reporting is recognized by a number of attributes that set it apart from conventional journalism. They include:

- **Being proactive.** Conventional reporting reacts to events and the agenda of “news makers.” Investigative reporting goes after stories that are news in themselves. Hence the term “enterprise reporting.”
- **Reveals wrongdoing.** Investigative reporting’s primary focus is on rooting out corruption, abuses, waste of public resources, or



Daily reporting is like hunting



Investigative reporting is like farming

the endangering of public welfare. It penetrates the governmental and corporate veil, forcing transparency of powerful institutions.

- **Accountability.** By fixing responsibility for the wrongdoing, as well as identifying those capable of reforming the system, investigative reporting holds authorities accountable for their actions.
- **Results-oriented.** By bringing problems to public attention, investigative journalism seeks to mobilize public opinion and inspire reforms. Investigative reporting is all about change.
- **Time-consuming.** There are no shortcuts for investigative reporting. Much of it is tedious and labour-intensive. For this reason, investigative journalism is not widely practiced in South Asian or Sri Lankan newsrooms, where reporters are required to produce several daily stories.
- **Deep and wide.** Unlike conventional reporting, investigative projects require multiple sources and numerous documents to prove assertions.
- **Different deadlines.** Investigative stories are done when they're done, not because of some arbitrary or time-driven deadline.
- **Reframing.** Sometimes investigative reporting means connecting known facts in a different way, thus "popping out" significant new information.

As suggested in *Digging Deeper: A Guide for Investigative Journalists in the Balkans (2009)*, it is sometimes easier to describe what investigative reporting is not. **It is not:**

- **Daily coverage or "scoops".** Investigative journalism takes a longer time to develop than the normal daily story. Another way to think of this is that daily reporting is like hunting—a reporter goes out and "bags" a story to feed his news outlet for a day. Investigative reporting is more like farming, where a reporter nurtures a harvest of stories that could last for weeks, if not months.

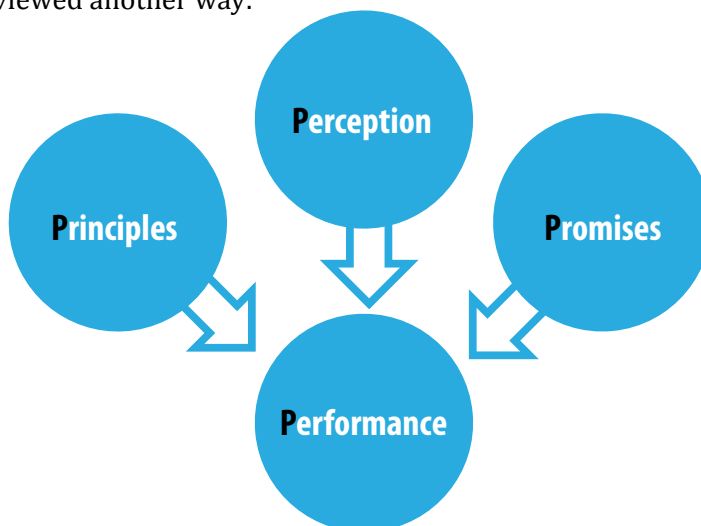
- **Single-source stories.** Investigative reporting requires multiple sources—human, documents, databases—to get at underlying patterns and truths.
- **Leak journalism.** Investigative stories can start with “leaks”—information dribbled out to a reporter from a government or business insider. But investigative stories ultimately rise or fall on original reporting. That’s because people who leak information often do it selectively, hoping to manipulate the reporter. Investigative journalism goes beyond the leak to take charge of the story.
- **Paparazzi journalism.** Investigative journalism isn’t preoccupied with celebrity news or lurid “tabloid” stories of the rich and famous. It is concerned with the public good, and includes personal information only as long as it advances that purpose.

## The “4-P” Formula of Investigative Journalism

Whatever the story, investigative reporting can be boiled down to one simple calculation:

Investigative journalism is the exercise of comparing the Perception, Principles and Promises of an authority, public institution, corporation or an identified individual against actual Performance.

Or viewed another way:



Let's examine each component.

Principles are what a politician, government official or institution supposedly stands for, or should be doing. Often, this is self-evident and generally known. For instance, local school systems exist to provide education for all children, regardless of income, race, ethnicity or religion. A politician may run for office based on specific beliefs—the budget needs to be cut or to bring morality to public office. These principles can often be found in official literature or the laws establishing a government agency. Obviously, principles and the public's perception are closely related.

Perception relates to an official or institution's image—usually a carefully crafted public “face” that is intended to inspire or motivate public response or confidence. We normally associate this with politicians and their political campaigns, but it also applies to government agencies, corporations and even civil society organizations. Perception is conveyed through speeches, advertising, public relations, symbolic actions and official actions.

Promises refer to the specific, on-the-record statements made by people, as well as statements by institutional positions about what they intend to do about a certain issue. In Sri Lanka, there were lots of promises made by public officials about providing relief to victims of the 2004 tsunami. The failure on the part of the government to ensure transparent and equitable aid distribution and alleged corruption in post-tsunami reconstruction made for quite an investigative story.

Each one of these “P's” offers an entry point for an investigative story. Revealing the actual performance through numerous interviews and a generous number of documents is the hard work of investigative reporting.

## Traits of the Investigative Reporter

Just as investigative journalism has specific traits, the same applies to the practitioners. Investigative reporters generally exhibit certain traits, usually (but not always) honed over years of experience.

- **Critical thinking.** Investigative journalism requires the ability to assemble reams of disparate facts, analyze them for patterns of misbehaviour and wrong-doing. It necessitates skill in picking apart disingenuous or faulty arguments.



- **Driven.** Investigative reporters aren't satisfied with official explanations. They are driven to find the answers for themselves and delve deep into records. They don't stop until satisfied. They are passionate, yet their passion does not cloud their logic or professional judgment.
- **Civic-minded.** While investigative journalism appears to be glamorous, 95% of the work is tedious. Investigative reporters check their egos at the newsroom door. They endure hardships and delve deeply into a subject for the public good, not awards or accolades. They harbour a finely honed sense of justice that won't let them rest unless a wrong is corrected, corruption is cleansed and authorities are held accountable for abuses. In the broadest sense, investigative reporters believe they help make democracy work for people, not just the powerful.
- **Courageous, but prudent.** Investigative reporters face the possibility of being ostracized by peers, denounced by authorities, threatened with lawsuits, physically attacked, forced into exile, unjust imprisonment, and even death. They understand those risks yet act to minimize them, knowing that no story is worth risking one's life.
- **Methodical.** Investigative reporters can't afford to be sloppy. They are methodical and meticulous, knowing it will pay off in preparation and the production of the story.
- **Fair.** Although investigative reporting uses hunches and hypotheses, investigative reporters follow the facts, not their prejudices. They insist that the "targets" of their stories have ample opportunity to respond. They also know that, as the Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ) manual says, investigations are "weapons" that will hurt someone. They must use this journalistic weapon carefully.

## Investigative Journalism in Sri Lanka

As is true in many developing countries, especially in post-conflict societies, investigative reporting presents special challenges in post-war Sri Lanka. There is no formal mechanism, such as a Right to Information Act, for journalists to get public documents. Civil society is generally weak and, thus, unable to give crucial institutional support to reporters, editors and news outlets that come up against authority. The 30-year old war produced a legacy of hostility against journalists, many of whom were killed, imprisoned or forced into exile for challenging the government's handling of the war.

Perhaps the biggest challenge, however, is within Sri Lankan newsrooms. Media houses are short-staffed and rely heavily on conventional news to fill pages and airtime. The news also tends to be Colombo-centric. Because of media harassment, reporters and editors practice self-censorship, steering them away from rich mines of investigative leads. Meager newsroom resources, the chief being money, present a formidable obstacle. Meanwhile, readers and viewers aren't demanding the kind of investigative reporting that could make a difference in their lives.

Provincial reporters face additional hurdles when practicing investigative journalism. Most are part-time journalists who get paid so little they must juggle assignments between different news organizations. This leaves little time to explore investigative leads. They lack the facilities to fax and e-mail their editors. They battle the Colombo-centric bias of their editors, who seem to need more convincing about a story the further away it is from the city.

Provincial reporters also haven't developed the skills and familiarity with investigative reporting. Because they live where they report, provincial reporters are also the most vulnerable to threats and attacks in retaliation for hard-hitting exposes. Even if they're willing to take the chance, there's always the fear their editor will take the investigative story away altogether, giving it to a better-connected Colombo reporter, who gets the byline.

Despite these and other limitations, there exists a resilient culture of journalistic inquiry, as represented by many indefatigable reporters who continue to pursue investigative stories despite the risks. And a variety of "off-shore" Sri Lanka news websites have popped up where intrepid investigative reporters can post their work, if the island-based newsrooms don't show interest.

## Chapter Two

# Professionalism and Ethics

Because the stakes are so high, investigative reporting practitioners must maintain the highest standards of ethics. This cannot be emphasized enough. If a reporter is going to accuse a powerful official or institution of wrongdoing and corruption, he and his news outlet must have “clean hands” to safeguard credibility. Thus, how a reporter conducts his investigative project is as important as what he finds out about his journalistic “targets”.

The Code of Professional Practice (Code of Ethics) of The Editors Guild of Sri Lanka was adopted by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL). The print media industry in general accepted the Code as the best practices to be adhered to by the industry. Plans are underway now to extend the guidelines for news websites operating in Sri Lanka.

Some media organizations have voluntarily moved to the next level. The Sinhala alternate publication, *Ravaya*, introduced its own house rules and introduced an ombudsperson to the newspaper. Some media organizations have evolved their own organizational policies on gifts.

Yet dodgy practices continue, particularly among regional reporters, who as part-time journalists may not fully understand the professional standards required of them. As a result, there have been instances of reporters soliciting bribes for doing positive stories and using the threat of negative articles to extort money from business owners. Some business reporters accept “sponsorships” from companies they cover. They take new products, such as mobile phones. One reporter allegedly imposed on a local five-star hotel to give him and 25 members of his family free food and golfing passes!

Meanwhile, provincial reporters have been known to ask the politicians they cover for jobs for their relatives and to help with school admissions

for their children. They often use the politicians' fax machines to send their stories. Even worse, a politician's regional media coordinator doubles as the regional freelancer who writes stories about the boss.

All of these practices devalue journalism and contribute to the prevailing negative image of reporters in general. Investigative reporters, whose aim remains to expose official corruption, must be especially careful not to cross ethical boundaries. Therefore, all journalists should avoid the following:

- **Reporting for personal gain.** Investigative reporting is for the public interest. Therefore, an investigative reporter must not use her work to solicit bribes or extort someone with the threat of publishing or producing a critical piece. She will not accept gifts, free meals and special privileges. Even the appearance of personal gain taints the credibility of the reporter and her news organization.
- **Political agendas.** While investigative stories can flow from a reporter's political awareness or perspective, they should not be slanted against the facts for the sake of ideology or to further a pet cause. Stories are what they are, and the investigative reporter relies only on the facts, not personal belief.
- **Conflicts of Interest.** No business deals, personal relationships or favours involving sources or story targets. The same goes for a reporter's family and friends. Journalists must be independent from the people and institutions they probe.
- **Favouritism.** In places as close knit as Sri Lanka, an investigative reporter will inevitably work on a story that involves someone she/ he knows. The reporter must do her best to be as tough on a friend as she/ he is on a stranger.
- **Sensationalism.** While investigative stories don't have to be boring, they must avoid hyping or exaggeration. Investigative reports have the greatest impact when couched in neutral language and stick to the meat of their findings.
- **Stealing.** The investigative reporter does not steal documents. She doesn't ask someone to steal them, although she may consider using documents that have been leaked by insiders at their own initiative. This seems like a fine line but it is an important one, both legally and ethically.

## Plagiarism and Fabrication

Plagiarism—lifting another journalist’s language or reporting without attribution—remains one of the cardinal sins of journalism. Yet thanks to cut-and-paste word processing programs, and the bounty of information available on the Internet, this unscrupulous practice continues unabated. In Sri Lanka, many regional reporters plagiarize to save time and catch up with competitors.

Plagiarism is not only dishonest, it is professionally risky. Reporters at USA Today, Los Angeles Times and The New York Times have been fired after they were caught stealing phrases and quotes from other newspapers. Journalists who get away with it, meanwhile, run the risk of incorporating factual inaccuracies into their stories.

At the very least, investigative reporters who use information from other sources must personally verify it. If they can’t, they should not use it. As *The Elements of Journalism* stresses, reporters should rely only on their original work, even if they get beaten. If and when they must borrow facts or quotes, investigative reporters are careful to attribute it. That way, if the information turns out to be wrong, the reader or viewer can be assured it was not the reporter’s fault.

Some journalists stoop even lower than plagiarism—they fabricate, or make up, facts or quotes. One of the more extreme examples involved reporter Steven Glass at *The New Republic*, a respected American national magazine. Glass was fired after his editor discovered he had fabricated parts or all of 27 articles he wrote for the magazine over the years. The scandal tarnished the magazine’s reputation and damaged the credibility of its staff and fact-checkers.

Making up anything for a story violates the basic tenet of journalism, which is committed to reporting the news accurately for public consumption. Fabrication not only means writing fiction, it includes changing the order of facts to heighten dramatic effect. For instance, it means reporting that a local official gave a contract to a friend before the election, when, in fact, the contract was awarded after the election.

Investigative reporters will never make up things for their stories or distort the facts as they’ve understood them.

## “Sting” Journalism

Perhaps nothing is more controversial in investigative reporting than “stings,” or undercover operations that use deception to expose corruption and misdeeds.

Stings have a time-honoured place in the genre, going back to the 1880s in New York City, where journalist Nellie Bly faked mental illness to write searing exposes about abuse and squalid living conditions in the city’s largest mental institution. Stings became popular in South Asia following two prominent undercover operations performed by *Tehelka*, a Delhi-based investigative journalism website.

It first used hidden cameras to record Indian cricket players accepting bribes for match-fixing. For the second story, two *Tehelka* reporters posed as representatives of a fictitious defense-related company peddling mythical “thermal cameras.” They appeared to bribe the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) President, Bangaru Laxman, a senior officer in the Indian Army and Jaya Jaitley, the General Secretary of the Samata Party and Defense Minister George Fernandes. The ruse caught numerous government officials, including the then-Defense Minister, George Fernandes on tape demanding and accepting bribes and the services of female sex workers. The sting led to the resignation of the Defense Minister, the permanent dismissal of other officials and a criminal investigation.

*Tehelka*, meanwhile, recorded 30 million “hits” per day during the scandal and its founders, Tarun Tejpal and Aniruddha Bahal became journalism celebrities. Bahal went on to start [www.cobrapost.com](http://www.cobrapost.com), where he continued sting journalism, including an operation that filmed 11 Parliamentarians accepting small bribes to submit questions during the *Lok Sabha* Question Hour. Eventually, all were forced from office.

There’s no doubt that undercover stings work. But they also have a dark side that can boomerang against the investigative reporter and his news outlet.

When the ABC Television Network in America used hidden cameras to show the unsanitary food handling and labour law violations of a supermarket chain, the chain won a large court award against the network and its employees for fraud—not in the story, but because the reporters had misrepresented themselves when they were hired as store employees.

Similarly, *Tehelka* suffered a withering backlash from the “stung” government administration that added legal wrangles to their daily lives. Bahal was arrested and later released on bail. The website’s financial backers were hounded into submission by tax agents and the website shut down for two years before *Tehelka* was reborn a hard-copy magazine. The risk of similar political, legal and economic repercussions had dampened the enthusiasm by many a newsroom manager for journalistic stings.

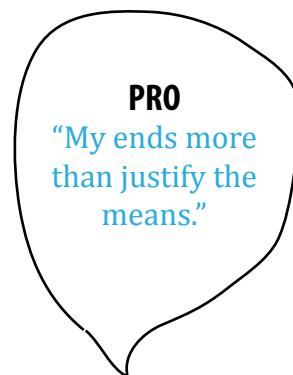
More troublesome, however, are the vexing ethical and professional problems that stings pose. They rely on deception to get at the truth. Many journalists believe this erodes credibility, making stings a self-defeating exercise over time.

Stings also raise thorny questions about invasion of privacy and entrapment, when people are enticed to take actions they might not normally take. Meanwhile, many lazy journalists use stings as shortcuts or to hype a story that would otherwise remain in the back pages of the newspaper or buried in the newscast. The sting is an easy way out of hard investigative work.

The *Elements of Journalism* doesn’t rule out stings but stresses that reporters should resort to them sparingly. The book offers a three-step process to determine when to use stings and how to present them to readers or viewers.

Those steps are:

- Use deception only when there is absolutely no other way to get a story that is vital to the public interest;
- Reveal in the subsequent story that a deception took place;
- Give readers or viewers the reason why the deception was necessary.



--Aniruddha Bahal,  
Editor, Cobrapost.com,  
and prominent  
“sting” journalist.



--Ben Bradleee, former  
Executive Editor, The  
Washington Post





## Section Two

# Building Investigative Stories

## Chapter Three

# Investigative Story Ideas

Asoka Senaratne, a regional correspondent from Anuradhapura, noticed something was wrong with a government program to give milk cows to villagers. The year was 2006. He saw that some of the animals were too sick, old or underweight to give milk. A couple died within days of being delivered.

Rather than write a story based on a few interviews, Senaratne went deeper. He found a similar pattern with government-issued goats. Villagers were getting sickly and old animals, not the ones they had been promised. He wondered if this was part of a larger problem—and whether the government was aware of it.

His search led him to a source attached to the Auditor General's office, which had heard of the same problem and extensively documented the same deficiencies throughout the country. He obtained a copy of the report and wrote an expose for *Dinamina*, the state-run Sinhala newspaper. The result: The Provincial Director of Animal Husbandry was removed from office.

Senaratne's story is a prime example of how investigative reporters come up with their ideas. They are keenly aware of their surroundings. They notice anomalies. They employ common sense. They listen carefully.

Besides observation, there are other sources of investigative stories. Among them:

- **Beat coverage.** Woody Allen, the well-known American comedian, jokes that 90% of success is just showing up. That's true about finding investigative story ideas, too. Beat reporters who are always around tend to hear and observe way more than they put in the paper. They see

patterns of behaviours that merit inquiry. Beats are an excellent source of investigative story leads.

- **Follow-up stories.** The follow-ups are a natural bridge to investigative reports. A story about one new road that has to be replaced after six months naturally begs the questions: How many other faulty roads are there? What's in the paving materials? And who approved their use? Who got the job?
- **Tipsters.** “Gadflies” are critics who are often ignored. “Whistle-blowers” are insiders, perhaps bureaucrats, who are troubled by wrongdoing. Both are excellent sources of investigative story leads.
- **Spot checks.** When officials make a statement or promise, crosscheck it with other documents and sources. If you discover contradictions—or that the official was flat-out wrong—then you not only have a daily story but an opening for a deeper investigation.
- **Personal experience.** Reporters are people, too—they pay taxes, deal with companies, and use government services. Often a reporter's experience with the bureaucracy will point the way to a potential investigative story. The reporter needs to look at what is changing around him, then ask “Why?”.
- **“Listening posts”.** These are places where people with common interests gather informally to chat. The lobby of Parliament, for example, is a veritable crossroad of interests and gossip that can yield investigative story leads.
- **Local meetings.** Many times investigative reporting leads emerge from discussion in open meeting. There are several types of meetings that regional reporters can mine for story ideas. They are
  - Provincial Councils, Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and *Pradeshiya Sabhas*
  - Local/ International NGO service consortium
  - District gender-based non violence committees
  - District Development Committees

## Common Topics of Investigative Stories

Since investigative reporting is almost always focused on the misuse of public money, government programmes offer ample opportunity for stories. And as in the example of Asoka Senaratne above, the best indicators of these stories are in the provinces, where the effects of corruption or misguided policies become obvious.

Some programs yield more investigative reporting leads than others. They include:

- **Public Works.** The awarding and construction of roads, sewers and utilities is habitually fraught with corruption, bribery and extortion.
- **Health.** The spread of disease, lack of potable drinking water, understaffed local hospitals are all major targets for investigative efforts.
- **Elections.** Vote-rigging, ghost voters, intimidation and election-day violence can be fodder for investigative snooping.
- **Education.** School-related topics ripe for investigation include “missing” teachers and shake-down schemes that require parents to pay bribes for admissions. There appears to be widespread abuse by teachers who short-change their regular jobs so they can force students into “tuition classes” after normal hours.
- **Government performance.** In short, any public program that promises services, capital improvements, food or money to citizens is ripe for examination through the “4-P” Formula—comparing principles, perception and promises to the actual performance or record.

## The Problem: Corruption

Most investigative stories share a common thread: Exposing corruption. Therefore investigative reporters need to have a clear understanding of what constitutes corruption, which distorts public decisions, wastes taxpayers' money, stunts development, endangers lives, threatens the public good and frustrates the working of democracy.

Generally speaking, corruption is when someone misuses his position or access for personal gain, either for himself, his family or his friends. Instead of acting on behalf of the public good, the corrupt official siphons off public money, victimizes citizens or rigs governmental systems for private gain.

Inherent in this idea is conflict-of-interest. That means the official has a personal interest that conflicts with his duty to be fair, equitable and effective for public benefit. One example: If a corrupt public works official has a road paved to his own house instead of a bridge that is needed for the entire community. Or the official pockets money intended to buy rice for the poor. Or he steers that rice to a private trader, who makes 10 times the price on the black market, then kicks back some of that to the official. There are many variations.

Corruption can easily take root in countries where there are serious governance-related issues. Some societies tend to view corruption as a flexible concept with nepotism and cronyism in some ways being linked to culture.

Let's take an example. A public works official overlooks more qualified competitors on a project and gives the business to a company owned by his family. The official may argue this gives him tighter control over the project so he can get things done. Some people also express sympathy for public officials, particularly police, who are paid so poorly, compelling them to find less honourable ways to supplement their income to make ends meet. This kind of thinking is wrong. These excuses ignore the fact that issues such as government employee pay are supposed to be hashed out openly in a democracy. They also gloss over the fact that while corruption can be considered just the "cost of doing business" for the middle-class and the rich, it is a crime against the poor, who can afford it the least. Poor families may not be able to feed, cloth or educate their children because they have to pay bribes for electricity, water, police protection and their government food.

Corruption escalates poverty by widening the gap between rich and poor, undermines the legitimacy of public services, and is a key impediment to human development.

## Types of Corruption

Following are the broad classifications of corruption as defined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):

- **Grand corruption:** Grand corruption is corruption that pervades the highest levels of national government, leading to a broad erosion of confidence in good governance, the rule of law and economic stability.
- **Petty corruption:** Petty corruption can involve the exchange of very small amounts of money, the granting of minor favours by those seeking preferential treatment or the employment of friends and relatives in minor positions.
- **Active/passive bribery:** “Active bribery” usually refers to the offering or paying of the bribe, while “passive bribery” refers to the receiving of the bribe.
- **Political corruption:** The abuse of public power, office, or resources by government officials or employees for personal gain, ie: by extortion, soliciting or offering bribes.
- **Corporate corruption:** Corporate criminality and the abuse of power by corporate officials, either internally or externally.

## Acts of corruption

- **Bribery:** Bestowing of a benefit in order to unduly influence an action or decision affecting others to influence the outcome.
- **Embezzlement:** The fraudulent appropriation of funds or property entrusted to one’s care and owned by someone else, by virtue of his or her position or employment, that provides access to such funds or property.

- **Fraud:** Intentional deception, trickery or breach of confidence, perpetrated in order to profit or to gain some unfair or dishonest advantage. It is the false representation of a matter or fact - by word or conduct.
- **Extortion:** Use or threat of violence or the exposure of damaging information, to extract money or other resources
- **Favouritism:** The abuse of power and discretion by the practice of giving special treatment to a person or group
- **Nepotism:** Favouritism shown or patronage granted to relatives.
- **Cronyism:** Improper appointment of friends and associates to positions of authority without regard for their qualifications.
- **Influence peddling:** Public, political and corporate sector insiders peddling privileges acquired exclusively through their official status that are usually unavailable to outsiders
- **Insider trading:** The act of making profit by trading non-public information of the organization
- **Abuse of discretion:** Involves the abuse of discretion, vested in an individual, for personal gain

## Final Word: Think Small

Provincial reporters in Sri Lanka shrink from investigative stories because they think too big. They believe investigative stories have to take on the President, his family, his political allies or high-ranking central government officials. Indeed, not everyone can be Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the rookie reporters at the Washington Post who broke open the 1970s Watergate scandal, which led to the resignation of American President Richard Nixon.

Sri Lanka reporters not only lack the confidence, skills and resources to conduct such a high-level investigative series, they also worry about the personal costs of taking on the mighty. As the chapter on Safety discusses, there have been ample examples of reporters intimidated, attacked, sued, disappeared, jailed and even killed for big-game stories.

Yet these may not be the best or even mean the most to readers and viewers, most of whom in rural areas are just trying to eke out a living. They are most directly affected by corruption that robs them of roads, bridges, schools, services and government relief. These cases are much easier to identify and to document. They also represent symptoms of larger problems that can be followed up later in conjunction with Colombo-based journalists who have the necessary contacts and clout to go up the line.

Therefore, Sri Lankan reporters should remember that with investigative stories, small is beautiful. Bite-sized stories help sharpen their investigative skills and yield immediate impact on the communities they serve.



## Chapter Four

# Refining and Pitching the Story Idea

### Back-grounding

Once a reporter gets a glimmer of an investigative story idea—but before approaching the editor—she needs to conduct a quick background search. Background searches necessitate “working from the outside, in.” This means the reporter doesn’t confront the target immediately, or start interviewing major or obvious witnesses, associates, etc. The reporter doesn’t tip his hand or give the target of his story enough time to conceal the evidence of wrongdoing or threaten likely sources.

Instead, the investigative reporter seeks what he or she can achieve through secondary sources. As the ARIJ manual suggests, the majority of “secrets” a reporter might seek is available through open source documents, such as published speeches, academic papers, agency regulations and government reports.

**Initial back grounding.** This should take only the time required to give the reporter a general idea of the current issues facing the targeted official or agency, as well as previous disclosures. This kind of back-grounding can be done easily during dead spots in the day, between other assignments. Among the methods:

- **Newspaper archives.** As the old saying goes: There’s nothing new under the sun. Chances are that at least one news outlet has written something about the targeted topic or official. The investigative reporter needs to know everything that has been said on-the-record, and to look for oblique references or comments included in the previous articles but never followed up.

- **Computer-assisted searches.** Through services such as Lexis-Nexis, a company providing legal and archive search services in the US, reporters can now look at different archives online. (In 2006, Lexis-Nexis purportedly had the world’s largest electronic database for legal and public-records related information).
- **Sri Lanka National Library Services Board.** If a particular outlet doesn’t have a good archive, regional reporters can always contact the national library for press coverage according to broad categories.
- **Google.** One of the easiest ways of doing a quick backgrounder is by “Googling” the target and looking at the first two or three pages.

**Deep back-grounding.** After a reporter gets story approval, he typically launches into the task of deep back-grounding. The reporter does this to become conversant with the target’s track record, principles and legal constraints. The investigative reporter strives to become a short-term expert in the laws, rules and regulations that govern the official or the targeted agency. He learns all about the agency’s norms, procedures and bureaucratic culture.

Why go to such lengths? There’s good reason for such deep back grounding. When combined with field reporting, it:

- Allows the journalist to start reporting from a position of strength;
- Helps the reporter know when he is being lied to;
- Prevents the reporter from being fooled;
- Gives important context to the documents he will receive;
- Opens his eyes to possible corruption. Any deviation from agency rules or procedures waves a red flag of possible wrong-doing.

## The Hypothesis

As the reporter makes his observations, thinks up a story idea and starts to fill in the obvious blanks with background information, she can’t help but develop a theme, a notion, or a hunch of what she’s looking for. This is called a hypothesis.

Scientists come up with hypotheses that they test through controlled experiments. Likewise, the investigative reporter comes up with a

hypothesis and then tests it thoroughly with extensive documents and interviews. One simple way of coming up with the hypothesis is to use the 4-P Formula. The hypothesis becomes the “official statement” of the target’s principles, image or promises, which are then tested by performance as indicated through real-life experience (interviews) and documents.

In the case of the milk cows, reporter Senaratne could have come up with a hypothesis based on the official description of the program, something that might look like this:

**Hypothesis:** The milk cow program will provide a healthy, young cow of more than 100 kg to every rural family as a microloan to develop its farms. It will also give healthy young goats of no less than 20 kg to families that would prefer to sell the animals for meat.

Then, as he made his observations, inspected animals and spoke to farmers, Senaratne would “test” the hypothesis against what he found (Promise v. Performance). He changes the hypothesis as he confirms new facts. For instance, if he discovered there was only a problem with milk cows and not with goats, he would change it to something like this:

**Refined hypothesis:** While a government program has delivered the healthy goats it promised, most of the cows delivered to rural residents around Anuradhapura have failed to meet the promised conditions—they were under 100 kg, sick, or too old to give milk.

While the hypothesis approach may seem to be a relatively new concept, it isn’t. For many years, major newspapers have asked investigative reporters to write memos and short descriptions about what they know and what they believe they can find.

By whatever name, the hypothesis approach employs a brief statement that focuses on the story. As suggested in the ARIJ manual, adjusting the hypothesis doesn’t require the reporter to be correct-- only honest and precise. It also virtually guarantees that at the end of the reporting process, the reporter will deliver a story and has worked used a strong scientific-like methodology while developing it.

## Pitching The Story

Many potential investigative stories die stillborn because reporters cannot adequately pitch or “sell” their stories to their bosses. Yet this is a crucial part of the job. Even at major outlets with a long history of investigative reporting, journalists must convince their supervisors that an investigative project is worth the effort.

Pitching a story depends on the reporter’s rapport with her editor. For a provincial reporter, it can be difficult to cultivate this kind of relationship because she is in the field, far from the home office, and doesn’t have the opportunity for important “face time” with the boss. At most, the regional reporter has only a short chat, if that, with the gatekeeper who handles provincial news. She seldom has the occasion to talk to a higher-ranking editor who can approve investigative stories. She also worries the editor might tip off the politician or organization under scrutiny to get his own favours.

Still, the provincial reporter needs her editor for an investigative project. There may come a time when the editor will intervene to help the reporter set up an interview with a prominent official. Or, ideally, the editor can protect the reporter from newsroom pressures to take her off of the investigative story and back onto daily stories. Whatever the particulars, reporters need to have a newsroom champion for their investigative projects.

The provincial reporter needs to take the initiative. She needs to be clear why the proposed investigative story is in the public interest and is important enough for the news outlet to dedicate time and attention to it. While there’s no guaranteed formula for securing approval for an investigative story, there are some strategies that make it more likely.

- **Empathize.** The reporter’s gatekeeper has bosses to convince as well. She needs to help the editor by providing a memo that spells out in clear and concrete terms what the outlet can expect from her efforts.
- **Pre-report.** The investigative reporter makes sure she does enough back-grounding to answer an editor’s likely questions about the story.
- **Bracket expectations.** Reporters often hype a story idea only to set themselves up for disaster if it doesn’t pan out the way they had hoped.

The wise reporter will instead give his/ her gatekeeper a “minimum story/maximum story” scenario. She/he will say that, “at the least, we can expect a story about X. If everything works out, at the most we will have a story about X + Y +Z.” The gatekeeper will appreciate this realistic assessment and take the reporter seriously.

- **Set limits.** Don't begin with an open-ended request for time or materials. If the story is good enough, you can press for that later. Instead, commit to having a rough draft ready by a certain date. Keep to that deadline.
- **Be inclusive.** If the investigative story is really good, chances are the gatekeeper will want to team the regional reporter with a reliable hand from the Colombo newsroom. Welcome the collaboration. After all, the main concern is getting the story done, no matter whose name goes first on the byline. And by working constructively with an experienced Colombo journalist, the regional reporter enhances his/ her reputation and respect within the newsroom.
- **Think visual.** Story pitches succeed better if the reporter has thought through ways to use photos, video, charts and graphs.

## Chapter Five

# Human Sources

Investigative stories usually begin and end with human sources.

They begin with human sources who tip off a reporter about something wrong in a government programme or an abuse by a public official. They end with on-the-record quotes from a number of people—the targets of the story, experts, witnesses, activists, victims etc. These are the human faces and voices that demonstrate the true costs of corruption.

Investigative journalism requires the use of multiple sources. The careful use of many relevant human sources for strict verification is a time-honoured investigative journalism tradition. The investigative reporter needs to consult a range of people, not just one or two sources, during the course of the project. Multiple sources are necessary for a reporter to fully understand the subject, to confirm vital information and to broaden the story for maximum impact. As a rule, a good investigative report, even when backed up by strong documentary evidence and additional data, requires at least four high-value human sources.

**Insiders.** Referred to as “tipsters” or “whistleblowers,” these are people inside a government department or someone close to a public official. They may be motivated to talk to a reporter for several reasons. They could be trying to leak information that would politically damage a bureaucratic rival. They may be acting out of revenge because they were passed over for a promotion—or for being demoted for expressing concern internally about wrongdoing.

Many, however, act out of conscience or outrage. They are genuinely disturbed about the corruption they see around them or, in some cases, are being forced to participate in. They don’t, however, want to risk their livelihoods by going public or complaining to government investigations, who may ultimately cover up the problem for political reasons. So they try to get a reporter’s attention, hoping the media will expose the corruption and bring public pressure for reform.

Does it matter what the motive is? Well, yes and no.

Yes, because it is always helpful to understand why someone is talking and whether he or she is motivated to slant or distort that information. A reporter doesn't want to be manipulated or used. For that reason, the investigative reporter uses a number of sources rather than base a story on one person who provides a tip or leaks information. Leaks are dangerous and often offered to settle personal vendettas rather than inform the public. This can result in distorted information, which devalues the overall reporting in the end.

No, because, ultimately, a tipster's motivation is not as important as the quality of information he or she provides. It doesn't matter what the tipster's motivation is as long as the source gives or leads the reporter to information that is accurate and credible. It is the investigative reporter's job to take that information, verify it by using other independent sources, and build on it for a story based on documents and other interviews.

Besides drawing attention to a potential story, insiders are good for several things:

- **Historians.** Insiders are valuable sources of information about the history, and personalities involved in issues and practices targeted in the story.
- **Roadmaps.** Insiders can help reporters understand the hierarchy of an organization, the flow of documents and paperwork.
- **Guides.** Insiders can point the reporter to specific problems, identify problem administrators and name the documents a reporter should request.
- **Retrievers.** Insiders can provide internal documents.

This last function is perhaps the most crucial for investigative reporting, which requires hard proof of corruption. Indeed an investigative reporter will use his or her human sources mainly as a way to get documents, thus making the sources themselves irrelevant and protecting them from any backlash within the organization when the story is published.

But doing this also involves a huge caveat: The reporter cannot ask a source to steal or violate any criminal laws to get information. And the

reporter can't pay the source for information. Media Corporation's hacked voicemail scandal, in 2011, which led to closure of the News of the World, is a cautionary tale about how cutting ethical and legal corners is dangerous.

**Outsiders.** These are generally former employees, officials in similar organizations, academics, gadflies, outside experts—and former spouses. They are not involved directly with the official or the organization, but have special information, insight or expertise to explain the corruption and put it in context.

**Getting people to talk.** In conventional journalism, official sources offer information to reporters on a platter, largely to promote their agenda and their goals. Sources readily share information when the questions are non-threatening and the story furthers government propaganda. Reporters typically take statements at face value. Not true with investigative reporting. The same government official who talked so freely at his own press conference suddenly clams up when he senses the reporter is working on an investigative story. The reporter will likely have doors slammed in his face. In Sri Lanka, as throughout South Asia, the task can be particularly daunting because of the curtain of secrecy that surrounds many government agencies and bureaucracies.

Investigative reporters know that some of the most valuable sources are in the middle of an organization's hierarchy. These mid-level officials are low enough in the pecking order to know what's happening at the grass roots level but high enough to know what the leaders are doing.

People are already reluctant to point the finger at corruption and bad behaviour, for fear of retribution. Getting mid-level bureaucrats to talk is even more daunting because they tend to be the most protective of their positions. Breaking through the wall of silence sometimes requires time, tenacity and a talent for engendering trust. For an excellent primer by Eric Nalder, an American investigative reporter, see "Loosening Lips" included in the appendix of this guide. Successful interviewers use a number of approaches to loosen up their subjects.

- **Google.** Before the interview, Google the person to see if there's anything publicly available relating to her—a newspaper quote, death notice of a relative, academic paper she wrote. This will help with ice-breakers.



- **Try to understand.** Lawrence Wright, author of *“The Looming Towers,”* teaches that no psychological force is stronger than the need to be understood. Sources will naturally clench if an investigative reporter approaches them angrily, aggressively or with a made-up mind. Sources will relax and open up if the reporter shows a genuine interest in understanding that person’s perspective, actions or experience. Saying “I really just want to understand why this happened” can unlock a treasure of information.
- **Green light, red light.** Canadian investigative journalist, author and interviewing expert John Sawatsky believes reporters actually hurt themselves by the way they interview sources. He observed that reporters tend to use “red light,” or closed-ended questions, that can be answered by “yes,” “no” or one-word answers. Questions like: Is it true you took that money? No. Instead, he urges reporters to use “green light,” or open-ended, questions that prompt sources to explain things. These questions typically start with how, why or what. For instance, “How did it happen that the money disappeared?” Or “How do you know this?”
- **Go slow.** There’s no rule that says the reporter must immediately start interviewing a source. If the person is powerful or particularly nervous, woo him gently, just as one might court someone. Spend the early part of the interview in a relaxed manner getting to know the person. Sometimes it takes one or two interviews to warm up a source before he starts to talk.
- **Relationship, then facts.** As the ARIJ manual succinctly puts it, tend to the source relationship first and the “scoops” will come later. At times, it is necessary for the reporter to spend the first couple of interviews to win the confidence of an important source.
- **Shut up.** Too many reporters try to show off by filling in silences, completing a source’s statements, or dominating the conversation by spewing everything they know. This saps the life out of a good interview. Ask the question, then be quiet.
- **Bring stories.** If the investigative reporter is digging as part of a follow-up to a daily story, he or she should bring that story and have the source discuss it.

- **More than words.** Body language and vocal pitch can speak volumes. An investigative reporter observes how the source shifts in her chair, averts her eyes, repeats statements, changes the pitch of her voice when she becomes uncomfortable. A savvy interviewer also notes the subject's emotions; they are reportable information as well.
- **Tape interviews.** A reporter who is constantly scribbling in his notebook is a distraction and can even intimidate a reluctant source. When it comes to the actual interview, use a tape-recorder. After awhile, the tape recorder will be forgotten and the source will be engaged in a normal conversation.
- **Don't stop the tape.** Often the most revealing part of the interview surfaces after a reporter turns off the tape record and the source thinks business is over. It's not. Keep the tape rolling even when you are wrapping up and saying goodbye.
- **Playbacks.** Concerned about accuracy and maintaining his source's trust, the investigative reporter will often do "playbacks" of quotes he intends to use in the story. A playback means that before publication, the reporter calls back the source and reads back the source's quotes word-for-word. This assures the reporter he got the quote right, and also eases the source's mind about what will be made public. At no time, however, does the reporter agree to change the wording of a quote because the source has second thoughts or changed his mind. Neither does the reporter share any other sensitive quotes from other sources.
  - Famous last words. Three questions that the investigative journalist must use at the end of the interview:
    - "How do you know that?"
    - "Is there anything I've missed?"
    - "Who else should I talk to?"

**Attribution and Identification.** There are three levels of attribution and the investigative reporter uses all of them in the course of a project—sometimes even in the course of an interview. Whatever the case, the investigative reporter is absolutely clear with his source about the ground rules. The reporter can't just say the interview is "on background," then continue with his questions. "On background" may mean different things to different people, especially sources who are unacquainted with the working rules of journalism.

The three levels of attribution are:

**Off-the-record.** Investigative reporting often involves explosive information that can put a source in harm's way. And that would make the most well-meaning source or a public-spirited whistleblower think twice. So to get the source talking the reporter may offer to interview him "off-the-record." This has a specific meaning the reporter needs to make clear. Off-the-record means the reporter cannot use any information or quotes from the interview, nor can he even tell others he talked to the source. It is as if the interview never took place. The only thing the reporter can do is verify the information with other sources. The reporter also retains the right to inform his boss about the conversation and the source's identity but the promise of anonymity will extend to the news outlet.

It should be remembered that going off-the-record is the exception, not the rule. Anonymity is a privileged relationship. In certain countries, it is considered an oral contract that can be litigated in court if a source believes the reporter disclosed his identity.

So when the reporter agrees to 'off-the-record', he or she needs to think first: Is this information important enough to go to jail for it? Can I get it another way?

In Sri Lanka, reporters often promise to go off-the-record information but turn around and use the information without attribution. Sometimes to offer some window dressing, journalists will describe the source as "unimpeachable" or "well-informed" or "reliable." This demonstrates a profound misunderstanding of the practice.

There are also examples of newspapers who have handled the identification and use of confidential sources ethically.

The Editor of *The Sunday Times* took the heat to protect sources for a 1995 gossip column that some interpreted as defaming the then President, Chandrika Kumaratunga. He was indicted and brought before the Colombo High Court, where he accepted responsibility for the column, although he was not its author, but refused to divulge the sources. These kind of practices go to the very heart of media freedom.

**On background.** This means the information and quotes can be used, but the source cannot be identified by name. Instead, the reporter needs to figure out some kind of description of the source that will protect his or her identity, but tell the reader that the source is authoritative and to be trusted. For instance, someone speaking on background may be described as “an official in the Home Ministry with direct knowledge about the programme.”

**On-the-record.** The information and quotes can be used, and the source fully identified.

**The ladder of attribution.** The gold standard for reporting, investigative or otherwise, is that all human sources are quoted in stories by name and position. Identifying sources is essential for the credibility of the information placed before any audience.

Yet this is easier said than done. Even innocuous stories in the South Asian media are filled with anonymous quotes. Government officials often wish to be “off-the-record” and reporters, not willing to alienate their best sources, do comply. With the potential threat to their livelihood, if not in some instances life, people are reluctant to be fully identified in investigative pieces. And with human sources being, well, human, they can often come across conflicted and difficult, especially if they perceive how much power they hold over the reporter. The sources will ask for anonymity as the price for the information.

Mindful of this, a reporter tries to move his sources up the ladder of attribution.

If he interviews someone “off-the-record,” the reporter comes back to the person and tries to persuade him to place some or all of the statements “on background.” If the interview occurred “on background,” the reporter tries to pull some of it “on-the-record.” While not ideal for the reporter, it works for a simple reason. And that is most sources don’t speak on-the-record not because of what they may say, but because they will have no control over what happens to their statements. This fear of the unknown—or fear of being badly surprised—is what makes sources reluctant to be fully identified. They don’t know what the reporter will use or how it will appear in print or in broadcast.

But by moving up the ladder of attribution, the source exerts control and no longer has to worry about being surprised by what may appear in the

newspaper or on the broadcast. When relieved of this central worry, the source learns to relax, even to emotionally invest in the story and learn how to easily relate to why certain things need to be on-the-record.

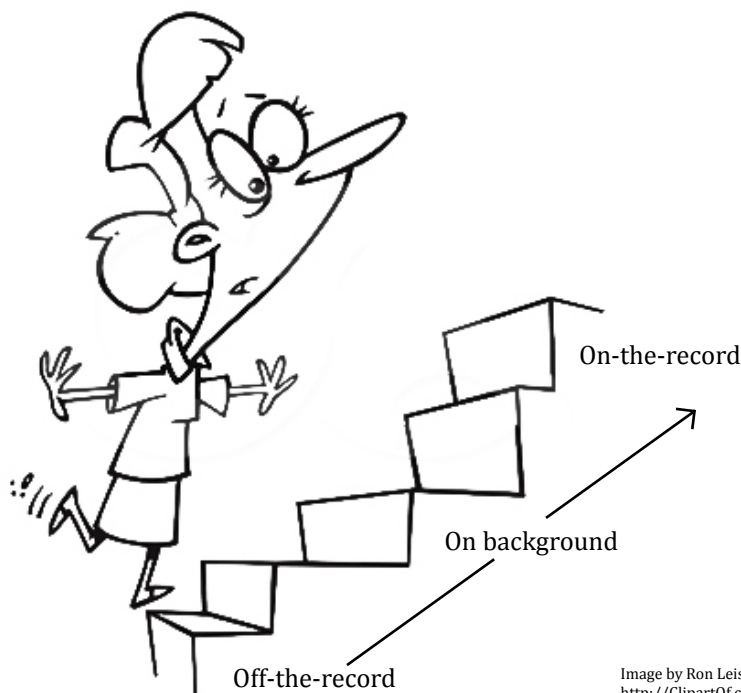


Image by Ron Leishman at <http://ClipartOf.com/439457>

## Children and Other Vulnerable Victims

South Asian reporters show a tendency to exploit the tragedies of children and vulnerable persons, such as those displaced by war, natural disasters or governmental actions.

In Bangladesh, for instance, reporters and camera crews jammed a hospital emergency ward to interview and collect sensationalistic video of two children who were set on fire by their mother, who tried to commit suicide to protest the fact her husband had taken a second wife. Both children subsequently died but their charred images were replayed on local newscasts. Even Dhaka's most respectable English daily, *The Daily Star*, ran photos of them—not once or twice, but three times with follow-up reports and an editorial.

While some might argue this was necessary to drive home the tragedy, this was indeed a breach of journalistic ethics, not to mention good taste. The sensationalistic coverage was a media victimization of the children, who had no say over being doused with petrol and set on fire, much less granting interviews.

Reporters need to take special care when dealing with children, who are legally incapable of giving informed consent. At the very least, they should get permission from the children's parents to use any quotes or images. They should also consider using only the child's first name or even a pseudonym, taking care to alert the reader or viewer about this technique. They must resist mentioning the exact village where the child lives, so as not to lead to easy identification.

These rules also apply to victims of rape, domestic abuse, war and governmental action. If the victims are willing to be named, the reporter needs to fully explain the ramifications before quoting and naming them. The reporter should ask herself: By identifying this person, will he become a target of revenge or shamed unnecessarily?

The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) has developed a code of ethics for media practitioners that makes strong references to demonstrating respect for others, protecting privacy and avoiding pandering to lurid curiosity. The code can be accessed at <http://www.spj.org/pdf/ethicscode.pdf>.

## Human sources: A Sri Lankan case study

A series of investigative stories by *The Sunday Leader* in 2008 present a classic example of how a network of sources helped sustain a reporting campaign for months.

The campaign started when the newspaper reported that a Colombo-based ring was abducting Tamil business owners and holding them for ransom. The story originated from an anonymous source who leaked the tidbit that a Cabinet Minister complained to the President that the government was doing nothing to protect the Minister's ethnic-minority constituency from an on-going extortion ring.

The first news report appeared without direct quotes or attribution. But the story was true and contained information about certain bank accounts that were being used for deposits of ransoms.

After the initial report, relatives of the victims—mostly Tamil jewellers in Colombo—started coming forward to the *Leader* with confidential information, as well as copies of the police complaints they lodged. That emboldened family members to go public. This eventually led to more reports by the *Leader* and other news outlets about similar abduction-extortions in the Western Province and elsewhere.

Then after several months, the *Leader* learned through sources that a key person in the abduction racket was a retired Air Force officer who had strong political links and the blessings of certain powerful people to conduct the kidnappings. Over time, the identity of the kingpin was well established through a verification process with multiple sources—family members of victims, as well as politicians and activists.

Yet the kingpin's whereabouts remained unknown until an anonymous source tipped *The Sunday Leader* that he was in a certain hotel. Two reporters went to the hotel, waited outside his room and caught him on film emerging from the hotel room. The story was published just two days after an opposition politician made a heated speech in Parliament disclosing the identity of the alleged offender and challenged the government to raid a popular hotel in search of him. The government denied knowing the existence of the kingpin, much less his whereabouts. Soon after, authorities arrested the kingpin, who was taken into custody by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID). According to a senior Cabinet Minister who made an official statement in the aftermath, the arrest put an end to the abductions in Colombo.

**What sources are not.** One of the problems with today's journalism in Sri Lanka is that influential sources have been able to play the role of "story approvers," telling reporters what can and cannot be used from interviews. This exists because reporters have little confidence or general professionalism, and they are afraid of offending the sources. Politicians aren't the only ones who claim the right to "prior editing." The corporate sector regularly vets copy and videos before release. Sources need to be reminded that it is the journalist's job to choose quotes. No source should enjoy this privilege.

**Legal and ethical source issues.** There are no shield laws or whistle-blower protection laws in Sri Lanka. Therefore investigative reporters are often grilled by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID), which seeks the names of sources in relation to specific stories. The reporter may also face a court order to turn over the names and the notebooks.

While legal protection for sources of information in Sri Lanka remains weak, the judiciary has recognized the principle of source protection in the landmark case of *Chandrika Kumaratunga Vs Lakkbima*.

In this case, the High Court held that the Editor of *Lakkbima*, a Sinhala weekly, had no criminal intention to defame the President; that *Lakkbima*, had published past articles laudatory of the President; and that the source of the defamatory article had been a hitherto trustworthy source who was also considered as relevant. Importantly, the Court conceded the point that the *Lakkbima* Editor had demonstrated reluctance to divulge the source of his information. It also, emphasized that case precedent has established that editors and publishers ought not be compelled to disclose the sources of their information.

Although Sri Lankan journalists may not enjoy the necessary *locus standi* in court, some have refused to divulge their sources in court and to the CID. They were following a bedrock journalistic practice that is spelled out in the Code of Professional Practice, produced by the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka. Section 5.1 of the Code clearly states: "Every journalist has a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information, until that source authorizes otherwise." There lies the golden rule applicable to practitioners.



## Chapter Six

# Paper Trails

Investigative reporters often develop human sources with another payoff in mind: Getting their hands on relevant documents.

Indeed, the preoccupation with documents is one of the major things that sets investigative reporting apart from conventional journalism. As one American journalist put it, “What distinguishes investigative reporting is the depth of the information we get and the amount of records we look at.” And for very good reason. The more documents a reporter gathers, the less she will have to rely on the human sources, who may change their stories over time. Documents, on the other hand, don’t change—a key fact that allows the investigative reporter to build a case against the corruption or wrongdoing. And official records can be studied, analyzed and sorted through database programs to reveal patterns of misbehaviour that human sources have no way of knowing. Documents are powerful journalistic weapons.

Right to Information laws were intended to help reporters and other citizens access public documents to promote transparency and accountability. Yet even in countries with a long tradition of public records, reporters have a hard time getting documents through official requests. Bureaucrats sit on requests, hoping the reporter will lose interest and go away. Reporters who persist have to fight long and hard to get what they want. One Los Angeles Times reporter waited six years and filed repeated requests before recently receiving Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) files about a controversial 1970 murder. The *New York Times* battled for more than a year and went to an appellate court to extract the United States Defense of Department records that led to a 2009 Pulitzer Prize winning series.

Sri Lanka has no Right to Information law. Reporters have had to rely on their wits and networking skills to tease out selective documents from government bureaucracies shrouded in secrecy. Still, there are pockets of public documents that could prove useful for investigative projects.

- **Parliament.** The Hansard is an edited record of parliamentary proceedings that is publicly available. While most committee reports are secret, some are made accessible to the public. Reporters can also get pre-budget estimates.
- **The Department of Census and Statistics.** Population trends and general demographic data.
- **Registrar of Companies.** Records showing boards of directors, share capital, articles of association.
- **Central Bank of Sri Lanka.** Publishes a monthly bulletin and periodic reports with statistics, speeches and other socio-economic data.
- **International organizations/lending agencies.** The World Bank (WB), Asia Development Bank (ADB), United National Development Program (UNDP) and many other organizations publish reports on Sri Lanka.
- **Local government authorities.** Budget documents, annual development plans and session reports can be accessed.
- **District Secretariats.** Information officers in these secretariats are often helpful with finding documents.
- **Government Publications Bureau.** All government publications can be accessed.

**Handling documents.** Once you obtain documents, do not write on them. Make a copy and put the originals in a file. Then, methodically read through the copies, underlining or highlighting significant passages and writing notes in the margin. Periodically reread the documents. As a reporter goes deeper into his story, the documents will say different things at different times. Phrases and references that didn't make sense in the beginning will take on new meanings as reporting continues apace.

**Organizing documents.** Whether journalists are researching major investigative stories that entail tens of thousands of documents or more modest stories with dozens, it is important for a reporter to devise clear and logical systems for organizing the documents so that they can be easily retrieved and analyzed. We say "systems," because an effective investigative reporter actually organizes copies of the same documents in different ways to different effect.

One is **chronologically**. By following the chain of events, the reporter can gain valuable insights into how the corruption developed, who knew about it when, and what if anything was done to stop it and when. If the reporter doesn't want to use the full documents, she can build a timeline, which is just as useful.

Another useful technique, of course, is to organize documents **alphabetically**, according to subject.

In the end, the organization of documents should serve the story. Say a story is about how rural parents are forced to pay bribes to have their children admitted to a public school. The reporter interviews 30 parents whose children sought admission to five different primary schools. He transcribes each interview, which then becomes a document.

The documents could be organized by the names of the parents. But a better way might be to make folders for each school and then put the appropriate interviews into those. This would allow the reporter to take a closer look and help him sift through the files more efficiently. Within each file, he could highlight the best quotes in each of the interviews, then put stars by each of the highlighted quotes that are likely to be used in the story.

Filing the documents by school could also help reveal another wrinkle, or pattern, in the story. Say the parents at two of the schools claim they were forced to pay bribes of Rs. 1,000 per child, while the parents at the other three said they had to pay Rs. 50. This would cry out for additional reporting to find out why the bribes at two of the schools were so high. The reporter might find out that those two schools came under the same district official, and are centrally located or enjoy better facilities. This affords another clue, a vital angle that “pops out” when it might otherwise be overlooked.

Alphabetical	Chronological
A	July 30, 2011 (recent most)
B	June 3, 2011
C	December 1, 2010

**Databases.** One of the most efficient and revealing ways to organize documents is by using an existing database or constructing your own. A database is indispensable when doing a wide-ranging investigation that brings in many documents. Constructing a database gives the reporter freedom to pull together important information from many different kinds of documents, tie them together or sift through them for trends.

Most standard computer software packages include programmes such as Microsoft’s “Excel.” These programmes allow the user to enter information into different fields, typically a column of boxes. Loading these fields with information is boring but must be done carefully.

Consider making a database of the interviews about school-related bribes. The reporter needs to decide what characteristics—also called data points or parameters—he wants to collect from each interview. These will likely be a parent’s name, as school name, amount of bribe demanded, whether the bribe was paid and whether the child was admitted.

Here’s how the database might look:

Name	School	Town	Bribe	Paid?	Admitted
Anishka	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Aravinda	4	Jaffna	400	Y	Y
Ariyadasa	2	Kandy	1000	N	N
Ariyapala	5	Matale	350	Y	N
Ariyaratna	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Ariyasiri	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Arjuna	2	Kandy	800	Y	Y
Asanka	6	Anuradhapura	150	N	Y
Ashan	5	Matale	300	Y	N
Athula	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Hashini	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Hemi	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Hasarangani	2	Kandy	1000	Y	Y
Chandrika	4	Jaffna	400	Y	Y
Bambi	2	Kandy	1000	N	N
Mahindra	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y

By sorting according to different fields, the reporter can find patterns that will “pop out” different angles, which can then lead to more reporting—and a better story. Let’s look at the amount of bribe required:

Name	School	Town	Bribe	Paid?	Admitted
Ariyadasa	2	Kandy	1000	N	N
Hasarangani	2	Kandy	1000	Y	Y
Bambi	2	Kandy	1000	N	N
Arjuna	2	Kandy	800	Y	Y
Anishka	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Athula	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Hashini	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Hemi	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Aravinda	4	Jaffna	400	Y	Y
Chandrika	4	Jaffna	400	Y	Y
Ariyapala	5	Matale	350	Y	N
Ashan	5	Matale	300	Y	N
Ariyaratna	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Ariyasiri	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Mahindra	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Asanka	6	Anuradhapura	150	N	Y

This clearly shows in which towns the educational officials are most greedy. And by using the built-in maths programme in these databases, the reporter can easily calculate the average amount of bribes demanded in each town. The average in Kandy, for instance, is Rs. 950. This begs several questions.

Other sorts yield other clues. A database like this allows the reporter, like a scientist, to test and expand his story hypothesis. The reporter can come up with different sorting strategies by asking himself questions. For instance: Does paying a bribe automatically get your child admitted? Sorting by admissions shows:

Name	School	Town	Bribe	Paid?	Admitted
Ariyadasa	2	Kandy	1000	N	N
Bambi	2	Kandy	1000	N	N
Ariyapala	5	Matale	350	Y	N
Ashan	5	Matale	300	Y	N
Hasarangani	2	Kandy	1000	Y	Y
Arjuna	2	Kandy	800	Y	Y
Anishka	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Athula	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Hashini	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Hemi	1	Galle	500	Y	Y
Aravinda	4	Jaffna	400	Y	Y
Chandrika	4	Jaffna	400	Y	Y
Ariyaratna	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Ariyasiri	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Mahindra	3	Kegalle	200	Y	Y
Asanka	6	Anuradhapura	150	N	Y

As expected, the two parents who didn't pay the bribe in Kandy had their children rejected. But the only two parents from Matale, who also paid bribes, weren't able to get their children into school. That means they were victimized twice. This is something that might not have caught the reporter's eye just by thumbing through the interviews in his notebook or computer files.

Another wrinkle: The database reveals that the only parent from Anuradhapura who didn't pay a bribe still managed to get her child admitted. And the bribe demanded was the lowest, at Rs.150. This gives you two new investigative "hot spots" for reporting.

While checking the database, it is also important to note what the data does not say. This will point the way to other databases that can fill in the blank. If those aren't available, then the reporter must shrink his or her story to fit the facts. It would be hype for a reporter to write a sweeping introduction claiming that almost all Sri Lankan parents have to bribe school administrators to get their children admitted (although it may be the perceived truth). The sample in our make-believe database is quite limited.

## Deadly Bus Drivers: A Case Study

"Investigative reporting students at the Indian Institute of Journalism & New Media (IIJNM) used an electronic database effectively to show that officials of the Bangalore bus system were misleading the public about what happens to bus drivers who kill pedestrians and bicyclists.

The officials told students that other drivers, not bus operators, caused most of the accidents. They added that if they found a driver to be at fault, they would dismiss him.

To compare the bus agency's representations to its performance, the students gained bus accident records through the Indian Right To Information Act. Then they constructed a database showing the names of the drivers, their employee numbers, the dates of their accidents, whether they

were found at fault and what their punishment was. In all, students collected information on more than 650 accidents going back eight years. Sorting the information showed a dramatically different picture than what officials wanted citizens to believe.

The statistics revealed that public bus drivers caused nearly 75% of all fatal accidents. And despite the tough talk by top officials, these drivers got off lightly. Only 9% were dismissed, as promised. Most were put on probation, had their pay docked and were put back behind the wheel.

A particularly shocking fact: 28 bus drivers had killed two or more people in fatal accidents before officials fired them. In one case, a single driver killed two people in a month before he was canned.

**Overlapping documents.** It is not necessary to build your own database from scratch but it is possible to superimpose information from two different data sets that already exist. This is called a mash-up or a mashable.

Mash-ups, made possible through New Media technological tools, helps investigative reporters spot trends and patterns, especially through maps or other visuals.

During 2010, for instance, the Sri Lankan media reported sporadic violence at universities. These stories were treated as usual—seemingly disconnected pieces of information, appearing at various places in newspaper pages and on broadcasts over a span of time. The true significance of what was happening on the campuses didn't become clear until <http://www.groundviews.org>, the citizen journalism website, using Google maps to plant electronic flags for each incident at each campus. The exercise showed a wider phenomenon that escaped the attention of journalists and their audiences: Violence had hit almost every university campus in Sri Lanka, and involved tens of thousands of students and Buddhist monastics. This was investigative reporting, in that it connected known facts in a different way.

**Authenticating documents.** Just because someone produces a piece of paper or designs a website, doesn't mean it's the real thing. Faked documents have been used by unscrupulous police officers, government officials, con men and the like for centuries.

Thus, it is absolutely crucial that an investigative reporter makes sure he is relying on authentic documents. Publishing a story without vetting the foundational documents is courting disaster.

Here are the basic rules for verifying documents:

- **Consider the source.** Would it be reasonable to think this person had access to the material? Is he or she an expert on the subject? What is his or her motivation? What about bias? Does the source have a history of lying? Will another human source vouch for the documents? Find out where the documents came from and who handled them.
- **Consider the information.** Is the document recent? Can its content be verified?



- **Internal clues.** Few forgeries are perfect. If you stare at a falsified document long enough you are bound to see some inconsistencies, such as misspellings or strange language. If possible, get a blank copy of the document from the agency to see if the boxes and spacing match.
- **Show to an outside expert.** If these are “smoking-gun” documents, don’t wait until the end of the investigation. Show someone who is an unbiased expert, who deals with the same kind of documents, for confirmation that they are real.
- **Present them to the target.** One of the best ways to validate documents is to show them during the confrontation interview to the official who supposedly wrote them or the head of the agency that generated them. Ask the official “Do you recognize this document?” and you will tell from his or her reaction whether the record is authentic.
- **Bias check.** Scientists fight their confirmation bias, or tendency to look at something only for the value of validating their theory. Journalists, especially investigative reporters, need to do the same. One way to make sure your bias isn’t leading you is to show your editor your documents. He or she is paid to be cautiously skeptical.
- **Timing.** If a smoking-gun document suddenly appears at the right time, think twice. It may be a plant.

Legal implications or issues. Finally, documents are necessary for an investigative reporter’s legal protection. The reporter should hold onto all documents for at least two years after the story is published, the statutory of limitations applicable for filing a defamation suit. If the documents are particularly sensitive, they should be kept with the news outlet’s attorney.

## Chapter Seven

# Electronic Trails

Paper documents exist in a specific time and place. But through the magic of technology, investigative reporters can transcend the limitations of time, space, international borders and money to tap into vast reservoirs of information.

**New Media/Online Searches.** The term “new media” is broadly used to describe digital, or computer-generated, information that combines words, photos, video, audio, graphics, maps and other visuals. By this definition, new media is not television, movies, magazines, newspapers or books.

Reporters are increasingly turning to the popular search engine Google and others to gather information and scope out possible sources. This method requires a minimum knowledge of Web and Internet skills, such as how to use search engines and how to send emails. Online searching requires patience, alertness and practice. Like swimming or cycling, the best way to learn how to use the New Media is through doing.

It is important at the very outset to understand that the tools and platforms associated with new and social media are in a constant state of flux. Functionalities and features are regularly added, removed and revised. This is due to the ongoing technological revolution that is taking place. Here are the basics for Internet searches.

- **Requirements.** “Surfing” the Web requires certain equipment (hardware) and applications (software). The hardware is either a desktop or personal computer with a good Internet connection, preferably broadband. The software consists of several kinds that make the computer work, and others that connect to the Internet and help the user “browse” for information.
- **Searching.** Once the computer is working and connected to the Web, the reporter conducts Internet searches using the correct “search terms”—key words that summarize the topic of interest. For instance,

if the reporter is investigating reports that fluoride in the local drinking water has resulted in a rash of kidney failures, he would first go to the Google search page and put in the words “kidney failure” and “fluoride.” He would then get a list of “links,” which would lead to reports, news stories and other materials discussing how drinking fluoridated water endangers kidney health.

- **Verification.** As with paper documents, a key challenge for investigative reporters is verifying the accuracy of the information obtained through the Web. What is published online is often taken for granted as being somehow more accurate and impartial than older channels of information. Yet information fetched from online can be even more biased, partial and inaccurate. For instance, certain sites, such as Wikipedia, are “open-sourced,” meaning anyone can add or change information. Obviously, this means a reporter can’t take the information at face value. Online photographs can also be easily doctored. Journalists should follow the same rule for electronic sources, as they do for everything else: If you can’t verify it, don’t use it.
- **Google.** The Internet search engine Google (<http://www.google.com/>) has revolutionized the way people can find and process information—so much so that the name has become a verb. People who meet, even before a first date, go to their computers and “google” each other, looking for anything that has been mentioned in public documents, news accounts and Internet postings.

Google uses a formula that ranks the information roughly according to how many times each bit has been viewed, suggesting that what appears first is the most popular or important. Google searches are incredibly fast and can yield a startling number of results. Googling Mahinda Rajapakse, for example, yields 5, 650, 000 results within .06—yes, eleven one hundredths—of a second.



Google’s advanced search features can be extremely helpful to investigative reporters who want to hone in on a specific topic or issue. The more specific you get with your “key words” the better your results will be.

No investigative reporter can afford to start a project without first using Google. Lacking a personal Internet connection, the reporter can go to a cybercafé to google. The reporter must take the time to visit all the important pages, not just the first few. Many times the least-viewed information at the end of the Google search is the most revealing and helpful.

Google also leads to maps, images, videos and scholarly articles on a subject. Google also features an advanced search function that allows the user to be more precise in sifting through massive amounts of data. Google is also an excellent way to double-check the spelling of names and places. Google has moved closer to home. Google Transliteration IME is currently available for 22 different languages - Amharic, Arabic, Bengali, Farsi (Persian), Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Russian, Sanskrit, Serbian, Sinhalese, Tamil, Telugu, Tigrinya and Urdu. For more details, please visit: <http://www.google.com/ime/transliteration/>

**Wikipedia.** Google any subject or person and one of the first links that comes up is something from Wikipedia (<http://www.wikipedia.org/>).

The cyber encyclopedia is known as an open site because anyone can write or edit it—a concept that relies on the “wisdom of crowds” for an accumulation of knowledge. Yet contributors have also added errors or intentionally included false information. While reporters often read Wikipedia for a general idea about a subject, they shouldn’t take anything from it without first double-checking its accuracy. Many reporters just click on the footnotes to find the original source materials.

**Official Websites.** Don’t overlook the value of official Websites. Investigative reporters for the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* were able to find intriguing leads and clues for their stories about a hurricane relief fraud through the official Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) website (<http://www.fema.gov/>). In Sri Lanka and other South Asian countries, agency websites often show an organogram, laying out the layers of bureaucracy. This is a wonderful device to figure out whom in middle-management to approach. Organograms often give information on salaries, regulations, past actions and professional qualifications.

**Foreign Websites.** Search these for pertinent information about companies and individuals doing business in Sri Lanka, as well as to get around the lack of RTI capacity in Sri Lanka. For instance, if a Sri Lankan company is doing business in the United States, a reporter can find a wealth of information through the Edgar database at the US Securities and Exchange Commission (<http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/webusers.htm>).

**Authenticating Websites.** Just as reporters need to authenticate paper records, they need to make sure Websites and their contents are credible. Here are some guidelines:

## Website “Reality Checks”

**Authority:** Is the site operated by a recognized expert or reputable organization?

**Accuracy:** Sites with factual and spelling mistakes should be avoided.

**Appearance:** Is the site well constructed? Sloppy, amateur productions are trouble.

**Intent:** Does the site fulfill its mission?

**Currency:** Is the information up-to-date?

**Recommendations:** Do reliable experts, organizations recommend it?

**Connectivity:** Does the site link to other trusted and well-reputed sites?

**Depth:** Has it done a thorough job in covering a subject or issue?

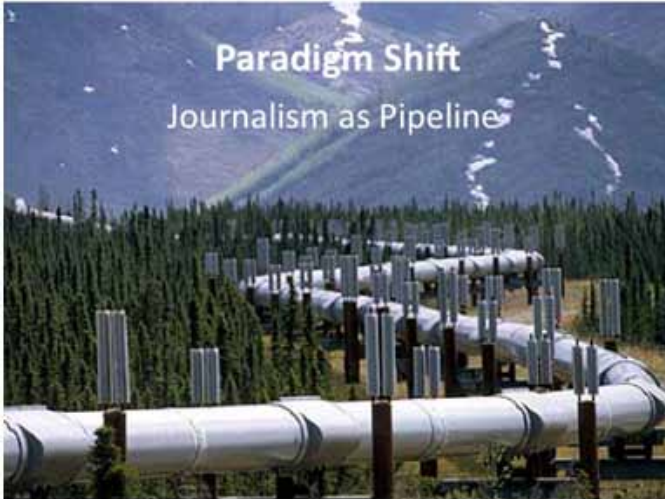
**Understandable:** Does the content make sense? Is it straightforward?

**Credibility:** Does the information make common sense? Are assertions supported?

## A Little Help from Networked Friends

**Social media.** Generally defined, “social media” are emerging channels of electronic communication that allow people to network with others having similar interests, to share data and audio video on easily accessible Websites, or to send short bursts of information or opinion to a “following.” The most powerful and best-known site is Facebook, of course. Others include Twitter, Flickr, Wordpress, Blogger and YouTube.

Social media are drastically changing journalism. Before social media, the process of journalism was more like a pipeline. Reporters and editors prepared the news, then sent it on a one-way journey through the pipeline to passive audiences of readers, listeners or viewers.



But with social media, journalism has become like an intersection of roads, where information whizzes back and forth between a matrix of users. This is often referred to as the “democratization” of news. It has changed journalism from a monologue to a conversation.



New and social media have also given rise to “citizen journalism,” where average citizens send short messages, write short descriptions or post photos of what they are seeing and hearing. That means reporting is no longer the exclusive domain of professional journalists, who have been trained in schools or on the job about the conventions of the trade.

The eyewitnesses that reporters once chased and interviewed are now able to cut out the media middleman. They do much of this by using their mobile phones, which can take photos, video and sent “tweets” through Twitter with text messages. As we saw in the recent uprisings in Iran, Egypt, Libya and Syria, citizens kept the news flowing when professional reporters couldn’t be everywhere or were locked down by the government to limit access.

Reporters are now learning to harvest these new sources of citizen-generated information, sometimes to a great extent. While a tutorial on using new and social media is beyond the scope of this manual, reporters need to come up to speed about these powerful new tools to be able to practice investigative journalism effectively.



## Chapter Eight

# Preparing the Story

Make no mistake: A reporter can have the most compelling investigative story of the year, but if it stays in his notebooks, files and databases, it means nothing. And if it comes out on the page or over the air as a flood of muddled information, it will have no impact.

So a huge job for the investigative reporter is finding the right way to tell the investigative story--keeping the readers and viewers engaged. Just because a story is vitally important and has lots of information doesn't mean it has to be boring.

Always remember, the easiest thing for your reader or viewer to do is stop and do something else.

The investigative reporter needs to be always thinking about telling the story. Some actually write an early first draft, almost from the time they start reporting. This allows them to change and shape the story as they discover new facts. Without this head start, reporters can feel a lot of pressure facing a blank page when their minds are filled with a large amount of material and the gatekeepers have high expectations for a blockbuster expose. The result: Writer's block.

**Journalistic “insurance”.** There is also another compelling reason to write a solid working draft. As the reporter continues to work from the outside in, he will begin interviewing people close to his “target” official or organization. There's a good chance the target will be tipped off, and in some cases may try to take over the story by holding a press conference about the issue, announcing a reform or even leaking a “spoiler” story—one on the same theme, but leaving out incriminating information out—to the reporter's competitor. Or the target may slap the media house with a lawsuit.

For this reason the reporter needs to write a version before he faces the target during the confrontation interview.

This version must be more than an outline, more than a sketch. It has to be something the news outlet can slam into the paper or put on the air the moment it senses the target intends to preempt the story. The exercise of writing this “insurance” draft will also reveal the holes in a story and force the reporter to really think through what she needs to ask the target.

Writing an insurance draft or preparing an insurance report may seem counter-intuitive, and even a bit unfair. How can you write a story without the most important information, i.e. what the target will say? And aren't you prejudicing the story before the reporting is finished? Actually, it isn't. Just as auto manufacturers test their models before putting them on sale, the reporter is test driving his story. And as far as prejudice, the story can always be changed or killed if necessary. Consider it a dry run.

Try the following too:

- **Talking.** Just talking about the story to her gatekeeper or a colleague will help the reporter in writing the story. The listener's reactions will tell the reporter whether she needs a different approach or more material. Walt Bogdanich, a three-time Pulitzer Prize winner now at the *New York Times*, said he often talks about his stories to colleagues. If there is no light in their eyes, he says, he knows he hasn't gotten it right.
- **Telling Mom!** When writing their first drafts, reporters should visualize sitting at the dining table and telling the story to their mothers. By focusing on a friendly and supportive face, or audience, the reporter is more likely to relax and tell the tale in a conversational way that the average reader can understand.
- **Prompts.** A prompt is a series of words that gives the writer a running start into the story. One useful prompt is “This story tells my readers/viewers that...” By filling in the blank, you have the introduction to your story. For example: “This story tells my readers/viewers that the National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) tested the water in and around Kandy and found that the fluoride levels are more than five times what scientists say is safe for human consumption.”
- **Anecdotes.** A compelling anecdote is another excellent way to start an investigative story. It personalises a complicated subject, often by showing the plight of a victim of the corruption, abuse or government incompetence.

- **Automatic writing.** The mind is a powerful thing and investigative reporters underestimate how much their minds absorb. So one technique calls on the reporter to put away her notes and write from memory. This usually yields the eventual form and highlights of the story, even if details have to be confirmed or changed later.

**Writing style.** As with breaking news stories, investigative articles are best if they are written in a clean, straightforward style.

- **Prose.** Use simple declarative sentences. Resist complicated phrases that only clutter the language.
- **Movement.** Use active, not passive, verbs and sentence construction.
- **Tone.** If you have the goods, there's no need to sensationalize. In fact, slight understatement adds power to a journalistic exposé. It allows facts to emerge forcefully on their own, unobstructed by overwrought prose, rhetoric or judgment statements. Avoid adverbs and adjectives that colour things and leave a reporter open to charges of "hyping" his story.

**Jargon and acronyms.** At all costs, avoid jargon and unusual acronyms.

Experts talk in jargon and acronyms as a specialized language. But using this lingo in a broadcast or a newspaper will only leave the audience frustrated.

Yet reporters do this all the time. Instead of calling something a "homemade bomb," reporters will refer to "improvised explosive devices" or, worse, "IEDs"—as if everyone in the world should know what this is. They don't. The *Reuters Alertnet* writing guidelines explains this cardinal principle clearly. Do not use words like "stakeholder" in stories. Your grandmother will not understand that. The golden rule prevails: Keep it simple.

**Gemstones.** These are quotes, anecdotes, examples and special visuals that drive the theme of the story home with readers. They help give life and context to what often seems like a recitation of dry facts. Like precious jewels, they should be chosen carefully and used sparingly, adorning the facts.

The citizen journalism website [www.groundviews.org](http://www.groundviews.org) made the most of a gemstone when it wrote about a record-breaking 12,000 kg. milk rice cake, or kiri bath, that was presented to President Mahinda Rajapaksa to celebrate his second term (23 <http://groundviews.org/2010/11/19/record-breaking-rice-cakes-but-at-what-cost/>) Using World Food

Programme (WFP) statistics, Groundviews estimated the cake could have fed a typical refugee for 165 years—or a family of five refugees for 41 years.

**Story structure.** There are some basic story structures that investigative reporters have adopted over the years to great effect for investigative projects. Here are two of the most popular and useful.

- **Bullets.** This is the most common investigative story template for newspapers. The beauty of this approach is that once you decided on the bullets—or findings—you can use them as an outline for the different sections of the story. Each bullet represents a major section, which can be revisited in greater detail. Here are the standard elements:

- A summary lede;
- One or two paragraphs that “unpack” the lede by teasing out information to keep the reader hooked and build story momentum;
- A quote from a victim, the subject or an expert about the problem;
- A response from the subject—this must be high up in the story.
- A nutgraph explaining why the public interest angle;
- Bullets giving brief highlights of what the investigation found;

This may sound quite complicated but it actually flows naturally. For instance with the old and sickly cow story:

**LEDE.** An Agriculture Department programme that promised free goats and milk cows to help rural families has instead provided livestock that is too sick, old or decrepit to give milk or be used for food, an investigation by the Colombo Muckrakers has shown.

**UNPACK.** Over the last two years, the department has spent more than Rs. 1000 millions for its “Healthy Dairy Cow and Goat Initiative,” promising to deliver either mature cows for milk or goats for meat to an estimated 400,000 rural families outside of Colombo, interviews and records show.

**UNPACK.** But an examination of the animals shows that the department has been paying exorbitant prices for underweight, sick or decrepit livestock, which is then distributed to rural residents. Records also show that the sole supplier of the animals has financial ties to the administrator who oversees the programme.

VICTIM QUOTE. Somapala Hewage, a poor farmer from Kandy, said the programme, intended as a sort of micro-loan, has only cost him more money. Since he claims the government “burdened” him with a sick cow, he’s paid hundreds of rupees just to keep it alive.

“The government workers drove away, laughing, after dropping off a cow that was too weak to stand up,” said Hewage. “Since then, we have spent so much for cow medicine that my children haven’t been able to buy clothes for school. And they’re eating weeds. The animal is too scraggy to be sold, too.”

NUTGRAPH. Considered a new kind of micro-finance programme, the cow and goat initiative is the central government’s largest rural welfare initiative, accounting for a third of the Agriculture Department’s budget. President Mahinda Rajapaksa introduced the programme with much fanfare in 2009, promising to cut poverty by 20%. Experts say the programme boosted the President’s popularity in rural areas and gave him a substantial margin of votes for his re-election.

FINDINGS. To evaluate how the programme is working, the Muckrakers reviewed dozens of government documents, interviewed scores of rural families and asked volunteer veterinarians to examine 100 cows and 100 goats. The investigation found:

- More than 80% of the cows were too old to give milk and 75% of the goats had diseases that make them unfit to eat. Nearly all of the animals weighed less than government stipulations.
- The government paid an average of Rs. 500 per animal—twice the market price for healthy animals.
- The sole supplier of the animals is a Colombo cement mill operator who owns the apartment building where programme administrator, Peter Silva, lives.

RESPONSE. Silva disputed the Muckrakers’ findings and said President Rajapaksa’s political enemies were behind criticism of the programme, which he terms an “unqualified success.”

RESPONSE. He also acknowledged that his landlord was the sole supplier. But added that the Colombo cement magnate was the lowest bidder among 15 firms vying for the contract, which Silva now administers.

**Anecdotal.** Just as it seems, this is an investigative piece that begins with a small scene or story that illustrates the problem, then spins out into a nutgraph that summarizes the problem. This form doesn't usually employ bullets because it is less rigid, more conversational. Here's an example using the water fluoride problem.

ANECDOTE: Nine-year-old Sepalika lies in pain, waiting for her dialysis treatment at the Healthcare Rural Hospital in Chilaw. As sweat rises on her brow, the girl remains quiet—used to waiting in the same corridor each week.

ANECDOTE: Doctors say Sepalika's kidneys have been damaged for life, just one of dozens of children doomed to undergo dialysis treatment because of a single source: Their drinking water.

NUTGRAPH: Tests show that the community water supply has fluoride at five times the level experts say is safe for children like Sepalika. And an investigation by the NWSDB shows that ...

**Endings.** Often overlooked, the ending is just as important as a lede.

As the investigative piece builds momentum, piling up fact after fact, it drives to some kind of conclusion. If his reader or viewer has stayed with him through to the end, the investigative reporter wants to offer a psychic reward. He does this by providing a sense of emotional satisfaction or by stamping a lasting image into the reader's brain. Most often this requires circling back to the first anecdote in the story, then finishing it off.

**Images.** Now, more than ever, investigative reporters must think in terms of telling their stories through photos, video, sound bites and graphics. Regional reporters are no exception. As more stories are picked up on Sri Lanka-related Websites, these images and sounds will grow in use. Choosing images requires planning and forethought. While gatekeepers often take the lead, the reporter usually has the best suggestions. Some powerful visual tools include:

- **Maps.** Google Maps makes it easier to plot incidents and show the geographic concentration of a problem, say water pollution, than describing it in writing. It also allows news outlets to group phenomena in a more visual way.

- **Charts and graphs.** They are an excellent way to show numeric information that would otherwise form impenetrable blocks of numbers in a story or broadcast.
- **Photos.** The investigative reporter wants to bring a photographer into the story early, making sure the same photographer is along on key interviews, and especially the confrontation interview. The photographer can not only do his own work, but serve as a de facto witness for the reporter if there are questions of accuracy later. Photos are also dramatic if they depict the before and after of a disaster.
- **Web presentations.** The Web gives reporters an excellent way to combine audio and visual platforms. One can tell a story through video clips—such as those powerful scenes of the 2011 tsunami washing away portions of Japan.

## Chapter Nine

# The “Confrontation Interview”

Finally, after the investigative reporter has interviewed multiple sources; accumulated, organized and analyzed dozens of documents; has changed and refined his hypothesis, and put together an “insurance” story or segment, it is time for the “confrontation interview.”

This is the moment when the reporter presents his findings face-to-face to the subject and asks for comment. This is known as a confrontation interview because the reporter often takes the role of prosecutor, presenting his evidence and trying to pin the target down with concrete answers.

While the process can be frustrating and testy for both parties, a confrontation interview doesn’t have to be confrontational. It actually fulfills the most honourable intentions of journalism—to be fair and accurate. The reporter can get the answers she wants while taking the emotion out of the situation by playing “show and tell,” and exhibiting an honest curiosity about what the target has to say.

Still, South Asian outlets tend to run stories based on anonymous sources that present allegations as fact or, worse, without any comment from the individuals or organization accused of irregularities or corruption. This may stem from the reluctance of a reporter to personally upset or directly challenge an authority. Even gentle confrontation also runs counter to cultural norms where saving “face” is important, and where elders, the powerful and “betters” are treated with deference. Even basic human nature makes it difficult for a reporter to conduct interviews where there is a high likelihood of harsh responses, angry outbursts, legal threats and even threats of violence against the reporter.

Still, avoiding the confrontation interview is a professional mistake.



It leaves the story unfinished and presupposes the reporter knows everything, when she doesn't. Maybe there's an innocent explanation for the apparent corruption—a memo the reporter hasn't seen, a directive she doesn't know about. And maybe the target will actually confirm the reporter's findings and give great quotes. After investing so much time and energy in the investigative project, it would be a professional sin for the journalist not to conduct the confrontation interview. Sri Lankan reporters have gone to great lengths to confronting the powerful over misdeeds, overcoming various threats to tell their stories. These threats may range from verbal to physical threats, prison time and malicious law suits.

## Preparation

The keys to conducting successful confrontation interview are preparation and professionalism.

**Prepare.** Don't depend on memory or the gift of gab. Go over all of the material as often as it takes to master it. Select the clean (unmarked or absent of any source-identifying notations) copies of key documents to show the subject. A few powerful documents will show the target that the reporter has done her homework and can't be fooled. It will also send a subtle message: The reporter will know when the target is lying.

**Scripting.** Investigative reporters know they may have only one shot at getting answers from their targets, who could shut down the interview at any time or refuse to take follow-up calls. Reporters can't afford to forget any topic. They must be absolutely clear in their questions. Therefore, investigative reporters usually script their interviews by writing out their questions; also coming up with possible follow-up questions depending on what the target may say; arranging all questions in the proper order; and rehearsing the interview, either alone or with a colleague. At major outlets, investigative reporters can spend days rehearsing the interview to make sure they don't get rattled or leave anything unasked.

**Tripwires.** This is a common technique used by criminal investigators as well. During the early part of the interview, the reporter asks a number of questions that aren't particularly threatening or crucial to the story, but for which the reporter knows the answer. The questions serve as a kind of honesty litmus test.

If the target lies, the questions become “tripwires,” alerting the reporter that he shouldn’t take any of the target’s answers at face value. For instance, a reporter looking into terrible water quality in a rural village knows from his documents that the engineer of the district signs off on all water quality test reports. When interviewing the engineer, the reporter should inquire if he receives routine water quality reports. If the engineer says “no,” the reporter knows right away he can’t trust the official.

**Ground rules.** Make sure the target understands in advance that the interview is indeed on-the-record. No back-grounding or off-the-record is permitted for confrontation interviews. Media-savvy targets will invite such off-the-record chat to soften up a reporter to find out what she has against them. Stay firm, even if the target says something juicy and then adds “that’s off-the-record.” Insist it isn’t with: “I’m sorry, the understanding is that everything’s on the record. I may use it.”

**Tape-recorders.** Reporters, especially those in print, must use tape-recorders for the confrontation interviews. Obviously, broadcast reporters already have this capability.

There are several reasons for an electronic record of the interview.

- **Proof.** First and foremost, a good recording yields pretty much ironclad proof of what was said and how. Unless comments are garbled, the recording prevents the target from back-tracking or making accusations he was misquoted. If necessary, the news outlet can reproduce a transcript for proof.
- **Freedom.** Tape-recording frees the reporter and the target from the distraction of taking notes by hand. The reporter can then thoughtfully engage, make eye contact and think of pertinent follow-up questions.
- **Actualities.** Recordings can yield MP3 files for radio broadcast or the Web.

**Important:** Make sure the tape-recorder is trusty, not rusty.

It is recommended that reporters use a standard tape-recorder that runs 90-minute cassettes. Avoid pocket models with mini-cassettes that often jam or stick. There is absolutely nothing worse than conducting a confrontation interview, spilling out all of the findings, getting major concessions or comments—and then discovering later that the tape-recorder jammed. Check the tape-recorder frequently during the interview or even use a back-up tape-recorder- a smart practice.

## Professionalism

**Taping.** Don't seek permission. Inform the target that you are recording the interview, then place the recorder out in the open. Check it at the beginning of the interview to make sure it is running and occasionally during the interview. Don't let the subject handle the recorder. If he tries, resist by saying "I don't handle your work tools. Please don't handle mine."

**Stick to business.** During the interview, don't try to argue, debate or show off. The nature of the interview is emotional enough. Many times targets try to throw the reporter off balance by cutting them off during questioning, making threats, laughing at or taunting them. Don't take the bait. It's business. Keep to the material but be open enough to pursue avenues of inquiry the target himself might open up.

**Besides words.** People say volumes with their body language, emotions, eye movements, hesitations, Freudian slips (little truths that seem to "slip out" accidentally from the person's subconscious mind). With the tape-recorder taking it all down, the reporter is free to note these other levels of expression as the target deals with delicate questions. Emotions are information. Does the target raise his voice? Pound the table? Cry? Cringe? Pause? Shout? Cut off the interview? All this is reportable information.

**Note-taking.** Although the reporter is using a tape-recorder, she will continue to take light notes to denote when something important was said, how the target reacted or to jot down a follow-up question that comes to mind. The note-taking should be kept to a minimum. Also, the reporter should camouflage her note-taking by waiting a few moments before writing things down. If she were to jump and write down some juicy quote, it might cause the target to reflexively back-track.

**Silence.** Every reporter knows that moment: The subject of an interview stops talking and glares. Silence is awkward and uncomfortable for everyone. Often the reporter becomes uncomfortable and attempts to fill the silence—either answering the question herself or making some kind of statement. Don't.

Silence, when used well, can actually push the subject to say more. When the target seems to have made a vague or incomplete statement, just wait several beats before moving on. Or simply say: "I don't understand" or "What do you mean?" Then wait some more. But if the situation becomes a stare-down, move on to the next question.

**Echoes.** During the confrontation interview with the subject, the spin doctor (see below) may speak up to answer the question. Politely redirect the question to the target, with such questions as: “Is that your answer?” or “Is that how you feel?”.

**Spin doctors.** High-ranking public officials and government agencies often have spokespersons or outside public relations officers to act as a buffer and shield between the investigative reporter and subject. While these “spin doctors” can be helpful in answering less important questions, they should never be considered a substitute for the target.

One of the biggest jobs of spin doctors is to prepare the target for what’s coming. Part of this is useful, in that the target’s representative will help him or her find documents and other materials the investigative reporter will need for the story. Mostly, though, the interest is strategic. The spin doctor will ask the reporter for a list of written questions, then use that to script the target’s answers and, in some cases, write a “worst case” story based on the questions. The game then becomes how to attack or neutralize enough findings to defang the story.

It is probably unavoidable giving the target some idea about the topics to be covered in the confrontation interview, and even some questions. After all, the reporter has been snooping around enough that the target already has a good idea of what’s coming. This is especially true in such a tight-knit society as Sri Lanka. But this doesn’t mean the investigative reporter has to spill her guts—or disclose her most important findings. For the sake of goodwill, a reporter may submit a number of representative questions but she will also hold back the most important ones. Usually, it’s best to just give the spin doctor the kind of topics that will be covered in the interview.

## After

**Empty your head.** Some reporters recommend immediately returning to the office to begin transcribing the tape. However, this consultant has always found it helpful to let the rhetorical dust settle a bit. Confrontation interviews can be confusing, with the target giving contradictory answers or running off on tangents. Meanwhile, the reporter’s mind is crowded with observations and thoughts of follow-up questions. The overall significance of what transpired can easily be lost. Some of the most innocuous answers may, upon reflection, be keys to the story. Therefore, if time permits, a

reporter benefits from “emptying his head” of the interview for a day or so. He can work on another aspects of the project or another story altogether.

**Transcribing.** A chore, but absolutely crucial and instructive. The reporter needs to transcribe his or her own confrontation interview, typing out every word said by the target. Key quotes need to be set off in bold type for later reference. Hand-written notes taken during the interview can be incorporated in ALL CAPS or [using brackets].

## No Comments

Not every target will agree to a confrontation interview. In fact, many won't. Still the reporter needs for professional and legal reasons to show she made a good faith effort to present her findings and get comment.

Thus the reporter needs to make at least three good-faith attempts before publication or broadcast. Good faith means more than dialing the phone and hanging up after two rings. The attempts need to be made in writing and time/date-stamped for documentation. This can be done by writing out the interview request and then requesting an official stamp from the officials' secretary or assistant when it is handed in. Or it came be documented through e-mail, which the reporter prints out and keeps as a project document. This way, the target can't say after the story is run or aired that he was never contacted.

## Chapter Ten

# Fact-Checking and Editing

Investigative reporters need to be perfectionists.

They know that reporters are more likely to land in trouble for what they get wrong, not what they get right. Even a misspelling, wrong date, bungled quote or hyped fact can cast aspersions on the journalist's professional integrity.

That's why investigative projects need thorough vetting. Everything must be double-, even triple-checked. There can be no leaps of faith or built-in assumptions. This kind of "quality control" comes best through rigorous rechecking and vigorous editing process. At major American papers, key investigative projects go through several layers of editors and multiple rewrites. *The New Yorker* magazine is famous for employing aggressive fact-checkers, whose job it is to question every inconsistency, every assertion, every quote. Some Sri Lankan publications have recently hired fact-checkers, too.

So-called "forensic" editing can be a long and painful process. In the first round, the reporter's immediate editor challenges every fact, asking the reporter "How do you know that?" and requiring proof from notes, tapes and documents. The editor may even want to know the identity of unnamed sources, so as to evaluate the quality of information.

As the story progresses and passes through the newsroom chain of command, each editor weighs it with his or her own suggestions and observations. The goal is to end up with a polished and airtight story. Finally, an attorney for the news outlet may review the piece to determine if it is vulnerable to legal challenges and suggest changes that might minimize the possibility.

At least that's the ideal. The reality is that provincial reporters won't have the benefit of this kind of editing. They need to be hard on themselves to make sure their investigative pieces are ready for release. Some things to note:

- **Numbers and names.** Journalists are notoriously bad with numbers. Investigative reporters can't afford that kind of weakness. Each number must be triple-checked for accuracy. One American reporter goes through his stories with a red pencil and circles every number, then crosses them off after recalculating and checking. Reporters should take the same care with names, since misspelling them detracts from the piece's credibility.
- **Tone.** While facts are of supreme importance, it is the tone of a story that most often gets the reporter or news outlet in trouble. If the investigative reporter has done her job, she can let the findings speak for themselves. Thus, she avoids sensationalistic terms such as "major," "shocking," "appalling," "amazing." As the ARIJ manual stresses, fact-checking needs to remove the "emotional noise" from a piece.
- **Context.** Reporters can be tempted to lift juicy quotes from an interview without giving the full context of the remarks. Don't take this shortcut. Make the general description of documents and interviews are well above reproach. Otherwise, accusations of misquoting can cast doubt over the entire story.
- **Fairness.** Even if the journalist gets some comment from the target, an appalling number of news outlets may put those comments in the last couple of paragraphs of a long, accusatory piece. This is inexcusable. Reporters and editors should make sure that a representative quote from the target appears high up in the story or broadcast segment.
- **Playbacks.** Thorough investigative reporters offer "playbacks" to sources and targets to maximize accuracy and to minimize complaints. Most people will appreciate the gesture, even if they want to quibble over wording. Don't, unless you are convinced you genuinely misunderstood or the tape was garbled. Sources, even important ones, are not "story approvers."

- **Play lawyer.** For particularly sensitive pieces, an investigative reporter prepares as if he has to defend his story in court. This is where the way he organized his material helps him. He has a file, transcript, link or document to back up every fact and interview, with the pertinent information underlined or highlighted.

**Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite.** True writing requires hard work.

It comes through the labour of massaging, cutting, transposing, reworking and polishing done through a number of additional drafts. And if your story is as important as you believe it is, your editor will want you to rewrite it at least twice to make sure it shines. Then other gatekeepers will ask for additional changes, adding a fact here to including an explanatory line there.

For major projects at the *Los Angeles Times*, it isn't unusual for reporters to rewrite their stories 10, even 20 times, to make them sparkle with perfection. Most news outlets can't afford to take that kind of time, but even a second or third rewrite will yield noticeably beneficial results. Consider it sculpting a piece of art—and don't fight the rewrites.

**Ears and eyes.** The reporter knows her story so well that when she reads it, her mind fills in the blanks or automatically corrects mistakes. To prevent this mental override, the reporter needs to read her story aloud to herself or a colleague. Problems of logic, language and timing will become painfully clear.

The news outlet also needs to get at least three pairs of eyes on a major investigative story. These eyes could belong to a reporter's colleagues and certainly would include gatekeepers, even the Editor. If more people look at a story, it helps to catch problems of logic or fact. This is the reason why that some media institutions appoint senior staffers to wear the proverbial 'red cap' and look for whatever that may still be missing in a story draft.

**The morning after.** Any powerful authority or institution can withstand one journalistic shot to the gut. Since the goal of investigative journalism is reform, be it systematic change or criminal charges, no reporter should rest once the original story runs.



The investigative reporter should do all he can to give his story “legs,” so that the story will keep running as a topic of public discourse, a cause for important organizations or important people, and an ensign for social change.

Among the steps a reporter can take to give the story legs are:

- **Follow-up stories.** Of course, the best way to guarantee follow-up stories is for the investigative reporter to do them himself. He can get this “traction” by following up the exposé with reaction from likely victims, citizen groups, neighborhood leaders, health organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who may be sympathetic to reforms. Or he can write a follow-up if a prominent official makes a promise to investigate. But he shouldn’t stop there. After waiting a short time, he should consider a piece to see if the official followed through. If the reporter and his news outlet won’t keep the story alive, no one else will.
- **Advanced notice.** Contact citizen groups, international associations or government regulators a day or two before the story runs and give them an overview without a few juicy details. This prepares the ground for follow-up stories and generates a “buzz” about the story.
- **Advertising.** If a news organization has the resources, it often advertises a big story or series. This also helps strengthen the outlet’s brand recognition.
- **Availability.** The investigative reporter should be available to be interviewed by other news outlets eager to follow his story.



## Section Three

# Editors and Reporters Safety

## Chapter Eleven

# Managing Investigative Journalism Projects

Investigative journalism is a team sport. A news outlet can have willing and talented “players,” but if the “manager” and “owner” don’t put them into the game, nobody wins.

That’s why it is vital for Sri Lankan media gatekeepers, editors and media owners to recognize the long-term value of promoting this journalistic genre. Investigative reporting fulfills the civic imperatives, journalistic best practices and financial needs of news managers. Only owners and supervisors can change a newsroom culture in Sri Lanka that, like other developing and post-war countries, values quantity over quality.

In his excellent preface to the ARIJ manual, Al-Jazeera investigative correspondent Yosri Fouda observed:

... From an industrial point of view, most of our news organizations are not as familiar with the culture of quality as they are with the culture of quantity. Among other things, quality requires a highly educated management, continuous training, integrated teams, realistic budgets and – dare I say – time. You will hardly come across a manager or an editor who does not passionately praise in-depth reporting. But rarely will you find them equally enthusiastic for, and capable of, translating their praise into reality. They are traditionally part of the problem, although it is much better to see them as part of the solution in a comprehensive attempt to change the culture....

There are compelling reasons for news managers to start changing this culture of quantity over quality in Sri Lanka.

**Not mutually exclusive.** The first is that the notion investigative reporting takes away from daily stories is a myth based on a short-term view. In fact,

time and again, investigative projects have yielded more—and better—stories than the run-of-the-mill dailies the newsroom may sacrifice in the short-run.

**Civic responsibility.** Media enterprises are more than private businesses. In a democracy, they are to public discourse what generating plants and reservoirs are to electricity and water. They are necessary for the public good and play an important sociological function of providing a common public platform for political and cultural interaction. The media play a vital public function by giving citizens the information they need to have for informed decisions. And this means more than the news that is manufactured, managed and conjured by news-makers. The media have a civic duty to dig out the stories that forge a new public agenda and cleanse the system of corruption.

**Journalistic best practices.** The spread of investigative reporting to new democracies represents a wave of best practices that Sri Lankan media houses need to adopt. Investigative reporting reinforces editorial independence and raises standards of professionalism in newsrooms that welcome it.

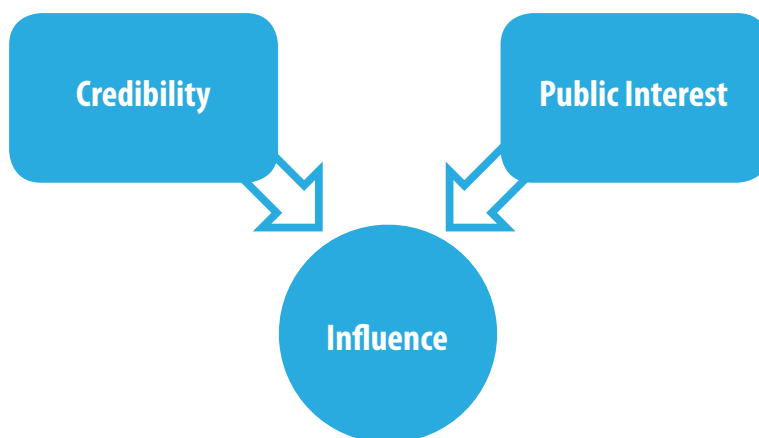
**Is good business.** Contrary to conventional wisdom—and the prevailing short-term thinking—investigative reporting helps, not hurts, a media house’s bottom line.

How? American journalism experts Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel maintain that news outlets sell more than space in newspapers and time on the air waves to advertisers.

“Rather than selling customers content, news people are building a relationship with their audience based on their values, on their judgment, authority, courage, professionalism and commitment to community. Providing this creates a bond with the public, which the news organization then rents to advertisers,” they wrote in their book, *The Elements of Journalism*.

After conducting an in-depth study of media accuracy, journalist-turned-sociologist Philip Meyer came to the same conclusion. In his book, *The Vanishing Newspaper*, he argues that media outlets rise and fall based on how advertisers perceive the outlet’s influence with the audience. And that influence is comes from a trust built on the outlet’s credibility and the perception it is acting in the public interest.

As a graphic, it would look like this:



Good investigative journalism embraces high standards of accuracy and is a visible demonstration of the news outlet’s commitment to the public good. It will enhance the outlet’s influence and, thus, its long-range economic health. It will also dispel the pervasive belief among South Asia news consumers that media owners act only in their own financial or political interests.

For example, a recent survey done by for a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) project in Dhaka, Bangladesh found that the vast majority of Bangladeshis believe their news media is becoming more objective and responsible, but that coverage is still overwhelmingly influenced by the political, financial and personal agendas of owners. More than 80% believe the owners established news houses primarily for business reasons, implying owners were more interested in making money and using the media to promote their other business interests than providing credible news. Another 54% said the owners wanted media organs to promote political views. Both statistics underscore the widespread skepticism that the Bangladesh media is operating for the greater public good.

## How to Foster Investigative Reporting

As elsewhere, investigative journalism in Sri Lanka will require a new understanding and commitment between gatekeepers and reporters,

especially those in the provinces. Regional reporters believe that Colombo-based newsrooms already devalue or ghettoize their stories. They are also afraid that if they come up with good investigative story ideas, the Colombo gatekeeper will take it away from him or team him with a Colombo reporter, who will hog the story and credit. Mostly, they feel that gatekeepers won't give them the financial and institutional support that investigative reporting requires.

The president of a provincial reporters' organization recently complained about this lack of support from the news outlet that ran his story about rural prostitution. Following the story someone smashed his van windows and punctured holes in the sides with a metal pole. It cost him Rs. 150,000 to complete the repair work. The paper offered no help.

"What would you have done if I were killed?" the journalist said he asked a gatekeeper. "Would you at least send a wreath?"

The gatekeeper paused.

"We have no particular officer to look into these matters," he said.

## Mutual Expectations

Both editors and reporters have expectations. What works for the media house is a matching of these expectations.

**Editors.** Here's what news managers should expect from regional reporters who want to do investigative stories.

- A realistic appraisal of the "minimum" and "maximum" story that might result from an investigative effort
- Periodic updates on reporting developments.
- Exclusivity for the news outlet—no sharing of investigative reports.
- If necessary, co-operation with other regional or Colombo reporters to broaden the story and deepen its impact.
- Follow ethical guidelines.
- Ideas about photos, graphics and other visual elements.
- Story delivered in the correct format.
- Reliability of information.

**Reporters.** Here's what regional reporters should expect from news outlets while they pursue investigative stories:

- Commitment to publish the story.
- Time and resources to do the story.
- Support within the newsroom, including up the chain of command.
- Byline credit when paired with a Colombo reporter.
- Willingness to stand by or vouch for the provisional reporter.
- Occasional help by intervening to help set up important interviews.
- Cover expenses for transportation, faxing, notebooks, internet access.
- Extra payment for enterprise stories.
- Mentoring, within and outside the media organization, on investigative reporting techniques and specific mentoring on a story.



## Chapter Twelve

# Safety

For any Sri Lankan reporter, safety must be a top concern.

Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF) ranks Sri Lanka near the bottom, or 158th, in its annual Press Freedom Index. A big reason for the poor ranking was the assaults and killings of journalists that occurred during the recently concluded war.

And that's just in the course of daily reporting. With its challenge to powerful people and powerful interests, investigative journalism presents its own kind of peril. Sri Lankan journalists have been jailed, forced into exile and have disappeared for taking on the authorities.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of this peril came in January 2009, with the gunning down of Lasantha Wickrematunge—Editor-in-Chief of *The Sunday Leader* and Sri Lanka's most controversial investigative journalist crusader—while he was driving to work. The killing triggered international outrage and three days after the killing, the newspaper ran a poignant column Wickrematunge had written predicting his death and naming his killer. Shortly after his death, an international jury of 14 professional journalists awarded Wickrematunge the 2009 UNESCO World Press Freedom Prize for his courage and sacrifice.

“Jury members were moved to an almost unanimous choice by a man who was clearly conscious of the dangers he faced but nevertheless chose to speak out, even beyond his grave,” said Joe Thlloe, President of the Jury and Press Ombudsman of the Press Council of South Africa, referring to the posthumous column. “Lasantha Wickrematunge continues to inspire journalists around the world.”

As in all cases like this, the question still remains whether Wickrematunge could have taken additional steps to protect himself. He and other Sri Lankan journalists face the same kind of safety risks as their peers in post-conflict regions like the Balkans, or like Russian and Italian reporters who take on the crime lords and black market activities there.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists(CPJ) estimates that 76 % of the reporters killed were murdered in retaliation for their work, and that the majority of them represented the local media. According to an analysis of the data on murdered journalists, 55% of them were political correspondents while another 27% were war correspondents.

That is the same trend that the International Federal of Journalists(IFJ) reported in "*Live News: A Survival Guide for Journalists*," which estimated that 90% of the nearly 1,200 journalists killed during the 1990s and early 2000s died in the country where they were born and raised. "Foreign correspondents are the high-profile casualties, but most victims are local," the report said.

It is important for journalists to be aware of organizations that assist media practitioners working in conflict-ridden environments. The London-based International News Safety Institute (INSI) is a unique coalition of news organizations, journalist- support groups and individuals exclusively dedicated to the safety of news media staff working in dangerous environments. It is a not-for-profit charity aimed at helping journalists to survive the story.

INSI's purpose is to create a global safety network of advice and assistance to journalists and other news gatherers who may face danger covering the news on international assignment or in their own countries.

While the risks can never be eliminated for local reporters, they can be minimized through a system of precautions that require the close cooperation of gatekeepers and reporters. As Al Jazeera's chief investigative correspondent, Yosri Fouda, says:

...from a personal security point of view, the saying that "to be a journalist is to look for trouble" could not apply to any form of journalism more than this one. Risk calculation thus becomes a crucial concept in investigative journalism, based on the fact that there is no single story that is worth the life of a journalist.... Part of the responsibility for resolving this situation lies with media departments and training centres, another part with management, but the biggest part remains on the shoulders of the journalist. He or she is the one who will pay the ultimate price should someone die, and he or she is the one who can decide to live for one more story.

Terry Anderson, the former Associated Press Beirut bureau chief who was held hostage for nearly seven years in Lebanon during the 1980s and 1990s, urged reporters, especially those in high-danger situations like war zones, to continuously calculate the dangers they may face:

“Always, constantly, constantly, every minute, weigh the benefits against the risks. And as soon as you come to the point where you feel uncomfortable with that equation, get out, go, leave it. It’s not worth it. There is no story worth getting killed for.”

At the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina, editors and reporters automatically assume they are in danger, even if they never receive a threat. The reason: Statistics, which show that three-quarters of the journalists who are killed because of their stories were never warned. As a result, the center has a security policy that calls for close cooperation between reporters and editors.

Following are some general guidelines for enhancing the safety of investigative reporters and their sources. The guidelines are based on the CIR safety manual, as well as “*Safety Matters—For Journalists and Media Workers*,” a booklet recently developed for Sri Lankan reporters by the International Federation of Journalists, Free Media Movement, Internews, and Young Asia Television.

## Safety Measures

**Professionalism.** The best safety strategy for any reporter is to conduct herself in a professional manner, and to produce accurate, fair and complete stories. This means:

- **Fairness.** Make sure the subject of the report has adequate time to digest your information and ample time for replying to each and every point. Even if the subject refuses an interview early on, continue to extend invitations to talk, especially by e-mail, letter or telegram. Keep trying, up until deadline. As for the timing of your report, the outlet’s internal deadlines or the need to run something during the week aren’t nearly as important as giving the subject a full and fair hearing. Again, this is presuming your subject is playing fair, as well, and isn’t just stalling for time to undermine your efforts.

- **Playbacks.** Earlier in this manual we discussed the value of “playing back” quotes to those interviewed in the story. The main reasons are the need to be accurate and the courtesy of giving those who cooperated the knowledge of what will come out in the story. This heads-up is especially crucial for targets deemed dangerous or might act out if surprised by the story.
- **Attitude.** Investigative reporting and interviewing is about business, not a personal grudge. While there is an element of “gotcha” and/or confrontation, doing so with anger, relish or a moralistic tone will elicit the same kind of response from targets. In fact, subjects react more strongly to a reporter’s emotions than a thorough discussion based on the facts.
- **Story Boundaries.** Most of the time, subjects—including criminals—are used to media attention. But a reporter tempts retaliation if he adds gratuitous personal material—a “cheap shot”—or strays into the subject’s personal life for no bona fide reason. Subjects who are normally sanguine about allegations of corruption will become quite agitated if a reporter starts dragging in names and facts about their spouses, children and other relatives.
- **Share nothing personal.** When reporting particularly sensitive stories, journalists should never disclose personal information that might make them vulnerable to threats or blackmail. Do not give out the names and ages of family members, home address, home phone numbers or any personal mobile telephone numbers. If someone tries to nudge the conversation into personal matters, politely but firmly steer it back to the story.
- **Keep family and friends out of the loop.** Likewise, reporters should not share anything about their stories or sources with their loved ones. That not only makes the loved ones potential targets of violence, but could jeopardize the story if they slip and disclose information to the wrong person.
- **Protect your sources.** Powerful people often have ways of reaching into the newsroom through other sympathetic or even corrupt reporters. Never keep the names or identifying information of your sources in a master computer file, which can be easily copied or recovered. Assign each source a code name or number, using that for reference. Keep paper files under double lock and key, and off-premises if possible.

When meeting sources face-to-face, frequently change locations and times; do not stick to a predictable pattern that others can use for an attack.

- **Redundancy.** Always back-up files on a memory stick or portable hard drive, then keep them in a secure place. Do the same with copies of paper documents. Do not take your original documents to face an angry official.

## Threats and Dangerous People

**For reporters:** At some point, investigative reporters need to contact people who, no matter how gently or professionally approached, are dangerous or will make threats to stop the information from getting out. Here are steps for protection in such circumstances:

- **Telephone threats.** Write down the exact wording of the threat. Start recording the conversation immediately. Extract as much information from the caller as possible—What story? What are your objections? Avoid getting into an argument. Inform the caller that the editor, not the reporter, controls the story. Immediately notify the editor and police about the threat. Also, consider going public with the threat. Perpetrators are less likely to follow through on a threat if others are alerted beforehand such as the authorities.
- **Being followed.** According to the Bosnia policy, some journalists killed in the line of duty had expressed fears they were being followed. A reporter who gets the same feeling should heed it. He should inform his project editor, the police and then find a safe place to wait for further instructions.
- **Mobile phones.** Phone cards are easy to buy in Sri Lanka. Get one and use it only for sending text messages or making calls to potentially dangerous people. Never use personal or work mobile phones. Also, buy a spare battery. If a mobile is being traced, it is through the battery, which can be discarded if necessary, throwing off a predator.
- **Email.** The same principle applies to email. Get a free account with Yahoo or Google just for the story. Don't use it for anything else.

- **Neutral turf.** If the reporter is interviewing someone who is potentially dangerous, the interview should be conducted over the phone or, at the very least, a crowded, public place that is easily viewable. Arrive on a bus or, best, by taxi. Avoid meeting in the interviewee's office, where visitors are vulnerable, or bring the interviewee to the newsroom, where he or she can glean information from papers, personal photos or unsuspecting colleagues- or generally snoop around.
- **Backup.** The reporter should always tell an immediate supervisor who, where and for how long he will be interviewing. Then, the reporter needs to agree to call the editor immediately once the interview is safely concluded. Another form of backup is to have a colleague secretly planted at the interview spot as a bystander or diner. The colleague can call authorities if the reporter gives a predetermined hand signal.
- **Terminating interviews.** If the source delivers a threat, even jokingly, the journalist needs to terminate the interview by saying, "I have come here for business but I feel like you have made a threat. I need to leave." Then go.
- **Delay but don't abandon.** If a threat is serious, take a break from reporting so things can "cool off." Typically, the person who made the threat will be less likely to follow through the longer he has to think about it. But it is essential that the reporter or someone else at the outlet eventually finishes the story, otherwise the intimidation has worked and will be worse next time.
- **For Editors.** From Day One on any investigative project, the safety of the reporter and her sources should be of the utmost concern for the gatekeeper and news outlet editor.

Editors need to take the following steps to safeguard their reporters:

- **Assess early.** One of the first things an editor needs to figure out is how risky the potential story is to him and his reporters.
- **Plan early.** From the moment the editor becomes involved with an investigative project, he or she needs to be thinking strategically about safety plans. It begins with a frank discussion with the reporter about potential bad characters covered by the story, and a plan for who should be called in the event of an emergency. The editor should compile contact information for the reporter's friends and family. He

should have an agreed upon “safe word” the reporter can say or text message in case of trouble.

- **Safety in numbers.** Editors need to consider spreading the work of an investigative project around to a number of other reporters, who can be rotated in for different interviews and tasks.
- **Monitor.** Make sure each reporter has a working mobile phone and uses it to keep tabs of his or her activities. Call the reporter every morning for a schedule of tasks and appointments. Require the reporter to call first before attending any meeting and then set a deadline for him or her to call back; if she doesn't, you need to call to make sure she is okay.
- **Threats.** If there is a threat, the editor takes responsibility for immediately calling authorities, while dispatching the reporter to the police station or a pre-arranged safe spot. He or she should provide extra security to the reporter and, if necessary, make it possible for the reporter's family to leave town for a time. If the threat warrants it, consider suspending the project temporarily until things “cool off.”
- **Investigate threats.** Have someone check out every threat to figure out why it was made and how serious it is. Publicize the threat by writing a media release to other publications and outlets. Consider running a story about the threat as well.
- **Edit responsibly.** Keep security in mind while editing the piece. Make sure that the subject has been afforded adequate time and space to respond. Ask the outlet's lawyer to review the story for any potential legal time bombs.
- **Newsroom visitors.** Take responsibility for approving and meeting all newsroom visitors. Escort them to a meeting place other than the newsroom, and limit contact to only the reporters on the project.
- **Mean it!** If a reporter fails to follow the pre-agreed safety instructions, consider disciplinary action.

## The Safety of Sources

The same dangers that confront Sri Lankan journalists also extend to their sources.

Given the lack of so-called shield laws to protect sources and whistleblowers, there is no legal right for a reporter to refuse naming his source. Some journalists in the past have been placed under serious pressure by various authorities to betray their sources.

As for physical danger, reporters should follow the same guidelines for protecting their sources as they do for protecting themselves. Make sure the source has a media-only SIM card number. Create a password that the source can use if he or she needs to speak to you urgently, or is in danger. Inform editors about any threats on the source's safety. Never meet the source in the same public place twice.

Ultimately, however, both sources and reporters need to understand there is no iron-clad guarantee to safety. This became painfully clear after a 2007 story in *The Sunday Leader* about a group of police officers who were falsely accused and indicted of crimes in retaliation for raiding well-known Colombo drug rings that had been operating with the approval of certain police superiors. The story quoted several of the falsely accused officers, including IP Douglas Nimal.

The day after the story ran, Nimal called the reporter and thanked her profusely for her work. He also said he was on his way to the Supreme Court to file a fundamental rights petition challenging his wrongful suspension. He promised to come over to the newspaper office with additional information exposing even more wrongdoings of his superiors.

He never made it. Nimal and his wife were killed in Athurugiriya on their way to the Supreme Court in Hulftsdorp.

Although the decision to file court papers and continue exposing corruption was Nimal's alone, the tragedy was a personal and professional blow to the reporter. And it showed how careful everyone must be while practicing investigative reporting in Sri Lanka.



# Appendix

# Appendix 1

## Definitions of Investigative Journalism

Investigative journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of interest, often involving crime, political corruption, or corporate wrongdoing. An investigative journalist may spend months or years researching and preparing a report. Most investigative journalism is done by newspapers, wire services and freelance journalists. Practitioners sometimes use the terms “watchdog journalism” or “accountability reporting.”

- [Wikipedia](#)

Investigative journalism is critical and thorough journalism.

- [Dutch Association for Investigative Journalism, VVOJ](#)

The activity of news reporters trying to discover information which is of public interest but which someone might be keeping hidden is investigative journalism.

- [Cambridge Online Dictionary](#)

The type of reporting that involves the journalist having to do a lot of research to discover more detail, often an exposé of something that somebody is trying to cover up.

- [www.mediadictionary.com](#)

A type of journalism where reporters try to find out and publish the truth about corruption or government mismanagement, etc.

- [www.publishingdictionary.com](#)

Essentially, investigative reporting means digging beneath the surface and telling your audience what is really going on by emphasizing the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ and not simply ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’ and ‘where’. There is no more important contribution that we can make to society than strong, public-spirited, investigative journalism.

- [Tony Berman, Editor-in-Chief, CBC News](#)

# Appendix 2

## The Ten Commandments of Journalism

- **Universality** (being available and accessible to all)
- **Being engaging** (content that is accessible and enjoyed by readers and viewers)
- **Diversity** (something for everyone)
- **Plurality of expression** (catering to minorities regardless of age, gender, race or creed)
- **Identity** (concern for national and regional identity and community, cultural and linguistic diversity, capable of building social cohesion)
- **Editorial independence** (freedom from vested interests and government interference)
- **Quality** (both content and high production values)
- **Originality** (new content, rather than repeats or acquisitions of “commodity content”)
- **Innovative** (breaking new ground or offering new approaches)
- **Challenging** (making viewers or readers think)

# Appendix 3

## The Seven Basic Rules for Investigative Reporting

by Clark Mollenhoff

### Rule 1

Avoid political partisanship. You will cut off 50% of your effectiveness if you investigate only one political party or even have a special leaning toward investigations of one party.

### Rule 2

In seeking facts and answers, make a conscientious and determined effort to be equally aggressive whether the public officials involved are people you admire or distrust. You will do your friend a favour by asking him tough, direct questions because you will be demonstrating that he will be held accountable.

### Rule 3

Know your subject, whether it is a problem of a city, a country, a state or a federal government or whether it involves big labour or big business. If you are in a highly technical area or are dealing with a complicated fact-situation, you may make unintentional mistakes simply because you did not understand what you heard.

### Rule 4

Don't exaggerate or distort the facts of the law. Efforts to sensationalise will discredit your investigation in the long run.

### Rule 5

Deal straight across the board with your sources and investigation subjects alike. Don't use tricks or pretence to get people off guard. Don't use a false name or identity or impersonate a law enforcement officer. If you deal straight with the subjects of your investigation, it is quite likely that they will be your best sources of inside information at some time in the future.

### Rule 6

Do not violate the law unless you are willing to take the consequences. Anytime you violate the law to obtain information, you develop a vulnerability that can destroy your credibility as well as the story you are pursuing.

### Rule 7

Use direct evidence when writing a story that reflects adversely upon anyone and give that person the opportunity for a full response to the questions raised. Direct testimony is often unreliable, even when the witness has no personal interest, and the chances for error increase with geometric progression as your source is removed one, two or three steps from the event.

- The Committee of Concerned Journalists

# Appendix 4

## Code of Professional Practice (Code of Ethics) of The Editors Guild of Sri Lanka Adopted by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

### 1. Preamble

This Code of Practice which is binding on all Press institutions and journalists, aims to ensure that the print medium in Sri Lanka is free and responsible and sensitive to the needs and expectations of its readers, while maintaining the highest international standards of journalism.

Those standards require newspapers to strive for accuracy and professional integrity, and to uphold the best traditions of investigative journalism in the public interest, unfettered by distorting commercialism or by improper pressure or by narrow self-interest which conspires against press freedom. Newspapers and journalists, while free to hold and express their own strong opinions, should give due consideration to the views of others and endeavour to reflect social responsibility.

This Code both protects the rights of the individual and upholds the public's right to know. It should be honoured not only to the letter but in the spirit – neither interpreted so narrowly as to compromise its commitment to respect the rights of the individual nor so broadly as to prevent publication in the public interest.

### 2. Accurate Reporting

2.1. The media must take all reasonable care to report news and pictures accurately and without distortion.

2.2. Every reasonable attempt should be made by editors and individual journalists to verify the accuracy of reports prior to publication. Where such verification is not practicable, that fact shall be stated in the report.

2.3. Editors and their staff, including external contributors, shall not publish material in such a way as to endorse any matter which they know or have reason to believe to be false or inaccurate.

2.4. Publications are encouraged to engage in investigative journalism in the public interest.

### 3. Corrections and Apologies

3.1. Where it is recognized by the editor that a report was incorrect in a material respect, it should be corrected promptly and with due prominence and with an apology where appropriate, except where the correction or apology is against the wishes of the aggrieved party.

### 4. Opportunity to Reply

4.1. A fair and reasonable opportunity to reply should be given to individuals or organizations in respect of factually incorrect statements endangering their reputation, dignity, honour, feelings, privacy and office. The reply should be confined to the complainant's version of the facts and no longer than necessary to correct the alleged inaccuracy.

4.2. Newspapers or journalists who respond to a complainant's reply other than to apologize or regret the error, must then be prepared to offer the aggrieved party a fresh opportunity to reply.

### 5. Confidential Sources

5.1. Every journalist has a moral obligation to protect confidential sources of information, until that source authorizes otherwise.

## 6. General Reporting and Writing

6.1. In dealing with social issues of a particularly shocking or emotionally painful nature – such as atrocity, violence, drug abuse, brutality, sadism, sexual salacity and obscenity – the press should take special care to present facts, opinions, photographs and graphics with due sensitivity and discretion, subject to its duty to publish in the public interest.

6.2. In reporting accounts of crime or criminal case, publications shall not, unless it is both legally permitted and in the public interest –

- i. name victims of sex crimes;
- ii. knowingly name any young person accused of a criminal offense who is below the age of 16 and who has no previous convictions;
- iii. identify without consent relatives of a person accused or convicted of a crime;

6.3. A journalist shall not knowingly or willfully promote communal or religious discord or violence.

6.4. i. The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, religion, sex or to any physical or mental illness or disability.

ii. It must avoid publishing details of a person's race, caste, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability unless these are directly relevant to the story.

6.5. i. Even where the law does not prohibit it, journalists must not use for their own profit financial information they receive in advance of its general publication, nor should they pass such information for the profit of others.

ii. They must not write about shares or securities in whose performance they know that they or their close families have a significant financial interest, without disclosing the interest to the publisher, editor or financial editor.



## 7. Privacy

7.1. The press shall exercise particular care to respect the private and family lives of individuals, their home, health and correspondence. Intrusions on this right to privacy without consent, could be justified only by some overriding public interest.

7.2. The use of long-lens or other cameras to photograph people without consent on private or public property where there is a reasonable expectation or privacy is unacceptable, unless in the public interest.

7.3. Particular care should be taken to ensure that in cases involving grief or shock, inquiries and approaches are handled with sensitivity and discretion.

7.4. Young people should be free to complete their school years without unnecessary intrusion. Publication of material concerning a child's private life would be acceptable only if there was some exceptional public interest other than the fame, notoriety or position of his or her family or guardian.

7.5. The restrictions on intruding into privacy are particularly relevant to inquiries about individuals in hospitals or similar institutions, unless it serves the public interest.

## 8. Harassment and Subterfuge

8.1. Journalists, including photo-journalists, must not seek to obtain information or pictures through intimidation or harassment or by misrepresentation or subterfuge. The use of long-lens cameras or listening devices, must also not be used unless this can be justified in the public interest and the material could not have been obtained by other means.

## 9. Dignity

9.1. Every journalist shall maintain the dignity of his profession.

## Interpretation

The public interest includes:

1.
  - i. Protecting democracy, good governance, freedom of expression and the fundamental rights of the people and of keeping them informed about events that would have a direct or indirect bearing on them, and that of their elected government, and detecting or exposing crime, corruption, maladministration or a serious misdemeanour;
  - ii. Protecting public health and security and social, cultural and educational standards;
  - iii. Protecting the public from being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organization.
  
2. In any case where the public interest is involved, the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka will be entitled to require a full explanation by the Editor and/or journalist demonstrating how the public interest was served.

## Review

The Editors Guild of Sri Lanka shall review the provisions of this Code from time to time, but not less than once each year.

# Appendix 5

## International Federation of Journalists Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists

This international Declaration is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events.

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right of fair comment and criticism.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.
4. The journalist shall use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.
5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.

8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following: plagiarism; \* malicious misrepresentation; \* calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations; \* acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.

9. Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognise in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.

# Appendix 6

## Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka How To Make A Complaint

### Rules and Complaints Procedure

1. Any person who reasonably believes that he has been adversely affected by a published item, including a news story, article, photograph and/or graphic that appeared in a newspaper or a magazine published in Sri Lanka may Complaint to the PCCSL.
2. The complaint of the said complainant shall be in writing and duly signed preferably in the prescribed form and communicated to the PCCSL in person, by Registered Post, Facsimile, E-mail or any other electronic means.
3. The complainant shall annex a copy of the published item, which he alleges adversely affected him, along with the said complaint. Where the complaint is communicated via e-mail or any other electronic mean, the complainant shall take steps to have the complaint form duly signed and to provide a copy of the published item along with a copy of the complaint be delivered at the PCCSL within seven working days thereof.
4. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the PCCSL shall entertain a duly received complaint only if it appears that the published item referred to has breached the Code of Professional Practice of the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka as adopted by the Sri Lanka Press Institute and the PCCSL for the time being.
5. The CEO shall not entertain a complaint against any published item after two years from its publication.
6. Once the complaint is entertained the CEO shall, within one working day thereof with a copy to the complainant, communicate the same to the Editor of the newspaper or the magazine concerned and call for a reply from the said Editor within a maximum period of three working days thereof.

7. Failure by the Editor of the newspaper or the magazine as the case maybe to tender his reply on the due date may result in the said complaint being directly referred for adjudication by the Council of the PCCSL. Provided, however the Editor or someone acting on his behalf requests time to reply and such request is deemed by the CEO to be a reasonable request, such further time may be granted by the CEO.

8. The CEO shall make all endeavours by way of conciliation and/or mediation to facilitate the parties to enter into a settlement within the shortest period of time, but no later than two weeks from the date of entertainment of such complaint. Such settlement may include a correction, correction and/or apology and/or a right of reply. Provided, however the CEO may engage the services of a member of the Council of the PCCSL for such mediation.

9. When a correction, and/or apology and/or a right of reply is published pursuant to a settlement before the PCCSL by the newspaper or the magazine against which the complaint was made, it may be specifically stated in the said newspaper or the magazine that such publication is pursuant to a settlement reached before the PCCSL.

10. Where settlement is not possible by way of conciliation and/or mediation, the Council of the PCCSL shall adjudicate the complaint within two weeks from the date of such failure to reach a settlement by way of conciliation and/or mediation.

11. Notwithstanding the aforesaid, the CEO may refer any complaint entertained, directly for adjudication to the Council of the PCCSL, if it appears to him/her that such adjudication is necessary in the public interest and/or interest of the newspaper industry, and/or interest of the complainant.

12. The parties to the adjudication shall agree on the composition of members of the Council of the PCCSL for such adjudication.

13. Quorum for any adjudication by the Council of the PCCSL shall be three whilst always maintaining non-press related members' majority.

14. A member of the Council of the PCCSL having a specific personal interest in the content of the published item complained of shall not take part in such adjudication.

## Evidence

15. At the request of the Arbitral Tribunal, the parties shall state the evidence on which they wish to rely on, specifying what they wish to prove thereby.

16. The Parties shall produce as requested by the Arbitral Tribunal the documentary evidence on which they rely.

17. The Arbitral Tribunal may when deemed appropriate, require the submission of written affidavits.

18. The Arbitral Tribunal may refuse to accept evidence offered to it if it considers that such evidence is not required or is irrelevant or that proof can be established more simply by other means on a particular matter.

19. The Arbitral Tribunal shall require the parties to the dispute to be comprehensive in any or all statements submitted in accordance with the foregoing Rules and may dismiss the case if the member of the public fails to comply with such requirement. In the event that a publication who is a party to the dispute fails to submit any or all statements in accordance with the foregoing Rules, such failure will not prevent the continuation of the arbitration proceedings.

20. Unless the parties agree otherwise, the Arbitral Tribunal may appoint an expert to give his opinion on a particular matter.

21. In the event that a party fails to appear at a hearing or otherwise to comply with an order and does not show valid cause for such failure, such failure shall not prevent the Arbitral Tribunal from proceeding with the case and or rendering an award.

## The Award

22. Unless the parties to a dispute expressly confer on the Arbitrator, in writing, power to award any other relief, the powers of the Arbitrator to award relief in any arbitral proceedings shall be limited to making an order to the publication who is a party to the dispute to publish a right of reply and or correction and or apology in the media in which the publication of the matter in dispute was made.

23. An arbitral award shall be made not less than one (1) month from the date the statement of Claim is submitted unless otherwise determined by the Council.

24. In the event a settlement is made, the Council may at the request of the parties confirm such settlement in the Award.

25. The Award shall be made after having conscientiously considered and evaluated all aspects of the proceedings and after the Arbitral Tribunal determines what has been provided case.

26. In the event, the Council sits in as the Arbitral Tribunal, the majority opinion of the Arbitral Tribunal shall prevail.

27. A separate issue or part of the matter in dispute between parties may, at the request of a party, be decided by a separate award. If any party objects, such an award may be rendered only if the Arbitral Tribunal deems that there are exceptional reasons.

28. Where a party has partially admitted a claim, the Arbitral Tribunal may give a separate award on the part that has been admitted.

29. The Award shall be rendered at the place of arbitration. The Award shall contain an order or declaration and the reasons therefore and shall be signed by the arbitrator or all the arbitrators, as the case may be. An Award may be rendered even in the absence of the signature of an arbitrator, provided that the Award has been signed by the majority of the arbitrators and contains verification by them that the arbitrator whose signature is absent took part in deciding the dispute.

30. An Arbitral Tribunal shall after the close of the proceedings submit to the Commission, one copy of each award as well as a record of all proceedings.

### Correction or Change of the Award

31. Any obvious miscalculation or clerical error in an award shall be corrected by the Arbitral Tribunal.

32. In the event that a party so requests, within thirty (30) days of receiving the Award, the Tribunal may decide a question which should have been decided in the Award but which was not decided therein.



33. In the event that a party so requests, within thirty (30) days of receiving the Award, the Arbitral Tribunal may provide an interpretation thereof in writing.

34. Before the arbitral Tribunal takes such action, the parties shall afford an opportunity to express their views.

## Enforcement

35. In the event a publication fails to abide by the terms of settlement of conciliation, mediation and/or arbitration proceedings, the Council shall assist the members of the public to enforce such terms of settlement before High Court in terms of the Arbitration Act, No. 11 of 1995.

36. An Arbitral Award may be enforced by applying to the High Court within one year after the expiry of fourteen (14) days of the making of the Award in accordance with the provisions of the Arbitration Act No 11 of 1995.

37. Any adjudication of the Council of the PCCSL shall be published, in full, by the relevant newspaper or magazine in its very earliest publication thereafter.

38. Such adjudication of the Council of the PCCSL is equivalent to an award by an Arbitral Tribunal referred to in the Arbitration Act, No. 11 of 1995 and provisions of the said Act shall apply mutatis mutandis for the enforcement of such adjudication.

39. Any decision of the CEO and/or Adjudication of the Council of the PCCSL shall be final and conclusive for all purposes and cannot be challenged before a Court of Law.

40. The CEO shall maintain records of all complaints and decisions of conciliation, mediation and arbitration proceedings and shall make available to the Commission an annual statement, which will be made available to the public thereafter by way of a publication by the Commission.

41. This procedure is effective for any complaint against a published item appearing in a newspaper or a magazine published on or after October 15, 2003.

## Code of Professional Practice by the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka as Adopted by the Sri Lanka Press Institute

42. The interpretation of the Code of Professional Practice of the Editors' Guild of Sri Lanka as adopted by the Sri Lanka Press Institute and the PCCSL shall vest with the Council for the purpose of carrying out all provisions under these Rules.

### Spokesperson of the PCCSL

43. The Spokesperson for all policy matters relating to the Company shall be the Chairman of the PCCSL, or any member of the Board authorized to speak on behalf of the Board.

44. The Spokesperson for all Complaints received and Decisions made by the Council will be the CEO, provided however; that the CEO may consult the Chairman of the Council where it is prudent to do so, but in any event no details will be provided to the press and/or electronic media and/or the public of on-going inquiries, and any interpretation of any Arbitral Awards made by the Council will be made by the CEO only after consultation with the Chairman of The Council and/or the Arbitral Panel.

45. Any officer of the PCCSL who may wish to contribute an article or be part of any media discussion in the electronic media relating to the work of the PCCSL will require the prior approval preferably in writing, of the CEO, but in any event, such officer is precluded from speaking on any policy matters which will be the prerogative of the Board of Directors.

46. All press releases by the CEO will require the prior sanction of the Chairman of the PCCSL provided that if they relate to any matter involving a Complaint, it will require the authorization of the Chairman of the Council.

47. These procedures will be reviewed annually or as and when required and if necessary revised and submitted by the CEO to the DRC for approval and to the PCCSL Board of Directors for ratification and implementation.

# Appendix 7

## Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka Complaint Form



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இலங்கை பத்திரிகை முறைப்பாட்டு ஆணைக்குழு  
Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka

### COMPLAINT FORM

Name in Full:.....

Address: .....

Telephone: ....., Mobile:..... Fax:.....

Email:.....

Newspaper/Magazine..... Publication date:.....

Headline:.....

Please indicate which clause/clauses of the Code of Professional Practice, in your view has been breached. (Give clause number only).....

By signing below I agree to abide by the following terms and conditions:

1. I agree to participate in the process adopted by the Press Complaints Commission of Sri Lanka (PCCSL) in resolving the complaint.
2. I agree to abide by the settlement reached between myself and the Editor through the facilitation of the PCCSL.
3. I have enclosed a copy of the newspaper article against which the complaint is being made, and my version of the facts.

Please note that the PCCSL follows the Rules and Complaints Procedure of the Commission in seeking a settlement. As per clause 38 of the Procedure, if a settlement is reached through the intervention of the Dispute Resolution Council (DRC) of the PCCSL, such a decision is equivalent to an award by the Arbitral Tribunal referred to in the Arbitration Act No. 11 of 1995, and provisions of the said Act shall apply "mutatis mutandis" (as it is) for the enforcement of such adjudication.

Any decision of the CEO and or the Adjudication of the Council of the PCCSL is deemed final and conclusive for all purposes, and cannot be challenged before a court of law.

.....  
Signature of Complainant

.....  
Date

*\*Conciliation is the first step in seeking a settlement. The PCCSL obtains the services of the DRC to adjudicate in the matter if conciliation fails.*

96, Kirula Road, Colombo -05, Sri Lanka  
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# Appendix 8

## LOOSENING LIPS

### The Art of the Interview

Eric Nader - Seattle Times

#### The Set Up

**Research:** The best questions are informed questions. Whether you have five hours or five days, gather clippings and court records and talk to the subject's cohorts.

**Tactics:** Make a tactical plan and discuss it with a friend or colleague. Whenever possible, I interview people close to the action, while they are actually doing whatever it is I am writing about. However, whistle-blowers and reluctant targets are best contacted at home. You can calm a nervous source by taking him or her for a walk. And if you arrange a lunch appointment you can force a person to spend at least an hour with you.

**Organize:** Write single-word clues on the flap of your notebook to remind you of issues you want to cover. Organize paperwork so you won't fumble with it as you talk. Begin with softball questions (i.e., a chronological life history), but prepare a comprehensive all-purpose question for cases where the door might slam in your face.

**Inner Interviewing:** As a warm-up (maybe during your morning shower), imagine a successful interview. Reporters who don't believe they will get the interview or the information usually fail. As far as I'm concerned, no one should ever refuse to talk to me. It works.

**The Opener:** The techniques of "inner interviewing" continue. Never approach your subject as though they seem menacing or likely to clam up. Appear innocent, friendly, unafraid and curious. If you are a hard-boiled, cynical reporter who talks out of the side of your mouth, you will need acting lessons.

**Pay Attention to Detail:** Inventory the room thoroughly and in an organized fashion. Look at the walls, read the top of the desk and study the lapel pin. You'll get clues and details for your story. Make notes on what you see.

**Look for Other Sources:** While at the interview, meet the secretary and the other co-workers and make note of details about them. This will come in handy as you turn them into sources.

## Reluctant People

**Keep It Going** -- When the door is closing on your face, find common ground. "By the way, I notice you've got a poodle. I've got a poodle. Weird dogs. Just the other day . . ." As a person hangs up the phone, I quickly say I only want to explain what I am working on and they should at least know that. (They usually comment once they hear what I am doing). On one occasion I inadvertently repeated something that was inaccurate and a cop dragged out a report I wanted to see just so he could show me I was wrong. You've got to be quick, sincere, kind and courteous.

**It's No Big Deal** -- Respond to the "I can't comment" by saying "You don't have to worry. Heck, you are just one of several people I've talked with. It's no big deal. Here's what I understand about the situation. Let's talk about this part a little bit . . . (and then start talking about the information you want to confirm)." Notice that I avoid a debate over the reasons they don't want to talk with me. You'll lose that debate nine times out of 10. Keep the conversation rolling.

**Sympathy** -- Respond to the "I'm afraid to comment" with a little sympathy and a lot of reassurance: "I understand your concern. These are tough times for your agency. But a lot of folks talk to me in situations like this, including people you work with. Let me at least cover a couple of things with you, it would help me a lot." Give glancing recognition to their concerns, but try to move right on to the point of the story.

**Public Official or Other Big Shot** -- Respond to the "no comment" from an "important" person or bureaucrat by saying: "You know, I feel bad about just putting a 'no comment' in this story since the readers will think you are hiding something. Let's find a way to talk about this. Tell me about this, for instance . . ."

**Door No 1, or Door No 2?** -- As a last ditch method with the reluctant public official or big shot, I say, "Look, whether you talk to me or not, I'm going to do a story on this. So you can have it one of two ways: Either I do a fair story that says that you refused to cooperate, or I do a fair story that has your point of view in it. Now which do you want?" They usually choose Door No. 2.

**Detours** -- If a person won't talk, go to others in his or her office or to associates. You will get more information, and by doing this you will loosen them up.

**Ratcheting** -- If a subject insists on talking "on background," take notes anyway. At the end of the interview, pick out a good quote in your notes that isn't too damning and say: "Now what about this thing you said here. Why can't you say that on the record?" If they agree to put that comment on the record, go to another one in your notes and say: "Well, if you can say that on the record, why can't you say this? And so on. I have gotten an entire notebook on the record this way. If they insist on anonymity, however, you must honour it.

**Anonymity** -- Don't accept information "on background" without a fight. Even if it means going back to them several times, try to convince people to go on the record. (Absolutely "off-the-record" information is useless, since you can't use it under any circumstance. Avoid it. It's a waste of time.)

**For the Sake of Clarity** -- There are cases where someone tells you part of a story and then balks, or you already know part of a story and can't get the rest. Try saying, "look, you've already told me this much (or, I already know this much). You had better tell me the rest. I mean, you don't want me to get it wrong, do you? For instance, what about this part here . . . (refer to something in your notes)."

**Play Like You Know**-- Ask the official WHY he fired the whistle-blower rather than asking WHETHER he did the deed. The question presumes you already know even if you don't have it confirmed. They'll start explaining rather than denying.

**The Statue of Liberty Play** -- Emphasize that people are more believable when they put their name behind what they say. It's the American Way: A robust public debate.

**Lost Reporter** -- It doesn't hurt to say you need the person's help. "Who is going to explain this to me if you don't?"

**Try Again** -- When the door is slammed in your face, try again a day or two later. People change their minds.

## Getting All the Goods

**Chronology** -- Take the subject through his or her story chronologically. You will understand the tale better, and you will spot gaps in the timetable and logic.

**How and Why** -- When a person says something important, ask the key question: "How do you know that?" It sheds light on credibility, extracts more detail and is a door opener to other sources. Also, ask people why they do what they do, rather than just asking what they do.

**Slow Motion** -- When people reach the important part of a story, slow them down so you can get it in technicolour. Ask where they were standing, what they were doing, what they were wearing, what was the temperature and what were the noises around them? Then switch to the present tense, and ask questions like: What are you doing now? What is your friend saying? You and the interview subject will then re-enter the scene and walk through it together. If this fails, tell them it is not working. "I'm trying, but I just can't picture it yet. What did it feel like?" This is how you get a story, not a bunch of facts.

**Telephone** -- Ask people on the phone to describe their surroundings (the plaque on a man's wall became a key detail in one story, after I had independently verified what it said). Get people to tell their stories in three dimensions (see the "slow motion" advice above).

**Use Your Ears** -- We talk too much during interviews. Let the other person do the talking. After all, you can't quote yourself. And check your biases at the door; listen with an open mind.

**Getting the Confession** -- Ask the subject for the names of people who support him or her. Then ask for the names of people who would criticize. Then ask what those critics are likely to say. This will jar loose uncomfortable information and tips. Ask whether the person has ever been disciplined or fired on the job or in school, charged with or convicted of a crime, arrested for drunken driving, sued, testified in court, etc. Since all this stuff is on a record somewhere, people are reluctant to lie about it.

**Liars** -- If you know someone is lying, allow the liar to spin his or her yarn. Don't interrupt except to ask for more detail. Deceivers frequently provide extensive detail because they think a very complete story will add to their credibility. Listen and take good notes. When the lie has been fully constructed -- down to the last nail -- go back and logically de-construct it. Don't be impatient. The fabricator is now in a corner. Keep them there until they break.

**Life Story** -- Get the life story, even in cases where you don't intend to use it. Even when I interview a lawyer about a case, or a bureaucrat about a government policy, I get the life story if I have time. I get useful information and ask better questions as a result.

**Don't Join** -- Be sympathetic in manner, but don't join sides with your interview sources. Don't get sucked in by the embattled congressman who seems so cooperative when he grants you an interview and says, "I don't believe in taking money from those guys." You should say, "that may be true, but I'm asking you whether you took the money, not whether you believe in doing so."

**Ask Again** -- Sometimes it pays to interview a person two or three times on the same subject. One public official gave me four different and conflicting explanations for the trips he took at taxpayer expense.

**Review** -- Go back over your notes with people. They will fill in gaps for you, and in doing so give you more information.

**Innovate** -- If an outrageous question comes to mind, ask it, even if it is terribly personal. There are no embarrassing questions, just embarrassing answers. Your chisel-like questions should chip away at all sides of an issue. Drain Them -- People aren't aware of how much they know. You must lead them through their memory. Visualize your subject as a bucket full of information and empty it.

**Honesty** -- Don't pretend to be someone else and don't lie. You can certainly omit information, but the more you can reveal about the nature of your story, the more comfortable and helpful your subject will be.

**Be the Doctor** -- A great interview feels like a conversation but moves relentlessly toward the information you need. Keep control, but do so gently.



**Don't Be Unmovable** -- You may know what your story is about, but don't get stuck. A great interview will change your story.

**Personality** -- Let your personality shine through (if you have a good one). Don't be a blank wall.

**Open – Ended Question** -- Near the end of an interview, ask the person what else our readers might be interested in. Sometimes people have more than one newspaper-worthy story in them.

**Check back** -- After the story runs, call the subject for his or her reaction. You'll get additional stories and tips this way.

# Appendix 9

## International News Safety Institute (INSI) Safety Code for Journalists

### International News Safety Institute

The International News Safety Institute (INSI) is dedicated to the right of all journalists to exercise their profession free from persecution, physical attack and other dangers to life and limb. While recognizing that some conditions under which journalists and media staff work never can be completely safe and secure, INSI will strive for the elimination of unnecessary risk, in peace and in war. It will draw on the expertise of its members and supporting organizations to lobby on behalf of working journalists everywhere who embrace the INSI Code of Practice and confront physical or psychological barriers to the free and independent gathering and dissemination of news.

### The INSI Safety Code

1. The preservation of life and safety is paramount. Staff and freelancers equally should be made aware that unwarranted risks in pursuit of a story are unacceptable and strongly discouraged. News organizations are urged to consider safety first, before competitive advantage, for journalists in hostile environments.
2. Assignments to war and other danger zones must be voluntary and only involve experienced news gatherers and those under their direct supervision. No career should suffer as a result of refusing a dangerous assignment. Editors at base or journalists in the field may decide to terminate a dangerous assignment after proper consultation with one another.
3. All journalists and media staff must receive appropriate hostile environment and risk awareness training before being assigned to a danger zone. Employers are urged to make this mandatory.

4. Employers should ensure before assignment that journalists are fully up to date on the political, physical and social conditions prevailing where they are due to work and are aware of international rules of armed conflict as set out in the Geneva Conventions and other key documents of humanitarian law.

5. Employers must provide efficient safety equipment and medical and health safeguards appropriate to the threat to all staff and freelancers assigned to hazardous locations.

6. All journalists should be afforded personal insurance while working in hostile areas, including cover against personal injury and death. There should be no discrimination between staff and freelancers.

7. Employers should provide free access to confidential counselling for journalists involved in coverage of distressing events. They should train managers in recognition of traumatic stress, and provide families of journalists in danger areas with appropriate and timely advice on the safety of their loved-ones.

8. Journalists are neutral observers. No member of the media should carry a firearm in the course of their work.

9. Governments and all military and security forces are urged to respect the safety of journalists in their areas of operation, whether or not accompanying their own forces. They must not restrict unnecessarily freedom of movement or compromise the right of the news media to gather and disseminate information.

10. Security forces must never harass, intimidate or physically attack journalists about their lawful business.

The INSI Code has been developed from a number of existing industry codes prepared by leading journalist groups and media organizations.

### **Dealing With Surveillance**

- Always be alert.
- Familiarize yourself with your own neighbourhood.
- Take note of suspicious looking persons or vehicles.
- Surreptitiously take photographs of the above.
- Report presence of suspicious persons or vehicles to colleagues, friends and family.

- File a complaint with the police.
- Surveillance can also be detected in checkpoints like traffic lights, busy intersections, bridges and narrow streets.
- When driving, be on the lookout for vehicles, especially motorcycles, following you.
- Keep car windows up and doors locked.
- Keep your car in good running condition.
- When driving on wide avenues, try to stay close to the center island.
- Avoid walking in deserted or dark streets or alleys.
- If you think you are being followed, head for the nearest police precinct
- In a taxi, constantly check for vehicles that may be closely tailing you. Ask the driver to loudly honk the horn and head for the nearest police station.

### Dealing With Death Threats

- Write down the exact wording of the threat including details about how the threat or threats were received. Doing this enables you to provide the police with a thorough report.
- Threats should not be taken lightly. Immediately inform superiors, colleagues, and family about the incident.
- Create a lot of noise about the threat. Seek support from press associations and other media groups. Ask news organizations to publicize it.
- Save threats sent through SMS in your phone memory so that you can have a support document when reporting to proper authorities.
- If the threats are imminent, consider temporarily moving to another place.
- Ask for police protection only when absolutely necessary and if the police in your area can be trusted.

### Keeping Your Family Safe

- Instruct family members and household help not to give out information through the phone or to strangers.
- Conduct regular drills with the family members on taking cover from gunfire, etc.
- Tell family members to take note of the presence of suspicious vehicles or persons.
- Keep doors securely locked; make sure that these have deadbolts.
- Designate a safe room within the house where family members can seek cover in case of an attack. The room should have a sturdy door, a telephone line, water and food, flashlight, first-aid kit, and a possible escape route.

- Entrust house keys to a trusted neighbour; do not leave under doormats or in flowerpots.
- If possible, get a watchdog.
- Enlist the help of neighbours in detecting surveillance.

### Covering Wars and Conflicts

- Get out fast when clearly threatened.
- Do not cross the battle zone, it could be very dangerous.
- Be careful about reporting from both sides of a conflict.
- Avoid bias for one or the other side.
- Never draw maps of military positions or establishments in your notebook nor should you show unusual interest in military equipment.
- Do not take obvious notes in public nor pull out a microphone or notebook without permission.

### If Firing Coming in Your Direction

- Take cover from view; do not wear anything bright.
- Let your shiny equipment become dirty or muddy to lessen light reflection.
- Do not take cover in position where someone has recently been firing.
- A hole or a dip in the ground may provide enough cover.
- In a building, find a room without exterior walls such as a hotel bathroom.
- Do not peek from your cover.
- Even if you are behind a wall, lie flat on the ground.
- When you take cover, immediately assess your situation and plan a route of escape.
- When withdrawing, keep low while running and try to put vegetation or structures between you and the firing position.
- Leave equipment behind if this is hindering your escape.

### Covering Demonstrations and Other Civil Disorders

- Plan in advance.
- Establish pre-arranged contact points with the rest of your team (photographer, camera operator, producer, etc;) if you are separating.
- Always carry press identification but conceal it if it attracts unwarranted attention.
- Bring a cellular phone with emergency numbers pre-set for speed dialling.
- Position yourself upwind if there is a possibility that tear gas will be used.
- Bring eye protection such as swimming goggles or industrial eye protection.

- Carry first aid kits and know how to use them.
- Wear loose natural fabric clothing as this will not burn as readily as synthetic ones; remember there is always the possibility of gasoline bombs being exploded.
- Carry a small backpack with enough food and water to last for a day in case you are unable to get out of the area.
- If you are a reporter you don't have to be in the crowd as long as you can see what's happening.
- If you are a photographer or camera operator, try to shoot from a higher vantage point.
- Work with the team and keep a mental map of your escape route if things turn bad.
- Have an immediate newsroom debriefing after the coverage to extract lessons from the coverage.

### Covering Natural Disasters

- Assess the situation.
- Learn as much as you can about the type of disaster (earthquake, tsunami, chemical spill, etc;) you are going to cover.
- Wear appropriate protective clothing and gear.
- Bring bottled drinking water.
- Follow warnings of authorities and disaster experts.
- Do not cross police lines.
- Do not get in the way of rescue and relief workers.
- Do not touch or sniff canisters or containers that may contain hazardous chemicals.
- Refrain from smoking (there may be fractured gas lines in earthquake devastated zones).

### What to Do in Case of Checkpoints

- Always be polite.
- Avoid confrontation.
- Identify yourself as a journalist.
- If on foot, approach the checkpoint with only necessary papers on hand. When in a vehicle, keep windows and doors locked; do not alight unless ordered to do so.
- Never try to film without permission.
- If soldiers or militia manning the checkpoint are hostile or nervous, offer sweets or cigarettes.
- When showing your identity card, let them also see pictures of your wife or children to bring out the more human aspect of your work.

- Let them know that people know where you are and that you are expected back.
- Make them understand that you are not a threat.
- Stay polite but be alert especially for soldiers who seem to be listless and would not look you in the eye.

### **What to Do When You are Arrested**

- Know your rights.: you have the right to remain silent and to be assisted by a competent and independent lawyer of your choice.
- You have the right not to be subjected to torture, intimidation, deceit, other forms of coercive harassment.
- You have the right to be informed of these rights and to be told that anything you say may be used against you in court.
- If you are detained, you must be treated as a human being and must be entitled to due process.

### **What to Do When You are Abducted/ Kidnapped**

- To survive an abduction, you must retain mental alertness and a positive attitude.
- Do not antagonize your abductors, do as you are told.
- Mentally converse with someone (your partner, colleague) to help you keep the situation in perspective.
- Use whatever methods you have for relaxing like mentally picturing what you will do when you return home.
- Try to seek some improvements in your condition especially if you are being held for more than a day.
- Make it difficult for your captors to treat you inhumanely by talking about your family.
- If you are being brutally treated, try to mentally converse with loved ones or talk to your God.
- Do not believe in promises that you will soon be released.

### **What to Do to Secure the Newsroom**

- Inform your editors or immediate superiors of your whereabouts or itinerary for the day; let them know who you will be meeting and at what time and where.
- While on dangerous assignments work out a system with the news desk so that you can be in constant communication with the office or that you can reach them immediately.
- Sensitive files, documents, compact discs, video and audio recordings should be secured. Ideally these should be stored in a secure place outside the newsroom.
- As much as possible, limit phone interviews to non-sensitive information.

# Appendix 10

## Resource List

### Regional and Global Investigative Networks

- Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)
- Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN)
- Forum for African Investigative Reporters (FAIR)
- Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)
- International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ)
- Investigative Reporters Network Europe (IRENE)
- Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (Southeastern Europe)
- SCOOP (East and Southeastern Europe)

### Global Investigative Reporting Centers

- Bulgarian Investigative Journalism Center (BIJC)
- Caucasus Media Investigations Center (CMIC)
- Center for Investigative Journalism, UK
- Center for Investigative Reporting, Bosnia & Herzegovina (CIN)
- Center for Investigative Reporting, Nepal
- Center for Investigative Reporting, Serbia
- Centro de Investigación de la Información Periodística (CIPER), Chile
- Ghana Center for Public Integrity
- Investigative Journalism Center (IJC), Croatia
- Investigative Journalism Center of Moldova
- Investigative Journalists NGO, Armenia
- Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ)
- Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism (CRJI)
- The Canadian Centre for Investigative Reporting (CCIR)



## Investigative Reporting Centers in the US

- Center for Investigative Reporting(CIR)
- Center for Public Integrity(CPI)
- Investigate West
- Investigative Reporting Workshop, American University
- New England Center for Investigative Reporting at Boston University
- ProPublica
- Rocky Mountain Investigative News Network
- Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, Brandeis University
- Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism, Columbia University
- Texas Watchdog
- Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

# Appendix 11

## Related websites

- Article 19 - <http://www.gn.apc.org/article> 19
- Canadian Journalists for Free Expression - <http://www.cjfe.org>
- Cobrapost - <http://www.cobrapost.com/>
- Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)- <http://www.cpj.org>
- Commonwealth Press Union - <http://www.compressu.co.uk/>
- European Journalism Centre - <http://www.ejc.nl>
- European Journalism Network - <http://www.ejn.org>
- FACSNET - [www.facsnet.org](http://www.facsnet.org)
- Freedom Forum - <http://www.freedomforum.org>
- Groundviews - <http://www.groundviews.org>
- Independent Journalism Foundation - <http://www.ijf-cij.org>
- International Federation of Journalists - <http://www.ifj.org>
- International Freedom of Expression Exchange - <http://www.ifex.org>
- International Institute for Journalism -<http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu>
- International Journalists Network - <http://www.ijnet.org>
- International Media Support- <http://www.i-m-s.dk>
- International PEN - <http://www.internationalpen.org.uk>
- International Press Institute- <http://www.freemedia.at/>
- International Women's Media Foundation- <http://www.iwmf.org>
- Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas -<http://www.knightcenter.utexas.edu>
- Malaysiakini - <http://www.malaysiakini.com/>
- Online Journalism Review - [www.ojr.org](http://www.ojr.org)
- Panos South Asia - <http://www.panossouthasia.org>
- Poynter Institute- [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)
- Press Foundation of Asia -<http://www.pressasia.org>

- Reporters San Frontiers(RSF) -<http://www.rsf.fr>
- Salzburg Seminar- <http://www.salzburgseminar.org>
- Society of Professional Journalists in the United States - [www.spj.org/ethics.asp](http://www.spj.org/ethics.asp)
- Tehelka.org - <http://www.tehelka.com>
- The Freedom Forum -<http://www.freedomforum.org>
- The Reporters' Committee for Freedom of the Press- [www.rcfp.org](http://www.rcfp.org)
- The Thomson Foundation -<http://www.Thomfound.ac.uk>
- UNESCO - <http://www.unesco.org/webworld>
- World Association of Newspapers -<http://www.wan-press.org>
- World Press Freedom Committee-<http://www.wpfc.org>
- World Press Photo -<http://www.worldpressphoto.nl>

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- Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists by Mark Lee Hunter, Nils Hanson, Rana Sabbagh, Luuk Sengers, Drew Sullivan and Pia Thordsen - <http://www.arij.net/look/englishmanual.pdf>
- Digging Deeper: A Guide for Investigative Journalists in the Balkans by Sheila Coronel (2009)
- <http://groundviews.org>
- Investigative Editors and Reporters - <http://www.ire.org/>
- The Code of Professional Practice (Code of Ethics) of the Editors Guild of Sri Lanka – [http://www.fojo.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.1900!Code%20of%20Ethics-%20English.pdf](http://www.fojo.se/polopoly_fs/1.1900!Code%20of%20Ethics-%20English.pdf)
- Complaint Form of the Sri Lanka Press Complaints Commission - [http://www.pccsl.lk/how to make complain.php](http://www.pccsl.lk/how%20to%20make%20complain.php)
- International Federation of Journalists: Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists- <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en>
- Tehelka - <http://www.tehelka.com>
- Cobrapost - <http://www.cobrapost.com/>

- ABC Television Network, US- <http://abc.go.com/>
- Definitions of Corruption - <http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/corruption/Handbook.pdf>
- Lexis-Nexis - <http://www.lexisnexis.com/>
- Loosening Lips (The Art of the Interview) by Eric Nader - <http://home.earthlink.net/~cassidyny/naldertip.htm>
- The Society of Professional Journalists - <http://www.spj.org/pdf/ethicscode.pdf>
- Attacks on the Press 1999: Sri Lanka by the Committee to Protect Journalists - <http://cpj.org/2000/03/attacks-on-the-press-1999-sri-lanka.php>
- <http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/sri-lanka-fifty-years-on.pdf>
- Section 5.1 of The Code of Professional Practice (Code of Ethics) of the Editors Guild of Sri Lanka – [http://www.fojo.se/polopoly\\_fs/1.1900!Code%20of%20Ethics-%20English.pdf](http://www.fojo.se/polopoly_fs/1.1900!Code%20of%20Ethics-%20English.pdf)
- <http://groundviews.org/2010/11/04/a-turn-for-the-worse-undergraduate-protests-and-unrest-in-sri-lanka/>
- Google - <http://www.google.com/>
- Wikipedia - <http://www.wikipedia.org/>
- South Florida Hurricane Relief Fraud Report - <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/local/southflorida/sfl-femacoverage,0,3866065.storygallery>
- Edgar Database at the US Securities and Exchange Commission - <http://www.sec.gov/edgar/searchedgar/webusers.htm>
- <http://groundviews.org/2010/11/19/record-breaking-rice-cakes-but-at-what-cost/>

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ISBN: 978-955-1281-47-2