The Hidden Scenario

Plotting and outlining investigative stories

by Luuk Sengers and Mark Lee Hunter

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Introduction

In 2009, we and other investigative reporters published *Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists*. Funded by UNESCO, translated into numerous languages and released as a free download on over 200 websites, it quickly became one of the most widely distributed reference works in journalism.

The innovation of *Story-Based Inquiry* resides in its methodological approach. It is not just a summary of anecdotal experiences or tips – it is a coherent procedure for journalists who want to investigate, based on doctoral-level research, a total of a hundred years of professional practice, and extensive field testing with literally hundreds of students and professionals. The basic concept is that a story takes shape not when an investigation is finished, but when it begins; thus investigating and writing are part of the same process.

In the three years following publication, we have continued our research on the story-based inquiry method. Our goal, as always, is to continually make the process of investigation more efficient and effective – to offer creative techniques that solve the real problems investigative reporters and trainers encounter; to help them make quicker and better decisions, thus leaving more time for storytelling. In teaching the method to journalists, trainers and students, we have become aware of issues and needs that require more attention than we could provide in our first manual. We have

also discovered further processes that can make investigative stories richer and more rewarding to create.

This handbook is the first of a series that sets out our recent discoveries. We gave ourselves certain constraints: Each text must focus on one key technique. They must each cost no more than a newsstand magazine, so that anyone can afford them. And they must contain techniques that are immediately useful to journalists, teachers or activists engaged in investigations.

One of those techniques is *making a scenario*, and it consists of two successive processes. On the one hand it refers to the elaboration of a sequence of events in a story – a task that calls first on the imagination of the investigator, leading to a prospective chronology that is subsequently verified, revised or discarded. On the other hand, a scenario requires the transformation of information into dramatic scenes. In this handbook we will deal with both of these procedures.

We understand that they may upset some reporters and teachers, who will see in them an invitation to falsification of reality. Are we merely composing scripts into which selected facts will fit? We are perfectly aware that this danger exists. There are few safeguards, but they can be effective: A relentless focus on verification, openness to facts beyond one's imagining, the critical judgment of peers and the public, and an unyielding desire to tell the truth. Journalists who do not care about the truth can certainly use our methods, and we can't stop them. But to paraphrase Woody Allen, if we want to help the world, we have to tell better stories. Facts alone do not tell a story; a story tells the facts, and without a story to give them meaning, the gravest of facts are without consequence. So we must be diligent, even compulsive, about sticking to the facts, while providing them with a powerful vehicle. For us, the aim of investigative journalism is to produce true stories that unleash energy to change the reader or the viewer, and perhaps even the world, for the better. To that end, we can provide honest reporters with tools to make their work more effective, more memorable, and simpler to produce.

A scenario is one of those tools. It is neither the only tool available to

investigators, nor necessarily the most powerful in a given situation. But in the right situation, it can be very useful. It is particularly useful in the planning stage of an investigation, when a reporter or a team are trying to gauge the plausibility and importance of a subject; and in the composition phase, when a reporter and editor or producer are trying to bring a story to life. The first part of making a scenario, in which the reporter builds and verifies a chronology, can be easily applied to any story in which a sequence of actions takes place over time – for example, crime, or business, or political campaigns. The second part of the process, in which the reporter constructs discrete scenes, can just as easily be applied to structures involving movement and encounters across a landscape – in literary terms, a picaresque narrative (think of Huckleberry Finn, David Balfour or Don Quixote). Both procedures work well in documentary or investigative filmmaking as well as print.

We have organised the text as follows:

Part One sets out a basic principle of *scenarising* an investigation: constructing a chronology. The required techniques are not complicated, but they need to be applied together, as a system. In Part Two, we move on to the construction of powerful scenes. As the New Journalists discovered, reporting scenes is not the same as reporting facts. Here we try to alert the reader to the kinds of dramatic details that must be collected, and why. Part Three shows how the scenes lead to sources: people, documents and data that might be available to prove your hypothesis and describe your scenes. We will emphasise documents, since they are often more reliable than interviews and richer in information (records might provide you with answers that you didn't ask for – something that seldom happens in interviews). Part Four is about applying your scenario in the field, as a research tool.

We'll conclude with some suggestions for further reading, drawing from journalistic and non-journalistic sources. It is now almost 50 years since the New Journalists proposed that reporting could both contribute to, and learn from, other forms of narrative art. One implication is that journalism is not a refuge for failed writers or filmmakers, a second-rate endeavour. We agree.

We would like to thank Gavin MacFadyen, founder of the Centre for Investigative Journalism in London, for his support and encouragement over the past decade. Along with Pia Thordsen and Rana Sabbagh, Gavin was among the first to recognise our research and encourage the development of *Story-Based Inquiry*. We hope that this handbook justifies their faith in our work. We also hope that for experienced reporters, it will do what *Story-Based Inquiry* did for many: make them conscious of their own best reflexes, and thus give them greater control over their skills. For beginning reporters and campaigners, we hope that this work and the ones that follow will open doors to a new power. Too often, we hear that investigative journalism is slow and expensive. Sure, it costs more than cut-and-paste "churnalism", in Nick Davies' apt phrase, but often enough, the delays and costs result from poor method; they are not inherent in the task. Too often, young journalists are given to understand that investigative reporting is difficult and dangerous. It can be. But it can also be one of the best things one will ever do in life, and it is learnable. This handbook will show you one way to do it. There are other ways, of course; you will find some in our companion volume, *The Global Casebook* (UNESCO 2011). This one works, and it can work for you. We hope you'll use it well.

Part One

From Hypothesis to Timeline

"Investigative reporting is doing a few simple things remarkably well."

– Nick Davies

I. What do you hope to reveal?

In a scientific article in a specialised magazine, written by scientists of the Technical University of Denmark in Copenhagen, reporters[1] discovered a mystery. The chemists had taken plastic pipes, the kind available in do-it-yourself stores, into a laboratory and filled them with tap water. At intervals the scientists took samples of the water, and found to their surprise that after a couple of hours it showed traces of chemicals that could only have

[1] This investigation was carried out by reporters from the Investigative Reporters Network Europe (IReNE). The core examples in this handbook are drawn from one of the resulting stories, "*Danger from the Tap*", by Luuk Sengers, published by *Algemeen Dagblad* in 2005. A version is available at: www.storybasedinquiry.com

come from the pipes. The chemists couldn't say whether or not the chemicals were dangerous, however.

It would take a few months for the reporters to find the answer. But in the meanwhile, they had a burning question. And that is what most investigations start with – an *incomplete* story or set of facts contained in a tip, a hint, a rumour, a strange experience, or a statement. In the case at hand, we know that chemicals are leaking from plastic pipes into water. What we don't know – what we can only *suspect* – is that those chemicals can hurt people.

The first, absolutely crucial step of making a scenario is to *express* this suspicion as a *hypothesis*.

You cannot create a valid non-fiction scenario without a hypothesis, so we are going to take a moment to tell you how to do it. At the most basic level, a hypothesis is a theory, a suspicion; it is what *you think* happened.

A hypothesis can also be viewed as the answer to the question: *What do you hope to reveal?* There is no reason to deny that hope. No successful investigation was ever conducted without at least a faint idea about the outcome. We would not even make the point, except that some journalists find it hard to admit that they have conceived even a hypothetical result in advance; they are afraid of appearing biased. It is true that a hypothesis urges you to make choices – in particular, to focus on particular aspects of a story. But the point of calling yourself an 'investigative reporter' is that *you are able to prove or disprove a given story*. If the theory of your choice accounts for all the available facts, then it is no longer a 'bias', but as valid a truth as we can find.

Reporters may also worry that a hypothesis introduces an imaginary element into their search for the truth. That is a peculiar fear. Not only artists, but also explorers, detectives, and scientists embrace imagination as their companion. A search is more likely to be fruitful if you have a picture in your head of what you are looking for. In our experience, a good hypothesis is seldom *completely* wrong. There is often at least *some* truth in it. (Columbus did not find a passage to India, as he hoped, but he nonetheless sailed west in keeping with a plausible theory, and he found a continent.) This is not

entirely surprising, since the hypothesis is based on a concrete element – like personal experience, a tip, a statement or a strong suspicion.

In the case at hand, the hypothesis can be formulated as:

> **Pipe manufacturers add dangerous chemicals to their plastic water pipes that end up in drinking water and kill people.**

If that's true, it's a dreadful and important story, and indeed, it sounds as if it *could* be true. As such it illustrates a point: A good hypothesis almost speaks for itself: Of course, *that* is the story!

But in our experience, reporters (or scientists, for that matter) rarely get to that point on the first try. Where reporters are concerned, we think that this is partly a matter of professional reflexes. The typical hypothesis is a combination of *facts* (already known elements) and *assumptions* (new elements you want to reveal), and reporters are trained to avoid assumptions and stick to the facts. We repeat: There is nothing wrong with making an assumption, as long as you *know* you are doing so and verify it carefully. In fact, one of the purposes of a hypothesis is to make your assumptions explicit, which practically obliges you to verify them.

It will be easier to make a robust hypothesis if you follow these steps:

1. Write the tip, rumour, experience or statement that grabbed your attention at the top of an empty document.
In the drinking water story, the statement in the scientific journal furnished the starting point: *Plastic pipes leak chemicals into drinking water.*

2. Ask any and all questions that pop up in your head.
What do you want to know that the starting point *doesn't* tell us? Allow all questions to surface, no matter how absurd or difficult to answer they appear to be. You can choose the best ones later. For example: "Why would anyone use such chemicals? Where do they come from? Are they in anything else?"

3. Choose one question.
Pick the question that is the most urgent and/or most important for you or your target audience. In this story the most urgent question is clearly: "Are the chemicals that leak from plastic water pipes dangerous for our health?"

4. Answer that question *yourself*.
The answer that you formulate *is* a hypothesis!

In the story at hand, this was the first hypothesis: "Plastic water pipes leak dangerous chemicals into drinking water." We will add more questions and more hypotheses to this foundation in a moment.

5. Take people as the focus.
Don't investigate "things" or "problems"; investigate *people*. Don't ask yourself: "What do I want to investigate?" but "*Who* do I want to investigate?" Stories are about *people*, not about dead matter (if galaxies are exploding in a distant universe, we do not care unless human beings are affected). Moreover, taking *people* as a starting point makes your life as an investigator much easier.

You don't want to investigate "plastic pipes", do you? They are hardly available for interviews, and it would be silly to blame them for whatever went wrong. It's much more useful to ask: *Who* is responsible for the problem? *Who* causes dangerous chemicals to leak into our drinking water?

In our example, pipe manufacturers are the main 'doers' – the *subjects* of the story. If they hadn't used dangerous chemicals in their products, there would be no danger. They can now be added into the hypothesis: "*Pipe manufacturers* add dangerous chemicals to plastic water pipes."

6. Add concrete details.
It is easier to prove the existence of concrete elements than of abstract concepts. Taking a person or group of people as the subject of your hypothesis – instead of the problem that they might have caused – is the first step in making it more concrete. Other concrete elements that you can

try to add are:

- Actions (who did what);
- Instruments (such as the materials used by the 'doer' or subject);
- Victims and beneficiaries (the objects of the actions);
- Places, settings (such as buildings or offices) and times where crucial actions occurred.

In other words, the hypothesis can give detailed answers to classic journalistic questions: who, what, where and when? Don't worry if the hypothetical answers are wrong; the hypothesis, precisely, enables you to *check* if they are right or wrong.

You may have noticed something missing from our classic w's: the 'why'. In investigative reporting, we think you're better off without it, at least at the start. Motive is often hard to prove – in fact, even the people who do something may not be sure why they did it, or lie to themselves about their own motives. (There are exceptions – for example, when a source offers an explanation for a given action, as in 'we sold blood products contaminated with AIDS to hemophiliacs *because* no other products were available.' We will return to this point later; for the moment, note that even here, the exception leads to a concrete fact – were other products available? – that can be verified.) Instead of why, focus on *how*. For instance: You can plausibly imagine, and likely prove, that the dangerous chemicals used by pipe manufacturers are cheaper than other, safer substances. But it is much harder to prove that manufacturers use dangerous chemicals *only* to maximise their profits.

In fact, motive is usually not worth worrying about (with some exceptions we'll look at later). It is perfectly acceptable to leave viewers guessing about the motives of characters in a story, including true stories. If you can prove *how* something was done, in most cases the why will be pretty obvious.

In the drinking water example the hypothesis could now be extended to the instruments and victims: "Pipe manufacturers add dangerous chemicals to their plastic water pipes that leak into drinking water and kill people."

In other words, try to formulate your hypothesis as:

Someone does something to someone else, at a certain place and time.

Another good practice is: Add facts (including details) that you already *know*. An hypothesis is typically formed from a combination of facts that are already known and assumptions by the investigator trying to connect the dots.

The scientific article that provoked the toxic pipes investigation, for example, already revealed important details. It stated that the leaking only occurred in pipes made of *polyethelene*, and not of other plastics, and that the main group of chemicals they detected was *phenols*. So the hypothesis can be sharpened to: "Pipe manufacturers add cheap but dangerous phenols to their polyethylene water pipes, that leak into drinking water and kill people." Why would we do that? So that we don't waste time – the only resource we will never recuperate if we lose it – investigating every chemical that appears in plastic water pipes.

7. Avoid passive, denying and accusing statements

a. Don't use the verb 'to be' in the hypothesis. Make sure that the subject actually *does* something, because you can't check a state of being as easily as you can verify an action. 'Pipe manufacturers *are* responsible for the deaths of people who drank water from their pipes' is hardly as easy to prove as 'Pipe manufacturers *add* potentially lethal chemicals to their products.'

b. Keep away from negatives. Don't state what did *not* happen, since that is usually harder to prove than what *did* happen. Don't say: 'Pipe manufactures don't care about the users of their products'. They will claim that this is absurd, and it probably is. Instead, say: 'Pipe manufactures ignored warnings about the health risks of their products.' That will be harder to deny once you have proof that they were, in fact, warned. See if your subject (the doer) fits into an active role; for example, see if he or she consciously *ignored* something, rather than just *failed* to handle it.

Another way to get rid of negatives in a hypothesis is to state a concrete *alternative* to what did not happen. Pipe manufacturers don't care about

their customers, you say? Well, if that is true, then what do they *do* instead that makes their disdain evident? Do you imagine pipe manufacturers, for example, who refuse to allow their own children to use their products?

c. Stay even further away from accusations. 'Pipe manufacturers are criminals who only care about profits' looks fierce, but does not lead to a shred of evidence. In the short run it will make your encounters with these people very uncomfortable, especially once they realise that you despise them. It will also encourage you to overlook evidence that they are not monsters, after all. In the long run it will get you condemned for libel, because you will never prove that anyone cares *only* about profits.

8. Don't aim too low.

It may seem a bit aggressive to suppose that ordinary water pipes kill people, but it is not impossible. Aim for the maximum plausible theory – the one that makes the biggest headline. You can always revise it later, if you can't find the facts to back up the worst case scenario. (In the toxic pipe story the chemicals turned out to have a less immediately fatal effect than we hypothesised, but were implicated in organ defects and certain types of cancer.) If you can't do the maximum, figure out what you *can* do, and decide if that piece of the story is worth your time. (The value of your time is *not* zero.)

Follow these eight steps, and you will be able to give a clear and concise answer to the question: *what do you hope to reveal?*

II. What else must have happened? Beginning the scenario

"The ideal reasoner, he said, would, when he had once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chain of events which led up to it but also all the results which would follow from it."

– Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

How can a mere journalist prove that people die because of chemicals in

their drinking water? The answer is: by verifying every single detail of the process. To do so, you have to break the hypothesis into smaller steps, and investigate them one by one.

The technique involves creating a *hypothetical* timeline of all the events that *might* lead to the contamination of water and the poisoning of innocent users. It looks like this:

1. **Pipe manufacturers realise that dangerous chemicals are cheaper than safer alternatives.**
2. **Pipe manufacturers buy dangerous chemicals.**
3. **Pipe manufacturers add dangerous chemicals to their plastic water pipes.**
4. **Pipe manufacturers lobby to prevent a ban on the dangerous chemicals.**
5. **Governments allow the use of the dangerous chemicals in water pipes.**
6. **Plumbers install plastic water pipes in homes and offices.**
7. **Chemists discover chemicals from plastic pipes in drinking water.**
8. **Biologists show a link between the chemicals found in the drinking water and grave side effects.**
9. **Scientists express their concern to governments about the use of the dangerous chemicals in consumer products.**

Notice the following features of the timeline, starting with the most obvious:

A timeline is a list of events, in chronological order.

Each of these nine steps expresses an *event*, and the events are set in chronological order. Remember that the timeline describes a process. So, when you add an event, put it in chronological order. It sounds simple, but you'd be amazed how many people let a nice, clean timeline become a muddy pile of data.

Like the hypothesis, the timeline is a combination of what you already know for certain, and what you can plausibly guess.

All the events in our nine-point timeline are hypothetical, except for number 7: 'Chemists discover chemicals from plastic pipes in drinking water.'

We have already taken this point as true, because we can document the discovery. (If a direct witness attests to something, you may also consider it as true unless and until stronger evidence emerges that it is not.) In effect, we took this event as a starting point. We then worked forward and backward in time, to imagine what must have happened *before* the chemists discovered the chemical traces in drinking water, and what would surely happen *afterwards* if nothing changed. We will return to this point later.

Each event has a human being for its driver.

Notice something strange in the timeline: The most important step in the whole toxic process occurs when the chemicals actually 'migrate' (as it is called) from the plastic into the water, *and this step is missing from the timeline*. The reason is that at this point the drivers of the action are chemicals, and not human beings.

Do we have an alternative? Yes, because the event is embedded in *another* event: 'Chemists discover chemicals from plastic pipes in drinking water.' Why do we proceed in this way? One reason is that the migration process is not visible to a scientist, let alone a peeping journalist – and if you can't see it, it's very, very hard to prove it. So instead, we put another event in the timeline – the discovery of the *effect* of the migration. This we can prove: Chemicals swimming in drinking water are captured on the flickering screen of a scientist's nifty gas chromatography spectrometer.

There are no events that we can't see, because if it can't be seen, it can't be proven.

Another absolutely key event is missing from the timeline: namely, consumers dying after drinking water from plastic pipes. Alas, the causes of such deaths are not directly visible, either. It is practically impossible to draw a straight line between death and a normal dose of ordinary drinking water. Like many hazardous substances, phenols build up in the body over a period of time, and the level has to reach a certain threshold before effects are visible. Moreover, the causes are often obscured by other factors. Inas-

much as the purpose of a timeline is to indicate things that we need to prove, and we can't prove this, we can remove it.

However, if the effects of phenols on human cells *can* hardly be observed in private kitchens and bathrooms, they can be discerned in certain laboratories. Hence the next step in the timeline: 'Biologists show a link between the chemicals in the drinking water and grave side effects.' If this is true – if biologists have found such a link – then we *can* prove it.

No show, no tell. If you can't show it, you can't prove it, so you don't say it.

The chronology is built from conditions and consequences.

Most of the events in the timeline were not expressed in the original hypothesis. Events 1-6, which deal respectively with the role of manufacturers who put dangerous chemicals in pipes, governments which allow their use, and plumbers who install the pipes, have something important in common. They are *conditions* for the hypothesis to be true. If any of these had *not* happened – if manufacturers used other chemicals, or the government banned the chemicals, or plumbers refused to use plastic pipes instead of copper and steel – there would have been no problem in the first place.

Events 7-9, which describe the discovery of the chemicals in water, their link to side effects, and the protests of scientists, are not conditions, but *consequences*. They happen as an *effect* of the previous events.

Ever since the days of Sherlock Holmes, investigators know that certain things can happen only when other things happen *first*. And when certain things happen, there must be a *reaction*.

This is where a timeline creates its true value. When you make your first version, check that you haven't forgotten other events that must have happened, *in between* the events that are already there. The way to do this is to ask yourself for every event in the timeline: What must have happened *before* this? What must have happened *during* the event, and in parallel? And what must have happened *after* this? (In the Watergate investigation, when investigators realised that after a certain date, the panic at the White

House turned into choreographed movement, they knew that a key meeting had taken place. When they obtained Nixon's audio tapes of his meetings, they went straight to that date.) By asking these questions, you will capture the *conditions* that made your story possible, and the *consequences* that made it evident.

Under these conditions, it's permissible to imagine a scene before you have any proof of what actually happened. Your imagination is a strong research tool: it makes you sensitive to details that you may otherwise overlook. And if you *can't* find the expected details in reality, you will also be more aware of the things you didn't expect.

III. Using Characters to Build the Timeline

There is an alternative way to create a timeline. In an investigative story, unlike a news story, individuals are not only sources or spokespeople – they are actors in events; they play a role in the narrative at a given point or points in time. They are characters, in more ways than one. You will document the role they play, and how they play it. There are two steps:

1. Make a list of the characters involved in the story

Obviously the subject of your hypothesis is the 'principal character' of your story. But there are 'supporting' characters too. They help carry out or bring to light the actions stated in the hypothesis, either as helpers, victims or witnesses. So the question is: *Who is involved?*

a. Let's start with the *principal character*. In order to be able to act, he or she needs to get access to the necessary *means*. The pipe manufacturers, for instance, must buy dangerous chemicals before they can mix them into their pipes. Then they need *opportunity*. They may need authorisations to purchase the chemicals. (As it turned out, they successfully lobbied the European Parliament to prevent a ban on the use of those materials in consumer products.) And finally they may express a *motive* for their actions. Now, we previously said that at the start of an investigation, it's best to leave

motives aside. However, what characters *say* or *claim* about their own actions can be viewed as very informative, even if their professed motive is merely designed to make them look good (for example, saying 'our new breed of water pipes eliminate dangers associated with metal pipes', while passing over new dangers). The statements of characters may also reveal a measure of truth, as in: 'Pipe manufacturers admit that they use dangerous chemicals because they are cheaper than safer alternatives.' If these statements are quoted accurately, and in context, they also provide proof of a reporter's good faith ('I listened to everyone'). Not least, the proof can't be attacked in court: How can a reporter be blamed for what a given character said of her own free will?

Think of means, opportunity and motive as useful techniques to define a character's role in a story, rather than as ways to prove he or she is guilty of something. If the story exposes a guilty party, so be it. But journalists are not prosecutors, and we are not always pursuing criminals. Very often, our targets are people who made a mistake, from carelessness, haste, or simple stupidity. That doesn't mean they should always be forgiven, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they are evil, either. Leave space for compassion in your investigation. It will enable you to see more of the truth, and it will make it easier for others to speak with you.

b. *Helpers* make it possible for other actors to drive events by supplying financial, legal, intellectual or physical resources (such as funding, expertise, intelligence or muscle). They too can be held responsible (to a degree) for what happens.

c. *Beneficiaries* are people who profit from the principal character's actions, financially or otherwise.

d. *Victims* suffer from the principal character's actions. They may react, as individuals or as a group. They may also incite others to protest, like lawyers, interest groups, NGOs, trade unions, etc.

e. *Witnesses* observe events without taking part. They can be experts who do not work for any of the other actors; or bystanders, like a woman who's walking her dog when she spots robbers who jump into a waiting car and

speed away; or professionals, like a guard in the bank that was robbed, or an analyst who monitors a particular industry, or regulators and scientists.

2. Specify what the characters do and when.

Take the list of characters in the timeline and define exactly what each does. In other words: What is his or her role in the story?

Then, revise your list by putting these roles in chronological order, according to when the characters first appear in the story. This is what resulted from this technique for the toxic pipes story:

Principal characters: Pipe manufacturers put dangerous chemicals in their products in order to cut their costs;

Helpers: Government agencies approve the pipes for use and plumbers apply the plastic pipes on a large scale;

Victims: Consumers and their families drink water from the pipes;

Witnesses: Chemists discover the chemicals in drinking water and biologists discover a link between the chemicals and grave side effects.

This procedure enables us to verify that our hypothetical timeline makes sense; if the roles of the actors don't match the sequence of events, something is wrong. It also alerts you to the kinds of people you will meet in the course of your research. Knowing the part they played, and when they played it, will make those conversations easier to commence and far richer.

Part Two

From Timeline to Scenes

Reporting for Scenes

It took three interviews for a leading scientist in Denmark to give away his true feelings about his discovery of phenols in drinking water. It happened when reporters showed him scientific proof that phenols can disrupt the endocrine system, resulting in irreparable damage to organs or in cancer. He said: 'I'm going to call my daughter right away and tell her not to mix the baby's milk with tap water.'

By the standards of news reporting, this is not much of an event. It was nonetheless the first time that this internationally recognized researcher showed the reporters his emotions. In doing so he provided them with an idea for a scene.

A scene conveys different information and significance from an event. In an ordinary event something *happens*; in a scene, a character *struggles*. The

stakes of the struggle convey the meaning of the scene, and of the information it contains.

For example, our timeline says that this scientist and his colleagues 'discover chemicals from plastic pipes in drinking water.' That exactly describes the event. But you could also argue that this moment was a great deal richer than the description implies. The test itself was hardly the scientists' final goal. They wanted to establish with certainty that harmful substances *do not* leak from pipes into drinking water. When they discovered that there were chemicals in the water that they could not positively identify as harmless, they were surely surprised, and not happily. They now had to contend with doubt as to the real implications of their findings. *And so does the viewer*.

Surprise and uncertainty are the main ingredients of any scene, because they make the reader want to keep on reading, and the viewer to keep on viewing. In the sequence of events described above, there are repeated surprises: An important scientist gets the idea of testing plastic water pipes, because past experiments had shown that plastic sometimes leaks dangerous chemicals into water. He hopes to discover that widely used water pipes are demonstrably safe. His first surprise is that the pipes leak a number of chemicals. This creates a terrible uncertainty: the effects on human health of some of these chemicals are unknown to him. Should he loudly sound the alarm? For the moment, he settles for a report in a scientific journal. But the thought that the chemicals could be lethal gnaws at him, especially now that he has a grandchild. When he learns that his fears are justified, the first response of this careful, cautious man is to call his daughter and warn her. In the next scene, the scientist uses all his influence to raise money from the government for more research into the health effects of plastic water pipes. There are surprises for the viewer, too: As the story progresses, we keep seeing different sides of the scientist's character, and different roles that he plays. What drives those changes is that the danger he contends with continues to grow, beyond what any of us imagined.

A lot of the material that investigative journalists deal with would bore anyone else to tears: incomprehensible documents, piles of data, interviews

with experts or idiots. If we throw all these facts at the public, readers or viewers will simply turn us off. If we embed them into the stories of individuals who struggle to prevail over the mess that is the world, we will keep the public with us at every step.

Scenes are the basic narrative units at our disposal: *detailed descriptions of actions at a given point in time, leading to a climax*. Unlike the writer of fiction, we can't make them up – not if we want to claim the rights and powers of a journalist, which are to find and reveal the truth about real-world situations and personalities. Luckily for us, however, some of the events in the timeline contain brilliant scenes. We can capture and reconstruct them, collecting their dramatic elements as we report the story. We suggest the following procedure.

1. Choose the most dramatic climaxes from the timeline.

The events in the timeline are really *climaxes*: crucial or definitive actions, which determine the course of the story. Without any of these events, the story would be different. On the other hand, not all events are as meaningful as others.

Look at the timeline: Which of the climaxes it contains have the most impact on your story? In our example, two events leap out: 'Chemists discover chemicals from plastic pipes in drinking water', and 'biologists show a link between the chemicals found in the drinking water and grave side effects'. Without these two events, our larger story – that people can get mortally ill from drinking tap water – is mere speculation.

Whatever the space at your disposal, you must focus first on the events with the most dramatic impact. If those scenes do not work, neither will your story.

2. Choose an interesting individual.

Imagine a character who will be affected by his own actions – someone whose life, career, behaviour or beliefs change because of what she does or what she experiences. You will find that character at the centre of an event

in which she or he is an actor. For example, the Danish scientist ceases to be an ivory-tower intellectual when he realises that his grandchild must be protected from tap water.

If you discover more than one such character, congratulations: Each of them will furnish you with a central actor in at least one scene. In journalism, unlike fiction, it is perfectly acceptable, viable and effective to shift point of view (the personage through which events are seen) from one character to another. In fact, that is perhaps *the* key narrative advantage of journalism.

3. Imagine possible conflicts.

The character has to overcome obstacles in order to reach his goal. The struggle to do so – in other words, the attempt to resolve conflicts – is what makes a scene more dramatic than an ordinary event.

Take a look at this list of possibilities and ask yourself: Can any of this have happened in my story?

- **The character failed entirely or partially to reach a goal.**

If so, what kept her from it? If you don't know, hypothesise the cause.

- **The character encountered opposition.**

Opposition can come from another character (in Greek drama, the 'antagonist') or from a social group, like a family, colleagues, friends, neighbours, competitors, bandits, or even a protest movement. Its forms may include critiques, objections, lies, deceptions, accusations, prosecutions, etc. Many of these adversarial actions leave traces that you can document.

- **The character confronted natural or material obstacles.**

Floods, fires and earthquakes can defeat even the heroic. But the material obstacles most of us have to overcome regularly have nothing to do with Mother Nature: lack of money, lack of physical strength, lack of skills, lack of resources are a few of the more painful ones. We can be hit by illness or accident, loss and theft. There may be a sudden change in a contract or in legislation, or in the stock market, or any market. The industry that employs us can be overtaken and wiped out by a more innovative industry.

In practical terms, this means that you must document the environment in which your characters move. That includes everything from their physical surroundings to their organisational and economic status. What you seek here are forces that the character *must* deal with, whether or not he or she wants to. For example, if a pipe manufacturer suddenly discovers that her biggest market is do-it-yourself stores, and those stores are turning to cheaper suppliers, the manufacturer may be more attracted by cheap alternatives to the materials that make up her products.

The character had to make a choice.

Did he consciously choose from alternatives? Did he have to pick one or another way to solve a dilemma? If so, what instruments did he prefer? The moment when a choice is made is *always* an important scene.

The character took a risk.

Was she afraid of what might happen? Was there a threat of danger or failure? Or did she push her luck? Did she realise that she was playing with fire, and that the outcome of her actions could be merely bad or completely disastrous, for him or for others? People who have to take tough decisions, who invest their time and other resources in achieving a certain goal (such as politicians, CEOs or scientists), sometimes also take great risks. Documenting those risks – for example, by the potential or real consequences of a given decision – generates great drama. So does demonstrating that the individuals who pay for the risks are not those who assumed them in the first place. For example, pipe manufacturers may be taking a serious risk by using substances with unpredictable properties in their products, but they won't be the only ones who suffer as a consequence.

The character was lucky.

It is also possible to be affected by a *positive* disturbance. Finally pregnant! An unexpected prize or award! A promotion! A fortuitous encounter! Love! The lottery! The conflicts here may stem from unexpected adverse consequences of good fortune – the dream job turns out to be worse than slavery – or from new responsibilities that go with success, or from some hidden fact that will reveal the triumph to be hollow or toxic. In one case we

worked on, the Museums of France forced the auction house, Christie's, to sell them an Old Masters painting at a bargain price; the curators' satisfaction lasted until a prosecutor showed up to inform them that the painting had been stolen from a woman who died in the thief's hands, and before long, one of them had been indicted for receiving stolen goods. Good luck or bad, a change is going to come, and that change creates drama.

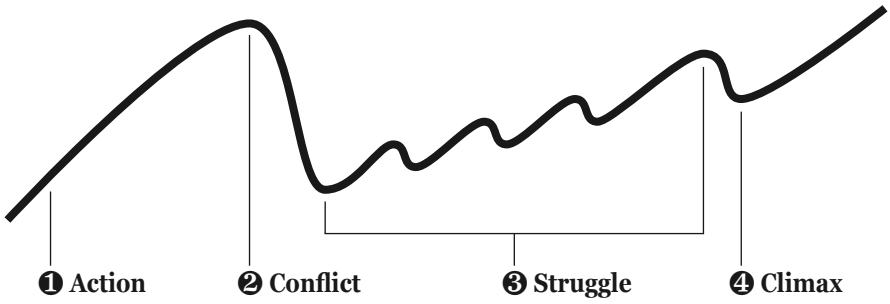
■ **The character was tempted.**

Was he lured away from an initial goal by the promise of something better? Temptation is a conflict in its own right.

Another useful trick: Let your own expression tell you when a conflict is emerging. Conflicts in our language are often announced by the word 'but'. For example: 'The scientists wanted to draw a conclusion about the health risks of plastic water pipes, *but* instead they found chemicals whose effects they didn't know.' Whenever you can add the word 'but' after an action, you are in the presence of a conflict and a struggle.

4. Rephrase the event as a scene.

There are many ways to view a scene, and this one supports reportage: Think of the scene as containing four elements (see illustration below): it starts with an action ❶, then a conflict occurs ❷, next the character struggles to overcome this hurdle ❸ and finally he or she succeeds or surrenders, the climax ❹.



To rephrase events as scenes, try to formulate them in four segments, like in these examples from the drinking water story:

'Chemists discover dangerous chemicals from plastic pipes in drinking water' can be changed into:

❶ *A chemical scientist* puts water in plastic pipes in his laboratory.

❷ *But* something unexpected happens (we'll confirm or disprove that later).

❸ *So* he struggles to solve the problem (this is for later too).

❹ *Finally* he discovers dangerous chemicals in drinking water from the plastic pipes.

While interviewing the scientist, the reporters asked him specifically about possible conflicts and struggles, and filled in the scene:

❶ *Erik Arvin* puts water in plastic pipes in his laboratory. He wants to *rule out* that dangerous chemicals leak from the pipes into water.

❷ *But* to his surprise, he does not recognise all of the chemicals he finds, so he can't tell whether they are dangerous or not.

❸ *So* he begs the government for more funding to extend his research.

❹ *Finally* he learns that the chemicals in drinking water are indeed dangerous.

Another example: The event 'biologists show a link between the chemicals and grave side effects' became the following passage (this time, in one piece) after an interview:

'In her laboratory, biologist Ana Soto placed human cells in test tubes. After a while she noted that the cells had started to proliferate. *But* that was impossible; nothing else in the tubes could spur such growth. She eliminated all the possible causes of the phenomenon. In the end she could think of only one explanation, however improbable: The cells had multipled under the influence of chemicals originating from the plastic in the tubes.'

Note how the surprise in this scene ('the cells start to proliferate') leads to a conflict ('but to her surprise'), followed by a struggle ('she eliminates all possible causes') and finally to a climax: phenols are causing human cells to multiply in an uncontrollable manner, which is what happens with cancer. To report this scene, the reporters needed to know every step in Ana Soto's discovery, as well as her emotions at each of these points in time.

Reporting for scenes (getting details for the story) is different from *reporting for facts* (getting proof for your hypothesis), but they can be done simultaneously. While asking about the facts in an interview, keep your eyes and ears open for hidden conflicts and struggles and for details to describe characters, objects and locations.

Why go to all the trouble of collecting all this data, and then composing it into a scene? We could, after all, just say it straight: 'Phenols can cause cancer.' The problem is, true or not, why would you believe us? We're just reporters (and by the way, a great many people think reporters are professional liars). If we show you an expert witness who reached that conclusion on the basis of unmistakable evidence, and against her own expectations, won't you find her more convincing?

We know what Robert Louis Stevenson would say, because he used the same technique. In *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, not once does he tell the reader, 'Please, believe me: A gentleman can turn into a beast by drinking certain chemicals.' First he shows you an impeccable witness who has seen the beast, thus proving its existence, and later he produces another witness who watches the beast become the good Doctor Jekyll by drinking a potion. It's fiction, of course; the witnesses are inventions.

You are in the business of finding flesh and blood witnesses who know a piece of the truth, and the technique works even better with them. If an imaginary firsthand report can make the transformation of Hyde into Jekyll more plausible, imagine the effect you can create when the events described actually took place. If you can find that material, why *wouldn't* you use it?

Part Three

From Scenes to Sources

Mapping the Sources

Once you have identified the possible scenes in your story, it is a small step to imagine the sources that may be available to verify these hypothetical scenes with facts. This is the final step in your outline – from hypothesis to timeline to sources. Together they form a research plan, a strategy for your investigation.

Look at every scene in your timeline and ask yourself: *'Who or what can give me proof that this really happened?'*

1. Imagine people to talk to.

Reporters have a tendency to overuse human sources – but even worse, they overuse the *same* human sources, the ones already quoted in news reports. Now that you've taken the time to imagine some others, these characters

deserve a visit:

- *Doers and helpers*: the person or group of people who are responsible for the action in a given scene.
- *Victims and beneficiaries*: people who lost or gained because of this action.
- *Witnesses*: people who accidentally saw or professionally monitored what happened.

2. Imagine documents you want to obtain.

Some sort of paperwork frequently comes into being because of the events in a true-life scene. In general, the paper trail is created by the people involved: the doers, the victims, the beneficiaries and the witnesses. The investigator can therefore ask: *What kinds of documents did the people involved in the scene possibly create?* In other words, you can hypothesise the existence of the documents you would like to find, and then confirm whether they exist or not. Be serious about this. It is plausible, if not practically certain, that paperwork exists to show the legal owner of a certain house or company; it is not plausible that you will find tax records for the Man in the Moon. Likewise, you may hypothesise proof of the existence of a secret unit of the Bulgarian intelligence services whose specialty was 'extreme measures', as did Alexenia Dimitrova[2]; but to find it, as she did, you will need expertise in accessing and reviewing the pertinent archives. You may gain that expertise through your investigation, but don't take it for granted.

To help you brainstorm, be aware that documents related to a scene are not created all at once. Some originate from *before* the action and concern the *planning* of it. Other documents were created *during* the action, such as a secretary making a transcript of a meeting. And finally there may be documents from *after* that the scene took place, like studies or evaluations. Any

[2] Her story of that discovery, 'From Bulgaria with Love', as well as her account of how she got the story, is included in Mark Lee Hunter, editor, *The Global Casebook*, UNESCO 2011 (free download via www.storybasedinquiry.com and other sites).

of these documents may include not only paperwork, but also video footage, photographs, personal letters or emails, audio recordings and databases, and so on. (The author of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Stieg Larsson, was an investigative reporter, and the scene in which his hero patiently tracks down old photos of a key event captures a real process.)

In short: People lead to documents and vice versa (because every fresh document may give you names you didn't know). The people involved in a scene are usually the best sources for the pertinent paperwork. *Always* ask for (and collect) documents during interviews, especially at the source's office! A very large percentage of the documents used in investigative stories comes from people who were interviewed. Some sources hang on to evidence for years, waiting for someone to show up who asks good questions.

We sometimes use a table to keep track of prospective human and documentary sources for key scenes. It is a good way to see at a glance the options you have for documenting the most dramatic points in your story. This one is for the scene in which a chemist discovers chemicals from plastic water pipes in drinking water.

"PEOPLE TRAIL"		"PAPER TRAIL"		
		BEFORE	**DURING**	**AFTER**
	PRINCIPAL CHARACTER Chemical Scientist	Proposal Assignment Contract Budget	Report Data(base) Notes Log Book	Study Article Press Release Diary Interview
	VICTIMS/ BENEFICIARIES Pipe Manufacturers	Letters Emails	???	Annual Report Press Release Counter Expertise
	WITNESSES Technical University	Proposal Assignment Contract Budget	Letters Emails	Annual Report Press Release

First make a list of characters involved in the scene (first column). Next add behind every character what documents he might have produced,

before, during and after the scene (columns 2-4). The aim is to identify *all* possible sources for this scene. But you don't need to *obtain* all of these sources. The circles are drawn around sources that the reporters thought they really needed, like the contract that the chemist signed with another party for his research on plastics. But as it turned out, the story could be done without that contract.

To get your imagination working on documents that are possibly created before, during and after a certain scene, use the checklist below. It is far from complete, but provides the most common documents that turn up in investigative stories:

Planning	**Execution**	**Evaluation**	
Plan	Report	Study	Press release
Law	Minutes	Review	Speech
Proposal	Data(base)	Audit	Diary
Policy paper	Letter	Inspection	Interview
Agreement	Email	Complaints	
Assignment	Receipt	Court records	
Contract	Photo	Financial records	
Permit	Video	Company records	
Agenda	Audio	Cadaster	
Survey	Notes	Book	
Budget	Log book	Article	
Memo		Broadcast	

Add your own documents to this list. If you can link them to official or open records of some sort, keep track of that too. Sources are a reporter's key assets. Don't be careless about cataloguing your own.

3. Decide what sources you *really* need.

You don't need *all* the sources available and you will not be able to get all the sources you *want*. Put quality over quantity, and reassure yourself with the thought that if you are not able to lay your hands on a certain source, then probably neither can your competitors.

Part Four

Field Work

"Imagination is a good servant, and a bad master."

– Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*

I. Testing the Hypothesis in the Field

Don't be a slave of your hypothesis; it is a working instrument. Its purpose is to be tested against reality.

Test it first on your editor (or an experienced colleague).
Does he or she like the story? Or share your hopes of what will be revealed? Is the editor prepared to provide you with the resources that it takes to prove the story? In any case, editors much prefer to discuss a possible *story* than a vague idea or boring facts. Like everyone else, they like to see before they buy. The hypothesis projects a film or headline in their minds. So don't sell facts, sell a story!

Then, test the hypothesis in interviews.
Your sources may find it easier to deny or confirm a theory than to simply offer what they know, for all sorts of reasons (they've been burned by reporters before, they don't like your face, etc.). It will help when you say: 'Let me tell you what I think happened.'

Your hypothesis also works as a lever that restores the balance of power between you and your sources. When you arrive with a plausible theory they will get the distinct impression that you have done your homework and that you are prepared to challenge them. This can make them wary, but more often, and especially with non-hostile witnesses, it will reassure them. In particular, experts feel more comfortable talking to someone who can grasp the basics, if not every nuance, of what they have to say. Too many reporters make their sources do all the work. As a general rule, never ask a source to tell you what you can discover for yourself, unless you seek confirmation, or wish to know if the source will lie to you.

Next, test your timeline.
See if your sequence of events stands firm, just as you would for any other facts. Ask key players, when you are interviewing them, to take a look at your chronology. Did you overlook important steps? What do *they* say happened before and after every event in your timeline?

Please note: You are not required to investigate events in the same order that they occurred in time. Instead, begin with the events that are easiest to prove (we call these the 'open doors'). *This is the quickest way to test your hypothesis*. If any of the easily provable events in your chronology cannot be substantiated, your whole hypothesis may require revision. In the toxic pipes investigation, the reporters started with plumbers: After one phone call to a trade organisation, they had reliable evidence that polyethylene pipes had been widely installed in European homes and offices.

Finally, remodel the hypothesis to fit the facts.
Change your hypothesis if the facts prove it even partially wrong. Don't be

disappointed when that happens. Nuances, or even significant variations from an initial hypothesis, can make a story more convincing. In the toxic pipes example, the reporters were not able to find conclusive evidence that dangerous chemicals were added consciously to plastic water pipes, as firmly stated in the hypothesis. They did find that manufacturers sometimes use phenols as anti-oxidants, to make their products more durable. More important, manufacturers explained that the phenols found in drinking water were in fact a *by-product* of other, in principle harmless, additives they had used. This nuance did not weaken the conclusion that the pipes leaked dangerous chemicals. Instead, the manufacturers *admitted* that they knew about the problem. Repeat: Let reality control your hypothesis in the field.

II. Reporting the Conflict and Colour in Scenes

Throughout the investigation, focus firmly on possible conflicts. In every interview, ask about unexpected disturbances that the interviewee had to resolve. In every document – including bureaucratic reports that at first seem bland – read between the lines for criticisms, irony, protest. Example: Our first hint that a multinational firm had misled its shareholders about some key events that could affect its stock price resided in the deliberately mild comment of a financial analyst that the company's current woes were 'surprising, given the reassuring discourse of management.' By the linguistic standards of his profession, he was calling them liars.

Whatever your source – documentary or human – be alert to these elements:

- Did your character encounter a surprise?
- Was he or she drawn into a struggle before achieving or failing to achieve his or her goal?
- What feelings did, or will, he or she express about these events?

If you don't know what a character in your story feels, or felt at a given moment, ask him. He may lie, but even a lie will tell you what a person is

trying to hide.

Novelists have an advantage here over non-fiction writers: They can make up conflicts and emotions for their characters. Journalists have to deal with the facts. So here's a fact you must accept: *In real life, not every event contains a conflict*. Some things just run along smoothly, encountering not a single obstacle, angel or saboteur. Thus you will not always be able to find or document a conflict for each possible scene. (That's the small price we pay for the luxury of dealing with *real* people and *real* situations.) If a conflict is *not* evident to you, and no one tries to bring it to your attention, please do not waste time looking for it. We are not in the business of creating conflicts where none exists.

Always be careful not to substitute *yourself* for any character – that is, don't mistake your thoughts for the thoughts of someone else. If you tell us what the character is thinking, you must first document every idea and image that flashes through his or her mind (through interviews, diaries, letters, reports, etc.). A real person in a journalistic story is not your *thing*, to be manipulated as you please.

If you meet an interesting individual in the course of your research, document everything you can about that person. Obviously, interviews with the characters will furnish crucial information. Transcribe the interviews as completely as possible (so as to capture their vocabulary and manner of speaking), observe and note their way of dressing, the decoration of their offices, the books on their shelves, and so on. Make a particular effort to collect their writings (from articles to Facebook posts). The uses of this material are multiple. For example, by studying the speeches of a certain individual, we learned that he never lied, but often avoided revealing the truth. By studying transcripts of his testimony during a criminal investigation, we were able to identify points at which he gave answers (but not to the questions that he was asked). We hypothesised that he was trying to avoid something, and we turned out to be right.

Introducing a character (his or her upbringing, life, career and defining features) is also the first step in creating *suspense* in your story. The reader

will automatically think: 'Why is the author introducing this person?' He now expects something to happen to that character; otherwise, you would not have bothered to introduce him or her in detail. A single well-chosen detail can do the job. Hitchcock's great thriller, *Strangers on a Train*, opens with close-ups of the shoes of the two principal characters, and between the wingtips and the sneakers, you already know that two very different people are about to meet.

III. Create a Masterfile

Keep track of all your notes in a 'masterfile'. The masterfile is a single document (typically a word processing file; MS Word or Open Office will do) that contains everything related to your investigation. In a masterfile you can organise the material according to your outline. It shows the hypothesis, the timeline with the scenes, the sources, questions, notes (facts and insights), references (which fact checkers and lawyers adore) and a logbook of contacts (in case, say, you ever have to prove where you met someone).

Having all your data in one *searchable* file enables you to quickly review your notes for connections and lacunae. Moreover, while writing the masterfile, you are basically already writing your story. Once you are ready to produce the final story, the masterfile presents all the facts in a structured way.[3]

On the next two pages we have outlined a structure for a masterfile that can be created as a word processing document. Keep in mind that this is not a checklist of information that you must have in every scene; *it is a way to organise the information that you collect, as you are collecting it*. This is particularly useful in long form stories, where it is easy to drown in a flood of data, and hard to keep even important details in your head. Once you start organising your material, the benefits will be so obvious that you will develop your own systems. In the meanwhile, here are some of the

[3] We have already dealt with this subject in detail in *Story-based Inquiry*, a free download at www.storybasedinquiry.com and many other websites.

categories and tricks that we've used in building masterfiles. Try them. Use the ones that increase your productivity and help you avoid trouble; notice which ones you regret *not* having used on a project, too.

Hypothesis

- Write your hypothesis at the top of the document, in a slightly larger font, so that it catches your eye every time you open the Masterfile.
- Change it to suit new information.

Scenes

- Enter one or more scenes from the timeline.
- Start events with a date or a time (when available), like: '23/11/2012: ...' or '09:30: ...' so that you can easily create a chronology with Menu -> Table ->Sort.

Persons or Organisations

- Enter human sources under every scene.

Documents

- For interviews: name of the source and date and place of the interview.
- For paper or electronic documents: bibliographical reference.
- Give every source a unique number, for referencing purposes.
- Hyperlink, if you wish, to the original document on your hard disk or on the Web.

Facts

- Enter facts and quotes followed by the source (as in 'observation' or 'interview with X').

Notes

- Mark your own thoughts and insights with the word 'NOTX' or any other term *not* in the dictionary (to facilitate searches).
- Search the masterfile quickly for your notes with: Ctrl+F NOTX.

Questions

- Mark questions with the term 'QTN' or any term not in the dictionary.
- Search the masterfile quickly for unanswered questions with: Ctrl+F QTN.

To Do

- Mark tasks with a term not in the dictionary (for example, 'DOX…')
- Search the masterfile quickly for tasks with: Ctrl+F DOX

Contacts

- End or begin the masterfile with a list of people you have spoken to: name, function and organisation, phone numbers and email addresses. Do not include confidential sources.
- If you expect legal challenge, add a log of contacts with this person, like:
  CALL TO/FROM, 12/4/2012: … (make a short note of the conversation)
  MAIL TO/FROM, 12/4/2012: … (copy-paste content from the email)

The hypothesis becomes a timeline; the timeline turns into scenes; the scenes evoke sources; the sources confirm or disprove events and their meaning; the information becomes a masterfile, and the masterfile will become the final story. May yours change something.

Suggested Reading

If you're serious about your work, study it. We recommend the texts below.

Investigative Reporting

Brant Houston and Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE),
The Investigative Reporter's Handbook. A Guide to Documents, Databases, and Techniques, 5th Edition. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009.

Mark Lee Hunter et al.,
Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists.
UNESCO 2009.

Mark Lee Hunter, editor,
The Global Casebook. UNESCO 2011.

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel,
The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect. Three Rivers Press (CA), 2007.

Luuk Sengers (red.),
Onderzoeksjournalistiek: Researchproces van idee tot verhaal.
Lannoo Campus, 2009.

Storytelling

Jack M. Bickham,
Scene and Structure. Writer's Digest 1993.

William E. Blundell,
The Art and Craft of Feature Writing, Based on The Wall Street Journal Guide. Plume 1988.

Robert S. Boynton,
The New New Journalism. Conversations with America's best nonfiction writers on their craft. Vintage Books, 2005.

Theodore A. Rees Cheney,
Writing Creative Nonfiction. Fiction Techniques for Crafting Great Nonfiction. Ten Speed Press, 2001.

Mark Kramer and Wendy Call,
Telling True Stories, A Nonfiction Writer's Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University. Plume Books, 2007.

Robert McKee,
Story. Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting. ReganBooks, 1997.

Victoria Lynn Schmidt,
Story Structure Architect. A writer's guide to building dramatic situations & compelling characters. Writer's Digest, 2005.

Tom Wolfe, editor,
The New Journalism. Pan, 1975.

Brainstorming

Michael Michalko,
Cracking creativity. Ten Speed Press, 2001.

Luuk Sengers

is a lecturer of research techniques at Lessius Hogeschool Mechelen, and other journalism schools and universities in The Netherlands and Belgium. He teaches investigation skills to reporters in newsrooms and in journalism training programs in Europe and Africa. He has worked as an economy reporter at Dutch newspapers and magazines like *NRC Handelsblad* and *Intermediair*, where he produced investigative pieces about train accidents, hormone disrupting chemicals, hazardous baby food, inequality at the work place, unfairness in the tax system, diminishing social security and rising poverty. Nowadays, as an independent reporter, he investigates environment and sustainability issues. In 2009 he wrote a (Dutch) handbook about investigative reporting: *Onderzoeksjournalistiek. Researchproces van idee tot verhaal* (Lannoo Campus 2009). In the same year he contributed to the Unesco-manual *Story-Based Inquiry*. Luuk serves on the board of the Dutch-Flemish association of investigative journalists (VVOJ) and is a member of the Global Investigative Journalism Network.

Mark Lee Hunter

is an Adjunct Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the INSEAD Social Innovation Centre, where he is a founding member of the Stakeholder Media Project. His manual *Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists* (Unesco 2009) is the most widely-distributed reporting method in the world; a companion anthology, *The Global Casebook*, will be published in 2012. He is the author of five other books, on subjects ranging from the French extreme right to a case-cracking murder inquiry. Dr. Hunter has won two Investigative Reporters and Editors Awards (for reporting and research on journalism), along with the H.L. Mencken Free Press Award, the Sigma Delta Chi Award for research on journalism, the National Headliners and Clarion Awards, and two EFMD Awards for case-writing. His articles have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Washington Post*, *Mother Jones*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, and many others. He was a founding member of the Global Investigative Journalism Network, and serves on its board as well as the board of the German journalism review, *Message*.

More information: www.storybasedinquiry.com

cals were dangerous, however.

It would take a few months for the reporters to find the answer. But in the meanwhile, they had a burning question. And that is what most investigations start with – an *incomplete* story or set of facts contained in a tip, a hint, a rumour, a strange experience, or a statement. In the case at hand, we know that chemicals are leaking from plastic pipes into water. What we don't know – what we can only *suspect* – is that those chemicals can hurt people.

The first, absolutely crucial step of making a scenario is to express this suspicion as a *hypothesis*.

You cannot create a valid non-fiction scenario without a hypothesis, so we are going to take a moment to tell you how to do it. At the most basic level, a hypothesis is a theory, a suspicion; it is what *you think* happened.

A hypothesis can also be viewed as the answer to the question: *What do you hope to reveal?* There is no reason to deny that hope. No successful investigation was ever conducted without at least a faint idea about the outcome. We would not even make the point, except that some journalists find it hard to admit that they have conceived even a hypothetical result in advance; they are afraid of appearing biased. It is true that a hypothesis urges you to make choices – in particular, to focus on particular aspects of a story. But the point of calling yourself an 'investigative reporter' is that *you are able to prove or disprove a given story*. If the theory of your choice accounts for all the available facts, then it is no longer a 'bias', but as valid a truth as we can find.

The above extract is from "Part One: From Hypothesis to Timeline", page 9.

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