The Story Tells the Facts

Structuring and composing investigative narratives

by Mark Lee Hunter and Luuk Sengers

This book will help you to make your investigative writing better, far more quickly than you would by trial and error alone. We focus on writing skills, because they transpose very well into other media. If you can tell a story in words and capture information in a narrative, the odds of telling a good story in film or radio go up, too. Investigative hypotheses and scenarios are very handy tools in documentary work, as in print. Likewise, documentation remains a fundamental concern for investigative filmmakers, and that raises issues of organisation and quality control. Rhythm, or pacing, must be mastered

The Story Tells the Facts

Structuring and composing investigative narratives

by Mark Lee Hunter and Luuk Sengers

Published by the Centre for Investigative Journalism

Contents

Introduction

No matter how you do it, whether or not you find it enjoyable, writing is work. We have written investigative features for a living since our late 20s. It's been very rewarding – doing something we love, getting praise and dinner and money for it – but it has not become much easier over the years. One of our fathers was a very successful and productive writer and scenarist; he could be found on a couch most afternoons, drained by putting words on paper. The same thing happens to us after a few hours of writing. Unlike hard manual labour, writing will not destroy your body, but it will not get easier as you go along. It may well, however, get steadily better.

This book will help you to make your investigative writing better, far more quickly than you would by trial and error alone. We focus on writing skills, because they transpose very well into other media. If you can tell a story in words and capture information in a narrative, the odds of telling a good story in film or radio go up, too. (Yes, we have worked successfully in film, too, and our colleague Nils Hanson of Sweden's SVT network is using similar methods in the investigative unit he directs.) Investigative hypotheses and scenarios are very handy tools in documentary work, as in print. Likewise, documentation remains a fundamental concern for investigative filmmakers, and that raises issues of organisation and quality control (as SVT has also confirmed). Rhythm, or pacing, must be mastered whatever the media you work in. All of these issues, as well as tools for structuring and composing narratives, are treated in this book.

Forty years after Watergate, one still hears people – including professors,

who should know better – say that "all journalism is investigative journalism." That is nonsense, and it is plain dangerous where composing an investigative story is concerned. You can waste a lot of time doing this work, and you also run risks (like being sued, or in some places, assassinated) to a much greater extent than in other kinds of journalism.

Most people reading this book have been trained in news writing or "narrative" journalism, another name for contemporary feature writing. Others are accustomed to making short spots for TV. These are valuable skills, but they often get in the way when composing an investigation.

A news product is front-loaded. The key details of the story are generally included in the first paragraph or introductory voiceover, so that if an editor has to cut the story, he or she can start at the back and leave the "essentials" untouched. Another advantage of front-loading is that distracted, hurried readers or viewers can grasp the essence of the story in a glance. Unfortunately, that is not always the best way to recount an investigation. In a longer format, this technique usually kills the story. At the least, it complicates the task of creating a sustained rhythm, and rhythm is what keeps people watching and reading. It also makes it very, very difficult to compose an ending, even allowing for the fact that the news is never really final.

An investigative report cannot be written like a news story, because whether or not it starts out strong, it gathers impact as it proceeds. Investigations that are published in news media, as opposed to magazines, are exceptions that prove the rule: A classic news lead, the "Five Ws", is pasted at the top of a tense narrative that delivers repeated shocks. It's like running a 400 metre race: you try to get out of the blocks at the front of the pack, lead them through the first curve, widen the gap in the backstretch, then accelerate as you get to the finish line. The longer the format, the harder it is to keep delivering those shocks. (In fact, the length should be proportional to the number of truly fresh discoveries that the journalist can deliver, plus a summary history if the story has one.)

Narrative journalism, the currently fashionable style in feature writing, avoids this danger. It teaches reporters to draw viewers into a story, piece by piece, and that is no small skill. But it creates other risks for the work. Its popularity with editors is due in large part to the fact that as the number of staff has been downsized, there were fewer reporters around to fill the paper or the

news show, and having them turn in longer pieces made the holes in the staff less obvious. The data that make up such pieces are relatively easy to get and organise, because otherwise the story won't get assigned. The principal hurdle is access, getting the subject of the story to let the reporter in.

Once that's accomplished, the rest is mostly attentive chronicling. That's a fastidious task, and it often becomes boring, first for the reporter and then for the reader or viewer. Many such pieces come across as precious and pretentious – imagine! Getting inside the once-in-a-lifetime moment of a first kiss! How *sweet*! They tend to lack conflict – a key dramatic element – because the reporter slips into identification with the subject and downplays what makes them look bad. (In *The New Journalism*, Tom Wolfe remarked that a reporter who hangs out with sources tends to become friends with them, and grows anguished about writing about them.[1] That syndrome grows even more oppressive when the reporter has to denounce the source, as happens sometimes in investigations.) The reporter also tends to focus inward, toward the group, rather than to step back and look at what's happening outside it. These are major reasons the Pentagon insisted that reporters covering the war in Iraq be embedded with combat units; the military and its PR consultants figured that embedded reporters would play up the heroism and sacrifices of soldiers, and ignore the larger questions their struggle evoked. And that's pretty much what happened.[2]

Investigation rarely resembles an embedded insider's account, even if undercover work is involved, because the journalist is not there to chronicle, but to expose. Nor does its interest reside in compiling more or less fascinating details of The Way We Live Now. The narrative power of investigative journalism ultimately resides in trying to put a stop to things that should never have begun, or to protect things that should never have been threatened. Investigation leads to a judgement. (In the stunning phrase of the great French journalist Albert Londres, "I've finished. The government has to start."[3]) It can be said in more or less subtle ways, but if it is not said – if someone is not told, "This must never happen again" – the reporter has failed.

1. Tom Wolfe and Edward Warren Johnson. *The New Journalism*. MacMillan General Books, 1990.
2. For an in-depth study of the "embedded" PR strategy and its effects on the news, see Rod Brookes, Nick Mosdell, Terry Threadgold, and Justin Lewis, *Shoot first and ask questions later: Media coverage of the 2003 Iraq war*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
3. Translated by the authors from *Au Bagne* (1923), Editions de Londres, 2011.

This book focuses on the last, crucial phase of the investigative process, when you transform information into a finished story. Writing the story will be most effective and efficient when you have properly prepared for it. That is why we say "transform information into a finished story", and not "find the story in the mountain of information." (Trying to dig a pony out from under a manure pile is common neophyte procedure, and it is also a major reason that editors think investigation is slow and costly. *Anything* is slow and costly when you do it in disconnected steps.) By the time you begin composing a final version, the story should already be structured and its facts verified and set out in an order of use. Otherwise, you are taking unnecessary risks of getting something wrong or leaving something out. You are also setting yourself up to waste great amounts of time, which happens to be the only resource you will never get back once you spend it. (Students, please note: The cost of your time is *not* zero.)

We have already dealt with how to plan and organise an investigative story in our previous handbooks, *Story-Based Inquiry*[4] and *The Hidden Scenario*,[5] which we recommend as foundation reading. Both those works dealt with different aspects of the writing process – an overview in *Story-Based Inquiry*, and methods for creating timelines and source maps, and for reporting scenes, in *The Hidden Scenario* – but neither addresses writing in depth and detail. This time, we focus on how to structure, compose and edit material, as opposed to collecting and organising it. We've incorporated answers to questions from participants in our classes – for example, how the raw material in a "master file", our name for the compilation of data and insight that provides the backbone of a story, becomes a finished scene. We've also looked at how specific effects and devices can be incorporated into investigative narratives.

We also make use of material from open sources, in particular *The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook*.[6] This freeware anthology, which we edited, contains about two dozen state-of-the-art investigative stories, plus afterwords in which the authors explain how they researched and wrote the

4. Mark Lee Hunter with Nils Hanson, Rana Sabbagh, Luuk Sengers, Drew Sullivan, Flemming Tait Svith and Pia Thordsen, *Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists*. UNESCO, 2009, 2011.
5. Luuk Sengers and Mark Lee Hunter, *The Hidden Scenario: Plotting and Outlining Investigative Stories*. Logan Handbooks, 2012.
6. Mark Lee Hunter, editor, *The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook*. UNESCO, 2012. Hereafter referred to as "Casebook".

stories. We have also cited other prize-winning stories, including our own, because we know exactly how they were put together, line by line, effect by effect.[7]

With this handbook, we have reached our goal of setting out in detail the core techniques and materials required for an investigative reporting class – varied examples to illustrate methods that can be transmitted, and that enable students or professionals to reliably conceive, plan and execute a valuable investigative story. By "valuable" we mean not only that a story contributes to a more just and peaceable society, but also that it increases the reporter's and the publishing media's asset bases, in terms of skills, knowledge, data, contacts, brand recognition and other working resources, including finances. We think journalism needs more professionals who will thrive by doing work that needs doing. (No, we do not think taking photos of pop stars in their underwear especially needs doing, though we're glad some good people can live from it). If a method doesn't increase your ability to create impact and get resources for the next project, it isn't sustainable. The material in this handbook has helped thousands of journalists and campaigners toward those goals. We hope it will do the same for you.

We thank Gavin McFadyen, Minal Patel and Juliet Ferguson of the Centre for Investigative Journalism for their support of this project, and Dan Hind for his sharp-eyed and unfailingly courteous editing.

7. All these stories have been posted at our website, www.storybasedinquiry.com.

Chapter One

Building the Foundation

Setting Our Objectives

This book describes a method and a system for composing and publishing investigative stories. The method is designed to achieve three objectives:

1. Write a story (and not a catalogue of facts)

A story captures the movement through time and space of events and people, as well as the meaning of that movement and its contents for the viewer. A phone book captures rich information, without movement. Only a freak can remember a page (or even three lines) of the phone book. Anyone who reads, hears or watches a good story will remember its meaning and more than a few lines.

The implication for journalists (and anyone else who creates fact-based narratives) is that the focus of the work is not only or even mainly on *the facts*; it has to be on what has *changed* (another name for movement) and what it *means*. Put simply, **the story tells the facts**. Facts, however fascinating

they may seem, do not tell a story until they are put into a sequence that makes sense of them.

There is no way that a storyteller can dispense with narrative art, yet since the invention of modern reporting in the nineteenth century, many journalists have claimed to be finding stories instead of telling them, by holding an objective mirror to reality. That's fine, but investigations often reveal things that won't show in a mirror.

There is likewise a debate in investigative journalism about whether using artistic methods cheapens a story, signalling to viewers that it is mere entertainment.[8] Our stance is that narrative art is thousands of years old, and has lasted because it addresses powerful forces within the human mind and soul. Those forces will not go away simply because you pretend to ignore them. One way or the other, you have to take them into account. So we will show you some ways you can use them without reducing your work to half-truths, let alone a throbbing pulp of cheap sensational lies.

2. Touch the emotions (not just the mind)

Investigative reporting uses objective facts – by which we mean facts that would remain verifiable regardless of who discovered them – to a subjective end. We are telling our stories not just because they are true, but because we want to change the world. If nobody cares about a story – if nobody besides the person who tells it finds the truth it contains unacceptable, intolerable, or admirable – the project has failed.

As the peerless Tacitus said, there are two reasons to write history: to find examples worthy of emulation, or acts that must be abhorred. The emotions a true story creates may thus be bright or dark. The story can evoke joy, that someone who was unjustly forgotten or overlooked is now recognized,[9] make us laugh at the absurd hypocrisy and pretention of self-elected elites, or drive us to outrage and protest. But if it does none of these – if it simply adds to the long list of facts that no one cares about – nothing will change.

One of the people who will be affected by this story is you, the author. There is another long debate in journalism about whether or not, or how

8. See Robert Miraldi, *Muckraking and objectivity: Journalism's colliding traditions*. New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1990.
9. For a brilliant example of such an investigation, see Malik Bendjellou, director, *Searching for Sugar Man* (2012). The film reveals an artist who achieved the feat of being simultaneously highly influential and practically unknown.

much, journalists should be present in their own stories. We will return to the subject later in this book. For now, we would like you to accept, for the sake of argument, that your personal desire for change, and the values on which it is based, are part of the story. They are what got you into it in the first place, and they will help you get through it. So do not think that in order to tell a good story, you must disappear from it, leaving only the facts. On the contrary: Readers and viewers will assume that you have a motive for telling your story, and that it is not reducible to "the public has a right to know." They are perfectly correct, by the way. The public also has a right to a better world, and so do you.

3. Save time and avoid anguish

We warned you that writing is work, and writing investigations can be harder than most. Unfortunately, most people (and especially beginners) make it harder than it needs to be. They force themselves to do the same tasks over and over, because they didn't do them right the first time, or can't remember why or how they did them. They lose information and have to look for it again. They get bogged down in narrative strategies that Scheherazade could not manage. And when it's time to publish, they go absolutely mad, because they have no way of assuring themselves that what they've said is demonstrably true.

Has it happened to us? Yes, in our clueless youth, but not since we changed our methods. (The absence of a viable strategy is also a method, albeit a hapless one.) Will it happen to you? Not if you work methodically, efficiently and effectively. That's what we'll now teach you to do.

Chapter Two

Create the Conditions for Success

I. Structure First, Last and Always

The single most important thing you need to know before undertaking any composition, including an investigative story, is that **structure rules content**. If your structure is inappropriate, imprecise or fragmentary, whatever content you pour into it will lose impact and interest for the viewer. (If you find it hard to see why, try eating dessert before your soup, and note the effect on your appetite.) You are therefore well advised to create your structure before you begin to write. If you don't, you may get away with it once or twice, like Tom Wolfe when he sat down and poured out his famous essay, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*.[10] Usually, however, Wolfe outlined in meticulous detail, and probably not because he enjoyed the extra work. If you don't make this effort, you will probably create stories that no one who considers time of value will bother to decipher, except for the

10. In Tom Wolfe, *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. Vintage Books USA, 2005.

lawyers who gleefully peruse your work for mistakes that will make them – and cost you – money.

Journalists under deadline pressure often write their stories from scrawled notes, putting the freshest stuff they have first. This technique simply will not work, except badly, for most investigative projects. As Petra Bartosiewicz says in *The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook*: "Before I start writing, the outline is key. I can't write a story unless I know where it's heading."[11] Neither can we. Unless you are a unique genius, neither can you.

We hate outlining, and so we tried to develop a less painful and more effective way of doing it. Ours is not the only way to do it, but it works, it's simple, and it provides a searchable database that can be used for quality control and future projects. We call it the **master file**.

II. The Master File: Computer-assisted Outlining, Sourcing and Filing

The first three steps in creating an investigative project, in order, are making a hypothesis, developing it through a timeline and then adding sources to it. We detailed this process of planning in *The Hidden Scenario*.

Let's focus now on expanding the timeline into a particular kind of database, a *master file*, containing information about characters, locations, objects and actions drawn from your sources. These are the pieces of your story, and you can begin shaping and polishing them while you collect them. Piece by piece, you are going to set them in a preliminary order, determined by their place in the timeline, or their relation to a specific theme. You will return to them when you find new information that illuminates or enriches them, and add it to the file. You will thus acquire an overview and inventory of what you do and don't know, captured in a single file. Even better, the process will help you absorb and structure your story *as you research*. And when the writing or editing is done, the master file will save you a lot of time and anguish during quality control.

Whenever we teach this technique, someone in the room sighs. He's thinking: "This sounds like lots of work." That's probably because he's the kind of

11. See "The Intelligence Factory: How America makes its enemies disappear". Casebook, pp. 230-245, 245.

reporter who piles up the manure, then looks for the pony. That's a lot *more* work in the end than making entries in a master file. You will enter your material into an electronic file at *some* point in any case. The only difference is that you won't wait for your deadline to start adding up what you know. The task can and should be done at the beginning or end of a day, when you review your latest research. It shouldn't take more than half an hour. We are *not* slow and steady in this business, we are *fast* and steady.[12] So let's see how it's done.

III. Creating a Record of Events

Events constitute the backbone of the master file. Events must contain a more or less rich description of what happened, who the actors were, when it happened, where it happened, how it went down, and how you know these facts.

Below, we set out a framework, followed by examples that illustrate each element. The main examples are drawn from one of our books – a nonfiction crime "novel" about a felony that created a cadaver and a scandal at the summit of the French and English art worlds.[13] Later in this book, we will use different examples that illustrate different genres, including news writing. In this sequence, the auction house Christie's advances toward the sale of a major artwork, while fearing that the curators of the Louvre will claim that the picture was smuggled out of France. We will show you the raw data as it was gathered in the master file – the first we ever built, by the way – and then, progressively, the finished texts we drew from the data.

1. Describe the event

The entry begins with a cogent description of every **event**. Make sure the description contains names, specific actions and (when possible) a date and time. These elements enable you to find the event via a keyword search. You are creating a **searchable database**. So make sure you always spell names correctly, and that you write dates and times as exactly as you can, always in the

12. A French manual of investigative reporting, written by a well-meaning neophyte, says that reporters should follow "the method of the snail", very slowly circling their subject. (*Groaning sound.*) Tigers, too, circle their prey.
13. Mark Hunter, *Le Destin de Suzanne: La veritable affaire Canson*. Paris: Fayard, 1995.

same format (for example: MM/DD/YYYY,[14] or 13:15). That way you can search for what happened on a particular day, and even perhaps at a particular time. We put the date of the event first (*not* the date when we learned of it). Thus we create a timeline as research progresses. Here's a sample description:

> *05/03/1985. Gregory Martin of Christie's meets with lawyer Bernard Duminy in Paris to discuss sale.*

In *The Hidden Scenario* we recommend that research plans begin with a hypothetical chronology. You begin to extend, enrich and verify that chronological order when you start the master file. The chronological order creates several benefits. Internal contradictions or conflicts between sources, or in someone's personal testimony, will leap out of the data. You will see points that require further clarification, especially holes in the story (as in, "but what happened *between* these events?"). And you will simultaneously create the rough draft for the simplest and most powerful narrative structure, which happens to be a chronology.

The alternative is to structure your master file thematically. The themes can be based on locations, such as the places where perpetrators, victims and other actors function; Michael Moore's film, *Roger and Me*, is built on this principle. You can also structure through representative personalities or institutions (regulators, industries, legislators, activists); Mark Schapiro uses this technique for complex environmental policy investigations.[15] You can also organise by issues; for example, a political party may be concerned by immigration and fiscal policy in the course of the same story. We used this procedure in researching France's extreme right party, the National Front, because it was a heterogeneous movement that pursued the same objectives by different means in many places at once, and chronology wouldn't capture those nuances as well.[16]

Perhaps you prefer a thematic organisation of your data. Chronology may still appear in your master file, whether you use it as the basic structure for the file or not. In particular, you can usefully organise material chronologi-

14. The European format is DD/MM/YYYY. Note that successive versions of the file, if you use the European format date in the title, will not appear in chronological order in your archive, because the day, not the month, will determine the order.
15. See Mark Schapiro, "Conning the climate: Inside the carbon-trading shell game." Casebook, pp. 81-92.
16. See Mark Hunter (*sic*; I began using my middle name in 2002), *Un Américain au Front: Enquête au sein du Front national.* Paris: Stock, 1998. An extract in English is available at www.storybasedinquiry.com.

cally within a thematic structure. For the National Front project, in one chapter we collected material on court cases, and organised the cases by theme (violence, electoral fraud, etc.). Inside each thematic file, cases were arranged in chronological order.

Whatever order you use, it must enable you to put your hands on any document in your file without delay (meaning: less than one minute). If you find yourself thinking, "Where did I put that?" – then you had better take a hard look at how your data is organised, right away.

2. Add sources under the events

Now, under every event give **sources** that corroborate it (with the exception of confidential sources, who must never be named on your computer). Include bibliographical citations (title, author, date, page numbers, etc.) for documents, dates and places for interviews, authors and captions of images, etc. Example:

Letter from lawyer Journaud to Christie's, 04/23/1985.

We put source information right after the events in our master file because this is a way to **keep your information and its source together at all times**. It is also a way to remind yourself *how* (and how well) you know what you know. So be precise about where you got your data. In our crime story, many documents were drawn from a case file compiled by an investigating magistrate, and thus bore numbers like "D105". We put those numbers in the master file, along with the dates they were made; when saving to hard drive, we use such identifying information in titles, as well as names and document types (like "itv" for interview). We recommend including hyperlinks to documents on your hard drive or online – except confidential documents, which, like some names, should never go on your computer. Keep copies, but make sure some are not in your home or office; never leave them with a third-party, like a newspaper editor, who might have a personal interest in divulging them.[17] If you cite web pages, save them to disk, because websites can change fast, and your targets may do away with such evidence.[18]

17. A whistleblower was betrayed by a Fleet Street editor in just this way. The editor gave the whistleblower's key documents to the police in settlement of an unrelated matter.
18. The International Herald Tribune once investigated the falsehoods on an Asian magnate's website; the online evidence disappeared the morning the story came out.

3. Add contact data under the sources

Include contact data the first time a source is mentioned: phone numbers, email addresses and a short log of contact moments and agreements (especially when something is "off the record" or "not for citation"). For easy recognition label them with the word "CONTACT:" notice the colon, to facilitate searching. Do *not* find yourself without this data when you need it most, which is nearly always when you are writing the story and realise you need more info from that source.

All of these practices will reduce your search time, and after unfocused research, search time is the single biggest waste in most investigations. The difference really shows when you go to quality control. In our true crime story, we were able to show our editor and lawyer the source of a given piece of information within 30 seconds of the moment they asked for it. (My, did they look happy. That's exactly how you want your side to feel if you're going into battle.) We said some very hard things in that book,[19] and no-one sued us. If they had, our master file was clear evidence that we had done a very thorough investigation, which judges appreciate. So do plaintiffs.[20]

4. Add details under the sources

Enter **quotes**, such as extracts from documents and interviews. For example:

> *Martin letter to Duminy, 05/08/1985*:
> "Naturally I am also glad that you thought, having read the letter and its enclosure, and having heard what I understand to be the background to the issue, that we could proceed with the auction sale of the picture in London. I much appreciate that you have agreed that any query from a French official can be referred to you."

Use extracts that reveal:

a. Details about the location(s)

Describe the **location** where the event took place as exactly as necessary; "necessary" is defined by narrative interest as well as the need to demonstrate

19. For an example of the current limits of reportorial ferocity backed by research, please visit Andrew Jennings' website, http://transparencyinsport.org/.
20. A corrupt Belgian lawyer once told us that the great reporter Chris de Stoop had lied about him. We asked, if that's true, why didn't you sue de Stoop? He said: "It would be so fastidious to prove it." Indeed.

mastery of the material and to impact the reader's senses.

For example, during a visit for an interview, we recorded as much as we could about the lawyer's office where Martin and Duminy met in Paris. The final text used these details to evoke the secrets buried in the walls of such a place:

> "[It] was a sunlit, cream-walled former bourgeois family apartment, divided into a seeming infinity of closed-off spaces that defined the frontier between masters and servants. Its sober, classic elegance… was concealed from the ignorant by a tired coat of paint. It was a setting that breathed prudence, but the business at hand was highly risky."

b. Details about the character(s)

Now we enter **who** took part in the event, in as much detail as necessary to give the viewer a sense of the personages involved. Thus when you introduce a significant character, you can provide pertinent aspects of his or her personality, history and appearance. For certain characters, you may wish to insert a full biographical sketch or CV. Others need less attention. For example, we noted that the lawyer, Duminy, was in his 50s, with a rectangular face. He showed very little expression, and he spoke quietly. He certainly knew what he was talking about. His eyes were his best feature – beautiful eyes, dark, sensitive. We later observed how Duminy kept his head in crises, by following him across several events and interviewing him repeatedly. These impressions were combined in the final text:

> "A long career had shown him the futility of panic. He cultivated calmness like a gardener tending his roses. He had trained his rectangular face and quiet voice to carry no expression; only rarely did a flash of emotion escape his oddly feminine, dark eyes."

c. Details about the action(s)

Next, what **actions** took place? Who did what? Who said what? Who thought something but didn't say it? If we have several sources who were involved in the event, we can cite them all here, thus sketching a dialogue that we will later use in the narrative. If related events happened before or after this event (such as other people responding to it), we can also cross-reference them here, by date. This technique is a variant of one used by the American FBI,

and adopted by Woodward and Bernstein in the Watergate case: Whenever a source mentioned another source, copies of their separate versions were put in both files. For example:

Martin left letter from Journaud [see 23/04/1985] with Duminy.

Our final text alludes to these sources, reconstructs the dialogue from them, and quotes a key document directly to validate the procedure and close the passage:

"Martin had good reason to think it highly unlikely that the Louvre, or anyone else, could [stop the sale, because] the heritage was Swiss. And the French could no more obstruct the sale of a Swiss estate than they could conscript British punks into the Foreign Legion. The worst that could happen, according to [Journaud's letter of 04/23], was that when [the owner of the painting] brought her profits home to France, Customs would ask where the money came from, and she'd have to prove the Murillo came from a Swiss estate.

But that was [her] problem, not Christie's.

Martin pressed Duminy for an opinion: were [the owner's] people right? Could the Murillo go in the sale on July 5? He was close to the wire now. The printing deadline for the sale catalogue was only a few weeks away.

Christie's could go ahead, said Duminy.

'What if the Museums of France or Customs object?' Martin insisted.

'Tell them to talk to me,' said Duminy.

'I much appreciate that,' wrote Martin to Duminy from London on May 8, in a letter detailing their conversation."

5. Add your own thoughts and emotions

As you work on the story, it will start to work on you. Capture the flashes of insight and feeling that result in the master file. We label this material, simply, *note:* (sic). It can be a source of great insight; your emotions will respond to stimuli before your rational mind. You may also note further questions that occur to you as you record an event. Again, you can cross reference to events that answer your questions or illuminate your insight.

For example, after copying the letter where Martin thanks Duminy for

agreeing to handle contacts with French officials, we noted in the master file that this task turned out to be *Much more than D[uminy] bargained on*. That may not sound like much. But this insight made us sensitive to the lawyer's growing exasperation as the affair roared out of control. In a further interview, Duminy commented on another lawyer who was later swept up in the same case, leading to this ominous premonition:

> "It occurred to [Duminy] that he did nearly all his business with [the owner's lawyer] by phone. Duminy, who loved the precision of written words, considered this extraordinary."

Likewise, you may have a sudden insight that captures the meaning of a bit of your data, and that you can eventually use, nearly verbatim, in your final text. Don't wait: take it down with whatever you have at hand – a notebook, your phone recorder, a napkin. Then put it in your master file. This is particularly useful when, after leaving a source, you fill up with conflicting or unpleasant emotions. Recording these feelings turns them into artefacts that you interrogate, rather than you being their thing, helpless and manipulated. For example, noting that we were afraid of immigrants in the street after leaving meetings of the National Front helped us realise that what kept the movement together was not hatred, but fear.

Stephen Grey, currently with Reuters' investigative unit, developed a variant of this procedure that relies on frequent summaries of his research and memos that capture ideas. If necessary, he says, "I go and explain the story to someone (an editor or a friend) and in the act of trying to interest them or explain it, I feel my way to a coherent way of capturing the essence of things. Immediately after the conversation I write down what I remember of how I explained it."[21] One way or the other, don't waste your thoughts.

6. Remember necessary tasks

Finally, enter anything you may have **to do** to resolve open questions related to the event. For example:

> TO DO: Ask Duminy whether he had a copy of all Martin's correspondence with the Museums of France.

21. Casebook, p. 246.

IV. Tips to Make the Master File Stronger

1. Don't worry about being perfect (yet)

Master file events can be short. You don't have to write a story within a story for every one, especially if you're working in film. You *do* want to capture the *flow* of events and actors, so that you begin to see causes and effects. In the process, you internalise the story.[22] With time, you will get a sense of how much detail and precision you need in your master file entries. The writing process will teach you, because if a given detail isn't in the master file, you will miss it when you compose.

2. Customise the content

You do *not* need to label each category of information, as we have done here. Yes, it can be useful to enable searches of your database for every **contact**, or **character**, or **note**. But you may prefer other terms, or other kinds of data. That's fine. What matters is how easily you can assess and retrieve your data. For example, do you have a description or image of the place where a key scene happened? (By the way, why not paste your best .jpegs and .mp3 snippets into your master file? They make for stronger magazine submissions).

3. Keep it all in order

Remember: **The goal is to organise your information as you research**. Don't collect a mass of stuff, *then* try to set it in order. Do this work a bit at a time, and your story will begin to compose itself. Letícia Duarte, a young Brazilian reporter, created a running account of her research by instinct during the three years she spent following a street kid in Sao Paulo, and the result was a story that changed Brazil's welfare system.[23] A similar phenomenon happens when news reporters go in hot pursuit of a story and hit on it for days at a time, until they practically have the chronology in their heads. Unfortunately, they often neglect to build a database, since they already know the case, and rely on their clips, which are far less rich, for archives. When they go back to the story a few years later, as often happens, they must either do without their

22. The filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard noted the scenes he'd shot on credit cards, "to carry as much of the film in my head as possible."
23. Letícia Duarte, "Filho da Rua" ("Street child"). The story ran as a 16-page special section in Zero Hora, June 17th, 2012.

previous research, or painfully reconstruct it.

You can create a rich archive even with a cold trail, using the present method. That's not drudgery. It's fun. It's also profitable, because the next time events make the story hot, you own it. And it's a potent equaliser, as Andrew Jennings can tell you. Jennings built a searchable database on the lords of sports institutions, beginning with the International Olympic Committee, which eventually led him to all the things that his targets believed they had hidden away for good. That's even more fun.[24]

24. See Andrew Jennings, 'Some thoughts on our simple craft'. Casebook, pp. 222-227.

Chapter Three

Getting Ready to Write

Journalists have more or less complicated rituals to prepare themselves for the work of making a story from their research. Leaving aside the merely strange stuff (magic pens! magic drinks! magic spells!), we think there are two particularly useful steps you can take: reviewing and completing the master file, and seeking models.

I. Completing the Master File

At least once a week, we review the entire master file for a project. Frequently we see something that can be cut, added, or annotated. If you make any such changes, save the file under a new name, with a date in the title, so you can track different versions. Disk space is cheap, and making a mistake that involves source data is costly.

Also consider making online back-ups of the master file, in case your hard disk dies on you or is stolen. Mozy and Dropbox, for instance, will keep your file saves behind a strong password. You can also hide the file from prying

eyes by encrypting it with PGP or (for Apple) Fileward. (More record keeping software can be found on our website: www.storybasedinquiry.com.)

Pay special attention to holes in the file. What questions does a gap raise that you can't answer? Are they important, or merely interesting for some future project? If they are important, get the answers and plug them in, or note that they can't be answered. Ask yourself if the unanswered questions point to another story. When Petra Bartosiewicz investigated a "terrorist" case where even prosecutors could not agree on or prove what had happened, she made that uncertainty the core of the narrative: "We knew from the start that the likelihood that we would uncover 'what really happened' was slim." Instead, Bartosiewicz and her editor used the lacunae to demonstrate "the vagaries of our system of intelligence gathering in the US."[25] Chief among those vagaries is the revelation that even the people who have access to all the intelligence can't tell what's fact and what's fantasy.

Remember this: Admitting what you don't know to the viewer or reader makes what you *do* know more credible – but only if you **show that you tried to find out**.

Also notice, during your review, if you have collected the vivid elements necessary to build scenes. Did people recount conversations during your interviews? Are they in the master file? Do you have a description of the place where they talked? You can't see everything for yourself, or go everywhere. You do want to be fully aware of what material you can work *with*, and what gaps you have to work *around*. For example, we were not allowed inside a prison where one of our characters was incarcerated. We went to the gate and watched who came in and out, including women in poor dresses, holding children by the hand. We showed the viewer the building, then the women, then said: "They took him in."

II. Borrow Some Wheels: the Uses of Models

As you review the master file, you will find yourself thinking of other stories that resemble yours in some way. More or less consciously, you are searching for models and solutions to help you finish the project. For example, our true

25. Op. cit., Casebook, pp. 243-245.

crime story centred on a collision between the worlds of art, crime and political power. One of the few works that combines these elements is Honoré de Balzac's *Splendours and Miseries of Courtesans*. Among other things, it is a model for exposition of judicial procedures. (Yes, we read John Grisham too, and preferred Balzac.) Our story also involved dozens of characters, and unlike a writer of fiction, we could not simply kill them off or cut them out at will. Instead, we borrowed a technique from Anthony Trollope. His epic tales of English upper-class life in the late Victorian era are structured in scenes, and in each scene a different portion of his cast takes the stage, while others fade into the wings.

Once you acknowledge that you are, in fact, using narrative techniques to support your story, you join a club where certain assets are borrowed and exchanged freely. Jorge Luis Borges, who won the Nobel Prize for literature, is a member: He told university students that they should read Robert Louis Stephenson to learn literary mechanics.[26] Professionals don't waste time inventing techniques that they can borrow from others with an easy conscience. Of course plagiarism – the copying of someone else's *words* – is disgusting as well as pointless (there is no shame and much benefit in citing a source); but most innovation is a matter of adapting a proven technique to a new context, and that's what we're considering here.

It's a mark of inexperience to try to invent structures or techniques that have already been perfected by someone else. Sometimes writers do it because they want to test their talent, or because they're afraid of being labelled as copycats. (Shakespeare borrowed plots from Italian authors and from history. So what?) Often, their structures collapse even in short pieces, because they're based on shallow conceits or gimmicks, such as a certain tone of voice. Usually, the reporters who display these problems are incapable of naming more than one or two models, and they haven't analysed them closely; they're more interested in their models' fame than in how they achieve their effects.

We recommend that if the stuff in your master file reminds you of something else, you look at it right away. We also recommend that you constantly read and watch other work – not just your contemporaries and competitors,

26. Jorge Luis Borges, Daniel Halpern and Frank MacShane (Editors), *Borges on Writing*. Norton, 1994.

but also the classics. At a minimum, **focus on models that relate to your current projects**. When we wrote our first political biography, we noticed that our subject had spent seven years playing the lead character in Albert Camus's play, *Caligula*. We read not only the play, but also *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, by the Roman historian C. Suetonius Tranquillus, in order to better understand Camus's anti-hero. The latter book is an unparalleled achievement – 12 riveting biographies in 400 pages, a crash course in key factors that shape and reveal leaders. Sometimes you'll come away with a single but highly useful trick. (Later we'll show you one we picked up from filmmaker King Vidor's 1953 memoir, *A Tree is a Tree*.)

Don't just collect facts: collect narrative techniques. Building a toolkit is part of your work, and a very big part of what will make your work a success. Listen to your critics, and note what affects your public the way you hoped. Learn other ways to affect them so you don't sound stale the next time they see you. Meanwhile, find the best models you can, and loot them for paths around and through your current obstacles. Don't worry if you feel inferior to them at first. One day you will do something they never dreamed of doing. That's one of the payoffs of this work, too.

Chapter Four

Choosing the Structure

In a moment, we are going to show you how to turn your master file into an outline that contains your material in the order you intend to use it. To reach that point, we have to make two decisions. First, what kind of story are we telling? Second, what is the order of material within that story?

In the classic narrative movement of investigative reporting, we begin in a moment of peace or a sunny place, descend into a maelstrom of corruption or violence, and then return to a world of order and justice. The great literary theorist Northrop Frye called this kind of story a "romance narrative", and *All the President's Men*, Woodward and Bernstein's account of the Watergate scandal (1974), is a famous example.[28] Within that movement, we can usefully choose between a **chronological** organisation of a story, and a **spatial** organisation. Let's see how this process works.

> "*[T]hroughout history, humankind has told two stories: the story of a lost ship sailing the Mediterranean seas in quest of a beloved isle,*

28. See Northrop Frye, *The secular scripture: A study of the structure of romance*. Harvard University Press, 1976. See also Mark Hunter, "Dante's Watergate: All the President's Men as a Romance Narrative". American Journalism 14 (1997): 303-316.

and the story of a god who allows himself to be crucified on Golgotha."

– Jorge Luis Borges, *Collected Fictions*

Recognise those narratives? They appear in contemporary investigative writing, but hardly for the first time. The Greek poet Homer used both. The first is a "picaresque" narrative, in which the story moves from place to place, embodied in *The Odyssey*. The second form evoked by Borges is a history, recounted in chronological order; it applies to the demi-god Achilles in *The Iliad*, who went back to Troy knowing that he might be killed there. At the risk of over-simplifying, one of these narrative forms reposes on space, and the other on time. Certainly this distinction is not absolute. A history may involve diverse settings. In *The Iliad*, for example, Homer takes us back and forth from the Greek camp to the besieged royal palace of Troy. But what mainly drives the story is movement toward the time when the war will end in the destruction of one side or the other. In *The Odyssey*, every place where Odysseus and his shipmates touch land has its own history; but what pulls the story forward is longing for home.

We highlight these two structures, among all the possible forms that a narrative may take, because they are simple to apply, and they work very well for nonfiction narratives. As Borges suggests, they also allow for multiple variants, and you may develop some. These forms are platforms, not ceilings, and they've worked for at least as long as stories have been written down. We therefore recommend that you learn to use both.

Before writing the final draft, consider: Do the elements in your story seem to follow a chronological line of cause and effect? That's fine, because it means you are essentially writing a history. Do the elements seek to cluster around specific themes, personalities or places? That's fine too: we are writing an odyssey, in which we will move among these nodes, bringing the reader or viewer with us.

Historical structures work very well for biographies, portraits, and reconstructions of disasters, crises, policies gone wrong, or crimes. In all of these genres, the succession of surprising events can generate an acute desire to know what will happen next on the part of the viewer.

Michael Moore's evident preference, in contrast, is for picaresque storytelling. His typical narrative involves a stranger in an even stranger land,

encountering one weird scene after another. Here the viewer is held by the desire to know what lies beyond the next hill in the landscape. This was Hunter S. Thompson's favourite structure, too. Well before he used it in psychedelic road stories, he applied it masterfully in *Hell's Angels*.[29]

The fact that both Thompson and Moore are highly visible in their stories suggests a principle: If you like to appear as an actor (and not just a narrator) in your story, you will surely be drawn to picaresque structures. They also work nicely for investigations where the location of the action plays a major role. Moreover, the picaresque form supports stories where the actors are dispersed, and the chronological frame is *now* – for example, Stephen Grey's investigative war correspondence, tying together diverse phenomena into a single major trend as he crosses Afghanistan.[30] For investigations where many stakeholders are involved, but little movement results, a picaresque narrative structure can simulate the missing movement. Scandals that involve regulatory or political inaction, such as Albert Chiinga's work on Zambia's hellish mines,[31] are classic examples. In such stories, the only thing that moves is the reporter, trying to find someone who will stop a disaster from further unfolding.

There's nothing wrong with preferring one or the other structure, but there is a double danger that you must take into account.

- First, if you avoid choosing, you will choose anyway, by default. In practice, each of us tends to prefer and rely on one or the other of these forms. We typically use the one we most like to do and know best how to do. You will gain more control over the material if you make a conscious decision.
- The second danger stems from the first: The structure we're most comfortable with is not always the best vehicle for our material. We rank Moore among the most innovative of our generation's journalists, but we also think that the picaresque structure of *Fahrenheit 911* doesn't optimally serve its material, which centres on the history of the Bush family's relation to the Saudi ruling elite. If Moore could make this mistake, so can you. So ask yourself why you want to use a given structure, and put the story ahead of your own preferences. In the end, you'll greatly enrich your toolkit.

---

29. Hunter S. Thompson, *Hell's Angels: A Strange and terrible saga*. Random House, 1966.
30. See Stephen Grey, "Hearts, Minds and the Same Old Warlords". Casebook, pp. 238-244.
31. Albert Chiinga, "Casualisation Undermining Workers", Casebook, pp. 120-123.

1. Make an order for the information in your master file

Now we need to determine, as well as we can before we begin to write a finished draft, the *sequence* in which we will recount the events of the story. The reason we take the time to do this is that trying to sequence a story as you compose is another name for breaking your head from the inside out. You *will* go mad, as you try to fit endless bits of data into a series that doesn't lose the reader after every third sentence or frame. In the end, your story will at best contain a few flashes of fire in a sea of mud.

Avoiding that fate will require modifying the master file, more than once. Every time you do so, save the file under a new name. Please be systematic about this – for example, by giving each new save a version number (V3_1, say) or the date you last changed it. That way you can trace your changes across time and go back to a previous version if necessary.

Below we consider sequencing first in picaresque, then in chronological structures. Some of the techniques are shared, particularly in the case of scene-by-scene construction. We looked at building scenes closely in *The Hidden Scenario*, and will not repeat that material here. Here, we are concerned first with moving blocks of material into the order of use, then refining the order within those blocks. Scenes comprise one form that those blocks can take. Note also that scenes can be used in either a picaresque or chronological structure. So please do not think that you will escape the issue of sequencing by working with scenes. It does not go away, and you are well advised to address it as soon as possible.

a. Sequencing events in a picaresque structure

Let's start by looking at how Barry Yeoman sequenced the material for *School of Hard Knocks*, a heart-breaking inquiry into how adult "education" rips off the hopes, dreams and cash of poor students.[32] It's a story that involves multiple actors and locations, in which history matters less than a spreading scandal. Thus chronology will be less effective as an organising principle for this data than the environments in which the actors move – the wealthy and powerful who sell glowing futures, and the poor but hopeful whom they feed off.

---

32. Casebook, pp. 28-40.

First, during the research process Yeoman groups his material according to the institutions and actors who occupy the ground. Some of them are governmental regulators or industry associations; some are students who sued the schools:

> "There were topical folders ('Accreditation,' 'Federal Aid,' 'State Regulation – California,' 'State Regulation – New York,' etc.) and case folders ('Cases – Caliber Training Institute,' 'Cases – University of Phoenix,' 'Cases – University of Phoenix – Hendow lawsuit,' etc.)"

Now he moves that material into position. Yeoman begins by selecting individuals whose personal stories illuminate larger themes or dodgy practices; he calls these stories "anecdotes". Some involve victims, and some focus on defenders of the institutions Yeoman investigates. He uses these individuals like signposts in the landscape, directing our attention to particular abuses and their perpetrators. Instead of placing these events and actors on a chronological continuum, Yeoman separates them into different spaces, where we see fresh variations on the theme of victimisation, deepening our knowledge of the scandal:

> "I outline my story in advance, dividing it into 500-word sections. I look for the anecdotal lead, look for several more anecdotes that will advance the story in the middle and end, and group the substantive material into blocks that can be introduced in between the anecdotes."

This technique keeps the story moving across a landscape of trickery and pain, but it also allows the viewer regular respite. When Yeoman puts "substantive" material (such as historical or legal background, analysis or exposition) between "anecdotes", he broadens the perspective. That allows viewers to regain control over their anger that such things happen, before we meet the next victim. Remember that your narrative will take viewers from a world that seems to function more or less well, and plunge them into a world of chaos and pointless, cruel suffering. Along the way, the viewer needs relief after seeing terrible truths.

Finally, we need to know when the journey, with all its adventure and pain, will end – for the viewer as for the actors in the story. The close of every inves-

tigative odyssey is the moment when we either get home safe and sound, or see with certainty what home will be like when we get there. Maybe you can offer some hope, in the end, that things will change – that the ordeal served a purpose. Thus Yeoman says he sought "an empowering but realistic ending about students fighting back." He closes with a former victim who has become an activist, who says: "Thousands of people are being taken advantage of. And it needs to stop." By now, the viewer can only agree.

We suggest that when you see the overall movement in your story – the sections that will give it rhythm – you cut and paste blocks of material into the appropriate position. Do this whether you use a chronological or picaresque structure. We will continue this process in a more and more detailed way as we proceed.

b. Sequencing events in a chronological structure

In *The Poetics*, Aristotle argued that a proper story has a beginning, middle and end.[33] He meant, quite literally, that once it starts, the story runs through to its conclusion. Some great investigative works have been written that way – for example, William Shawcross's *Sideshow*,[34] the story of how Cambodia was destroyed as a consequence of American political ambitions. When it works, this sequence imparts a dreadful sense of destiny – of forces seen and unseen moving toward a climax.

The key issue here from a compositional standpoint is where your story will begin. The answer is not always obvious: how far back need we go in the history of Cambodia to understand and appreciate its tragedy? The file for our crime story included family histories dating from the Middle Ages; a first draft that began with such material started slow and became even slower. A wise editor suggested that we begin with the moment when Christie's sought to market the family's heritage, as shown above. This is the underlying principle: **Begin the text at a moment when something important is about to happen**.

To see some alternatives to Aristotle's linear time, instead of a beginning, middle and end, think in terms of the *past, present and future*:

33. Aristotle. *The poetics* (c. 335 BCE). Kessinger Publishing, 2004.
34. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the destruction of Cambodia*. Simon and Schuster, 1979.

- The past is where the events we describe took root.
- The present is where their effects become visible.
- The future is what will happen if nothing changes, or if we oppose those effects.

The great majority of investigative features or documentaries follow a chronological sequence of *present-past-future*. Strong psychological mechanisms underlie this choice (or reflex, as is often the case). If we begin in the present, we can show the audience why it is urgent to understand and act upon the story. The audience will then ask: *How did this happen in the first place?* That question takes us into the past: We descend into the darkness of things forgotten, or hidden. Then the audience will want to know: *How do we get out of this mess?* The answer begins with exposing the truth, and then points to justice for the victims of the story, whether or not justice is ever rendered.

Very few investigative stories begin with the future. If the matter isn't urgent now, why are we bothering with it, instead of seeing what already needs fixing? Only disasters clearly waiting to happen – like the Bhopal explosion of 1984, the deadliest industrial catastrophe on record, which local reporter Raj Kumar Keswani repeatedly predicted beginning two years before it occurred[35] – are obvious examples here. In searching through hundreds of investigative features we have written, we found only two examples of this structure, over 20 years apart.

The most recent was a feature on "Europe's Monster Plane":

> "Here is the future of aviation: By 2015, air passenger traffic will double; by 2020, it will triple to nearly four billion passengers a year... a cabal of airline executives from around the world has regularly convened in the French countryside to decide if they want to change [the congested mess implicit in] this picture. To do so, they will have to take one of the costliest gambles in the history of civil aviation."

The piece then goes into the history of Airbus, makers of the monster plane, and ends in the present, when the crucial decision must be made.[36] This largely defines the objective of such future-first pieces: to influence an

35. Cited in Roli Varma and Daya R.Varma, *The Bhopal disaster of 1984* Bulletin of Science,Technology & Society 25.1 (2005): 37-45.
36. Mark Hunter, *Europe's Monster Plane* Salon, June 9 2000. Via www.salon.com/2000/06/09/airbus/

impending decision (as opposed to assessing the results of a decision that was already made and implemented).

We recommend that you test drive various sequences in different stories, often enough to avoid relying on any one of them, and also to learn new tricks. But please, don't make stories the hard way just to prove that you can. If you don't see immediately how a given sequence will play out, drop it. You will get plenty of chances to do other stories, but you will never get back lost time.

As in a picaresque structure, the key to sequencing in a chronology is to always work with manageable blocks of material. Break points in the chronology – moments where an action or scene reaches a climax, or another begins – are useful for determining these blocks, whether you are writing a book that can be cut into chapters, or a feature article built around a few key scenes. If two actors reach an agreement, that is a break point. If an actor scores a victory, or experiences a defeat, those are break points too. Be alert to them in your material; you can't invent them and still be a journalist.[37]

Watch out for a very common and absolutely fatal mistake: **Never go back, forth and back again in time**. Of course you can flash back from one moment in your narrative to a preceding event that illuminates it. This often happens in reality: a cop who is listening to a suspect will be reminded of a similar case, for example. You can use those rich moments in your narrative. But keep these movements simple. In particular, do not subject the viewer to repeated to-and-fro movement – say, going from 2000 to 1996 to 2008 to 1994 to 2011… unless you want to make your public physically ill, as if they were riding a boat in choppy seas. When that happens, their best cure is to walk away from your story – and they will.

2. Refine the sequence

Whether you choose a picaresque or chronological sequence, you will end up with a single file that contains your material in the rough order that you will use it. Don't worry if the file seems long. (For the crime book, ours was 250

37. Be careful about one thing with break points: don't use them as an excuse to sound hoarse with excitement, or solemn. In a recent account of the invention of a new machine, a key chapter ends when an unknowing scientist is shown into a room with the device. The narrator quotes the company owner: *"This," he said, "is Lucille."* (We changed the code name, but not the grammar.) Suppose the sentence read: *He said, "This is Lucille."* Which do you like better? For us, the first version, with its implied fanfare, sounds a little silly. Unless that's the way the owner really spoke, it spoils the effect by exaggerating it.

pages.) You can cut it back later.

Now, save the file under a new name, and cut and paste again. This time, work with individual events or extracts. Focus on the material that supports each part of the story. Keep cutting and pasting until you are satisfied with the flow, focusing on quotes, document extracts and insights from the master file (or separate thematic files, if that's how you prefer to work); this is the material you can cite directly in your final text. More insights will occur to you en route. Keep them; you can edit yourself later.

You can, and very likely will, change the order of some pieces in your narrative as you write. That's fine: You are creating a floor, and you can move the furniture around once you have a solid platform.

3. Redact the master file

You've placed the right material in the right order. But maybe you feel like there's far too much of it. If so, you need to reduce that mass.

The three simplest ways to do so are to **cut, cut and cut**. You *must* learn to do this, because it is how you learn what really matters to your story and the viewer. We recommend reducing the master file (under a new file name, right?) to no more than twice the length you will ultimately publish. We know this isn't easy. Reporters, and especially beginning reporters, fall in love with the details they have gathered. They are also afraid that if they leave out something, or for that matter anything, their story will fall apart. It won't, as long as you keep the best material and jettison the rest. They also worry that people will think they didn't really do the job. In fact, drowning the viewer in details is how you do *another* job – namely, persuading the viewer that you don't know what really matters.

If you find it hard to operate the delete button, do exactly the opposite and *highlight* your most brilliant passages. Nearly all the rest (you saw this coming) can be chopped.

Use the most powerful among the different versions of the same facts in your file. If you have done your research well, you will have several sources for a given fact. You do not need to use them all in the final story; it is enough to know that if it is challenged, they are retrievable from the master file.

A second technique is to **condense the material as you review it**. An advantage here is that the process of summarising enables you to compose entire

passages that you can reuse or revise further in your final draft. This is how our own work has evolved: Once the material has been ordered, we proceed directly to a rough revision. In the process, we jettison the material that is merely interesting, and focus on the stuff that burns. You will find just such fuel, frequently, in the *notes:* sections of your master file.

When we have finished re-ordering and redacting the master file, the hardest part of our story – the structure – is very largely written. We may change it later, of course. But the remaining work mainly involves *recomposing* the material – modelling it, like you would model clay – instead of trying to invent material to fill space. You will rewrite the master file, instead of wondering what to write.

The key issue you will face in shaping the text is maintaining the rhythm of the story. In the next section, we will show you some techniques for doing so.

Chapter Five

Make the Narrative Run

I. Cut as you Write

In most first drafts, up to half the content is **waste** – pointless little phrases, throat-clearing, clever but minor insights that are supposed to add character or tone, but kill driving tensions. We came to this discovery through writing investigative features for the *Reader's Digest*. They warned us that they would cut half our finished story. When the text came back we read it first with dread, and then with stupor. It read quite like what we wrote in the first place. The only stuff missing was the stuff we didn't need. Please note: It is better not to rely entirely on editors to do this for you; more than a few have no idea what counts in an investigation, and so cannot cut such stories well. When you find a good one, watch closely how he or she does the job – then do it yourself.

A second likely cut involves repetition. In a general sense, you should never say anything more than once in a story, unless the purpose is to generate a specific effect, such as **summarising** (which we'll return to). Most repetition

is due to an author's lack of confidence that something was said perfectly the first time, or to poor outlining, which creates uncertainty about the order of argument. The unintended effect is nearly always to create ambiguity, because every repetition adds nuances that alter meaning. **Say whatever you have to say well and once**.

The third candidate for cutting is any text that requires extensive rewriting, yet remains ineffective. In A.E. Hotchner's biography of Ernest Hemingway, the latter recounts how he rewrote a certain passage of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* about 70 times, the last just before the book went to press.[38] It was a passage that stopped us cold when we'd read the novel. If Hemingway, a very great technician, could not make that passage work, no one could. It should have been cut. If you have taken three shots at a passage and it still doesn't flow well and make good sense, cut it. Either you don't know what you are trying to say, or it isn't worth saying. Either way, you are wasting your time.

II. Build Effects into the Story.

1. Temporal effects: controlling the rhythm

A large share of narrative effects aim at managing the rhythm of a story. You do not always need to identify in advance the places where they can be most effective. Sometimes you will simply sense, as you are writing a text or editing a film or radio report, that your story is moving too quickly or slowly. But you can also foresee moments where you will generate intense excitement or potent meaning through a simple narrative device, and include it in your outline. Either way, **all of these effects depend on first collecting rich material**. You do not have the right to *invent* them, only the right to *use* them when justified by your material.[39]

a. Use conflict and struggle as drivers

Scenes, and in particular action scenes, push the narrative forward through creating and resolving tension. In a typical scene, a character reveals a pur-

38. Aaron Edward Hotchner, *Papa Hemingway: a personal memoir*. Da Capo Press, 2005.
39. See *The Hidden Scenario* for more on the technique of "reporting for story".

pose or goal and tries or fails to reach it. Conflict arises when the character encounters an obstacle. A struggle ensues, and then a climax, as the character either prevails or is defeated; resolution comes through reflection. All these elements can be delivered in one paragraph; in fact, the deadlier the action, the faster it can be shown. (Balzac and Melville could convincingly recount murders in a sentence or two.) In a story about train accidents,[40] a driver forgets his purpose, faces unpleasant consequences, loses a struggle with his own train, and damns the outcome:

> "Van Doorn must have overlooked a yellow signal, warning him that the next signal will show red, because suddenly a red light shines in his face. Before he can react, the automatic security system sets in and brakes the long, heavy train. It comes to a complete standstill just before it reaches the signal tower. A curse escapes from the driver's mouth."

b. Plant the nut graf

In complicated stories, you can save the reader from getting lost through occasional brief **summaries**. The most common form of this effect is the '**nut graf**' – a paragraph at or near the top of the story that sums it up in a few cogent phrases. If you indeed began your work with an investigative hypothesis, the verified, corrected hypothesis will serve this role for you.

Here is the nut graf from a story that opened a *very* slowly widening scandal that ended with legislative reform 11 years after our work appeared in 2002:

> "In 1992, a Socialist government capped the salaries of politicians. But they never said what would happen to the money the 'pols' couldn't collect. In the following decade, $45 million was transferred from the State to the pals of those same politicians."[41]

c. Recap the scheme

If the schemes described in your story are complicated, occasional "recap" summaries will not only keep the viewer from getting lost – they will also

40. From Luuk Sengers, "Door rood", published in *Intermediair*, July 19, 2001.

41. Mark Lee Hunter, Nour Richard-Guerroudj, Salim Jaouani, Fabien Laborde, Lucie Monier-Reyes and Aurore Gorius, "45 Million euros in pocket change for politicians." Originally published in Le Figaro, Jan. 8 2002. English translation: http://www.storybasedinquiry.com.

reinforce the viewer's amazed realisation that unbelievable things *do* happen. We used this device later in the same story; note the use of a quote to capture the meaning of the summary.

> "Let's sum up so far: you voted for a candidate who already had the good fortune to win another electoral post, which he keeps. (A privilege, let us recall, that no other democracy allows to the same extent as France.) Cloaked in this democratic legitimacy, he transfers a share of his salaries to another official who sits in one of the same assemblies. Possibly without knowing or desiring it, you have mandated your representative to boost the pay of another.
>
> 'It's a weird practice. Weird, especially coming from the State,' admits Catherine Gegout, adjunct mayor of the 20th Ward of Paris and member of the Communist group of the City Council."

If you find yourself thinking, "no one is going to *get* this," note it in your outline, and try inserting a summary. If a source has already tried to explain the mess to you, then that may well do the trick.

d. Listen to the chorus

Alternatively, you can rely on a **chorus** – characters who appear repeatedly, at certain intervals, to comment on or otherwise illuminate the situation. The impact of the chorus rises steadily as the viewer sees that it is telling the truth about successive developments. This role can obviously be played by an expert source, or by a victim who has learned a dreadful lesson. It may also be played by a thing – a weapon, or a document from which key facts repeatedly emerge (say, a political donor list).

In Moore's *Roger and Me*, which recounts General Motors' withdrawal from manufacturing in Flint, Michigan (USA), the chorus is a man who appears repeatedly to evict downsized workers who can no longer pay their mortgage or rent bills. The chorus in our crime story consisted of three cops who each separately interviewed a maid who had watched an old woman slowly die, locked in a room where she starved to death, beating on the door and crying until her strength gave out, and finally eating her own excrement. The maid had never noticed that something was wrong. In editing the master

file, we realised that every one of the cops had reacted to this terrifying brute in the same way: first with incredulity, then with anger, and then literally by hallucinating. We used those three different interview scenes, successively recounted in greater detail, to gradually deliver the full horror of the crime without sending the reader screaming for the exit. If an element from your master file keeps coming to the surface, make it your chorus.

2. Keep the reader guessing

Suspense intensifies the viewer's curiosity through postponement of crucial actions. It comes in several forms, and the following are among the most useful for nonfiction:

a. Foreshadow what's coming

This effect provides a glimpse of what is to come to the viewer, but not to the actors of the story. The viewer thus sees that a momentary climax is deceptive – something else is about to happen. That news can be delivered by a source, or by you, the author. If the ominous voice is yours, keep it short, or you'll distract and annoy the viewer. One of our students wrote: "The woman was in her third month of pregnancy. She went to her gynaecologist for what she thought was a routine visit. Instead, she and her husband would go through a traumatising experience." That last sentence kills the suspense and puts the author in front of the victim.

In our crime story, the lawyer Duminy learns that the picture Christie's is trying to sell was smuggled out of France. He manages to negotiate a deal with the Louvre that saves Christie's from severe punishment. The chapter ends:

> "Duminy returned to his office after the meeting ended, and prepared a message for Gregory Martin. Christie's had stubbornly held open the option of a sale for [the picture's owner]. Now Duminy telexed King Street: 'The [picture] should be withdrawn from sale.' He was too tired to explain himself. He added only: 'Letter follows.'
>
> This mess is nearly over, he thought.
>
> He was wrong."

b. Place a time bomb

The extreme form of foreshadowing is a time bomb – an event that will explode with massive force. Once again, the audience knows what's coming. The trick is to plant the bomb, then switch to another setting before it goes off, as in this example from our investigation into train accidents:

> "In the locomotive cabin, Van Doorn runs through his routine. He increases the speed by gently pushing forward a lever, his eyes switching between the metres on his dashboard and the track outside his window. When he is satisfied, he releases his grip and settles into his chair. At 130km/h, he sees trees, buildings and cows flash smoothly by. Then, without warning, the train jumps.
>
> At that same moment, 90km down the track, Helen Jansen climbs the stairs to her observation post…"

You can't insert a time bomb for the fun of it, but if you have one, it's fun for the viewer. However, it surely wasn't amusing for those who were in the room when it exploded. So don't overdo it. In particular, don't abuse people, even if they made a gross mistake or did something terrible. You will pay dearly for insults if and when you are sued, and they will not make your story better. They will merely signal to your adversaries that you are afraid of them.

3. Let them laugh

Humour, usually dark or absurdist, counts among the most under-used effects of investigative reporting – perhaps because its powers are potent and difficult to control. The main risk is that you trivialise the story and its victims through making a joke of suffering. You also want to avoid sneering at your subjects, which usually makes you look worse than them.

But when used well, the benefits of humour can be significant. First, you can provide momentary relief to the viewer. This is another trick we learned from Balzac, who cuts into even horrific action like murder or suicide with absurd counterpoints. It's fiction, but the truth is that life sometimes behaves that way, if you care to notice it. In one passage of our crime story, a dreadful interrogation that lasted deep into the night, involving several defendants, their lawyers and a pair of angry magistrates, abruptly degenerated into mad

laughter. The reader takes a breath, and then things get worse.

Andrew Jennings lightens the excruciating passage of time for a team of football champions who were obliged to sue their paymaster, with sardonic poetry: "More months passed. Small creatures lived out their life cycles and the leaves fell."[42]

Note that the humour in both these examples serves ultimately to underline the irrational undercurrents of the stories. Beware of the temptation to make sense of everything. A great deal of cruelty is absolutely senseless, and one or another species of cruelty often figures in investigative stories. Humour enables you to evoke it without weeping.[43]

You may also marvel innocently at the very amazing things that Our Betters may do:

> "Years before his banking empire was shut down in a massive fraud case, Allen Stanford swept into Florida with a bold plan: entice Latin Americans to pour millions into his ventures – in secrecy.
>
> From a bayfront office in Miami in 1998, he planned to sell investments to customers and send their money to Antigua.
>
> But to pull it off, he needed unprecedented help from an unlikely ally: the state of Florida would have to grant him the right to move vast amounts of money offshore – without reporting a penny to regulators.
>
> He got it."[44]

Quoting sources who say bizarre or ridiculous things is fair game, too. Thus a government official who enabled the above fraud comments: "Upon reflection, would I have liked to have done it differently? Would I have liked to stop them from doing what they currently did? Yes, of course."[45] When someone hands you a pearl like that, display it and step aside. Don't get in the way of your own effect.

When you go through the master file or the rushes, pay attention to moments when something tears a stunned laugh out of you. It will do the same to the reader or viewer.

---

42. From Andrew Jennings, "Jack Warner still won't pay Soca Warriors their 2006 World Cup money". Casebook, pp. 219-227, 220.
43. For a stunning example, see Jon Stewart's "Torture Talk" at www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-february-11-2008/torture-talk
44. Lucy Komisar, Michael Sallah and Rob Barry, "Florida Regulators – over objections by the state's top banking lawyer – gave sweeping powers to banker Allen Stanford, accused of swindling investors of $7 billion." Casebook, pp. 151-158
45. Ibid, p152.

4. The functions of detail

Most beginning investigators worry whether they have enough detail in their story, or conversely, they fail to recognise the value of specific material. We recommend that you think of detail in terms of the function it serves for you.

The most obvious principle here is that details validate the narrative. By providing nuances of facts, we signal to our viewers that we know the story very well indeed.

Certain visual or spoken details can symbolise larger themes, and thus function as **found metaphors**. Used correctly, they capture various meanings of your story. For example, the entry to the part of the Louvre where its leaders work is called the Lion's Gate, because it is flanked by two stone lions – "symbols of a bygone royal power, and of the ferocious pride at the heart of the Louvre," we noted. That's what the lawyer Duminy unhappily saw on his way into the Louvre to negotiate for Christie's. Later, our story shifts to the Palace of Justice in a provincial city, where the staircase is flanked by statues of Justice and Law, "each of which was missing an arm." That's the image of our tale. Why struggle to invent metaphors when life throws them in your face?

Just as importantly, detail modulates the speed of your narrative. It takes time for viewers to absorb each fact that you present, and more time to grasp its significance. If the viewers conclude that too many details carry no meaning, they will begin to resent you, or to suspect that you don't know what matters in your own story, or simply to feel bored. Any of these sentiments will lead them to drop your story.

The following passage from our crime story begins by drawing close attention to a particular document – a rare formal proof that an art smuggling crime had been committed. The desired effect is to create a sinister anticipation.

> "Landais [the Director of the National Museums] asked: 'Do you have proof that the picture was in France recently?' Frequently his curators identified smuggled works, but such proof was lacking, and no action could be taken against the smugglers.
>
> [The curator in chief of paintings] Laclotte opened his file and took out a sheet of paper, typed over by a worn machine. It was a report on the

> Murillo, compiled in the Louvre's own laboratory, signed by the lab's former Chief Curator, Magdeleine Hours, and dated April 17, 1975."

By slowing down the action, we imply that something awful is taking place; the document becomes a death letter. This is the King Vidor trick we promised to show you: By giving each gesture more weight, we communicate gravity. Vidor did it by beating a drum behind his marching actors in a funeral scene. You can also do it by adding detail. In film, you can also do it with a close up, which signals that we must carefully watch the speaker's face.

Remember that every detail you insert into the story demands attention from the viewer. **Try to show only the details that deserve attention**. Frequently, these will be the facts or stimuli that your sources noticed in the course of a given event. Let them tell you what matters, and how it matters. Which, by the way, they did for us in this exact case:

> "The sight of that document was like a slap in Landais's face. There was only one way the Murillo could have entered the Louvre's lab: it must have been offered for sale to the National Museums. Only works under consideration for acquisition could be examined by the Louvre's curators (otherwise, every dealer in Paris would be asking the Louvre to certify his or her wares). So someone had brought the picture to the Louvre, and then snatched it away and taken it abroad."

If it takes a while to tell us why a detail counts, ask yourself if it's really needed. If not, cut it. Life is full of details, and most of them matter only for a moment, if at all. By trying to make each of them seem important, you reduce all of them to meaninglessness. If you are unsure of the value of a given detail, try telling a colleague or trusted friend about it. If either of you gets bored, it's time to cut.

5. The human factor: how characters create perspective

One of the great advantages of journalism, relative to fiction, is the ease with which an author may shift from one individual's point of view to another without weakening the narrative. To do this, we need to show our characters from different perspectives, and not merely cite individuals as sources of information.

a. Characters can be symbols

By far the most common device in investigative composition is **personification – the embodiment of a situation or issue in an individual**. The reason for its popularity is that it is simple and very effective when properly done. Frequently, a journalist will employ personification in the lead of a story, to put a human face on a complex issue. The reporter can also use different characters to symbolise different aspects of a story.

The best way to get this wrong is to finish your research and then dig through the manure pile in search of someone who fits the role you have in mind. You will end up trying to twist personal testimony into your chosen frame.

The best way to get it right is to be alert, as you research, for individuals who typify known facts or issues embedded in your story. For example, Letícia Duarte looked for a boy between 11 and 14 years old on the streets of Sao Paulo, because that is the average age of Brazil's homeless kids. Often characters responsible for key events in your master file exemplify a certain type –the grandmother in the attic, the cheating prosecutor. You can begin with a known profile; just take pains to see if there's anything to them beyond the stereotype. (Sometimes a cheap hood is just a cheap hood.)

A second common error resides in using the most shocking individual example in your file as a lead, whether or not it fits your story. Terrible things can happen to people, and people can do terrible things, but not all of those things may be directly related to your investigation. As criminologist and investigative reporter Declan Hill once remarked, if your story is about match fixing in football, it is *not* about doping.[46] So don't show us an athlete with a syringe unless he's placing a bet.

In a properly chosen anecdote, every detail points toward a larger issue, and the facts seem carved into the character's face and flesh. Sometimes the signs indicate success, but more often they involve suffering. The following example furnished the lead for a four-part series on an obscure law that created a population of handicapped children. We knew we'd found the lead when a woman we were interviewing said, "You know, there were times I wondered if my daughter would be better off dead." The passage starts with

46. Cited in Casebook, p. 218.

that phrase, then shows us that she is one among hundreds of thousands of cases, then zooms in on a child who fully symbolises the horror that resulted from the law.[47] The overall tone is of shocked outrage. Details of the damage to the girl, combined with the mother's deadly calm tone, make clear that our accusations may be justified. All of these factors were considered when we wrote and edited the story.

"There were times when Carol Castellano wondered if her daughter would have been better off dead.

Born in 1984 after only 23 weeks in the womb, Serena Castellano is one of more than a quarter of a million disabled children who owe their lives to ink: the Baby Doe legislation of 1982-84, which made it a crime for doctors to do less than the maximum to keep even the least tenable prematurely-born infants alive.

The quarter-million children who would have been left to die before Ronald Reagan signed them alive, and their families, frequently found themselves alone, overwhelmed by pain, worry and care, burdens made even more terrible by the lack of government support. The same government that snatched these babies back from death left them crippled – and heartlessly abandoned them and their families.

Like so many others in this virtually unnoticed, unreported population, Serena Castellano would not have survived the delivery room only years earlier. Like so many others, Serena survived to suffer. Born blind, brain damage prevented her from speaking or chewing, and pulmonary and abdominal abnormalities required six operations in her first eight months – not one with anaesthesia.

'If I'd had some way of knowing what [extremely premature] babies endure, I wouldn't have wanted my baby to go through that,' said Carol Castellano, president and co-founder of New Jersey Parents of Blind Children. 'I adore my daughter. I'd never wish her away. But if I were in premature labour, I wouldn't go to a hospital. I'd stay home and let nature take its course."

47. We are grateful to Hesh Kestin, founder of *The American*, whose editing of the original story brought this passage to life and made this a prize story. Reminder to the reader: If an editor makes it better, agree.

Personification never fails when you have the right data. If it isn't working, you don't.

In that event, either find new sources, go back to your present sources for more information, or use another strategy. Please note: If you find no sources who illustrate the problem you hope to solve, you are on the wrong track.

Locations or things can also personify different aspects of your story. Certain things can happen only in certain places; certain objects are necessary to accomplish specific actions (you can't shoot someone without a weapon). Thus Robert Louis Stevenson opens a story of murder and flight in the night by turning Paris into a gigantic, frozen trap:

> "It was late in November, 1456. The snow fell over Paris with rigorous, relentless persistence; sometimes the wind made a sally and scattered it in flying vortices; sometimes there was a lull, and flake after flake descended out of the black night air, silent, circuitous, interminable."[48]

The larger principle here is that any of the "five Ws" – who, what, when, where, why – can lead us into a story or a section within a story. Try playing with different elements of your story in this way. Just remember: Use the device and then move on. Don't try to build an entire story around *one* element.

b. Create parallel versions of events and meanings

Frequently in journalistic research, one source will not recall an event in the same way as another, or may even deny that an event someone else described in detail ever occurred. When this happens, rather than try to reconcile different versions, you can also use as many as you find pertinent, and let the viewer decide what really went down. For example, you can show one source saying, "nothing happened," and then another version of the same scene, in which something quite interesting happens. To show that one or the other source is more credible, offer evidence that supports one version or the other (say, someone saw the two sources go into a room together, or there were consequent events).

---

48. Stevenson, Robert Louis, "A Lodging for the Night". In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories (Vintage Classic)*. Vintage Classics, 2007.

A powerful variant of this approach is to take two or more versions of the same event, and create a **dialogue** based on extracts. Such conversations may reveal not only information, but also personality traits and circumstances that lead to serious consequences. The following verbal confrontation was reconstructed from interviews with two sources – a highly experienced railroad worker and an insecure rail traffic controller. They found it quite hard to communicate, and that failure contributed to a major accident:

"Her phone rings. It's a train driver: 'Hey, I'm calling to report a flap.'

"Did you say, 'A flap'?"

"Yes, a flap. You know, a spot under the track where the earth has been washed away, making the rail flap and the train bounce. Didn't you know? We have been using this word for ages."

"Look, this is really called a flap, right? Otherwise my colleagues here will make fun of me.'"

c. Narrate from the character's point of view

Characters who lived part of the story in a particularly intense way enable us to recount that part through their eyes. To make this effect work, we need to set these people in context. We must show enough of their past to understand how they got where they are, and what they might be capable of. Finally, we need to see them in action.

The following passages are based on an hour-long interview, and describe a social worker who stumbled onto evidence of a blood crime. Alone among the actors in the story, she tried to stop it from happening – too late, as it turned out:

"Brigitte Tonelli was 26 years old, a little blonde with a sweet and most oddly childish voice, especially considering the sorrows she saw and heard every day. In the fall of 1986 she was two years into her career, armed with a college diploma and a certificate of three years' study with the Red Cross, as a social worker for the town of La Garde... It was a highly-trained job paying about $1000 monthly, but she'd wanted to help people, and there were an awful lot to help.... Their stories were awfully alike: alcoholism, family violence, despair. But Tonelli still treated every case like it was dis-

> tinct and important, still felt pain for her clients. She was either very strong, or very naïve."

The last assessment was based on what we felt during our first conversation with her. Further on, as Tonelli tracks a criminal, we see that she is not naïve, after all:

> "No way was she going to say what she was really calling about. If a an old woman had been locked away, and this woman was privy to it, any trace of the crime might be cleaned-up before Tonelli could do anything about it, and an old lady would stay imprisoned. Tonelli hadn't yet seen anything like that herself, but she'd heard of it."

Do not worry if these personages subsequently disappear from the story. However, if they reappear after a few pages or minutes, the viewer will probably have forgotten them. That will surely be the case if you have given the viewer other things to consider in the meanwhile. So remind the viewer who is talking – for example, "the social worker, Tonelli."

d. Borrow the character's voice

Extended quotes alter the tone and perspective of the narrative, because another voice takes over from yours. This places the viewer beside you, as mutual spectators of a third actor. In the following passage, a leader of the National Front electrifies an auditorium by improvising a speech, which we recorded for once (transcription is slow, so we try to avoid it). The news value of the passage is zero; its value resides in exposing the mentality of a man who says he wants to lead a democracy. The typographic effects were added to the published text to recreate his tone. At the end of the passage we reclaim the narrative with a brief, ironic note that shifts the perspective to a distance from the speaker:

> "'There are, in this government and its back alleys, people who should be in prison for pae-do-phi-lia. You hear me? **You hear me**? You can say Roger Holeindre told you that! You can give the hour! It's a quarter to five, I think! YOU HEAR ME? Well, I was saying the other night, "we should **hang** all this scum," and a lady in the room said, "Ah, Mr Holeindre, that

isn't nice, why do you want to hang them?" And I replied: "yes, Madame, do you know what it is, paedophilia?" "Ah, no, I don't know." "Well, it's men who profit from their positions... *TO RAPE LITTLE CHILDREN OF THREE, FOUR OR FIVE YEARS OF AGE!*" "*Oh, we have to hang them!*" "***You said it, Madame!***"'

The room exploded into applause."

e. Get inside the character's mind

Another way to shift perspective is by citing the **thoughts** of your sources, which takes us into their world. To be valid and ethical, this approach must be founded on very solid material. You can obtain this material through letters, emails, diaries, or interviews; on one occasion a lawyer offered us his client's prison notebooks to copy, to make up for a broken promise. If you did not obtain such material, and you regret not having it, simply get in touch with your sources again before or while you write. Aren't you glad you have their contact info handy?

We like to say that a narrative is like a train. Your concern at the outset is to make sure the passengers get on board. Once the train is rolling, you can slow it down to allow the passengers to consider a choice bit of scenery. You can even throw a switch and take them down a parallel track for a while, before accelerating toward the final destination. But never, ever, stop the train. If you do, the passengers will take it as a signal to get off.

III. The Temptation of the Ending

How do you end a story that hasn't stopped? This is the structural obstacle that faces all journalists, and especially investigative journalists. Showing that something unacceptable is true does not necessarily mean that it will disappear. Nor do journalists typically possess the power to impose an ending of their own imagining.

They can, however, offer a judgement. From that standpoint, an investigation is a long requisitory, ending with a verdict. The awful statement that ends Shawcross's *Sideshow* – "What they did in Cambodia was a crime" – is just such a verdict. It will not bring back the dead, but it may change the way you

feel about Henry Kissinger and Richard M Nixon. It certainly changed the way we write: it showed us that a journalist may indeed step out from behind the facts to deliver their meaning.

In our crime story, we ended with three different kinds of verdicts – the court's, the unspoken judgement of the defendant's son, and the prosecutor's private judgement – and then said: "This is our verdict." In that passage we put everything that we had withheld until the end. This technique generates tremendous power, on condition that the viewer accepts the investigation. In that case, all you are doing is saying, very explicitly, what the viewer already suspects. Precision counts hugely here. Do not surprise the viewer by judging matters that you have neither investigated nor revealed; do not use language that cannot be justified by the facts.

There are several other ways to reveal the meaning of the story, and related errors to avoid.

1. Let a source write your closer

We've said this before, and it's worth saying again: no one understands the meaning of a story better than those who lived it. Sometimes you will find a statement that captures this meaning in your master file. Sometimes you will recognise it at the moment it is spoken by a source. That was the case with the closer to the first part of our Baby Doe series, when an interview ended with a shocking, sardonic comment – the kind of thing that brave people say to conjure away horror. It contained a found metaphor for the pointless, programmed suffering of the story. All we did was to set it in context:

> "Last year, doctors at Cedars Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles saved a newborn who weighed just 13 ounces. Six months and $1m in medical bills later, the infant was discharged. He died two weeks later.
>
> 'The family were lucky – they had indemnity insurance,' said Charlie Lahaie, a spokesperson for Cedars Sinai. 'Can you imagine paying a $1m bill and your baby's not even alive?'"

Reporters learning their trade often flub this technique, and the usual reason is that they give the last word to the wrong source. Frequently, this source is someone older and much more famous than the reporter – say, a leader is his or her field. If an investigation threatens such figures or their colleagues, they

can be expected to subvert it. Often, they do so by offering grand declarations, taking you into their confidence as a person of rare intelligence and understanding. In reality, they are treating you like an insect, and stepping on you and your story. And then you accept their opinion by using their words to confound your story.

If you can't find a closing quote in your master file that fits the meaning of the facts, either you're trying to tell the wrong story, or someone else is telling you the wrong story.

2. Stop when we can see the next step in the voyage… or there is nothing more to see

In Emmanuel Mayah's account of life on the path across Africa to Europe with would-be illegal immigrants, the closer is the moment when he can no longer bear the deadly dangers of this road: "Every step forward was a further risk."[49] The only places left to go are home or the grave. When your investigation arrives at such a crossroads, show the viewer all the choices, and then pick one.

A variant here is to show the viewer that certain truths can never be known. Paradoxically, the effect is to reinforce the viewer's astonishment at what the story has already revealed. Thus Alexenia Dimitrova, after exposing in detail an ultra-secret Bulgarian secret service unit that conducted abductions and assassinations, leaves us in front of a closed door: "The American files contained no further information on the kidnapping ring."[50]

3. Show the viewer a solution

Woodward and Bernstein end *All the President's Men* by provoking Congress and the public with Richard M Nixon's refusal to exit; they did not explicitly say, "This guy has to go." In the 39 years since they published that book, notions of objectivity have changed. Internet forums have trained viewers to expect that media can and should provide solutions to their problems, and not only the facts they require to make their own informed decisions. (The internet has also taught them that much of what passes for information, including in news media, is not.) If you have taken the time to investigate pos-

49. Emmanuel Mayah, "Europe by Desert: Tears of African Migrants." Casebook, pp. 51-65, 65.
50. Alexenia Dimitrova, "The Murder Bureau." Casebook, pp. 21-26.

sible solutions to the wrongdoing or careless damage your story has revealed, why would you *not* use them?

One of our most satisfying investigations concerned an internet service provider who made a phony "unlimited access" offer to its customers in France, without adequate equipment to satisfy the demand. Another media published the story as we were going to press, but they didn't tell cheated consumers how to sue the company. We did. We don't know if anyone sued the company because of our story, but at least one person sued the company and won. We can live with that.

Not all your stories will or should deliver an immediate pay-off. But as often as you can, specify how an issue can be resolved or improved, and who might be responsible for doing so. We are not the first people to make that suggestion; we first heard it in Jay Rosen's work on "public" or "civic" journalism in the 1990s.[51] Rosen proposed that news media must be directly engaged in society, as reformers and builders. He was not infrequently trashed for that idea. We think he was right, on condition that media propose solutions based on solid research. Like yours.

If you have made the case, in the end (or even earlier) you may tell the viewer what it means. If you can't do that, or refuse to do it, either you don't believe in the story, or you don't believe in yourself.

51. See Rosen, J., & Merritt, D. (Eds.). (1994). *Public journalism: Theory and practice*. Kettering Foundation.

Chapter Six

The Ethics of Investigative Style

The worst ethical and stylistic mistake of investigative reporting is to take the place of the victim. Sometimes this occurs because reporters are so horrified by their stories that they unconsciously look away from it, into themselves and their own pain. Sometimes it occurs because the reporter acts in an arrogant, opportunistic or callous way.[52] The ensemble of the American people press, from the *National Enquirer* to *Vanity Fair*, painted the parents of the murdered child JonBenet Ramsey as guilty of the crime. There was no evidence that could support an indictment. The "proofs" leaked to reporters consisted solely of insinuations from the police.[53]

This is important: we are not writing novels here, in which anything you can make believable is as good as true. An investigative journalist has no right to use the imagination as a substitute for verified facts, or as an excuse for

52. Not only journalists do this. In the 1980s, French novelist Marguerite Duras, a favourite of President François Mitterrand, visited the home of a woman she would never meet, who had been jailed for the murder of her own child. The crime, Duras explained in the daily *Libération* over a two-page spread, was the woman's "forcibly sublime" response to the mediocrity of her condition. The woman was innocent. See Marguerite Duras, *Sublime, forcibly sublime Christine V.* Montréal: Héliotrope, 2006.

53. See Mark Hunter, "Newsreal: Free the Boulder Two!", Salon.com, 17 October 1997: http://www.salon.com/1997/10/17/news_395/

exploiting someone else's pain.

Emile Zola provides an example to follow here. When he wrote *J'accuse*, a roar of protest at the railroading of Captain Alfred Dreyfus on phony charges of espionage, he adopted a narrative position beside Dreyfus, as the victim's advocate.[54]

This is the rule: **Never step in front of sources, except to shield them**.

This rule is simply best practice. Even Tom Wolfe, who hardly conceals himself from his readers, knows how to step back when someone who matters is saying something that matters (for example, when Junior Johnson, "the last American hero", is talking about the time he served in prison[55]). Likewise, try not to say anything for sources, especially victims, that either they can say for themselves or would not say under any circumstances. (Someone on trial for his life, for example, might not enjoy reading his imaginary confession, courtesy of you.) Do not imagine that you are giving a voice to the voiceless, please. You are listening to and judging the voices that your sources possess.

As the viewer progresses through the story, he or she will wonder – just as sources do when you approach them during an investigation – *why are you asking these questions*? *What are you going to do with this information*? The reporter's motives inevitably become part of the story, because the reporter is asking both sources and the viewer to trust in the story and its meaning.

You must therefore work with confidence that you are doing a right and meaningful thing by telling the story. That is not the same thing as an aggressive tone, which generally reveals a lack of confidence. One of the most common errors in neophyte investigations consists of tearing into one's target from the first line, then ending the story in a conciliatory tone: *Well, maybe the guy is human, after all*. This is fear talking – fear of retaliation, or of being mistaken for a nasty insect. If you know what you're talking about, don't be nasty about it, and *never* apologise for it. In a well-done investigation, you need to push the material very little for it to leap at the viewer.

If you are not confident about this or that point, you need to say why. Transparency matters to contemporary users of our content. They practice it

54. Zola, E. (1898). *J'accuse*. Paris: Fayard/Mille et une nuits, 1998.
55. See Tom Wolfe (1965). "The Last American Hero is Junior Johnson. Yes!". *Esquire: The Best of Forty Years* (New York, 1973), 144-59.

themselves: The members of internet forums who say they like or dislike a given product nearly always announce whether they have a relationship with its makers. So must you.

Viewers no longer reject authentic emotion as noise, manipulation or unprofessionalism in media professionals. They expect even professionals to be affected by the stories they tell. They still expect us not to succumb to those emotions – to seek the meaning in them, rather than wallowing in them like a mud-drunk hippo. But they allow us to say what we feel, when we have earned the right to say it.

An investigation, precisely, is one of the ways to earn that right. Don't abuse it, but don't refuse to acknowledge your emotions, *especially to yourself*. They do not need to be explicitly stated; they will get into your work, one way or the other. Meanwhile, treat emotions like any other kind of material, to be verified and mined for information and meaning. Get them into your master file as *notes*: or observations. Repeat: You may, but don't need to, declare them to the viewer. But In any case try not to deny them, because then you will have no control over or use from them.[56]

In our mid-thirties, one of us went through a professional crisis, and the core of it was that he had done such a good job of eliminating himself from his work that it no longer meant anything to him. Wasn't that what journalists were supposed to do – *just give us the facts, ma'am*, as they said on *Dragnet*? We're now in a period where a CNN reporter can say, "Thanks for watching me," instead of "Thanks for watching the story." Neither of these stances works as an investigative style. The story needs you to give it meaning; the facts are not enough. But you must not stand in front of the facts and the people who lived them.

There is no one right way to manage this balance. But when sources realise that this is what you seek to do, most of them will try to help you to succeed.

And you will.

56. For more on this subject, see Mark Hunter, "Psyches and Investigative Work: The Flypaper Syndrome and other phenomena." IRE Journal, January-February 1996.

Chapter Seven

Maximise the Return on Investment

For some strange reason, reporters and editors tend to think that a single episode of a story can change the world, all alone. Thus TV news stations in the US run their investigations during ratings sweep weeks, then forget about them. Unfortunately, it is extremely rare that a single episode of any story has lasting impact. That outcome is absolutely certain when a story is simply "thrown over the wall", on the assumption that it will be greeted with public outrage, official shame and remedial action. It won't. Reporters must build their publics, seeking out allies who will amplify and defend their work.[57]

There is another waste that results from such strategies: The reporter winds up sitting on a mass of material, acquired through long work that is rarely or never used again. It is as if we spent our lives building prototypes that never went into production.

In this section we suggest and briefly discuss a number of other uses for your material. We strongly suggest that before publication, you prepare a

57. See David L. Protess, Fay Lomax Cook, Jack C. Doppelt, James S. Ettema, Margaret T. Gordon, Donna R. Leff, and Peter Miller, *The journalism of outrage: Investigative reporting and agenda building in America*. Guilford Press, 1992.

strategy that involves these features. One way or the other, you can seek to maximise the return on investment of your time, skills and passion.

1. Spread the story over time

Instead of one long blockbuster story, try publishing it as a series. Once you have attracted a core audience to the story, they will not go away while it continues.

Some stories and characters never die – they just move to a new location. Follow them there and report it. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists did this with the asbestos industry, and the result was a groundbreaking global exposé.[58]

Make sure that those who can effect change take action upon your story. Ask for their reactions and follow them closely. Promise your audience that they will hear the latest plans for change from you first. Then, use news breaks as publicity for your latest chapter. One story like this can change your career, or your business.

2. Serve some side dishes

Typically investigative features are so rich that you may place some content in separate stories without hurting the main piece. Moreover, the main story may become more powerful when it is "relieved" from the burden of copious characters, facts, figures, dates, etc. Some of these side-stories can become independent pieces.

You can use the master file to write a story about how you discovered the news: *The making of...* The story can be used at journalism conferences, in lectures, in exhibits (where you can also show off photos that weren't sold elsewhere), in specialised magazines or as an awards entry.

All subjects have a history, usually including laws, agreements, meetings, sanctions, and other key events. Reporters typically present that history in their main story, but it can be rich in its own right. People like reading histories, because of the simple, chronological structure and the context they provide for recent events. Satisfy that appetite, and demonstrate your command of the past as well as the present.

---

58. Jim Morris et al., "Exporting an epidemic." Casebook, pp. 138-148.

Business schools and NGOs are frequently interested by in-depth examinations of a firm, a policy or an individual. The former generally pay better than news media. However, you may find it difficult to retain your rights to the work in both of these markets.

If your master file contains portraits or biographical material on key actors in the story, you can spin that material into feature articles as their careers continue. A variation is to create a portrait of their power networks, which can be published and sold independently from the main story. Such stories are highly popular on the internet, where users can click on characters to discover their relationships. Similarly, if money moves through your story, show its route as a graphic or a separate story. The market is wide for stories about how money is made or stolen.

Some people grasp numbers more quickly than words. But nearly *all* people like to learn about stunning figures. Put them to the side as colourful graphics, and make sure you can understand each graphic in a single glance.

Even reporters worried about their own objectivity can agree that in an editorial piece, they have the right to opine. It's a great way to keep your story, and sometimes your career, alive. When our biography of French culture minister Jack Lang was effectively banned by its subject, we wrote an op-ed piece[59] that was picked up by the French edition of the *Reader's Digest*. If nothing else, it showed him that we weren't going away.

3. Create assets

A proper investigation nearly always generates assets that can support not only a project, but a business. Don't throw those assets away. Consider how they can be re-used or monetised.

Create a database of the data you have collected and make it available to your audience on a website. Give them an opportunity to construct their own "stories". For example, the Center for Public Integrity offers free access to a large database of polluted places in the USA.

You can monetise a database by selling it to interested stakeholder groups, or by creating niche media for such groups. This has been done by small publishers as diverse as France's lesradins.com, which offers consumers verified

59. Mark Hunter, *The Art of Cultural Suicide*, Washington Post, June 16 1991.

leads to free goods and services, and the UK's ethicalconsumer.org, who have compiled the world's most complete database on boycotts.

Expertise is also an asset, and sooner or later, a government, industry or stakeholder group will find yours interesting. However, be aware that working with them can involve a conflict of interest. For example, if you work for a corporate, non-disclosure agreements are typically requested and enforced. You cannot use what you learn from them without their permission, if at all. Moreover, any future journalism work you do that involves them will require disclosure of your past relationship.

Do not play with this rule. The career of the medical reporter for *Le Monde*, France's newspaper of record, was badly damaged by the revelation that he had accepted a part-time salary for several years from one of the defendants in the "contaminated blood" case. He neither recused himself from the story nor informed his readers of his past employment.[60]

Don't just investigate stories: also investigate the *value* your work can create – aesthetic, social, financial – for you and others. It's a way to motivate yourself, and to see what you contribute as well as what your skills are worth.

60. See Mark Hunter, "Ethical Conflict and Investigative Reporting: Le Monde and the Contaminated Blood Affair." *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 2/2 (1997): 77-95.

Chapter Eight

Learn How Right You Can Be: Editing and Quality Control

The American practice of fact-checking – reviewing a story for factual accuracy, completeness and precision of expression – was designed to minimise the risk of legal challenge, by removing errors from an investigation that could suggest culpable negligence in a libel trial. It has since been adopted by some leading investigative units elsewhere, and in particular by Nils Hanson's unit at the SVT in Sweden, where they call it "line by line editing". Some reporters dread it. We have learned to love this process. It affords an opportunity to refine a story while confirming its veracity. When done properly on the basis of a solid narrative, it imparts a terrific sense of confidence in the product.

There should be at least two of you in the room. Your job is to answer the questions the other person asks, politely and *directly*.

Of course your first objective is to verify that every fact and allegation in

your story reposes on documented sources (such as official papers or interview notes). You can make this part of the process easier by doing two things:

- Put your supporting documents in the order of appearance in your final story;
- Add footnotes to the story that refer to the documents. (Fact-checkers will love you for doing this.)

In the process that follows, there are three main things you are looking for.

1. Assess the "feel" of the story

Read or watch the story in its entirety. What is your first impression? Does the story "feel" right? Do you miss something? Are there any passages that do *not* feel right?

Be especially critical toward the tone of your story. A negative tone may impact the viewer more than the facts.[61] In particular, verbs and adjectives often express a quality or judgement. Saying that someone "claims" something implies that the claim is false. Saying they are "shrewd" is less of a compliment than calling them "thoughtful". We know a great TV reporter who lost a libel case for using *one* such word. The word added nothing to his story.

Most targets of an investigation are not deadly adversaries, and their failings are due to carelessness or stupidity, not evil. Treat them with respect. Do not merely *allow* fatigue, revulsion or stress to make you aggressive.

Whatever you say, say it for a conscious reason, knowing you can back it up. Be aware that at this point, you may have discovered some things that you would rather not have known, but are nonetheless demonstrably true. That can be depressing, and it can also lead you to wonder if you've gone crazy. If these feelings occur to you – sooner or later, they will – pay particular attention to verifying your facts. It's the best way to judge whether or not you have truly discovered something that no one else has tried, dared or wished to reveal.

Your feelings can provide a good first test of your product. Let them alert you to potential problems.

---

61. We thank Wim Criel, who shared years of experience as a lawyer for the Belgium media group Roularta in one of our previous books (Luuk Sengers, ed., *Onderzoeksjournalistiek. Researchproces van idee tot verhaal*, Lannoo Campus 2009); we also use his insights here.

2. Check the facts and their sources

Ask yourself for every fact in the story: Is it correct? Does it reflect the *whole* truth? And for quotes: did you paraphrase correctly and completely? Check also the facts that are *not* in the story: Did you leave out inconvenient (for you) truths?

For every fact and quote, who or what is the source, and *how reliable is that source*? Is every document authentic? Can its contents be verified, to show that they were not manipulated, disguised, adjusted or distorted? Are there other documents that shed a different light on the story? Have you read and interpreted all the documents correctly?

Who are your human sources? How did they gain access to their information? Does the source have an interest in a particular outcome of your story? Do any other sources offer similar information?

If thoughts or feelings are described, what are the descriptions based on? Has the source talked about it in interviews, or did he note his thoughts and feelings at the time in documents such as diaries, which are in your possession?

Your adversary is the ultimate source. Before you publish, you must offer your targets a chance to explain and rebut the facts that concern them. If doing so involves physical danger, you may take the risk of not seeking comment from your targets. However, in general your risks are greater if you do not engage your targets than if you do, because in the first case they will perceive you as unprofessional and frightened. So may judges and juries.

Consider yourself as a source, too. Are you able to see the story in a balanced way? Have you been misled by one or another party to the events? Is there an alternative explanation for your facts? Do you have an interest in the outcome of the story? Of course you want something to change, but to change something for the better, you need first to accept the reality of the situation, whether or not you like it. If you don't agree, please change jobs.

3. Check the narrative flow

By now you have grown so close to the story that you probably can't tell whether it works well as a narrative or not. You need help, and preferably skilled help.

Ask a friend whose talents, frankness and taste you respect to listen to or

watch the story. Don't pay attention to the story as you read or show it. Instead, watch their reaction. Do they seem bored or tired or confused at a given moment? Ask them, afterwards, what most impressed, distressed or annoyed them in the story.

Also, listen to yourself: does your voice grow strained, or shift to a higher pitch, at a certain passage? Do you speed up, as if trying to burst through an obstacle, or slow down as if bearing a crushing weight? If these are not the effects you desired, something is wrong.

You will know you are done when the story creates the emotion in you that you hope to create in its public.

Congratulations. You've created a story that may change something for the better. Do another one, soon.

Afterword

This book was written using the techniques it advocates.

We began by creating a master file, using our presentations from the past several years to provide a basic structure. We then completed this structure with new research, ideas, citations from work we hoped to use, and subjects we wished to discuss. These materials were set in a provisional order.

As we wrote, we perceived gaps in the text, or pieces that needed to be placed elsewhere. Daily writing sessions began with review and revision of all the text to date, including such details as footnotes (which we sometimes add later for the sake of maintaining momentum as we write). Revision consisted mainly of cutting, followed by word changes to augment precision. On occasion we restored previous cuts.

We have previously used this method as individuals in dozens of long-form projects, ranging from books to investigative features. However, writing as a duo or team can be harder than writing solo, largely because different individuals may consider certain ideas or facts, and the way that they are expressed, more or less important. We have found in two collaborations that our method simplifies the inevitable issues and conflicts that arise, because most content inclusion decisions are made early on. It also helps the work to get completed in a reasonable and predictable time frame.

To comment on this book or suggest additions (we promise to cite contributors, just as we cite our other sources), please write to us at: info@storybasedinquiry.com

More information: www.storybasedinquiry.com

Mark Lee Hunter

is an Adjunct Professor at the INSEAD Social Innovation Centre, where he is a founding member of the Stakeholder Media Project. He is also a founding member and board member of the Global Investigative Journalism Network. He has taught investigative journalism on five continents. His manuals for investigative reporters, *Story-Based Inquiry* (UNESCO 2009) and *The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook* (UNESCO 2012) are the most widely-distributed works in the history of their field. His other books include a contrarian study of the work-life dilemma (*The Passions of Men: Work and Love in the Age of Stress*, 1986), an independent biography of former French culture Minister Jack Lang (*Les Jours les plus Lang*, 1990), an exposé of a murder case involving high French government officials (*Le Destin de Suzanne*, 1995), a comparison of French and American investigative reporting methods and history (*Le journalisme d'investigation en France et aux Etats-Unis*, 2007), and an inside account of France's extreme right (*Un Américain au Front*, 1998). He has written well over 100 investigative features, and 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 for feature writing, and two EFMD Awards for case-writing. Dr. Hunter's articles have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Mother Jones*, *Harper's Monthly*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, *Harvard Business Review*, and many others. Website: www.storybasedinquiry.com

Luuk Sengers

is a lecturer of research techniques at Thomas More Hogeschool in 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, the Middle-East and Africa. He has worked as an economic reporter for 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.

whatever the media you work in. All of these issues, as well as tools for structuring and composing narratives, are treated in this book.

Forty years after Watergate, one still hears people – including professors, who should know better – say that "all journalism is investigative journalism." That is nonsense, and it is plain dangerous where composing an investigative story is concerned. You can waste a lot of time doing this work, and you also run risks (like being sued, or in some places, assassinated) to a much greater extent than in other kinds of journalism.

Most people reading this book have been trained in news writing or "narrative" journalism, another name for contemporary feature writing. Others are accustomed to making short spots for TV. These are valuable skills, but they often get in the way when composing an investigation.

A news product is front-loaded. The key details of the story are generally included in the first paragraph or introductory voiceover, so that if an editor has to cut the story, he or she can start at the back and leave the "essentials" untouched. Another advantage of front-loading is that distracted, hurried readers or viewers can grasp the essence of the story in a glance. Unfortu-nately, that is not always the best way to recount an investigation. In a longer format, this technique usually kills the story. At the least, it complicates the task of creating a sustained rhythm, and rhythm is what keeps people watch-ing and reading. It also makes it very, very difficult to compose an ending, even allowing for the fact that the news is never really final.

An investigative report cannot be written like a news story, because whether or not it starts out strong, it gathers impact as it proceeds. Investigations that are published in news media, as opposed to magazines, are exceptions that prove the rule...

The above extract is from the Introduction, page 4.

Published by the Centre for Investigative Journalism

www.tcij.org

DESIGN: IAN DENNING