

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## Learning objectives

By the time you have read this chapter and worked through the exercises, you will know how to:

- Sort and organise information before you write
- Structure a story to present the results of your investigation clearly
- Build arguments in your story that are credible and logical
- Use various writing techniques including narrative journalism to engage readers
- Discuss the uses and limitations of different writing approaches for investigative stories
- Discuss differences in story presentation and packaging between print, broadcast and online media
- Apply appropriate checklists for revision and self-editing.

This chapter does not deal with information-gathering or reporting. To revise these aspects, go to:

- Chapter 1 for definitions of investigative journalism
- Chapter 2 for guidance on generating story ideas
- Chapter 3 for pointers on planning and investigative project
- Chapter 4 for guidance on handling sources
- Chapter 5 for help with forensic interviewing techniques
- Chapter 6 for guidance on research tools and techniques
- Chapter 8 for discussion of the legal and ethical aspects of investigation.



## Writing the story

*This chapter does not follow exactly the same format as most others. Instead, it is based around a worked example, through which we follow all the stages of writing a story, from data map through drafts to final version for publication.*

 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

 INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM WORKSHOP

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INVESTIGATIVE  
REPORTERS

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# Starting points

**Y**ou've been working on an investigative project dealing with crop-spraying in your area, and allegations that a spray used to kill pests (called "green bugs") on banana palms has been damaging the health of farm-workers and other residents. Bananas are the main crop in the area, they're exported to neighbouring states and to Europe; farming bananas provides most local employment.

There is poor warning to plantation workers about when spraying will happen, especially since wind can carry the spray far beyond designated areas. Often, the spray goes on to other food crops in village smallholdings. Some plants die, and many insects, including bees. The pilots who do the spraying have been warned that the chemical they use, Killyt, is toxic. Safety leaflets are distributed to workers and in the village, but they are in English, not the local language.

The local clinic says that every year, after the spraying, they treat huge numbers of people for skin rashes and asthma. This does not happen at other times of the year.

Your hypothesis: the crop spraying is bad for people's health and for other local food crops; better safeguards should be in place and possibly the chemical should not be used.

**Now you have to sit down and write.**

- What's the best way to approach the task?
- What should the final story look like?

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## Planning and outlining the story

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**Writing  
the story:**

### back to your hypothesis and data map

You've interviewed several people: in the village, at the banana company, in government – and a science expert. You've also researched the chemical on the web. Your final interview was with the Agriculture Minister in the capital. She says that of course she is concerned about the health of villagers and farmers – but she would need to see proof. She also points out that Anane (the company owning the banana plantations) has been discussing investment in other districts and a public-private partnership for a banana-processing plant "and it would be a pity to jeopardise our government's good relationship with these benefactors on the basis of alarmist rumours from peasants who do not understand science." You take that as a hint that she'd rather you didn't do the story – and a warning that you'd better write it as carefully as possible.

But your editor is willing to go ahead, and gives you space for not more than 1 500 words, which he'll use as a centre-spread with the pictures you brought back from the village.

Your first step is to return to your initial hypothesis. Have your interviews and research turned up anything that will change, or add to your initial idea about dangerous crop-spraying? As we saw in Chapter 3, it's not unusual at this stage to find that the focus of your story has changed quite a lot, and that you need to revise your hypothesis completely. But here, your basic idea seems sound.

You add all your interview and research information to your data map of the story.

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## Creating a data map of your story

Villagers	Experts and insiders	Government	Own research, notes and observations	Company
<p>Mama Amina Kiruki Woman farmer, chair of village food-growers' co-op Interviews Friday June 3</p> <p>"That was where my sunflowers were. When they sprayed the crops, all my sunflowers died. In the forest, other plants are dying too"</p> <p>"To be a farmer is good! I'm proud that I have always been able to feed my family. Even since the end of the Civil War, when there was nothing, my family has not starved because of these gardens."</p> <p>"We want the spraying stopped."</p> <p>"We went to the District council offices. They made us wait a whole day – but nobody came out to see us."</p> <p>"I don't read English. I saw the leaflets but I can't understand them."</p> <p>"Use sacks to cover the crops? That would be a waste. We need sacks to store our food in!"</p> <p>"Anane owns this village. That's why the council and government aren't interested in us."</p>	<p>Prof Henri Soren, National Chemical Research Institute. Research Scientist specialising in agricultural chemicals. Interview Monday June 6 his lab 9am</p> <p>"Gindrin is a corrosive chemical. It eats away at skin tissue. It's sprayed on banana plants before the fruits form for that reason.</p> <p>People exposed to it for long periods (3-5 years) in the US have shown a higher than normal incidence of skin and lung cancers: that is why the US FDA has suspended its use. As for wildlife, in some areas of Florida the same depletion of the bee population has been noted where Gindrin was used. What should we do? We should do an environmental impact study. I would not recommend that anyone breathe it in or eat food that has caught the spray and I am highly concerned that it is being used here. Chemicals used here are supposed to be registered on our permitted list and Gindrin does not appear there."</p>	<p>National Agriculture Minister Penelope Farawa-Holiuki by phone Tuesday June 7 2:00pm</p> <p>"The company has had good relations with our government since the end of the civil war."</p> <p>"We are at present in discussion over its expansion into three more districts, as well as about the construction of a banana-processing plant as a public-private partnership. This would empower our economy by allowing us to add value through processing: a long-term aim of our economic renaissance."</p> <p>"I do not know of problems relating to crop spraying."</p> <p>"I have never been informed that Gindrin is not an approved chemical here. We would look into it if that turned out to be the case."</p> <p>"I can't tell you when. Such enquiries would probably have to happen only during the next session of parliament. We are very overstretched for technical manpower and have not budgeted for such a project."</p> <p>"Before I close this interview I must state that it would be a pity to jeopardise our government's good relationship with benefactors such as Anane on the basis of alarmist rumours from peasants who do not understand science."</p>	<p>Plot is lush and green – but the place where sunflowers grew is black &amp; rotting.</p> <p>Mama Amina wears traditional dress. The hoe she's using, and leaning on as we talk, has been mended at least half a dozen times.</p> <p>USA Food and Drugs Administration website: Gindrin was approved for use 1999 but was suspended in 2005 pending an environmental enquiry – no results yet published.</p> <p>Approx 1 000 litres of Killyt are sprayed from low-flying planes to kill greenbugs on the banana plantations every Spring.</p> <p>Last Christmas, Anane catered a lavish reception for the District Council at its staff Community Centre.</p> <p>It also offered the community centre free for ruling party rallies during the recent council elections. SOURCE: COMPANY NEWSLETTER EDITION Vol 4/ No 2 p.13</p> <p>Plantations employ 300 people at various times of year as casual labour: picking, cleaning and packing all by machine.</p> <p>Banana exports 45% of all income coming into the district, SOURCE EU Agricultural Projects Survey Group June 2007. Tourism, 10% of district income. The rest: 12+ other crops and activities</p> <p>NB: Food growing for domestic support not part of these calculations – but the only means casual plantation workers have of surviving when laid off by Anane.</p>	<p>Anane Spokesperson Miriam Kiruki-Lafitte – by phone. Friday June 10</p> <p>"The complaints are overstated. Killyt is a relatively safe chemical sprayed very carefully. Occasionally, wind-drift may cause small problems for nearby gardens and we regret this, but we give adequate warning and make sure everybody is informed of safety precautions."</p> <p>"Our spraying permits are completely in order. They were issued by the Kuru District Council, and I was not made aware of any requirement to register the actual chemical. But if it is needed, we will, of course, comply."</p> <p>"I don't think I could estimate the exact value of offering meeting facilities to the politicians, or catering the function. Of course, you must understand the welfare of the district is important to us, and we help out where we can."</p>

## Creating a data map of your story

Villagers	Experts & insiders	Government	Own research, notes and observations	Company
<p>Job Kiruki – hunter. Mama Amina's father</p> <p>"You don't see bees any more. When we used to go out hunting we used to collect honey. Now it's rare."</p>	<p>Captain Aaron Mendez – Anane crop-sprayer MUST NOT NAME HIM! Interviewed Wednesday June 8, La Bella Bar.</p> <p>"They would sack me if they knew I had shown you this."</p> <p>LEAFLET SAYS: "Wear masks at all time when spraying. Do not handle the Killyt tanks, hoses or nozzles with bare hands. Do not touch spills. In the event of exposure you may experience a burning sensation in eyes, mouth, nose or throat, or skin eruptions. Rinse skin immediately with copious cold water. Return to base immediately, shower, change your clothing and consult the staff medical centre at once. Do not fly another spraying mission until cleared by the medical centre."</p>	<p>Amos Minuki, Administrative Permits Clerk at Kuru District Council. Interviewed Friday June 3 11:30 "Spraying permits were issued in June 2006. The form, does not require specific chemical to be named. Perhaps we should look into that. But in fact we are not aware of any problems or complaints with the spraying. No-one has told us of this."</p> <p>"It is a blue lie that we are beholden to the company or uninterested in Kuru Village. We will look into all legitimate complaints. We get no personal benefits from Anane, although they do benefit local development and revenue – which of course is used for the good of the inhabitants."</p>	<p>Job wears a hat made of animal skins. Looks about 90 but probably much younger. Sounds like he's drunk. Spends most of our interview sleeping, but comes out to make sure he says something to us.</p> <p>Capt Mendez is about 60s – Portuguese I think? Seems reliable – sober, very neatly-dressed. Feels like ex-army of some kind. But very nervous – he needs this job and is terrified he'll lose it – probably too old to get another flying job?</p> <p>VILLAGE LEAFLET SAYS: "There is no conclusive scientific evidence that any of the spray materials used to control greenbug on banana plants are the cause of disease in humans when used correctly. But since health impact remains under study, we recommend that persons who need not be in the spray areas, and particularly those who may be susceptible, stay out of the area or indoors during spraying, and cover food crops with sacking. Persons who are concerned about health impacts may wish to consult their physician."</p>	
<p>Sister Sara Wahuki clinic nurse</p> <p>"Cases of eczema and other rashes double in September when the spraying happens. I see many babies with coughs who cannot breathe. It is not like this at other times."</p> <p>"Yes, I went with Mama Amina to the council offices. We wasted a day there but nobody wanted to see us."</p> <p>"I helped her to write a letter afterwards. We've never had a reply."</p>			<p>About 40. Round glasses. A bit shy and soft-spoken. Gleaming white uniform – I don't know how she keeps it so clean in this dusty village!</p> <p>Clinic admissions book shows: August- 20 skin rash patients, 10 asthma attacks September after spraying – 45 skin rashes 28 asthma</p> <p>Carbon copy of letter 24/10/06 seen</p>	

This type of data mapping is only one option. Other approaches may be to mark up your notes with coloured highlighters or numbers to link material on the same topic together; do computer cut and paste to move linked material into sections – or even, on

a long, complex story, physically cut up and staple bunches of notes that belong together.

Do what suits your personal working style best.

What matters is that you group together all the answers and information on each aspect of your story. This is the foundation of a well written story: it gives you paragraphs and sections that hang together, allowing you to make your analysis and line of argument clear.

You see the following contradictions/questions on this data map:

- ❓ **The European company that owns the commercial banana plantations, Anane**, says that the spray is 'relatively non-toxic' BUT
- ❓ **The warning leaflet for pilots** is much stronger than **the warning leaflet for villagers and farmers**, implying real danger.
- ❓ **You've seen clinic admission figures** that peak at spraying time, and have **anecdotal and observed evidence** from the village of crop damage.
- ❓ **A research scientist in the capital** says that long-term exposure for 3-5 years (spraying with this particular chemical has only been going on for 2 years so far) could cause illness.
- ❓ You've also done **research on the chemical via the web** and found that its use has been suspended in the USA because of health fears.
- ❓ **The District Council** says that it has received no complaints about the spraying. It says that European investment in banana-growing is vital for village development, BUT
- ❓ **Both the clinic nurse and the head of the village food-growing co-op** say that they have written a letter and even visited the council offices to try to get the spraying stopped.
- ❓ **Your research scientist** says the chemical is not approved for use in your country. District and national authorities say they aren't aware of this, AND
- ❓ **When you check the spraying permit form**, it doesn't even ask for the name of the chemical.
- ❓ **Villagers** say the authorities are in the pockets of the company, AND
- ❓ **You** have discovered that the company has promised national expansion, a new plant, and has held parties and made facilities available to the district council and for ruling-party electioneering.

So, it looks as if your story has four aspects:

1. The damage that spraying appears to do
2. The harmfulness and non-approved status of the chemical
3. The failure of authorities to respond
4. The relationship of the company to district and national authorities.

Go back to your notes, and organise every fact, quote and detail into these four sections, to make sure you don't miss anything.

## Writing the story: **building the argument: proof and logic**

Now you need to spend some time thinking about what you have. The ideal in an investigative story is to have absolute proof – the 'smoking gun' – that the wrongdoers you are pointing at have caused the wrong you allege.

### ❓ **What would count as absolute proof for your hypothesis in this story?**

Your best proof would be to wait until the next crop-spraying, and, immediately afterwards, send a sample of damaged plants and a person with skin or breathing problems for further tests to establish that the chemical in question is the cause. This means delaying the story, and will involve costs. But it will give you the 'smoking gun': it will establish a clear, scientifically-supported connection between the cause (crop-spraying) and the effect (sickness and plant deaths), that will link to your broader evidence about the status of the chemical.

And it is the only way to get this. It's hard to do it merely through clever writing. Writing an investigative story means you are

- Suggesting causes
- Suggesting results
- Suggesting links
- Putting things in categories...
- ...and doing other things that require you to use **logic**.

Look up the word logic in the dictionary, and you'll find several linked definitions related to "reasoning". In everyday speech, 'logic' simply implies "reasoning that makes sense".

But very often, we find investigative stories that sound convincing, but actually don't make sense, because writers have been loose in their use of words, their use of evidence or in how they link things together. And some of these poorly constructed implications are also likely to be defamatory.

You can't get a smoking gun for this story by doing any of the following:

### **Sliding between different definitions**

Gindrin (known locally as Killyt) is dangerous because it has been banned in the US. The FDA has suspended the chemical... ('Suspension' is not the same as 'ban'; it is more often a measure to allow time to study something.)

**SOLUTION?** Make the abstract concrete by explaining or using examples. Define your terms when you're writing, and stick to the same definition throughout.

### **Using unproven generalisations**

Our country is horrified by the use of this unregistered crop spray.

(What about the people you interviewed who approve, or who don't know? And those who don't care? Aren't they also part of your country?)

**SOLUTION?** Be sure you understand the meaning of (and differences between) terms such as 'most', 'many', 'some', 'few'. Use them accurately. Be very careful with the distinction between 'most' and 'many', and even more careful about saying 'all' or 'none'. Is something 'the reason' or 'one of the reasons'? 'Always', or 'often'? Make the general specific by citing concrete instances, and quoting named individuals.

### **Using unsupported arguments**

The council has been bought by Anane and that is why it refuses to act against the company.

(Every District Councillor? How do you know?)

**SOLUTION?** Support all your statements and make them more detailed, carefully defined and cautious. Show, don't tell: let readers make up their minds whether favours have motivated action or inaction.

### **Attacking the person when you ought to be looking at the idea**

The Agriculture Minister favours Anane because she despises the poor.

(Even if she is a snob, there might still be strong economic arguments in favour of co-operation with the company.)

**SOLUTION?** Just don't do this. Stick to discussing facts and arguments.

### **Quoting authorities as proof of arguments**

Gindrin is dangerous because a professor at the National Research Institute says so.

(This is evidence, not proof. He could be wrong, particularly if he is your only source.)

**SOLUTION?** List pros and cons and deal with all of them in a balanced way. Focus on reasons: why, not who says it. Talk to, research and quote a range of relevant sources, not just one.

### **Appealing to prejudice, stereotypes or emotions**

The peasants of Kuru Village are hardworking and honest, so it is unlikely they would lie about this. The council, on the other hand, is corrupt.

(All of them? Or is that just a stereotype?)

**SOLUTION?** Just don't. Avoid stereotypes, positive or negative, keep your language neutral and treat all sources and subjects with the same healthy scepticism. Cite evidence for what you say.

### **Finding false cause ("After X therefore caused by X")**

Gindrin is dangerous, because after crop-spraying, plants die and children get sick.

(Crop-spraying still may not be the cause of these effects. The timing merely suggests a possible connection. This is what the courts call 'circumstantial' – the timings match up, but you have no other link. You have to find some other connection than simple timing. Day comes before night, but it doesn't cause night.)

**SOLUTION?** See if it was really possible and likely that X caused Y. Did X come before Y? What did X do to cause Y? Are there other possible causes? Can you rule them out? Can you find other similar examples where X caused Y?

That final point sounds like really bad news. If you can't afford to wait for lab tests next spring, and you can't use the argument that the negative effects follow the spraying and are therefore caused by it, where's the proof for your hypothesis?

But there is good news too. It is possible to write an accurate and convincing investigative story based on the weight of evidence, rather than a single, clinching proof. Proof is better – if you can find it. But solidly-assembled evidence can do much the same job. And you have a lot of evidence:

- the evidence of your eyes
- anecdotal evidence from villagers
- expert evidence from a local scientist
- the actions of the US authorities in suspending the chemical
- the very strong warning of dangers in the crop-spraying leaflet.

What you may need to do is make this evidence more tight and explicit, perhaps by going back to some of your sources to get them to say things more clearly. We'll look at this as we follow the writing process further.

You may also need to establish context more firmly. Context gives you information about the environment in which actions and consequences took place. It builds up information about whether those involved had

- Means;
- Motive; and
- Opportunity  
to do the things you allege.

As in all other types of writing, it is better to show than to tell. Lay out the evidence in a way that lets the reader see how it piles up against your 'villain' without adding possibly defamatory interpretation. But in investigative writing, you sometimes have to show **and** tell. To be crystal clear about your message (and to avoid other, possibly even more defamatory interpretations by readers) lay out the evidence and then add a summing-up sentence: "The pilots' leaflet shows that Anane was aware of the dangers posed by Gindrin."

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## Writing paragraphs

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Reporters working for daily newspapers often quickly discard the schooldays habit of planning and writing stories in paragraphs. This is because newspapers rarely print their stories in the original paragraphs as set; sub-editors break up paragraphs to create extra lines, or merge them together to save space.

Don't worry about that. The paragraph is an essential building-block of every story. Plan and write in paragraphs, and let sub-editors deal with layout issues later.

Each paragraph is a mini-story. It takes one aspect of your overall investigation and explores it fully, breaking down the big theme into parts that are manageable for writer and reader. It starts with a 'topic sentence' that tells the reader which aspect you are dealing with, or how it links to what has gone before. Then, the paragraph provides

- evidence (details, quotes, facts and figures)
- definitions or explanations
- context, history, comparison or contrast
- cause or effect
- arguments for or against
- analysis or suggests consequences.

**(No single paragraph will try to do all of these!)**

**Here's how it works.**

Suppose you want to write about the relationship between the agri-company, Anane, and the local and national government. You have the villagers asserting that the council is in the company's pocket, official denials, and your own research on the issue.

"Anane owns this district," asserts Mama Amina. "That is why the council and government aren't interested in us." **[Topic sentence stating villagers' belief]**

District council official Minuki vehemently denies this. "We will look into all legitimate complaints," he promises. "We get no personal benefits from Anane, although they do benefit local development and revenue – which of course is used for the good of the inhabitants." **[Official denial]**

Last Christmas, Anane catered a lavish reception for the District Council at its staff Community Centre, which it also made available for ruling party rallies during the recent council elections. **[Your research evidence]**

Ms Kiruki-Lafitte declined to estimate the exact value of these events and facilities, commenting, "Of course, the welfare of the district is important to us, and we help out where we can." **[Official comment]**

Anane is likely to be helping out more widely in future. **[Topic sentence for next paragraph, linking from local to national and from now to the future]**

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National Agriculture Minister Penelope Farawa-Holiuki spoke to this reporter from the capital. "The company has had good relations with our government since the end of the civil war," she said. "We are at present in discussion over its expansion into three more districts, as well as about the construction of a banana-processing plant as a public-private partnership. This would empower our economy by allowing us to add value through processing: a long-term aim of our economic renaissance." [Official confirmation of investment advantages]

You'll notice that in this example, the topic sentences are abstract and general: the district is "owned" by the company; the company will be 'helping out more' in future. The evidence and quotes you add help to tie this down. They make the abstract concrete and the general specific, by talking about actual events and things that can be seen or checked. This is very often how you structure a paragraph. Your topic sentence uses an idea as its skeleton, and then puts the flesh of hard evidence, real quotes and verifiable research on to those bones.

## Writing the story: using quotes

Use quotes to make a point, not to tell the complete story, and to add to information, not merely repeat it. Don't use quotes to convey basic information. Use them to give the flavour of your conversations with people, but not as a substitute for your analysing what they've told you.

Especially in an investigation, it is important to use the exact words people gave you. The exceptions are:

- Errors that make what someone has said hard to understand, hold them up to ridicule and do not add to the 'flavour' of speech
- Profanities and obscenities if your house style does not permit these
- Longwindedness and repetition. For example, villager Mama Amina may actually have said, "Look, you know I think Anane owns this district." The words "look", "you know", "I think" are unnecessary; they add nothing.
- Information you can simply tell the reader in the story, or that everybody knows – for example, an Environment Ministry official saying 'My ministry is responsible for the health of land, water and air.'

Attribute all quotes carefully (and, indeed, give a source for anything you did not observe yourself). In an investigative story, you will be even more careful than usual about attribution, because readers will judge the worth of your evidence partly by its source. Where a new speaker enters your story, make that clear. Where you cannot attribute, explain why: "The company would fire me if they knew I had shown you this," said the crop-sprayer pilot.

Make quotes flow, by ensuring that you introduce them properly.

- The line preceding a quote should help the reader understand what is coming next, as in "The Minister said Anane was important to the economy. 'They plan to invest...'"
- Where your introduction to the quote sends a different message, you confuse readers, as in "The Minister said Anane was important to the economy. 'Peasants know nothing about agriculture.'"
- But don't be repetitive, as in "The Minister said Anane was important to the economy. 'They are important to the economy...'"  
Quotes have to add value; don't choose words that add nothing.

Stick with "he/she said" to describe speech. Other words ('asserted'; 'claimed'; 'argued') may add unnecessary spin, or ('refuted'; 'rebutted') may be misunderstood by readers. But if it's accurate, you can use a term that adds flavour. If the District Clerk said accusations of obligation to the company were "a blue lie", it is accurate to say he "denied vehemently".

When you paraphrase, do not spin. Keep the sense and tone of the original. If the spokesperson says "We do not have a budget", do not paraphrase into, "She said her company was not prepared to spend on this," which implies attitude, not merely the financial situation.

### Checklist for using quotes

- Are quotes used only where needed?
  - For emphasis
  - For change of pace
  - As evidence or extra detail
  - To reveal character or add colour
  - To emphasise an important point
- Are words inside quotation marks the speaker's exact words?
- Are the words clear and do they do the job? (If not, rather paraphrase)
- Are the words repetitive? (If so, cut either the quote or the repeated information)

### Checklist for using quotes (cont.)

- Have you used quote marks correctly to indicate the start and end of the quote?
- Have you attributed quotes fully and correctly?
- Have you avoided loaded words (“he argued”; “she sneered”) and stuck with neutral descriptions of speech?

## Writing the story: **draft and rethink**

By this stage you should have sorted all your material into sections of the story, and assembled all the quoted matter and research information. Now is the time to write your first draft.

Many people misunderstand the purpose of a first draft. It isn't the complete story as it will finally appear, but a sketch, which will allow you to see how the story looks and identify any further work you need to do. So you don't need to worry about elegant introductions, neat conclusions or polished language. At this stage, you're writing, not editing. All you are doing is putting your material together on the page. Where you do have a section that feels 'finished', write it like that; where you simply have information, slot that in where it seems to belong.

### First draft

**This is what a first draft for the crop-spraying story might look like.**

Since 2006, when Swiss-based multinational agri-company Anane began spraying its banana plantations with the chemical Gindrin – known locally as Killyt – villagers claim many of their own crops have died as a result. They say not all crops are affected, but that also bees and other insects are dying out.

Clinic nurse Sister Sara Wahuki says: “Cases of eczema and other rashes double in September when the spraying happens. I see many babies with coughs, who cannot breathe. It is not like this at other times.” The clinic admissions book supports her claim: in August, she saw 20 patients with skin rashes; in a single week in late September, after the spraying, 45 skin cases were reported. In the same period, the number of asthma admissions rose from 10 to 28.

Anane spokesperson Miriam Kiruki-Lafitte describes the complaints as “overstated. Killyt is a relatively safe chemical sprayed very carefully. Occasionally, wind-drift may cause small problems for nearby gardens and we regret this, but we give adequate warning and make sure everybody is informed of safety precautions.” Ms Kiruki-Lafitte says that spraying permits were issued by the Kuru District Council, and that she was not made aware of any additional requirement to register the actual chemical. “But if it is needed, we will, of course, comply.”

We obtained a copy of the leaflet distributed to the village. It is in English, not the local Seuki dialect, and reads in part: “There is no conclusive scientific evidence that any of the spray materials used to control greenbug on banana plants are the cause of disease in humans when used correctly. But since health impact remains under study, we recommend that persons who need not be in the spray areas, and particularly those who may be susceptible, stay out of the area or indoors during spraying, and cover food crops with sacking. Persons who are concerned about health impacts may wish to consult their physician.” “Covering crops with sacks would be a waste: the only sacks we have we must use for storing food,” says Mama Amina Kiruki, who chairs the local food growers' co-operative.

The leaflet given to the pilots of crop-spraying planes is very different, says an Anane pilot who preferred not to give his name in the interests of preserving his employment. “They would sack me if they knew I had shown you this,” he said.

He showed us his safety instructions, which read: “Wear masks at all time when spraying. Do not handle the Killyt tanks, hoses or nozzles with bare hands. Do not touch spills. In the event of exposure you may experience a burning sensation in eyes, mouth, nose or throat, or skin eruptions. Rinse skin immediately with copious cold water. Return to base immediately, shower, change your clothing and consult the staff medical centre at once. Do not fly another spraying mission until cleared by the medical centre.”

Those second, stronger warnings are more appropriate, says Dr Henri Soren of the National Chemical Research Institute based at Capital University. “Gindrin is a corrosive chemical. It eats away at skin tissue. It's sprayed on banana plants before the fruits form, for that reason. People exposed to it for long periods – say, 3-5 years – in the US have shown a higher than normal incidence of skin and lung cancers, and that is why the FDA has suspended its use. I would not recommend that anyone breathe it in, or eat food that has caught the spray, and I am highly concerned that it is

## First draft (cont.)

being sprayed in this country. Chemicals used here are supposed to be registered on our permitted list, and Gindrin does not appear there. In some areas of Florida, the same depletion of the bee population has also been noted where Gindrin was used. There should be an environmental impact study done here."

Amos Minuki, Administrative Permits Clerk at Kuru District Council confirmed that spraying permits were issued in June 2006. He showed this reporter the permit form, which does not require the specific chemical to be named. "Perhaps we should look into that," he said. "But in fact we are not aware of any problems or complaints with the spraying. No-one has told us of this."

Mama Amina and Sister Sara say this is not so. They visited the District Council offices in October 2006 after the first spraying cycle, to raise questions about the crop damage and health complaints. They waited a day, but no-one was available to see them. Subsequently, the growers' co-op wrote a letter to the council on the same issues. This reporter saw the copy, dated 24 October 2006. No-one ever replied, they say.

Commercial banana growing is valuable to the Kuru District. The plantations employ 300 people at various times of year as casual labour: picking, cleaning and packing are all mechanised.

- Banana exports account for 45% of all income coming into the district, according to a study done by the European Union Agricultural Projects Survey Group in June 2007. By contrast, tourism, including trips to the small Munu Falls Game Reserve, brings in only 10% of the district income. A dozen other crops and activities make up the rest.
- Food growing for domestic support is not factored into these calculations, although it is the only means casual plantation workers have of surviving when they are laid off by Anane.
- Gindrin use has been suspended by the United States Food and Drug Administration, pending an inquiry into its long-term safety.
- Around Kuru Village, approximately 1 000 litres of Killyt are sprayed from low-flying planes to kill greenbugs on the banana plantations every Spring.

"Anane owns this district," asserts Mama Amina. "That is why the council and government aren't interested in us."

Minuki: "We will look into all legitimate complaints. We get no personal benefits from Anane, although they do benefit local development and revenue – which of course is used for the good of the inhabitants."

Last Christmas, Anane catered a lavish reception for the District Council at its staff Community Centre, which it also made available for ruling party rallies during the recent council elections. Ms Kiruki-Lafitte declined to estimate the exact value of these events and facilities, commenting, "Of course, the welfare of the district is important to us, and we help out where we can."

Anane is likely to be helping out more widely in future. National Agriculture Minister Penelope Farawa-Holiuki spoke to this reporter from the capital. "The company has had good relations with our government since the end of the civil war," she said. "We are at present in discussion over its expansion into three more districts, as well as about the construction of a banana-processing plant as a public-private partnership. This would empower our economy by allowing us to add value through processing: a long-term aim of our economic renaissance."

The Minister said she did not know of problems relating to crop spraying, or that Gindrin was not an approved chemical here. "We would look into it if that turned out to be the case," she said. When pressed, however, she said such enquiries would "probably have to happen only during the next session of parliament. We are very overstretched for technical manpower and have not budgeted for such a project. It would be a pity," she concluded, "to jeopardise our government's good relationship with benefactors such as Anane on the basis of alarmist rumours from peasants who do not understand science."

## READ What are your comments on this draft?

### respond

- ? What reads well, what is boring?
- ? Are there gaps in the information?
- ? Does it flow? Is it interesting?

Take 10 minutes to think about it and note your ideas.

**What are your comments on this draft? (cont.)**

Take 10 minutes to think about it and note your ideas.

Comments

- It jumps around between different topics, and obviously needs work on paragraphs and links. In particular, all the research information is blocked together, as is the whole of the interview with the expert. The two extracts from the different safety leaflets make for long, hard reading put together like that. You'll need to cut and paste, so the pros and cons of the arguments are supported by the relevant evidence at each stage.
- There are some clumsy and repetitive phrases: you don't need to talk about the pilot losing his job in both the attribution and the quote. 'Wind-drift' will need explaining.
- The story feels 'cold' and theoretical, because we don't have much sense of the human impact of the problem. In fact, villagers' views are often summarised and paraphrased, while officials are quoted in full. (Perhaps you were too worried about official reaction?)
- Putting the Minister's interview in one piece as the final conclusion perhaps lends her views greater weight than what others say, and affects the story's balance. Maybe there are protocol requirements about how you deal with her words? If not, break up that long speech!
- And there are some 'holes' in your investigation:
  - The clinic nurse talks about asthma, but your expert doesn't comment on this.

### What are your comments on this draft? (cont.)

- You haven't asked the company about the different messages in its leaflets (you'd have to do this carefully, so as not to expose your source: "We've heard pilots are warned to shower?"), or why it does not produce warnings in the local language. You could also ask the company whether it is prepared to assist poor villagers with protective coverings for their crops. You haven't asked the District Council about the specific letter the villagers allegedly sent. Do they just claim they sent a letter, or can they prove it? Was it signed for at the council offices?
- Your story cannot just blame the authorities without finding out what their response or attitude is to the problems. A couple of follow-up interviews are needed. When you do these interviews, you discover the following:
  - Dr Soren is happy to comment about asthma. He says, "Respiratory problems are also very common and could be life-threatening in vulnerable children." You can't afford another trip to the village, but you phone the local headmistress, who confirms that she often has to send children home from school with breathing difficulties in September.
  - The clinic nurse says she personally delivered the letter to the reception desk at the council offices, but was not given any receipt for it. So you can't prove it reached the relevant person in the district council.
  - The company spokesperson denies "absolutely" that Anane gives different safety information to employees and villagers. "We may phrase it differently, obviously our employees are more sophisticated and knowledgeable, but the information is the same." She demands to know where you heard this, which you cannot tell her to protect the pilot. She says there is "no budget" to print safety leaflets in "a million different little dialects" but says the company would consider redesigning the leaflet "if it is hard to understand". And she says there is "no budget" to provide crop coverings for the village: "We cannot go distributing materials to every back garden – that would be ridiculous."

Now you have this additional information, you can begin to work on your second draft, which will look a lot closer to the final finished story. It's time to think about structure, shape, and the ways you can bring the story more alive through the writing.

## Story shapes and styles

There are two basic types of story content, whether investigative, hard news or feature:

- chronological – in which the story unfolds through time, and sequence and actions are the material of the investigation (narratives; following a situation through a period of time; following the actual investigation as it unfolds); and
- topical – in which the story revolves around issues and arguments (depending on the specific story, these may be systems, processes, trends or explanations).

The crop-spraying story is clearly the latter: it's about issues and arguments.

As we've seen, you start sorting your material by doing a fairly crude division into sections: the issue; who's affected; the conflicts and discoveries you make. On a relatively simple, short investigative story, these sections, with an introduction and conclusion added, may make a perfectly satisfactory plan for the final story.

In investigative writing, literary flair takes second place to making the issues and facts crystal-clear to readers. So a sections structure, without any 'frills' can work well. On our crop-spraying story, the sections are:

- The issue: the damage that spraying appears to do
- Who's affected: villagers, company, government
- The technical background: the harmfulness and non-approved status of the chemical; the regulations
- The villains: authorities who don't respond or fail to issue warnings
- The motives: the relationship of the company to district and national authorities
- The end: where this leaves us or what might happen next.

But you may feel that this bald outline of the story could be made more interesting for readers if you worked it more. There are a number of different ways to shape your material into a story; a number of 'recipes' and approaches that writing coaches suggest for investigative stories. Your material is longer and more complex than a normal hard news story, and imposing shape and structure gives your reader a pathway through complex information. The three most common investigative story structures are:

**1 The 'Wall Street Journal' formula**

This involves

- starting with a person or situation to set the scene
- broadening out from that individual case to deal with the bigger issues, by means of a 'nut graph' that explains the link between the case and the issues, and then
- returning to your case study for a human, striking conclusion.

**2 'High Fives'**

This is a model developed by US writing coach Carol Rich. Her five suggested sections are:

- News (what's happened or is happening?)
- Context (What's the background?)
- Scope (Is this an incident, a local trend, a national issue?)
- Edge (where is it leading?)
- Impact (Why should your readers care?)

This structure needs the ability to write good links and transitions, so that the five elements fit together. Otherwise, it can feel like five shorter stories one after the other. But it can make an excellent structure for a long story on the web, where you need to break an extended narrative into manageable sections so readers can browse (see Writing for the web, page 7-21).

**3 The pyramid**

Whereas the traditional approach to a hard-news story was the 'inverted pyramid' (main points first; less important supporting material added later) the pyramid turns the structure right-way up. You have the length in an investigative story to build up to the punch, leading the reader with you through the discoveries you make. So, you

- Start with a summary of the story's theme
- Foreshadow some of what you'll discover
- Then walk step by step through your investigation, keeping the suspense alive and building the story towards the most shocking or dramatic discovery, just as if you were writing the story of a scientific breakthrough – or a mystery novel
- Save the most important, dramatic information for last.

Writing  
the story:

## narrative journalism

Each of these recipes borrows a little from the toolkit of the fiction writer. You are not making anything up – but you are employing techniques from literature. And this makes sense because every journalist is a storyteller. Putting your role as a teller of good – but true – stories in the foreground is the basis of the modern approach to news-writing we call narrative journalism.

### Narrative journalism

**According to Mark Kramer, director of the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism at Harvard University, narrative journalism involves:**

- Writing with character
- Action that unfolds over time
- The ... voice of the teller ... with a discernable personality
- Some sense of relationship to [the audience]
- Leading the reader to a point of realisation or destination.

**According to author Susan Eaton:**

*"Narrative writers carry the authority of all the work they've done. They have considered the sequence and the puzzle pieces. They've considered everything from several perspectives. They've read the academic literature. They've crafted the story that puts all this together in a way that makes sense for readers. They've put the pieces together in a sequence and created a meaning ... Doing this is what grants you the authority not necessarily to say which policy is better ... but more specifically to name the heart of the matter ... This is very different from editorialising ... you envision yourself as a guide helping people navigate through confusion."*

Both of the descriptions (in the box above) make it sound as though the narrative approach was made for investigative journalism. One caution, though. American investigative journalist Danny Schechter, in his film about US coverage of the Iraq War, *Weapons of Mass Deception*, noted a problem with the storytelling approach. By focusing on individual's tales, the narrative approach made it possible for some US news media to ignore highly contentious bigger issues and arguments. This doesn't devalue the narrative

approach. It's just a reminder that, like any other writing technique, it needs to be used consciously and skillfully, with care and adequate context.

### Some of the tools narrative journalism employs include:



#### Portraits and scene-setting

If you choose the Wall Street Journal approach, you'll need to have a good eye for detail when you report. Your key person or scene must feel real and convincing for readers. This doesn't mean describing everything in painful detail – you don't have space – simply picking a few authentic, telling details from what you have noted. This is why in Chapter Five we suggested you note how the person and setting looked, and what their physical response was to your questions, as well as their answers.

So, in the crop-spraying story you can go back to your notes and find your description of Mama Amina, your woman farmer, and her garden. Look for a few details: the worn hoe she leans on, the blackened, rotting rows of chemical-blasted sunflowers, and think how you can work those into your story, like this:

KURU VILLAGE - Leafy green lines of maize and the scarlet flowers of bean plants fill Mama Amina Kiruki's small food plot. Mama Amina, who chairs the Kuru village food growers' co-op, is proud of her crops, which have fed her family since the end of the Civil War. But one quarter of her garden is scarred by an ugly patch of withered leaves.

"That was where the sunflowers were," she says sadly, leaning on a much-repaired hoe. "After they sprayed the banana plantations, all my sunflowers died. And in the forest," she gestures around, "other plants are dying too." Mama Amina's father, hunter Job Kiruki, sees changes in the surrounding forests too: "You do not see bees any more. We used to collect honey when we went hunting. Now, it's rare."

Since 2006, when Swiss-based multinational agri-company Anane began spraying its banana plantations with the chemical Gindrin – known locally as Killyt – villagers claim many of their own crops have died as a result.

You've noted that the agri-company's slogan is "Anane: bananas that smile with health". That's ironic, in view of your topic. How could you use it?



#### Foreshadowing

This means giving hints or clues at the start of a story about what will emerge. You'll use it if you adopt the pyramid structure. You give just enough detail to keep readers interested, until you unveil the final findings.



#### Pacing

Every narrative moves; the structure and words you choose decide how fast or slowly. Short sentences and words speed things up. Longer sentences slow them down. Giving a large amount of technical information in one solid paragraph will force readers to go more slowly, even if the sentences are short. Unnecessary, overloaded background and context will bring the story to a dead halt, long before you've finished the telling. Always ask yourself: does this add value, or merely extra words? Cut what the story doesn't need.



#### Voice

If you read your story to yourself, you will feel the pace and flow of the narrative. But you'll also feel where the story becomes not merely slow but daunting and difficult. Your ear is your best editor, and will tell you when you have lost your natural human voice as a writer, or where your language is long-winded, complex, incorrect or in other ways causes your reading to stumble. Write the story conversationally, as you would speak it, so readers can identify with your voice. But since speech involves elements like tone, gesture, eye contact and expression, which are not written down, you'll then need to revise your work. Correct grammar and punctuation add the tone, emphasis and nuance to writing: they do the job on paper that our hands, eyes and face muscles do when we speak.

## Writing the story: **thinking visually**

One way to find the images and dramatic moments you need for a narrative journalism approach is to think visually: to consider the images and illustrations you'll need for the final story – even if layout and design are not your responsibility. Like developing a provisional headline, (even where sub-editors write the 'real' headline) such activities help you to focus on your story theme and write better; if you plan for a chart or diagram of certain facts, this will allow you to leave the rather boring list of the same facts out of your story.

However, thinking visually can also help your writing and the final story in other ways:

- It helps with pitching your story, because it gives advance warning of any maps, charts, graphs or images that might be needed.
- It helps with teamworking by alerting layout people and those who place stories on pages.
- It especially helps your teamworking with photographic colleagues, laying the basis for conversations about what the best

images for the piece would be, where you can draw on their expertise.

- It puts images in your head which you can then 'paint with words' for, for example, a scene-setter intro.
- It helps you to communicate better with readers, who often learn far more from a well-chosen image or a striking chart than from wordy writing. An image, says the proverb "is worth a thousand words".

**Writing  
the story:**

## introductions, links and conclusions

Every story needs to begin and end well. The beginning and the end are the strongest parts of any piece of writing. A good introduction pulls readers in and gives them a frame through which to view the whole story – most studies show that if the introduction of a story isn't appealing, readers won't carry on, however important the topic. The ending is the thought readers take away from reading.

Ways to begin include:

- A portrait or scene-setter
- A summary of the story theme (**not** the whole story) in one short sentence.
- The results or impact. Then you can track back to tell us how it happened. That's how investigative journalist Seymour Hersh started stories on both the My Lai massacres in Vietnam and the Abu Ghraib prison abuses in Iraq.

In all cases, don't make the reader wait too long to get into the story. A good rule of thumb is that no more than 10% of your story should be introductory material. But don't think of this, to use a textbook term, as a 'delayed lead'. Your story begins where it begins, and that doesn't have to be with a list of facts.

Since you have already noted that your crop-spraying story lacks warmth and colour, a good way to start it might be with a description of the woman farmer and her blighted plot.

Ways to create a satisfying conclusion include:

- Tie up loose ends (what happened to the characters or what will happen next).
- Summarise the theme once more to remind us why we're interested.
- Create a 'kicker' (a sting in the tail that makes people think).
- Emphasise context. Put the issue back into its setting and remind us of hopes, constraints, linked developments.
- Go back to the people we met at the beginning and let them have the last word.

A good kicker for your crop-spraying story might be that ironic slogan from the agri-business company: "Bananas that smile with health."

Never write a conclusion just for completeness, and never tell us – even in different words – that "only time will tell." You're the investigator, and you destroy readers' confidence in your authority if you shrug the story off in this way.

Equally important for stringing your story together, however, are the links: the way the story moves from section to section and paragraph to paragraph. The most useful techniques here are:

- Mention the topic regularly.
- Use extended metaphors to tie ideas together and make them vivid. For example, you could talk about the environment as like a human body, where all the parts have to work together.
- Use lots of signpost words to indicate whether one paragraph follows on from the previous one ('And'), changes direction ('But'), is a consequence ('So'), follows after ('Then'), and so on. These simple words can be extremely powerful in keeping a reader with you as you track a complex argument.

**Writing  
the story:**

## putting it all together

### How the story might look now

**This is how our crop-spraying story might look, when we've corrected the defects we spotted in our first draft, and applied some shaping and writing techniques to the material.**

KURU VILLAGE - Leafy green lines of maize and the scarlet flowers of bean plants fill Mama Amina Kiruki's small food plot. Mama Amina, who chairs the Kuru village food growers' co-op, is proud of her crops, which have fed her family since the end of the Civil War. But one quarter of her garden is scarred by an ugly patch of withered leaves.

## How the story might look now (cont.)

"That was where the sunflowers were," she says sadly, leaning on a much-repaired hoe. "After they sprayed the banana plantations, all my sunflowers died. And in the forest," she gestures around, "other plants are dying too." Mama Amina's father, hunter Job Kiruki, sees changes in the surrounding forests too: "You do not see bees any more. We used to collect honey when we went hunting. Now, it's rare."

Since 2006, when Swiss-based multinational agri-company Anane began spraying its banana plantations with the chemical Gindrin – known locally as Killyt – villagers claim many of their own crops have died as a result.

Gindrin use has been suspended by the United States Food and Drug Administration, pending an enquiry into its long-term safety. Yet around Kuru Village, approximately 1 000 litres of Killyt are sprayed from low-flying planes to kill greenbugs on the banana plantations every Spring. And the villagers want it stopped.

Not only crops suffer. Clinic nurse Sister Sara Wahuki says: "Cases of eczema and other rashes double in September when the spraying happens. I see many babies with coughs, who cannot breathe. It is not like this at other times." The clinic admissions book supports her claim: in August, she saw 20 patients with skin rashes; in a single week in late September, after the spraying, 45 skin cases were reported. In the same period, the number of asthma admissions rose from 10 to 28. Maria Siluki, headmistress of the local school says that in September "I have to send many children home because they become breathless and cough too much. It's mostly children who work in their parents' gardens."

Anane spokesperson Miriam Kiruki-Lafitte describes the complaints as "overstated. Killyt is a relatively safe chemical sprayed very carefully. Occasionally, wind-drift may cause small problems for nearby gardens and we regret this, but we give adequate warning and make sure everybody is informed of safety precautions." (Wind-drift happens when breezes carry the spray over a wider area than planned, from the plantations to surrounding homes and gardens.)

We obtained a copy of the leaflet distributed to the village. It is in English, not the local Seuki dialect, and reads in part: "There is no conclusive scientific evidence that any of the spray materials used to control greenbug on banana plants are the cause of disease in humans when used correctly. But since health impact remains under study, we recommend that persons who need not be in the spray areas, and particularly those who may be susceptible, stay out of the area or indoors during spraying, and cover food crops with sacking."

The leaflet given to the pilots of crop-spraying planes is very different, says an Anane pilot who preferred not to give his name. "They would sack me if they knew I had shown you this," he said.

He showed us his safety instructions, which read: "Wear masks at all time when spraying. Do not handle the Killyt tanks, hoses or nozzles with bare hands. Do not touch spills. In the event of exposure you may experience a burning sensation in eyes, mouth, nose or throat, or skin eruptions. Rinse skin immediately with copious cold water. Return to base immediately, shower, change your clothing and consult the staff medical centre at once. Do not fly another spraying mission until cleared by the medical centre."

Those second, stronger warnings are more appropriate, says Dr Henri Soren of the National Chemical Research Institute based at Capital University. "Gindrin is a corrosive chemical. It eats away at skin tissue. It's sprayed on banana plants before the fruits form, for that reason. People exposed to it for long periods – say, 3-5 years – in the US have shown a higher than normal incidence of skin and lung cancers, and that is why the FDA has suspended its use. I would not recommend that anyone breathe it in, or eat food that has caught the spray. Chemicals used here are supposed to be registered on our permitted list, and Gindrin does not appear there." Dr Soren also confirmed that in the US Gindrin was suspected of causing breathing problems.

However, Ms Kiruki-Lafitte denied that different information was given to pilots and villagers. She demanded details of our anonymous source, but did concede that since Anane workers were "more sophisticated" the wording of leaflets might differ, "but the information is the same." She said that spraying permits were issued by the Kuru District Council, and that she was not made aware of any additional requirement to register the actual chemical. "But if it is needed, we will, of course, comply."

Amos Minuki, Administrative Permits Clerk at Kuru District Council confirmed that spraying permits were issued in June 2006. He showed this reporter the permit form, which does not require the specific chemical to be named. "Perhaps we should look into that," he said. "But in fact we are not aware of any problems or complaints with the spraying. No-one has told us of this."

Mama Amina and Sister Sara say this is not so. They visited the District Council offices in October 2006 after the first spraying cycle, to raise questions about the crop damage and health complaints. They waited a day, but no-one was available to see them. Subsequently, the growers' co-op wrote a letter to the council on the same issues. This reporter saw the copy, dated 24 October 2006. Sister Sara says she handed the letter in to the reception desk of the District Council offices, but was given no receipt – and has had no response.

Commercial banana growing is valuable to the Kuru District. The plantations employ 300 people at various times of year as casual labour: picking, cleaning and packing are all mechanised.

## How the story might look now (cont.)

Banana exports account for 45% of all income coming into the district, according to a study done by the European Union Agricultural Projects Survey Group in June 2007. By contrast, tourism, including trips to the small Munu Falls Game Reserve, brings in only 10% of the district income. A dozen other crops and activities make up the rest. Food growing for domestic support is not factored into these calculations, although it is the only means casual plantation workers have of surviving when they are laid off by Anane.

"Anane owns this district," asserts Mama Amina. "That is why the council and government aren't interested in us."

Minuki vehemently denies this. "We will look into all legitimate complaints," he promises. "We get no personal benefits from Anane, although they do benefit local development and revenue – which of course is used for the good of the inhabitants."

Last Christmas, Anane catered a lavish reception for the District Council at its staff Community Centre, which it also made available for ruling party rallies during the recent council elections. Ms Kiruki-Lafitte declined to estimate the exact value of these events and facilities, commenting, "Of course, the welfare of the district is important to us, and we help out where we can."

Anane is likely to be helping out more widely in future. National Agriculture Minister Penelope Farawa-Holiuki spoke to this reporter from the capital. "The company has had good relations with our government since the end of the civil war," she said. "We are at present in discussion over its expansion into three more districts, as well as about the construction of a banana-processing plant as a public-private partnership. This would empower our economy by allowing us to add value through processing: a long-term aim of our economic renaissance."

The Minister said she did not know of problems relating to crop spraying, or that Gindrin was not an approved chemical here. "We would look into it if that turned out to be the case," she said. When pressed, however, she said such enquiries would "probably have to happen only during the next session of parliament. We are very overstretched for technical manpower and have not budgeted for such a project. It would be a pity," she concluded, "to jeopardise our government's good relationship with benefactors such as Anane on the basis of alarmist rumours from peasants who do not understand science."

Researcher Dr Soren, however, feels that fears about health, plants and wildlife are far from alarmist. "I am highly concerned that Gindrin is being sprayed in this country. In some areas of Florida, the same depletion of the bee population has also been noted where Gindrin was used. There should be an environmental impact study done here."

As for, Mama Amina, she has never been to a function at the community centre, and cannot read the English of the safety leaflets. When we told her about protecting her crops with sacks, she said "That would be a waste: the only sacks we have we must use for storing food." The Anane spokesperson said that there was "no budget" to print leaflets in what she called "a small local dialect" or to assist with protective materials like sacking for what she described as "every back yard – that would be ridiculous."

As we left Kuru Village, our car was overtaken by a large refrigerated container lorry carrying bananas to port. On the side was the company's slogan: "Anane: bananas that smile with health."

*(With thanks for the idea to Carol McCabe whose "Maine Budworm War" [Providence Sunday Journal 27/05/79] provided the inspiration for this exercise.)*

### The story isn't perfect yet.

- This is a long-run story, so one important thing to do at the finalising stage is to check back that information collected early in your reporting process is still valid, and is not contradicted by what you have discovered later. Equally, new facts, scientific reports or test results on the chemical may have emerged; it is worth repeating a quick web-search.
- That lump of text from the two leaflets still makes for heavy reading. Maybe you could pull it out of the story into a box or sidebar?
- We haven't heard from any actual patients. This would be useful, both to back up the nurse and headmistress's testimony, and to add to the human character and liveliness of the story.
- But you have increased the number of villagers' voices, and the story flows more smoothly from section to section. There's a vivid, visual intro and an ironic, thought-provoking conclusion. Most importantly, most of the holes in your hypothesis have been sealed. The story is certainly publishable.
- However, **the best stories are re-drafted more than once**. Editing your writing is not an extra, a luxury or a chore: it is part of the process of writing the best possible story you can. If re-drafting and editing alone become oppressive, find a colleague or team-member to share the editing and critiquing process. Good ideas come from teamwork.

**READ****What if you were to write a third draft?****respond**

What would you change if you were going to re-draft this version again?



The story was written using the 'Wall Street Journal' formula. Try rewriting it as either a 'pyramid' or to the 'High Fives' formula and see which approach makes the strongest impact.

**Comments**

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## Writing it for broadcast

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**(NOTE: this is not a complete guide to broadcast scripting, but it provides some hints on how to use language and construct a good narrative for a broadcast investigation)**

- All broadcast stories are accompanied by video footage or audio quotes.
- The same picture or quote can tell many stories, depending on its context.
- The purpose of the surrounding commentary is to make sure the audience gets **your** story.

Intelligent text can make viewers see even a very conventional image or humdrum quote in a new light. (But good text does not always compensate for boring pictures or quotes - because the audience has not been 'grabbed' and will turn away.)

On radio, the script written around the recorded quotes sets the context most powerfully. But on TV, the pictures make around 85% of the impact. In both cases, you need to construct your story around the pictures or recorded quotes. We call this 'writing for the ear,' 'writing to pictures,' or 'writing to sound.' Start with the reality you have captured: the scenes of Kuru village; the interviews. Then use the right words in your own commentary and links to:

- Underline important aspects of the story
  - Provide balance where the pictures or quotes only show some aspects
  - Select and point out the things you want the audience to pay attention to
  - Connect different images or quotes, explaining how we're moving through time or space
-

- Contextualise the images or quotes
- Put a 'spin' on the images or quotes by adding extra meaning or interpretation. (NB This does **not** mean distorting or taking out of context!)

The announcer or reporter can – and should – be doing all of these things. But that does not mean that he or she should be constantly interposed between the viewer and the news, forming a filter – or a barrier. Where you have real up-sound of a person saying something relevant to your story, always prefer that to a station voice standing in front, paraphrasing.

Writing  
the story:

## differences between print and broadcast

**READ**

Reading and viewing

**respond**

Think about the main differences between how you read and how you consume a radio or TV broadcast. Take five minutes to note some differences.

Comments

You may have made some of the following points:

- When you read something you can always skip back and read it again if you haven't understood; a broadcast just flies past you.
- When you're reading, mistakes jump out and they're there every time you turn back to the page. In a broadcast, you either notice them first time – or you don't.
- When you're reading, there are clear signposts -- like headlines, captions and paragraphs -- to help you find the way around the page. If you come in in the middle of a broadcast, you can't always work out what's going on.
- You can leave reading to go off and do something else. When you come back, you can pick it up again where you stopped without missing anything. You can't do that with a broadcast unless you record it or take it off the web.

Here are some more differences:

- Broadcast news offers the viewer more evidence for what it says (up-sound; pictures, etc.) which may make it more credible ("It must be true: I saw it on TV"). For the same reason, it can distort the truth more powerfully.
- Broadcast news exists only through time – except for podcasts, there's no 'object' like a newspaper for us to handle.
- It's harder to concentrate on broadcast news because it literally flashes past us. So we're more likely to pick up an impression than a detailed memory – which is why the nature of the whole package is so important.

- Broadcast news doesn't need high-level literacy – but it may demand good general knowledge to make sense of varied, fast-moving packages.
- Broadcast news often looks or sounds more slick than a grey newspaper.
- But newspapers let a reader decide what and when she will read, and allow her to go back if she wants to check something on the page. It may take longer to read, but the reader gets more detail from the page.

For all these reasons – the nature of the broadcast medium and the way the audience consumes it – broadcast scripting needs a very different approach to language from that employed by the print media.



### You're fighting limited time

There may be many significant facts in a story. Try to find one '**star fact**' or idea that will immediately grab your audience, and use this to start your investigative package.

#### For example, compare:

"We read many stories these days about environmental pollution. Some people say that chemicals are damaging the environment, while others say that without fertilizers and pesticides we will not be able to produce enough food to feed the world. Our team looks at the debate through the experience of one village."

*(No star reason, although it's all intelligent information)*

#### and:

"Children are falling sick in the small Central District village of Kuru. And villagers say the cause is crop spraying. Our team went to investigate."

*(Cuts straight to the star, local-relevant reason)*



### When and where are very important to broadcast audiences

This is because of the way stories 'fly past'. Try to script the story in the order it happened and use time and location labels more than once in each story.

## Writing the story:

## writing to pictures and sound

When you outline your story, you'll go through the same sequence we described in planning a print story: sorting the material into sections, testing the soundness of the argument in each section, then linking the sections together in a way that will make sense to the audience. But when you come to turning that into a script, build it around the live material you have collected.

For a TV script, first sketch out a **storyboard**: a list of the shots and speech you'll use for each section. Write your commentary second, to contextualise, fill in the gaps and link those scenes.

For a radio script, first list and group the audio quotes you'll use to make the points in each section. Then write the links. Go back if you need to, to what we say about using quotes in print. The same points apply here; quotes need to add value, not repeat what you've already said, but should flow smoothly from your words of commentary or analysis.

## Writing the story:

## writing for the ear

In a broadcast there's no chance to stop and reconsider. So:

- Make your **starting-point** for writing clear communication, not grammatical correctness. You can pick up and correct errors that interfere with understanding later.
- Speak the words as you write, to ensure a natural voice
- Imagine the audience as you write
- Keep it short and simple.

## Introducing quoted material

### Compare these two ways of introducing the same quoted material.



This one is grammatically correct – but it's not written for broadcasting, and is longwinded and repetitive.

"Research scientist Dr Henri Soren describes the biochemical processes associated with the chemical Gindrin, outlining both the corrosive environmental and physiological impact of the substance on the ecology of the area and the health of individuals.

[Upsound] 'Gindrin is a corrosive chemical...'



This one is more conversational and written to the audio quote, rather than just tucking it in as an afterthought:

"Dr Henri Soren, a research scientist in the capital: [Upsound] 'Gindrin is a corrosive chemical. It eats away at skin tissue.' Worrying stuff! But there's more, says Dr Soren: [Upsound] 'I would not recommend that anyone breathe it in or eat food that has caught the spray.' And, says Soren, Gindrin isn't even on the list of chemicals approved for use in our country: [Upsound] 'I am highly concerned that it is being sprayed in this country.'"

Doesn't this second approach make more impact – even though it contains contractions and a 'sentence fragment' that isn't strictly grammatical?

### When you're writing for the ear:

- Stick to one idea per sentence and short, direct words.
- Use short phrases where these sound more natural than "correct" complete sentences.
- Use actives rather than passives. They're shorter, more immediate and fresh and less likely to tie you in grammatical knots.
- Get the tense right. Stick to simple past, present and future if you can.
- Use contractions (It's, He's) where appropriate (but stick to station style).
- Use 'signposts' to start sentences – And, But, So, That's why – and to show structure: "We've found two instances of support from the company to local government: the first, when..."
- Find clear ways to express figures since many viewers and listeners have real problems when these fly past too quickly. (Round them off; convert them into an international or local currency; paraphrase: "one person in five" is easier to understand than "20% of the population.")
- Be aware of tone. News needs to be authoritative but NOT authoritarian; impartial but not cold. Write in terms that talk **to** viewers, not **at** them or **down to** them.
- Keep your writing fresh. This means avoiding overworked general adjectives like 'nice,' 'important' or 'disastrous' (use specific, telling information instead) and clichéd broadcast-speak like "and now for something completely different".

### Compare:

- "Environmentalists estimate this will have disastrous consequences..."
- "Environmentalists say one in five plantation workers may get too sick to work."

Which has more impact?

*[Editor's note: With thanks to broadcast trainer Fiona Lloyd from whom I learned most of what I know about broadcasting, and whose words and phrases are undoubtedly echoed substantially in these broadcast sections – GA]*

## Writing the story: writing for the web

Many newspapers have websites that simply reprint stories from the paper, with no changes whatsoever. That works – so in one sense there is no point in worrying about 'writing for the web'. If you have completed a worthwhile investigative project, you may immediately post it, as it is, on whatever website is available to you.

However, it is possible to adapt stories to make them more web-friendly. Especially if your story is long, complex and linked to large amounts of other information, a little re-editing can maximise the value readers will take from it.

**READ****Writing for the web****respond**

Again, take five minutes before you read on to think about the different ways in which you use a web article as opposed to a print story.

**Comments**

You probably came up with some of the following points:

- It's harder to identify the right web article, unlike a print story where headings, sub-headings and so on lead you to what you're seeking.
- Technology problems (such as power cuts) get in the way more often; you can read by candle-light. So getting to what you need fast is important.
- You tend not to read a web article from beginning to end, but skip through it looking for key points.
- You often rely on the navigation tools like indexes to skip through.
- You may leave a web article half-read, to chase links to other, more relevant-seeming material.

For this reason, getting an article web-ready is not so much about writing it in a different way, but rather about **editing** your print article so that it has the architecture (shape) and navigation tools a web reader will need. This may mean:

- 1 The good old 'Who, Where, What, When, Why and How' summary.**  
In this case the essence of the story is summed up at the beginning. Readers who are interested can then read the 'long tail' (the full story which follows that nutshell introduction).
- 2 Giving it a new headline.**  
Search engines such as Google are very literal-minded: they will only find stories containing the actual keywords a searcher has entered. Wordplay and teases often don't get picked up, and may irritate readers if they mislead. So while your newspaper may headline the Gindrin story "Deadly harvest", the web version is more likely to be picked up if it is headlined "Gindrin crop spray damages village health, crops." A *New York Times* journalist headlined his analysis of web headlining "This boring headline is written for Google!"
- 3 Revising language.**  
Because many web readers tend to be 'skimmers', a more straightforward 'writing for the ear' approach to language is more user-friendly.

**4 Breaking the text into a series of self-contained sub-documents.**

Each of those sections you began your story plan with, could be given a sub-heading, and tidied up so that it can be read as a mini-story on its own. The bigger a story is, the longer it will take your reader to download, especially in African countries with narrow bandwidth. And while there is no limit to how long a web story can be, we know that readers read 25% more slowly on screen, so there may be a limit to human patience! So it's important to inform readers about the content and value of the story, and, if you make them download the whole, unbroken document, make sure it's worth it. If you do break a story up, make sure each section is genuinely self-contained: since a search engine will not necessarily have brought them in through the 'front door' – your introduction – you may need to repeat some information or context in each section. Make sure date markers are clear, so readers know when your story happened.

**5 Identifying links to other texts.**

For example, you could list links to stories on the FDA suspension of Gindrin, to the national code on crop-spraying, and to international stories on pesticides. But check out sites you link to, to make sure the links are worth following. And get the URL (web address) right: even a skipped comma can make a link valueless.

**6 Adding indexes and outlines where needed.**

This is so that readers can skip to the part of the story that interests them.

**7 Simplifying layout and captions.**

The eyes of web readers bounce around, so simple and arresting words are better than long complex lines.

**8 Not being carried away by the multimedia possibilities.**

Big complex graphics, moving charts and interactive sections require fast connectivity and big bandwidth – which many African searchers simply do not have. In fact, they may be desperately trying to read or download while the electric power holds out. And fancy visuals do not make up for bad writing.

**9 Re-checking everything!**

Mistakes are easier to spot and faster to correct on the web than in print, but while they are up they may be seen by many more people, and this can, for example, multiply the seriousness of a defamation.

Finally, the following points from the 2007 meeting of the American Copy Editors Society, from an address on Editing for the web by Theresa Schmedding:

- Choose the RIGHT multimedia element
  - Still photos – best for setting a mood; making readers stop and think
  - Video – best for action, changes, bringing readers face-to-face with a person or event
  - Audio – best to hear emotions, add context, 'in their own words', narrative backbone behind visual material
  - Graphics – best to explain complicated processes, numbers and stats, sequence, scale, development over time, relationship of different elements. Don't forget maps
  - Words – added value, more depth.
- Know your audience

**Myth:** Online users log onto your web site for the same reasons they read the paper.  
**Fact:** Whether that's true depends on your market, but it is unlikely. Find out who is accessing your site and why.

# Case studies

Case  
study

## The Richmond Development Company by Finnigan wa Simbeye

Finnigan wa Simbeye is a Tanzanian journalist who has worked for a number of local newspapers. His story of how the Tanzanian government seems to have awarded lucrative and economically-important contracts to a 'mail-box company' deals with some of the same issues, including credentials and truthfulness, as our fictional example in this chapter.



### Please give us a brief outline of the story and tell us how it got started?

The Richmond Development Company (RDC) story started with a controversy over the government's attempt to grab a Dar es Salaam to Mwanza oil pipeline project from a local firm, Africommerce International Limited (AIL) and hand it over to RDC.

It got started when I covered a story where the owner of the pipeline project, who had spent over \$15 million, protested against the take-over and sought parliamentary intervention in 2005. I have since covered the story while working for two different private newspapers, *The Citizen* and *THISDAY*. I sympathised with the local company and wondered why the government wanted to snatch the project altogether, instead of accepting the two firms to work in partnership, as suggested by the local investors.



### What process did you follow, and what resources did you consult?

I did look for documentary evidence from AIL, talked to its executives, engineers, the former Tanzanian Minister for Energy and Minerals, Daniel Yona, Houston, and the Texas-based RDC founders and owners. I searched websites and found the company's websites, with information claiming (as I later found out, incorrectly) Tanzania and East Africa as places where the company's major projects are.



### Was the story published, and what was the impact? Were there any follow-ups?

The first story was published by my paper, but the same company, RDC, won a \$172 million tender to supply power to Tanesco. At this point I established that the company was in fact a mail-box company in the US with two owners: a Pakistani power engineer and a Tanzanian businessman based in the US. The RDC, which enjoyed support from political heavyweights, tried to get \$10 million from the Ministry of Finance as a down-payment, contrary to the contract. This was not successful, and by December 2007, the company had failed to deliver and sold the contract to Dowans Holdings of Kuwait. The story became a national issue at that point, since the country faced 12 hours of load-shedding due to poor hydro-electricity supply as a result of droughts. It was this outcry that pressured the government to make RDC sell its contract to Dowans.

By that stage, all the other papers had picked up on the story, publishing follow-up stories on which political heavyweights were behind the RDC and Dowans, and why the company was given such a big project at a time when power outages were very serious.

My latest story on Richmond has led to the formation of a parliamentary select team to investigate the Richmond Development Company's power purchase agreement with state-owned power supplier, Tanesco.



### What difficulties did you encounter, and how did you deal with them?

The difficulties were the usual ones: bureaucracy, threats of libel actions – and sometimes people accused me of having been corrupted by AIL, who were the rightful owners of the pipeline.



### What lessons did you learn, and what advice would you give to others tackling similar stories?

Check websites carefully – that was how I discovered the inflated claims RDC was making.

Getting authentic documents is very serious because sometimes I did get in touch with forged documents from people trying to expose the paper to libel suits.

Integrity is very important to win the confidence of both parties in a conflict. Never show bias at the initial stage and get the facts correct as to who is really the bad guy.

# Key points from this chapter

- ✓ You need to develop a method of data mapping the information you have gathered before you begin writing. Collect all the facts, quotes and ideas together and note where contradictions or gaps exist.
- ✓ Understand the difference between 'evidence' and 'proof'. Particularly in an investigative story, ensure that your arguments are logical and don't over- or under-state the case because of careless, generalised writing.
- ✓ Structure the sections of your story as paragraphs: mini-stories that group together all the material on one aspect. Then order the paragraphs and link them together to show the path your argument is taking.
- ✓ Use quotes selectively and to add value to the story. Don't take quotes out of context or spin paraphrases.
- ✓ Write at least one draft before you attempt the final story. Use the draft to lay out what you have, identify strengths and weaknesses, and plan any additional research or reporting you still need to do. You may need several drafts to get it right.
- ✓ Clarity is the most important quality in writing an investigative story. If you lack confidence about writing, just lay out the evidence clearly and in order.
- ✓ If you want to structure your story in a more sophisticated way, the 'Wall Street Journal', 'High Fives' or 'Pyramid' formulas work well for investigative stories.
- ✓ If you use a narrative journalism approach, make sure your focus on an individual story or incident doesn't get in the way of explaining issues and broader arguments.
- ✓ Good introductions and conclusions are important. Spend time working on these. The introduction invites your reader into the story; the conclusion ties together the thoughts the story leaves them with.
- ✓ When writing a broadcast story, script to your pictures or audio quotes and 'write for the ear'. Remember, your audience will be watching and listening, not reading; they can't back-track so you must make your structure and language accessible and easy to understand.
- ✓ A print story can be posted to the web exactly as it appeared. But you can edit it to make it more web-friendly. In particular, breaking a story into manageable sections, and providing good indexing and links, will massively increase its usefulness.

## Checklist for the whole story

- Is the language and writing style appropriate for my readers?
- Has every fact been checked and is each accurate?
- Is the information new, or at least analysed in a fresh way?
- Does the introduction grab attention?
- Were the sources reliable?
- Are all sides or interested parties represented/quoted?
- Are all quotes and paraphrases faithful to what was said and attributed?
- Do any numbers or calculations in the story add up/make sense?
- Is jargon explained and has technical information been made understandable?
- Have conflicts/issues been clearly explained?
- Is there sufficient detail to back up arguments and analysis?
- Are arguments reasoned and logical?
- Is there sufficient colour, detail, drama or human interest to keep it engaging?
- Does the story flow?
- Is the story told in the order events happened?
- Is there enough context to explain issues and significance? (Do I explain "why?" and "so what?")
- Is there a strong, thought-provoking conclusion?
- Finally – have I presented the story so readers can judge, or editorialised with my own opinions?

## Glossary

- **Abstract** – used as a noun to mean a short summary of a longer paper. Used in this section as an adjective, to describe terms and writing that refer only to ideas and concepts, with nothing the reader can visualise, grasp or experience
- **Chronological story** – a story about events or actions, told in the order in which the events happened
- **Draft** – a sketch or outline of a story, growing more structured and detailed as it moves towards the final version
- **Foreshadowing** – hinting at or mentioning events or elements in a story that will be fully described or explained later
- **Generalisation** – drawing sometimes unwarranted conclusions about a broader issue from a small number of instances
- **Logic** – putting ideas together in a way that leads sensibly to an intended conclusion
- **Narrative journalism** – journalism that borrows some of the writing approaches of the fiction writer to make factual stories clearer, better contextualised and more interesting
- **Pacing** – the speed at which a story unfolds: controlled by the reporter through careful choice of words, sentence length and organisation
- **Paragraph** – a group of sentences devoted to one topic or aspect of a topic within a story. Structured like a mini-story with a lead sentence and then supporting or more detailed information
- **Paraphrase** – to re-tell or summarise what an interviewee said in the reporter's own words, without quotation marks
- **Proof** – evidence so conclusive that no other reasonable explanation for events is possible
- **Scene-setter** – way of beginning a story by describing its setting
- **Writing for the ear** (also **writing to sound, writing to pictures**) – technique of scripting required for broadcast, where the story is structured around the sound-clips or video footage collected, and the script is written to reflect natural speech patterns quickly grasped by a listener or viewer

## Further reading

**For more on writing techniques (including broadcast and web editing) we recommend the Poynter Institute website**

- <http://www.poynter.org>

**For more on narrative journalism, check out**

- <http://www.narrativedigest.org>

**For ongoing information and debates on issues relating to writing, and for news of conferences and seminars on these kinds of topics, try the University of the Witwatersrand journalism department site**

- [www.journalism.co.za](http://www.journalism.co.za)
- the online version of the Rhodes University Journalism Review: <http://www.rjr.ru.ac.za>

**For a comprehensive guide to web journalism, see**

- *Journalism 2.0: How to survive and thrive – a digital literacy guide* by Mark Briggs. Chapter 5 deals with writing for the web. (Available as a free PDF download from J-Lab at the University of Maryland.)