

How to use these chapters

Welcome to the Investigative Journalism Manuals!

You may be using these investigative journalism chapters in one of three formats: as PDF files you are reading on the Web, or from a CD, or as printouts of those files. If you have printouts, you'll be able to make notes on the pages as you work through the text; if not, we recommend you keep a notebook and pen beside you as you read, so that you can record your own ideas and questions as you progress.

What do the chapters cover?

These first chapters form the core of what is planned as a growing guide to investigative journalism over the next two years. To begin, we have assembled the basics: definitions of the field and some key techniques and resources. We will add to these over time a series of supplements dealing with investigative work in particular fields – such as politics or health – or particular countries, or types of institution. All will be available free to read and work from on the internet.

The first eight chapters presented here are designed to answer the FAQs everybody has about investigative reporting, as follows:

- **Chapter 1: About Investigative reporting**
What is investigative journalism and why is it worth doing?
- **Chapter 2: Generating story ideas**
How do I find topics worth investigating?
- **Chapter 3: Planning the investigation**
How do I set about doing an investigation?
- **Chapter 4: Sources and spindoctors**
How do I deal with people who offer me tip-offs?
- **Chapter 5: Forensic interviewing**
How do I get my questions answered properly?
- **Chapter 6: Basic research tools**
How do I find and make sense of hard data?
- **Chapter 7: Telling the story**
How do I present my findings to my audience?
- **Chapter 8: Ethics and general legal principles**
What values should I stick to as an investigative reporter?
- **Reading list and weblinks**
How can I find out more?

If you have a solid background of journalism education and/or experience, and just want to know more about one of these topics, you can go straight to the relevant chapter and use it as a self-contained guide. But if you are new to practical journalism or investigation, we recommend that you work through all the chapters in order. They build on one another, and, along the way, they will broaden your knowledge of reporting in general as well as of specialised investigative techniques.

If you are using the chapters as part of a journalism education programme, your lecturer or supervisor will guide you on which sections to read, and may set alternative exercises that relate specifically to your reporting context.

But you can also use them for self-study, and these notes provide you with guidance on that.



How is each chapter organised?

Each chapter has the same format. At the beginning, we spell out the **learning objectives** for the chapter: the things you will be able to do or understand better after you have worked through it. Then you will find **information and exercises**, designed to add to your knowledge and get you thinking about the debates. Exercises will indicate how long you should spend on them, and any questions in them will be answered as the chapter progresses. We recommend that you do take time to attempt these exercises, and write down your responses, using the timeframe indicated. They are designed to give you a pathway into the issues the chapter focuses on.

A **case study** will show you how an African journalist in recent times has tackled a relevant story, and the journalist will explain how he or she approached the task and dealt with the problems, and what lessons were learned. Then, depending on the subject matter, there may be additional **tips and hints**, some of them country-specific. A **summary** at the end of the chapter will help you revise what you have read, and there are references to particularly useful extra **readings**. All the readings, plus more, are consolidated into the longer reading list that forms the end of Chapter 4.

I don't think I have the time or patience

I don't think I have the time or patience for self-study – and anyway, I'm out of practice!

Forget any ideas about study that may have discouraged you in the past. Self-study is different. You are doing it because there is something you want to discover or master – and you, as a self-directed adult, make the rules. Here are some tips that may help you. They are based on what students on distance-learning programmes have discovered about staying motivated and focused.



Plan your time.

Especially if you are working to tight deadlines in an understaffed, under-resourced newsroom, it isn't always easy to make time to work through a whole lengthy chapter. So look at your working week, and find some short periods (20-30 minutes) that you can allocate. You'll find it more motivating to work through a few pages and finish, than aim to consume a whole chapter and fail. But try to get into a routine where you use these time-slots regularly.



Set objectives.

The proverb says: "How do you eat an elephant? One piece at a time!" In other words, although your long-term aim may be to master every aspect of investigative reporting, it's more effective to add to your skills and knowledge in small steps, consolidating each before you move on to the next. Use the learning objectives at the start of each chapter to help you list and prioritise what you want to cover.



Keep records.

Make notes about what you have read, the exercises you have completed, the goals you have reached and the questions you still have. File these for reference in the future; either as papers in a folder or electronically on your computer. This will help you to track your own learning and to see how you are progressing – and will be very useful if you need to use evidence of your studies to develop your career.



Work with friends or colleagues.

The biggest discouragement to self-study is feeling isolated. So if others in your newsroom or among your friends have the same interests, work together. Set aside a lunchtime to discuss what you have read, and how it relates to current issues in your own media context or stories you are working on. African and international journalists' organisations are listed at the end of Chapter 4, and if your own circumstances mean you have to work alone, you could use these to establish a supportive phone or e-mail relationship with other journalists who are also committed to investigative reporting, for example through the Forum for African Investigative Reporters (FAIR).

 **Find a mentor.**

The best support is to find a more experienced reporting colleague that you respect, and who will agree to guide you. Even if that person does not have teaching skills, or isn't interested in engaging directly with the chapters, they can give you the benefit of what they have learned in their lives, and provide a 'sounding board' for your ideas.

 **Be honest and positive about problems.**

Sometimes you will be too tired or too busy to achieve your goals for the day. You won't get round to finishing the exercise or completing the chapter. It happens to everybody occasionally. Instead of using this as an excuse to give up, consider why the problem arose and whether it's possible to avoid it next time. Then simply start fresh the next morning.

 **Reward yourself.**

Allow yourself small incentives for reaching the goals you have set: one long, relaxed lunch-hour, for example, in the week when you complete a chapter. But the biggest incentive of all is to see your investigative story in print, and to know that you have helped to right a wrong or create debate on a formerly invisible topic: that's what, in the end, these chapters are designed to help you achieve.
