From STORY IDEAS to HYPOTHESIS

1. We discover a subject
2. We create a hypothesis to verify
3. We seek open source data to verify the hypothesis
4. We seek human sources
5. As we collect the data, we organize it so that it is easier to examine, compose into a story, and check
6. We put the data in a narrative order and compose the story
7. We do quality control to make sure the story is right
8. We publish the story, promote and defend it

Investigative journalism involves exposing to the public matters that are concealed – either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances that obscure understanding.

Q: What can we investigate?

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

- Corruption
- Wrongdoing
- Impropriety
- Criminality
- Failures of officials, systems, policies
- Abuse of power
- Wasteful spending
- Injustice and misery
- Uneven relationships

A lot of places to look for stories

- National
- Cross-border
- Beat-based / Sector
- Local / Community

Story ideas are everywhere

- Breaking news stories
- Old stories, new leads
- Clippings, stories on file
- Tips or Leaks
- Hunch
- Documents
- Databases
- Advocacy groups / NGOs
- People's complaints
- Government meetings that other reporters ignore
- Government and company reports
- Public information
- Friends and acquaintances
- Direct observation (Trends)
- Rumors and conversations
Before you even begin investigating, ASK:

- Is the information CREDIBLE?
- Is the story worth pursuing? (RATIONALE)
  - Is this of public interest? Is the issue a priority?
  - How many are affected and will benefit?
  - What hidden truths would the story reveal?
  - Has anyone addressed this before?
  - Are there wrongdoers who must be punished or be held accountable?
Can I prove it? What methods and processes could produce the evidence I need? (Feasibility)
Do I want to do it (Passion)? Can I do it (Capability)? Am I the best person to do it (Risks and resources)?
What about the competition?
Will my newsroom run the story?

Story ideas are broad
- Who is the real Ron Paul, Republican nominee?
- A secret unit had operated against the opposition in Bulgaria
- Unfair treatment by the law and court of divorced women in Jordan
- India’s river conservation plan after almost 20 years
- Questionable practices of Danish pharmaceutical companies

Mind map: What can I focus on?

Hypothesis-driven investigation
- Give the investigation a DIRECTION
- Make it MANAGEABLE
- Narrow SUBJECT to TOPIC

Investigative Hypothesis
- Concrete, specific STATEMENT that your investigation intends to prove—or disprove (Hunch, theory)
- The CORE of the investigation

Crafting the investigative hypothesis
- 3 sentences or less
- Statement, not a question
- Contains the following:
  - The news of the problem (Present)
  - The cause of the problem (Past) and consequences
  - What will happen if nothing changes—or what must change for the problem to end (Future)
Creating a hypothesis: I’m going to prove that...

Who is the real Ron Paul, Republican nominee?

Republican nominee Ron Paul is sympathetic to the right-wing militia movement, and deeply bigoted against blacks, Jews, and gays

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Creating a hypothesis: I’m going to prove that...

A secret unit operated against the opposition in Bulgaria

A super-secret unit that existed in Bulgaria before democracy kidnapped, assassinated, or discredited Bulgarian emigrants and “enemies of the Bulgarian state” around the world

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Creating a hypothesis: I’m going to prove that...

Unfair treatment by the law and court of divorced women in Jordan

Divorced women in Jordan lose financial support and even custody of children because of a legal loophole that has made them lose their cases in court

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Creating a hypothesis: I’m going to prove that...

India’s river conservation plan after almost 20 years

India’s 20-year-old river conservation plan is a failure. Rivers are dirtier as officers have misspent the money.

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Creating a hypothesis: I’m going to prove that...

Questionable practices of Danish pharmaceutical companies

Danish pharmaceutical company Lundbeck got Sri Lanka to approve an antidepressant that was never approved in Denmark by manipulating people and documents

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What if your hypothesis is wrong?

- You got it wrong
  - Make a new hypothesis
- The facts disprove your hypothesis
  - You still have a story
- The facts are more than what you bargained for
  - Hurray! A bigger, better story
Think minimum, think maximum

MINIMUM STORY
Explanatory Report
• How does the system work?
• What are the flaws and weaknesses?
• Who are affected?
• What should be done?

MAXIMUM STORY: Investigative Report
• What kind of wrongdoing was committed?
• Who did it? How?
• What are the consequences?
• What does the wrongdoer say?
• What should happen?

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What's your story idea?
Where did it come from?
What's your hypothesis?

ACTIVITY TIME
Write it down

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