ORGANIZING the data / WRITING the story

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

Good practice

- Transcribe notes immediately after an interview
- Read and file the documents. Index them, with hypertext links to full electronic versions
- Classify them neatly
- Make backups
- Review what you have periodically

Put all the info you intend to use in a single location and form

MASTERFILE

Basics of the “MASTERFILE” (Hunter)

- Create a word processing or database file
- Move your data into this file
- Note the physical location (like a file folder or hyperlink) of the data
- Order the data (chronological or thematic). Use the same date format
- Identify connections between data points by a keyword

Initial evaluation

- Mark key points and facts you can consider as having been firmly established
- Summarize/outline major themes that are emerging
- Diagram relationships between people or instructions
- Visualize data to help you understand the information
- Spot the gaps
Ask yourself

- Have I proved my hypothesis?
- Do I need to more fieldwork?
  - Talk to more people? Go back to a source(s)?
  - Get documents?
  - Conduct observation?
  - What else do I need to do?
- Am I ready a stop to my data gathering?
- Can I start writing the story?

Preparing to write: Do I have all the answers?

The Writing Process

- Ask yourself:
  - What are the main findings of my investigation?
  - What is the most important of them all?
  - Why is it significant?
- Frame your major findings in a few sentences = NUT GRAPH

The Writing Process

- Open your MASTERFILE and save a copy for editing
- Identify pieces of information that support the nut graph, and cut out those that don’t
- Move around the information to support your findings
- Pre-writing techniques: Outline; themes and sub-themes; headlining and subheads
- Choose the structure most appropriate to your story
- WRITE!

Major Finding

Many public doctors assigned to remote areas leave their posts not because of hardships but because they can’t stand their mayors.
BACKUP FOR MAJOR FINDING

The mayors give low priority to health, use health centers as a political tool, and are engaged in corrupt practices in the purchase of medicines for their constituents.

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So what? Why should readers care?

Because many doctors leave, critical health services are not delivered in remote areas where as many as 90 percent of the population is poor.

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What structure?

- Traditional, newslike structure
- Analytical / explanatory
- Narrative (“Narragative”)

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NARRATIVE: Some options

- Chronological: time
- Europe by desert: tears of African immigrants
- Picaresque: scenes
- The stage-managed famine

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Start strong: Variety of leads

- Narrative
- Descriptive
- Anecdotal
- Question
- …and a lot more

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NARRATIVE: The school of hard knocks

After her divorce five years ago, Yasmine Issa realized she could no longer afford to be a stay-at-home mom. She’d taken two years of college classes before getting married, but had never trained for a professional job. “I wanted to do something promising for myself,” says the 28-year-old from Yonkers, N.Y.

Hoping to become an ultrasound technician, she found the Web site for Sanford-Brown Institute, a chain of for-profit career colleges specializing in the health professions. “If you’re looking for an exciting and rewarding career in today’s expanding fields,” the Web site said, “we can help you get there.”…
Descriptive: Exporting an epidemic

In Osasco, Brazil, an industrial city on the western flank of Sao Paulo, the past is buried beneath a Walmart Supercenter and a Sam's Club at the intersection of Avenida Maria Campos and Avenida dos Autonomistas...

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Question: From Bulgaria with love

Do you remember Ian Fleming's James Bond novel, From Russia with Love? It introduced SMERSH, a Soviet counterintelligence agency whose acronym was composed from two Russian words: smert shpionam, meaning “death to spies”...

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Anecdotal: Health politics demoralize doctors

When barrio doctor Richard Lariosa arrived in [a town of the Samar region, name withheld] in 2002, he was surprised to learn that medicines for the town were being kept at the mayor's office. “When you gave a prescription to a patient not of the same political color as the mayor, he'd be told by the people at the mayor's office there was no medicine even when there was still a lot,” the doctor says. “Color coding.”

The mayor was later persuaded to turn over all the stocks to the rural health unit, after being assured the people would know the medicines came from him. But months before the May 2004 elections, newly delivered medicines again wound up with the mayor...

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Every story must have a NUT GRAPH

Nut graph = paragraph or paragraphs that tell readers what your investigation has proved
- Contains your major finding(s)
- Tied to your investigative hypothesis

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Where to put the nutgraf

- Definitely in the first page of your story
- You can make it the lead (DIRECT / HARD LEAD)
- You can tease readers a bit and employ foreshadowing (DELAYED / SOFT LEAD)

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Direct: A question of ethics

This is about ethics, or perhaps rather the lack of them. A large, established Danish pharmaceutical company refuses to accept that a developing country has twice rejected its application for the approval of a combination product for the treatment of depression and mild psychoses. The product is not registered for sale - meaning that it has been approved for use - in Denmark.

The pharmaceutical company is H. Lundbeck A/S; the product is Deanxit and the country where it was first rejected and later approved is Sri Lanka. The Nurse has examined all the documents in the case and visited all seven of the psychiatrists who, according to Lundbeck, participated in a meeting [where the drug supposedly obtained their unanimous approval] and who are mentioned in a letter to the Sri Lankan authorities asking for their approval for the drug. At least two of the psychiatrists were unable to attend the meeting. None of them had heard that the product had never been registered in Denmark, or that the Sri Lankan authorities had twice refused its approval...

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Direct: A Taliban of our very own

Just a few kilometres outside our capital, there exists a body that brazenly rejects our Constitution and our laws. It orders the assassination of couples who marry for love and snatches and sells the children of those who defy its rules. It has ordered the punitive gangrape and murder of mothers whose sons have eloped with another's daughter. This body has even gone so far as to order that women should only give birth to sons. In yet another paradox in this land of paradoxes, our Prime Minister goes to the G8 Summit to lend his support towards fighting the Taliban, even as we refuse to acknowledge a Taliban huddling not in some foreign mountain redoubt but reigning rampant over millions of Indians – just a short bus ride away from the halls of Parliament.

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Soft lead: From Bulgaria with love

Previsouly unknown documents and other irrefutable evidence now prove that such a super-secret unit existed in Bulgaria, too. Nearly 5,000 pages of the newly disclosed secret files of the Communist-era Bulgarian intelligence organization reveal that this special bureau was responsible for kidnapping, assassination or discrediting of Bulgarian emigrants and “enemies of the Bulgarian state” around the world.

YVONNE T. CHUA / University of the Philippines & VERA Files

Soft lead: Health politics demoralize doctors

Corruption and official neglect are not the only problems plaguing the health system in local government units. Traditional politics is also compromising the delivery of health services to the people who need it most, and discouraging health workers who would otherwise not even mind the low pay and long hours their jobs entail.

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Soft lead: Fields of terror

Our three-month investigation in Romania the Czech Republic, Moldova, Transnistria – a state that broke away from Moldova – Ukraine and The Netherlands, has uncovered the way in which a brutal criminal network of Ukrainian-run gangs recruited hundreds of victims to work in effect as slaves in Bohemia for years before the network was broken up this spring. All the 40 victims from Romania whom we interviewed had been lured to an asparagus farm in Hostín u Vojkovic in 2007 and 2008, to toil for Bohaemer Spargel Kultur, BSK, a Czech firm owned by a Dutch company, Procint B.V. None of them were paid, nor even decently fed. All say they felt lucky to escape.

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Ending = Closure

What’s being done – or not done

Streams of filth

What needs to be done

No matter how well charted those presentations may be and those funds may sound, India’s solution to its river pollution does not depend on money. What matters is the integrity of those in the business of implementation and the swiftness and conscientiousness of the NRCP.
Case study (Full circle)

Even Lariosa has not junked the idea of serving communities despite his rather tumultuous experience... “The work of a public health practitioner is challenging,” he says. In a good way, he meant.

Lariosa’s younger sister has just graduated from medical school and plans to go straight to residency training. “But I’ll try to expose her to the Doctors to the Barrio program when she visits me in Batanes in the summer,” says Lariosa. “There are bits of ugliness, but I think my type of work is beautiful.”

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How long?

- Depends on your newsroom
- Newspapers: 2,500 words; serialization
- Magazine: Cover story (longform)
- Broadcast: News magazine show; daily specials
- Online: Multimedia elements complement each other

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Illustrating the Story

- Remember photos
- Let graphics help carry the load

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Editing

- Edit line by line
- Apply “skeptical editing”
- Have several people look at the story
- Get a lawyer’s opinion

When the story is out: Promote and defend it

- Announce story with proper headlines
- Tell principal friendly sources when the story is coming or has appeared
- Spread the story across different media (Leveraging)
- Establish pre-eminence through regular appearances (Branding)
- Stand by your story because you know it’s right
- Be ready to explain and defend your methods