



Center for  
Investigative Reporting

**Investigative  
Reporting**

**A USER'S  
MANUAL**

# IMPRESSUM

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# PREFACE

Investigative reporting reveals facts that have been intentionally hidden from the public.

In order to do so, investigative reporters need to acquire a set of skills that is not otherwise pressingly needed in journalism. They need to understand and know how to analyze public documents, follow the money and cull important evidence that could be used to prove corruption and criminality in a pile of records.

They most often investigate complex schemes that involve private businesses and large state or publicly owned corporations, banking, real estate and other assets, which means that the job of an investigative reporter is rarely simple and easy.

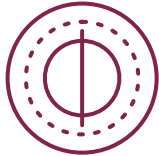
Yet, there is no other way to write a story that is based on records and could expose unscrupulous people and unravel their misdeeds.

Frequently, the judiciary uses some of this evidence to punish such behavior.

Investigative reporting offers people truth upon which they can base decisions and even change the world.

We want as many journalists as possible out there writing stories that may well transform our societies.

You will find in this guide the sum of our experiences in this kind of world-changing journalism. We hope it will encourage our colleagues who want to follow in our footsteps.

**REPORTERS' OR EDITORS'**  
story ideas**READERS'**  
ideas**CONVERSATIONS**  
with sources**NEWS BRIEFS**  
put out by other media

## HOW TO FIND A TOPIC FOR INVESTIGATION?



Ideas for investigative topics may come from a variety of sources.

Usually, reporters or editors may find something dodgy about the way an individual, a firm or a group of people conduct their business – in a way that is illegal and harmful to the public good.

Or ideas may pop up while reporters are browsing a document for another story, while they're chatting with colleagues and friends, reading newspapers or walking in the park. Sometimes a man on the street might also tip reporters about something suspicious. Journalists need to verify the tip to see if there's an important story behind it.

# PRE-INVESTIGATION



It's a long way before setting out to do some fieldwork.

Reporters must be confident that what they had heard is worthy of an investigation, because that's the only way to convince the editor that the investigation should continue. It is important at the very beginning to learn the rules of the game and the laws of the system in which the story takes place in order for them to understand more easily and quickly recognize the importance of people they come across during the investigation and their relationships.

They will discuss a story idea with colleagues who have worked on similar stories; they will read all that has been published on the subjects, comb through the media outlet's archive and talk off the record with people who might know more on the subject.

## NEWSROOM meetings



## BACKGROUND research



## PRESS-CLIPPING



## PORING OVER legislation



## CONVERSATIONS with experts



## SENDING FOIA requests



## COMMUNICATION with clerks



## LEGAL battle



## PILES of documents



# COLLECTING RECORDS



A record is a piece of evidence. It's a golden rule in our line of business that stories must be fully backed up with hard evidence. This is why all investigative reporters look for documents.

Sometimes to get a good story only takes one piece of paper, the right one. More often, evidence enough to support a story is scattered over many documents and buried deep in records that reporters must haul out of multiple government agencies, companies, and banks.

Reporters obtain documents through requests made under Freedom of Information laws that entitle all citizens to access the records in the custody of their government agencies.

Even with these laws, it can take a long and arduous struggle to get many records. Reporters often must, besides their regular work, write appeals and put together lawsuits when their straight-forward requests for information are ignored by secretive bureaucrats.

Reporters have learned alternative ways - all within the bounds of professional ethics - of obtaining documents outside of formal requests.

# RECORD ANALYSIS



Investigative reporters analyze documents they have collected and look for important connections among the actors, follow the money, and look for patterns in the actions of people under their spotlight.

Evidence may be hidden in hundreds or thousands of pages of records, so it's important for investigative reporters to know how to classify, process and illustrate information in order to come up with the correct conclusions. This is data journalism – the journalism of the future.

Increasingly journalists are teaming up and working with software programmers, those nutty geniuses who share with them a passion for the truth.

## CLASSIFICATION of Documents



## ANALYSIS of Documents



## DIAGRAMS, SCHEMES, graphic connections



## NOTES





## PREPARATIONS



## FIELDWORK



## INTERVIEWS



## TRANSCRIPTION

of interviews



# INTERVIEWS



Investigative reporters go to an interview fully prepared. Just like the best lawyers, they go into interviews having already learned the answers to their questions from the paper trail and other sources. Naturally, they want the public to hear the answers from the story's subjects directly, out of their own mouths.

Interviews with people who have done bad things can be long and exhausting. This is why reporters have to be like psychologists somewhat, in order to persuade interview subjects to speak frankly and truthfully.

It is of utmost importance that a reporter has good rapport with a photo-reporter and a camera operator.

Many investigative stories become memorable because a camera captured expressions of fear, of wonder or confusion, or because an audio recorder caught the tell-tale seconds of silence that followed a well-placed question denoting fear or guilt.

This could speak volumes about the topic or the person. Every interview is transcribed in full.



# LIST OF CRITICAL INFORMATION



Already deep into her investigation, the reporter is slowly building the scaffolding of her story and pieces the puzzle together having revealed suspicious connections between seemingly unconnected persons.

Now is the time to formulate the story's thesis and pen down a list of critical information, because the reporter has already found out what her lead characters have done and has an idea what else she could find out about their deeds.

The list of critical information represents all the documents, sources and other possible evidence reporters need to prove - or disprove a story's thesis and conclusions. The invaluable list helps reporters move through their investigation more efficiently.

For us in CIN, this simple tool helps us stay focused on the target and not veering away on interesting tangents during the investigation. The list makes it easier to follow what we have and where the story is going and what remains to be done.

When the editor confirms this step, the investigation may continue. With new findings, the list's contents will be updated.

## A LIST



## WHO, WHAT, WHERE, HOW?



## WHAT HAVE I learned so far?

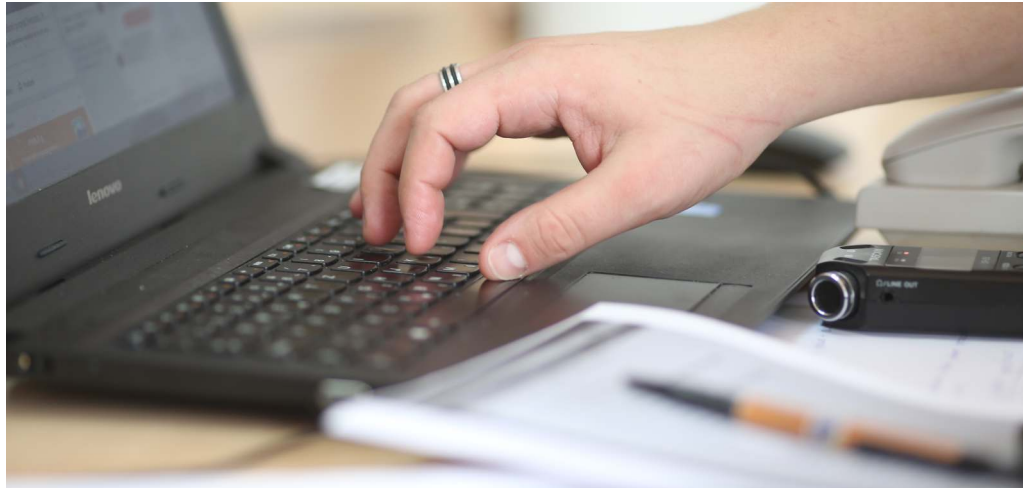


## WHERE WILL I find what I need?



**SUMMING-UP**  
of information**FOCUSING**  
on a thesis**SIMPLICITY****CLARITY**

## INVESTIGATIVE STORY'S THESIS



After months of research reporters usually develop a clear idea of what exactly has happened in their story.

The last phase in their work – the writing of a story – begins with the refinement of the thesis around which the whole story revolves.

The thesis has to answer a question: “What is your story about?”. It has to be simple and clear as day.

One challenges the strength of evidence that supports the thesis by discussing it with colleagues.

If an investigative reporter can defend the story's thesis before their colleagues, then it will be easy for them to do it in public.

# WRITING AND EDITING



Some hard work remains.

A list of critical information, notes, interview transcripts and analyzed documents may exist – but that screen is still blank.

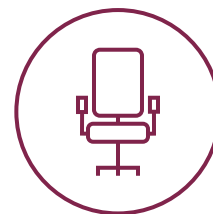
Investigative reporters learn many things and dig out hundreds of documents – but how to tell readers and viewers about all this in an interesting way that makes sense? Usually there's space or time just for part of all they've learned – so they must select the best parts.

When the words finally find their way onto a piece of paper, editors help reporters by “killing their babies”, i.e. erasing paragraphs, or even whole pages of text that wanders off topic or bogs down in detail.

The editor checks if the story has been written well and in line with professional standards; if the evidence is presented clearly and is sufficient; plus, if the story takes the best angle to show off the topic.

Here at CIN, most stories are accompanied by a video. Thus, along writing stories, we work on screenplays for video, while a producer with a multimedia team shoots and edits the footage.

## WRITING



## STORY EDITING



## VIDEO EDITING



## A COLLABORATION

between two colleagues



## CHECKS, CONFIRMATIONS AND EXACTITUDE



## EVIDENCE, EVIDENCE, EVIDENCE



# FACT CHECKING



Just as reporters think the story is done and they are finished – that queen of irritation is at the door – fact-checking.

**"How do we know this?"** is the annoying sentence most often uttered by fact-checkers, and to reporters who have spent weeks chasing down tips and bits of information to find out things, there is no worse question.

But it must be answered to the satisfaction of fact-checkers who demand a document or a quote from a named source or multiple duplicated quotes from unnamed sources to support every fact finally printed in an investigation. Complaining is futile.

Fact-checking has helped fortify CIN's stories against charges that we produce propaganda or lies or that we in some way manipulate the truth.

CIN fact-checkers are veteran reporters trained in how to cross-examine evidence and the way it is presented. If the thesis of a story cannot hold up to this rigorous fact-checking, reporters must give up on her story or keep on looking for more evidence.

## ROUND TABLE

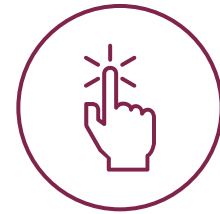


The edited and fact-checked story is nearly ready for the public.

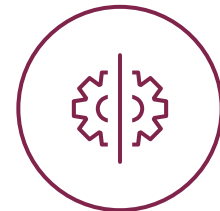
First, the author, a fact-checker and at least two other reporters will read the story out loud in a group. They will share concerns or doubts about individual sentences, test the claims made in the story and the style of writing. Any item in the piece is fair game for questioning. This is called “a roundtable” and represents the story's dress rehearsal before an audience.

The topics that investigative reporting deals with are complicated and hard to explain fully to readers. This is why the round table gives the content of the story one last polish of hard-to-understand terminology and descriptions. Facts are not touched.

### A FIRST READ



### ADDITIONS TO THE TEXT



## INFOGRAPHICS



## VIDEO



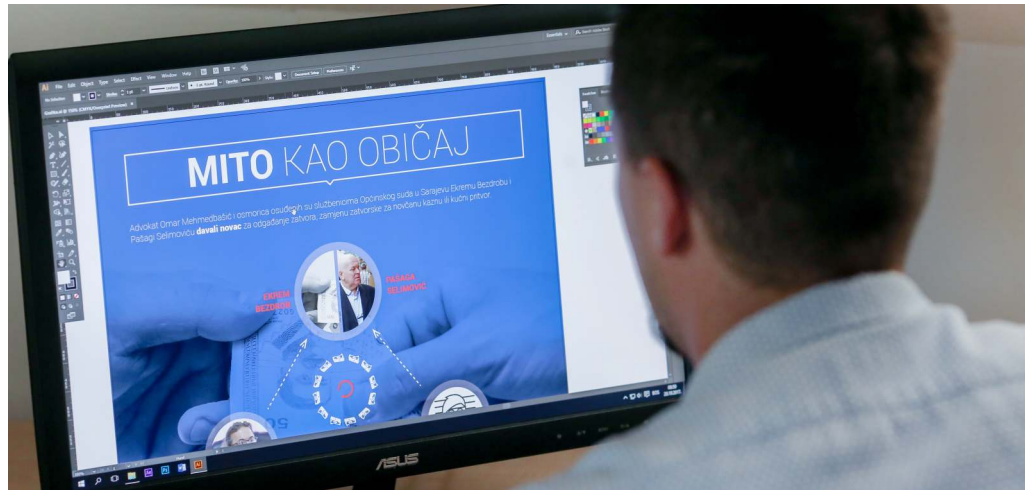
## MAPS



## GRAPHS



## PHOTOS

MULTIMEDIA  
CONTENT

We at CIN know that not all readers and viewers have time for long investigative stories.

Still, we count on their curiosity and need to be informed and we offer information in various packaging.

For a more visually minded audience, we like to tell a story through a video or a series of photographs.

For those who prefer lots of details, we write stories. Along with the stories, we publish infographics, timelines, graphs, maps and other visual elements that help readers understand the story better and give CIN a broader reach.



## PUBLISHING



The home of all our stories is our web page [www.cin.ba](http://www.cin.ba), but we give all our content free-of-charge to all local media outlets under one condition – to name us as the source of a story.

We insist on this because we think that it is important that the public gets objective and fair information, while copyright is being respected at the same time.

## TV



## PRESS



## RADIO



## INTERNET



## COPYRIGHTS

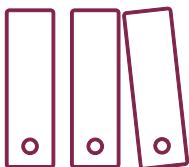




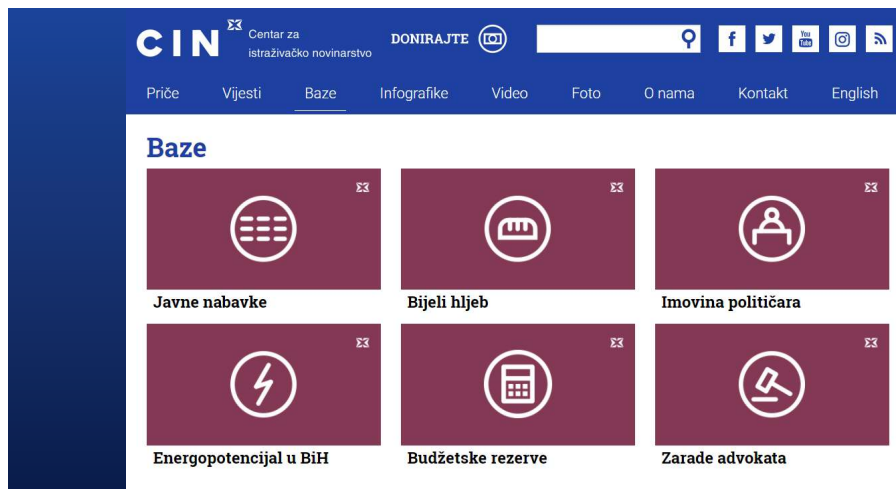
## DATABASES



## ARCHIVES



## WEB PAGES

BENEFITS TO  
THE PUBLICBONUS  
MATERIAL

Over the years, CIN reporters have collected thousands of documents and records.

Since they give testimony to public spending, we publish them in topical databases available “one-click away” to anyone who wants to be informed.

Our most important databases are about politicians' assets; public procurement; post-term severance pay, energy and budget reserves.

In effect, along with our daily job of journalism, we also do the work of public administrators who should be publishing records of public importance on official web pages.