

Module2.2 - A few tips that can ease work in your investigation.

Good day. This is Xanic again with you. I thank you for joining me in the second part of our module and for participating in our forums.

We are reviewing the steps to develop an investigation. And in the first part we talked about four initial steps. So, this you can see the review in the following slide. But so, once we have determined there is a story, once we have corroborated and made basic verification that our suspicion is correct or a tip or the hunch we have. Once we have a hypothesis and we have determined what evidence we need. The next very important step is to come up with an action plan. I cannot stress how important it is to think, to think, think, think in this phase and no other process, really. Every minute invested in thinking will pay out. One thing I try to make sure when designing my action plan is that it looks more like the figure to your right and not like the one on your left. This is, I want to make sure I am picking the shortest way possible to the evidence. It often happens that the easiest route isn't successful. It happens many, many times. Multiple times, probably. And that's why we have a plan B and a plan C. In any case, it's best if we don't choose the most complicated route first.

So how do we come up with an action plan? I'm sure you have your thoughts. You've got very valuable experiences you can share with us. Please do it in our forums.

Something I find very useful is to start by making lists of things, lists of places I must go to, a list of things I must personally corroborate, documents I have to FOIA or to find and the people I must listen to. This starts off as a disorderly collection of lists. I call it a roadmap. I believe we can often forget great reporting ideas if we don't write them down. So, I just add things at the beginning and in the course of the investigation and I will trim and prioritize it afterwards and continuously. I also build a map of sources. I use a diagram that looks very much like the map of a theater with the stage at the very center and rows and rows of seats. And what I do is I place the sources and diagram according to their proximity and the role in the story. Those who are firsthand witnesses or protagonists or antagonists go in the row closest to the stage and say external experts go on the very last row. I will often move the sources around the more I know about them and the role in their story. This map helps me decide who to go first and second and so on. I add these ideas of who you talk to my roadmap file and I then make a first selection of to do things the straightest route possible to the evidence I need.

This roadmap is a living animal, and I feed it of all the way, I add things and we organize, I prioritize. David Barstow and I shared this road map in a Google Drive for working together in the Wal-Mart story. That way we were we could make sure that we were both on the same page. We were both with the same priorities. That's what we do in collaborative investigations in Quinto Elemental Lab as well.

Part of our action plan is also having a clear idea of how to make our first approach to sources, how to describe what we're doing and why. Being very careful not to mislead anybody, but also very strategic in regards to how much to say to whom and when. It is of extreme importance to go to the sources with an attitude of total open-minded curiosity without giving the impression that you have come within a fixed idea in your head. Because what we're really doing is, we're wanting to know it all. And the way we're going to organize our reporting and our interviews is basically to know it all explore it on.

One thing I want to make sure at this stage in the reporting is that my hypothesis, the pieces of evidence I have identified and my action plan are perfectly aligned.

I've learned many things from Lisa Olsen, your instructor in Module 1 and an extraordinary journalist, and I'll bring two of them only to the table this time, and this is one of them. This matrix is something that could be important to use at several stages of our reporting. One, when we have confirmed our tape or our hunch or have our hypotheses.

And it's also an exercise we can repeat at this moment in the process to have an action plan. What this matrix really asks is, is this story worth the effort? So, if your story is very important and very difficult. It's an amazing challenge. And I'm sure you will want to pursue it. If it's very important and less difficult. It's, of course, it's something you want to do. But what if it turns out it's less important and very difficult? It's something you want to be able to assess very early in the process.

Another thing I've learned from Lise is that investigating is hard and that there are ways to keep spirits high. One is we have. It's important to have in mind that we will be on a roller coaster of emotions. Investigating can take, it can take you through a four year and to the deepest insecurity and once empty in a very predictable way as well. So, praise yourself each time you have a breakthrough even if it's small and toil and be certain that the anguish and the blues will also pass.

Apart from this, there are set of routines that can reduce our suffering and increase our victories. Let me tell you a story. Martin is a German friend whom I went hiking, hiking with a mountain some years ago. We were preparing hot water for an ice soup when Martin realized I had left the box of matches on top of the snow. Each thing has its place. He scolded me as he rescued the matches and put them in a zip lock. What I learned from Martin that day, and I play now to investigation is the fact that we need to put things in place unless we are a bit masochistic and we enjoy the experience of not finding valuable information we had.

After one week of reporting, things can become hard to manage. We need to stay on top of the story and organization and the materials in the core. It's something we must do every step of the way. Chronologies at one of us are one resource and are super important. It's one it's this one place where we put everything that we find and learn. Chronologies help us have all our material together and noticed pattern patterns and anomalies. And they tell us a story which will be of great help in the writing process. I usually work with a logbook to where I start building paragraph with aspects of the story or scenes that could probably make it to the draft. That way I am returning information and findings into story form. I also keep an Excel file with all my FOIA requests in order to remember where I am at with each of them. And I make memos of each interview or reporting I do on the ground; I write them up as soon as I leave the room. This way, instead of working with dozens of notepads, I have one-page selections of the very best. All this makes the investigation and even collaboration so much easier.

Right now, Walker, who you may know from ICIG, was one of the very inspiring directors of the consortium, insists on the importance to share radically. Don't keep information to yourself, communicate tirelessly. So, don't think don't keep things to yourself, but share in an organized manner with chronologies, memos, log books, road maps and very frequent conversations. Conversations is the other key thing, key aspect for an investigative process. Many reporters prefer to keep their editors far away and colleagues also are at arm's lengths as long as they can. But the best is to do quite the opposite to get others

involved. Share the information. Share your breakthroughs and your mishaps. Make them part of the process and make them work with you on behalf of the story.

I hope you find these ideas helpful. See you in the forums. And happy investigating.