INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

DIGGING

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1.   LOOK FOR LIES & CONTRADICTIONS

Some rule breakers make great quick-hit investigations. Know basic public records so you can find out if:

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1. A candidate lives in the wrong city. (*Deeds or Property records and residency requirements.*)

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2. The mayor (or the governor) doesn't pay taxes (*Tax records*).

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3. The legislator accepted illegal contributions (*Campaign finance reports and experts*).

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4. The government official lied about his degree (*Bios/online resumes and calling universities*).

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5. The congressman (or other politician) who didn't report his income or assets, or whose assets grew quickly after being elected (*Disclosure reports*).

Some rule breakers make great quick-hit investigations. Know basic public records so you can find out if:

6. A politician is a convicted criminal or has been accused of fraud (*Criminal, civil and/or family court records*).

2. EXPLORE OMISSIONS

Think:
What could they be hiding?
Why?
And is that against the law?

State Rep. Miles did not disclose business ownerships

'Corrected' ethics forms turned in after questions

By James Drew and Ericka Mellon | April 23, 2016 | Updated: April 23, 2016 10:50pm

RECOMMENDED READING :

Week 3 Instructor Lee Zurik investigated a corrupt coroner.

In this story, Zurik debunked Tammany Parish Coroner Peter Galvan's claim that he never used official vacation & was owed back pay. Galvan's wife's Facebook page featured vacation pics…

Another apparent vacation photo, this one from Dubai

3. BUILD CHRONOLOGIES - LOOK FOR PATTERNS & CONTRADICTIONS

Think: Who's really telling the truth?
What was the real sequence of events?

DEA agent, former eyewitness allege prosecutorial misconduct in Linda Carty murder case

DEA agent, witness say prosecutors forced their hands

RECOMMENDED READING

"He's a Liar, a Con Artist and a Snitch. His Testimony Could Soon Send a Man to His Death."

Pamela Colloff's *ProPublica* story showed that even as prosecutors in Florida trusted Paul Skalnik as a star witness in death penalty cases, he assumed fake identities and continued to steal. Read the explainer on how she reconstructed his "43-year odyssey through the criminal justice system."

ProPublica

4. EXPLORE ALL TYPES OF SOURCES
If you get a no, think: Who else can talk?

Some sources are barred from speaking by legal rules – or dead.

This victim could not grant interviews for years. I persuaded her mother and best friend to explain how she'd been sexually assaulted by a federal judge in this Houston Chronicle story.

Details emerge in Judge Kent scandal

How far did this federal judge go?
A judicial council reprimanded U.S. District Judge Samuel Kent for 'inappropriate behavior' and accused him of misconduct over sexual harassment charges. But that only begins to tell the story.

5. EXPLORE AND MAP CONNECTIONS
Property & businesses & addresses & associates & images too

Court documents/property records:
The Mexican state of Veracruz
alleged its ex-governor
[bought Houston-area homes with stolen money](#)

Source: *Houston Chronicle* staff photo

5. EXPLORE AND MAP CONNECTIONS
Property & businesses & addresses & associates & images too

- Photos/property records/Mexican websites showed This slain Mexican official had Houston ties too, but was not accused of money laundering.

His house looked like this:

Source:

Houston Chronicle staff photo

Tips on finding public records — worldwide:

- Explore [Corporation Wiki](), [Open Corporates]() and [Investigative Dashboard]()

Tips on finding public records — worldwide:

- Bookmark & use directories like OCCRP [Aleph](#), the [Global Investigative Journalists' Network](#) and the [Investigative Journalists' Toolbox.](#)

Tips on finding public records — worldwide:

- Learn to use your national and state public records laws. A great international index is [here](#).

Tips on finding public records — worldwide:

- Remember not all documents are public —or on the internet.

Private records can be more important

Alejandra Xanic, instructor in Week 2, won a Pulitzer for proving how Walmart broke Mexican laws to build stores on archeologically sensitive sites. Her sources included letters from a dead man, videos archived in tiny Mexican towns, and officials interviewed at home...

ALEJANDRA XANIC

RECOMMENDED READING:
[How Walmart Got its Way in Mexico](#)

The New York Times

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How Wal-Mart Used Payoffs to Get Its Way in Mexico

By **David Barstow** and Alejandra Xanic von Bertrab

Dec. 17, 2012

See how this article appeared when it was originally published on NYTimes.com.

SAN JUAN TEOTIHUACÁN, Mexico — Wal-Mart longed to build in Elda Pineda's alfalfa field. It was an ideal location, just off this town's bustling main entrance and barely a mile from its ancient pyramids, which draw tourists from around the world. With its usual precision, Wal-Mart calculated it would attract 250 customers an hour if only it could put a store in Mrs. Pineda's field.

6. REACH OUT TO READERS

- Network – carefully. Use Twitter direct messages and replies (though not during active shooter or other dangerous situations). Send Facebook messages.

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- Use the advanced search option on LinkedIn to find former employees and common connections.

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- Use Google advanced search, people finders and social media search tools.

6.REACH OUT TO READERS

- Use a Google Form to solicit tips

And remember, a reader tip is still just a tip. It's easy to fake an identity. You must verify.

RECOMMENDED READING:

Miami Herald reporter Julie Brown discovered old emails and persuaded victims to talk (via social media, cold calls and door knocking and interviews) for her scoop on Jeffrey Epstein,
a billionaire who avoided prosecution in 2008 despite evidence he'd systematically abused Florida teens.

Read her: investigation
Watch an explainer video

7. COLLABORATE!

Often a team can investigate faster – if there are good ground rules, common goals and ethics, and a story of mutual high interest. Learn to use collaborative tools like Document Cloud or ProPublica's new Collaborate platform.

8. PARTICIPATE!

- Post in our MOOC discussion forums.
- Send questions to instructors.
- Join the MOOC Facebook page. @lisedigger

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