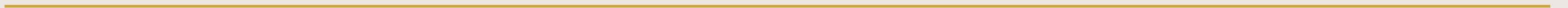


# Topic 2.

# Research Ethics in Investigative Journalism



# Who should we investigate?

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## ✓ Governments

These range from local councils to national parliaments and foreign governments that often they hide a decision because they know the public may not like it.

## ✓ Companies

Some companies break the law and should be exposed. But companies usually like to keep activities secret for a number of reasons.

## ✓ Criminals

Although governments and companies can be corrupt, criminals make their living at it. They act like leeches on the community, so people have the right to know about them





# The subfields in the investigative journalism

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Political journalism

International journalism

Broadcast journalism

Print journalism





# Basic principles of investigative reporting

## News value

You should judge all topics for investigative reporting on the criteria for what makes news. Is it new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people?

## Keep your eyes and ears open

Listen to casual conversations and rumour, on the bus, in the street or in a club, but never write a story based only on talk you have overheard or on rumour.

## Get the facts

You must gather as many relevant facts as you can, from as many people as possible. Your facts must be accurate, so always check them.

## Fit the facts together

As you gather the facts, fit them together to make sure that they make sense. Investigative reporting is often like doing a jigsaw.

## Check the facts

Remember you are trying to find information which some people want to keep secret. Criminals lie, so be suspicious of what you are told - and check their words with someone else, preferably someone you trust.



# Basic principles of investigative reporting

## Evidence

In addition to gathering facts, you should also gather evidence to support those facts. This is especially important in case you are taken to court for defamation as a result of your investigation.

## Confidential sources

When investigating corruption or abuse, you will meet people who will only give you information if you promise never to reveal their identity. If you promise to protect a confidential source, you must do so until the source himself or herself releases you from that promise.

## Threats

People may threaten you to try to stop your work. But all threats should be reported immediately to your editor or your organisation's lawyer.

## Work within the law

Journalists have no special rights in law, even when investigating corruption. You must work within the law, but more than that, you should not use any unethical methods of getting information.



# Factors of investigative journalism

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## Thorough Investigation

Many days, weeks, or even years of study go into an investigative journalism report. Before reaching conclusions, every bit of information is double- or even triple-checked with factual evidence.

## Sequential

When dealing with such a massive volume of data, it is easy to become lost, confused, and overwhelmed. Investigative journalists work methodically and deliberately through mountains of data.

## Getting to the bottom of the story

The critical distinction between traditional and investigative journalism is that investigative reporting goes beyond the story's surface features.



# Factors of investigative journalism

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## Conducting interviews and verifying facts

To illustrate how an investigative journalist would tackle a subject, consider how they would cover a regular newsworthy event, such as a building catching fire. A conventional journalist would travel to the site and gather information about an event. But in pursuing the ‘true story,’ the investigative journalist may discover that the owners of the tiny store were frequently threatened with eviction by a corporate-like enterprise.

## Investigating hypotheses

The investigative journalist will then begin connecting the dots, talking to people, conducting interviews, and poring over records to check the legitimacy of the hypothesis that the big business vying for the store’s space was directly implicated in the firestorm that tore down the store to the ground.

*“Journalists ought not to stand outside the closed doors of the powerful waiting to be lied to. They are not functionaries, and they should not be charlatans. They ought to be sceptical about the assumed and the acceptable, especially the legitimate and respectable”*

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(John Pilger, Hidden Agendas)





The basic  
ethical principles  
of journalism  
remain the same

- seek the truth and report it as fully as possible
- minimise harm
- be accountable
- act independently



**The British Press Complaints Commission** provides a useful framework for journalists to assess whether their methods are in the public interest. These include:

- ◆ If the activity is used to expose a crime or serious misdemeanour

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- ◆ If the story would help protect public health, safety and other rights

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- ◆ If it prevents people being misled by the statements or actions of individuals or organisations who use public money or who are in the public eye



# Social Norms

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## Folkways

behaviors that are learned and shared by a social group that we often refer to as “customs” in a group that are not morally significant, but they can be important for social acceptance

## Mores

norms of morality, or right and wrong, and if you break one it is often considered offensive to most people of a culture

## Taboo

a very negative norm that should not get violated because people will be upset

## Laws

social norms that have become formally inscribed at the state or federal level, and can laws can result in formal punishment for violations, such as fines, incarceration, or even death

# Protection of sources

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Under Principle 18 of the Johannesburg Principles

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“Protection of national security may not be used as a reason to compel a journalist to reveal a confidential source.”



# Invasion of privacy

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Another challenge facing the investigative journalist is the conflict between press freedom and the protection of the citizen's private life. Media codes of conduct in the SADC region endorse the right to privacy enshrined in article 17 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

