

Topic 7.

Planning and Carrying Out an Investigation



BUILDING A DATABASE FOR INVESTIGATIONS



I. Getting Ready

- Exploring the documents
- Defining the scope
- Making a list of the questions
- Encouraging teamwork

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2. Designing and Developing the Database

- Starting by defining what each record is going to be
- Making a list of the elements that would help identify each record
- Defining a key for each record and including other notes for details
- Uniformity is paramount

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2. Designing and Developing the Database

- Including fields to identify who input each piece of information and what the original source is
- Making sure the database design is user-friendly
- Making the database scalable

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3. Testing

- Performing a pilot test of the database
- Making a list of “what ifs”
- Evaluating the reliability and consistency of the most important fields

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4. Filling in the Database

- Making use of collaborative storage tools
- Splitting the data using the categories defined in the design stage
- If there's a need of scraping data from the web or from text documents, concentrate your efforts
- Considering hiring an external professional if the amount of data is too big to be manageable

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5. Fact-Checking

- Before analyzing the data and drawing conclusions, you need to confirm it with the original sources
- Decide what kind of audit you will do
- The database is not ready for use until it has gone through fact-checking, data auditing, personal source confrontations, and legal review

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Software

- Apps for creating a web form that will help to fill in the database (*Google Forms, Node.js, Django, Flask, etc.*)
- Database storage (*MongoDB Atlas or Google's Firebase*)
- Structuring and processing data (*Python, PostgreSQL, ELK Stack, and Filemaker*)
- Data extraction and PDF conversion (*Wondershare Pdf Converter Pro, Google Documents basic converter, iLovePDF, Smallpdf, Tabula, Import.io, etc.*)
- Downloading the data from the database system and working on it with *Excel* or *Google Spreadsheets*.

PLANNING AND CARRYING OUT AN INVESTIGATION



- **Security** is a key issue (use encrypted communications, back-up copies of the data, and consider your personal safety)
- Be aware of **instruments** that can make the job easier (tools for scraping, online forms to fill the database, PDF converters, scanning with OCR (optical character recognition), and massive text processing)
- Make the **methodology and sources** transparent for your audience, assuming safety and security protocols allow it
- Publish your **contact information** alongside the investigation so readers can get in touch with questions