


The Investigative Checklist:
How to Choose, Conduct and Complete Your Tough Stories


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FOUR PILLARS OF INVESTIGATIONS




- **HOW TO DO THEM:**
HOW TO FIND, CHOOSE AND CARRY OUT YOUR INVESTIGATIONS
- **HOW TO TELL THEM:**
HOW TO STRUCTURE AND WRITE YOUR STORIES
- **HOW TO STAND APART:**
WHAT'S YOUR MANDATE, WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT
- **HOW TO ORGANIZE YOUR TEAM:**
PITCHES, WORKFLOW, TEAMWORK

HOW DO YOU PLAN AND EXECUTE A COMPLEX INVESTIGATION:




- **1. HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR STORIES**
- **2. QUESTIONS...** the 'unknown unknowns'
- **3. GOOD INTERVIEWS/ GOOD WRITING ...AND A SHARP FOCUS**
- **4. KEEP AN CONSTANTLY UPDATED CHRONOLOGY**
- **5. ORGANIZE YOUR RESEARCH**
- **6. ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS KEEP QUESTIONNING YOURSELF - AVOID TUNNEL VISION**
- **7. FACT CHECK, FACT CHECK, FACT CHECK!**

1. HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR STORIES?




- ✓ IS IT INVESTIGATIVE?
- ✓ HOW EXCLUSIVE IS IT?
- ✓ DOES IT FIT YOUR PRIORITIES?
- ✓ WHAT KIND OF INVESTIGATIVE STORY IS IT?
- ✓ WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?
- ✓ WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR STORIES?



WHAT MAKES THIS AN INVESTIGATIVE STORY?

ALL GOOD STORIES NEED THREE BASIC BUILDING BLOCKS:



- **1. GREAT CHARACTERS**
- **2. GREAT PLOT (structure)**
- **3. GREAT WRITING**

BUT AN INVESTIGATIVE STORY NEEDS THREE ADDITIONAL BASIC ELEMENTS

- ✓ **ABUSE OF POWER**
[A powerful person or organization/ victims]
- ✓ **A NEW REVELATION**
- ✓ **EVIDENCE (THAT CAN BE SEEN)**

WHAT IS ABUSE OF POWER?:

- CAN BE A WORLD LEADER....




- OR A HUSBAND WHO BEATS HIS WIFE



WHAT KIND OF ABUSE OF POWER?:

- CAN BE EXTREME, VIOLENT....




Somalia's police boss called 'WAR CRIMINAL' in Canada

- OR HYPOCRISY...

CBC INVESTIGATES | Trudeau's chief fundraiser linked to Cayman Islands tax scheme

Massive offshore leak reveals secrets of Stephen Brothman's company



WHAT KIND OF ABUSE OF POWER?:

- CAN BE ACTIVE HARM...

H&M, Asda and Next supplier polluted rivers with chemicals linked to cancer and deaths, investigation finds

- OR NEGLECT - THE ABSENCE OF JUSTICE

BBC

Indian villagers' tales of injustice

CHOOSING YOUR STORIES:

DOES IT FIT YOUR PRIORITIES?

- **DOES IT FIT YOUR MANDATE?**
(You need a mission statement)
- **DOES IT FIT YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE?**
(You need to know your existing and intended audience)
- **DOES IT FIT YOUR NEEDS RIGHT NOW?**
(You need to know your mix of stories)

CHOOSING YOUR STORIES:

What kind of exclusive story is it?

The best stories have all three. Usually you need at least two of these:

- **PEOPLE: A STRONG CHARACTER**
(Whistleblower, a victim, a powerful target in your story)
- **DOCUMENT/INFORMATION/PICTURES**
- **A SHOCKING NUGGET OR REVELATION**
(leaked or hidden documents)
- **ACCESS -- TAKE US SOMEWHERE FEW HAVE GONE**
(Police raid, a hidden part of society)
(It can be cooperative – or undercover)

FIGURE OUT WHERE YOU ARE GOING TO START

- **START FINDING PEOPLE ?**
[victims, natural enemies]
- **START LOOKING FOR DOCUMENTS?**
[newspaper archives, court documents]
- **START TRYING FOR ACCESS**

**IT'S A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE:
ONE ROAD WILL LEAD TO ANOTHER**

- **FINDING PEOPLE**
[Interviews will lead you to documents]
- **LOOKING FOR DOCUMENTS?**
[Newspaper stories might get you people, experts...]
- **TRYING FOR ACCESS**
[Access to a police investigation for example will get you people and documents]

CHOOSING YOUR STORIES:
How exclusive is it?

- **NEVER BEFORE TOLD**
A tip, a brand new investigation
- **A NEW DEVELOPMENT IN AN OLD STORY**
Part of it told already
But you bring it to new heights
- **BRING IT IN A NEW WAY TO A NEW AUDIENCE**
-It was told by another media outlet, another language, another country
- You do it in a new way


CHOOSING YOUR STORIES:
What is your goal?

- **YOUR TOP, DREAM STORY –THE GOLD**
- **YOUR MIDDLE GROUND – SILVER**
- **THE ACCEPTABLE MINIMUM – BRONZE**



CHOOSING YOUR STORIES:
What is your goal?

- **YOUR TOP, DREAM STORY –THE GOLD**
- **YOUR MIDDLE GROUND – SILVER**
- **THE ACCEPTABLE MINIMUM – BRONZE**



SOMETHING MIGHT BE TRUE BUT
> **IS IT PROVABLE?**
SOMETHING MIGHT BE PROVABLE BUT
> **IS IT DOABLE?**

CHOOSING YOUR STORIES:
What are the risks?

- **PERSONAL**
- **LEGAL**
- **CORPORATE**
- **TIME, MONEY**



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- ✓ WHAT KIND OF INVESTIGATIVE STORY IS IT?
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- ✓ WHAT ARE THE RISKS?



ONLY AFTER YOU HAVE CHECKED OFF THE ANSWERS TO ALL THESE QUESTIONS ARE YOU READY TO PITCH YOUR STORY

NOW YOU ARE READY TO PITCH YOUR STORY

- Make a clear and concise sale of your story to your boss, your editor ...



CHOOSING YOUR STORIES: THE PITCH FORM

Sample Story Pitch Form

Here is a sample "pitch" form. All journalists have to answer these questions before their story is approved

- > FOCUS: **WHAT IS THE BIG QUESTION YOU ARE SEEKING TO ANSWER? SO FAR BASED ON YOUR RESEARCH, WHAT DO YOU THINK THE ANSWER IS?**
[What's your focus? Usually in the form of: Why is something bad happening and who is to blame?]
- > HOW DOES YOUR STORY FIT THE MANDATE OR MISSION OF YOUR MEDIA OUTLET/NEWSPAPER/TV SHOW?
- > WHO ARE YOU **HOLDING TO ACCOUNT** — AND FOR WHAT?
- > WHAT MIGHT BE THE **ONLINE NEWS HEADLINE** FOR YOUR STORY?
[If you can't summarize your story in a short and snappy headline, you're in trouble]
- > WHO IS YOUR MAIN PROTAGONIST?
- > WILL YOU HAVE ANY EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEWS OR INFORMATION?
- > WHAT WILL SHOCK, OUTRAGE OR ENTERTAIN PEOPLE THE MOST?
- > WHAT IS YOUR SUGGESTED STORY TREATMENT?
[How long will it be, how will it look/read, what will be different, what will be the style?]

DOWNLOAD THE FORM AT: WWW.JULIANSHER.COM/TRAINING

OK – YOUR BOSS GAVE THE THUMBS UP!! NOW YOU ARE READY TO START YOUR INVESTIGATION

2. KEEP A LONG LIST CONSTANTLY CHANGING QUESTIONS



Donald Rumsfeld was mocked for this speech about "Unknown UnKnowns"



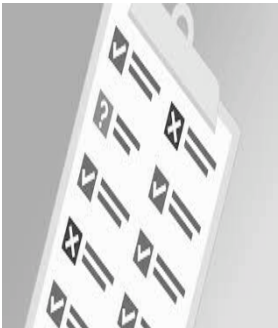
But he has a point...

Watch the video at
<http://tinyurl.com/bg4ejng>

WHAT WE KNOW – AND WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

- **THINGS WE KNOW**
You get a story tip on known fact: baby dies in hospital under mysterious circumstances..
- **THINGS WE KNOW WE DON'T KNOW**
Did doctors make an error?
Did the hospital cover it up?
- **THINGS WE DON'T KNOW WE DON'T KNOW: THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS**
The story is bigger than you thought: The baby died because the drugs used by thousands of hospitals are contaminated and more babies will die...
The story is wrong and quite different: The mother killed the baby


THINGS WE KNOW WE DON'T KNOW



- MAKE YOUR LIST EVERY DAY
- IT KEEPS CHANGING AS YOU FIND SOME ANSWERS... BUT ALSO MORE QUESTIONS
- DECIDE IN THE END: IF I DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER TO A QUESTION, CAN I STILL DO THE STORY?

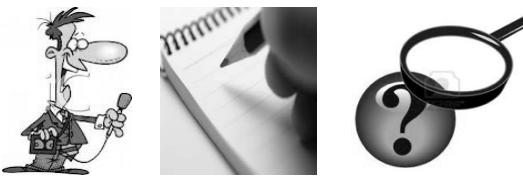
THINGS WE DON'T KNOW WE DON'T KNOW: THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS

- BE OPEN FOR SURPRISES




- YOUR STORY MIGHT CHANGE COMPLETELY!!

3. THREE BUILDING BLOCKS:
GOOD INTERVIEWS, GOOD WRITING AND A SHARP FOCUS*




* WE'LL LOOK AT THIS ELSEWHERE ON THIS COURSE. FOR SLIDESHOWS ON INTERVIEWS AND STORY TELLING, SEE WWW.JULIANSHER.COM

4. YOU NEED A CHRONOLOGY




WHAT A CHRONOLOGY LOOKS LIKE:



DATE/TIME: March 26, 2016 4 pm	EVENT: Secret funds transferred	SOURCE: <u>Court document #4321, p. 6</u>
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HOW A CHRONOLOGY HELPS YOUR INVESTIGATION:



DATE/TIME: ?	EVENT: Secret funds transferred	SOURCE: <u>Court document #4321, p. 6</u>
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Maybe you know what happened -- but you need to find out exactly when?


HOW A CHRONOLOGY HELPS YOUR INVESTIGATION:



DATE/TIME:
March 26, 2016


EVENT:
?

SOURCE:
News reports



You know something big happened – “Company President resigns” - but you don’t know why


HOW A CHRONOLOGY HELPS YOUR INVESTIGATION:



DATE/TIME:
March 26, 2016

EVENT:
Secret funds transferred

SOURCE:
?




Or you know what happened and when but you need solid evidence

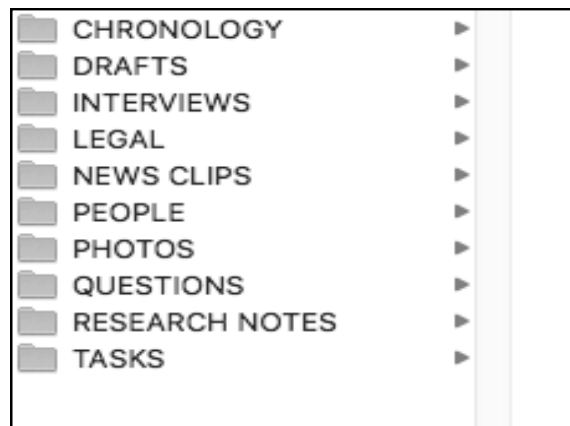
5. ORGANIZE YOUR RESEARCH

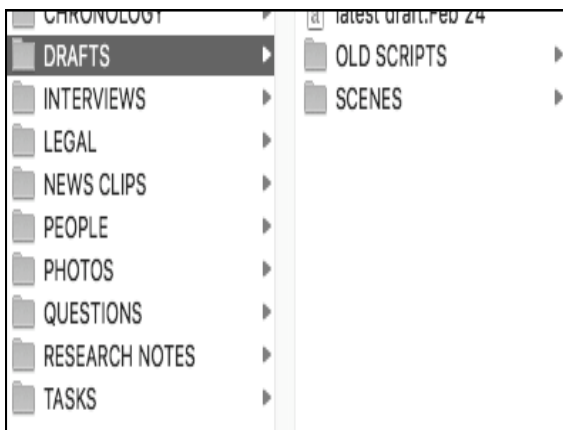
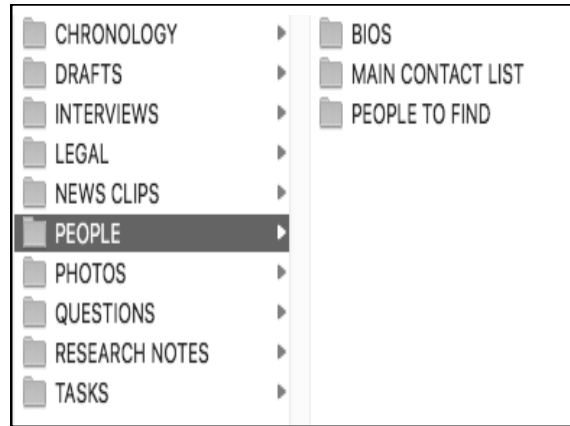


ORGANIZE YOUR HARD DRIVE ...



HERE IS A SAMPLE OF HOW I ORGANIZE MY HARD DRIVE ...CONSIDER USING SOME OF THESE KINDS OF FOLDERS:





**6. FINALLY: ALWAYS, ALWAYS ALWAYS
KEEP QUESTIONNING YOURSELF**

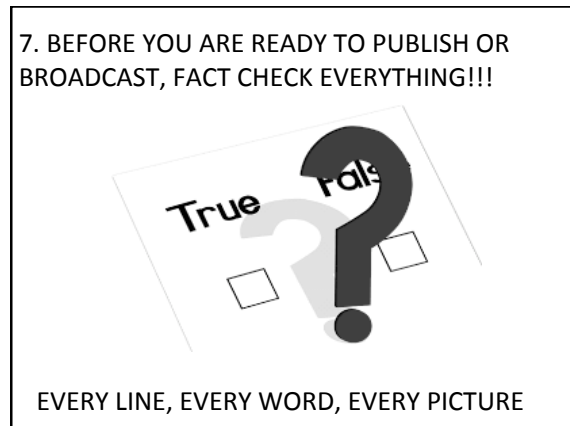
A black and white image of a broken heart, split vertically down the middle with jagged edges, set against a light gray background.


**NEVER FALL IN LOVE WITH
YOUR STORY**

A black and white image of a broken heart, split vertically down the middle with jagged edges, set against a light gray background.

AVOID TUNNEL VISION


A black and white photograph of a dark, narrow tunnel with rough, stone walls. At the far end of the tunnel, there is a bright, circular opening, possibly a doorway or a light source, creating a strong contrast with the dark interior.



THE INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST 

YOU CANNOT DO THE STORY UNLESS:

- ✓ YOU HAVE ABUSE OF POWER
- ✓ YOU HAVE A NEW REVELATION
- ✓ YOU HAVE REAL EVIDENCE
- ✓ IT FITS YOUR MANDATE
- ✓ IT TARGETS YOUR AUDIENCE
- ✓ IT FITS YOUR PROGRAM PRIORITIES

THE INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST 


NEXT, DECIDE HOW YOU ARE GOING TO START INVESTIGATING YOUR STORY:

- ✓ IS IT PEOPLE BASED?
- ✓ IS IT DOCUMENTS BASED?
- ✓ IS IT ACCESS BASED
- ✓ [TRY FOR ALL THREE]

THE INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST 

AS YOU ARE DOING THE STORY, KEEP IN MIND:


- ✓ **WHAT KIND OF EXCLUSIVE STORY IS IT?**
(NEVER BEEN TOLD; ALREADY TOLD BUT YOU CAN BUILD ON IT; AN UPDATE)
- ✓ **WHAT IS YOUR BAR OF SUCCESS:**
GOLD - SILVER-BRONZE. PROVABLE? DOABLE?
- ✓ **THE RISKS:**
PERSONAL, LEGAL, CORPORATE

THE INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST 

AS YOU ARE WRITING THE STORY:

- ✓ **KEEP A LONG LIST OF QUESTIONS?**
- ✓ **KEEP IN MIND YOUR FOCUS**
- ✓ **BUILD YOUR CHRONOLOGY**
- ✓ **ORGANIZE YOUR RESEARCH**
- ✓ **AVOID TUNNEL VISION**
- ✓ **BE READY TO CHANGE OR KILL THE STORY**
- ✓ **FACT CHECK. FACT CHECK. FACT CHECK!!**


THE INVESTIGATIVE CHECKLIST



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Story-telling: Writing the Investigative Story	Interviewing skills	Organizing Complex Investigations	Mastering the Web as an Investigative Tool
 <p>The Art of Investigative Story-Telling Julian Sher</p> <p><small>*Scripts are required, but stories are sold</small></p> <p>DOWNLOAD PDF HANDOUTS HERE:</p>	 <p>MASTERING THE INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEW: Questioning the way you take on your targets</p> <p>With Julian Sher www.juliansher.com twitter: @juliansher sher.julian@gmail.com</p> <p>DOWNLOAD PDF HANDOUTS HERE:</p>	 <p>How to carry out complex investigations Julian Sher</p> <p>How to organize a months-long investigation?</p>	 <p>Click here for some helpful web sites</p>

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