**Lecture # 2**

**News Gathering (Finals)**

Investigative and Interpretative Reporting

**Investigative Reporting**

One of the major duties of a journalist is to be a civic watch dog and achieving this often demands investigation and in-depth work. Thus, in a way, all stories are investigative stories because they require research, digging, interviewing and writing.

According to Itule and Anderson (2007: 397), all reporters are investigators who are trained to ask questions, uncover information and write the most complete stories possible.

Nevertheless, some reporters concentrate solely on investigations of wrongdoings. They deal with reporter-adversary relationships that are usually not found in beat reporting or other in-depth coverage. Their aim is to search out well-guarded information from often hostile sources. This gives them a chance to be creative, to become part of their reader’s emotional lives and sometimes to uncover an injustice and correct it

**Elements of the Investigating Story**

According to Ansell et al (2002: 4-5) investigative reporting has the following elements:

 It’s about digging deeply into an issue or topic

 The issue or topic has to be of public interest

 It’s a process, not an event

 It’s original and proactive

 It should produce new information or put together previously available information in a new way to reveal its significance

 It should be multi-sourced

 Because of its in-depth nature**, it calls for greater resources, team working and time than a routine news report**

The core of investigative journalism is to uncover information that is in the public’s interest. Investigative journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters deeply investigate a single topic of **interest, often involving crime, political corruption, or corporate wrongdoing.**

University of Missouri journalism professor Steve Weinberg defined investigative journalism as:

“Reporting, through one's own initiative and work product, matters of importance to readers, viewers, or listeners”

British media theorist Hugo de Burgh (2000) states that: “An investigative journalist is a man or woman whose profession it is to discover the truth and to identify lapses from it in whatever media may be available…

**Qualities of an investigative journalist**

Any journalist becomes an investigative journalist when their story grows in scope and depth beyond a routine report

 Passion

 Curiosity

 Initiative

 Logical thinking, organization and self-discipline

 Flexibility

 Team working and communication skills

 Well-developed reporting skills

 Broad general knowledge and good research skills

 Determination and patience

 Fairness and strong ethics

 Discretion (Will , Prefernces)

 Citizenship

 Courage

**Story ideas:**

 Your own experience and that of friends and neighbors

 Follow-ups on previous stories

 Reading and the Internet

 Street, café and taxi gossip

 Routine checks of public information and with contacts.

 Tip-offs (Clues. Hints)

Tip-offs can produce dramatic stories, but should be handled very carefully.

Wherever a story idea comes from, journalists should start with their own and their community’s real concerns:

**Planning the investigation**

 You need a framework of structured questions that will allow you to move from a broad, theoretical story idea to a tightly-framed hypothesis or question your IJ project can prove or answer

 You need to plan your project, thinking about rationale, sources, obstacles, timeline and budget Planning the investigation

 Consider all sources: primary, secondary, paper, human and digital

 Be aware of the uses of each, and construct a methodology that allows you to dig for information from

sources that are appropriate.

**The first is the classic formula for focusing a story**

 What’s been happening? So what? (Why should our readers care?)

 Who did it? How did they do it? What are the consequences? How can it be put

right?

 What went wrong? How did it go wrong? Why did it go wrong? What are the consequences? How can it be put right?

 What’s the news? What’s the story? What’s the keyword?

 What’s the rationale? (Why are we doing this story?)

**Sources and Spin Doctors**

 The usefulness of sources depends not only on the sources themselves, but how skillfully you use them.

 Start with your subject, and then ‘map’ witnesses, people currently or previously involved, experts and relevant official and organizational contacts. Make your selection from these.

 Select and evaluate experts carefully, and find a way of dealing with differences in expert views without distorting arguments.

 Pay particular attention to organizational contacts who act as gate-keepers, surveyors and door-openers.

 Use covert techniques only after careful decision-making on important, public-interest stories.

 Evaluate sources and documents methodically. Use the two-source rule to try to ensure that each of your findings has independent back-up.

 Beware of spin. Question the origins and motives of everything

The most important principle is that your relationship with your sources is sacred. Do not make promises you cannot keep. If you have made promises, you must be prepared to put your own liberty or life on the line to see they are kept.

**Investigative Interviewing**

 Interview preparation is key

 Set up the interview in a way that suits the story and circumstances.

 Have a strategy for the whole interview.

 Keep questions clear, simple and direct.

 Establish ground rules

 Follow-up, re-phrase or reflect back to get answers that are equally clear and direct.

 Handle reluctant or fearful interviewees kindly and carefully – but don’t let them off the hook.

 Establish support structures and strategies to help you deal with threats and pressure.

 Never take interview answers out of context.

**Writing the investigative story**

 This requires choices about: form, content, and style.

 The 7 stages of writing: choosing the subject, planning, news gathering, pre-writing, writing, re-writing and feedback.

 Good writing: accuracy, clarity, conciseness, coherence, conventionality and originality.

 Make sure the story is complete

 Make sure the story makes sense

 Make sure the story is written well, as well as time will allow.

**Kinds of Investigative stories**

 Descriptive (Expressive) story: who, what, where, & when.

 Analytical (Logical , Systematic) story: how & why.

 Consequential (Important or significant) story: so what?

**NEGATIVE IMPACT**

If the investigative report proved to be wrong or fake, then the reporter may lose the job and personal and professional reputation. He may have to pay the fines. Even sometime he might face indictment and conviction as well.

**USEFUL GUIDELINES**

Reporter must know the law.

Know the procedure.

Focus on research.

Follow the lead.

Just keep digging.

Organize the information.

Write the report.

Check facts, Triple Check.

Libel Check, Deformation check.

**Interpretative Reporting**

Interpretative reporting is more than the concert of bare facts but reporting news refreshed with background materials to make it comprehensive and meaningful. Interpretive reporting uses skills in **explanation, analysis and description.**

Interpretive (or interpretative) journalism goes beyond the basic facts of an event or topic to provide context, analysis, and possible consequences.

**Major phases of interpretative reporting:**

• **Factual or fact-gathering phase** - the first and, personally, the crucial stage, since, this stage will be the foundation of all the reports. With enough facts gathered, verified and rechecked, the reporter can then have more assurance of making a story stand.

• **Prophesy phase** - the writer, like a scientist, makes an “educated guess” or like a hypothesis in science, where he can somehow predict, based on the FACTS, where his / her story is leading. Information from experts can verify if the “guess” may lead to something concrete.

**• Interpretation phase** - this phase is the “fruit” of the two previous phases, where the reporter concludes on the MEANING, IMPORTANCE or EFFECT of all the reports. The reporter’s interpretation can be highlighted on this or an / the expert/s opinion on the matter.

**what is the distinction between objective journalism and interpretive journalism?**

**Interpretive reporting takes the facts from objective journalism and adds context and analysis**

The full peak of interpretive reporting, however, occurs in stories that are not based on events . These are enterprise (initiative) stories: trend stories, backgrounders, analyses, “think” pieces, investigative reports: that are increasingly becoming the hallmark of newspaper journalism

In today’s mixture of objective interpretive journalism, reporters are expected to seek out fact and correct distorted assertion by a news source. For spot news stories reporters must supply suffienct background and context for reader or comprehension even though it means going beyond event for information. **They seek to identify the causes of events rather than report on their occurrences**

Readers demand today more than drab objective reporting following the fws and 1h. they demand contextual reporting expanded beyond the five ws and 1h

The interpretative writer reads the fine print f news story in order to answer the readers’ questions: what does it mean? He wrote to keep the news events in focus by showing its comparative importance. He not only writes about what’s going on ? He goes beyond this to ask and answer the question. What does it mean? He knows that nothing just happen without antecedents and other surrounding circumstances.