

# INVESTIGATION

## 10 Keys

1. **The story is both accurate and true.** You don't just get the facts right, the story is true in context. Great investigations get close up and wide.
2. **Be fair. Be honest.** Is this a 6-month investigation or did you work on it for an hour each month for 6 months? How many times did you try to call your subject for a response? How can you prove how hard you tried to get in touch with a subject? Details your techniques to the public. Make documents available on your website. Allow your public and the subjects of the story to respond in full online.
3. **The story gets beyond the “what” to the “so what, why and how often.”** Great investigations search for system errors, chronic ethical violations, obvious disregard for the law, human rights, fairness or public safety problems. Look for patterns, repeat behavior and widespread abuse more than one time incidents. Keep asking “what is the larger issue?”
4. **Cool Characters**
  - Colorful-they create emotional responses in viewers
  - Opinionated-they know about the story before you tell them about it
  - Outgoing-they give you access to their life
  - Lively-makes them interesting visually
5. **The story does not raise false questions.** Avoid the stories that ask questions that can be obviously answered “NO.” ”Do bras cause cancer? Is your ice-tea killing you?” Don't raise false questions to just to pique the viewer's emotions.

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Teaching the ideals of journalism in a democracy.

# 10 Keys to

# Investigative Reporting

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## 6. Say it-Prove it.

Do not assert anything and do not allow any character to make a claim that you cannot prove (or disprove) immediately after they say it. Ask who else would confirm this? Who has photographs of this? Where can I find documents that will support this?

## 7. Try to Disprove Your Story.

Constantly ask, “What is the weakest part of my story?” Ask, “What is the one thing my toughest critics will say about this story and how can I answer that before they raise the issue?” Ask the targets of your investigation what points they disagree with. Don’t be afraid to share the main points of your investigation with the subject of the story before the piece(s) air. Ask for their response and offer them the opportunity to go public with their critique.

## 8. Go After Goliaths. Don’t Only Pick on the Little Guys.

Go after the big guys, the policymakers. Why beat up on some little inspector when the system is broken? Why beat up on a little oriental restaurant when the health inspector system fails to hold chronic violators responsible?

## 9. Follow-up.

Often journalists do a great job breaking an investigation but fail to follow up. Just about the time you tire of a story, they are figuring out there “is” a story.

## 10. Great Investigations Leave a Legacy.

When you begin a project, start asking what needs to change as a result of your findings? What is the best and largest possible outcome that could result from your work? Make that outcome larger than ratings, awards and job security.

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