

Investigative Journalism

One definition of investigative journalism: Finding, reporting and presenting important news that is hidden by people or institutions.

Investigative journalism often involves:

- Representing the public interest
- Exposing secrets, wrongdoing, harmful practices
- Critically examining institutions and their workings
- Showing how laws are violated or exploited
- Holding the powerful accountable

Investigative Journalism

How do reporters' roles fit into this paradigm?

- **Disseminator**

- Common in daily journalism, but more passive than active

- **Interpreter**

- Need elements of this (clarifying), but investigations go deeper

- **Watchdog**

- Goal: Critically examine work of government & major institutions
- Expose wrongdoing, hold those in power accountable
- Best fit for investigative work, but not the only one

- **Adversary**

- Goal: Confront officials, fight for public interest over private gain
- Most reporters tend to want the facts to speak for themselves

- **Mobilizer**

- Reporting behind the scenes, not as face of movement

Investigative Journalism

What investigative reporting is not:

- **Daily news reporting**
 - Attending news conferences and staged events
 - Routine statements from officials, comments from citizens
 - Covering individual day-to-day incidents
- **Reactive**
 - Responding to others' ideas for stories
 - Reporting leaked information from officials
 - Simply verifying material disseminated by others
- **Fast**
 - In-depth investigations can take weeks, months, years
 - Getting info from & about reluctant individuals & institutions takes time
- **Cheap**
 - Many news organizations don't have resources to support it
 - Salaries, travel, databases, document requests, etc.
- **Spotlight seeking**
 - Most work done quietly behind the scenes
 - Nothing glamorous about poring through documents, making calls

Investigative Journalism

What investigative reporting is:

- **Proactive**
 - Often begins with desire to look beyond the obvious
 - Relies on reporters' own drive and initiative
- **Original**
 - The reporters' own work, assembling facts from many sources
 - Typically involves plowing through records, laws, data, messages
 - Requires ability to connect, interpret, explain complex information
- **Often teamwork**
 - Take advantage of individuals' strengths, divide labor
 - Complexity of work frequently requires team approach
- **Time consumptive & exhausting**
 - Often must confront threats from powerful people
 - Painstaking – can involve weeks, months of thankless work
- **In the public interest**
 - Usually topics that are important to citizens, communities
 - Serving the public's right to know

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Examples:

- Harrisburg, PA *Patriot-News* – Sara Ganim
 - [Investigation of longtime Penn State coach and benefactor Jerry Sandusky for sex abuse of teenage boys](#)
- *Los Angeles Times* – David Willman
 - [Articles on consequences of FDA fast-tracking new drugs](#)
- *San Francisco Chronicle* – Kevin Fagan and others
 - [How established Oakland citizens found themselves homeless](#)
- *Spartan Daily* – Lindsey Boyd and others
 - [Investigation of misappropriation of athletic scholarship money](#)