

4 resources for journalists from the world's top investigative conference

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The Global Investigative Journalism Conference 2023 ([#GIJC23](#)), hosted in Gothenburg, Sweden in September, was probably the largest and most diverse gathering of investigative reporters in history, with over 1,660 delegates drawn from 144 countries. Reporters pursuing long-term investigations are often isolated in their work, the conference was a welcome reminder of the vibrancy of this global community. Also, that learning from one another remains the best way to improve your skills as a journalist - regardless of whether you do long term investigations or daily news reporting.



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I attended the conference on a fellowship sponsored by the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) and the Incubator for Media Education and Development (iMedD). These are four useful insights and tools, from the conference, for journalists wanting to incorporate more investigative methods into their everyday reporting.

1. **Hypotheses:** a platform for investigative reporting. Investigative reporters are often questioned about how exactly the craft and intention of what we do is different from everyday news, feature or informative reporting. In few places are the nuances and best practice of investigative reporting better laid out than in [Mark Lee Hunter's](#) seminal manual: Story Based Inquiry. Hunter spoke at #GIJC23, on a panel alongside experts in the instruction of investigative reporting to students, especially in the university setting. But, much of the learnings from the panel and Hunter's Story Based Inquiry manual are universal and will apply to reporters at every level of experience.

Chapter One answers unequivocally how investigative reporting differs from news reporting. For me, the biggest point of departure is Hunter's argument that investigative reporters refuse to "accept the world as it is" and aim to expose wrongdoing, in order to "reform" or "denounce" it.

Chapter Two, delves swiftly into what I believe is the best tool in the hands of a prospective investigative reporter. It argues that an investigative idea may be best articulated as a “hypothesis” to be proven, dispelled or reformulated on the basis of inquiry and evidence gathered.

Armed with these two insights, I believe that any reporter can interrogate the subject matter of their reporting from a new vantage point, unlocking the unlimited potential that an investigative lens brings to a reporting project. Story Based Inquiry: A Manual For Investigative Journalists is [free to download](#).

2. **Learn to search the web like a pro.** Before picking up the phone, sending an email to a potential source, or getting boots on the ground for some dogged field-reporting, it is a rule of thumb that investigative reporters should first learn what they can about their subject through research of publicly available information, or Open Source Intelligence (OSINT).



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In Story Based Inquiry, this point is driven home by an example from the [Centre for Public Integrity](#) – one of the top investigative, nonprofit newsrooms in the United States – where investigators are required to do several weeks of research before being allowed to start phoning sources. Google has long been the most accessible tool for journalists researching the topics surrounding their hypotheses. But, so often the results of our search phrases are frustratingly irrelevant to the questions we’re asking or information we seek.

In his session at #GIJC23 [Henk van Ess](#), an expert at finding relevant, public information to advance investigative reporting, shared his hotlist of “all currently documented advanced search operators” also known as Google “dorks”. With these powerful scripts, you can home your Google search results to be as narrow and as relevant to your research question as possible. From searching for results within specific date ranges, or for specific types of files uploaded on specific websites (to name but a couple of hacks), these [Google Dorks](#) will change the way you research and access better sources on just about any topic.

3. **Going undercover.** When compared to other parts of the world, and on the continent, there appears to be a dearth in undercover reporting in the stable of South African investigative journalism. This is a shame. The culture of corruption, non-accountability and impunity of the country’s ruling elite - which is so often subjected to forensic, financial- and data-driven investigations - is pervasive throughout our society. Things like workplace abuses, corruption day-to-day or people’s on-the-ground experiences of failure with institutions meant to serve or uphold the public interest are plentiful in the South African context and ripe for undercover reporting.

#GIJC23’s panel undercover reporting showcased projects of recent years, from the BBC’s [exposé](#) of Islamic schools which chained and whipped students into submission in Sudan, to OpenDemocracy’s [revelation](#) that a global network of ‘crisis pregnancy centres’, backed by US anti-abortion groups, has been targeting vulnerable women with “disinformation, emotional manipulation and outright deceit”, to independent Kenyan journalist Naipano Lepapa [undercover investigation](#) into the shady surrogacy industry in her home country. The [Global Investigative Journalism Network](#)(GIJN) and the [BBC’s](#) guidelines for going undercover are starting points for journalists considering the potential of this classic method for gathering explosive evidence of wrongdoing or gaining hard access.

4. **Make AI your co-pilot.** Artificial Intelligence has become one of the most powerful tools in the arsenal of investigative journalism. As featured at #GIJC23, via some of the world's most impactful investigations, the use of AI may rely on complex, bespoke models of machine learning. One [winner](#) of the Global Shining Light Award for Large Outlets, a collaboration [Corredor Furtivo](#), by [Armando.Info](#) (Venezuela) and [El País](#) (Spain), used AI analysis of satellite images to help map and identify over 3,700 illicit mining locations across a vast area of the Amazon.

But use of AI does not necessarily have to be so complex and ambitious. Investigative reporters can now rely on accessible AI tools – [ChatGPT](#) or [Google Gemini](#) in particular – to assist their reporting. The concept of co-piloting your workday with ChatGPT has massive potential for investigative reporters. This involves writing prompts to ChatGPT to quickly do work - such as writing code to analyse databases or providing research briefs on particular topics - that might take a journalist hours to do manually.

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