



INTERVIEWING FOR JOURNALISM

Public Interest Journalism

AGENDA DAY 7



6 hours
15-minute breaks
30-minute lunch break

Who to interview

**How to conduct a successful
interview**

**Exercise: The Revelation Show –
Part I**



Camera on, mic off



Notebook and pen



OLA account



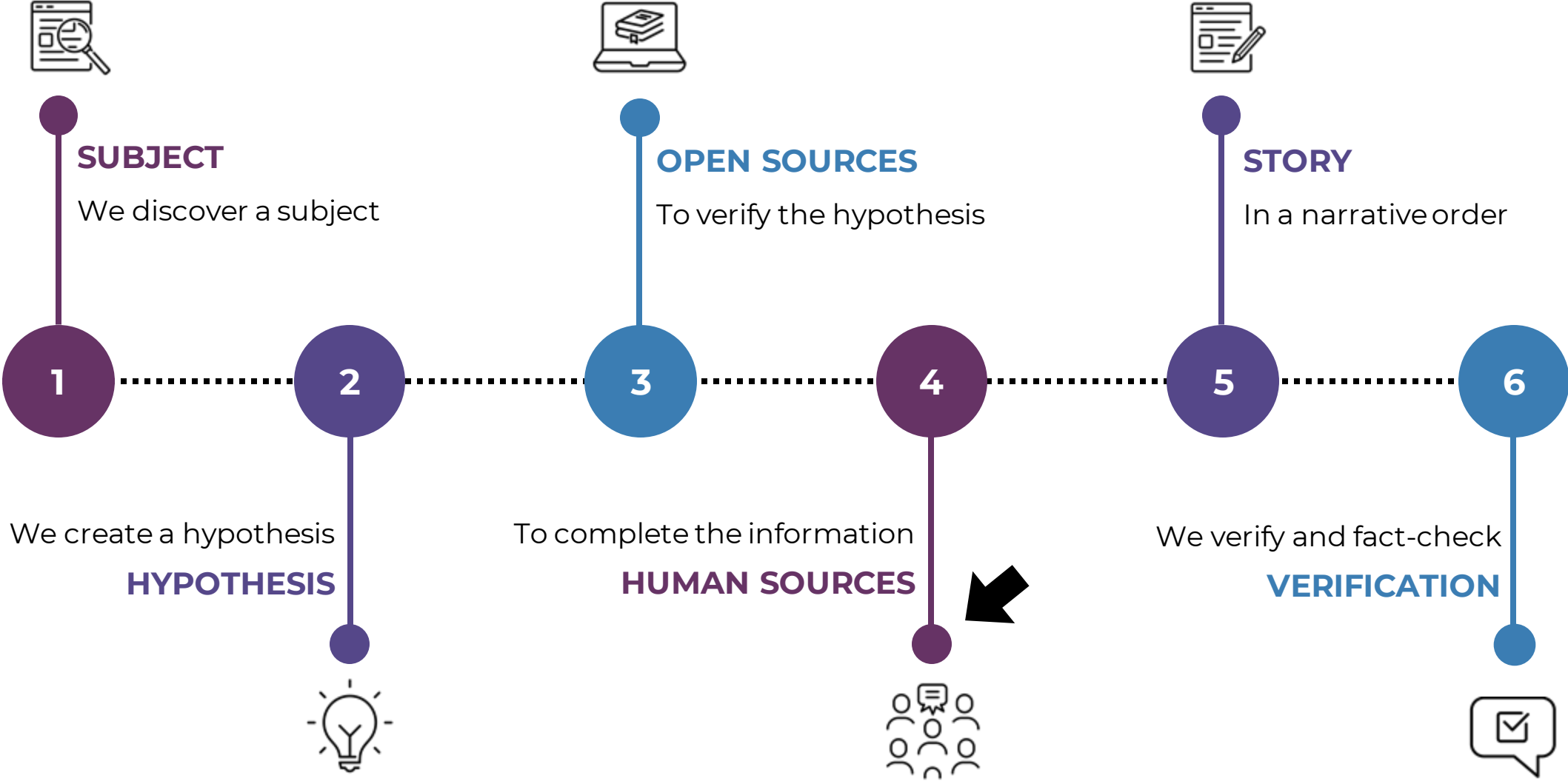
Smartphone

WHAT YOU NEED

Let's break the ice.



STORY-BASED INQUIRY



EXERCISE: INTERVIEWING CREDIBLE SOURCES



Flint, Michigan—the birthplace of General Motors—was the flourishing home to nearly 200,000 people, many employed by the booming automobile industry. But the 1980s put the brakes on that period of prosperity, as rising oil prices and auto imports resulted in shuttered auto plants and laid-off workers, many of whom eventually relocated. The city found itself in a precipitous decline: Flint’s population has since plummeted to just 100,000 people, a majority of whom are African-American, and about 45 percent of its residents live below the poverty line. Nearly one in six of the city’s homes has been abandoned.

This was the lay of the land in 2011, when Flint, cash-strapped and shouldering a \$25 million deficit, fell under state control. Michigan Governor Rick Snyder appointed an emergency manager (basically an unelected official chosen to set local policy) to oversee and cut city costs. This precipitated the tragic decision in 2013 to end the city’s five-decade practice of piping treated water for its residents from Detroit in favor of a cheaper alternative: **temporarily pumping water from the Flint River until a new water pipeline from Lake Huron was built. Although the river water was highly corrosive, Flint officials failed to treat it, and lead leached out from aging pipes into thousands of homes.**

Interview 5 credible sources: the expert, the victim, the perpetrator, a government official, and a former government official



EXPERTS

- Start here!
- Journalists, activists, independent researchers, scientists, government investigators, academics, archivists and authors.
- This person will overshare and be technical. Get them to speak in a way everyone can understand.
- Experts provide certainty and hard evidence

Sample questions: “What exactly is....?”
“How certain can we be about...?” “Can you explain how this works?”



GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

- Will often evade hard questions that force them to take responsibility. Try to pin them down politely.
- Sometimes no answer is an answer.
- Sometimes it is useful to point out when someone is being evasive: “I’m sorry. That’s not really an answer.”
- **Always be polite!**

Sample questions: “What did you know and when did you know it?”



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CIVIL SERVANTS

- Judges, bureaucrats, government lawyers, people at government funded institutions
- Frankness and truthfulness depends on what's at stake for them. Do your research!



FORMER CIVIL SERVANTS / GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

- Potential whistle blowers
- People who have left an organisation = an insider who no longer fears losing their job
- Find out why they left. They may be getting revenge which will make their responses overly emotional and discredit them.
- Ensure they sound calm and credible



VICTIMS

- Experiential experts and “people like us” for other victims
- Take extra time
- Be sensitive
- Find a secure place
- Bring tissues

Sample questions: “I know this is hard, but can you tell from the beginning how it started?” “When was the exact moment that you knew that...?”



PERPETRATORS

- People who have committed the act.
- Don't put yourself in danger.
- These people may already be incarcerated or, even worse, in power.

Sample questions: "Why did you do it?" "When was the moment you decided, you were going to...?" "Did you think you could get away with it?"



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CELEBRITIES

- Celebrities who have an opinion or interest in the subject
- Getting someone famous involved may be a form of protection and will highlight interest in the story
- Other miscellaneous allies and sources!

💡 **Remember:** This is about making relationships. Earn someone's trust. If they don't want to speak with you today, speak with them tomorrow or the week after!

**What do we
need for an
interview to be
successful?**





PHASES OF A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

Preparation and Research

Pre-Interview

Structure the Interview

PHASE 1

Preparation and Research

Demonstrate **awareness and understanding** of:

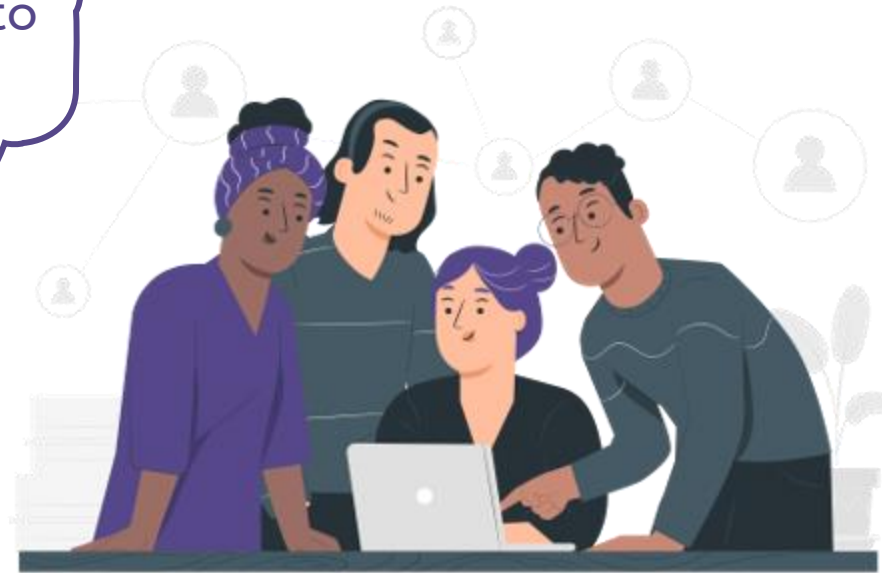
- The **person**: career trajectory, articles
- The **issue**: key words, jargon

➔ **Exercise:** In groups, choose a public figure and issue, and start your research!



PLENARY

How did you choose which information to focus on?



What could be this person's motivation?

PHASE 1

More about Preparation and Research

3 key questions to ask yourself before the interview

1. What kind of information do you want to acquire from this meeting?
2. What do you want to reveal to the source?
3. How do you want to present yourself?



 **Making contact:** ideally, through mobile phones with prepaid cards. Avoid emails!

PHASE 2

THE PRE-INTERVIEW

"Pre-interviews can feel awkward. Hello human being person, I would like to bypass all the normal societal niceties and find out if you have the information I require. Can you please tell me all your deepest, darkest secrets? But this isn't the actual interview, and I don't have a ton of time so if we can wrap this up in, oh, say, three to seven minutes I would super appreciate it. Thanks!"

 **The art of the pre-interview, Sally Herships**

PHASE 2

The Pre-Interview

Why?

- Find out if someone is a useful source
- Determine the location of the interview
- Determine if they can tell the story well

How?

- Introduce yourself
- Identify your purpose
- Let them know you want to talk on the record



EXERCISE: THE REVELATION SHOW



In pairs, you will create an interview show on one of these topics:

- Your proudest moment
- The closest moment you ever came to death
- What is the best piece of advice anyone has given you?
- What is the greatest gift you have ever received?
- Tell the story of the worst thing that ever happened to you that taught you something good
- When and why you really changed your mind about something?
- Your worst regret
- Your greatest moment of triumph

EXERCISE: THE REVELATION SHOW



Today:

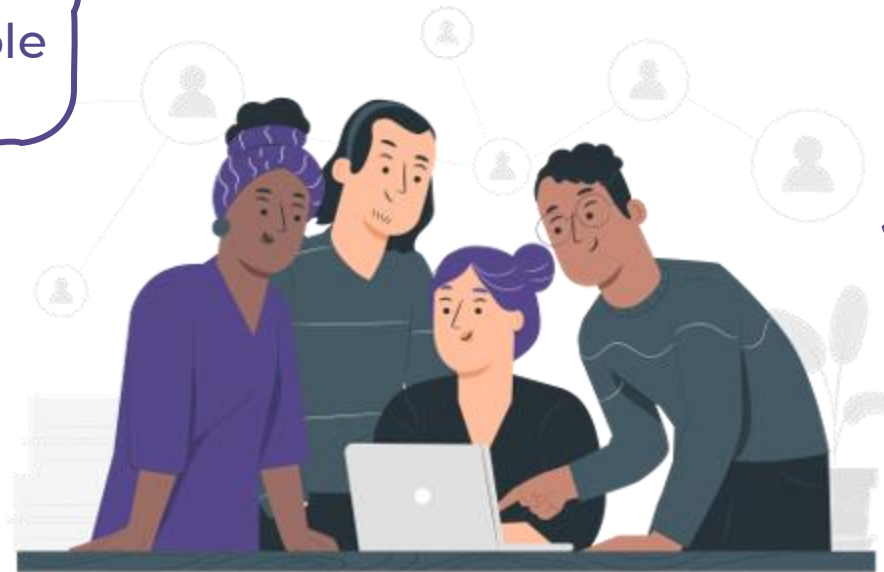
- Choose a topic
- Conduct a pre-interview
- Start writing your interview questions
- Switch roles

Tomorrow:

- Refine your interview questions
- Conduct the interviews

PLENARY

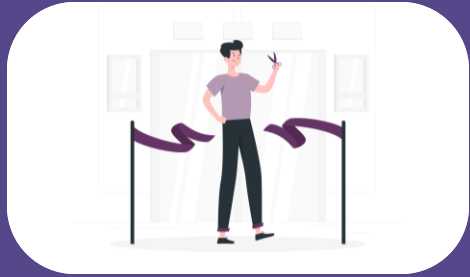
How did you avoid the interviewee from telling the whole story?



What was the easiest/hardest part?

PHASE 3

STRUCTURE THE INTERVIEW



OPENING QUESTIONS

Tell all questions,
e.g. *How did it all
start?*



FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

Gather more info
e.g. *What
happened next?*



CLOSING QUESTIONS

Understand their
motivation
e.g. *Would you do it
again?*

PHASE 3

STRUCTURE THE INTERVIEW



OPEN QUESTIONS

More descriptive
answers
"5 W & 1 H"



CLOSED QUESTIONS

More specific
information
Yes/no

List the questions you hear:





PREPARE THE INTERVIEW

Refine your interview guide
and prepare for the
interview



REFLECTION

**What is your key
takeaway from this
session?**

QUESTIONS





THANK YOU!

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