**Investigative Journalism** or REPORTING means the unveiling of matters that are concealed either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances - and the analysis and exposure of all relevant facts to the public. In this way investigative journalism crucially contributes to freedom of expression and media development, which are at the heart of UNESCO’s mandate.

The role media can play as a watchdog is indispensable for democracy and it is for this reason that UNESCO fully supports initiatives to strengthen the capacity building of investigative journalism throughout the world. At a time of a widening communications ecosystem, journalism today needs to clearly show its key value-add to the public interest. In this light, credible investigative stories, like the kind promoted in this book, are increasingly pivotal to public confirmation of the continuing importance of professional journalistic work in the coming years.

Investigative reporting involves collecting, verifying and assessing information—but on a greater scale than day-to-day newsgathering. The research phase can run for months or years, focusing on a single topic such as political corruption or corporate wrongdoing. Most investigative reporting is written in the form of one or a series of feature stories.

**Below is a step-by-step guide on writing an investigative feature article with tips :**

Step 1: Find Your Story

Freelance writers usually identify and pitch their own stories to news organizations, while in-house writers are more likely to have topics assigned to them by editors or developed through editorial meetings. Here are a few things to keep in mind when hunting for a story:

Look at abuses of power. The root of most great in-depth reporting is the use and abuse of power—look at government agencies, large corporations, and the people who hold power in society.

Find something that surprises you. Another aspect of good investigative stories is the element of surprise. Woodward calls these “bacon-cooler stories”: if you’re eating breakfast while reading the paper and a story is so surprising that the bacon on your fork remains uneaten and cools down, you know it’s compelling.

Read other investigative stories. To get a sense of what makes a good feature, Woodward suggests reading “An Unbelievable Story of Rape” by T. Christian Miller and Ken Armstrong, published by ProPublica and The Marshall Project in 2015. This thoroughly researched piece investigates a rape in the state of Washington, illuminating the gross deficiencies in police response to sexual violence.

Step 2: Hunt Down Documents

Written sources— documents and memos—confer authority to your reporting, which is essential in a moment when journalism is sometimes perceived as dishonest. Here are his tips to acquiring down the documents you need:

Ask for the documents. Keep in mind that Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests often take a long time, so an essential part of your reporting is asking people directly to share documents that reveal the truth of what happened. Never leave without the document.

Explore all avenues. Start thinking of what hidden documents might exist on your topic and ways you could get access to them. Are relevant voter records or arrest records available online? What about things people involved in your story have written for work, projects in town they’ve spearheaded, arguments they’ve had with other people? Think about how you will win someone’s trust enough that they will show you the files that you need to see. Make two lists: one, the documents you think you might need, and, two, the tactics you can use to get those documents.

Organize and save all your documents. Make copies and keep everything—you won’t regret it.

Step 3: Find Sources and Interview Them

Seek out all witnesses and participants. Email each of them and set up a time to meet in the near future. In the emails, introduce yourself concisely, detail your idea, explain why you’re writing the story, and ask if they can help you. If you don’t hear back from them in a few days, be prepared to call them or just knock on their door. Plan to spend at least two hours with each of them (or however long they’ll give you). You will want to conduct several interviews, making sure to choose a location in which your source feels comfortable.

Prepare for the interview by doing your homework on your source. This not only boosts your authority but demonstrates to your source that you see them as a human being. Consider sending them a list of questions beforehand, but don’t feel limited by it.

Conduct the interview, assuming your source will talk about everything. Move chronologically through what happened. And don’t be afraid to ask questions that could stir up your source’s emotions.

Follow up questions to get clarity. Ask why, ask for clarity, ask why again, follow up until you get the information you need. You can also ask follow-up questions after you have confirmed facts with other people or compared one source’s account with another.

Step 4: Write the Story

When it comes to writing the story, there are several things all good investigative reporters should keep in mind:

Write every day. It’s essential to discipline yourself to write every day. Give yourself the assignment to write a certain number of words, and then do it.

Write a “premature” first draft. Write a rough first draft before you have everything figured out. Don’t be too precious about the style of writing—the idea is to rewrite later, and typing up everything you know now will show you where the holes are. Woodward has a “rule of six”— he believes a story should have at least six strong elements.

Talk through your story. Another great way to sketch out your story and get an immediate reaction is to talk through your story with a trusted reader. What questions do they have? What doesn’t make sense?

Decide how to structure your story. News articles and feature writing should be structured differently. In a news story, the first paragraph gives readers a full sense of what is to come. By contrast, you should start a feature article right in the middle of a pivotal dramatic moment to capture readers’ attention. You can then go back to the beginning and relay events chronologically. This approach helps you establish intimacy, authority, and, most importantly, relevance.

Step 5: Polish Your Story

Woodward sees the polishing stage as invaluable in the creation of a great feature story. This is when you will fact check your story and finesse the writing.

Use details to establish credibility. The inclusion of concrete details and dates establishes credibility in your reporting, offering tangible proof to your audience that you were there or you’ve spoken to who was.

Use active verbs. When revising your work, make sure you use active verbs to bring immediacy to your writing.

Avoid absolutes. Using words such as “never” and “always” may compromise the integrity of your work if an instance arises that contradicts your statement.

Proofread thoroughly to catch your mistakes. Woodward prefers to review a printed copy of his draft, analyzing it for everything such as clarity and repetitions and making sure it is devoid of an opinionated tone that he believes does not belong in investigative stories. Try reading your work out loud too—you’ll find that hearing mistakes can often be easier than reading for them.

Show your first draft to a trusted reader or colleague. Treat him or her as your editor and listen to what he or she has to say. Pick someone who will be fair but critical. A good editor is supposed to make you better. And your article has to be clear to your readers, so take his or her advice to heart. A story can always be more clear, more deeply sourced, and better organized.