

1. Start with an investigative question or questions. If you have just a general topic, probe deeper and think: what can you prove? What's the biggest "get?" Putting your investigation in the form of a question will automatically make you go deeper. Challenge yourself to develop a cutting-edge investigative report that can prove something (often that someone is trying to hide) that's vitally important to our society. Gerardo Reyes of Univision has defined investigative reporters as "expert assemblers of jigsaw puzzles" whose pieces are missing or dispersed and whose reports help illuminate solutions for a society in crisis. For inspiration, read about one of Reyes' investigations, Fast and Furious:  
<https://www.knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/00-14333-awarding-winning-journalists-univision-talk-about-challenges-investigating-controversi>

2. Do a pre-investigation: What documents can you get now or quickly? What sources do you need? Evaluate: how hard will the investigation be to prove vs. how important it is – that's advice often given by Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter Deborah Nelson of the University of Maryland. Here's about how Nelson conceptualizes an investigation:

[Play Video](#)

If you're lucky, your investigation will be vitally important – and easy to prove. If it's both difficult and dangerous and not so important, perhaps you should pass...

3. Read all about it: What has already been written on your topic? Is your investigation really novel or a rerun? Organizations like Investigative Reporters & Editors (<https://www.ire.org/resource-center>) and the Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad in Peru (<https://ipys.org/periodismo/banco-de-investigaciones>) have archives of investigative stories AND how-to questionnaires you can request. In some cases, it's useful to email or call reporters who have done similar investigations for more tips.
4. Use tools like [GoogleNews](#), [Advanced Google search](#) and [social media searches](#) to do preliminary research. You can also set up a [Google alert](#) to receive updates on your subject. If you set up an alert, think of key words that are unique to your topic or you may be inundated!
5. Make a list of the public records you want. They may already be online – find out by exploring directories built by investigative reporters like [The Journalists Toolbox](#); [The Investigative Dashboard](#); the GIJN's [Help Desk](#) and corporation search tools like [Open Corporates](#) or the US's [Corporationwiki](#).
6. File records requests. Are there records you will need to request via the Freedom of Information Act or some other public records request? File these requests early because they can take a long time. Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press has a lot of [resources](#).

7. Start reaching out to sources – both on-the-records and on background. Think beyond your main subjects to others surrounding your topic – perhaps former business partners; attorneys; wives and ex-wives; friends and ex-friends; former executives or employees; rival politicians, whistleblowers, auditors. Make a list (or spreadsheet) with people to interview first, second and last. Mining social media and advanced Linked In searches can help.
8. Can you divulge some of what you need on social media? Crowd sourcing can be a great source of tips and difficult-to-obtain information. ProPublica offers these [tips](#).
9. Do you need extra money for your investigation? Do you need funds for travel, or records or support, consider applying for a grant once you have an investigative plan. [Connectas](#); the [Fund for Investigative Journalism](#); the [Pulitzer Center](#) and others provide seed money. GIJN offers this [list](#).
10. When you feel you've got your pre-investigation trip planned, write it up. Taking that step will help you organize your ideas. Then you can begin to share them with trusted friends and mentors –maybe even your fellow travelers in this MOOC!