



MASTERCLASS

BOB WOODWARD

TEACHES INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM



ABOUT **BOB WOODWARD**

Bob Woodward is an associate editor of the *Washington Post*, where he has worked since 1971. He has shared in two Pulitzer Prizes, first in 1973 for the coverage of the Watergate scandal with Carl Bernstein, and second in 2002 as the lead reporter for coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Gene Roberts, the former managing editor of the *New York Times*, has called the Woodward-Bernstein Watergate coverage, “maybe the single greatest reporting effort of all time.”

Bob has authored or coauthored 18 books, all of which have been national nonfiction bestsellers. Twelve of those have been #1 national bestsellers. In listing the all-time 100 best nonfiction books, *Time* magazine has called *All the President’s Men*, by Bernstein and Woodward, “perhaps the most influential piece of journalism in history.”

Bob Schieffer of CBS News has said, “Bob Woodward has established himself as the best reporter of our time. He may be the best reporter of all time.” In 2014, Robert Gates, former director of the CIA and secretary of defense, said that he wished he’d recruited Woodward into the CIA, saying of him, “He has an extraordinary ability to get otherwise responsible adults to spill [their] guts to him ... his ability to get people to talk about stuff they shouldn’t be talking about is just extraordinary and may be unique.”



ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

The MasterClass team has created this workbook as a supplement to Bob's class. Chapters are supported with a review, opportunities to learn more, and assignments. Throughout this workbook, we ask you to read and study examples of excellent journalism, published by media outlets such as the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, and the *New Yorker*. You will need a digital subscription to these sites, but we feel it's a worthy investment in your education as a journalist.

MASTERCLASS COMMUNITY

Throughout, we'll encourage you to discuss elements of the class and your work with your classmates in [The Hub](#). You can also connect with your peers in the discussion section beneath each lesson video.

YOUR CLASS PROJECT

Your class project for Bob's MasterClass is a 3,500–4,500 word investigative reporting project. It should examine and assess a city or state government program, a school, a local business or event, or something else newsworthy going on around you. There are holes and weaknesses—and therefore stories to be uncovered—everywhere. Identify one and dig deeply into it. You will interview sources who witnessed or participated in events; research using original documents, newspapers, books, and the internet; and, if possible, visit the scene of the story. Then you will write it up, edit it, and pitch it to a local news outlet.

SUGGESTED READING

- Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men*, Simon & Schuster, 1974.
- Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *The Final Days*, Simon & Schuster, 1976.
- Scott Armstrong and Bob Woodward, *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court*, Simon & Schuster, 1979.
- Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981–1987*, Simon & Schuster, 1987.
- Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- Bob Woodward, *The Agenda: Inside the Clinton White House*, Simon & Schuster, 1994.
- Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, Simon & Schuster, 2004.
- Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III*, Simon & Schuster, 2006.
- Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, Simon & Schuster, 2010.

1.

INTRODUCTION

“The starting point in journalism is that there are no boundaries. Everyone has their own version of the truth. But there are facts. There is reality. And as a reporter you can come up with the best obtainable version of the truth.”

—Bob Woodward

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob believes anyone can be a journalist. We all seek facts, reality, and truth, and it is a journalist’s obligation to reveal them to the public. The business of journalism is collecting, verifying, and assessing information, so throughout Bob’s MasterClass you will learn how to gather facts, test them, and talk to other people about them. Bob will impart lessons about the importance of human resources and interviewing, offer techniques on listening and obtaining written notes and documents, and discuss the value of investigating at the scene.

Journalism is about understanding an issue in a comprehensive way. Bob asserts that there is never a situation about which a journalist cannot inquire. He identifies the Supreme Court’s decision in the case of the Pentagon Papers as an all-important moment for journalists. In that landmark ruling, the court decided that prepublication censorship of newspapers by the government is unconstitutional.

LEARN MORE

- Become better informed about the Pentagon Papers by reading [this overview](#). Consider the documents involved. Do you agree with Bob’s claim that the US Supreme Court’s decision gave journalists significantly greater freedom to investigate? Post your thoughts in [The Hub](#).
- The *New York Times* published its first story detailing the Pentagon Papers on June 13, 1971, which you can read [here](#). The story was placed on A1 [above the fold](#). The *New York Times* did so without consulting the government and managed to publish two more stories before the government obtained a temporary restraining order, issued by a US district court, preventing the *Times* from publishing further installments until a hearing could take place. The *Times* complied with and reported on the court-issued restraining order (you can read that coverage [here](#)) and ultimately the *Times*’ lawyers succeeded in convincing the district court to deny the government’s motion for an injunction. After the Justice Department appealed the decision and it was tossed back to district court, the *Times* petitioned the Supreme Court to review the case. Just a few weeks later, in the case of *New York Times Company v. United States*, the Supreme Court ruled 6–3 in

1.

INTRODUCTION

LEARN MORE CONT.

favor of the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, which had also published stories based on the leaked documents and been temporarily restrained by the government. That decision is detailed [here](#). The historic ruling helped keep journalists in the business of investigating the US government and holding those in power accountable.

- Consider *New York Times Company v. United States* in the context of Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and the leaks that made up the Panama Papers. Then read [this feature](#) in the *Columbia Journalism Review*. Reflect on the question: Is it easier to publish explosive material about the government today than it was in 1971?
- Watch the film *The Post* (2017), which depicts the showdown between the *Washington Post* journalists and the US government over the Pentagon Papers.

2.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

“You need to get out of your comfort zone. You need to move into areas that you naturally do not understand, because the learning curve is fast when you do that, and you are in a position, as an outsider, to look at what’s going on differently.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Get Outside Your Comfort Zone
- Leave Opinion in the Op-Ed Column
- Don’t Take Political Sides
- All Good Work Is Done in Defiance of Management

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob shares the four guiding principles by which he operates as a journalist. The first is to move outside of your comfort zone. Good reporters aren’t afraid to cover a wide variety of subjects, and to do so requires hard work and a willingness to learn.

Bob’s second guiding principle is to leave opinion out of stories. Always separate emotional issues from the facts. Failing to separate opinion from fact costs you credibility with the public.

Third, journalists should avoid taking political sides. Bob is careful to not show partiality to any one news network, giving interviews to news organizations on both ends of the political spectrum. Bob doesn’t vote in presidential elections in order to send the message that he is “in the middle of the road.” He is a reporter and citizen without a political agenda.

Finally, Bob firmly believes that at a newspaper, “all good work is done in defiance of management.” He maintains that this guiding principle does not permit the breaking of laws or rules, but instead encourages reporters to go their own way and carry out an investigation as they see fit. This is Bob’s central tenet, and it’s behind the mentality of independence that has fueled his career. Do what you feel you must (within the law) to get the story, even if your manager might disapprove of your methods.

LEARN MORE

- Review the *Washington Post*’s [ethics guidelines](#). Bob discusses journalistic ethics throughout the course, but it’s always good to have a firm grounding in what the industry standard looks like.
- Bob contends that opinion belongs on the op-ed page, not in an investigative story. In 2017, the *Washington Post*’s David A. Fahrenthold won a Pulitzer Prize for his transparent political campaign coverage which included a rigorous investigation of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump’s assertions of charitable giving. In the links below, notice how Fahrenthold reports and compare it to an opinion column on the same issue.

2.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

LEARN MORE CONT.

Investigative reporting:

- [“Missing from Trump’s list of charitable giving: His own personal cash”](#) by David A. Fahrenthold and Rosalind S. Helderman, *Washington Post*, April 10, 2016. Fahrenthold and Helderman report how the list of charitable giving that the Trump campaign released did not include a penny of Trump’s personal cash. Nor was it as substantial as Trump often claimed on the campaign trail.
- [“What ever happened to all that money Trump raised for the veterans?”](#) by David A. Fahrenthold, *Washington Post*, March 3, 2016. This article investigates Trump’s promise to donate \$6 million to veterans’ groups. Fahrenthold notes that a month had gone by since Trump pledged that sum, and while the Trump campaign released a summary saying he had donated roughly \$3 million (or half the initial pledge), the *Post* reports they were unable to account for that amount after following up with the charities listed as beneficiaries.

Opinion column:

- [“Donald Trump’s epic meltdown”](#) by Steve Chapman, *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 2016. Chapman writes about then-candidate Trump’s clash with media over criticism about his failure to deliver on promises ranging from the education of Trump University students to the issuing of charitable donations to veterans’ groups. You’ll notice Chapman uses a different tone than Fahrenthold and makes very different claims. Would Fahrenthold have considered leading his article with, “Donald Trump: crazy or evil?” Which style is more effective? Are they complementary?

ASSIGNMENTS

- As you embark on Bob’s MasterClass, think about your communication skills and your comfort zone as a journalist.

2.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

Are you good at asking questions? Do you learn things when overhearing conversations? What topics are you most comfortable investigating and writing about? What topics or type of reporting scare you? What kinds of questions are you comfortable—and uncomfortable—asking? Start the reporting process with a strong sense of who you are as a journalist and what your comfort zone is. Record your observations in the notebook you'll keep throughout Bob's MasterClass.

- Think critically about how and why you consume news and which news sources are most important to you. Write about what you are looking for from news coverage and what you want as an informed consumer of news. If being up-to-date is important, spend time identifying journalists covering relevant beats on Twitter and elsewhere. Develop a way to be up-to-date with their materials. If you are more interested in the Supreme Court, carve out 15 to 20 minutes each day to read [Robert Barnes's coverage](#) in the *Washington Post*, entries by various contributors to the [SCOTUSBlog](#), and Nina Totenberg's NPR [reports](#). Compile a personalized list of news sources in your notebook, and share your preferred resources with your classmates in [The Hub](#).
- Brainstorm up to five topics that you might want to cover for your 3,500–4,500 word investigative reporting project. Is there a mayoral candidate in your town whose platform interests you? Does a local school have funding issues? Maybe a business down the street appears to be polluting a local river. Find something that interests you and go after it, taking into account the scope of the project. What kinds of sources will you have access to? With whom can you talk? In your notebook, make a list of three to five topics you might want to investigate and why.

3.

FINDING THE STORY

“Great stories have to do with power—how people [are] using power, abusing power.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- What Makes a Great Story
- Bacon-Cooler Stories
- Always Follow the Best Story
- If a More Important Story Appears, Pivot

CHAPTER REVIEW

The use and abuse of power is at the root of most great in-depth reporting. But another aspect of a superb story is surprise. Bob 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.

Compelling stories do not have to be of a national scope like those around the Watergate break-in. Bob urges you to always follow the best story, which may or may not be the one you set out to investigate. If a more important story appears in the midst of your research or writing, pivot to cover that story. It’s okay to go looking for one story and find another one entirely. For a journalist, this is not an unusual occurrence.

LEARN MORE

- Read Bob’s story [“Hangings in Tripoli Focus Attention on Libyan Dissent,”](#) *Washington Post*, 1984, for which he provides context in this chapter. Now that you know the backstory, try to imagine how he sourced and reported the story in full.
- Read these reports that take a new angle on Bob’s point about using power and abusing power:
 - [“Why Did It Take 9 Hours and 3 Emergency Rooms For This Woman to Get a Rape Kit?”](#) by Jillian Keenan, *Cosmopolitan*, 2016. Keenan launches a detailed investigation into the frustrations and inefficiencies that prohibit women from getting appropriate emergency care after sexual assault.
 - [“An Unbelievable Story of Rape”](#) by T. Christian Miller and Ken Armstrong, *ProPublica* and *The Marshall Project*, 2015. This thoroughly researched piece investigates a rape in the state of Washington, illuminating the gross deficiencies in police response to sexual violence.
 - [“One Month in Clausnitz: A Visit to Ground Zero of Refugee Anxiety”](#) by Takis Würger, *Der Spiegel*, 2016. After a group of nativist residents of Clausnitz, Germany, attacked a bus carrying refugees, the reporter spends a month there to understand and uncover the story behind the incident.

3.

FINDING THE STORY

LEARN MORE CONT.

- [“The Coddling of the American Mind”](#) by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *Atlantic*, 2015. Two academics have a controversial take on the state of rhetoric on college campuses, calling the growing push for greater sensitivity, “vindictive protectiveness.”

ASSIGNMENT

- It’s time to settle on a topic for your final assignment. Take each story on your list and think about it individually. For all of your ideas, write up a list of potential sources in your notebook. Do a deep Google search. Maybe visit a local government office—like the police station or the town clerk—and see if there are public records on each topic. Now, try searching Lexis at your local library or university. Submit public information requests for any documents that might involve your topic. Sift through your local newspapers’ archives for stories about the main characters in your piece. Try to exhaust the information you can gather from the privacy of your own desk. After you’ve done so, see if any of your ideas stand out and pick the one with the most potential. Don’t worry if you can’t imagine the whole story now. It will become clear as you report.

4.

STUDENTS DIG INTO WOODWARD'S INTERVIEW WITH TRUMP

“The purpose of an interview ... is not ‘gotcha,’ is not to catch. ... It is to understand, in my view.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Analyzing the Story Ledes
- Figuring Out What’s Driving Trump
- Grading Journalism

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob and a group of students from his Yale journalism seminar take a deep dive into his April 2, 2016, interview with the then–presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Donald Trump. Students analyze Bob’s choice of a lede, discuss insights into Trump’s personality that the interview revealed, and assign journalism a grade on its coverage of Trump before the 2016 presidential election.

LEARN MORE

- Download the transcript of Bob’s interview with Trump from the resources section and read it in full.
- Journalists have been trying to understand Trump for decades. Below are a few examples of reporters taking on the task of attempting to understand Trump.
 - [“36 Hours On The Fake Campaign Trail With Donald Trump”](#) by McKay Coppins, *BuzzFeed*, 2014. Coppins’s profile presents a skeptical view of a potential Trump candidacy just two years before before Trump won the Republican presidential nomination. In retrospect, how does this piece hold up?
 - [“This Town Melts Down”](#) by Mark Leibovich, *New York Times Magazine*, 2017. Leibovich has a surprise encounter with the president as he tries to understand what the Trump administration means for Washington, DC, and the country.
 - [“Kellyanne Conway Is a Star”](#) by Olivia Nuzzi, *New York Magazine*, 2017. Nuzzi examines what we can learn about Trump from the people he surrounds himself with.
 - [“Donald Trump: Entertainer in Chief”](#) by Yuval Levin, *National Review*, 2017. Levin posits that Trump’s presidential ambitions are performative in nature, rather than policy-driven.

5.

HOW TO APPROACH IN-DEPTH REPORTING

“I guess I can’t emphasize this enough: the roadblock often is you. That you’re not creative enough. That you’re not determined enough. In reporting, you need to focus.”
—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Things Aren’t Always As They Appear
- Focus and Act Aggressively
- Give Your Case the Time It Deserves
- Get Your Rear Out of the Chair

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob’s central reporting strategy is about persistence—you must show energy and curiosity, and demonstrate the willingness to work long and hard. If you are supposed to work eight hours, work ten. Invest time in your craft and don’t be passive.

Bob says that journalism is about “time against the problem.” You need to completely immerse yourself in the story and always remain open to what unfolds. You build a case incrementally. Journalists submit promising reports in drafts before the full story is uncovered, and editors and colleagues will suggest other avenues and ask questions that help broaden the investigation. Bob finds this exchange to be essential. Remember that your own experience is part of the journalistic method, so get out of the chair and onto the scene.

LEARN MORE

- The work of many longform journalists comes from months of reporting on the hidden corners of things. They slowly unravel the most complicated stories. Read these shocking longform articles that reveal secrets without the urgency of a daily newspaper deadline:
 - [“Strange Love”](#) by Elsa Walsh, *New Yorker*, 1999. Elsa Walsh, Bob’s wife, was most recently a reporter at large for the *New Yorker*. Read her psychological drama about the love affair between the Reagan gunman, John Hinckley Jr., and his fiancé, Leslie deVeau, a one-armed woman who murdered her own daughter.
 - [“The Mountains of Pi”](#) by Richard Preston, *New Yorker*, 1992. This story covers two math geniuses in their dingy New York apartment. The Chudnovsky brothers yearned to probe the mystery of pi, so they built their own supercomputer out of mail-order parts.
 - [“Inside the Federal Bureau Of Way Too Many Guns”](#) by Jeanne Marie Laskas, *GQ*, 2016. When a gun is used in a crime in America, there is no way for cops to connect it to the owner. Only one place, in West Virginia, tries to do this work—without the help of computers.

5.

HOW TO APPROACH IN-DEPTH REPORTING

LEARN MORE CONT.

- Consider the ways some reporters make themselves part of their stories. In your reporting and your investigative project for Bob’s MasterClass, one of the questions you’ll be asking yourself is whether or not you want to use “I.” Journalists never want to be the story, but sometimes a personal pronoun is essential for understanding whatever it is you are writing about. Is it important that the reader relate to you in the piece in order to understand the subject(s)? Does the reader need you as a guide to the topic or does the piece make sense without you in it? To help you gain a better understanding of what self-referential reporting can be, read the following pieces:
 - [“How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?”](#) by Lillian Ross, *New Yorker*, 1950. Lillian Ross spends three days in New York with Ernest Hemingway, providing an intimate first-person narrative along the way.
 - [“Choosing a School for My Daughter in a Segregated City”](#) by Nikole Hannah-Jones, *New York Times Magazine*, 2016. Hannah-Jones, who won a MacArthur genius grant in 2017, makes herself the main character in this story of how one school became a battleground over which children benefit from a separate and unequal system.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Now that you’ve settled on a topic for your final project, it’s time to build an initial plan of attack. Who will you call first? What is their phone number? What is their title? What are a few questions you want to ask them? And who would you call next? Soon it will be time to pick up the phone and head out the door.

5.

HOW TO APPROACH IN-DEPTH REPORTING

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

- Find a way to organize all your information, so that you can easily reference your material later on as you continue reporting. Now is also a good time to get in the habit of writing yourself memos after long reporting days. That way, you can build a record of what you've found and what hunches you might have. It's also a great place to start when you get back to your project the next day. Keep a list of new sources and follow-up questions you might want to ask in the future.

THE REPORTING CHALLENGES OF WATERGATE

“People are gonna take shots. People are gonna say things. People are gonna do things. And of course the ultimate cushion is to have good human sources and documents, witnesses. That will protect you as a journalist in the end, but it’s not gonna protect you from criticism.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- How It All Began
- Journalists Don’t Take Down Presidents
- The Lust for Power
- Get Used to Criticism
- Good Reporting Can Protect You
- Don’t Tell Me Never
- You’re Never Done Assessing History

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter, Bob discusses the impact of Watergate: what started as a small story—what the White House press secretary famously called “a third-rate burglary”—ballooned into an event that changed history. Bob and fellow *Washington Post* journalist Carl Bernstein spent years interviewing and reinterviewing everyone they could track down who was attached to the case. Bob discusses the role their reporting played in Nixon’s resignation. But keep in mind: journalists don’t aim to take down presidents; they pursue the facts.

A good journalist cannot protect himself or herself from criticism. In fact, journalists have a professional obligation to seek comment from the people who are most likely to criticize them. The best safeguard against mistakes is the integrity and thoroughness of your own reporting, so don’t cut corners.

While Bob was investigating Watergate, Katharine Graham, the publisher and owner of the *Washington Post*, encouraged him to never give up on uncovering the truth because “that’s the business we are in.” As Bob explains, you have to keep going back. Even 40 years later, people like Alexander Butterfield—the former deputy assistant to President Nixon who disclosed the White House taping system—continue to divulge new information about Watergate when interviewed.

LEARN MORE

- The tactics Bob and Bernstein used to follow the story are helpful for any aspiring journalist in understanding just how far you have to go. They wrote about their experience reporting on Watergate in *All the President’s Men*, which later became a movie starring Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford. If you haven’t already, take the time to read Bob and Bernstein’s book and watch the film.

6.

THE REPORTING CHALLENGES OF WATERGATE

LEARN MORE CONT.

- Think about how the Watergate scandal might have been covered if it had occurred today in the era of the internet. Share your thoughts with your classmates in [The Hub](#), and engage them in discussion about their own posts. Don't be afraid to critique the reporting methods described in *All the President's Men*.

7.

HUNTING DOWN THE DOCUMENTS

CHAPTER REVIEW

“I have rarely found a significant story where there isn’t a document. Often you can’t get it because it’s classified, or somebody’s not gonna give it to you, or it’s somebody’s tax returns or their bank records. But it’s there. If you can get somebody to assist you, it will indeed help you with your story.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Ask for the Documents
- Explore All Avenues
- Never Leave Without the Document
- Organize and Save All Your Documents

In this chapter, Bob talks about the importance of documentation—both acquiring documents for your reporting, and documenting your own research. Written sources—documents and memos—confer authority to your reporting, which is essential in a moment when journalism is sometimes perceived as dishonest. A story nearly always has troves of notes and other written materials associated with it, and you must explore all avenues to find them. Keep in mind that Freedom of Information Act 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. Bob advises you to never leave without the document. Once you get your sources to agree to divulge secret information to you, make sure that you can get copies of it. It’s important to be able to back up your claims and essential to have a text you can return to, clarify, and work with on your own time.

Another important part of documentation is to develop a good bookkeeping system. Make copies and keep everything—you won’t regret it. You never know when you might have to prove a detail, or when you’ll have to refer back to your notes. Develop a filing system that works for you, and make sure you can prove everything you print.

Remember: you usually can’t find documents without a human source; the two methods of reporting are complementary. Do what it takes to develop both.

LEARN MORE

- Read about the *New York Times* reporter Susanne Craig’s experience receiving secret documents in her mailbox [here](#). Think about how Craig developed a public persona that invited people to submit information to her, and how she made herself available for tips. Then, read [this story](#) she wrote with a team of other reporters for the *Times* about their findings. How did they use these secret documents as evidence, and how did they justify their discovery to the public? How could they have obtained these pieces of evidence through relationships with sources instead?

7.

HUNTING DOWN THE DOCUMENTS

ASSIGNMENT

- 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? Are there ways to use social media to think about where the secret files might be? 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.

FINDING SOURCES

“The internet is [an] important, useful tool but it’s not a magic lantern where you can go and it’s gonna tell you everything. ... It’s all about human sources.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Understand Why People Agree to Be Sources
- Seek Out All Witnesses and Participants
- The Internet Will Not Replace Human Sources
- You’ll Be Surprised Who Will Talk to You
- Never Give Up on Finding Sources

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob believes people agree to be sources because they want their side to be heard and because “everyone is a secret sharer [under] the First Amendment.” When you start working on a story, make lists of people who might have any understanding of the case. These witnesses and participants will help you uncover the truth.

The internet will never replace human sources in investigative journalism. Obviously, no one can google “Where are the Secret Memos?” with a reasonable expectation of success. Decades later, Watergate would be reported in pretty much the same way. But how might the internet be used as a tool alongside human sources?

When reporting, you have to knock on doors, set up meetings, and ask people to help you. To develop these relationships, especially with sources who might be hesitant to divulge important details, you will need to be persistent and patient. Sometimes that means calling an office five or six times before someone will meet with you. Most importantly, never give up on finding sources.

LEARN MORE

- Some stories lend themselves to obvious sources. If you’re covering a sports team, a politician, or a local interest story, you’ll probably contact a coach or the captain of the team, a legislator or two, or the person behind the local happening. Other times, the story is bigger than the obvious cast of characters. Maybe it’s about a national trend. Maybe you’re not sure who is affected by a piece of local policy. You need to identify sources before you can move forward with your reporting. Check out how Diana Marcum of the *Los Angeles Times* offers nuanced portraits of Californians affected by the drought in her 2014 five-part series on the Central Valley, “Scenes From California’s Dust Bowl.” Marcum is a master at finding differing voices that offer texture to her story:
 - [“Dreams Die in Drought,”](#) May 30, 2014. This story explores how farmhands and their families in California’s San Joaquin Valley coped with a third year

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FINDING SOURCES

LEARN MORE CONT.

of drought.

- [“Drought Imperils a Dream,”](#) July 4, 2014. Marcum details the saga of a retired barber turned farmer and his pistachio trees’ fight for survival.
- [“Sinking Land and Hearts,”](#) October 24, 2014. This piece looks at the many and sundry ways in which Stratford, a small town reliant on farming, is affected by the drought.
- [“Wells Full of Generosity,”](#) December 11, 2014. Here, Marcum highlights neighbors helping neighbors in times of need.
- [“Carrying a Town’s Water,”](#) December 18, 2014. When wells start going dry, one woman tries to ensure fresh water for everyone in her community.

ASSIGNMENT

- Begin reaching out to the sources you identified in your initial “plan of attack” memo. 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.

DEVELOPING SOURCES

“I need your help.’ Those are the four most potent words in journalism.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Determine the Source’s Value
- Establish the Ground Rules
- Start at the Bottom
- Share What You Know

CHAPTER REVIEW

When people approach you with information, assess carefully whether their knowledge may be valuable. Consider where they work, and how they came to know what they know. People like to talk and want their side of a story told. But you’ll have to dig deeper than that.

It’s important to establish ground rules when you are starting to talk to someone about being a source. Explain the difference between on the record, background, deep background*, and off the record, and make sure you are both on the same page. What matters most is that you honor the deal you strike with your source, no matter what you call it.

In the process of developing sources, start at the bottom and ask people in junior positions about an important person or topic first. A mayor’s aide will likely be more willing than the mayor to talk with a reporter, and you’ll likely learn as much or more from a politico’s staffers than you will from the officeholder. In this process, you should work to prove that you’ll be fair with your reporting and will respect their confidentiality. People around a prominent figure will be necessarily hesitant to divulge intimate information without trusting you first. It is your job to find a way to build that trust.

Another effective approach to getting a source to talk to you is to share what you already know, either with the source directly or by publishing it in the newspaper. Making the source aware that the story is incomplete can make him or her more willing to help you uncover the facts. As Bob says, “I need your help” are the four most potent words in journalism.

*Deep background discussions with sources mean the information can be used but no source, named or unnamed, will be cited if the reporter believes it reliable and authentic and the source is in a position to know. Examples would be: “The president favored the CIA operation.” Or, “The senator considered the vice president irresponsible.”

9.

DEVELOPING SOURCES

LEARN MORE

- Read “[Money Unlimited](#)” by Jeffrey Toobin, *New Yorker*, 2012. Toobin investigates how US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts pushed through the *Citizens United* decision in 2012, which virtually designated corporations as people who have both a right to privacy and a right to make nearly unlimited campaign donations. Consider the ways Toobin might have worked his way up through the clerks and aides in the court, and the lawyers representing the US government, to reconstruct the case and understand exactly how this happened.
- Take a look at the *Wall Street Journal*’s [prize-winning reporting](#) from December 12, 2006, about backdated financial instruments business executives used to make millions, which resulted in the firing of executives. How did they source a “bacon-cooler” story like this?

ASSIGNMENT

- Before you start scheduling on-the-record interviews with your sources, make time for informal meetings. This way you and the source can get to know each other as people without a notebook or a tape recorder. This conversation can be off the record, but listen for facts you might want to revisit in your interviews, or for personality traits that might impact the process.

HOW WATERGATE'S MARK FELT BECAME DEEP THROAT

CHAPTER REVIEW

“The misconception about Watergate is that Mark Felt came in and handed us documents, which he never did.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Meeting the Ultimate Source
- Covert Communication
- Why Mark Felt Talked
- One Source Will Not Tell You the Complete Story
- Protecting a Valuable Source

Mark Felt became “Deep Throat” by accident. Bob met Felt long before the Watergate investigation, when Bob was a US Navy sailor who sometimes acted as a courier between the chief of naval operations and the White House. When Bob started his career as a reporter, Felt provided tips and clues on various stories. After the Watergate break-in, Bob asked Felt if he knew anything about “H. Hunt”—a White House worker whose name was written in two of the Watergate burglars’ address books. Felt verified Hunt’s involvement and went on to share information many more times throughout the investigation.

Felt spoke with Bob on deep background, meaning Bob was not able to identify him as a source. Their communication was clandestine. They met in a garage using a secret code involving a newspaper and flower pot, espionage tricks Felt had learned during World War II. Felt ultimately conveyed the true gravity of Watergate to Bob. The burglary was part of a much larger effort by the Nixon reelection committee to sabotage Senator Edmund Muskie and get a weaker Democrat nominated. The situation was so severe, he told Bob, that he feared Bob and Bernstein’s lives might be at risk.

Bob believes Felt became a source not just because Felt was offended by the criminal activity of Nixon and his cohorts, but also because of thwarted personal ambition. Even so, Felt never handed documents over for the *Washington Post*’s use, nor did he provide an outline for the story. Instead he provided clues to help Bob uncover the overall picture. Bob always made sure that Felt’s identity was completely protected, even as speculation about his identity circulated in Washington decade after decade. Over the years, Bob gained the trust of other sources because of the protection he gave Felt.

LEARN MORE

- Revisit your list of strengths, weaknesses, and comfort-zone boundaries that you wrote at the beginning of class. Have you made improvements in your areas of weakness? Are you pushing yourself far enough outside of your comfort zone to write a compelling story?

10.

HOW WATERGATE'S MARK FELT BECAME DEEP THROAT

ASSIGNMENT

- Reflect on the research you've done so far on your final project—your daily memos, the documents you've obtained, and the sources you've identified and developed. Do you have a better sense now for what kind of story might be there?

BUILDING TRUST WITH SOURCES

“Expediting intimacy is central to reporting.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- How to Build Trust
- Expedite Intimacy
- Be a Journalist, Not a Friend
- Don't Let a Source Change the Ground Rules
- Protect Your Sources

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter, Bob shares his approach to building trust with sources. When dealing with powerful figures, you have to find a way to get inside what former ambassador George F. Kennan called “the treacherous curtain of deference” surrounding these individuals. To do this, you must be polite and convince your source that you will not misuse the truth.

Bob also discusses “expediting intimacy.” In other words, getting sources to trust you so you can learn what you need to know. While developing these human connections, you should be sincere about needing people’s help and sit down to give them time to tell their story. But remember that you are a journalist, not a source’s friend. That can be hard, but it is important in order to stay professional.

Make sure that all your sources know you are a journalist, even as you develop personal relationships with them. This is the first thing you should do; there can be no confusion about who you are and what you are doing. The stories you will be writing will, as Bob says, “cut close to the bone,” and you need to develop the infrastructure of trust and distance so that you can learn what you need and publish what you learn.

Once you’ve established the ground rules with a source, don’t let them change the rules retroactively. At the same time, you must take every step to protect your sources. This is fundamental to your integrity as a journalist.

LEARN MORE

- Read the following stories written by two very different reporters—Seymour Hersh and Eli Sanders—who asked vulnerable, normal people to tell them very sensitive stories. By spending time with people and earning their trust, Hersh and Sanders both told detailed and empathetic stories that won Pulitzer Prizes. As you’re reading, consider the relationships between the reporters and their subjects, and think about how they identified the importance of these topics.
 - [“The My Lai Massacre”](#) by Seymour Hersh, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 1969. In Hersh’s series on the My

11.

BUILDING TRUST WITH SOURCES

LEARN MORE CONT.

- Lai Massacre in Vietnam, he includes the perspectives of different American soldiers involved in the mass civilian murders there. He asks the men to tell him their most shameful and traumatic secrets, and his reporting exposes an atrocity.
- [“The Bravest Woman in Seattle”](#) by Eli Sanders, *Stranger*, 2011. For an alt-weekly paper in Seattle, Sanders writes about a woman who survived a brutal attack that left her partner dead. Sanders uses the victim’s courtroom testimony to vividly rebuild a narrative of that harrowing night.

ASSIGNMENT

- After your informal meetings with your sources, take notes on your impressions of the scene. This is a good practice to begin now. You want to be vigilant about details during your on-the-record interviews. Perhaps a source keeps cleaning their glasses, or they are nervous and spill a glass of water. Keeping a record of these visual cues can inform and enrich your story.

GROWING YOUR ROSTER OF SOURCES

“... People who are very experienced, who’ve been around in government or are still in government, ... can be your eyes and ears and say, ‘This is the story. This is what you should be looking at.’”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Good Reporting Will Open Doors
- Sources Can Become More Valuable Over Time
- Important Sources Can Be Your Eyes and Ears
- Understand When “No” Means “No”

CHAPTER REVIEW

Building a reputation as a fair and honest reporter opens doors. As Bob says: “Good stories beget good stories.” If someone with critical information is looking for a reporter to talk to, you will be the one who comes to mind. As your reputation grows, you’ll be surprised who will talk to you, if you frame the request correctly. Let them know that you need their help, that you’re trying to get the story right, and that you just want the facts.

Bob discusses how to develop sources over time. If you meet someone interesting, even if they are in a junior position, spend time with them and learn from them. You never know who they will become. Some people will become important sources you can check in with frequently. These people can become your eyes and ears while you are reporting.

Finally, as you continue to broaden your reach, keep in mind that you will hit roadblocks. It’s important to know when to keep pushing and when to stop. If a source answers with a firm “no,” then you have to let it go.

LEARN MORE

- Read these annotated stories from the Nieman Storyboard in which authors discuss their methods with other reporters. There’s no better way to learn how to report than to listen to (or read) how other writers do it. Consider reading the stories clean first and then reading them again with the annotations afterward. The second time you read a piece, you’ll pick up a lot more of the tricks.
 - [“Far Away from Here”](#) by Teju Cole, *New York Times Magazine*, 2015.
 - [“Down the Drain”](#) by Roger Angell, *New Yorker*, 1975.
 - [“The Things that Carried Him”](#) by Chris Jones, *Esquire*, 2008.
- If you like podcasts, check out the [Longform podcast](#) and choose a few of your favorite writers to listen to.

12.

GROWING YOUR ROSTER OF SOURCES

ASSIGNMENT

- Expand your research plan. Add at least 10 potential sources to your list. Continue to dig into newspaper archives, city hall records, public archives, or other resources you have identified. Where else do you need to go? Who else do you need to talk to?

13.

STUDENTS CRITIQUE BOB'S INTERVIEW WITH OBAMA

"I wouldn't start with the big question. I would start with a series of empirical questions: What happened? What was the process?"

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Figuring Out the Assignment
- Getting to the Heart of the Matter

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob and a group of students from his Yale journalism seminar analyze his July 10, 2010, interview with President Barack Obama about his decisions in war. They discuss how and why Bob chose his line of questioning, the value of sitting quietly through awkward moments in pursuit of the truth, and what he discovered about President Obama's decision making process.

LEARN MORE

- Download Bob's interview with President Obama from the resources section and read it in full.
- A number of reporters chose President Obama as their subject. To get a sense of the breadth of approaches reporters took, read these profiles from around the media world:
 - ["Going the Distance"](#) by David Remnick, *New Yorker*, 2014. Remnick follows President Obama onto Air Force One to California and writes about what he saw.
 - ["The Obama Doctrine"](#) by Jeffrey Goldberg, *Atlantic*, 2016. Goldberg speaks with President Obama at length about his foreign policy philosophy. There may be no better record of how the man envisioned the world and the US presidency.
 - ["My President Was Black"](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Atlantic*, 2017. Coates presents a thoughtful meditation on the Obama administration's larger meaning to American culture and race relations.
 - ["The GQ Interview"](#) by Bill Simmons, *GQ*, 2015. Simmons and the former president embark on a more lighthearted conversation about family, culture, and one of Obama's favorite topics: sports.

14.

PENETRATING THE CIA — BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH BILL CASEY

CHAPTER REVIEW

“Find out where’s the center of gravity. The center of gravity was Bill Casey.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- The Hardest Target
- Building Rapport
- Gaining Respect
- The Center of Gravity

As a journalist, Bob believes the hardest target is the CIA. After speaking to Bill Casey, the CIA director from 1981 to 1987, 52 times over the years, Bob was able to build a longstanding relationship with him. These interactions included late night conversations over scotch on Casey’s plane, attending his speeches, meals at his home, and trips to the CIA headquarters. Casey shared a wide range of information with Bob, including details of CIA operations and his opinion of then-president Ronald Reagan.

Though developing a source is part of the business of being a journalist, it inevitably becomes personal. Bob and Casey read one another’s books and discussed their personal lives. Bob gained Casey’s respect through his accurate reporting on the Beirut bombings of 1983. This respect allowed Bob to get “close to the bone” in his conversations with Casey. Ultimately, Bob wrote an entire book about Casey called *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981–1987*.

LEARN MORE

- Dana Priest of the *Washington Post* is one of the few reporters who have managed to peek behind the walls of the CIA. In 2005, Priest published [a series of articles](#) detailing how the Agency developed secret prisons overseas to hold terrorism suspects.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

“I will send them a long list of questions, sometimes 20 pages, that are very specific. Some people think, ‘Oh, why did you send questions? Don’t you wanna surprise the person you’re interviewing?’ ... And the answer is you don’t want to surprise.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Ask People to Talk, Even When It’s Hard
- Do Your Homework
- Send the Question List Ahead of Time
- Talk Where the Source Feels Comfortable
- Be Completely Transparent
- Explain the Process
- Be Open About Time Commitment

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob acknowledges the difficulties of asking to interview people, especially at the most sensitive moments in their lives. But at such moments, people often want to share their grief, to be listened to and heard.

Before an interview, do your homework on your source. This not only boosts your authority, but demonstrates to your source that you see them as a human being. And if you don’t do your research—if you don’t know their story—that can be belittling. Also consider sending them a list of questions beforehand, but don’t feel limited by it. Choose a space to talk where the source feels comfortable.

At the start of the interview, explain the process to the source, especially if it’s new to them. Don’t set a time limit on the interview and clear your schedule so you can speak as long as you need to. Your stamina is the most important thing—never go to an interview exhausted.

LEARN MORE

- Interviews are part and parcel of journalism—but they’re also tricky. Take a moment to read through the following examples and see what you think about the writers’ interviewing techniques. Some of them are successes. Others are a bit more controversial.
 - [“I Am Not Backing Off Anything I Said’: An interview with Seymour Hersh”](#) by Isaac Chotiner, *Slate*, 2015. Hersh takes Chotiner for a wild ride in this interview. How did Chotiner handle himself? Would you have tried anything different?
 - [“Obama’s Way”](#) by Michael Lewis, *Vanity Fair*, 2012. Lewis was offered remarkable access to the president for this piece. How did he do? What questions would you have asked that Lewis didn’t? How would you have structured the piece?
 - [“Elicitation”](#) by John McPhee, *New Yorker*, 2014. In this piece, McPhee dives into his interviewing technique and analyzes what works and what doesn’t.

15.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

ASSIGNMENT

- Start preparing for your scheduled on-the-record interviews by listing specifically what you would like to discover from each person. Brainstorm questions you'll want to ask each source. You will want to gain knowledge about the chronology of what happened, observations about the big-picture meaning of your topic, and specific stories and memories, which you'll use to pepper your piece with scenes. Many of the questions you should ask will be questions that you already know the answer to. Often reporters will ask questions that they need a source to tell them in their own words.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

“You’re communicating just with your presence, and every aspect of what you wear, how you stand, how you shake hands, how you blink or don’t blink, how you smile or don’t smile, is part of it.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Assume Your Source Will Talk About Everything
- Ask Questions Chronologically, With Some Exceptions
- Stick to Relevant Questions and Be Upfront
- Ask About Emotion
- Be Aware of Your Body Language
- Mine the Silence
- Ask Follow-Up Questions to Get Clarity

CHAPTER REVIEW

When conducting an interview, assume your source will freely divulge almost anything; never assume they won’t discuss certain topics. It’s also critical to control your body language. Keep your facial expression still but encouraging.

During your interview, you will want to move chronologically through what happened. Not only does this help jog your source’s memory, it shows them that you’ve done your homework. It’s always important to be direct and ask the tough questions, but be sure to avoid hostility. And don’t be afraid to ask questions that could stir up your source’s emotions.

Remember that silence is sometimes the most effective tactic. Let it “suck out” the truth. More than anything, a great interviewer adapts to the conversation as it moves. Ask why, ask for clarity, ask why again, follow up until you get the information you need.

LEARN MORE

- Read Sarah Stillman’s work for the *New Yorker*, and imagine what kinds of questions she asked each source. Notice her use of language—specifically her description of the scene and use of adverbs, which create a level of detail that’s akin to reading a novel.
 - [“The Invisible Army,”](#) 2011. Stillman provides a look into the lives of struggling “third-country nationals” who left their homes to work in the service industry on American military bases abroad.
 - [“Taken: The Rise of Civil Forfeiture,”](#) 2013. Civil forfeiture means that Americans who haven’t been charged with wrongdoing can be stripped of their cash, cars, and even homes.
 - [“Where Are the Children?,”](#) 2015. For extortionists, undocumented migrants are big business.

16.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

ASSIGNMENTS

- This week, begin conducting on-the-record interviews for your story. Remember to tell your sources, “I need your help.” But don’t stop there. Start making a habit of asking other questions, such as “Is there anyone else I should speak with?” before you finish an interview. In your notes, pencil in regular time stamps by checking your watch every so often. That way, when you transcribe, you can keep track of good quotes and it will take you much less time. Record as many interviews as possible.
- Transcribe your interviews from your recordings. This process takes time and can be painstaking. Get on it early, and you’ll be happy you did.

NAVIGATING INTERVIEW CHALLENGES

“You are dealing, in journalism, with contested ground. The more contested the ground is, the more the emotions are gonna run high and the stakes are gonna be high. And that’s fine. It’s part of that process.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Be Civil and Hold Your Ground
- Address Lies Respectfully
- Be Aware of Charm: Bill Clinton Case Study

CHAPTER REVIEW

When tensions arise in an interview, the most effective response is to be civil and hold your ground. Arguments can occur when you and your source have contrary information or a source doesn’t like a line of questioning. A calm demeanor can help defuse the situation. Most importantly, never take confrontation personally. You are doing your job—seeking the truth.

Whether they know it or not, no one ever gives you the full story. There are two kinds of lies—some are unintentional, others are purposeful. Rather than accusing your source of lying, simply state that you have contradictory information and continue. Putting your source on the defensive won’t help you find the truth. It’s better to gently redirect.

Bob warns reporters to be aware of their interview subject’s unique communication skills. He shares the story of his interview with President Bill Clinton. Bob left the Oval Office feeling that it had been a significant interview. But when he reviewed the tapes, he discovered that President Clinton had not said anything new. Bob realized he’d been charmed by President Clinton’s ability to create instant intimacy with intense eye contact.

LEARN MORE

- Reflect on the interviews you’ve conducted for your final project. Share with your classmates in [The Hub](#) a synopsis of which interview techniques worked, and which didn’t. Read what your classmates have shared as well. Perhaps one of them has an approach that will work for you.

17.

NAVIGATING INTERVIEW CHALLENGES

ASSIGNMENT

- Schedule at least one follow-up meeting with a source you've interviewed. A second interview can yield important dividends. Sources might be more familiar with you and more candid as a result. You can also ask follow-up questions after you have confirmed facts with other people or compared one source's account with another. If you can, do two or three follow-ups this week and see how it goes. Keep in mind that you will be learning new interview techniques as this class continues. So also think of your follow-up conversations as a chance to try out these new skills.

LESSONS FROM EDITORS

“The relationship between a journalist and editor or editors needs to be honest. The editor has to be in a position to push, and the reporter has to push back.”
—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- The Magnificent Gift of Rejection
- You’re Not Here to Make People Happy
- Breaking Stories Are the Most Compelling
- Working With Ben Bradlee
- Open and Honest Communication Is Key
- “No” Means Dig Deeper
- Never Gloat
- Always Look Ahead

CHAPTER REVIEW

A good editor is a mentor to their writers, and Bob has had the privilege of working with some great mentors. As a young man just out of the navy, Bob was rejected from a position at the *Washington Post* by the local editor after a two-week tryout. Despite the setback, Bob felt he’d been given a great gift: the experience reinforced his desire to become a reporter. He went on to take a position at the *Montgomery County Sentinel*, where editor Roger Farquhar taught Bob the valuable lesson that revealing the truth doesn’t always make people happy. While reporting on Watergate, *Washington Post* editor Howard Simons showed Bob that the best story is a breaking story.

As executive editor of the *Washington Post*, Ben Bradlee taught Bob that a great editor will trust his or her writers, but never let them off the hook. Bradlee also showed Bob that mistakes happen, and, as a writer, you have to keep pushing forward. But working with an editor can be difficult. An editor has to say “no” from time to time. It’s in their job description. So be honest, and let your editor push, but don’t be afraid to push back. And listen to them, because they will help make you a better reporter.

LEARN MORE

- Writers and editors are two sides of the same coin. One is nothing without the other. But what makes a great editor? Here are a few ideas:
 - [“Homage to a great editor”](#) by Kathleen Parker, *Washington Post*, 2017. Parker, a Pulitzer Prize winner, writes an ode to Alan Shearer—her longtime editor at the *Post* who retired in 2017.
 - [“What Makes a Great Editor” Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), & [Part 3](#) by insider staff, *New York Times*, 2014. Some of the *Times*’ best contributors, from the late David Carr to Tim Egan, give their thoughts on what makes an editor great.
 - [“The Ben Bradlee we knew: Friend, fierce editor and a truth-seeker above all”](#) by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, *Washington Post*, 2014. If you want to know how important an editor is to a writer look no further

18.

LESSONS FROM EDITORS

[LEARN MORE CONT.](#)

than Bob and Bernstein's affection for the late Ben Bradlee.

ASSIGNMENT

- Review all of your notes and start writing an outline for the story. Think about how you want the project to flow. What might you lead with? What are your main six or so points? This will become your first guide when you start writing, so make it as detailed as you can.

DEVELOPING THE THEORY OF THE CASE

“What you don’t want to do is become wedded to the theory of the case if the evidence does not support it, which is often the case.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Don’t Be Wedded to Your Theory of the Case
- Don’t Forget Common Sense: Watergate Case Study

CHAPTER REVIEW

When developing a story, it’s very important that you stay open and not become attached to your own theory of what happened. Make sure you are not so blinded by what you believe occurred that you can’t see what is right in front of you. You might be certain you are right, but your personal perspective will inevitably affect the questions you are asking. Rely on other perspectives from your team and continuously examine your own perspective before you publish. Keep in mind Bob’s story of the pardon President Ford gave Nixon and the real story behind Ford’s decision-making.

Don’t forget to apply your own common sense. Sometimes the key to understanding a case is staring you right in the face. This became very clear to Bob when he was investigating whether the Committee to Re-Elect the President and the White House were connected to the Watergate burglary. It just didn’t make sense that low-level people in the Nixon campaign would spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on their own. In this case, the common sense way to uncover the truth was to “follow the money.”

ASSIGNMENT

- Review your completed outline and begin brainstorming your theory of the case. Push yourself to think of every angle, every possibility. Then, dig into what you could be missing.

WRITING THE STORY

“The psychology of writing is so important. When you have something down, and even if you’re only semi-satisfied with it, you’re gonna sleep better that night.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Write Every Day
- Write a Premature First Draft
- Talk Through Your Story
- How to Structure a News Story
- How to Structure a Book

CHAPTER REVIEW

Bob finds that if he’s done solid reporting and outlining, the writing itself is often a joy. Whether you agree with Bob or not, it’s essential to discipline yourself to write every day. Give yourself an assignment to write a certain number of words, and then do it.

Another tactic is to write what Bob calls a “premature” first draft before you have everything figured out. Typing up everything you know will show you where the holes are. Consider Bob’s “rule of six,” his belief a story should have at least six strong elements. 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?

News stories and books should be structured differently. In a news story, make sure your first paragraph gives your reader a full sense of what is to come. Busy readers want the important information up front. You can push the background information deeper into the story. In a book, by contrast, you may want to start right in the middle of a pivotal dramatic moment to capture your reader’s attention. Once they are engaged, you can move back to the beginning and relay events chronologically. This approach helps you establish intimacy, authority, and, most importantly, relevance.

LEARN MORE

- As you start writing, you’ll want to beef up your home library by adding valuable writing resources. Consider picking up a copy of *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White at the bookstore or library (it’s known by many as simply “Strunk and White”). This slim volume is canonical for many writers. It is a reference book to turn to whenever you have a question about style, grammar, or the nuts and bolts of writing a good story. Others to consider: *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser; *On Writing* by Stephen King; *The Sense of Style* by Steven Pinker; *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott; and *Follow the Story* by James B. Stewart.

20.

WRITING THE STORY

ASSIGNMENT

- Write a premature draft. Don't be too precious about it; rewriting is key to any great story. Some writers won't let a single word survive from their rough draft. You don't have to be that brutal to your own work, but write this draft knowing that Bob will advise you on polishing your story in the next lesson. Be ready to edit, edit, edit.

POLISHING THE STORY

“Particularly in this era of distrust of the media, the more concrete you can be ... I think really helps broaden the credibility of what you’re presenting.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Details Establish Credibility
- Be Specific
- Use Active Verbs
- Avoid Absolutes
- Catch Your Mistakes
- Print Physical Copies for Editing

CHAPTER REVIEW

The polishing stage is invaluable in the creation of a story. 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. In the current climate in which the media is distrusted by so many, this is particularly crucial.

When revising your work, make sure you use active verbs to bring immediacy to your writing. Another important tenet is to avoid absolutes. Using words such as “never” and “always” may compromise the integrity of your work if an instance arises that contradicts your statement.

It’s important to proofread thoroughly to catch your mistakes. Bob 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.

LEARN MORE

- Take a look at this advice on how to write well from some greats to inspire your own work:
 - [“Politics and the English Language”](#) by George Orwell, 1946. It’s both a condemnation of the English language and a digestion of its finer points.
 - [“Holy Writ”](#) by Mary Norris, *New Yorker*, 2015. This copy editor posits that to write well you have to know not only your material but also the rules of grammar, spelling, and style.

21.

POLISHING THE STORY

ASSIGNMENT

- Begin editing your draft. First, read it through and mark it up with a red pen. Next, read it out loud. You'll be surprised how many errors and style issues you'll catch just by doing that. You'll find that hearing mistakes can often be easier than reading for them. Finally, show your first draft to a trusted reader or colleague. Treat him or her like 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.

PUBLISHING SECRETS

“If there are things that are said that are not true or things in the report that can be contradicted, it’s our job to unearth them.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Communicate With Skepticism
- Aspire to Objectivity
- Do Not Trade Stories
- Publish What’s in the Public’s Interest
- Matters of National Security Require Extreme Caution: King Hussein Case Study
- The Sensitivity of Working With Intelligence Documents

CHAPTER REVIEW

As a reporter, it’s your job to communicate the information provided to you, but you must do it with skepticism and an eye toward any contradictions. As Bob reiterates, reporters are often used, especially when covering a press conference or report.

Despite your personal opinions, you must remain objective, not just in the words you say, but also with your tone. And it’s essential that you maintain journalistic integrity by avoiding trading one story you have with a source for another. Stories of public importance need to be told.

When deciding whether to publish a story or not, the public interest, rather than personal interests, should always come first. Matters of national security require particularly extreme caution. Always work with your editors (and legal counsel, if necessary) to make the right decisions.

LEARN MORE

- Military reporting is especially fragile and especially important, in large measure because the hierarchy of relationships established in the US military makes it more difficult for sources to uncover and share information. Below are three investigative stories written about various elements of military neglect and oversight. Read them and think about the difficulties the reporters may have encountered trying to develop sources in the military.
 - [“Soldiers Face Neglect, Frustration At Army’s Top Medical Facility”](#) by Dana Priest and Anne Hull, *Washington Post*, 2007. Two reporters spend months chronicling neglect at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where soldiers lived in terrible conditions and, in some cases, died. Their reporting lead to changes at the hospital and won Priest and Hull a Pulitzer.
 - [“12 Years Later, a Mystery of Chemical Exposure in Iraq Clears Slightly”](#) by C.J. Chivers, *New York Times*, 2015. Chivers, a former US Marine, writes an eye-opening piece about chemical weapons in Iraq and the US military’s inadequate response to the troops who were harmed by them.

22.

PUBLISHING SECRETS

- [“Other than Honorable”](#) by Dave Philipps, *Gazette* (Colorado Springs), 2013. Philipps’s Pulitzer Prize–winning reporting follows soldiers who were dishonorably discharged from the military, their return home, and how they cope with hospital care in the US.

ASSIGNMENT

- Do another edit of your piece. This time, try changing the font or the margins of your document to make it seem unfamiliar. You might pick up a few mistakes that you missed the first time around.

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

CHAPTER REVIEW

“[This is an] important lesson about journalism: first, be a human being.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- Publish Facts Not Logic: Watergate Case Study
- Be a Human Being First: Janet Cooke Case Study
- Verifying Information: Weapons of Mass Destruction Case Study

Bob shares lessons from the mistakes he’s made during his career as a journalist. While reporting on the Watergate investigation, he learned the value of verifying facts. One of his stories stated incorrectly that, according to grand jury testimony by Hugh Sloan, Bob Haldeman controlled a secret fund. Though the basic facts were correct—there was a secret fund that five people controlled, and Hugh Sloan had verified that Haldeman was one of those people—Sloan never stated this in grand jury testimony. If you don’t present the facts correctly—even if the essence of what you’re saying is correct—you compromise the integrity of your story and your news organization.

One mistake offers a particularly poignant moral lesson: In 1980, when Bob was working as the metropolitan editor for the *Washington Post*, a writer named Janet Cooke wrote a gripping story called “Jimmy’s World” about an eight-year-old heroin addict. It won the Pulitzer Prize. The story turned out to be fabricated, as did some of Cooke’s credentials. She was forced to give back the Pulitzer, and Bob himself contemplated resigning. Ultimately, Bob learned something invaluable—be a human first, and a journalist second. He realized that if he’d been thinking about the little boy, Jimmy, he would have first thought about how to help the child and the fraud would have been exposed before a single word was published in the paper.

While reporting on the decision to go to war with Iraq, Bob learned that though you may be confident your investigative research is on the right track, you might still be wrong. Bob reported on the Bush administration’s strong belief that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. But while the White House seemed to have no doubt that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, one CIA operative told him something to the contrary—that there was no “smoking gun intelligence” to prove it. Bob didn’t delve into this angle on the story, and admits that he should have. Ultimately it was revealed that the Bush administration was wrong about Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, and so was Bob.

23.

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

LEARN MORE

- We all learn from our mistakes, and Bob is no different. Read [“Jimmy’s World,”](#) and then see how the Janet Cooke scandal unraveled in the *Washington Post*’s [ombudsman report.](#)

ASSIGNMENT

- Put the finishing touches on your final project. Fact-check everything. Also, force yourself to do a few more follow-up interviews. Yes, even more. You can never get too many good quotes or ask too many clarifying questions. This is your opportunity to elevate all the hard work you’ve done so far. Go through as many drafts as necessary to get your story right.

THE STATE OF JOURNALISM

“This is the final exam for democracy. It’s a very dangerous time. The only answer is better, more authoritative stories.”

—Bob Woodward

SUBCHAPTERS

- The Accelerated News Cycle
- Attacks on the Press
- The Media Is Not Fake News
- Democracy Dies in Darkness

CHAPTER REVIEW

The internet has transformed the landscape of journalism. We are living in an era in which journalists are distrusted, which means that reporters must work even harder to present their stories authentically. The accelerated news cycle puts immense pressure on reporters, editors, and news organizations, but Bob cautions that impatience is driving too many journalistic choices.

Bob states that the key similarity between special counsel Bob Mueller’s investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election and Watergate is the attacks on the press. In both cases, those who have or had a stake in the outcome of the investigations accused the press of publishing falsehoods. In a speech made at the 2017 White House Correspondents’ Dinner, Bob emphatically proclaimed that “the media is not fake news.” Journalists must continue to uncover hidden government secrets and report the truth, because, as the motto of the *Washington Post* states, “Democracy dies in darkness.”

LEARN MORE

- The internet is changing how people consume and pay for news. New publications are replacing the old. As a journalist, you should keep an eye on the trends that are defining the industry for good and for ill. Here are a few resources:
 - [“State of the News Media 2016,”](#) Pew Research Center. Pew conducts a state of the news media analysis each year. If you want to see the trend lines in the news industry, you’ll find them here.
 - [“Read the Advice Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein Gave at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner”](#) by Jennifer Calfas, *Time*, 2017. With President Trump absent, Bob and Bernstein gave their own defenses of journalism and truth-seeking at this annual DC dinner. Read the transcripts of their speeches, attached to this article, and remember Bob’s message to Trump: “Mr. President, the media is not fake news.”

24.

THE STATE OF JOURNALISM

ASSIGNMENTS

- Think about publishing your work. Before you pitch your article, make sure all your reporting and evidence is collected in one place, as a good editor will want to see it for themselves.
- Send a pitch to the editor of your local newspaper. Keep your pitch short and sweet. Include a one- or two-paragraph synopsis of your story and why it is important. Then tell them why you are the right person to tell it. Don't make it too long and be ready for follow-up questions. Good luck!

APPENDIX: BOB'S COMPLETE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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To learn more, visit www.BobWoodward.com.



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