BLACKBIRD FOR TRAINING

The Future of Journalism & Investigative Reporting Workshop

30 August – 3 September 2027
Toronto (Canada)

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Introduction:

The future of journalism and investigative reporting describes how news organisations now gather, verify and publish evidence-based stories using digital sources, open-source intelligence OSINT, information gathered from publicly available material, data analysis and AI tools, while protecting sources and meeting legal and ethical duties. This 1-week course is for reporters, editors, producers, researchers and fact-checkers, and its final deliverable is a mini-investigation pitch with a verified evidence file. It is taught at intermediate practitioner level as a case study, with delegates working on real documents, images and datasets, then defending their findings.

Course Objectives:

- Distinguish misinformation from disinformation and apply a structured verification workflow to images, video and social media claims before publication
- Compare digital-first and print-first newsroom models and define how each changes story gathering, editing and audience distribution
- Apply source mapping, public records research and company registry checks to follow the money behind an investigative lead
- Interpret public datasets in spreadsheets to find, test and chart a data-driven story angle
- Select AI newsroom tools and digital security measures, distinguishing tasks AI can assist from decisions that need human editorial judgement
- Justify a mini-investigation pitch, with its evidence file, legal risk review and source protection plan, to an editor

Target Audience:

- Reporters and correspondents who gather news and pursue leads, deciding which claims to verify first and which leads justify deeper investigation
- Editors and desk staff who commission and check stories, judging whether evidence, sourcing and legal risk are strong enough to publish
- Producers of video, audio and digital packages, choosing the format and platform that suit each investigative story
- Researchers and fact-checkers who test claims, images and figures, deciding which verification method fits each piece of content
- Media and communications professionals who work closely with newsrooms, judging how open-source evidence and data will be scrutinised
- Newsroom team leads who coordinate daily coverage, deciding how AI tools, security practice and verification standards apply to team workflows

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Course Outline:

Day 1: Foundations: The Changing Newsroom and Digital-First Reporting

- Digital-First vs Print-First Newsroom Models: How Story Workflows and Deadlines Change
- Investigative Reporting Defined: Original, Evidence-Based Work That Reveals Hidden Wrongdoing
- Audience Platforms and Distribution: Social, Search, Newsletters and Podcasts for News
- Journalistic Ethics Principles: Accuracy, Independence, Minimising Harm and Accountability in Practice
- Newsroom Current-State Review: Assessing Verification, Data and Security Practice Gaps

Day 2: Investigative Methods: Sources, Records and Following the Money

- Hypothesis-Based Investigation Method: Turning a Lead Into a Testable Story Question
- Primary vs Secondary Sources: Weighing Documents, Witnesses and Published Material as Evidence
- Source Mapping and Interview Planning: Identifying, Approaching and Questioning Key People
- Public Records and Document Research: Court Files, Company Registries and Official Reports
- Following the Money: Tracing Ownership, Contracts and Financial Flows Behind a Story

Day 3: Core Skills: OSINT, Data Journalism and Fact-Checking Exercises

- Image Verification Drill: Reverse Image Search and Metadata Analysis on Viral Photos
- OSINT Geolocation Exercise: Confirming Where and When Video Footage Was Recorded
- Web Archive Research: Using the Wayback Machine to Recover Deleted or Changed Pages
- Data-Story Exercise: Cleaning, Analysing and Charting a Public Dataset in Spreadsheets
- Claim-Based Fact-Checking vs Pre-Publication Verification: Rating a Public Statement Against Records

Day 4: Advanced Risks: Misinformation, AI Ethics, Legal Safeguards and Digital Security

- Misinformation vs Disinformation: Recognising Manipulated Media, Deepfakes and Coordinated Campaigns
- Generative AI in the Newsroom: Transcription, Summarisation and Research With Human Checks
- AI Ethics and Disclosure: Bias, Fabricated Output and Transparency Policies for Audiences
- Pre-Publication Legal Risk Review: Defamation, Privacy and Right of Reply Checks
- Source Protection and Digital Security: Encrypted Messaging, Device Hygiene and Threat Modelling

Day 5: Case Study: Multimedia Storytelling and the Mini-Investigation Pitch

- Mobile Journalism Toolkit: Filming, Recording and Editing Investigative Stories on Smartphones
- Text vs Video vs Interactive Formats: Choosing How to Tell the Case Story
- Interview and Source Plan: Applying Source Mapping to the Case Investigation
- Evidence File Assembly: Applying OSINT, Data and Fact-Check Results to the Case
- Mini-Investigation Pitch Completion: Presenting Evidence, Legal Review and Story Plan to Editors

Skills You Will Gain:

- Open-Source Intelligence Research
- Image and Video Verification
- Public Records Research
- Financial Trail Analysis
- Data Cleaning and Visualisation
- Claim Fact-Checking
- Pre-Publication Legal Risk Review
- Source Protection Planning

Why Attend This Course:

- From sharing viral content after a quick look to verifying its origin, location and date with a repeatable OSINT routine
- From relying on press releases and official statements to building stories from records, ownership data and datasets
- From using AI tools informally to applying them with disclosure, human checks and clear limits
- From an unstructured story idea to a mini-investigation pitch backed by an evidence file, source plan and legal review

Conclusion:

Modern investigative reporting is the disciplined practice of proving what others prefer to keep hidden, using records, open sources and data, and publishing the result safely and fairly. The course makes three distinctions clear: misinformation versus disinformation, claim-based fact-checking versus pre-publication verification, and tasks that AI can assist versus decisions that stay with editors. It suits reporters, editors, producers, researchers and fact-checkers at intermediate level who already publish news and now need tested verification, data and security routines to take on deeper investigations.

Frequently Asked Questions FAQ:

What should a delegate know before a future of journalism and investigative reporting course?

Working experience of reporting, editing, producing or research, plus basic spreadsheet and smartphone skills, is enough. OSINT tools, data cleaning and security settings are demonstrated step by step before delegates use them in the exercises.

How does a future of journalism and investigative reporting course differ from a general media relations course?

It trains delegates to find, verify and publish evidence themselves, using open sources, records and data. Media relations courses focus on managing an organisation's messages and press contact, which this course treats only from the journalist's side.

Why does the future of journalism and investigative reporting depend on open-source verification?

Much evidence now appears first online as images, video, posts and public datasets. Open-source methods let reporters confirm origin, place and time independently, test official claims and detect manipulated media before it reaches audiences.

What does a delegate take back to work from a future of journalism and investigative reporting course?

A mini-investigation pitch built during the course, with its verified evidence file, interview and source plan, data findings and legal risk review, plus repeatable checklists for image verification, fact-checking and digital security, ready for the delegate's next story.