**Data state of mind**

**#1 rule: Data is a source**. Use the same rules we have for human sources. Is this source reliable? And how do you know that? What can and can’t this source tell us? Verify what this source tells you. Use more than one source.

**How to hone your data state of mind:**  
Find data sources on your beat. Take them “out for coffee.”

Frame story ideas as questions, not nouns.

Ask for underlying data when you encounter summary information.

Think about whether the summary data is enough. Does it provide the context you want?

**Finding data-driven ideas:**  
What did you write about a year or more ago? (i.e. programs that you could measure success/failure)

What are the big trends on your beat? Have they been supported by thorough, unbiased analysis?

What are the myths on your beat?

Steal ideas: Follow IRE’s Extra! Extra! Blog (or Twitter feed)

Visualize your data to get a new vantage point

**Requesting data:**  
Do some reporting or sleuthing about the data before making request. What’s in the data? What’s not?

Don’t ask for “lists” or “reports” – use terms like “machine-readable” or “database-friendly format such as Excel or delimited text.”

Don’t just ask for a few pieces of information. Think about context.

**Some go-to data sites:**

* [University of Minnesota Office of Institutional Research](http://www.oir.umn.edu/)
* [Minnesota Management and Budget](http://mn.gov/mmb/transparency-mn/)
* [Minnesota Dept of Education](http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Data/)
* [Minnesota Campaign Finance Board](http://www.cfbreport.state.mn.us/dataViewer/cfbsearch_disclaimer.html)
* [MN Election results](http://electionresults.sos.state.mn.us/)
* [MN Demographic Center](http://mn.gov/admin/demography/)
* [Met Council](http://www.metrocouncil.org/Data-and-Maps.aspx)
* [Minneapolis data portal](http://opendata.minneapolismn.gov/)
* [Minnesota Geospatial Commons](https://gisdata.mn.gov/)
* [CensusReporter](http://censusreporter.org/)
* [Census Bureau](http://www.census.gov/)
* [Bureau of Labor Statistics](http://www.bls.gov/)
* [Fatal Analysis Reporting System](http://www.nhtsa.gov/FARS)
* [D.O.D. Military surplus data](http://www.dispositionservices.dla.mil/EFOIA-Privacy/Pages/ereadingroom.aspx)
* [NOAA Storm Events](http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/stormevents/)
* [National Center for Education Statistics](http://nces.ed.gov/)
* [IPEDS (college data)](http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/)
* [U.S. Dept of Agriculture](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?navid=DATA_STATISTICS)

**Want to learn more?**

Read [“Data Literacy”](http://www.amazon.com/Data-Literacy-David-L-Herzog/dp/1483333469/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1429826903&sr=1-1&keywords=data+literacy+in+books) book by David Herzog, or [“Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide,”](http://store.ire.org/collections/frontpage/products/pre-order-computer-assisted-reporting-a-practical-guide-4th-edition) by Brant Houston.

Join #data channel on Slack

Learn how to “bulletproof” your data analysis. Guides are on my data training page: [**mjwebster.github.io/DataJ**](http://mjwebster.github.io/DataJ)

MaryJo Webster

[Maryjo.webster@startribune.com](mailto:Maryjo.webster@startribune.com)

@MaryJoWebster

612-673-1789