**Data journalism editing road map**

#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.

**Beat development:**

* Encourage reporters to find their data sources (add them to their Rolodex)
* Give reporters time to explore a dataset (“take it out for coffee”)

**Idea development:**

* Encourage reporters to frame ideas as questions, not nouns
* Ask your usual questions… How can we prove the key point? How can we measure/quantify that? …but think about whether data might be a source

**Requesting data:**

* Make sure reporter does some “reporting” or sleuthing about the data before making request
* 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.

**When the data arrives:**

* Encourage reporter to first come up with some questions and working theories
* Ask reporter some questions to get a feel for how well they understand the data. If they can’t answer confidently, encourage him/her to seek out help from expert(s)

**Questions you should be asking about the data:**

* What does each record represent? (What does this dataset include?)
* Is it possible that some things might not be included?
* What’s the time frame of the data?
* Are there any fields you don’t understand?
* Does it contain the fields of information you expected (and need for the analysis)?
* Does the data need to be “cleaned”?

**Analysis:**

* Encourage reporter to keep an analysis trail
* Sit down with the reporter, at least once, and have them show you the data and key parts of the analysis
* After analysis, have reporter write 2-3 graph summary to help find main points and the holes
* Expect more analysis will be needed after additional reporting
* Get digital and graphics people in the loop ASAP

**Vetting the findings:**

* Do the findings make sense? If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.
* Do findings line up with what sources are saying?
* Don’t be afraid to consult experts – ask them to review your methodology and findings
* Have critics/key sources reviewed the findings? (don’t wait until the last minute!)
* Have the reporter repeat the analysis

**Writing the story:**

* Avoid too many numbers in the text. Characterize the findings.
* Give readers the detail in graphics
* Do we have the necessary context? The “compared to what”?
* Are we portraying the results honestly and not making too much of it?

**Editing:**

* Do the math!
* Edit the digital content for usability, clarity, style, spelling/grammar and make sure it complements the story
* See bulletproofing guides on my training page for more

Data training materials: <http://mjwebster.github.io/DataJ>

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