

# Module 5: Data-Driven Stories

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STUDENT WORKBOOK

In this module, you will consider news stories from across the world where journalists collected, analyzed, and reported data-driven evidence to create an impact in public interest. With the information you have collected, you will learn how to organize your data, develop data-driven interview questions and then transform that information into powerful data storytelling with a strong lead and effective structure. You will also review the basics and a few examples of solution journalism – that uses data to outline potential solutions to problems.

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## Getting Started



What began with a mother's complaint, that her baby died of negligence, mushroomed into an appalling exposé of conditions at a local hospital. Three reporters from the Daily Dispatch revealed hundreds of needless neo-natal deaths at Frere Hospital, in Eastern Cape in South Africa. In a series published in 2007, the team revealed that alarming numbers of newborns were dying at the hospital, caused by a litany of abject conditions: negligence, staff shortages, incompetence, equipment shortages, and poor infection control. In one case, the reporters documented a case of a cleaning lady delivering a baby. Refer to the following reports:

- <http://www.journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/12julyfrere.pdf>
- <http://www.journalism.co.za/wp-content/uploads/13julyfere.pdf>

The initial response by national officials was not promising. The deputy health minister promptly declared the situation a “national emergency” -- and she was forced to resign. The South African President branded the story “false” while his Health Minister called it “lies.” The ministry even published a full-page ad to refute the allegations. But outrage was building. “We do not wish to destroy an institution which is vital to our community, but it is our responsibility to place the terrible facts we have discovered in the public domain,” the Dispatch wrote in an editor’s note. “The tragedy taking place at Frere has to end today.” Top officials soon had a change of heart. Ten days after the story broke, the Health Minister announced a series of sweeping reforms for the hospital, including a ten-fold increase in its maintenance budget, a program to hire extra nurses and doctors (and pay them better), an additional maternity ward, and new equipment that included fetal heart monitors and incubators. Refer to:

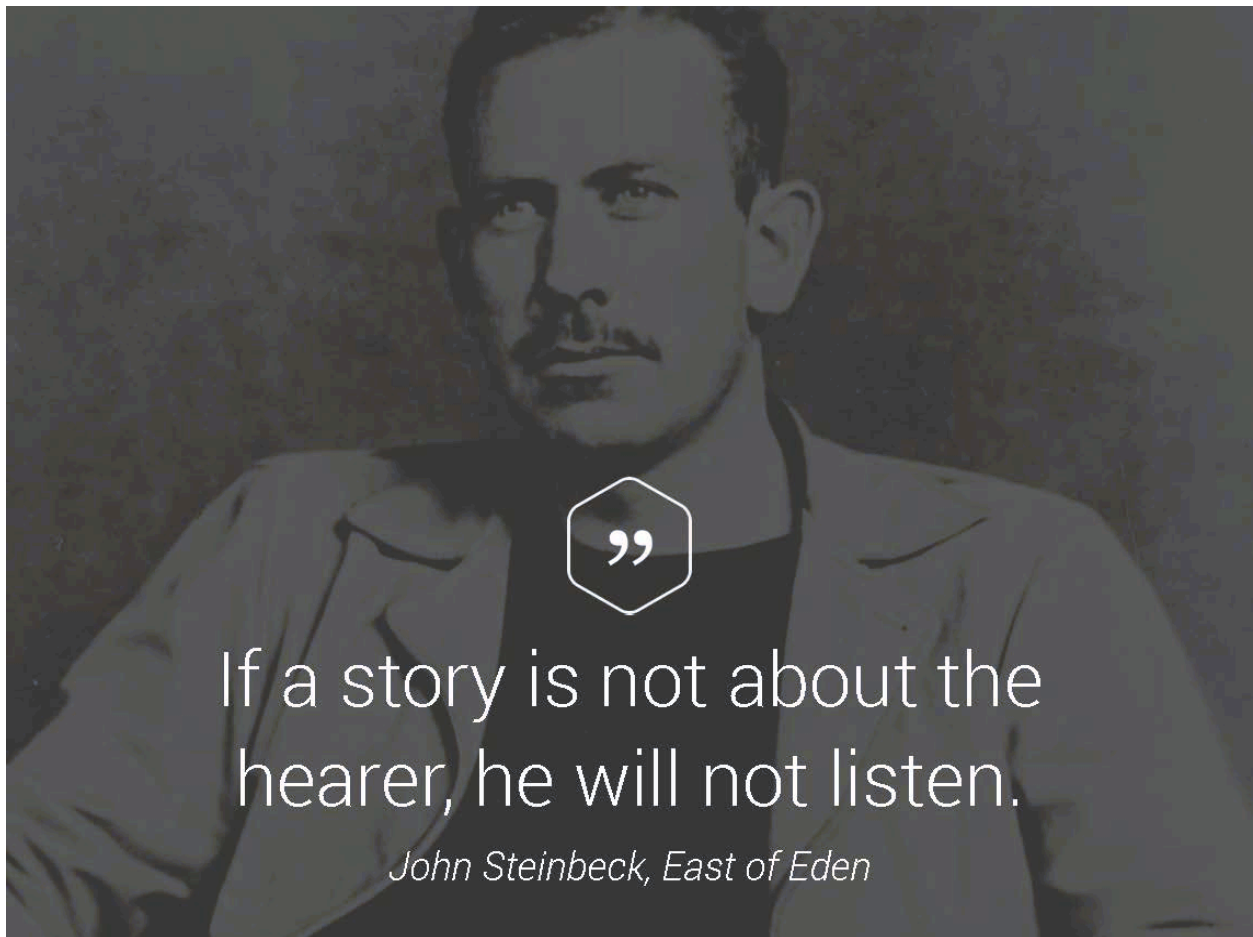
<http://impact.gijn.org/case-studies/why-freres-babies-die-south-africa/>

Despite the deluge of newly released data that can expose cases like the situation in the Frere maternity wards, the stories rarely get out and even more rarely result in sweeping public policy change. We will look at a few key elements that some of the most successful cases have in common and how to apply those strategies to our own stories.

## Lesson 1: Reaching your Audience

In general, the goal of open data stories are:

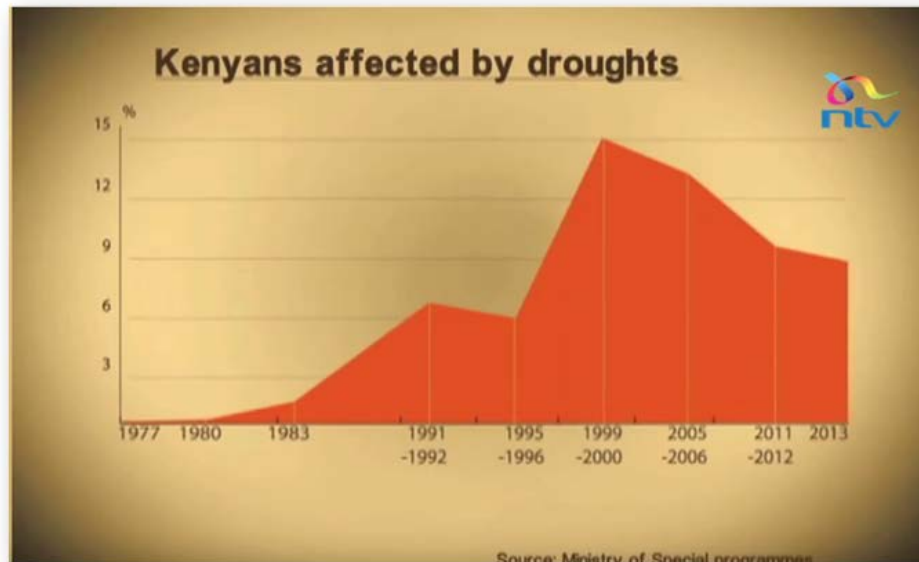
- Widespread public debate
- Overcoming indifference or inertia by stakeholders
- Engaging public, politicians and donors.
- Demand for more data from government by citizens for better governance



In order to do this successfully, choosing a correct vehicle for dissemination is crucial.

Let's look at two examples.

### Example 1: When Sun Sets in Turkana



**Watch:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ga8CEYVALo4>

The lead news story on NTV, one of the most watched news programs, on January 21, 2014 in Kenya revealed that malnutrition in children is a growing problem in Kenya and that diverting funds from emergency food aid to food security programs could end the problem for good.

#### Impact

In response to public outrage and an outpouring of public donations, the government released \$27 million dollars for humanitarian relief and sent teams to dig more boreholes, the drought relief strategy, which had been drafted but never implemented, was revisited and donors requested access to her data to develop a more effective aid strategy.

#### Key factors

- Dissemination on a primetime national news program seen by hundreds of thousands of viewers.
- Long-form narrative driven storytelling engaged the public's sympathy and prompted Kenyan citizens to donate tens of thousands of dollars for the cause
- Viewed by politicians and donors of humanitarian aid in Turkana alike, both government and donors called the journalist to access her data.

## Example 2: Aqua Final

**Read:** <http://labs.tribune.com.pk/aqua-final/>

*"We believe that understanding the system of hydrants and water tankers, and not just chasing numbers, brings us closer to tackling the problem."*

### 1. Introduction

**Hypothesis:**

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**Questions and Answers**

**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Character:**

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## 2. The debate over stealing from mains or drawing groundwater

**Hypothesis:**

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**Questions and Answers**

**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Character:**

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### **3. KW&SB's Frankenstein and the birth of a tanker Hydra**

**Hypothesis:**

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**Questions and Answers**

**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Character:**

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#### **4. Not just the hydrants but hidden theft, weak pipes**

**Hypothesis:**

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**Questions and Answers**

**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Character:**

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### 5. Bad budgets and bribes

**Hypothesis:**

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**Questions and Answers**

**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Q:-**

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**A:**

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**Character:**

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## Lesson 2: Data Driven Interviews

Data-driven interviews are very different from interviews for a regular news story. In the case of regular interviews, you may know very little about the topic you are covering and are relying on your sources to provide you with basic information and explanation. In the case of a data-driven interview, you are an expert in the topic and you are conducting interviews to help explain, illustrate and explore the issue at a deeper level. The data findings drive the interview. The interviews should always take place after the analysis is complete.

### Objectives

- Illustrate the human impact of the trend identified in the data
- Explore the reasons behind the trend identified in the data
- Seek accountability for negative trends in the data
- Compare and contrast groups doing badly and groups doing well
- Explore data-driven solutions
- Get more data!

### Types of Interviews

- Impact Interviews

- Explanatory interviews
- Accountability Interviews
- Solution Interviews

### Impact Interview

- These are primarily interviews with victims
- Show how the data issue affects real people
- Illustrate the contributing factors leading to the trend
- Introduce the cast of characters involved in the issue
- Get the readers' attention to keep them reading

### Example

In the case of the domestic violence story, we have found out what age group is most likely to report domestic violence, what type of abuse is most reported, and how the majority of the cases are resolved. You will want to seek out a victim who is “typical”: of the most common age group, victim of the most common crime and whose case got solved in mediation. These are questions you might ask her:

1. Our research shows that women of your age are reporting domestic violence at a higher rate and that cases of torture, like you experienced, are being reported most often. Please tell us about your experience in reporting your case.
2. What challenges did you face once you reported what was happening to you?
3. Our research shows that most cases get solved in mediation, not court. Why do you think that is? What barriers did you face when trying to take your case to court?
4. What to you advise the justice system to improve the situation for women?

### Explanatory Interviews

- Talk to experts who can explain why the trend you identified is happening
- Be sure to get a variety of expert sources: government, CSOs and academics
- Always ask if they have data to back up their explanations

- Ask about all the possible reasons that the trend is happening and what further research is needed.

### Example

In the domestic violence case, you may speak with an NGO that specializes in helping domestic violence victims get justice and assistance. You will want to speak to an NGO that is aware of the data and has adjusted its efforts to assist women. These are some possible questions:

- Our research shows that there are high rates of domestic violence cases being reported for torture but few cases for child marriage, which we know is a common phenomenon. Why do you think that is?
- Do you have data that shows factors related to reporting of domestic violence cases?
- Why do you think so many cases end up in mediation instead of court and what is your role during the mediation process?
- What initiative have you heard about to increase prosecution of perpetrators?

### Accountability Interviews

- Talk to all the officials who were responsible for the issue and get their side of the story.
- Present to them the specific findings and give them a chance to explain.
- Ask for data to justify any explanations or excuses they may provide.
- Check the numbers they mention during the interview after.
- Stay away from open-ended questions; use your data findings in all your questions so they cannot make excuses.

### Example

For the domestic violence story, speak with a government official who is in charge of implementing the domestic violence law and prosecuting cases of domestic violence nation-wide. This is an opportunity to find out why the process is broken and why so few cases go to court.

- Mr. Prosecutor, the data provided by the UN shows that Afghanistan has a very high-reported rates of domestic violence but one of the lowest rates of conviction of cases. Can you explain the challenges you have in prosecuting cases?

- The national budget shows you have received a budget to hire attorneys to prosecute cases. Can you explain why so few cases go to court and why there are so few court cases on important domestic violence issues such as child marriage?
- Do you have any plans to improve performance? Do you have benchmarks to measure progress?

### Solution Interviews

- Talk to experts who helped design a long-term strategy to address the issue you are investigating
- Talk to the organizations on-the-ground who are implementing the solution
- Talk to people who were impacted by the issue 10 years ago and those who were recently impacted and compare their experiences
- Talk to international expert who can make global comparisons

### Example

When investigating legal failings that are causing a trend, as is the case with the domestic violence story, choose an expert who helped design the solution for an interview. This could be a lawmaker, judge or ministry official who knows about the design of the program from the start.

- You were one of the authors of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women. Can you give us your perspective on the successes and challenges of implementation?
- Our data shows that more women are settling their cases outside of the courts. Can you explain how to get more of those cases back into the justice system?
- What is a long-term solution to this problem?
- What do you hope to see in the data in 10 years?

### Exercise

#### Read

1. <http://labs.tribune.com.pk/attack-on-education/>
2. Spending bonanza: PPP spent Rs125b to win votes. It failed  
<https://tribune.com.pk/story/852168/buying-loyalty-ppp-spent-rs125b-in-unprecedented-spending-bonanza-to-curry-favours-and-win-votes-it-failed/>

Based on the data findings, identify an interviewee and write a data-driven interview question for each type of interview.

**Impact Interviews**

*Interviewee:*

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Question 1

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Question 2

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Question 3

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Question 4

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Question 5

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### Explanatory interviews

*Interviewee:*

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#### Question 1

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#### Question 2

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#### Question 3

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#### Question 4

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Question 5

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Accountability Interviews

*Interviewee:*

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Question 1

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Question 2

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Question 3

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Question 4

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Question 5

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Solution Interviews

*Interviewee:*

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Question 1

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Question 2

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Question 3

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## Question 4

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## Question 5

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## Lesson 4: Anatomy of a Data Story

Once you have your data in logical order, it is time to integrate it with the other information for your story. Here are several data story structures that are especially well suited for data storytelling.

Before you begin organizing your data story, remember the objective of data stories:

- Data shows us contrasts
- Data reveals startling outliers
- Data shows us invisible connections
- Data lets us test hypotheses

Also, keep in mind the type of data you have collected:

- Problem questions: how big is the problem? How expensive is it? Is the problem getting better or worse?
- Impact questions: Who is affected by the problem? How? Are some groups more affected than others?
- Cause questions: What are the causes of the problem? What factors have made it worse?
- Solution questions: What is the solution to the problem? How can we measure effectiveness?

## Chronological

This is ideal for trend stories in which you are tracking the evolution over an issue over time. This allows the author to allow the data issue to unfold over time and explain how the roots of the issue have led to the current situation, examine the impact and project out to the future.

1. Lead with a specific case study
2. Explain history of issue
3. Focus on the scope of the story
4. Examine reasons behind what is happening in the story
5. Zero in on the impact of what is happening
6. Identify any contrary forces working against what is happening
7. Explain the future if the trend (or issue or event) continues as it is in the present.

Example: The Last Person You'd Expect to Die in Childbirth, ProPublica and NPR

<http://www.npr.org/2017/05/12/527806002/focus-on-infants-during-childbirth-leaves-u-s-moms-in-danger>

## Compare and contrast

When trying to illustrate divergent case studies based on data, compare and contrast can be an effective way to orient the audience and help them understand how decisions made in two different locations or for two different groups led to drastically different outcomes.

1. Lead features a startling contrast between two groups from the analysis. This can be, for example, a very successful initiative versus a very unsuccessful initiative that started under roughly the same conditions.
2. Explain the common history of the issue.
3. Illustrate the drastically different decisions that led to divergent results.
4. Explore systematically the impact contrasting the consequences for the two groups.
5. Project out how the groups will continue to grow apart without intervention
6. Explore potential solutions to bring the two groups closer together

Example: Machine Bias, ProPublica <https://www.propublica.org/article/machine-bias-risk-assessments-in-criminal-sentencing>

**Step-by-step through a problem or issue**

For complex system stories, sorting the data can require outlining the entire problem and breaking down data findings by each step in the process to explain the situation.

1. Lead: illustrative example of the multiple failings of the system being studied.
2. Context: provide background information on the issue as well as information sources for the story.
3. Break down each component of the issue, explaining each in its own section with illustrative examples to give each step a distinct human face.
4. End with an examination of possibilities for comprehensive solutions to fix an extremely flawed system and the merits of each approach.

Example: Fail Factories, Tampa Bay Times

<http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/chart-failing-black-students/>

**Exercise****Part I**

Read these stories and identify the story structure:

1. <http://labs.tribune.com.pk/aqua-final/>

Structure: \_\_\_\_\_

2. <http://labs.tribune.com.pk/attack-on-education/>

Structure: \_\_\_\_\_

3. <http://postandcourier.com/app/till-death/index.html>

Structure: \_\_\_\_\_

4. <http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/text-messages-save-lives-in-state-with-highest-maternal-deaths-25381>

Structure: \_\_\_\_\_

5. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/investigations/unfounded-sexual-assault-canada-main/article33891309/>

Structure: \_\_\_\_\_

6. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/finance-bill-minor-legislative-tweaks-prompt-major-fears-for-democracy-s-future/story-YwIAiVs71ZF3pcM4pm94LP.html>

Structure: -

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7. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMx5IRHbw3g>

Structure:

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## Part II

1. Open your Story Form for your most recent story
2. Write each piece of analysis on a separate post-it (you should have 5-10 post-its)
3. Get in a group with another person
4. Read aloud your hypothesis and each finding on the post its to the other person
5. The other person should listen and together decide on the best story structure.
6. Choose how to order the data, and stick each post-it in the order according to one of the structures above

## Lesson 3: Data-Driven Leads

People hear statistics. They feel stories. Keep this in mind as you begin writing your story. You will have all your data points in order, your interviews completed, all your information structured into your chosen story format. The first sentence of your story matters more than all the following sentences. A good lead can mean the difference between whether or not people give your story a chance. We will look at several different types of leads that can ensure audience engagement from the beginning. They should all be Clear, Compelling and Concise.

### Objectives of a lead

- Prioritize the issue over the number
- Show the impact of the numbers
- Tell a human story instead of just statistics

- Surprise the audience
- Grab the readers' attention

## Number Leads

Number leads put the statistics right up at front, but in a way that people can understand the impact of the issue. The numbers may be referred to directly or indirectly.

### Good Number Leads

1. *4 In 5 Indians Die Without Doctors Knowing Why.* – [IndiaSpend, India](#)
2. *Girls are undergoing female genital mutilation (FGM) at increasingly younger ages and suffering more severe injuries, even if the practice is increasingly unpopular.* – [The Nation, Kenya](#)

In both examples, the subject of the story are the people, not the number, drawing attention to the human impact of the issue.

### Bad Number Leads

1. *With 10% of 3.63 trillion medicines popped worldwide in 2015, India is the world's third-largest medicine market. It stands to scientific reason that these drugs will have side effects. Yet, in 2013, India reported no more than 2% of globally occurring adverse drug reactions (ADRs), jargon for side effects of medicines, logged in [Vigibase](#), a database maintained by the Uppsala Monitoring Centre, a World Health Organisation collaborating centre for international drug monitoring.*
2. *In the first eleven months of 2015, Croatian commodity exports expressed in kuna rose by 11.5 percent compared to the same period a year earlier, while imports grew by 7.1 percent, reported today the State Bureau of Statistics, [reports Vecernji List](#) on February 8, 2016.*
3. *Exports of handicrafts from the country grew by 3 percent from US\$ 2,215 million during April-December 2014 to US\$ 2,282 million during April-December 2015, data released by Ministry of Textiles shows.*

In all three cases, the journalist makes some common mistakes:

- The numbers are not simplified so people have no way of knowing whether the numbers are good or bad.
- There are too many numbers



- There is no human angle illustrating the human impact of the data.

## Anecdotal Leads

Anecdotal leads tell a brief human story to illustrate how the issue affects real citizens. Effective anecdotal leads capture a moment in the lives of those effected in simple, vivid language.

### Good Anecdotal Leads

*Her pale, yellow eyes stood out against her dusky skin, and the grief was visible on the face of the young woman from a tribe of traditional honey gatherers living on the edge of south Karnataka's Nagarhole National Park. Shanta (she uses only one name) recounted how her baby, a boy, was born dead. When she felt labour pains, she travelled by autorickshaw 20 km to the nearest district hospital at Hunsur, where they told her the baby had died in her womb, two days ago. Shanta—in her mid 20s—was diagnosed with gestational diabetes, a condition that endangers the baby if the mother is not diagnosed and treated. —[IndiaSpend, India](#)*

### Bad Anecdotal Leads

*On chilly nights this fall, tens of thousands of unsuspecting California homeowners will turn on attic furnaces similar to those that fire investigators say sparked numerous catastrophic blazes across the state over the last 10 years.*

*Federal safety experts and furnace makers and distributors have known for years that horizontal attic furnaces manufactured by Consolidated Industries ignited dozens of fires in single-family residences, townhomes and condominiums from San Jose to San Diego.*

In the first case, we get to know a specific person affected by the issue and her brief, painful story. In the second example, we hear about a generic, ordinary family having a not very surprising problem.

## Scene-Setting Leads

Scene-setting leads create a vivid image of a specific place and time so the audience feels what it is like to be there. This is especially effective if location is especially important to understanding the data story and relating to the environment.

### Good Scene-Setting Leads

*Karubamba, Rwanda—Nobody lives here anymore.*

*Not the expectant mothers huddled outside the maternity clinic, not the families squeezed into the church, not the man who lies rotting in a schoolroom beneath a chalkboard map of Africa.*

*Everybody here is dead. Karubamba is a vision from hell, a flesh-and-bone junkyard of human wreckage, an obscene slaughterhouse that has fallen silent save for the roaring buzz of flies the size of honeybees. – [The Associated Press](#)*

### Bad Scene-Setting Leads

*In the dark living space lay reams and reams of dark red wool. In this room, generations of Abed's relatives had woven traditional carpets, carpets that were now piling up against the walls.*

In the first example, the description of loss and absence is striking along with the disturbing sensory description of what remains. A scene setting lead must paint a striking picture to be effective. In the second example, the scene is not very surprising and describes a scene that many people are familiar with.

### Exercise

For each example identify the type of lead and decide whether it is a good or bad lead for a data story.

1. <http://labs.tribune.com.pk/aqua-final/>

Lead Type: \_\_\_\_\_

2. <http://labs.tribune.com.pk/attack-on-education/>

Lead Type: \_\_\_\_\_

3. <http://postandcourier.com/app/till-death/index.html>

Lead Type: \_\_\_\_\_

4. <http://www.tampabay.com/projects/2015/investigations/pinellas-failure-factories/chart-failing-black-students/>

Lead Type: \_\_\_\_\_

5. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04kw8tb>

Lead Type: \_\_\_\_\_

6. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/investigations/unfounded-sexual-assault-canada-main/article33891309/>

Lead Type: \_\_\_\_\_

7. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/finance-bill-minor-legislative-tweaks-prompt-major-fears-for-democracy-s-future/story-YwIAiVs71ZF3pcM4pm94LP.html>

Lead Type: \_\_\_\_\_

<http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/text-messages-save-lives-in-state-with-highest-maternal-deaths-25381> Lead

Type: \_\_\_\_\_

## Lesson 4: Data-Driven Writing

When choosing a structure, keep in mind the most important thing is to clearly explain the issue to your audience.

- Writing with a sense of the audience as citizens who, armed with information, can take action.
- Writing in a conversational voice, including the use of an empathetic character.
- Writing at a slow enough pace to promote comprehensibility and learning.
- Use of simple, but effective data visualization.

Case Study: <http://www.npr.org/2017/05/12/527806002/focus-on-infants-during-childbirth-leaves-u-s-moms-in-danger>

### Tips for Data Journalism Writing<sup>1</sup>

- Envision a general audience.
- Tell it to “Mom.”
- Slow down the pace of information.
- Introduce new characters or difficult concepts one at a time.
- Recognize the value of repetition.
- Don’t clutter leads.
- Use simple sentences.
- Remember numbers can be numbing.
- Think graphics.
- Translate jargon.
- Use analogies.
- Look for the human side.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.poynter.org/2014/a-new-explanatory-journalism-can-be-built-on-a-strong-foundation/244285/>

- Develop a chronology.
- Reward the reader.
- Consider the impact.
- Announce difficult concepts.
- Cut unnecessary information.
- Compile lists.

### Good Example

Foreign debt is simply the money that a government owes either to other countries, or private individuals and organizations that belong to other countries. Almost every country in the world borrows money from other countries, regardless of whether the country is rich or not. Because the world economy is so inter-connected, it is sometimes easier for a government to borrow from other countries than to borrow domestically. Borrowing on a state level is not unlike borrowing individually: cash becomes immediately available; it allows for expenses to be paid when one does not have the spending power. But the drawbacks are also similar: high interest rates imposed by loan sharks, and eventual bankruptcy (among countries, it's known as default) if the debt isn't paid. There's nothing necessarily wrong with borrowing - as long as one is able to pay the money (with interest) back on time. –[The Express Tribune Explains Foreign Debt](#)

### Bad Example

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves fell around 2% to \$22.03 billion in the week ended February 3, 2017, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) reported on Thursday. The central bank, however, avoided giving reasons for the decline this week. In the prior week, the bank had attributed the then decrease mainly to external debt servicing, including \$500 million loan repayment to State Administration of Foreign Exchange, China. According to details, the reserves held with the central bank decreased \$376 million to \$17.21 billion in the under review week. Also, the reserves held with banks other than SBP dropped \$27.6 million to \$4.81 billion during the week. --[sbp data: Foreign reserves fall 2% week-on-week](#)

### Exercise

Open one of the data stories you have written during the fellowship. Pick an especially dense paragraph and try to re-write it to be more engaging and understandable. If you can't find an example, pick a story from Pakistani media that ran this week.

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## Lesson 5: Solution Journalism

The data that provides in-depth documentation of the problem is important, but so is the data that outlines potential solutions: policy changes, legislation, investigations, or programs that data shows could help remedy the issue. Here is an example.

### Example:

Text Messages Save Lives In State With Highest Maternal Deaths

<http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/text-messages-save-lives-in-state-with-highest-maternal-deaths-25381>

List the problem data

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List the cause data

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List the impact data

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List the solution data

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## How Can Journalist tell Solution Stories

Here are some Tips for producing solution journalism:

- Look for “positive deviants,” the best performers in a category, in addition to the worst performers. By comparing the two, readers can better understand both problems and solutions.
- If the problem is widely known, you don’t have to spend time elaborating on the issue. If you’re reporting on bedbugs, you could jump right to how the city is addressing the pest problem.
- If you’re doing an investigative series, try including a solutions story at the end. It enriches the series and allows it to end on a more engaging note.
- The solution you report on doesn’t have to be the solution to the problem. Try narrowing your definition of solution to one aspect of a problem.
- Look at how a physical location has improved over time. What changes were made that could have caused this improvement? Stories like that offer important insights for comparable locations.

For more, refer to the **Solution Journalism Toolkit**: <http://solutionsjournalism.org/tools/solutions-journalism-toolkit/>

## Exercise

Review the following news examples, and answer the following questions.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/medical-program-helps-ease-strain-on-short-staffed-hospitals\\_us\\_566212d4e4b072e9d1c648d9?9lsj1yvi](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/medical-program-helps-ease-strain-on-short-staffed-hospitals_us_566212d4e4b072e9d1c648d9?9lsj1yvi)

<http://www.indiaspend.com/cover-story/why-india-needs-more-male-health-workers-to-tackle-maternal-health-crisis-45432>

**Answer the following questions:**

- What does traditional investigation: making phone calls, documenting, conducting field research, following trails of people, documents and money reveal?
- What does data access and analysis contribute to the story?
- What does the data visualization contribute?
- What stakeholders are implicated?
- What solutions are proposed? Are they backed by data?
- What issues should be tracked?

Pakistan Education In-Depth

Choose a section from this series:

<https://medium.com/millennialpk/beyond-classroom-7d98922814ab>

<https://medium.com/millennialpk/in-depth-community-colleges-can-help-pakistan-5a9a453212a6>

Write a hypothesis that focuses on solving one of the problems using data:

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