

James Benedict



24 deaths — up until three months ago this was the closest you could get to know the truth about how many people died due to a Taser. But this number, compiled by the company that markets Taser as a non-lethal tool, ignored another 129 people the **Reuters** national desk and I identified as being killed by the device.

The only way to hold institutions accountable is by doing your due diligence and having the spine to stand by your findings — even when those in power try to spin the facts. Our work at Reuters created the first comprehensive database of Taser related deaths, a necessary step to change the narrative and show the consequences of a company pushing self-serving falsehoods.

For complex, data rich stories a reader shouldn't have to fight against the story's medium make sense of it. I've worked hard to be well rounded so I can tell a story in whichever way serves the reader best.

I've received awards for telling stories with **graphics, tools, pictures** and **data**. I have extensive professional experience with responsive web development, data visualization and user interface design. I've worked on data-driven investigative series that blend traditional reporting with programming skills like Python, SQL and Excel.

Working alongside another reporter on a story about the **opioid crisis**, I was able to show the big picture by finding and visualizing multiple datasets while she focused on individuals' narratives. Additionally, I lead the data team responsible for a first of its kind analysis of **campaign finance** in Indiana, where I had to do extensive cleaning to categorize the nearly one billion dollars spent between 2000-2015. Unsurprisingly, this was not the only time I've had to clean data. At Reuters, when the Los Angeles police gave us dirty data I was able to clean it with Python in a fraction of the time it would have taken by hand. Another time as we were running up against deadline, I was able to automate part of my reporting by using Python to search through hundreds of pages of PDFs while I called police departments simultaneously.

I've worked on multiple stories involving Indiana University's administration where I used clear design to make a complicated situation understandable to the reader. When the university waited six weeks to notify the police about an alleged sexual assault I created a **timeline** to document every step of the investigation, as well as a custom website that improved the user's experience reading a long article. For another story which questioned the value of installing more emergency police beacons, I **mapped** campus crime data with the location of the beacons. This gave our story credibility because it showed empirically that these beacons were not being installed in crime dense areas.

Beyond telling stories, I've used my programming knowledge to address institutional inefficiencies. As the Indiana Daily Student's digital director, I developed a web design **template** that allowed others to focus on designing and not debugging. More than fifteen designers used this to learn to code, and it is now integral to the most advanced visual storytelling class at Indiana University's Media School. I've developed other **software** to help teams I've worked on, like an image sorter for the Society for News Design's annual book, which saved us a week of busy work.

I'm committed to writing clear documentation, and taking time to educate because cooperation produces better work than competition. If hired, I would make more tools that allow non-experts to solve problems with data, graphics and web design.

I believe the first duty of journalism is to hold those in power accountable by establishing facts. The school system is often able to stay out of the headlines, but it shouldn't be exempt from the same scrutiny other institutions are subjected to. If hired, I would love to find, clean and visualize data in order to show how school systems succeed and where they fall short.

I want to better my world by making it more understandable. I'm a self-motivated learner who enjoys experimentation almost as much I love telling stories. My versatility would allow me to contribute to your team wherever is needed most today, as well as approach stories in innovative ways. I am well prepared for this position because of my background in design, programming and reporting.

Thank you in advance for considering my application for the Data Visualization Developer and I hope to hear from you soon.