

# 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.

Creating clear journalism has never been more important than it is today with the amount of misinformation available. A story's medium should be whatever is easiest for the reader to understand, so I've worked hard to be a well-rounded journalist. Like you, I have a hard time naming exactly what I do, but I can tell you with certainty what I'm trying to accomplish. I remove the noise around an issue to find a compelling story and then tell that story in whatever format serves it 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 multiple **data-driven** investigative **series** that blend traditional reporting with programming skills like Python, SQL and Excel. I have a number of tools at my disposal, and know how to use them together to find and tell a story. 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.

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. A tool is only useful if it is actually understood, and there should be intentional efforts to bridge the gap between programmers and others in a newsroom.

As a listener and resident, WYNC clearly allows its journalists to experiment and have fun, but never to forget that their work will affect our community. The new Radiolab is often a highlight of my week. It proves you can make even the most serious stories approachable and enjoyable if they're told well. I would love to learn more ways to make the news accessible without dumbing it down from your talented colleagues that excel at this.

If hired, I would enjoy continuing to report on **police use of force** or the amount of **national money in local elections**. I believe the first duty of journalism is to hold those in power accountable by seeing through their spin and establishing facts. I would be immensely grateful to do this with an organization as important to their community as WYNC is to New York.

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 my stories in innovative ways.

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