

James Benedict



“Mzungu, you’re famous now,” the group of boda boda drivers shouted at me laughing and pointing to their radios as I left the station house. Mzungu, a Bantu term for foreigner, became my unofficial name the month I spent **reporting on HIV** medicine shortages for the ‘Daily Monitor,’ Uganda’s largest independent newspaper. When a district official continued to claim there was no evidence of a shortage, I confronted him with my photos of trash bags filled with medicine days from expiration outside of the clinic.

Without being there, we would have never discovered how reality differed from the official story. The only way to bring about accountability is by doing your due diligence and having the spine to stand by your findings — even if those in power try to spin the facts.

Creating clear explanatory journalism has never been more important than today with the amount of misinformation spreading. An approachable layout is necessary for an accessible story, and graphics have the power to make the complicated and abstract tangible. I would love to learn from all the talented Wall Street Journal journalists already excelling at this.

This is not to say I wouldn’t make a meaningful contribution to your team. I am a versatile visual reporter who has received awards for telling stories with **graphics, data, layout, pictures** and **words**. A journalist should be able to tell a story with whichever medium serves it best, so I’ve worked hard to be well rounded.

My first job after graduation was reporting with the Reuters national desk on **an investigative series** where I met tight deadlines, populated a database, and bulletproofed a story about a litigious company. I have extensive professional experience with responsive web development and javascript. My work as a photographer trained me to never forget about color and composition. I excelled in my programming courses that used d3, Python, and SQL. I design a story to its strength, whether that is visualizing a complicated dataset, selecting the perfect photo package or altering the user interface to improve retention on mobile.

Beyond telling stories, I’ve used programming to address institutional inefficiencies. As the Indiana Daily Student’s digital director, I found that other designers weren’t producing digital content at my standards. Instead of micromanaging their projects, I developed an **educational template** which allowed them to focus on designing and not debugging. More than fifteen designers learned to code using this, and it is now integral to the most advanced visual storytelling classes at Indiana University’s Media School.

I’ve developed other software to help other teams, like a **Python image sorter** for the Society for News Design’s annual book, which saved the team a week of busy work.

I’m committed to always write **clear documentation** and take time to educate others 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.

If hired, I could report on **police use of force**, the **opioid crisis**, or the amount of **national money in local elections**. I’d also love to help explain the staggering amount of news breaking daily in our capital. The last story I reported with Reuters was about Taser usage, which reaffirmed my commitment to look past the spin and try to uncover the true story.

I want to better my world by making it a more accountable and understandable place. I’m a self-motivated learner who does my best work in a fast paced environment. My versatility separates me from the pack and would allow me to contribute to your team wherever is needed most today.

Please accept my application for the Graphics Editor. Thank you in advance for considering me for the job.