


Data release-driven

Timescale: 1 day
Angles: scale, change, ranking
Length: 100-300 words


These story ideas come from scheduled data releases, typically by public bodies. You can identify these in advance and plan ahead, but might also react on the day if you are able to work quickly.

The public nature of the release means you will normally need to write the story within the same day, focusing on angles such as scale, ranking and change which are less technically challenging.

The newsworthiness of the story resides in the newness of the data, even if the period covered was some time ago.



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News-driven

Timescale: 1-3 days
Angles: all
Length: 300-800 words


These story ideas are sparked by events in the news which raise the question “How common is this?” “Is it getting worse?” “Which areas are most affected?” “Is this policy/claim/initiative justified?”

The limited topicality of the subject means you will normally need to write the story within a few days — but repeated events prolong the timescale.

The newsworthiness of the story resides in ‘moving the story on’ from the event to the wider issues that it is shining a light on. For example a flooding could lead to a piece on the rise in flooding, or spending on it.



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Example-driven

Timescale: varies
Angles: any
Length: varies


These story ideas come from taking a previous data story and replicating it for another place, period, or category/sector.

Timescales vary: if you are doing a local angle on a national data story you’ll need to do it quickly while it’s still newsworthy; while updated FOI stories will take at least 5 weeks. Replicating a story for another sector may involve obstacles.

Bear in mind what made the story newsworthy in the first place, and whether it will still be newsworthy when you’ll be ready to publish.



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Question-driven

Timescale: 1-52 weeks
Angles: any
Length: 300 words+


These story ideas come from a question, hunch or hypothesis, such as “How does X vary around the world?” or “Is there a relationship between X and Y?”

Question-driven stories rely on data being available to answer the question, so be prepared to abandon the idea if you can’t find the data or the story doesn’t justify the time involved in compiling it.

The story may need a topical hook, so consider what events might make it newsworthy in the future, but really quirky questions can be timeless.



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Exclusivity-driven

Timescale: 1-52 weeks
Angles: varies
Length: varies


These stories are sparked by a dataset which other journalists don’t have access to — perhaps because access is given exclusively (e.g. a leak or partnership) or because an info source can be scraped.

You will need to decide if the time required to scrape the data is justified by the potential story. Data which has been provided may also need time to be confirmed through other sources, or to be cleaned.

Exclusivity will be a key part of newsworthiness, indicated by the second part of the intro which may say ‘according to data obtained by [publication]’



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Tip-off-driven

Timescale: varies
Angles: any
Length: varies


These story ideas come from someone else: they might suggest you look into something, raise a question/complaint or pass on an idea.

Tip-off stories rely on data being available to answer the question, so be prepared to abandon the idea if you can’t find the data or the story doesn’t justify the time involved in compiling it.

The newsworthiness of the story most often lies in what it “reveals”, but make sure that the revelation justifies the work involved.



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Play-driven

Timescale: 1-52 weeks
Angles: exploratory
Length: varies

These story ideas are often rooted in passion and a desire to create interactive tools and visualisations to invite others to explore a field and discover insights.

It often involves compiling data that didn’t exist before, or visualising it in exciting new ways, so expect it to be more time-consuming and technically demanding than you plan for, and consider if the subject will justify the work involved.

The newsworthiness of the story lies in its call to action, e.g. “explore”, and the motivation of fans to explore the topic (e.g. culture and sport)



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