[Understanding Data in the Digital Age | Stats and Stories Episode 70 /November 15, 2018](https://statsandstories.net/media1/2018/11/15/understanding-data-in-the-digital-age-stats-and-stories-episode-70)

Mark Hansen offers prescriptions for journalism and stats majors aspiring to become data journalists.

He suggests that journalists develop basic coding and statistical skills to scrape data from the Internet and present it in a meaningful way. I have seen that it is very easy for code to go awry and often difficult to recognize when it has. Nooby data journalists will need someone to look over their shoulders alert to systematic errors.

Somehow, it strikes me that scraping data from the Internet can be very like looking for a key under a street lamp because that’s where the light is. The hard work of journalism often consists of extracting information from hard copy public records, contracts, and government regulations furnished by unhelpful sources. This poses problems more of data representation than statistical analysis. This calls more for database than coding skills. ( David Fahrenthold connects the dots escaping from Trump world for the Washington Post. See his [NPR interview](https://www.npr.org/2019/09/05/757867502/from-mar-a-lago-to-trump-hotels-reporter-says-trump-profits-as-president). )

Hansen says that statisticians were brought up as consultants to stand back from collecting and interpreting data, deferring to subject matter experts. Data journalism will call on them to get their hands dirty and will give them license to not only collect and analyze data, but also to ask questions, draw inferences that matter, and become agents of change. Nevertheless, the ratio of crusading journalists to purveyors of public relations is small. Of all the stats majors aspiring to become data journalists creating visualizations that will change the world, how many will wind up applying lipstick on pigs?

I was disappointed that Hansen did not elaborate on the narrative power of data. Humans are attuned to listening to stories. They are easily confused navigating more than two dimensions. I had hoped to hear more insights like those of Hans Rosling.