

# Journalists' Information Gathering Tools

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*Three tools to find info for stories – interviews, observation, background research*

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**JOURNALISTS** investigate and report on events, issues and trends for the mass audiences of print, broadcast and online media such as newspapers, magazines and books, radio and television stations and networks, and blogs and social and mobile media.

They write hard news stories, which are short, timely and focused reports on what's just happened, and feature stories, which are *soft*, not as timely, yet with a topical *news peg* (*raison d'être* or reason for existence). [How to write a feature story »](#)

**Researching stories.** Any journalist, whether covering hard or soft news, needs to gather information in preparation for writing. All writers have to conduct research and gather information before they can start writing. Journalists use three main tools to collect information for stories:

- Interviews
- Observation
- Background research

**Gathering info.** Expanding on those three, here are typical ways to collect information for a news story:

- Interviewing
  - Interviewing knowledgeable people
    - Experts, witnesses, officers, managers, leaders, officeholders, politicians, social scientists, physical scientists, applied scientists, humanists
  - Corresponding by email and letters
- Observation
  - Observing events
  - Attending speeches, lectures and public addresses
  - Conducting experiments and tests
- Research
  - Searching the Internet
    - General search engines, academic search engines, Web home pages, Web articles, Web journals, Web magazine articles, news Web sites, books on the Web, email discussion groups, Web archives
  - Searching the library
    - Electronic library catalog, general books, scholarly books and journals, reference books, periodicals, archives, bibliographies, indexes, biographies, government documents, Web sites, electronic databases
  - Inspecting government documents
  - Reading personal papers
  - Viewing audiovisual materials
  - Watching videos and television programs
  - Surveying with questionnaires

**Checking facts.** By the way, while it might seem that double checking facts would be very important after a story is written, newspapers rarely employ people solely to check facts in articles. Magazines still do check facts, but the practice is becoming less common. The consummate professional writer will check facts anyway, either personally or with help from an editor.

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