

The Long Haul: Developing and reporting longer story ideas

Be on the lookout. “I keep a working file of story ideas,” said Salt Lake Tribune justice reporter Lisa Rosetta. “If it’s a busy breaking news week, I try to jot those ideas down on a scrap piece of paper or in a file folder so I can return to it when things calm down a bit.”

Keep a file. “It’s important to keep a computer file and a paper file of possible enterprise ideas, along with the names of sources or tidbits of information that prompted you to think of that idea in the first place,” Rosetta said. Sergio Bustos, assistant city editor at The Miami Herald, said: “What I do each morning is I open up a word file on my computer, and I take notes on things... and I put in information, phone numbers and the like. I can go back and check things out. It’s almost like a running record of story ideas and tips.”

Gather string. You’ll run into some stories on the beat that require more developing. Take notes, gather string, make contacts, do research as you cover other stories, and come back to the partially developed ideas when you’re not bogged down with the breaking, daily coverage.

Digest. Cover the daily goings-on in the courtroom, on the police log, etc. Then, for a weekend paper – often Sunday – synthesize the news of the week from your beat, adding background, narrative, deep context and explanation. Information graphics, too, lend themselves naturally to this kind of in-depth reporting.

Be flexible. The name of the game is juggling. Don’t be overwhelmed with the amount of work given to you. “You have to catch most of the breaking crime news and also step in as a pinch-hitter on feature stories and other random meetings that dayside reporters couldn’t cover or just didn’t want to,” said Brent Wistrom, city hall reporter at the Wichita Eagle.