1) Story identification

1. a) What is an in-depth analysis?

In-depth analyses attempt to expose and explain in detail a certain problem, issue or phenomenon, where this is significantly important to a wide local and/or international audience. They do not contain the personal opinions of the author.

They do not deal with just one event or a single issue, but pick up on a cluster, pattern or series of these. By taking at wider perspective, in terms of topical, geographical and temporal scope, in-depth analyses explain in detail how various issues or problems interact, examine which further issues or consequences arise as a result and try to offer possible resolutions and predict future developments;

In depth analysis as a genre is in fact much closer to an investigation, rather than news analysis.

News analyses are shorter texts, which usually strive to show what is behind a certain event:

**EXAMPLE: Bulgarian Nuclear Shutdown Worries Balkans**

EU demand for Sofia to shut Kozloduy reactors poses major headache for region short in energy supplies.

By Altin Raxhimi in Tirana and BIRN teams in Sofia, Skopje, Sarajevo, Pristina, Belgrade and Podgorica (Balkan Insight, 26 Oct 06)


Gjergj Bojaxhi, Albania’s deputy energy minister, suffers from back pain that gets worse when he sits. He walks around the office, hunching and wincing, absorbing the twinges as he speaks. But one word makes him stand up straight - Kozloduy.

The towering chimneys of Kozloduy, a nuclear power plant, lie 300km from Albania in northern Bulgaria. But the distance is irrelevant in a Balkan energy market that was unified by a major treaty one year ago.

Across the region, energy officials like Bojaxhi are keenly concerned by the imminent closure of two of the plant’s four Soviet-built reactors by December 31, the last day before Bulgaria joins the European Union. EU officials have made closure a precondition for accession.

This is a typical news analysis. It focuses on the impact on energy supply in the region after the EU demanded that Bulgaria shut down an important nuclear reactor. This story is built around the news of its closure to analyse the concerns and consequences of the move.

In-depth analyses on the other hand tend to go further back in history and a step ahead in the future. Take the following story as an example:
EXAMPLE: Macedonia: Bulgaria’s Warm Embrace

Are Bulgarian policies towards Macedonians an indication that old territorial claims persist, or just friendly intentions?

By Albena Shkodrova in Sofia (Balkan Crisis Report No 537, 21-Jan-05)

http://iwpr.gn.apc.org/?s=f&o=242497&apc_state=henibcr2005

On the face of it, Macedonia enjoys a relatively untroubled relationship with Bulgaria. There is neither the recent legacy of living alongside other, war-torn former Yugoslav nations, nor the unpleasantness over the legal deeds to the word “Macedonia” that has marred relations with Greece for more than a decade.

Yet it is the relationship with Sofia that raises some of the hardest questions about Macedonia’s demand to be treated as a sovereign state, whose Slavic population has its own identity and language.

If one digs a little below the surface, some aspects of official policy in Bulgaria seem to work from the assumption that modern Macedonia is no more than an accidentally detached part of the mother country. Macedonian students are flocking to study at Bulgarian universities – but find they are encouraged to declare an ethnic Bulgarian identity. And the Bulgarians are reluctant to recognise Macedonian as a legitimate language distinct from their own.

These anomalies may annoy the Macedonians, but do they amount to a covertly expansionist agenda, or merely bureaucratic inertia that has failed to change old ways?

This story does not depend on a news peg, as it has been common knowledge for years that Macedonians take Bulgarian passports for various practical reasons, and that Bulgaria encourages this. However, it reveals new information and insight by tackling what is behind this phenomenon. Through its research and analysis, centred around numerous examples and personal stories, it exposes a great deal more about relations between Macedonia and Bulgaria, their government’s policies, and suspicions that Bulgaria seeks to quietly assimilate Macedonians, whose distinct identity it doubts.

What investigations and in-depth analysis have in common is that both genres often require months of thorough research, numerous interviews, and collection of data and documents.

However, while in-depth analyses have as their ambition to paint a detailed picture of and explain a certain problem or issue, investigations aim to uncover new facts and unknown circumstances surrounding certain event(s).

EXAMPLE: Ex-Policemen Run Kosovo Passport Scheme

While it is hard for most Kosovars to get papers to travel abroad, racketeers can solve everything for a fee.

By Krenar Gashi in Pristina and BIRN teams in Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro (Balkan Insight, 1 Dec 06)


"For 300 euro I can get you all the documents in one day," said Sajo, a former policeman in Kosovo and now based in Rozaje, in Montenegro. "All at once - birth certificate, citizenship papers, ID and passport." Sajo sells new identity papers to Kosovars. There are many like him in Montenegro and Kosovo, where a lucrative trade in falsely obtained passports and other documents is booming. In an undercover investigation by BIRN, we can reveal the large amounts of money Kosovars routinely pay to people like Sajo to obtain new versions of the old Yugoslav passport.

That does not mean that in-depth analyses can’t also reveal facts and findings previously unknown.
This story explores the aggressive entry of the German media concern in three countries in the Balkan media and how it has affected local media and journalism standards.

b) How do you choose a story for in-depth analysis?

When selecting a topic to analyse in depth, the journalist has to take into account the essential values which make any story worthwhile publishing. Some of the questions you -and the editor - need to ask are:

I. Why is this important?
II. Why do we care? Why are people going to be interested to read this story?
III. Why is this issue relevant now?
IV. What kind of trend is it showing?
V. What are the consequences?
VI. What are the possible solutions to the problem?

Other questions that arise are, particularly for in-depth analysis, are:

I. Who will be interested in this story? Will people in the Netherlands find it interesting? Think of all potential readers;
II. What will this story reveal? Have we read all of this before elsewhere? Think how you can find new information, look at previously unexplored angles of the topic;
III. Why will people read this article? Today, people barely have time to read brief news in their daily newspaper, let alone a story of 3000 words. Think how you can choose a story and an angle that are sexy, fresh and interesting;
IV. What is the potential impact? Can you in any way affect the current situation by publishing this story and how? Think whether your story can influence decision or opinion makers to push for action on the issue.

For example, let’s say you would like to explore the railway system in the Balkans. How would you go about selecting a story within this field for in-depth analysis?

In order to be sure you have a real story, you should be able to describe in a few sentences:

I. What the story is about;
II. What you want to tell;
III. Why that is important to the target audience;
IV. What are the implications or consequences of the issue;
V. What can be done about it

EXAMPLE: WAZ: German Media Giant Dominates Balkans

Massive investment by a German publisher is revolutionising media in the Balkans, but opinion is divided over the merits of the transformation.

By Julie Poucher Harbin in Vienna and Sarajevo, Elena Yoncheva in Bulgaria, Vera Didanovic in Serbia, and Drago Hedl in Croatia (Balkan Crisis Report No 419, 01-04-03)

http://iwpr.net/?p=bcr&s=f&o=157567&apc_state=henibcr2003

Germany's WAZ media group is pumping millions of dollars into former state newspapers in Bulgaria and the former Yugoslavia, giving ailing titles a new lease of life. Yet there are fears the takeovers could lead to a suffocating monopoly, concentrating media in the hands of a few powerful businessmen.
VI. Which are the story’s possible sources.

EXAMPLE: Macedonia Tilts Towards Kosovo’s Independence

After long towing the Serbian line, Skopje is pragmatically adjusting its position to new realities.

By: Ana Petruseva and Tamara Causidis in Skopje, Zana Limani in Pristina and Tanja Matic in Belgrade (Balkan Insight 12-Oct-05)


I. Here, the story is about changes in Macedonia’s foreign policy on the crucial issue of Kosovo’s independence.
II. We want to tell the reader that Macedonia has made a significant shift in how it addresses neighbouring Kosovo’s wish for independence, changing the delicate balance in relations between it and Serbia proper, also its neighbour.
III. The story is important, because it shows how the region’s geopolitics – on the most topical issue of Kosovo’s status – are influenced.
IV. It examines the consequences for Macedonia that might stem from an increase in pan-Albanian nationalism, a worsening of relations with Serbia, and an improvement of relations with Kosovo and the USA.
V. It presents options Macedonia has to balance relations with its neighbours and USA.
VI. It will use specific examples that demonstrate a change in Macedonia’s interests over time, statements from local and international officials and opinions from influential observers from all sides on why this is so and what it means.

2) Research

When tackling an in-depth analysis, you will be required to do two types of research in two phases:

a) Initial research, where you investigate a topic, for example, the railway system in the Balkans, in order to determine the general situation and find your point of focus;
b) Story research, after you have decided what your focus is.

In order to get to the second phase, you need to define through the first phase what it is you want to explore. You need therefore to research your story as thoroughly as possible, to make sure you:

c) Are up to speed with any new developments,
d) Know the background to events,
e) Know the key players and people who will talk;
f) Know what has been reported already;

After doing this, you should be able to come up with possible new angles to take on the story, and interesting ways to research and present it.
This article focuses on the many obstacles that prevent agricultural producers in the western Balkans from exporting competively to EU markets and the role of Brussels. In order to make this in-depth analysis, the reporter was required to first research the state of the agricultural sector in the Balkans, relevant agreements with the EU, and agricultural politics in the EU itself.

This initial research allowed the reporter to identify the angle she wanted to take, and then to come up with a novel and interesting approach to researching and presenting the actual story.

The resulting in-depth analysis is thus based on the experiences of a dairy products exporter in Albania, a wine company in Macedonia, fish exporters in Croatia, a food processing company in Kosovo and other businesses around the region that give a overall comprehensive picture of the challenges local business face when it comes to exports.

This is backed up with expert and official opinions, but the use of ‘real stories’ keeps the long, complex article vivid and tangible.

EXAMPLE: Macedonia May Rue Hastiness

Government accused of not thinking through legal reforms properly in its rush to show Brussels that it means business.

By Tamara Causidis and Sase Dimovski in Skopje and Svetlana Jovanovska in Brussels (Balkan Crisis Report No 562, 27-Jun-05)

http://www.iwpr.net/?p=bcr&s=f&o=242067&apc_state=henibcr2005

This article is about judicial reform, a topic which is very broad and can therefore be covered in many different ways. It is also very complex, meaning a risk of being very technical and boring. You, the reporter, can easily get lost in piles of material and lose your focus.

In this case, however, the reporters managed to focus on the shortcomings of Macedonian judicial reforms required by the EU, and discovered and documented the government’s attempts to maintain control over the judiciary.

In order to get there, the reporters first had to thoroughly research the whole area of judicial reform in Macedonia, pinpoint and understand all the problems the judiciary faces, from a lack of computers in courts to a million-case backlog and the appointment of judges.
This meant gathering all relevant materials on the topic, such as the law on courts, proposed constitutional amendments, and various EU recommendations for judiciary reform. Clippings from newspapers and magazines that had already published stories on this topic provided good background and were useful to keep track of what was already in the public sphere.

After doing this essential background reading, the journalists started to interview the main sources. Initially, before the focus was narrowed, journalists interviewed judges, university professors and experts that follow the issue in detail, such as the associations of judges, non-governmental watchdogs and journalists that cover the judiciary.

During this background research phase, the issue of political interference emerged as critical to the entire reform project, and so the journalists decided to focus on this. Despite the extent of the research done, they therefore resisted the temptation to report everything they knew, and presented instead a clear analysis of just one aspect of the topic – political control of the judiciary – which served to elucidate the main obstacle to reform.

3) Sourcing

When doing in-depth analysis, the universal rules of sourcing apply. This means:

I. Use of both primary and secondary sources;
II. Reference to both human and documentary sources;
III. Verification and cross-checking of sources;
IV. Balance and in selection of sources & relevance to the story;
V. Fairness in presentation of source material;
VI. Proper attribution of sources (with limited exceptions).

a) Primary human sources

These can be defined as participants in, or eyewitnesses to, events which are tried and tested or proven to be bonafide, and with whom we have communicated directly. Journalists can tap into human networks that are official, unofficial and personal, and possible sources include other journalists, activists, independent researchers, scientists, government investigators, experts, academics and authors.

b) Primary documentary sources

These can be official documents, such as laws, regulations, registers or court documents, the records of an individual’s, organisation’s or institution’s dealings, such as correspondence, meeting minutes or transcripts, internal reports, contracts or financial records, and original materials on which other research or reports are based, such as the first publication of the results of scientific investigations, surveys, fieldwork or interviews.

They present information in its original form, neither interpreted nor condensed nor evaluated by other writers. They are usually also from the time period in question (for example, something written close to when what it is recording happened is likely to be a primary source).

Consult government or parliament documents and records -laws and legal acts are also often accessible on government web sites, as well as in the legal gazette.

European institutions are also a great source of information. It is better first to consult reports of EU institutions (Annual EC reports for example) and then ask for comments/ interviews.

Most international organisations have a mine of information on their web sites. If you are not sure what to ask for, check with local representatives in the field you are covering - they should be able to direct you to all sources on the web and supply you with materials.
Various NGO's (local and international) can also serve as a great source of information, primary and secondary. They know all the players, can serve as experts and are usually easy to access. They may have conducted their own surveys, opinion polls, expert reports. Check their website before approaching them.

Note - Be careful with opinion polls. Often those are commissioned by government or political parties. Check carefully the background of the organisation that produced the poll and the methodology used. IRI are one of the reliable sources for analysis and polls.

c) Secondary sources

Secondary sources can be defined as reports and interpretations by others of events they have not witnessed firsthand. These include reports by our competitors in the media, journal articles, hearsay and rumour, second-hand accounts and sources that can’t be checked out.

Important for in-depth analysis, they also include the statements, opinions and interpretations of experts and analysts, where these repackage, reorganise, reinterpret, summarise, index or otherwise "add value" to original information.

Here, reports by think-tanks and NGOs, as well as media outlets, are useful, and many can be accessed free of charge on the internet.

d) Verification and cross-checking of sources

As a general rule, avoid secondary sources wherever an alternative primary source can be found. That means, if you see a report or an interview, you should try to obtain the original document or contact in person the expert interviewed.

As far as primary sources are concerned, common sources such as the emergency services, spokespeople and press offices do not usually have to be checked out. However, there may be cases when it is wise to verify official accounts, as these can be, intentionally or not, incorrect or misleading. Usually, you can only take court rulings for granted.

Non-official primary sources should also be checked, in order to ascertain any agenda they might have, political, economic, personal or otherwise. With all human sources its necessary to test all the key assumptions as critically as you would an opponent. Ask yourself what are the motives of the source to give you information?

This goes for both local and international experts, such as university professors and analysts. When interviewing them, as all others, do not take for granted everything you are told and make sure you double check each piece of information before you include it in your story.

When using secondary sources, you should conduct a search on the internet or make enquiries to try to verify the information, the reliability of the source and any political, economic, personal or other bias, interest or allegiance.

Previous work on the topic can also serve to discover discrepancies. You can reveal which sources are credible and what research can be reliable.

In this way, you will make sure you have all sides covered. Most stories are political and most sources have an interest to tell you their view, including experts. Examine their links with political parties, government, business interests, and check their previous statements/ reports to judge how reliable their analysis is.

Note the importance of not rewriting material from other media. Aside from being ethically and professionally weak, you may also run into legal problems due to breach of copyright. Furthermore, in case the information is libelous, you will not be protected by the fact it has been reported in another media outlet (we will deal with libel in more detail shortly).

e) Balance in selection of sources & relevance to the story
The best way to be sure that your analysis is accurate, fair and insightful is to consult a multiplicity of relevant sources, of all types and with a variety of interests.

During your research, ask yourself regularly who is affected by the story and the information you have learned from your sources. Thus assessing who the ‘stakeholders’ in the story are, you should be able to make a list of the most relevant sources to approach.

Wherever possible, attempt to locate a representative number of those directly affected by the issue in question, rather than relying only on official or expert interpretations. An interesting personal story can serve as a great intro and put a human face on problems that are usually dull and generalized. NGOs or local media may be able to help.

So, if you are doing a story on trafficking, find a victim of trafficking. You can ask at shelters, the police, and various NGOs that deal with human trafficking, such as IOM.

A farmer in Serbia or a wine producer in Macedonia can give your story colour, saving a story on agriculture from endless regulations, figures and percentages.

Look for people currently associated with the subject but also people who were previously associated. Former officials are always a good source as they tend to speak more openly on issues.

Say you are doing a story on unemployment rates being used by governments for political purposes. Former officials or fired employees of the statistical bureau can be a good source and would be motivated to talk. However, they also have the motive to give you a worse picture than really exists. Be careful and do not rely on those accounts only.

The information you find when checking out your sources should allow you to assess whether or not you have achieved a balance of official and non-official points of view, and a variety of political, economic and other interests.

Make a list of all institutions, governmental and non-governmental (local, regional and international) that are dealing with this issue. When dealing with government representatives make sure you have most of the information before you contact them.

While it may be difficult to access some sources, do not avoid them in favour of an easier secondary source.

If your story is EU related, consult relevant agreements between the country in question and the EU, both EU and local policy documents, regulations, officials and experts, as well as individuals or companies affected by the issue.

Do not look at one country only. An article of this scale usually has a cross-border element, or benefits from comparison with experiences abroad. Make sure therefore that you include sources within relevant foreign organisations and institutions. A Google search and national news agency websites can serve as a good guide to finding the people you need. If you are a journalist from Serbia exploring relations with Bulgaria, experts, NGOs and institutions in your country could also help.

Note - when consulting experts and analysts, don’t rely on the same narrow group. Rather, try to canvas a variety of opinions, even if these are anathema to your own point of view. This goes for all types of sources – it is important to represent the interests of different groups, even if minor and/or unpleasant.

f) Fairness in treatment and presentation of source material

While you will undoubtedly be able to present only a fraction of what you have learned from your sources, it is your duty to fairly represent their position and what they have told you. While it may be convenient to your argument to selectively quote or describe your source, this is legally and ethically dangerous if it results in misrepresentation.
By the same token, you should not omit information you have discovered in order to make your job of writing the analysis easier.

Where serious allegations or criticisms are made by any of your sources, you should do your utmost to obtain the reaction of the object of those remarks.

Be aware of the basic golden rule: journalists deliver facts, while their sources provide opinions, judgments, and feelings.

\[ g) \text{ Proper attribution of sources} \]

All sources should be described accurately and informatively, wherever possible. This means fully identifying individuals, organisations, institutions and documents mentioned in the analysis, including variously name, position, affiliation, authority, publication date, author, place of publication. Where individuals are concerned, it may sometimes be relevant to give further personal information, such as age, marital status, ethnicity/nationality, etc.

Some human sources may wish to remain anonymous, either for their personal or job safety. As a general rule, this should be avoided wherever possible – naming sources gives credibility to our work. However, anonymous sources cannot be avoided in practice. Journalists need to take some precautions when using them: we need to make sure they’re genuine and have a convincing reason for their anonymity. This means confirming any facts they may provide with at least one other, unrelated source, and being wary we are not being fed any ‘conveniently leaked’ propaganda.

When quoting anonymous sources, they should be identified as much as possible. There is no such thing as a Balkan Insight or Tanjug source: there is a high official at the ministry of interior, a senior EU diplomat in Belgrade, etc.

If someone asks for payment for information, the simple answer is no. In some places payment is considered a form of bribery.

\[ 4) \text{ Planning and budgeting} \]

When tackling an in-depth analysis, it is very easy to over-research. You can find yourself overwhelmed with information, going down various lines of enquiry, running out of time, money and perspective to start writing. At BIRN, we call this the ‘PhD syndrome.’

Here, your relationship with your editor is important. Your project should start with completion of a commissioning brief, which asks all the most important questions about the relevance of your topic, the arguments you will examine and the sources you will consult. It provides you with a working ‘lead’ or hypothesis, which should help to keep you focused.

Don’t be afraid to revise your article plans – if you come across new, important information that doesn’t fit into your existing hypothesis, don’t twist it or drop it just for the sake of it. That is how a good story gets ruined.

Of course your approach will change as you find out more about your topic. Use the sub-headings of the commissioning brief and consultations with your editor to constantly refine and focus your work.

As you accumulate material, think constantly of what your ‘angle’ is on this story. If you’re following up a story that’s already had an outing, what do you have to add? What is unique/special to your story?

The extent of your research of course depends on the amount of time and money you have available, as well as the ‘column inches’ you can fill.
a) Time

Firstly, look at your list of sources and plans for research and anticipate who will be most difficult to reach. Contact those people well in advance.

Experts, NGOs, some politicians, lower level officials at state institutions, ordinary people and international organisation representatives in your countries are usually accessible.

Are the locations accessible? How will you get access? Some locations require longer planning, perhaps requiring permits to get in. If your story deals with prisons or training army camps, make sure you plan accordingly and check if such a visit is possible.

How will you gather data in other countries? Apart from internet research you can always contact journalists that have followed the issue and ask them for a briefing both on the issue and potential sources.

If going abroad to do research in person, plan carefully who you need to contact and what practical issues you need to deal with. Do you need a visa for the country you need to visit? Check if you need journalistic accreditation for access in other countries. Wherever possible, arrange to have a local fixer or someone similar, who can help you out in knowing who to contact, and how.

Contact sources and book interviews before you set the date for the trip, give priority to the most senior sources and plan other interviews accordingly. Think of all potential technical issues: Do you need translation for the interview? If so, ask for more time for the interview.

If you have to file requests for information make sure you incorporate this in your timeline. The law on access to information entitles you to a response, 15 days in most cases.

Then, to best use your time, it is crucial you are well-prepared for interviews. This will ensure you get the best information, and help you avoid having to go back later for more information.

Your preparation needs to be detailed and specific. To save time, check with those who have studied the question before. Be prepared to stand on the shoulders of others’ earlier work. This could be other journalists, NGOs, independent researchers, government investigators, experts, academics and authors.

If the interviewee is likely to use technical terms, abbreviations, or refer to third parties, you need to know in advance what they are talking about. You can of course ask them to spell out a name or an acronym so that you are absolutely sure. Be precise. Avoid questions with several parts – break them up, take each part in turn.

When it comes to government spokespeople, for example, they are skilled in giving ambiguous answers, especially on sensitive issues. You do not want to research “on camera” or ask background or basic factual questions with an adversarial interviewee. Schedule carefully to have enough time to prepare the interview.

Plan your questions in advance. Keep to the point. Don’t ramble and don’t interrupt. Be flexible. Unless the interview is for background information, make sure you get to the point within two or three questions.

There are no stupid questions. There are only stupid answers. Demand a clear answer.

b) Money

The longer and more ambitious your in-depth research is, the more important it is to carefully plan the costs of travel, accommodation, visas, translation and subsistence, especially if going abroad.
Many of these costs can be checked on the internet. Many budget options are available for travel, accommodation and subsistence. Lonely Planet guides can also help. If in doubt, contact a friendly media outlet, NGO or the press club or journalists association.

Check the permitted per diem rates, rules on what kind of transport you can use, and financial reporting requirements.

Check the rates for fixers and translators, in case you need them, and how to pay them.

Agree a budget with your editor, incorporating all these elements, and be sure to keep all receipts in a clear order, clearly labeled, ready for submitting for reimbursement. If in doubt, always ask for an original bill, as well as the normal till print-out.

1) Documenting research

Throughout the substantial research you will undertake to produce your in-depth analysis, it is crucial you keep contemporaneous notes, including: quotes from interviews and conversations, logs of calls made and received records of your research, and your own thoughts and comments.

This is important not just for the purposes of writing up the story – it is also your security and credibility. If anyone challenges your work, your notebooks will back you up.

However you keep records – by handwritten note, on a computer, audio or visual recording – they must be as accurate as possible, dated and filed in a way that they can be recovered when necessary.

Most countries have the Freedom of Information Act or Law to Access Information. If you are denied information by a certain government body you can officially demand public records, if you do so, keep record of faxes and emails sent with your request. If you do not receive an answer you should say in your story that you have contacted the ministry in question on date … and have called x number of times but have not received a reply.

If you have agreed not to reveal the source of your information it may be necessary to give your notebooks or memory sticks to a third party, and remember not to disclose information about them in accessible formats, eg emails, to others who may not be constrained by your agreement.

We have a responsibility to protect our sources a) for their own protection and b) in our interest, to maintain a useful contact and build up trust. Laws vary around the world on the rights of journalists to protect their sources; usually we can defend it on the grounds that it is in the public interest. There may be pressure from the police to give them our information – at times this is appropriate - but if we compromise our sources we undermine our integrity and that of our profession generally. We are journalists, not policemen, and should not be expected to do their work for them.

2) Libel

The definition of libel is the publication of material that damages the reputation of an individual or an organisation.

A person is libeled if the words published tend to lower that person in the eyes of right thinking members of society.

This is the most common libel, but it can also happen if the words published:

a) Expose someone to hatred, ridicule or contempt;
b) Cause someone to be shunned or avoided; or
c) Discredit them in their business, trade or profession.
There are two crucial parts to the first definition - the libel has to lower someone, and it has to lower them in the eyes of right thinking members of society.

Libel is dealt with differently in each legal system. However, in the age of the internet, it is now possible to be sued or prosecuted just about anywhere. The UK law is one of the toughest, so it is worth knowing the legal defences it affords:

a) Justification – if something is true you can argue that you are justified in publishing it because it is true. But you will need witnesses and documents to be able to defend each and every part of the story, and deal with every aspect of libel law.
b) Fair comment – if you are reporting an opinion, which cannot by its very nature be true or false, the comments must be clearly marked as such; based on fact; made in good faith and without malice; and be on a matter of public interest. Journalists are responsible for publishing the opinions of others.
c) Privilege – when something has been said in Parliament or a law court, it is possible to report it so long as the report is fair and accurate. Privilege may be qualified or limited for matters of public interest.

Practical tips:

a) Don’t rely on the literal meaning – just because someone was once declared bankrupt or convicted of fraud, this doesn’t make them always a bankrupt or a fraudster;
b) Don’t exaggerate, but be clear and precise. If in doubt, try removing the adjectives;
c) Innuendo is dangerous ground. If the target is powerful and has deep pockets, make sure that a colleague, your editor, or the company lawyer has sufficient time to read your piece and make careful suggestions.

Common mistakes and assumptions:

a) Repeating a rumour – is unwise unless you can prove it is true. Adding ‘allegedly’ is not enough. Nor is contradicting the rumour if you start by repeating it;
b) Quoting others – dangerous if you can’t prove what they said is true. This goes for other media reports published;
c) Drawing conclusions – letting the facts speak for themselves is better than adding a conclusion you can’t prove;
d) Irresponsible adjectives – adding that extra something to your story just might prove costly;
e) Representing all sides – is good journalistic practice, but isn’t a defence against an actual libel.

3) Story structure

After doing all this research, it is essential to present it in a clear, interesting and highly readable style. The article will be long, so you have to try to keep your reader’s attention and convey exactly what it is you have found. In this way, you will also maximise the chances of your article making an impact on the topic/issue it deals with.

In general, an in-depth analysis should follow a certain structure. This should be taken as a guide, rather than a hard-and-fast straightjacket.

Contrary to much of Balkan journalism, you will state the main findings of your research and their significance at the outset of the article – the lead. If there is a news peg or a particular example related to the story, it should come next. A number of main arguments (usually 3) will back up the lead, which you should lay out in a summary immediately after the lead, followed by a concluding prediction or impression. Together, this constitutes the intro. It should be around 600 words long.
The body of the text follows, which may be anything from 1000 to several thousand words long. Before getting into your arguments in detail, you will usually present the background and context necessary for the reader to understand the issue/topic you are addressing. The arguments will then come in further blocks, each of which will themselves have a clear lead, with a number of arguments to back up or dispute it, logically presented.

The text should be wrapped up with a brief conclusion, which sums up what you have stated in the rest of the text and links back directly to your lead.

In essence, what you are doing is telling the reader what you will tell him, then telling him that, then telling him what you told him! That way, the majority of readers who won’t make it to the end of your article can give up after the intro and still be informed.

a) The intro

Devising the right lead is crucial to the success of the article. You should be able to state in brief what is at issue and suggest what it might mean or why it is important. In other words, it should interpret the significance of the facts that you are writing about.

To make a good lead, ask yourself what the significance of your story is for the outside world, and write with this significance in mind. Ask yourself what phrase would come to mind if you had to summarise the article in one sentence. Imagine that you need to tell a friend on a bus that is just leaving what the story is about or describe it to your grandmother in 20 words.

If you are unable to summarise the text for the purposes of the lead, maybe you have tried to work too many ideas into the text. You may need to simplify the story.

The lead is how you sell the story! It should be brief and sexy in order to capture the reader’s attention. You can afford to be creative in the first few paragraphs in how you get the essence of the lead across:

**EXAMPLE: Lobbyists Pull Out Stops in Battle for Kosovo**

Albanians have had a head start in the PR game over Kosovo centred in New York, but Serbs are catching up.

By Krenar Gashi in Pristina and Jeta Xharra in New York and London (Balkan Insight, 11-Apr-07)


Here, the lead is contained in the headline and ‘standfirst’, or sub-headline, of the article.

It may also be presented in the first one or two paragraphs of the article itself:
EXAMPLE: Macedonia Tilts Towards Kosovo’s Independence

After long towing the Serbian line, Skopje is pragmatically adjusting its position to new realities.

By: Ana Petrvseva and Tamara Causidis in Skopje, Zana Limani in Pristina and Tanja Matic in Belgrade (Balkan Insight, 12-Oct-05)


On the eve of Kosovo’s long expected final-status negotiations Macedonia is abandoning its former hostility to Kosovo’s independence.

After earlier supporting Serbia’s position, Skopje is opening up to the possibility of an independent Kosovo, believing this option might best secure its own sovereignty in the long term.

EXAMPLE: EU Hails Balkan Free Trade Deal as Milestone

New regional agreement sweeps away web of bilateral deals and - hopefully - boosts trade and investment.

By Anna McTaggart in Zagreb (Balkan Insight, 26 Oct 06)


The drive to create a free trade area in the Western Balkans ended more or less successfully on October 20, after the fourth round of negotiations closed on extending the Central European Free Trade Area, CEFTA.

EXAMPLE: Ice Melts Between Greeks and Bulgarians

Longstanding stereotypes and rivalries between the two peoples are beginning to fade.

By Albena Shkodrova in Nea Peramos (Balkan Insight, 20 Apr 06)


At Karnobat, in central Bulgaria, locals are gearing up to host an unprecedented event in the region’s recent history.

The Greeks are coming. More than 50 of them, together with their bouzouki orchestra, will attend a big fat Bulgarian wedding there on June 4.

The summary consists of a number of paragraphs where you say what the story is about, with the briefest background information. It is like the contents section of a book — it tells the reader what is going to be in the article, and predicts some future development for the issue/events/topic being analysed.

For example, in the CEFTA article:
b) The body

The rest of the story is then divided into separate blocks, with subheadings, representing each element contained in the summary.

In the CEFTA article, these are:

FROM SPAGHETTI TO LASAGNE
TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE?
HALF WAY TO A CUSTOMS UNION?

Each block should tackle a different aspect of the story. Here, the first section analyses what the CEFTA agreement has achieved, in terms of simplifying trade in the Balkans, the second presents criticisms of CEFTA and problems surrounding it, and the third judges what the overall significance of CEFTA is and may be.

Commonly, the first block provides the bulk of context and background required to understand the story. For example if you are writing about the relationships of Balkan countries with the EU, the first block is likely to contain an explanation of what those relations are, how they have developed, and so on.

c) Conclusion
When you reach the end make sure readers know. Neatly summarise what you have described or give a nice quote to wrap up the story, referring to the relevant potential consequences/solutions/developments/action you mentioned in the intro. Do not give new information at the end of the article.

In the CEFTA article:

Who stands to benefit most from the arrangement remains to be seen. Croatia may gain most, as its more developed economy will help it take advantage of improved terms to invest in its neighbours.

But at the same time, Croatia’s advantageous position will help it to assist others in the region to adjust their legislation and prepare for closer EU integration.

As Hamdouch put it, “Parties will gain experience from others who enter the EU earlier in an apprenticeship that allows them to take on the rigours of free trade gradually.

“In the process, they will strengthen their trading practices and improve their credibility. This should at the end of the day expedite EU integration and create a better environment for investment.”

4) Narrative style

Together, the content of each ‘block’ of your article – the body of the text - should build up a coherent picture of the topic, bringing the reader new angles and opinions. This is the place where you have to prove that your lead is right.

a) Concise & precise

Within each block, therefore, build the analysis carefully, using the most significant and important arguments first. Be clear and concise. Omit needless words and make each word count. Don’t go off at tangents – all the information must be relevant and add weight to the main argument or story.

At the same time, don’t assume the reader knows the background to every story. Especially when it comes to the target audience of such articles, the readership will have reasonable general knowledge and probably some specialist knowledge of one area, but not all. Use the exact date where possible, ie not 'last week' but ‘on June 20, 2006’.

b) Fact & opinion

The analysis must be wholly based on evidence. Every opinion expressed in the text should be based on the facts, every source attributed. There must be no personal opinion here. In general, therefore, the journalist’s voice is not heard in such an article. Rather, you should let your sources tell the story – a good variety of quotes shows that you have really done your job. No reference to the author is generally made ie ‘sources tell Balkan Insight’, not ‘sources tell me’.

c) Quoting

Use of quotations generates the most common mistakes. They should not be used to quote the obvious or plain facts in sheets of texts. They should be used sparingly for most dramatic, poignant or meaningful phrase. Otherwise use reported speech.

Quote one to two short sentences only.
Always identify the person that you are quoting. For the first quote, write the source’s full name and title. That title, or your description of it, should explain why this person is a respectable or relevant source to be quoted on the topic in question.

Use full names and not only abbreviations for local organizations. Instead of DSS, write Democratic Party of Serbia, DSS, led by Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica.

Always make sure quotes flow. You can use square brackets and dots to cut them down and make them work. If that fails, sum up what the source has said in reported speech.

   d) Paragraphs

   As opposed to much of Balkan journalism, paragraphs should be kept short, concise and clear. Paragraphs should deal with one idea at a time, following on logically from the one before.

   Balance is essential – one radical or controversial opinion should be balanced by an opposing one, giving the ‘right of reply’ to anyone who’s being criticised.