

# Verification, Analysis, Report Writing

## Starlight Stadium Episode 3

*This slide deck is designed to provide relevant instruction surrounding Starlight Stadium: Episode 3. Trainers should feel at liberty to use or adapt this slide deck to their own purposes, depending on how the game will be played, and what experience level their students possess.*

# Verification vs. Analysis

**Verification:** “Is this information true?”

**Analysis:** “What does this information mean?”

Verification and analysis are separate but closely related procedures that occur after the information has been gathered. Both must be performed according to procedure in order for information to be considered credible, and to be included in future reporting or advocacy actions.

As an example, you can propose a simple scenario to the class (e.g. “a report that police are stopping and searching all cars at a certain checkpoint”). Ask them the following two questions:

- How would you verify this claim as true or false?
  - Possible answers: social media monitoring (has it been reported online); checking traffic apps; getting in contact with those who reported; conducting direct observation at the checkpoint; etc.
- Once verified, what factors would determine if the event violated human rights?
  - Possible answers: Scope; reasons for searching cars; practices and actions taken during the searches; relevant domestic legal background; etc.

# Verification - Source Reliability

To verify information, first consider the source itself:

- Is the source reliable?
- Is the source impartial?
- Is the source established?

The first step in determining how trustworthy information is, is determining how trustworthy the source of that information is. Consider the following factors:

- Reliability – does the source have a history of being accurate, or relevant expert knowledge?
- Impartiality – there are no truly unbiased sources, especially when dealing with people's first-hand accounts. However, it's important to consider if a source has a strong reason to distort the truth. Presence of bias does not render the information inaccurate; it merely adds another element to consider during verification.
- Anonymity (or lack thereof) - Especially with the current state of social media, anonymous accounts are widely prevalent. Being able to confirm your source's identity is a way to lend authenticity to what they have to say.

# Verification: Information Cross-Checking

To verify information, check the accounts with multiple sources:

- Do you have at least three sources saying the same thing?
- Do you have accounts from sources with different perspectives?

Finding at least three sources is called “triangulation” and is a way to provide a balanced understanding of events, rather than relying on a single account. Additionally, it’s important for accounts to represent different positions on an issue (for example, the account of the guards vs. the account of the prisoners, or the account of the protestors vs. the account of the police).

Note that “sources” can refer to a variety of information - you can triangulate testimony with official documents, OSINT information, public statements, photos, and so on. Testimonies do not need to be verified solely by other testimonies.

Note that if you cannot triangulate a piece of testimony, that doesn’t mean it has to be discarded - it just needs to be contextualised as such, using hedges such as “allegedly” or “reportedly”.

# Analysis

Once an incident has been verified, it can be analyzed to determine if human rights were violated.

To assess a possible violation, consider its:

- Legality
- Legitimacy
- Proportionality

While there's not a definitive "threshold" for what constitutes a human rights violation, the more an incident violates any of these three principles, the more likely it is to be violated. Here's a quick summary of what each check means.

- Legality: Was the action allowed under the law as currently written?
- Legitimacy: Was the action justifiable for the sake of a "legitimate aim" (such as protection of national security or public safety)?
- Proportionality: Was the action appropriate to its intended effect, or was it excessive?

As an exercise, you might consider coaching students to come up with different responses for permutations of these factors – for example a response to a threat, which was legitimate but disproportionate vs. one that was allowed under the law but was disproportionate or unjustified in the specific context.

In the discussion, you should always highlight that certain actions are absolutely prohibited under international human rights law (such as the prohibition of torture and other ill-treatment). Under no circumstances, can these be justified by a legitimate aim or other considerations.

# Report Writing

A report should:

- Be written clearly and present findings accurately
- Propose SMART recommendations for addressing the problem:
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Achievable
  - Relevant
  - Time-Bound

Following verification and analysis, findings can be presented in a report. Reports should be written in accordance with the human rights monitoring principles: information should be presented accurately, with gender sensitivity, to reinforce credibility and legitimacy. Conditions of interlocutors' informed consent should be respected to ensure that the report does no harm upon publication.

A report will often be structured with an executive summary, methodology section, legal framework section, findings section, and finish with a conclusions and recommendations section. The speaker can consider highlighting recent relevant reports and asking students to identify elements of the reports that are good or bad.

Recommendations can be proposed from the report's findings and should be written following the SMART framework:

- Specific: Targeting a particular area for improvement
- Measurable: Quantifying, or at least suggesting, an indicator of progress
- Accurate: Outlining attainable results with available resources
- Relevant: Assigned to the correct stakeholder and connected to the findings in the report
- Time-bound: Including a timeline for expected results

If time allows, the speaker can task students to create their own recommendation, and have other students assess it against the SMART criteria.

- 1. Verification** – evaluate sources to find reliable accounts
- 2. Analysis** – evaluate verified accounts for the legality, legitimacy, and proportionality of actions that impact human rights
- 3. Report Writing** - present your analyzed findings in a coherent, effective manner

Verification and analysis both follow specific methodologies, as we talked about here. However, it's important to note that “analysis” is not the end of the process – once verified sources have been analyzed, and violations have been found, the next step is to take that information and turn it into an official report, communicating your findings to a larger audience. Once a report is written, then you work towards realising your recommendations, through an advocacy campaign.