

Neither Optional Nor Limited

- Stay lawful. Illegal methods (trespass, unauthorized recording, hacking, impersonation, intimidation) contaminate the work and can make you the subject of an investigation.
 - Be impartial. Investigate toward and away from any suspected person or theory.
 - Document everything contemporaneously (dates, times, sources, who said what, how evidence was obtained).
 - Follow all reasonable lines of inquiry. Do not stop when you find something that fits a preferred story.
 - Protect people and evidence first when there is risk of harm or destruction of records.
 - Use the **5 Ws + H** (Who, What, When, Where, Why, How) and the ABC rule: Assume nothing, Believe nothing, Challenge everything.
- Standard steps

1. Receive and assess the matter Record the complaint, report, allegation, or observation in the reporter's own words. Decide whether an investigation is actually warranted. Assess immediate safety, retaliation risk, and whether evidence is about to disappear. Not every rumor or grievance requires a full investigation.
2. Define scope and appoint an impartial investigator Write clear terms of reference: what exact questions or allegations are being examined, and what is outside scope. Choose someone with no personal stake and no close relationship to the parties. In official settings this is often a designated investigator, detective, HR professional, or counsel; in citizen work it is whoever can stay disciplined and documented.
3. Make a written plan List witnesses, documents, systems, locations, and public records to review. Set a realistic sequence and timeline. Identify legal constraints (warrants, consent, public-records law, chain of custody). Revise the plan as new facts appear.
4. Preserve and collect evidence first Secure scenes or records if applicable. Gather documents, emails, financials, photos, video, public filings, and physical items before memories fade or files are altered. Keep a chain-of-custody log. Start with the paper/digital trail; interviews come after you know what already exists.

Source: This is not a single official statute, court rule, or agency manual copied verbatim. It is a composite investigation framework assembled from long-standing professional sources, then rewritten in plain language for both official investigators and citizen work by AI Grok 09/2026

5. Interview in a sensible order

Typically: the person who raised the issue, then independent witnesses, then the subject of the allegation. Use open-ended questions first (“Tell me what happened”), then focused follow-ups. Take contemporaneous notes or recordings only where legally allowed. Do not coach witnesses or share other people’s statements.

6. Analyze the whole body of material

Compare accounts against documents and physical evidence. Note consistencies, contradictions, gaps, and alternative explanations. Decide what is established fact, what is disputed, and what remains unknown. Do not treat absence of proof as proof of absence, and do not treat a single source as conclusive.

7. Reach findings and write the report

State what the evidence shows, what it does not show, and the standard you used (probable cause, preponderance of evidence, etc.). Attach or cite source material. Keep conclusions tied to facts. Recommendations (discipline, charges, policy change, further inquiry) come after findings, not instead of them.

8. Close, communicate, and follow up

Share outcomes only as required by law, policy, or fairness. Preserve the file. If the purpose was prevention (workplace incident, government waste, safety), record what should change so the same problem is less likely to recur.