# We Build Your Dossiers

From a finding to a report you sign: the notebook, the Dossier and Publish

SemioSnap
Written by AI, reviewed and approved by Claude Vogel, PhD

November 2026

## Summary

People ask us what SemioSnap does. The short answer is: **we build your Dossiers.**

A Dossier is a comprehensive, deeply structured investigative report, which you guide and you sign. The word sounds a little formal, and it should, because that is what a Dossier is. It is not a chat log or a folder of bookmarks. It is a case, built on its documents, where every finding points to the sentence it comes from.

This paper follows the cycle that produces one: the **notebook**, where discovery is recorded as you go; the **Dossier**, which any finding or open question can start; and **Publish**, which turns the Dossier into a report. Its companion paper, *Semiotic Criticism*, describes the method used inside the Dossier: discover the patterns, snap the shapes, critique the narrative. This one describes the Dossier itself.

## 1. Why a Dossier

Investigation rarely starts with a plan. It starts with something odd: a name that keeps coming back, a date that does not fit, a sentence that says more than it should. The hard part is what comes next. The odd finding has to become a question, the question a line of inquiry, and the inquiry a report that someone else can check.

Most tools stop at the first step. A search engine gives you the finding and leaves the rest to you. A chat assistant gives you a paragraph, which is pleasant to read and hard to check. Neither keeps track of how you got there, and neither helps you build the case.

SemioSnap is built around the case. Everything the app does, it does to put something into a Dossier or to take something from one.

## 2. The notebook: discovery, recorded as you go

You never start the notebook. It is always on, like a lab book that writes itself.

Opening a story starts nothing. Your first *follow-up* on it does: a question asked, a pattern opened, a selection lit, a note typed. From then on, every discovery from that story goes into the same notebook, titled with the story. A search that is not tied to any story goes into your general notebook.

The notebook does not fill up with prose. It holds short entries, mainly of three kinds:

- **a screen** you picked: what it showed (its terms and its one-line reading) and its documents;
- **a claim** you kept, under "what we can say so far";
- **a short note**, in your own words, typed or dictated.

There are no paragraphs while you build. Text is written at the end, in Publish. Along the way you keep screens and claims and jot notes, so that the notebook reads in a glance.

## 3. The decision: any finding can start a Dossier

At any moment, one button turns what you are looking at into a Dossier. It sits at the top of every screen, and each news story on the front page carries its own.

The button takes what is in hand: the terms you have lit, the documents you have targeted, and the screen you are on. It never asks you to select something first, because there is always something on the screen. With nothing lit, it reads the screen as a whole: the groups of a map and the bridges between them, the families of a tree, the cast of a story.

The Dossier is created at once. Its title comes from what you were looking at, its documents are the ones in hand, and its first entry is the screen you were on: its terms and its documents. Anything in your notebook can be attached to it later, or to several Dossiers. Nothing creates a Dossier for you; the decision is always yours.

## 4. The outline: a plan, already filled

A new Dossier opens on its **outline**: the plan of the investigation, already filled in. It is never a blank form.

The outline offers four to six lines of inquiry, each one line long, each read from the documents in hand. They are written as leads, not as menu items:

- *Who profits, and who pays?*
- *Since when?* The first trace of a name, a term or an institution.
- *Who is quiet?* The actor everyone mentions and who never speaks.
- *Who says it?* The voice behind a claim.
- *Where do the sources disagree?*
- *Did you notice …?* Something the screen shows and that is easy to miss.

Each lead carries the words and the documents it stands on, and a line that finds nothing is dropped. None steers you toward a subject you did not raise yourself.

You can then shape the plan in a few gestures: **reorder** the lines by dragging them, **add** one of your own, **remove** one, or **emphasise** one (! or !!). Closing the outline keeps it as it is. There is no required step and nothing to fill in, and the outline reopens from the Dossier whenever you want to change course.

In a test on the Boeing 737 MAX record, for instance, we put *Who profits, and who pays?* first and marked it !!, then *Since when?* with a single !. One press of ▶ on the first line took us to the Map on the documents in hand and filed a finding under that line, with its source; Publish printed it there.

## 5. Collecting and organising: you drive

Once the outline is set, you work through it, and you stay free to move.

A thin line across the top of every screen, the **Dossier strip**, shows the Dossier in hand, the current line of inquiry, what is running, how many findings are kept, and a play button: ▶.

Each line of inquiry is answered on a screen. Pressing ▶ takes you once to that screen, on the documents in hand, with the right terms lit and the answer open beside the drawing. Then you are free again. Whatever runs in the background, such as documents being indexed or an upload being read, shows its progress on the same strip.

**The Dossier never moves you.** Background work writes only into the strip and the Dossier, never onto the screen you are reading. We learned this the hard way: a tool that

keeps switching your screen for you is a tool you stop trusting. So the next line waits with its ▶, and it never runs by itself.

What you keep is filed under the line of inquiry that produced it. The findings organise themselves into the plan, and the plan shows where the case is thick and where it is thin. A line that has its findings simply turns quieter. There are no checkboxes and no percentage complete, because an investigation is not a form.

Adjusting the trajectory is part of the work. A finding may open a new line, make another pointless, or move one to the top. Reopen the outline, change it, and the strip follows.

## 6. Publish: a report you sign

**Publish** turns the Dossier into a report. It starts from what you kept, in the order of your outline, with the lines you emphasised first. Each finding sits under the question it answers, and each carries its source document, and its sentence when you kept one. The claims you kept join the report's argument.

This is the one place where text is written, and you write or edit it. The report goes out as a PDF. It is yours to sign, because you guided every step of it: which leads to follow, what to keep, what to drop, and what to say about it.

## 7. Semiotic criticism, inside the Dossier

The method described in *Semiotic Criticism* happens inside this cycle. **Discover the patterns:** the front page, the Wall and the first look suggest where to start, and the notebook records it. **Snap the shapes:** the map, the tree and the story answer the outline's lines of inquiry, and the screens you keep become entries. **Critique the narrative:** on the Critique screen, the story the documents tell, and any claims it makes, will be weighed before it reaches the report; that screen is being rebuilt and arrives after the beta opens.

The Dossier also keeps the method honest. Every entry points to its sentence, so anyone who reads the report can go back to the record. And because the Dossier records how you moved through the material, the report shows the path as well as the conclusion.

## 8. Your Dossier is yours

A Dossier built on your own documents belongs to you. Only you, or your own team, ever read it. Who you are comes from your sign-in, never from a request. Your documents, and everything drawn from them (maps, stories, findings, reports), are never cached, shown or shared anywhere another reader can reach them. To build your Dossier they are processed by the services our privacy policy names, and only for that. Nothing you build is published unless you publish it.

## 9. A Dossier to open, and any topic you choose

We build our demos as Dossiers, on public records:

- **Boeing 737 MAX:** how a technical concern about the plane's flight-control software failed to become a decision before two crashes, as the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's record and the Justice Department's agreement print them, read here from the documents of the time.
- **Enron:** the collapse of a company, as the congressional hearings record it, read from the hearings' testimony and the exhibits they printed, board minutes and auditors' letters among them.

The Boeing Dossier, read-only, is arriving with the beta on November 16: open it and see how a case comes together; Enron follows in our demos. Then start your own, on any topic: a news story from the front page, a question you bring, or your own documents.

## 10. Who builds Dossiers

- **Legal counsel**, assembling the facts of a matter from thousands of pages, with every fact tied to its exhibit.
- **Journalists and investigators**, following a story from the first odd detail to a piece that holds up.
- **Researchers**, mapping a literature: its groups, its brokers, its unanswered claims.
- **Analysts**, watching a market or a region, and keeping what changes.
- **Writers**, collecting the striking facts and the exact quotes for a post or a book.
- **Teachers and students**, because a Dossier shows how a conclusion was reached, and not only what it is.

## 11. Pop the truths open

What do we do? We build your Dossiers. You bring the first odd finding or the open question. SemioSnap proposes the plan, draws the shapes and keeps what you find in order, and you decide at every step. At the end, the report is yours, and every finding in it can be checked.

*Pop the truths open!*

SemioSnap opens in public beta on November 16, 2026: semiosnap.com/join.