

## Merrill Core Summer Assignment

### Reading and Writing About the New York Times

**Due: First day of your Core seminar**

Reading the news helps us really engage with history as it unfolds in real time. It also helps you engage with multiple different genres: articles written for different purposes and in different styles. In the Merrill Core course, you'll be doing both--engaging with history as it unfolds and thinking about the forms or genres in which such history is written--in part by regularly reading the *New York Times*, one of the world's most well-respected traditional news outlets.

In order to familiarize you with the *Times*, we ask you to complete a **summer assignment** involving reading, and writing about, a selection of *New York Times* articles. You'll subscribe to the *Times* in early August and keep your subscription up through the end of the fall quarter—after which we hope you will continue to subscribe, to the *Times* or some other, equally reputable, news outlet.

#### **GOALS**

Your summer assignment has several goals:

- To help you become familiar with the *layout* of the newspaper (in online or traditional paper format), and with the *genres* or *kinds* of articles the newspaper publishes;
- To help you read the news *accurately* and *analytically* (observing what news the *Times* reports, and how those news stories are told);
- To help you see how news stories unfold and evolve over time; and
- To encourage you to *reflect actively* on the news.

#### **ASSIGNMENT**

Purchase an inexpensive student subscription to the *New York Times* at the low (~\$1/week) student rate via [this](#) subscription link.

Start by familiarizing yourself with the paper. Browse through the newspaper, taking note of the different sections (home page, politics, national, metropolitan, world, health, business, technology, obituaries, arts, etc). Try reading a little in a few different sections. Take a look at a few articles in each section. What do you notice about the articles—about their content, style, amount of detail, other?

**Choose articles that interest you.** Over the course of 4-6 weeks, **select a minimum of 15 articles that interest you** (see below), **read them completely**, and **reflect on** your reading. Record your

thoughts in whatever way works best for you, knowing that it will be essential to be able to recall and review themes, key questions, and insights from your reading.

For this assignment, you will then be asked to produce TWO records of your experience reading the news (single-spaced, 12 pt., Times New Roman):

1. **A dated log of the articles you read.** Think of this as a chronological bibliography of your explorations and encounters with the news. You will use it to:
  - a. keep track of your reading;
  - b. notice and record patterns, themes, and interests that emerge for you in the articles' content and style; and
  - c. notice and record your own responses to these patterns, etc., as you read the articles.

*The point of this log is **observation**: record-keeping about what you read, what you noticed about the content, and what you noticed about your response.*

2. **A one-page response.** Take what you discovered from reading the articles (patterns, themes, interests, and what you learn from thinking deeply about them) and go deeper: **analyze and reflect** upon what "happened" to you as a critical thinker and reader. Have the ideas you encountered changed the way you think, the way you engage with these issues, the way you read? How have they changed, and why?

*The point of this response is **metacognition**: thinking about your own thinking--in this case, thinking about how you're thinking about the news.*

## **PROCESS**

**How should I choose my articles?** As mentioned above, you should choose articles that interest you. Let yourself be guided by different questions on different days. Experiment with what catches your eye or what draws you in. Challenge yourself to pick up a different topic or a whole different section. Your reading log does not have to chart a coherent course or single subject area, but it should:

1. Contain a minimum of 15 articles that interest you, published between August 1 - September 30. **That's fewer than 3 articles a week**, but you should feel free to include more--and we certainly hope you will read more! These articles should be substantive (a very short article will give you little to think about). Please note: The Times website is updated regularly: stories can change or disappear. We strongly recommend saving as PDFs articles that you have read and may find it useful to be able to return to.
2. Include the following:

- At least one front-page (on the Home page) news article with a by-line (author name);
- At least one editorial representing the point of view of the paper itself (you'll find editorials on the Opinions page under Editorials; editorials have no by-line);
- At least one op-ed article (also on the Opinions page, this time under Op-Eds; op-eds have by-lines);
- At least one news article (not an op-ed or editorial) from elsewhere than the front page;
- A series of at least three related articles, published on different days, that follow a single story as it develops and changes. These can include straight news articles, editorials, op-eds, or other types of articles, so long as they are addressing the same story.

**What format should I use for my log?** Log entries don't have to be lengthy, but each should include identifying information about the article; your observations about patterns, content, or themes of the articles; and your responses to these patterns, etc. Because you'll be turning this in to your professor via Canvas, please type it up. Feel free to use a grid format such as the sample below, or a more narrative format.

Sample grid format

Identifying information (article author, title, date of publication)	Observations about the content, form, or style of the article	Your reflections or commentary on what you've observed: E.g., What draws your attention? What do you find curious or strange or notable about the article's focus or style? Etc.
1.		
2.		

**How should I compose my analysis/reflection?** This is largely up to you. It is not a formal paper, but it is a chance to write clearly, in your own voice (aim to sound like yourself, not your idea of what a college student should sound like). Focus on what matters about what you have read and about what matters about how you have responded to it. The following are some questions that may help you get started. Don't feel you need to address all (or any) of them:

Think about the different types or genres of articles you have read (op-eds, straight reporting, news analysis, feature article, review, etc.), as well as about the different topics. Did you learn

different things from different genres? Were Op-Eds or perhaps multi-day articles following the same, evolving topic more useful to pushing you in new directions in your thinking? Did you develop habits of reading that allowed you to use the news more effectively to answer questions that came up in your reading? What are the ideas and ways of thinking and reading that will stay with you? What are some useful “take- aways” from this period of intensive engagement with The New York Times?

### **A note about citations in your reading log/bibliography:**

Sources like the MLA Handbook or reputable online citation references like the Purdue OWL can provide guidance on the proper formatting and details for article citation. Though you may need to seek out specific guidance for different cases, the framework below (from the Purdue OWL) can get you started.

### **Article in a Newspaper**

Cite a newspaper article as you would a magazine article, but note the different pagination in most newspapers. If there is more than one edition available for that date (as in an early and late edition of a newspaper), identify the edition after the newspaper title.

Brubaker, Bill. "New Health Center Targets County's Uninsured Patients." Washington Post, 24 May 2007, p. LZ01.

Krugman, Andrew. "Fear of Eating." New York Times, late ed., 21 May 2007, p. A1.

If the newspaper is a less well-known or local publication, include the city name in brackets after the title of the newspaper.

Behre, Robert. "Presidential Hopefuls Get Final Crack at Core of S.C. Democrats." Post and Courier [Charleston, SC], 29 Apr. 2007, p. A11.

Trembacki, Paul. "Brees Hopes to Win Heisman for Team." Purdue Exponent [West Lafayette, IN], 5 Dec. 2000, p. 20.

### **ASSESSMENT**

This assignment is required of all incoming Merrill frosh. Your Core seminar instructor will not put a letter grade on your assignment but will note whether it is complete and on time. Your instructor may use this assignment in several different ways: he or she may have you work with this assignment in class, share it with other students, develop ideas from it for a formal essay, or revisit it at the end of the quarter.

