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 be expected to subscribe in early August and to 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. Once you subscribe to the *Times*, you’ll be able to begin the assignment.

**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 online subscription, starting in August, to the New York Times at a low student rate via the subscription link: [nytimes.com/getacademicroate](http://nytimes.com/getacademicroate). You’ll be expected to 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. Once you subscribe to the Times, you’ll be able to begin the assignment.

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 4-5 weeks, select, read completely, and write about a **minimum of 5 articles that interest you**, published between August 15 – September 15. These articles should be substantive (a very short article will give you little to write about). *Please note: The *Times* website is updated regularly: stories can change or
disappear. I strongly recommend saving as PDFs articles that you think you may want to write about, especially the articles noted in (5), below.

Your articles should include the following:

1. At least one front-page (on the Home page) news article with a by-line (author name);
2. At least one editorial representing the point of view of the paper itself (no by-line);
3. At least one op-ed (opinion) article—it must have a by-line to be an op-ed;
4. At least one news article (not an op-ed or editorial) from elsewhere than the front page;
5. 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.

In the end you should have a total of at least 5 articles in your log. It’s fine if Item 5 is made up of articles that satisfy 1-4.

**Write a news log:** For each separate article, write a “news log” entry. Log entries should concentrate on two things: first, reporting on each article’s main point (summary), and second, examining the writer’s choices and how these choices affect the article’s meaning (analysis). Examples of the authors’ choices include how they introduce the articles (focus); how they arrange the information they include in the article (structure); what sources they choose and quotations they include (evidence); their use of language (style). Don’t feel you need to address all of these choices, and feel free to address others as well. Log entries should be typed and written in complete sentences, and should run around 150 words. Each log entry should begin with the date of the article, the author name(s), the title, the type of article (front page, editorial, op-ed)—not part of the word count. (Including this sentence, to this point this paragraph is 155 words.) If the article is not an original NYT account, please also include the news source (e.g., AP, UPI, etc.). News logs are not small essays, but they must contain both summary and analysis.

**Reflect:** For item 5, in addition, please write (type) another paragraph or two describing how the story changes as it unfolds over several days or in different genres (e.g., news, editorials, op-eds), and your thoughts about how the story changes and what differences those changes make to you, the reader. For instance, you might consider how the topic or focus changes or the new directions the story takes, or how the story shifts from direct reporting to opinion. These additional paragraphs should run another 200-250 words.

**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, revisit it at the end of the quarter, etc.