

**Syllabus – Online Course**

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| **Course** | ENG 258 Basic News Writing (CRN 45211) |
| **Semester** | Spring 2021, T-Th 2:25-3:40 |
| **Location** | Spring 14-week Online  |

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| **Instructor Name** | Ron Thomas; website www.ronthomas.news |
| **Email** | Ron.Thomas@morehouse.edu |
| **Phone** | (cell) 510-913-0775, (MH) 470-639-0359 – cell preferred |
| **Hours of Availability** | 12-2 p.m. ET, and by appointment |

**course description**

This course is designed to teach you how to make the transition from academic writing to the newswriting style and thinking that is used by professional journalists. This transition includes recognizing what is newsworthy if you go to an event, hear someone speak or take an array of photos. It involves learning how to write in a clear, direct manner that will give information and yet convey emotion to the reader. It gives you the skills needed to establish rapport with live interview subjects and elicit substantive information from them. Finally, but perhaps most important, this course strives to teach you how to report and write with so much honesty and accuracy that the term “fake news” will never apply to content that you produce.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**When the course ends, students will be able to:**

1. Identify a worthy news topic, research it with publications and personal interviews, and produce an article written in traditional newswriting style.

2. Prove their knowledge of current domestic and international news topics.

3. Differentiate between hard news stories, features and commentary, and demonstrate their ability to write an article in each style.

4. Demonstrate their knowledge of key parts of the Associated Press Stylebook and possess a general understanding of its content.

5. Tell the difference between writing leads and headlines in traditional newspaper style and increasingly popular multimedia style

6. Demonstrate their ability to augment articles with photography.

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| **\* Name of Assignment Type**  | **Points** |
| News & Readings Quizzes 4 @50 points (lowest score dropped) | 150 |
| Multicultural, Quotes Tests 3 @100 (lowest score dropped) |  200 |
| Three articles@200 points each (lowest score dropped) | 400 |
| BLHAC and Final Article@400  | 800 |
| AP Style Tests 2@100 points each | 200 |
| **Total:** | **1750** |

\*Number of items in each category is subject to change

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| **Grade** | **Percentage** | **Total Points Earned** |
| **A+** | *97* | *to* | *99* |  | *to* |  |
| **A** | *94* | *to* | *96* |  | *to* |  |
| **A-** | *90* | *to* | *93* |  | *to* |  |
| **B+** | *87* | *to* | *89* |  | *to* |  |
| **B** | *84* | *to* | *86* |  | *to* |  |
| **B-** | *80* | *to* | *83* |  | *to* |  |
| **C+** | *77* | *to* | *79* |  | *to* |  |
| **C** | *74* | *to*  | *76* |  | *to* |  |
| **C-** | *70* | *to* | *73* |  | *to* |  |
| **D+** | *67* | *to* | *69* |  | *to* |  |
| **D** | *64* | *to* | *66* |  | *to* |  |
| **D-** | *60* | *to* | *63* |  | *to* |  |
| **F** | *0* | *to* | *59* |  | *to* |  |

**CLASS POLICIES**

**MOREHOUSE POLICIES**

**Attendance Requirements:**

Students are expected to attend each class meeting, although I understand the need for flexibility in this virtual environment so I will try to record each session.  Students with more than 2 unexcused absences will be referred to the Office of Student Success and may be administratively withdrawn from the course.  Failure to meet minimum attendance requirements may result in the loss of the student’s financial aid in accordance with federal financial aid requirements.

**EEO & Disability Statement:**

Morehouse College is an equal opportunity employer. As a Private Educational Institution, Morehouse College provides equal access to all qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student who is concerned you have a disability-related condition that is impacting your academic progress, you are required to register with our Student Counseling & Disability Center (the “Center”) at any time throughout the semester (preferably in the beginning of the semester). A disability accommodation letter can be obtained from the Office of Disabilities. Students are required to provide a copy of the disability accommodation letter to each of their professors upon approval of their accommodations. Please contact our Coordinator of Disability and Counseling Services, Dr. Travis Sadler, with any questions at (470) 639-0252 and/or email Travis.Sadler@morehouse.edu. Please don’t let pride prevent you from seeking the assistance you need.

**Academic Integrity:**

Morehouse College students are expected to conduct themselves with the highest level of ethics and academic honesty at all times and abide by the terms set forth in the Student Handbook and Code of Conduct. Instances of academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to plagiarism and cheating on examinations and assignments, are taken seriously and may result in a failing grade for the assignment or course and may be reported to the Honor and Conduct Review Board for disciplinary action. These standards include but are not limited to the following:

* In projects and assignments prepared independently, students must never represent the ideas or the language of others as their own.
* Students must not destroy or alter either the work of other students or the educational resources and materials of the College.
* Students must not take unfair advantage of fellow students by representing work completed for one course as original work for another or by deliberately disregarding course rules and regulations.
* Unless directed by the faculty member, students should neither give nor receive assistance in examinations.
* In laboratory or research projects involving the collection of data, students must accurately report data observed and not alter data for any reason.

Failure to maintain academic integrity will result in one of the following penalties: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, or possible expulsion. The instructor will determine the seriousness of the offence. The offence will be reported in Starfish and added to the student’s academic file.

**Tutoring:**

**Frederick Douglass Academic Success Center** (FDASC) offers peer tutoring which can be accessed through Starfish. Please look for the available tutor for the courses which you are enrolled in the Student Success Network. You can schedule an appointment by clicking on their name.

**Brainfuse**

In addition, the college is providing 24/7 tutoring through **Brainfuse**. You can access the link to this service in the Tools section of your Blackboard course.

**Morehouse Writing Center**

The Writing Center has available tutors to assist you with any part of the writing process, from conceiving an idea to the writing of it. Please contact them **to schedule an appointment at the Writing Center** [**morehouse.mywconline.com**](http://morehouse.mywconline.com/)**.  Writing Tutors are available Monday – Friday 9:00 am- 4:30 pm. Although journalism isn’t listed as one of the disciplines they serve, I have given them materials specific to journalistic writing so they can help you.**

**Inclement Weather Policy:**

In the event of inclement weather, the College will announce any closures via the emergency notification system and/or through local news outlets.  Absent an official closure, students are not excused from attending class due to weather and any absences will be considered unexcused.

**MY POLICIES**

**Plagiarism:**

No matter what form journalism takes, its ultimate goal is to seek the facts and the truth that lies within them. Only the highest ethics are involved in pursuit of the truth, and therefore plagiarism in this course is completely unacceptable. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines plagiarize as taking ideas or writing from another and passing them off as one’s own. Whether plagiarized material is taken from published material, the internet or other students’ work, it is inexcusable.

My longtime friend, Justice Hill, gave his students these examples of plagiarism when he taught journalism at Ohio University: “While not all forms of academic dishonesty can be listed here, examples include copying from another student, copying from a book or class notes during a closed book exam, submitting materials authored by or revised by another person as the student’s own work, copying a passage or text directly from a published source without appropriately citing or recognizing that source, taking a test or doing an assignment or other academic work for another student, securing or supplying in advance a copy of an examination without the knowledge or consent of the instructor, and colluding with another student or students to engage in academic dishonesty.”

The Humanities Division at Morehouse College endorses the highest standards and expectations of academic honesty and integrity. Plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Sanctions for violation of these standards include possible failing an assignment or the course, suspension from school or dismissal from the College. It is each student’s responsibility to be familiar with the expected codes of conduct as outlined in the Student Handbook and the Academic Honesty section of the Morehouse catalog.

• I will try to remember to tape every class period through Blackboard Collaborator. If you are late or absent for any reason, you are responsible for getting assignments that were given that day and for getting handouts that I distributed. It’s up to you to contact a reliable classmate.

**Attendance and Punctuality:**

• I will take attendance on Starfish at the beginning of class between 2:25-2:35, and it’s important that students arrive before 2:35 so they don’t miss important information. Besides, reporters should be adamant about being on time. If I detect a pattern of absences by a student, I will bring it to your attention and refer you to the Office of Student Success We are starting this semester

This may change dependent on the format adopted for classes during the pandemic: in-person, hybrid, or only online. The format also will determine how many unexcused absences you can have before being referred to the Office of Student Success to identify and rectify your attendance problem.

• I will try to remember to tape every class period through Blackboard Collaborator. If you are late or absent for any reason, you are responsible for getting assignments that were given that day and for getting handouts that I passed out. It’s up to you to contact me or a reliable classmate; I will not seek you out.

**Deadlines**

• Most tests will be posted on Blackboard with a completion deadline at least 48 hours later. Consequently, if you miss a test because of an unexcused absence, you get no points for the test or writing assignment, and no make-up will be given. If you miss a test or a deadline because of an officially excused absence, I will give you an alternative test.

Since making deadline is so important in journalism, if you miss a deadline on a writing assignment:

1. If you submit it less than one hour late, your grade will be lowered by 10% after the grade on it has been determined.
2. If a writing assignment is between 1 and 24 hours late, you get an F for the assignment, which is equal to 55 points.
3. If a writing assignment is more than 24 hours late, you get a zero on the assignment.

**My “I saw” Campaign:**

Far too many Morehouse students use "I seen ..." as the past tense of see instead of correctly using "I saw ..." It's a common error, but you must remember to use "I saw"  because you frequently use that combination throughout your life while talking or writing professionally or casually. If you plan to be a journalist, how can you convince an editor to hire you if you don’t know a past tense that is taught in elementary school?

There always is a word – usually "had" or "have" – between I and seen. Here's a web site called verb2verbe that gives you a full chart of  different tenses of any verb. That's called the conjugation of the verb, and the web site is for anyone learning English or French. Use it to remember "I saw" or any verb tense that gives you problems.

<http://www.verb2verbe.com/EnglishConj.aspx?verb=see&tail=&type=query>

Go to the link, click on English, type in "see" in the yellow window, and the conjugation will show up. It will show you how "saw" and "seen" should be used. You really need to memorize the chart by reading through all the tenses (be sure to scroll down to the bottom of the page) and then go to "Test yourself!" on the upper left side and take the tests on each tense. For the final challenge, take the random test at the end.

To sound as intelligent as you are, you must know that saw is the past tense of see.

**materials and access**

Books and laminations can be purchased from the bookstore (404-507-8685), which will mail thematerials to you.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

The Associated Press Stylebook (2020-2022 edition only, buy from Morehouse bookstore)

English Grammar & Punctuation Guide (laminated, buy from Morehouse bookstore)

Common Grammar Pitfalls & Mistakes (laminated, buy from Morehouse bookstore)

Online Punctuation Guide (I will send to you)

Newsroom 101 (Purchase online, I will explain how to do that)

The New York Times or Washington Post (there are special rates available for students)

Journal-isms (subscribe to free minorities in media column by Richard Prince; I will send instructions to you)

Why Writing Better Will Make You a Better Person by Morehouse Philosophy Professor Nathan Nobis (article that I will provide)

Verb2verbe.com web site (To learn how to conjugate any verb)

The Undefeated

**RECOMMENDED READING:**

*The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

The Morehouse Maroon Tiger (maroontigermedia.com)

theGrio (Managing Editor Gerren Gaynor Pro Publica

Axios.com

Strunk, William and White, *E.B. The Elements of Style*

Boyd, Gerald, *My Times in Black and White*

Zinsser, William, *On Writing Well*

The Root

Klibanoff, Hank and Roberts, Gene,*The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*

Politico.com

Rich, Carole. *Writing and Reporting News.* 5th ed.

Lacy, Sam with Newsom, Moses J., *Fighting for Fairness (can be borrowed from my office)*

Bill Rhoden,*Forty Million Dollar Slaves*

**RECOMMENDED LISTENING:**

WABE 90.1 FM National Public Radio – Morning Edition from National Public Radio, 5-10 a.m.; Weekend Saturday 8-10 a.m.; Weekend Sunday 8-11 a.m. (Download the WABE app.)

“Fresh Air” with host Terry Gross, THE BEST interview show on radio, Monday-Thursday 2-3 p.m.

“A Closer Look” with host Rose Scott, 1-2 p.m. and 7-8 p.m. replay

**RECOMMENDED VIEWING:**

Cable news on CNN or MSNBC

“CBS This Morning” with Gayle King and Norah O’Donnell

**EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY:**

I will give you 25 points for each one of your articles that appears in the Maroon Tiger, Spelman Blue Print or CAU Panther or for each two Maroon Tiger copying editing sessions you attend. You can earn up to 50 points toward your final grade for articles in these publications.

**WEEK-by-week schedule**

**COURSE SCHEDULE**: This is a week-by-week outline of topics that will be covered during the course. Reading assignments should be completed before the first class of each week. Be mindful that this syllabus is subject to change based on unforeseen news topics that will arise during the semester.

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| **Week** | **Topics/Assigned Reading** | **Assignments Due** |
| **Week 1** | **Course Introduction**Read before Thursday’s class: “Why Writing Better Will Make You a Better Person”and <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/19/politics/fact-check-daniel-dale-reflections-fact-checking-trump/index.html?utm_source=pocket-newtab> | Subscribe to Washington Post or New York Times, pick one or two cable news networks that you will watch regularly, buy Associated Press Stylebook 2020-2022, 55th Edition**Take Associated Press Style pre-test, which doesn’t count toward your grade, before reading any of the AP book** |
| Feb. 1-5 |
| **Week 2** | **FOUNDER’S WEEK****Monday is add/drop date****Read before Tuesday’s class:** “Keys to Writing an Acceptable Journalism Article” handout and“This Could Get Ugly” on reporters’ experiences when U.S. Capitol was attacked.<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/business/media/journalists-capitol-mob.html>**Read before Thursday’s class:**AP Study Guide handout; discussion of how you will learn AP style | **Writing Assignment:** “The Key Motivator in My Life Is …” (ungraded column due before Thursday’s class) |
| Feb. 8-12 |
| **Week 3** | **Read before Tuesday’s class:**“A Good Lead Is Everything” handout about writing strong leads and headlines in traditional newspaper style.**Read before Thursday’s class:**“Quotes and Attribution” chapter about the correct way to write and attribute quotes. | Complete in-class leads assignments as homework assignments. Do in-class “6-Word Memoir” exercise**Thursday: First day to take Test #1: AP Numbers Quiz in Blackboard Week 3 folder** |
| Feb. 15-19 |
| **Week 4** | Guest Lecturer all week: CNN Assistant Managing Editor Saeed Ahmed on writing strong leads and headlines in online writing style. | **Tuesday: First day to take Test #2: Quotes Test in Blackboard Week 4**Complete exercises/assignmentsgiven my Mr. Ahmed about online writing**Thursday: Write Article #1 – News topic to be determined. Due Sunday, Feb. 28, 11:59 p.m.** |
| Feb. 22-26 |
| **Week 5** | **Before Tuesday’s class about interviewing listen to:**“Fresh Air” interviews with actor Andre Holland and author Toni Morrison. Participate in in-class interviewing “What’s My Secret?” exercise |  |
| March 1-5 |
| **Week 6** | **Before Tuesday’s class about copy editing read:**“Grammar & Usage” handout and participate in editing poorly written article**Thursday’s class multicultural sensitivity, read:**“Why Cross Cultural Competence Is a Must in Journalism Education”[**http://mediashift.org/2015/07/why-cross-cultural-competency-is-a-must-in-journalism-education/**](http://mediashift.org/2015/07/why-cross-cultural-competency-is-a-must-in-journalism-education/)a**nd**“Biden Bill Would Remove ‘Alien’ From US Immigration Laws”<https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/21/politics/alien-biden-immigration-law/index.html> | Take AP Study Guide Test **Thursday: First day to take Test #3: AP Study Guide Test in Week 6 folder** |
| March 8-12 |
| **Week 7****Mid-term Exams** | **Before Tuesday’s class about ethics in journalism listen to and critique:** “Why Good People Do Bad Things” NPR radio segment andSacramento Bee article about sports writer Jim Van Vliet**Before Thursday’s class about ethics in journalism read:** “Jimmy’s World” and excerpts from Washington Post ombudsman’s report about the downfall of Janet Cooke | **Article #2 about multiculturalism for your mid-term – due date TBD.****Thursday: First day to take Test #4: Janet Cooke readings quiz in Week 7 folder** |
| March 15-19 |  |  |
| **Week 8** | **Before Tuesday’s class about sports reporting read:** “From Sports Fan to Sports Reporter” and “Keys to Writing an Acceptable Game Story” handout |  |
| March 22-26 |  |  |
| **Week 9** | **Tuesday Lecture: How to write a column, not a news article****Spring Break: Wed.-Fri, March 31-April 2** | **Tuesday: Article #3 – Write a sports column about your personal experience with sports** |
| March 29-April 2 |
| **Week 10** | **Black Life, History, Arts and Culture Week**Guest Lecturer on Pioneering Black Journalists  | **Tuesday: Article #4: Research pioneering black journalists and produce content that describes contributions of two (one male, one female).****April 7 – Last day to withdraw from a class** |
| April 5-9 |  |  |
| **Week 11** | Thursday - Guest Lecturer: Zach Thomas ’13 – Smartphone Photography  |  |
| April 12-16 | Final Article - Deadline Writing | **Article #5 – Topic, to be announced** |
| **Week 12** |  |  |
| April 19-23 |  | **April 19 – Distribute J&S Promo**Thursday: Class evaluations, Post AP test for a gradeAP post-test for assessment  |
| **Week 13** |  |  |
| April 26-30 |  | **April 26 – Fall Registration starts****April 28 – Last day of class****April 29 – Graduating Seniors Final Exams****April 29, 30 – Reading Days** |
| **Week 14**May 3-7 | Final Exams | NONE, but final versions of previous articles will be due. |
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| **Week 15** |  | **Commencement Weekend**  |
| May 10-17 |  |  |
| **Week 16** |  |  |
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