Abortion, gun control, global warming, Trump. This workshop is for people who want to make sense of an issue, and then expose their conclusions to the largest possible audiences in the most persuasive way.

Opinion journalism no longer means ponderous blocks of gray text -- the province of faceless editors and columnists. Now, civic engagement through opinion writing is pervasive, thanks to the Internet, and it belongs to everyone.

Most of it is mere venting, though. Self-indulgent, reactive twaddle -- a distraction and a waste of time for readers who want good information and sound reasoning along with the passion. That's your job here.

Texts:

*How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds*, by Alan Jacobs

*Thank You For Arguing, third edition*, by Jay Heinrichs

How the class works

It's a seminar. You listen *and talk*. You'll pick important controversial topics to write about. Then you'll figure out, for each of them, a place that would be likely to publish them. You will submit them to *these blogs*, or *these*, or others you follow, or *newspapers*. -- *The Collegian* is a welcoming target. So is the Canton, Ohio *Repository*, if you're from there or if your topic relates well to Canton. You will submit every op-ed you write somewhere, or to many outlets, with a blind copy to Nash.

By the end of the semester, we'll count up how many of your items have been published by someone other than their authors. The winner of that competition gets an automatic A. But being published is only a minor reward. The big payoff is learning how to research efficiently, to think straight, and to write well enough to open other people's minds. You know most of that already. Easy class!

Your opinion pieces will be 750 words, minimum. They will include two figures of speech that you have not used in a prior assignment, from *Thank You for Arguing*. A *criss-cross chiasmus*, maybe, or a *dialysis*. Each op-ed will have a minimum of four sources; for example, two original documentary or "primary" sources -- science research, legislative studies, policy research -- and two interview sources.

All interviews must be voice-recorded with the consent of the interviewee -- also recorded. Look online for "cellphone recording apps" to figure this out, or buy an inexpensive voice recorder -- I
use Olympus -- and a phone-recording earphone, also cheap. You will submit the soundfile for each interview, and a pdf of your primary document source, as part of the assignment.

You may not use the work of other journalists-- they are "secondary" sources -- but previously published journalism is, of course, a great place to background yourself as you begin your own research.

Collect illustrations -- photos, charts, other graphics -- to illustrate your op-ed, and be careful to gather credit information for each of those to submit with the assignment.

**Grades**

Half the grade for each op-ed is for the quality of your writing, half for the quality of your research. Pertinent, persuasive illustrations earn modest extra credit; so does getting your op-ed published.

Approximately 15-20 percent of your grade will be based on your contributions in class and/or on smaller assignments.

**Attendance**

We're only here once a week, so if you miss one class, you've missed a whole week of classes. You are expected to attend each class and to participate knowledgeably. Take notes on readings and on all material presented in class in whatever form (lectures, discussions and videos, for example). It is your responsibility to find out what you missed in any class you do not attend. Bring a pen and a notebook -- you will need them. Please inter your cellphones, laptops, tablets for the duration of class, and attend to restroom needs before class and at the mid-class break, whenever possible.

**Deadlines**

No late assignments will be accepted except in cases of illness or family emergency. Non-valid excuses are often generated when students begin work too near a deadline. Examples of non-valid excuses: source didn't return calls/emails, erased computer file, broken printer or computer. Anticipate such problems, start early, get the assignment in on time. If any of these instructions are unclear to you, ask me about them!

**Writing**

Use your dictionary. Keep it with you as you write, or bookmark a good one online.

Revise your work to make certain that it is clearly written. Read your writing aloud to yourself, and listen carefully to determine whether it is easily understood. You can avoid tangled prose with a little effort.

**Plagiarism**

It is unethical to use someone else’s work without attribution. It is also an honor code violation. You may use material from other sources as long as you give them credit. If you are involved in plagiarism, you will automatically fail this course. This has taken on new significance in recent
years with the ease of obtaining information from the Internet. When in doubt, check with me before handing in an assignment.

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work, words, ideas or data as your own. It's plagiarism whether you use a whole document, a paragraph, a single sentence, a distinctive phrase, specific data, or a graphic element of any kind without attribution or acknowledgement of the source. It's also plagiarism if you use an idea developed by another as if it were your own. If you use any work created by someone else as your own without acknowledging the creator, and if you hand in the work -- whether it is a news story or a research paper -- with your name on it, thus implying that it is your work, then you commit plagiarism. On the other hand, when you carefully acknowledge your sources, you demonstrate the range and depth of your research and reporting.

-- Adapted from the Virginia Tech English Department's statement on plagiarism: "Wonder Where They Got It?"

...and Glitches.

Any glitch in your op-ed knocks a point off your score. More items will be added to this list as time passes:

Avoid the passive voice. Write "The Journal covered the story in abundant detail," not "The story was being covered in abundant detail by the Journal."

Avoid clauses that begin with "there is" or "there are," whenever possible. They usually generate unnecessary verbiage.

Use singular verbs and pronouns with collective nouns.
The group was lost when it disappeared.
not
The group were lost when they disappeared.

Look up, and know the difference between "affect" and "effect."

Be careful to use apostrophes correctly. Apostrophes are not used to create plurals. Know "its" and "it's." When in doubt, look it up.

Don't misspell proper names (or anything else). Double-check each name and number in your work.

"Medium" is the singular:
Radio is a news medium.

"Media" is the plural:
The news media follow the candidate closely.

"Medias" is not a word.

"Mediums" is not a word, unless you're referring to people who can communicate with the dead.

Don't use "contain" when you mean "include."
Use "include" when the items that follow are only part of the total: The March 12 issue included several news stories.

Use "contain" to indicate something held within a volume or area: The tank contained several gallons of gasoline.

Avoid relating ideas or things to one another with vague phrases such as "involved with," "deals with," "aspects of," or "centered around." Instead, describe the relationship clearly and precisely.

Use hyphens to form a single idea from two or more words. Do not use hyphens with adverbs that end in "ly.

Correct: It was a once-in-a-blue-moon, 400-ton bargain.

Incorrect: It was a fully-booked ocean liner.

Don't use "amount" when you mean "number." The former is for bulk matter such as grain or oxygen; the latter is used with individual item such as news stories, words, or ideas.

"A lot" is a colloquialism, unwelcome here. Be specific whenever possible. Say how many "a lot" really is. Avoid other colloquial phrases, such as "it was a pain," "it was awesome," "screwed up," "messed up," "she was looking to vote," etc.

Some of your prospective instructor's more recent opinion writing:


"Virginia’s endangered species need the strongest protection possible," The Washington Post, Aug. 10, 2018. ...also published in Roanoke, and in ten other Virginia newspapers under varying headlines.


"The populist ethical issue hurting Virginia Democrats," The Washington Post, May 26, 2017*

"After the deal goes down: crooked alpacas replace Virginia democracy," (with Mary Peyton Baskin) Richmond Times-Dispatch, Aug 12, 2017*

"Something rotten in Richmond," Norfolk Virginian-Pilot, July 10, 2016*

"A guaranteed income might be just what Americans need now," Richmond Times-Dispatch, March 11, 2017

"Virginia’s leaders have a serious case of the slows on climate change," The Washington Post, September 22, 2017

“Can the Virginia GOP rise to the challenge of climate change?” Washington Post, June 6, 2014
* Localized variations of these articles on gerrymandering, campaign finance corruption, and Virginia climate change have also been published in the newspapers of Roanoke, Norfolk, Richmond, Charlottesville, Bristol, Danville, Fredericksburg, Lynchburg, Martinsville, Strasburg, Petersburg, Pulaski, Staunton, Suffolk, and some 28 other weekly and semi-weekly newspapers in Virginia. Some were also republished in other states, including Tennessee and Ohio.

Awhile-back opinion writing

"Invasion of the Buggy Snackers (and Other Horrors), The Washington Post, with: "Asian Silver Carp to Zebra Mussels: A Quiz." The Washington Post substantially similar versions:
"Free trade puts pests in position to destroy," Eugene (Oregon) Register-Guard

"Aliens Overrun Bugged-Out Ports in U.S.,” The Landsculptor

"New Pests Wreak Havoc on Environment," Richmond (Virginia) Times-Dispatch

"Pigs and Salmon, Tacos and Feds," syndicated by Blue Ridge Press and published in Roanoke, Fredericksburg, Wytheville, Farmville, Danville, Virginia; Rome, Georgia; Buckhannon, West Virginia.

“Action to combat air pollution long overdue,” News & Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina

“N.C.’s air needs a healthy push,” Citizen-Times, Asheville, North Carolina

“Where’s the Blue Ridge Parkway Heading Now?” Charlotte Observer, Charlotte, N.C.

“Exotics’ march on the mountains,” “Blue Ridge previews ‘biological pollution,'” (and a variety of other headlines for the same op-ed piece):

News & Observer, Raleigh, North Carolina
Citizen-Times, Asheville, North Carolina
Tribune-Times, Greenville, South Carolina
The Alleghany News, Sparta, North Carolina
The Record, Erwin, Tennessee
Patriot-Journal, North Wilkesboro, North Carolina
Crossroads Chronicle, Cashiers, North Carolina
The Northeast Georgian, Cordelia, Georgia
Rockbridge Weekly, Lexington, Virginia
Southwest Virginia Enterprise
Pickens County Progress, Jasper, Georgia
The Blowing Rocket, Blowing Rock, North Carolina
The Times, Chatsworth, Georgia
Black Mountain News, Black Mountain, North Carolina
The Highlander, Highlands, North Carolina
The Post, West Jefferson, North Carolina
Mountain Times, Boone, North Carolina
Advocate Democrat, Monroe County, Tennessee
The Tomahawk, Mountain City
The News Messenger, Christiansburg, Virginia
Valley Banner, Elkton, Virginia
Warren Sentinel, Front Royal, Virginia
The Monitor, Traveler’s Rest, South Carolina
News and Advocate, Lynchburg, Virginia
News-Topic, Lenoir, North Carolina
Times-Journal, Burnsville, North Carolina
Times-News, Kingsport, Tennessee
Blue Ridge Leader, Purcellville, Virginia
The Tribune, Elkin, North Carolina