

The 48-Hour News Blackout

Date and time Blackout started: _____

Date and time Blackout ended: _____

What You're Doing



You are about to enter the “Twilight Zone” and then write about the experience.

Beginning at the time designated by your instructor, and ending 48 hours later, you will adhere to a strict news blackout. Make no effort to obtain news from any source, including from family and friends. No weather forecasts, no sports scores, no news of any kind, including Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, Reddit or other social media.

More importantly, you must take active steps to avoid news that makes its way to you: walk out of the room if the TV is tuned to news, switch stations if news breaks in on your radio, change home pages if news turns up there, leave the table if it comes up at mealtime.

The point of this experience is to shut out all news, whether it is consumed actively or passively.

Carry a notebook, (or use your phone) to take detailed notes (time, place, incident, what you felt or said) of your observations and reactions. In the paper, select 3 to 5 anecdotes to illustrate your experience and what it taught you.

Then write it up in 250-300 words. Start with a strong, well-crafted opening statement and back it up with effective examples. Avoid trivial weather-related anecdotes.

What You Should Aim to Get Out of It

The Blackout, done correctly, will give you clarity about the information that you take for granted in making decisions large and small. This news deficit will help you weigh the role of news, where you obtain it and how you would fare without it.

Some students are tempted to imagine some experiences and write a fictional account instead of doing an actual Blackout. Your instructors have read hundreds of Blackout assignments and it is painfully obvious who is pretending and who is not and will grade accordingly. The Blackout’s value far outweighs four homework points. If you do an honest job of this, you’ll have more interesting things to say in the rest of this semester’s assignments, which can also improve your grade.

As with all written homework, this one is worth up to 4 points toward the homework portion of your final grade.