

PUBLIC CHOICE (ECO1028)

Guidance Document

Beatriz Gietner

beatriz.gietner@dcu.ie

Part A: Guide to Writing a Paper Critique

Overview

A paper critique goes beyond summary to provide critical evaluation. It demonstrates your understanding of the research and your ability to assess its quality, contribution, and limitations. You are expected to engage analytically with the paper's argument, methodology, and findings.

Suggested Structure (2000–2500 words)

1. Introduction (approximately 200 words)

State the paper's topic and research question. Briefly explain why this question is important to the field, to policy, and/or to society. Provide your overall assessment in one or two sentences. This serves as your thesis.

Example: "This paper investigates whether term limits reduce corruption in local government. While the empirical strategy is strong, the findings are sensitive to specification choices and may not generalise beyond the US context."

2. Summary of the Paper (approximately 400 words)

Explain the research question: what puzzle or gap is the paper addressing? Describe the methodology: how do they study it? Is it a theoretical model, regression analysis, experiment, or case study? Summarise the main findings and identify the key contribution of the paper.

Write this section as if explaining the paper to a clever classmate who has not read it. Aim for clarity instead of exhaustive detail.

3. Critical Evaluation (approximately 800 words)

This is the heart of your critique. Address the following dimensions:

Theory and Logic (if applicable): Are the assumptions reasonable? Is the logic tight or are there unsupported leaps? Are alternative explanations considered?

Empirical Strategy (if applicable): Is the identification strategy convincing? Can the authors really claim causation? Are the data appropriate for the question? Are robustness checks adequate? Do they address endogeneity, selection bias, or measurement error?

Interpretation: Do the findings support the conclusions drawn? Are there alternative interpretations? Are the conclusions overstated or appropriately cautious?

Limitations: What remains unanswered? Where might the results fail to hold (external validity)? What assumptions are crucial but unverified?

Contribution: Is this an important advance for the field? How does it relate to existing literature? Does it open new questions?

Even if you are critical, acknowledge what the paper does well. Fair critique is more persuasive than one-sided criticism.

4. Irish Application (approximately 400 words)

This section is unique to your assignment. Consider whether the paper's theory or findings would apply to Irish politics and explain why or why not. Identify what is different about Ireland that might be important, such as the electoral system, institutional structure, political culture, or legal framework.

Provide specific examples. Rather than stating "Irish bureaucracy might behave differently," explain "The HSE's structure differs from the US agencies studied because X, which would affect Y." If the paper studies a policy Ireland has not tried, consider whether it would work here and what would need to be different.

5. Conclusion (approximately 200 words)

Summarise your main assessment. Explain the significance of this paper and its contribution. Suggest what future research should explore and provide a one-sentence final takeaway.

What Good Critical Analysis Looks Like

Consider the difference between summary and critical analysis:

Summary (descriptive rather than critical): "The paper uses a regression discontinuity design to study the effect of winning an election on politician wealth."

Critical analysis: "The regression discontinuity design is appropriate given the close elections context, but the bandwidth choice seems arbitrary. Robustness checks using alternative bandwidths (Online Appendix Table A3) show the effect disappears with narrower windows, suggesting the result may be sensitive to including non-comparable elections."

The first merely describes. The second evaluates the methodology and identifies a potential weakness with evidence.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. **Excessive summary with insufficient critique.** The reader wants your analysis; detailed recap should be minimal.
2. **Vague criticism.** Replace "The methodology could be better" with specific statements about what is weak and why.
3. **Nitpicking minor issues.** Focus on substantive problems rather than typos or trivial points.
4. **Failing to engage with the paper's actual argument.** Critique what they claim, not what you wish they had studied.
5. **No evidence for claims.** Reference specific tables, equations, or sections when making points.
6. **Ignoring what the paper does well.** Balanced critique is stronger.
7. **Irish section feels tacked on.** Integrate it thoughtfully rather than adding it as an afterthought.

Writing Style

Aim for professional yet accessible prose. Write clearly and avoid jargon unless necessary. You may use first person occasionally (e.g., “I argue that...” is acceptable in a critique). Be assertive while remaining respectful: prefer “The evidence for X is weak because...” over “The authors obviously failed to consider...”

Use topic sentences so each paragraph has a clear point. Cite properly with in-text citations and a reference list using APA, Chicago, or Harvard style consistently.

Citation and Referencing

Cite the paper you are critiquing and any other sources you reference. If you mention related literature or alternative approaches, cite them. Use direct quotes sparingly and paraphrase most content. Include page numbers for specific claims from the paper. Doing this helps you and also helps me because I know exactly where to check.

Example: “Jones and Smith (2024, p. 487) argue that term limits reduce corruption by 15%, but this estimate relies on the assumption that municipalities with and without term limits are comparable conditional on observables.”

Practical Tips

Read the paper multiple times: once for understanding, once for critique. Take notes as you read and flag points that seem strong, weak, or unclear. Check the appendices, as robustness checks often reveal limitations. If the paper is a working paper, look for reviewer comments if available. Start early, as good critique requires time to think, not just write. Consider coming to office hours with a draft outline for feedback.

Sample Outline

I. Introduction

- Topic and question
- Why it is important
- Overall assessment

II. What the Paper Does

- Research question
- Approach and methodology
- Findings
- Claimed contribution

III. Critical Evaluation

- Strengths: what works well (theory, methods, evidence)
- Weaknesses: methodological concerns, interpretive issues, limitations

- Significance: is this important and to whom?

IV. Irish Context

- Direct applicability
- Key differences that are important
- Specific examples
- What would need to change for this to work or apply in Ireland

V. Conclusion

- Summary of assessment
- Future directions
- Final thought

Grading Criteria (Written Component = 50% of Project 1)

Your written critique will be assessed on:

- **Understanding (25%):** Do you understand the paper's argument, methods, and contribution?
- **Critical Analysis (35%):** Are your critiques substantive, specific, and well-supported?
- **Irish Application (25%):** Is your Irish connection thoughtful and specific?
- **Writing Quality (15%):** Clear, organised, professional writing with proper citations?

Key Dates and Support

Declare your paper by end of Week 4 (Friday, 6 February 2026) and submit by end of Week 6 (Friday, 20 February 2026). Start early. Use office hours to discuss draft outlines or specific questions. Email with clarification questions. The DCU library has research consultants who can help with database searches.

Part B: Irish Context Presentation Guidelines

Overview

The Irish Context Presentation is a core component of the module, worth 25% of your final grade. Working in pairs or trios, you will apply one week's theoretical material to Irish politics, presenting your analysis at the start of the following week's class. This assignment has three goals: (1) to deepen your understanding of Public Choice theory by applying it to a real-world context you know well; (2) to develop research and presentation skills in a supportive, collaborative format; and (3) to teach both me and your classmates about Irish political institutions and behaviour.

You will be assigned to a specific week after submitting your group formation (due end of Week 2, Friday 23 January 2026). Each presentation is 20 minutes long and applies the *previous week's* theory to Irish examples.

Assignment Logistics

Who: Work in pairs or trios. All group members must be present and contribute equally to the presentation.

When: Presentations occur in Weeks 3–6 and 8–10 (Week 7 is Reading Week). You will be assigned one specific week.

What: Apply last week's theory to Irish politics using specific examples and evidence.

Submission: Slides plus a 1-page summary due 48 hours before your presentation via Loop.

Length: 20 minutes presentation at the start of class, followed by brief Q&A and class discussion.

Structure of Your Presentation (20 minutes)

A suggested breakdown is as follows:

- **Brief Theory Recap (5 minutes):** Summarise last week's theory clearly. What are the main concepts, predictions, and assumptions? This should be concise and accurate, not a full re-lecture.
- **Irish Examples and Evidence (10 minutes):** Present specific Irish examples that illustrate, test, or challenge the theory. Use data, case studies, institutional details, and concrete events. This is the heart of your presentation.
- **Discussion Questions (5 minutes):** Pose 2–3 thoughtful questions to the class. These should spark debate or critical thinking about how the theory applies (or fails to apply) in Ireland.

This is a guide. Adjust based on your topic, but practice timing carefully. Going significantly over 20 minutes will affect your grade.

Content Guidelines

Theory Recap (5 minutes):

Your goal is to remind the class of last week's key concepts. Do not re-teach the entire lecture. Instead, focus on:

- The main theoretical framework (e.g., median voter theorem, Niskanen's bureaucracy model)
- Key predictions or hypotheses (e.g., "Parties should converge to the median voter's preferences")
- Important assumptions (e.g., "Voters have single-peaked preferences")

Use clear language. If there are technical terms, define them briefly. Think of this section as setting up the theory so you can test it with Irish examples.

Example Slide Content:

- **Slide 1:** "Median Voter Theorem: Key Concept"
- **Bullet:** "In two-party competition with single-peaked preferences, both parties converge to the median voter's ideal point."
- **Bullet:** "Prediction: Parties should offer similar platforms."
- **Bullet:** "Assumption: Voters care about a single policy dimension (e.g., left-right)."

Irish Examples and Evidence (10 minutes):

This is where you demonstrate your research and critical thinking. Your examples should be:

- **Specific:** Name institutions, parties, policies, events, and people. Avoid vague statements like "Ireland is different." Instead, say "Ireland's PR-STV system creates multi-seat constituencies, which changes party incentives because..."
- **Evidence-based:** Use data, reports, historical events, or case studies. For example, cite election results, budget figures, policy documents, or academic studies on Ireland.
- **Analytical:** Do not just describe Irish politics. Analyse it using the theory. Does the theory hold? Where does it break down? Why?

You should aim for 3–5 well-developed examples rather than 10 superficial ones.

Example of Strong vs. Weak Analysis:

Weak (descriptive): "Ireland has a PR-STV electoral system. This is different from first-past-the-post."

Strong (analytical): "Ireland's PR-STV system creates incentives for intra-party competition because candidates from the same party compete for votes within the same constituency. This undermines median voter theorem's prediction of party convergence. For example, in Dublin Bay South (2020 election), Fine Gael ran two candidates with noticeably different platforms—one emphasising fiscal conservatism, the other emphasising housing policy—to appeal to different voter segments within the same district."

Sources of Evidence:

Where can you find Irish examples and data? Here are some starting points:

- **Electoral data:** Central Statistics Office (CSO), ElectionsIreland.org
- **Budget and fiscal data:** Department of Finance, Central Bank of Ireland, ESRI reports

- **Policy documents:** Government white papers, Oireachtas committee reports
- **Institutional details:** Constitution of Ireland, Oireachtas.ie (Dáil and Seanad records)
- **Academic studies:** Irish Political Studies journal, ESRI working papers, political science theses
- **News archives:** Irish Times, RTÉ News, TheJournal.ie (for specific events or controversies)
- **Interest group websites:** IFA (Irish Farmers' Association), IBEC, ICTU, professional associations

You do not need to conduct original empirical research, but you should go beyond Wikipedia. Use authoritative sources.

Discussion Questions (5 minutes):

Your discussion questions should engage the class and encourage critical thinking. Good questions:

- Challenge the theory: “Does the median voter theorem really explain Irish coalition formation, or are there other factors at play?”
- Explore trade-offs: “Is Ireland’s centralised structure more efficient or less accountable than a federal system would be?”
- Apply theory to policy debates: “Would introducing compulsory voting in Ireland increase turnout among marginal groups, or would it simply formalise existing patterns?”
- Invite comparison: “How do Irish political budget cycles compare to those in other European countries with similar institutions?”

Avoid questions with obvious yes/no answers or questions that simply ask for factual recall. Instead, pose questions that require analysis and debate.

Example of Strong vs. Weak Questions:

Weak: “Does Ireland have political budget cycles?” (Yes/no; descriptive)

Strong: “If Ireland experiences political budget cycles despite ECB constraints on monetary policy, what does this tell us about the limits of institutional design in curbing opportunistic behaviour?” (Analytical; invites debate)

Slide Design and Delivery

Slide Count and Design:

Aim for 10–15 slides for 20 minutes. Use a minimum font size of 24 points. Limit text per slide to bullet points rather than paragraphs. Use visuals where helpful: graphs of election results, charts of budget data, maps of constituencies, or photos of relevant institutions or events.

Division of Labour:

All group members must contribute equally. Decide in advance who will cover which slides. Practice together to ensure smooth transitions. Introduce each other at the start: “I’m [Name], this is [Name], and this is [Name]. Today we’re applying the median voter theorem to Irish party competition.”

Delivery Tips:

- Practice out loud together. Timing is crucial.
- Use slides as visual aids, not scripts. Do not read text word-for-word.
- Make eye contact with your audience.
- Signal transitions: “Now [Partner’s Name] will discuss our second example.”
- Finish on time. Going significantly over 20 minutes will hurt your grade.

Handling Q&A and Discussion:

After your discussion questions, I and your classmates may ask follow-up questions. Listen carefully, pause to think, and answer concisely. If you do not know something, say so honestly: “That’s a good question. We did not find data on that, but it would be interesting to explore.” You are not expected to know everything about Irish politics, but you should know your topic well.

Grading Rubric (Irish Context Presentation = 25% of Final Grade)

Criterion	Weight	What I Am Looking For
Understanding of Theory	20%	Accurate recap of last week’s theory; clear explanation of key concepts, predictions, and assumptions
Irish Examples & Evidence	30%	Specific, well-researched examples with data or case studies; not vague generalities; use of authoritative sources
Critical Analysis	25%	Does the theory fit Irish reality? Where does it work or break down? Why? Analytical rather than purely descriptive
Discussion Questions	15%	Thoughtful questions that engage the class and encourage critical thinking; not yes/no or purely factual questions
Presentation Quality	10%	Clear delivery, good slides, time management (20 minutes), equal contribution from all members, professional demeanour

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. **Too much theory recap, too little Irish analysis.** The theory recap should be 5 minutes maximum. Spend 10 minutes on Irish examples.
2. **Vague or generic examples.** Saying “Ireland has coalitions” is not enough. Explain how specific coalition dynamics (e.g., confidence-and-supply agreements, programme for government negotiations) relate to the theory.
3. **No evidence.** Assertions without data, sources, or case studies are weak. Back up your claims.
4. **Purely descriptive rather than analytical.** Do not just describe Irish institutions. Analyse them using the theory. Does the theory predict what we observe? If not, why not?
5. **Weak discussion questions.** Avoid yes/no questions or purely factual questions. Pose questions that require analysis.
6. **Unequal contribution.** All group members must present. One person doing 90% of the work is unacceptable and will be reflected in the grade.

7. **Poor timing.** Going significantly over or under 20 minutes suggests poor preparation.
8. **Reading slides word-for-word.** This results in a major penalty for presentation quality.
9. **No sources cited.** When you use data or quote a report, cite the source on your slide or verbally.

Submission Requirements

What to Submit (via Loop):

1. **Slides:** PowerPoint, PDF, or Google Slides format. Submit 48 hours before your presentation.
2. **1-Page Summary:** A brief written summary (approximately 300–400 words) covering: (1) the theory you are applying, (2) your main Irish examples, and (3) your discussion questions. This helps me prepare for class and ensures you have thought through your presentation in advance.

File Naming:

Name your files: `Week[X]_Surname1_Surname2_Slides.pdf` and `Week[X]_Surname1_Surname2_Summary.pdf`

Example: `Week4_Murphy_OConnor_Slides.pdf`

For trios, include all three surnames: `Week4_Murphy_OConnor_Kelly_Slides.pdf`

Deadline:

48 hours before your assigned week. For example, if you present in Week 4 (class on Wednesday), submit by Sunday evening.

Group Formation and Assignment

Form Your Group:

Find partners (pair or trio) and email me all names by end of Week 2 (Friday, 23 January 2026). If you cannot find a group, email me and I will help match you.

Week Assignment:

After receiving all group formations, I will assign each group to a specific week (Weeks 3–6, 8–10). Assignments will be posted on Loop by end of Week 2. I will try to accommodate preferences if you email me early, but assignments are ultimately at my discretion to balance workload.

Research Tips

Start Early:

Do not wait until the week before your presentation. Begin researching Irish examples as soon as you know your assigned week.

Divide the Work:

One member can focus on finding data/examples while others focus on understanding the theory. Then come together to analyse and build slides.

Use Authoritative Sources:

Wikipedia is a starting point, not a primary source. Use government reports, academic studies, CSO data, and reputable news sources.

Ask for Help:

If you are struggling to find Irish examples or data, come to office hours. I can point you toward useful sources. The DCU library also has research consultants who can help.

Cross-Check Facts:

Make sure your facts about Irish institutions are correct. For example, do not confuse the Taoiseach with the President, or PR-STV with proportional representation by party list.

Learning from Others

Attend all Irish Context Presentations, even when you are not presenting. You will learn about Irish politics and see different approaches to applying theory. Take notes on what works well and what could be improved. This will help you when it is your turn.

Why This Assignment?

This assignment is designed to:

- Deepen your understanding of Public Choice theory by forcing you to test it against real-world evidence
- Develop your research skills by requiring you to find data and examples beyond the textbook
- Build your presentation and communication skills in a collaborative format
- Leverage your expertise in Irish politics to teach both me and your classmates
- Show you that theory is not abstract—it has real implications for understanding the politics around you

By the end of the semester, you will have a much richer understanding of both Public Choice theory and Irish political institutions. You will see how theory and reality interact, where models succeed, and where they fall short. This critical perspective is invaluable for anyone studying economics, politics, or law.

Week-by-Week Presentation Topics and Prompts

Below is a guide for each presentation week showing which theory you will apply and example questions to consider. These are starting points—you should develop your own specific examples and analysis.

Week 3 Presentation (Applies Week 2: Paradox of Voting)

Theme: Turnout, participation, abstention

Example prompts:

- Why is voter turnout in Irish general elections relatively high compared to many OECD countries? Does rational choice explain this, or do we need expressive/ethical voting models?
- Compare turnout in Irish referendums vs. general elections. What does Public Choice predict, and does the data fit?
- Does compulsory voting (hypothetical) make sense for Ireland given the paradox of voting?
- What role does civic duty play in Irish voting behaviour? Is there evidence for this?

What you're testing: Rational ignorance, expressive voting, civic duty, institutional context.

Week 4 Presentation (Applies Week 3: Median Voter Theorem)

Theme: Party positioning, PR-STV, convergence

Example prompts:

- Do Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, and Labour converge toward the median Irish voter? On which policy dimensions do they diverge, and why?
- How does PR-STV change the predictions of the median voter theorem compared to two-party systems?
- Is Sinn Féin's rise consistent with median voter logic or a challenge to it?
- Does intra-party competition in multi-seat constituencies undermine convergence?

What you're testing: Single-peaked preferences, multidimensionality, institutional constraints, coalition formation.

Week 5 Presentation (Applies Week 4: Political Competition & Macroeconomic Performance)

Theme: Fiscal cycles, budgets, opportunism, central bank independence

Example prompts:

- Is there evidence of opportunistic fiscal policy in Irish budgets before elections?
- Do Irish governments manipulate taxation, spending, or public sector pay in election years?
- How does ECB membership constrain Irish fiscal policy? Is this constraint beneficial from a Public Choice perspective?

- Does Ireland’s lack of monetary policy independence prevent political business cycles, or do they manifest in other ways (e.g., fiscal policy, capital spending)?

What you’re testing: Opportunistic vs. partisan models, timing of policy, voter myopia, institutional constraints on policy manipulation.

Week 6 Presentation (Applies Week 5: Bureaucracy)

Theme: HSE, civil service, agency problems

Example prompts:

- Does the HSE behave like a budget-maximising bureaucrat? Use budget data and service outcomes to assess.
- Are Irish public sector agencies characterised by slack, overproduction, or inefficiency?
- How do information asymmetries between ministers and civil servants shape policy outcomes?
- What mechanisms exist in Ireland to monitor and control bureaucratic behaviour?

What you’re testing: Niskanen model, principal–agent problems, information asymmetry, monitoring mechanisms.

Week 7: READING WEEK

No class. No Irish Context Presentation.

Use this week to prepare your Project 1 presentation slides, practice your 7-minute presentation, review your paper one more time, and get feedback from peers or come to office hours.

Week 8 Presentation (Applies Week 6: Federalism & Decentralisation)

Theme: Centralisation, local government, intergovernmental finance

Example prompts:

- Is Ireland “too centralised”? What would Public Choice predict about efficiency and accountability under greater decentralisation?
- Do Irish local authorities have meaningful fiscal autonomy? What are the incentive effects?
- Does the Tiebout model make any sense in the Irish context? Why or why not?
- How do intergovernmental grants affect local government behaviour in Ireland?

What you’re testing: Tiebout sorting, fiscal federalism, accountability, mobility, centralisation vs. local autonomy.

Week 9 Presentation (Applies Week 8: Interest Groups, Rent-Seeking & Lobbying)

Theme: Lobbying, organised interests, concentrated benefits

Example prompts:

- Analyse the IFA (Irish Farmers' Association) through Olson's Logic of Collective Action. Why are they effective?
- Do professional associations (Law Society, medical bodies) engage in rent-seeking in Ireland? Where do you see it?
- How do planning regulations create opportunities for rent-seeking or regulatory capture?
- Why do consumers remain rationally ignorant about policies that cost them money (e.g., tariffs on agricultural imports, professional licensing)?

What you're testing: Free-rider problem, concentrated vs. dispersed costs, capture, rent-seeking, collective action.

Week 10 Presentation (Applies Week 9: Behavioural Economics)

Theme: Nudges, heuristics, misinformation

Example prompts:

- Evaluate an Irish behavioural intervention (e.g. tax compliance, health, energy). Does it work? Why?
- Do Irish voters exhibit framing effects or status quo bias in referendums? (Consider recent referendum campaigns.)
- How does misinformation affect political outcomes in Ireland? Is this predictable under behavioural models?
- What role do heuristics (mental shortcuts) play in Irish voting behaviour?

What you're testing: Bounded rationality, heuristics, behavioural biases in politics, nudges.

Part C: Presentation Guidelines (Project 1)

Overview

Your presentation should communicate your paper critique clearly and persuasively in seven minutes, followed by questions and answers. This component tests whether you genuinely understand the paper and can explain your analysis to others.

Time Structure (7 minutes total)

A suggested breakdown is as follows:

- **Introduction (1 minute):** What is the paper about and why is it important?
- **Summary (2 minutes):** What did they do and what did they find?
- **Your Critique (2 minutes):** What is strong, what is weak, and what are your main points?
- **Irish Application (1.5 minutes):** Specific Irish examples and analysis
- **Conclusion (0.5 minutes):** Main takeaway and significance of this research

This is a guide rather than a rule. Adjust based on your paper, but practice timing carefully. Going significantly over or under seven minutes will affect your grade.

Slide Count and Design

Aim for eight to ten slides for seven minutes, roughly one slide per minute with some faster and some slower. The title slide does not count toward this total.

Use a minimum font size of 24 points to ensure readability from the back of the room. Limit text per slide to bullet points rather than paragraphs. If you are reading sentences off slides, you have too much text. Focus on one main idea per slide and avoid cramming. Visuals such as graphs from the paper, simple diagrams, or photos related to Irish examples can help. Use consistent formatting throughout by selecting a clean template.

An example slide sequence might include: (1) title slide with paper title and your name; (2) research question and significance; (3) methodology; (4) key results, possibly with a table or graph; (5–7) critique slides covering strengths and weaknesses; (8) Irish application with specific examples; and (9) conclusion with your takeaway.

Content Guidelines

Introduction Slides: State the paper's research question clearly and explain in one sentence why this question is important. Optionally provide brief context, such as how the paper fits into the literature.

Summary Slides: Explain the methodology in plain language and avoid jargon. For example, rather than saying "They use an IV approach with rainfall as an instrument," say "They use variation in rainfall to isolate the causal effect of agricultural income on voting patterns." Show key results and include a table or graph if helpful, with proper citation. Be selective and focus on what is important for your critique rather than summarising everything.

Critique Slides: Lead with your main points and prioritise what is most important. Be specific by stating, for instance, “The identification assumption is questionable because X” rather than “The methodology has some issues.” Back up claims by referencing specific tables, equations, or sections. Provide balance by mentioning at least one thing the paper does well to show you engaged fairly.

Irish Application Slide: Use concrete examples by naming specific institutions, policies, or events. For example, “The Irish Farmers’ Association behaves exactly as Olson predicts: a small, organised group that...” Avoid vague statements such as “Ireland is different” and instead explain “Ireland’s PR-STV system creates different incentives for X because...”

Conclusion Slide: State your main takeaway, explain the significance for the audience, and provide a one-sentence summary.

Delivery Tips

Preparation: Write a script or bullet points so you know what you will say for each slide. Practice out loud multiple times and time yourself. Practice in front of someone to get feedback on clarity and pace. Know your material thoroughly so you could give the presentation without slides if necessary.

During the Presentation: Use slides as visual aids to support your spoken explanation rather than reading them word-for-word. Make eye contact with your audience rather than looking at the screen. Speak clearly and pace yourself, as nervous speakers tend to rush. Use signposting such as “Now I will turn to my critique...” to help the audience follow. Show enthusiasm, as a bored speaker leads to a bored audience. Point to slides when relevant by saying, for example, “As you can see in this table...” Finish on time by practicing to prevent running over.

Common delivery pitfalls: Reading directly from slides word-for-word weakens engagement. Turning your back to the audience breaks connection. Speaking in monotone reduces impact; vocal variety helps. Excessive filler words like “um” distract from your message (pause instead). Apologising (“Sorry this is boring” or “I didn’t have much time”) undermines your credibility. Going significantly over or under seven minutes suggests poor preparation.

Handling Questions and Answers

Preparation: Re-read the paper the night before your presentation. Think about what questions might arise, particularly regarding weak points in the paper, your critique, or the Irish application. Review key tables and appendices.

During Q&A: Listen carefully to the full question before answering. It is acceptable to pause, take a breath, think, and then answer. If you are uncertain about an answer, acknowledge this honestly: “That is a good question. I am not certain, but I think...” demonstrates intellectual honesty. Be specific by saying, for instance, “The paper addresses that in Table 3” rather than providing vague answers. Engage with the question, and if someone challenges your critique, defend your position respectfully. Keep answers concise, aiming for 30 to 60 seconds maximum per answer.

You might receive clarifying questions about the paper’s method or findings, challenges to your critique such as “But could you not argue that...,” questions about the Irish application like “What about X in Ireland?” or extensions such as “How would this apply to Y?”

Technical Setup

Submit slides 48 hours early via Loop. Bring a backup on a USB drive or email the file to yourself. Arrive early to test your slides on the room's computer. Ensure you know your file format, whether PowerPoint, PDF, or Google Slides, and check compatibility. Saving as PDF can prevent font or layout issues. Embedded media should work, but have a backup plan. Animated slides are usually unnecessary and can be distracting.

Grading Rubric (Presentation = 50% of Project 1)

Criterion	Weight	What I Am Looking For
Content Clarity	20%	Can you explain the paper's argument clearly? Is your summary accurate?
Critical Analysis	25%	Do you demonstrate genuine understanding of strengths and weaknesses? Are critiques specific and substantive?
Irish Application	20%	Is your Irish connection thoughtful and specific? Do you use concrete examples?
Delivery	15%	Clear speaking, good pacing, effective use of slides, eye contact, staying on time
Q&A Responses	20%	Can you answer questions about the paper and your analysis? Do you engage thoughtfully?

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. **Excessive summary with insufficient critique.** Your audience needs your analysis more than every detail of the paper.
2. **Reading slides word-for-word.** This results in a major penalty for the delivery score.
3. **Poor timing control.** Going two or more minutes over or finishing in four minutes both hurt your grade.
4. **Vague criticism.** Compare "The paper has limitations" with "The sample excludes rural areas, which limits generalisability because..."
5. **Weak Irish connection.** Compare "This might apply to Ireland" with "The IFA's lobbying on CAP policy demonstrates exactly this mechanism."
6. **Poor slide design.** Walls of text, tiny fonts, and cluttered layouts reduce effectiveness.
7. **Inadequate Q&A preparation.** You should re-read the paper right before presenting.

Example Slide Comparison

Poor slide with too much text:

Critique

The paper has several methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the identification strategy relies on the assumption that the instrument is excludable, which may not hold if there are omitted variables that correlate with both the instrument and the outcome.

Second, the sample selection could introduce bias because the analysis only includes municipalities that reported data, and non-reporting might be systematic. Third, the external validity is limited because the study focuses on one country during a specific time period.

Good slide that is clear and actionable:

Key Weakness: Identification

The Assumption:

- Rainfall affects voting only through agricultural income

The Problem:

- Rainfall also affects infrastructure quality, local government capacity, and migration patterns
- Instrument may not be excludable

Final Checklist

One week before: Re-read the paper carefully. Draft your slides. Write speaking notes for each slide.

Three days before: Practice your presentation out loud multiple times. Submit slides via Loop (48-hour deadline). Get feedback from a friend or classmate.

Night before: Review the paper one more time. Review your speaking notes. Get adequate sleep, as you will present better when well-rested.

Day of presentation: Arrive ten minutes early. Test slides on the room computer. Take a deep breath.

Support Available

You may practice your presentation during office hours, and I am happy to give feedback on your slides and delivery. If you have technical issues, contact me or IT support before your presentation day. If you are nervous about presenting, come to office hours to discuss strategies.

Our primary goal is to assess your understanding; polished delivery comes second. Clear communication of your analysis is the key priority.

Part D: Project 2 Guidance - Grading an LLM

Overview

Project 2 asks you to craft a thoughtful question for a Large Language Model (LLM), generate an essay response, and then grade that response as if you were the instructor. This assignment tests your ability to formulate good questions, evaluate arguments critically, and provide constructive feedback. It is worth 30% of your final grade.

You will be randomly assigned a topic from the module in Week 8 (Monday, 2 March 2026). Your task is to develop a question that builds on class material, addresses a knowledge gap, and has practical relevance. You will then assess the LLM's response using specific criteria and write detailed feedback explaining your grade.

Part 1: Crafting Your Question (40% of Project 2)

The Task:

Write a question for an LLM (ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, etc.) that asks it to produce a long essay on your assigned topic. Your question should include the instruction: "Include 10 academic references and list them at the end."

Accompany your question with a 500-word motivation explaining why this question is important and worth asking.

Structure of Your 500-Word Motivation:

Your motivation should address the following:

1. **What is your question? (approximately 50 words)** State your question clearly and explain what you are asking the LLM to do.
2. **Why is this question important? (approximately 150 words)** Explain why answering this question matters for economics, policy, or our understanding of politics. What real-world problem or theoretical puzzle does it address?
3. **How does it relate to class material? (approximately 150 words)** Be specific. Reference particular theories, models, or readings from the module. For example: "In Week 4, we discussed political business cycles and how governments manipulate fiscal policy before elections. However, we did not explore how electoral systems moderate this effect. This question addresses that gap by asking..."
4. **What gap does it fill? (approximately 100 words)** What has not been discussed in class or in the readings? Where does our knowledge fall short? What extension or application would advance our understanding?
5. **Why would the answer be useful? (approximately 50 words)** How would policymakers, economists, or political scientists benefit from knowing the answer? What decisions or debates would it inform?

Formulating Your LLM Prompt:

Your prompt to the LLM should be clear and specific. Here are two formats:

Format 1 (direct): "Write a long essay on [your specific question]. Include 10 in-text academic references and list the references at the end."

Format 2 (explanatory): “Write a long essay explaining how [X] changes [Y] in the context of [Z]. Include 10 in-text academic references and list the references at the end.”

Examples:

- Good: “Write a long essay explaining how Ireland’s PR-STV electoral system affects the median voter theorem’s predictions about policy convergence. Include 10 in-text academic references and list the references at the end.”
- Bad: “Write a long essay on the median voter theorem. Include 10 in-text academic references and list the references at the end.” (Too generic; does not build on class discussion or pose a specific question)

Tips for Strong Questions:

- Build directly on class material. Show that you engaged with the readings and lectures.
- Be specific rather than general. “How does X affect Y in context Z?” is better than “Explain X.”
- Focus on gaps or extensions. What did we not cover? How might a theory apply to a different context?
- Consider Irish applications. How does a theory work (or not work) in the Irish context?
- Make it answerable. The LLM should be able to produce a substantive essay, not just a definition.

Part 2: Grading the LLM Output (60% of Project 2)

The Task:

After generating the LLM’s essay, you must grade it as if you were the instructor. Assess the essay using the criteria below, provide detailed written feedback, and assign a grade (as a percentage or letter grade).

Your grade depends on:

- The quality of your evaluation (do you identify strengths and weaknesses accurately?)
- The specificity of your feedback (do you point to concrete examples?)
- The fairness of your assessment (is your grade justified by the evidence you provide?)

Grading Criteria for the LLM Essay:

Assess the LLM’s output using these four dimensions:

1. Accuracy of Information (25%)

- Are the factual claims correct? Check key facts, dates, events, and institutional details.
- Are the theoretical concepts explained accurately? Does the LLM correctly describe models, assumptions, and predictions?
- Are the references real and appropriate? Verify that cited papers exist and are relevant. (You do not need to read all 10 papers, but check at least 3–4 using Google Scholar.)

- **Irish context errors:** Does the LLM misunderstand Irish institutions, politics, or history? For example, does it confuse PR-STV with other electoral systems? Does it mischaracterise coalition formation or the role of the Taoiseach?

What good feedback looks like: “The essay incorrectly states that Ireland uses a first-past-the-post system (paragraph 2). In fact, Ireland uses PR-STV, which has very different implications for the median voter theorem. This error undermines the entire analysis.”

What weak feedback looks like: “Some facts are wrong.” (Not specific; does not identify which facts or why they matter.)

2. Relevance (25%)

- Does the essay actually answer the question you asked?
- Does it stay on topic, or does it drift into tangential discussions?
- Is the level of analysis appropriate? (Not too superficial, not unnecessarily technical)
- Does it address the gap or extension you identified in your motivation?

What good feedback looks like: “The essay answers the question directly in sections 2–3 but then veers off into a general discussion of bureaucracy that is not relevant to the specific question about Irish local government finance (sections 4–5).”

What weak feedback looks like: “The essay is somewhat relevant.” (Not specific; does not identify where relevance breaks down.)

3. Quality of Referencing (20%)

- Are the references real? Use Google Scholar to check that cited papers exist.
- Are the references appropriate and authoritative? (e.g., peer-reviewed journals, books, working papers from reputable institutions)
- Are the in-text citations used correctly? Does the essay cite sources when making empirical or theoretical claims?
- Are there **fake references**? LLMs sometimes invent citations. Flag any that you cannot verify.

What good feedback looks like: “The essay cites Olson (1965) correctly in paragraph 3, but Reference 7 (Smith & Jones, 2022, ‘Political Cycles in Ireland’) does not appear to exist when searched in Google Scholar. This suggests the LLM fabricated this source.”

What weak feedback looks like: “The references look fine.” (You must actually check them.)

4. Depth of Argument (30%)

- Does the essay go beyond surface-level description? Does it engage with theory, evidence, and counterarguments?
- Is the argument logically structured and coherent?
- Does it consider limitations, trade-offs, or alternative explanations?
- Does it provide specific examples or evidence, or does it rely on vague generalities?

What good feedback looks like: “The essay provides a strong theoretical framework in section 2, drawing on Niskanen’s model of bureaucracy. However, it never tests these predictions against evidence. The discussion of the HSE (section 4) is superficial and does not engage with specific budget data or outcomes. A deeper analysis would compare HSE spending patterns to Niskanen’s predictions.”

What weak feedback looks like: “The argument could be deeper.” (Not specific; does not identify where depth is lacking or what would improve it.)

Writing Your Feedback

Your feedback should be detailed, specific, and constructive. Imagine you are an instructor helping a student improve their work.

Structure Your Feedback as Follows:

1. **Overall Assessment (2–3 sentences):** Summarise the essay’s main strengths and weaknesses. Example: “This essay provides a clear explanation of political business cycles but fails to apply the theory convincingly to the Irish context. The references are mostly appropriate, but two appear to be fabricated.”
2. **Specific Comments by Criterion:** Address each of the four criteria (accuracy, relevance, referencing, depth) separately. Point to specific paragraphs, claims, or sections. Use examples.
3. **Grade Justification:** Explain why you assigned the grade you did. Example: “I assigned 65% because the essay demonstrates a solid understanding of the theory (accuracy) and answers the question asked (relevance), but the depth of analysis is shallow and two references are fake.”

Tone:

Be fair and respectful. Even when identifying weaknesses, acknowledge what the essay does well. Your goal is to evaluate critically, not to be harsh. Avoid sarcasm or dismissive language.

Examples of Effective Feedback Statements:

- “Paragraph 3 provides a clear and accurate summary of the median voter theorem. However, paragraph 4 incorrectly claims that all voters have single-peaked preferences in multidimensional contexts, which contradicts Arrow’s impossibility theorem discussed in Week 2.”
- “The essay cites Shi & Svensson (2006) appropriately in the discussion of political budget cycles, which aligns with the readings from Week 4. This strengthens the argument.”
- “The Irish application (section 5) is too vague. Rather than saying ‘Ireland might experience political budget cycles,’ the essay should analyse specific election years (e.g., 2020, 2016) and provide evidence of fiscal manipulation. This would make the argument much stronger.”
- “Reference 8 (O’Connor & Murphy, 2021, ‘Fiscal Policy in Ireland’) cannot be verified in Google Scholar. This appears to be a fabricated citation, which significantly undermines the essay’s credibility.”

Submission Requirements

What to Submit (via Loop):

Submit a single document (Word or PDF) that includes:

1. **Your Question:** State the exact prompt you gave to the LLM.
2. **Your 500-Word Motivation:** Explain why this question is important, how it relates to class material, what gap it fills, and why the answer would be useful.
3. **The LLM's Essay:** Copy-paste the full essay generated by the LLM. Clearly label this section (e.g., "LLM Output").
4. **Your Feedback:** Provide your detailed evaluation of the essay, addressing all four criteria (accuracy, relevance, referencing, depth). Be specific and point to examples.
5. **Your Grade:** Assign a grade (as a percentage or letter grade) and justify it in 2–3 sentences.

Formatting:

Use clear headings to separate sections. Use a readable font (e.g., Times New Roman 12pt, Calibri 11pt) and standard margins. Include page numbers.

File Naming:

Name your file: `Surname.Firstname.Project2.pdf` or `Surname.Firstname.Project2.docx`

Due Date:

End of Week 12 (Friday, 3 April 2026) via Loop.

Grading Rubric (Project 2 = 30% of Final Grade)

Component	Weight	What I Am Looking For
Quality of Your Question	25%	Is your question specific, well-motivated, and clearly connected to class material? Does it address a gap or extension?
Quality of Your Motivation	15%	Is your 500-word explanation clear, specific, and persuasive? Do you explain why the question is important and how it relates to the module?
Accuracy of Your Evaluation	30%	Do you correctly identify strengths and weaknesses in the LLM's essay? Are your assessments of accuracy, relevance, referencing, and depth fair and well-supported?
Specificity of Your Feedback	20%	Do you point to concrete examples? Do you reference specific paragraphs, claims, or citations? Is your feedback actionable?
Grade Justification	10%	Is your assigned grade consistent with the evidence you provide? Do you explain your reasoning clearly?

Common Mistakes to Avoid

1. **Generic questions.** "Explain the median voter theorem" is too basic. Ask something that extends or applies the theory in a specific context.

2. **Weak motivation.** Simply restating the question is not enough. You must explain *why* it matters and *how* it connects to class material.
3. **Not checking references.** You must verify that at least 3–4 of the LLM’s citations are real. LLMs often fabricate sources.
4. **Vague feedback.** “The essay is good but could be better” is not useful. Be specific: what is good? What could improve?
5. **Ignoring Irish context errors.** If your question involves Ireland, you must identify where the LLM gets Irish institutions or politics wrong.
6. **Being too harsh or too lenient.** Your grade should be fair. An essay with fabricated references and shallow analysis should not receive 85%, but an essay with strong theory and evidence should not receive 50% just because it has minor flaws.

Tips for Success

- Start early. Formulating a good question takes time and thought.
- Re-read the relevant week’s readings and lecture notes before crafting your question.
- Test your question. Does it produce an essay that is substantive and answerable?
- Use Google Scholar to verify references. This only takes a few minutes and is essential.
- Write feedback as if you were helping a peer improve their work. Be specific, fair, and constructive.
- Come to office hours if you are unsure about your question or how to evaluate the LLM’s output.

Why This Assignment Matters

In your careers, you will encounter AI-generated content regularly. The ability to evaluate arguments critically, identify errors, and provide constructive feedback is essential. This assignment teaches you to:

- Formulate precise, substantive questions that go beyond surface-level queries
- Assess the quality of arguments, evidence, and sources
- Identify when AI produces plausible-sounding but incorrect or shallow content
- Provide feedback that is specific, fair, and actionable

These skills are transferable to policy analysis, legal reasoning, business strategy, and any field that requires critical evaluation of information.

Appendix: Semester Calendar

Overview

This calendar provides a week-by-week breakdown of topics, deadlines, and presentations for the entire semester. Use this to plan your time and stay on top of assignments.

Week	Dates	Topic	Irish Context	Deadlines & Notes
1	12–16 Jan	Introduction	—	Form groups
2	19–23 Jan	Paradox of Voting	—	Group formation due Fri 23 Jan
3	26–30 Jan	Median Voter Theorem	Voting behaviour	
4	2–6 Feb	Political Competition	Party positioning	Paper declaration due Fri 6 Feb
5	9–13 Feb	Bureaucracy	Political budget cycles	
6	16–20 Feb	Federalism	HSE & bureaucracy	Project 1 due Fri 20 Feb
7	23–27 Feb	READING WEEK	—	No class; prepare presentations
8	2–6 Mar	Interest Groups	Local government	Project 2 assigned Mon 2 Mar
9	9–13 Mar	Behavioural Economics	IFA & lobbying	
10	16–20 Mar	Institutions	Nudges & heuristics	
11	23–27 Mar	Project 1 Presentations	—	
12	30 Mar–3 Apr	Project 1 Presentations	—	Project 2 due Fri 3 Apr

Key Milestones

By End of Week 2 (23 January): Form your group (pair or trio) for Irish Context Presentations and email me all names.

By End of Week 4 (6 February): Declare your Project 1 paper choice by email. First-come, first-served.

By End of Week 6 (20 February): Submit your Project 1 written critique (2000–2500 words) via Loop.

Reading Week (23–27 February): No class. Use this time to prepare your Project 1 presentation slides and practice your delivery.

Week 8 (2 March): You will be randomly assigned a topic for Project 2. Begin formulating your question and 500-word motivation.

Weeks 11–12 (23 March–3 April): Project 1 presentations. You will be assigned a specific week in advance. Submit slides 48 hours before your presentation.

End of Week 12 (3 April): Submit Project 2 (question, motivation, LLM essay, your feedback

and grade) via Loop.

Irish Context Presentation Schedule

Irish Context Presentations will be assigned to groups in Weeks 3–6 and 8–10 (7 presentation slots total). Each group will present once during the semester. I will assign you to a specific week after you submit your group formation (due 23 January). You must submit your slides and 1-page summary 48 hours before your assigned week.

Planning Your Time

Weeks 1–4: Explore potential papers for Project 1. Attend Irish Context Presentations to see what is expected. Form your group early.

Weeks 4–6: Focus on writing your Project 1 critique. Start early; 2000–2500 words requires time to read, think, and revise.

Reading Week: Prepare your Project 1 presentation. Practice multiple times. Aim for exactly 7 minutes.

Weeks 8–10: Work on Project 2. Formulate your question, generate the LLM essay, and begin your evaluation. Do not wait until Week 12.

Weeks 11–12: Present Project 1, attend others' presentations, and finalise Project 2.

Throughout: Attend class, do the readings, and engage with Irish Context Presentations. These build the foundation for both projects.

Office Hours and Support

Office hours are available throughout the semester. Use them to:

- Discuss your Project 1 paper choice
- Get feedback on draft outlines or slides
- Clarify Project 2 expectations
- Practice your presentation
- Ask questions about readings or lecture content
- Get help finding Irish data and examples for your Irish Context Presentation

Do not hesitate to reach out. I am here to help you succeed.