

## Fall 2018 Writing Assignment

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This semester, you will write an essay motivated by research in current issues and structured on positive economic analysis. Writing is a key component of many STEM professions, but often a scarce component of many STEM courses. This extra credit assignment aims to fill that gap. Specifically, the objective of this assignment is to improve your writing for STEM themes by emphasizing the ability to form concise, factual statements regarding ideas whose material content is fundamentally mathematical or scientific, a learned skill which requires persistent practice and training. Your task is to research credible news sources for an article which discusses a specific theme you have learned in this course in a unique way and reflect on your reading in a formal, written essay. Further, you should collect data and do additional background research if necessary to assist in carrying out informed, critical reflection and analysis of the article. The objective of the writing assignment is for you to organize your thoughts in a formal essay, challenge yourself to reflect in the context of your economics training, and to practice writing about economic theory with emphasis on your ability to form concise, factual statements. Ultimately, the objective amounts to motivating arguments in terms of positive economics—fact-based and objective—as opposed to normative economics which is subjective and values-based.

The essay should be approximately three pages in length with standard margins and font characteristics. The essay should be organized in paragraphs. The first paragraph serves as an introduction, states the thesis, and sets the context. Body paragraphs should develop and support the thesis. Each paragraph opens with a strong topic sentence that announces the content of that paragraph and ends with a sentence that pulls it together. The last paragraph concludes the essay by reminding the reader how each of the economic arguments made work together to support the thesis.

When you apply concepts from the course to the article, you are expected to carry out economic analysis more extensive than that which is offered in the article. Charts and diagrams necessarily supplement any analysis. The work you have completed on Sapling with *Washington Post* articles may serve as an example of the kind of analysis that can be used to support the economic arguments you will make in studying current events.

The essay will be graded for analytical content; your ability to form concise, factual statements; as well as grammar and essay format. There will be a preliminary essay due by the start of class, October 22. The preliminary essay should be uploaded to Blackboard. The preliminary essay is worth 25% of the writing assignment grade, and will be graded out of 30 points according to the first four categories on the following rubric, one point for your name, and one point for the title. I will return the preliminary essays to you with feedback. The final essay is worth 75% of the writing assignment score and is due Dec 9. The essay will be graded out of 60 points: 7 points for each of the categories described in the rubric below, 2 points for your name, 2 points for the title. The essay must be uploaded to Blackboard by 11:59pm on Dec 9, 2018. I strongly prefer files in PDF format. Be sure to either save as PDF or print to PDF. If you are unable to do so on your personal computer, you can do this on a library computer. For questions on expectations, see assignment rubric below. For all other questions, please come to office hours.

As an example on forming concise factual statements, I have pulled a terrible sentence straight from my own writing:

“As a result, High Income countries experienced a dramatic decrease in direct investment inflows from a peak of 9% of GPD in 2000, falling each year to a trough of 3.82% in 2004 before rebounding.”

This sentence has many problems. The first is awkward phrasing. The second problem is the word ‘dramatic.’ We should avoid using non-technical adjectives and adverbs in technical writing. The following is how the sentence currently reads in the fourth draft of my working paper.

“Following the deceleration in economic growth, High Income countries experienced a 5.18 percentage point decrease in direct investment inflows between 2000 and 2004.”

For additional resources on writing about STEM themes, see *Economical Writing* by Deirdre N. McCloskey. This is a short text which I find tremendously valuable. I have written a quick summary which has been uploaded to Blackboard. Additionally, I have provided a very helpful guide to style written by Professor McLaughlin. Finally, *The Elements of Style* by E.B. White and William Strunk Jr. remains a relevant resource for all styles of writing.

Finally, I will award 5% extra credit to the writing assignment grade if you write your essay using  $\LaTeX$ . You should upload the .tex file along with your PDF file, though I will know. You will not be able to fake this. Your .tex file must run without error. I would suggest using [www.sharelatex.com](http://www.sharelatex.com), however any  $\LaTeX$  editor will do.

Table 1: Extra Credit Writing Assignment Rubric

	Sophisticated (7)	Highly Competent (5)	Fairly Competent (3)	Not Yet Competent (1)
Depth of Analysis	Paper goes beyond the assignment to explore the implications of arguments or evidence in new contexts or in particularly thoughtful, insightful, or original ways.  Paper shows a nuanced grasp of economic principles and the ability to apply these principles with facility.	Paper fully meets the parameters of the assignment but does not exceed them.  Paper demonstrates a good grasp of economic principles but some awkwardness applying them.	Paper does not address some of the aspects of the assignment.  Paper demonstrates a somewhat shaky grasp of economic principles.	Paper does not address the assignment  Paper is inconsistent with economic principles.
Grasp of Reading	Paper represents the authors' arguments, evidence, and conclusion fairly and eloquently. Demonstrates a firm understanding of the implications of the authors' arguments.	Paper represents the authors' arguments, evidence, and conclusions accurately.	Paper represents the authors' arguments, evidence, and conclusions accurately though not sufficiently clearly.  There are minor inaccuracies.	Paper badly misrepresents the authors' arguments, evidence, and/or conclusions.
Evidence & Economic Arguments	Evidence and analysis used to support the central point is rich, detailed, and well-executed. Employs appropriate data, theory, statistics, and diagrams. Arguments based in positive economics The connection between argument and evidence is clearly and compellingly articulated in all cases.	Evidence and analysis used to support the central point is well-executed though not particularly rich or detailed. Employs either appropriate data, theory, statistics, or diagrams. Arguments based in positive economics The connection between argument and evidence is clearly articulated.	Connection between argument and evidence is not clearly articulated. Data, theory, statistics, or diagrams are inappropriately employed.  Arguments based in normative economics Economic arguments not very well executed.	Evidence and analysis used does not clearly support the main argument.  Arguments based in normative economics Economic arguments are fundamentally absent.

Table 2: Extra Credit Writing Assignment Rubric

	Sophisticated (7)	Highly Competent (5)	Fairly Competent (3)	Not Yet Competent (1)
Thesis	<p>Clearly and eloquently identifies a demonstrable and nuanced central argument.</p> <p>Provides the reader with a clear sense of the nature of evidence that will follow.</p>	<p>Thesis clearly identifies a demonstrable central argument.</p> <p>Gives the reader a reasonable sense of the nature of the evidence that will follow.</p>	<p>Thesis identifies a central argument that is demonstrable, though not stated sufficiently clearly.</p> <p>Does not guide the reader into the body of the paper.</p>	<p>Thesis does not have a discernible central argument</p> <p>The argument is not demonstrable.</p>
Conclusion	<p>Elegantly synthesizes and reframes key points from the paper.</p> <p>Suggests new perspectives or questions relevant to the central argument, and brings closure.</p>	<p>Synthesizes and brings closure but does not examine new perspectives or questions.</p>	<p>Restates the same points as the topic paragraph without reframing them.</p> <p>Introduces new material rather than new perspectives.</p>	<p>Is missing or cursory.</p> <p>Repeats the topic paragraph more or less verbatim.</p>
Organization	<p>Organization as a whole is logical and quickly apparent.</p> <p>Connections among paragraphs are clearly articulated. Transitions between paragraphs are smooth.</p> <p>Each paragraph makes one distinct and coherent point, expressed in a clear topic sentence. The parts of each paragraph connect logically and persuasively, internal transitions are smooth.</p>	<p>Organization of paper as a whole is logical and apparent but transitions between paragraphs are not consistently smooth.</p> <p>Every paragraph makes one distinct and coherent point and the parts of each paragraph mostly connect logically and effectively.</p> <p>In all but a few cases the paragraphs point is expressed in a clear topic sentence.</p>	<p>Organization of the paper as a whole can only be discerned with effort.</p> <p>Not all parts of the paper fit the organizational structure.</p> <p>Topic sentences are missing or there is not a distinct or coherent point in a number of paragraphs.</p> <p>The parts of multiple paragraphs do not connect logically.</p>	<p>Organization of the paper as a whole is not logical or discernible.</p>

Table 3: Extra Credit Writing Assignment Rubric

	Sophisticated (7)	Highly Competent (5)	Fairly Competent (3)	Not Yet Competent (1)
Articulation	<p>Throughout the paper, factual statements are articulate and concise.</p> <p>Sentence structure is consistently clear and lucid.</p> <p>Quotations are all framed effectively in the text and explicated where necessary.</p>	<p>Factual statements are for the most part articulate and concise.</p> <p>Sentence structure is mostly clear.</p> <p>Quotations are framed effectively in the text.</p>	<p>Factual statements are not concise or inarticulate on more than one occasion.</p> <p>Sentence structure is sometimes confusing.</p> <p>Quotations are not framed effectively in the text.</p>	<p>Failure to articulate factual statements in a clear or concise way.</p> <p>Sentence structure is consistently confusing.</p>
Mechanics	<p>Paper is clean and appropriately formatted (MLA/APA).</p> <p>There are no incomplete or run-on sentences.</p> <p>Quotes and figures are all properly attributed and cited.</p> <p>There are virtually no spelling or grammatical errors.</p>	<p>There are few minor spelling or grammatical errors.</p> <p>Quotes and figures are all properly attributed and cited.</p>	<p>There are a number of spelling and grammatical errors.</p> <p>In a few places, quotes and figures are not attributed and cited.</p>	<p>Paper is unacceptably sloppy</p> <p>Quotes and figures are frequently not attributed or improperly cited.</p>