

## Paper Writing Guidelines

The final paper should be 3500-4500 words (15-20 pages double-spaced). There is no explicit length target for the draft, but to get a good grade, it must include: a research question, some findings, and all of the relevant elements of the main body of whatever type of paper you have chosen. The standard for how polished they need to be is lower on the draft, but you do not have a complete draft if you have entirely omitted one of these elements (with the caveat that some final papers will have a somewhat different structure than described below).

### General Writing Tips

- Minimize the use of the first person (I) in your paper, but do not feel that you need to eliminate it entirely. Saying “*I find ...*” or “*I use data on ...*” or “*I assume*” is perfectly acceptable. Avoid the use of phrases like “*I think*” or “*I believe*.” Better alternatives would be “*My analysis suggests ...*” or “*my results support ...*”
- Although not everyone agrees, I prefer that you avoid the “royal” we while writing. That is, since your papers are single-authored, avoid the use of phrases like “*We use data on ...*”. It is okay to use “we” when it is clear that the reference is to you and your reader as in “*Because economic theory predicts that monopolists will restrict quantity to raise price, we would expect to see higher prices on average in locations served by a single supplier.*”
- Proofread your paper. Please make use of your software’s automated spell-checker AND its grammar checker if it has one. Please consider having someone else read your paper before handing it in (this is especially true if you are a non-native English speaker). Make sure you do this for the draft as well.
- Target your paper to your classmates rather than me. That is, make sure you explain the important parts of the economic theory you use to someone who is familiar with standard undergraduate economic theory and has had exposure to some of the basic ideas we have discussed in class, but do not expect your reader to be familiar with all of the papers you cite or to remember the specific details of a paper we discussed in class.
- Use parenthetical citations in your paper and use the present tense when discussing other papers: *Galiani et al (2005) find that privatization was associated with reductions in child mortality in Argentina* or *Institutional details can strongly influence the effectiveness of water markets (Bjornlund and McKay, 2000)*. Do not list first names or article titles in the text of the document unless there is something specific about those that is important to your paper. Use a consistent citation style for your references that refers to papers by author and date rather than numerical references. I am not picky about the precise citation style, but please check the format for non-standard entries if you are using bibliographic software to generate your references. (A tip: Google scholar does a nice job of formatting *most* references in several standard formats if you assemble your bibliography manually).
- Follow standard practice on citing your sources. I take academic honesty very seriously and will report plagiarism on either the draft or the final paper to the Honor Board. Remember that ultimate goal of citation/attribution: to make sure your reader knows what

arguments/ideas are yours, which ones came from someone else, and who the source of those other arguments was.

Any text taken directly from any source needs to be in quotation marks. Arguments or statements that are paraphrased from other sources must be cited as well. In most cases, you will have few if any direct quotations in your papers. You should cite sources for specific theories or models that you rely on but do not need to cite sources for standard economic theories. Please ask if you are unsure whether a theory/model needs to be cited, but a general rule of the thumb is that if something appears in textbooks without specific citations, you can assume the basic idea is common economic knowledge and does not need to be cited. *When in doubt, cite the source or ask me.*

## Paper Structure

The precise structure your paper will take depends on your specific question and approach, but most will follow one of the two patterns below at least loosely. You do not have to structure your paper with each of these elements having its own subheading, but having this general format in mind will likely help you make sure you explain all the important parts of your analysis to your audience. Feel free to modify as you see fit. Remember that the ultimate goal is to answer your research question and convince your readers (me and your classmates) that we should believe your answer. Everything should be structured with that in mind.

### *Abstract*

Although you should write it last (or at least near the end), your paper will begin with an abstract. As you've seen from the journal papers we've read, the abstract is a short, concise statement of what the paper does and what the key results are. Do not keep your reader in suspense. Aim for 100-200 words (less is better) and do not include more than one short sentence motivating your topic or setting it in context.

### *Introduction*

Like the abstract, the introduction goes near the beginning of the paper, but it is often difficult to craft a good introduction until you have completed much of the research. Plan to substantially revise your introduction once you have completed the body of the paper and are sure of what your main points are. The introduction (outside of the literature review which may be included in it) should be no more than two pages double spaced and should answer the following questions:

- What methods are you using to answer the question? You do not need to get into too much detail in the introduction, but we should have a rough sense of what your approach will be by the time we finish the introduction.
- What data or evidence are you using to answer your question (if applicable)?
- What are your key findings/recommendations? An economics paper isn't a mystery novel. Tell us your basic results in brief form up front so we can be assessing how you build to this conclusion throughout the entire paper. *Note that in comparing this paper to the typical paper structure taught in writing courses, the answer to this question serves as the thesis of*

*your paper. Everything you do in the paper should be designed to convince us that we should believe these findings and any recommendations you make.*

- At very end of the introduction, include a paragraph describing the contents of the rest of the paper.

**Literature Review** The literature review portion of the paper may be part of the introduction or a separate section, depending on what makes the most sense to you. Your literature review should be clearly focused on putting your work in context. You should regularly connect the papers back to your research question. Questions/themes that may appear in your review include a discussion of related themes/trends in the literature, areas of agreement/disagreement in previous papers, areas that have been heavily researched and those that need additional study, the degree of support for your hypothesis in the existing literature, and a discussion of how your research fits into the existing literature.

Your literature should be comprehensive, but not necessarily exhaustive. It does not need to cover everything ever written that relates to your topic, but should be up-to-date and should provide the intellectual context and motivation for your research. It helps your reader to know how what you've done relates to previous work and what is new and helps to motivate why this study is important. With this in mind, you should discuss some or all of the following:

- The development of the methodology, framework, or model that you are using in your analysis. If your paper will apply an existing model/approach/technique (commonly the case), you should cite the original papers that developed the technique and recent notable examples of its application. Many of you may follow an existing paper's approach quite closely. This paper should be discussed in detail in your review. If you are developing a new methodology, framework or model (less common), you should discuss papers that used similar models and identify what your model will add (in general terms, save the specifics for your model section).
- Papers in the literature that have a noticeable overlap in question, key topic, and/or technique. Common examples would be a paper that applies the same technique to a different specific problem, papers that answer the same question in a different location, papers that address the same question with a different technique/data, and papers that address a closely related question.
- Papers whose results motivate your question
- Papers whose results will justify or explain any important assumptions you make in your paper.

### ***Main Body of an Analytical Paper***

*Note: you may find it more natural to organize the body of your paper in a different fashion, but be sure you are internally clear about the three different types of tasks described here.*

**Economic “Model”** In this section, you should develop a narrative model of the economic situation your paper is discussing. You should focus on identifying whose choices drive the outcomes you are concerned about and developing an economic story explaining how those decisions are made. You may want to use graphs or equations in this portion of your paper but are not required to. In developing this model/story, focus on your classmates as the target audience. Your model should clearly identify why there is a problem that might need to be solved.

**Impact of Policies/Changes in Your Model** In this section, you should use your narrative model to predict how various policies or changes you consider will impact the choices described above and how this will alter the outcomes of interest. In this section, you should focus on what we call positive analysis of the policies/changes. In other words, predict the effects but save most value judgments about these effects for your argument.

**Argument/Recommendation** Using the mechanics developed in the previous two sections, you should make an argument/recommendation. You are free to use any criteria you feel are appropriate in identifying the policy you recommend, but you will also need to justify and explain to your audience why the criteria you have selected are appropriate.

### *Main Body of an Empirical Paper*

**Economic Story** In this section, you should give us a rough economic story about what’s going on your analysis. This will not be as developed as the model in an analytical paper but you should still develop some economic motivation here. You may find it useful to refer back to some of the empirical papers we have read in class.

**Data** In this section, you will describe the source of your data and provide various summary statistics about the data. You want to discuss any data issues and any adjustments you had to make in the this section. You may also be able to motivate your main story with a simple comparison in this section.

**Empirical Model** In this section you will describe your regression model, explain the underlying assumptions you are making and talk about how the regression results will help you answer your question.

**Results** In this section (which you may decide to combine with the previous one), you will present and discuss your results. You do not need to discuss every number in your results, but should talk about the key messages to take away from the results. Format your result tables to be relatively easy to read by using a reasonable number of decimal places based on the data and making it easy for your readers to identify which coefficients are statistically significant.

### *Discussion & Conclusion (for any type of paper)*

In this (likely brief) section, you will discuss the implications of your analysis and briefly reiterate the main point. Unlike the mystery novel approach to writing, there shouldn’t be any major surprises here. If you’ve done your job well in the previous sections, the summary/conclusion aspect of this section will be exactly what your reader expects. In the discussion portion, you should mention any important caveats or qualifications to your analysis. You may also want to suggest directions for further research or analysis. You may also want to talk about broader implications of your results.