

ECON 8600 Research & Writing
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Class #1

Round of Introduction

- 1. Syllabus**
- 2. Background to the course**

Let's get started with brainstorming and exploring research topics

- 3. Skim read 15 min**
- 4. Database search 15 min**
- 5. Homework #1** due Sunday midnight before next class 5 min

2.Syllabus

3.Background to the course

This course shares a method for building a research paper in different steps.

First, brainstorm and explore topics.

Second, search the literature systematically on a given topic or more.

Third, finetune your topic and research question.

Fourth, situate your paper in the literature and develop an argument about its contribution.

Fourth, do the research.

Fifth, share the research (poster, talk, paper)

Sixth, revise the research

Seventh, repeat share & revise again and again

.... Until you publish

3. Background to the course (Cont.)

Notice how I did not include ‘writing’ above. Likewise, ‘reading’ is absent above. It is not because these are small or insignificant tasks. It is because they are there every step of the way.

Stephen King on writing and reading: “*A meeting of the mind*” or “*Telephathy*”; “*I read when I can*”; “*you must not come lightly to the blank page*” “*If you can take it seriously, we can do business*” ...and *research*.

This course is only 3 ½ months long. This is a short time line for a research paper. You cannot be too ambitious about the scope of the paper. This will not get you to a job market paper in such a time frame. However, the aim is for you to produce a first research paper

that will set you up on the path towards developing other, longer and more extensive papers.

Today, we are starting the **brainstorming and exploration phase**.

But before we do that, let's discuss some fundamental stuff.

1/ How is knowledge produced in economics?

2/ What is economics?

Word economic comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning ‘house’ and *nomos*, meaning to manage.

Cambridge dictionary:

the scientific study of the system by which a country’s wealth is made and used

AEA website: Economics can be defined in a few different ways. It’s the study of scarcity, the study of how people use resources and respond to incentives, or the study of decision-making. It often involves topics like wealth and finance, but it’s not all about money. Economics is a broad discipline that helps us understand historical trends, interpret today’s headlines, and make predictions about the coming years.

Krugman and Wells in their Principles of Macroeconomics textbook: “Economics is the social science that studies the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services”. “An economy is a system for coordinating society’s productive activities.”

Take the textbook “economics” written by Ronald M. Ayers and Robert A. Collinge [textbook 2005]. They define economics as, giving two interpretations, the first, “Economics examines how to make choices well.” They also say, “Economics studies the allocation of limited resources in response to unlimited wants.”

Alfred Marshall at the end of the 19th century: “the study of people in the ordinary business of life.”

Lionel Robbins (1932): “Economics is the science which studies

human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses.”

Paul Samuelsson (1992 textbook): “that economics is the study of how societies use scarce resources to produce valuable commodities and distribute them among different people.”

Jevons for example defined economics as “the mechanics of utility and self interest.”

Economics as method/ approach

Becker (1971): “the study of the allocation of scarce means to satisfy competing ends.” He did not exclude nonmarket behavior.

Duflo (2017) Economist as plumber

Pushback:

Ha-Joon Chang (2014): “my belief is that economics should be defined not in terms of its methodology, or theoretical approach, but in terms of its subject matter, as is the case with all other disciplines. The subject matter of economics should be the economy, which involves money, work, technology, international trade, taxes and other things that have to do with the ways in which we produce goods and services, distribute the incomes generated in the process and consume the things thus produced”. (Economics: the User’s Guide. A Pelican Introduction).

How do I brainstorm and explore?

Look inside: what is of interest to you?

Look outside: what is of interest to you? Read/listen

Write a research log/journal

4. Skim read

Skim read:

Keep track of what you skim read in your log.

In class activity: Skim read: skim read the article by Currie et al in 8 min (put a timer on) and identify the topic, contribution and main results. Input it into your log.

5.Database search

Explore EconLit and other social science databases (e.g. SocIndex)

6.Homework #1 due before next class:

1st entry into log/journal + 100 to 200 words on topic(s) of interest

Thank you!