

Guidelines to finding research topic and writing literature review

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1 Research question

The easy way to get started is to read through the handout *Snapshot of four benchmark models*. Discuss with your group project partner and get a feeling of which model excites you. Pay special attention to the "topic exploration" parts of each model. Are any of those topics or some possible extensions/transformations of a topic catch your attention? If it just so happens that any of the topic explorations that I listed catches your eyes, you still need to use your own thinking to come up with a concrete and detailed research question to guide the rest of your development of the project.

A research question must be concrete and detailed enough. A bad example is, how do financial aid impact young people's college education? A good example would be, how do need-based tuition assistance program for age 19 students impact the college completion rate for young people at age 25?

Think about the model you want to work with, and the potential questions it is going to address, and phrase your question in a concrete and detailed way. This is an extremely important skill, for your future academic or company career. A vague and not precise statement will gets you nowhere. As researchers, our goal is to deepen make our understanding of the world, but it will only happen if you have a detailed question one at a time. And then, you tackle one small question after another and connect to raise our knowledge frontier.

In your first writing assignment *Focused research topic*, you will need to write a two paragraph statement. You will need to clearly define your research question, and motivate it. In motivation, you will need to address why this question is important, to economics; why it is important to you; and why do I care about this question?

In terms of economics part, that's when you go back to all the economics theories you have learned. A good example, in the scholarship example, I can say, it relates to human capital theory, in which people decide to go to school by considering some direct tuition cost, as well as opportunity cost. How large does tuition cost play a role in young people's decision-making? This research provides empirical and/or theoretical contribution to this economic question. And this is the essence to persuade me, a "cold-blooded" economist, to be excited about your project.

In terms of "personal" part of the motivation, you may draw some anecdotal or empirical examples just to show your work is going to make the society a better place. Ultimately, economics is a social science. In the scholarship example, you may say, given how many people are under tuition loans, and graduate with heavy burden, and so on, this need-based tuition program also helps young people better achieving their independence after graduation.

2 Literature review

For this term project, you will need to find 5 relevant journal articles in economics to further motivate your project. For each journal article you find, you will need to summarize the article.

First, you need to present the research question of this article, just like how you would write your own research question. Second, you need to summarize what the researchers did to answer the question. What empirical (data-related) exercises they did, and what they found from empirical evidence. Then what model framework do they use? What exercises do they do from their benchmark model? And what conclusions do they draw? If the authors indicated, what contributions do they make to the previous studies?

For each paper you summarize, limit it within one paragraph. If you happen to find a really good article that you really like, you may go to two paragraphs. But that is the absolute top limit.

Lastly, writing is important. I use a narrative language in this document, as if I am talking to you, for the instructional purpose. In the assignment, you will need to use an academic voice, learn the tone from the articles you find. Have the writing center help you if you need (and I highly recommend everyone to ask for help from the writing center, even if you don't think so).

One more thing, citation. I do not require any particular specific citation style (MLA, Chicago, etc.), as long as you pick one and are consistent with it.