

Economics Department Writing Guide

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Writing Guide and Style Sheet

Introduction

You will have many opportunities to write papers in economics courses and to express your ideas clearly and persuasively. However, you should realize that writing in economics poses some particular challenges, so we have put together this writing guide and style sheet to help you learn to write like an economist. Here are some helpful hints:

- 1) Economics writing is a form of scientific writing and emphasizes accuracy, clarity and conciseness. We believe that clear thinking leads to clear writing, so the first step is to be clear on what it is you want to say.**
- 2) An outline is essential in structuring your argument.**
- 3) Writing a first draft is the largest hurdle, but after that you will want to do more drafts to refine your exposition and to be sure your essay says what you mean it to say, as clearly and as concisely as possible.**
- 4) Proofreading is the next step and you should do that very carefully. Reading a paper aloud is the best way to catch errant homonyms and phrases left behind from editing that spell check wouldn't catch. Failure to proofread is inexcusable.**
- 5) Finally, and very importantly, you want to be sure that your references are complete. We cannot emphasize enough that all materials you have quoted or paraphrased from another source must have citations. These citations also need to be in the correct form.**

In the pages that follow we have gathered some suggestions we hope will help your writing become more concise and direct.

In addition you will find samples from the American Economic Association's Style Sheet will serve as your guide to the correct form of citation. **Save these sample references to use as a guide for all papers you write in economics classes.**

We are happy to welcome you to the Economics Department, and we look forward to working with you over the next two years!

Sincerely,

Economics Department

General Writing Suggestions

Conciseness

“Brevity is the soul of wit / and tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes.”

Excess words and phrases can clog up your writing and make it less clear. Generally, there are two ways to eliminate wordiness: (1) Compress what you mean into the fewest possible words, (2) Don't tell your readers what they already know, don't need to know, or can infer. Unfortunately, we can inflate our prose in so many ways that it is impossible to list them all, but the following suggestions should help you find the most common types of wordiness.

Redundant Pairs

Many pairs of words imply each other. Finish implies complete, so completely finish is redundant. So are many other pairs of words:

past memories	important essentials	final outcome
various differences	future plans	free gift
each individual	sudden crisis	past history
basic fundamentals	terrible tragedy	unexpected surprise
true facts	end result	

Example: Before the travel agent was completely able to finish explaining the various differences between all of the many vacation packages her travel agency was offering, the customer changed his future plans.

Revision: Before the travel agent finished explaining the differences between the vacation packages her travel agency was offering, the customer changed his plans.

Meaningless Modifiers

Some modifiers are delaying tactics that we use almost unconsciously. These words and phrases can be pruned away to make sentences clearer:

kind of	for all intents and purposes	generally
sort of	definitely	individual
really	actually	specific
basically		

Example: For all intents and purposes, American industrial productivity generally depends on certain factors that are really more psychological in kind than of any given technological aspect.

Revision: American industrial productivity depends on factors that are more psychological than technological.

Stating the Obvious

Often we needlessly state what everyone knows or can infer from what we are writing.

Example: Imagine a mental picture of someone engaged in the intellectual activity of trying to learn what the rules are for how to play the game of chess.

Revision: Imagine someone trying to learn the rules of chess.

Excessive Detail

Sometimes we provide irrelevant details or more information than readers need to know.

Example: Baseball, one of our oldest and most popular outdoor summer sports in terms of total attendance at ball parks and viewing on television, has the kind of rhythm of play on the field that alternates between the players' passively waiting with no action taking place between the pitches to the batter and exploding into action when the batter hits a pitched ball to one of the players and he fields it.

Revision: Baseball has a rhythm that alternates between waiting and explosive action.

Phrases for Words

Sometimes we use excessive phrases when a well chosen word or two will substitute.

Example: As you carefully read what you have written to improve your working and catch small errors of spelling, punctuation, and son on, the thing to do before you do anything else is to try to see where sequences of subjects and verbs could replace the same ideas expressed in nouns rather than verbs.

Revision: As you edit, first find nominalizations you can replace with clauses.

Verbs Smothered in Nouns

Try to use a verb instead of a noun phrase.

Example: The committee made the decision to...

Revision: The committee decided to...

Example: They entered into an agreement to...

Revision: They agreed to...

Common Phrases

Some common phrases that you can compress are the following:

the reason for	as regards	it is crucial that
for the reason that	In reference to	it is necessary that
due to the fact that	with regard to/about	there is a need/necessity for
in light of the fact that	concerning the matter of	it is important that cannot be
considering the fact that	where ____ is concerned	avoided
owing to the fact that		
on the grounds that		
this is why		
is able to be in a position	it is possible that	on the occasion of
to	there is a chance that	in a situation in which/when
has the opportunity to/can	might, can, could	under circumstances in which
has the capacity for	it could happen that __ may	
has the ability to	the possibility exists for	

Example: It is possible that nothing will come of these preparations.

Revision: Nothing may come of these preparations.

Other Unnecessary Words

There are many unneeded words that can simply be omitted, including the following:

Articles: a, an, the

Example: The evidence we have...

Revision: Evidence we have...

That, who, and which clauses

Example: All applicants who are interested in the job must...

Revision: All applicants interested in the job must... or

All interested job applicants must...

There is and there are sentence beginnings

Example: There are four rules to observe...

Revision: Four rules to observe are...

Passives

Example: An account was opened by Mrs. Sims.

Revision: Mrs. Sims opened an account.

Infinitive phrases (infinitive phrase = to + verb)

Example: The duty of a clerk is to check all incoming mail and to record it.

Revision: A clerk checks and records all incoming mail.

Words Frequently Misspelled in Economics Courses

This sheet of paper consists of sentences containing misspelled words. Test yourself by correcting each sentence without looking at the answers and explanations on the attached sheet. Avoiding these errors would eliminate 95% of spelling errors in economics courses. Some sentences are grouped together to highlight errors closely related to one another.

1. Owners of factors of production recieve market-determined rental rates.
2. The rational consumer can acheive his goal of utility maximization.
3. Foriegn trade can benefit all countries involved.
4. Price has no affect on demand, although it does change quantity demanded.
5. Price does not effect demand, although it does change quantity demanded.
6. The Federal Reserve Board affected the increase in interest rates it desired.
7. Economics is a science, even though it's methods differ from those of the natural sciences.
8. Economics is a science, even though its based on methods different from those of the natural sciences.
9. Bankruptcies are occurring at an unprecedented rate.
10. Differring price elasticities of demand can make price discrimination profitable.
11. If a firm raises its prices, it will loose customers to its competitors.
12. The quanity demanded of a good is affected by its price but not by its cost.
13. If labor receives wages equal to the value of what it produces, then it's being payed what it is worth.
14. A firm can sometimes benefit by highering additional employees.
15. The benifits of education can to some extent be measured by more productive use of leisure time.
16. Demand for a good is affected by a change in the price of a complimentary good.
17. Perfectly competative firms choose quantities of output but riot prices.
18. Comparitive advantage is a key principle in economics.

Answers and Explanations

1. receive
2. achieve
3. foreign

Numbers 1-3 illustrate the operation of the famous spelling rule “*i before e except after c.*” It’s easy to remember because it rhymes. “Receive” is the most commonly misspelled word in economics. Note that “achieve” illustrates a fine point in applying the rule: *i* will precede *e* unless *c* immediately precedes the vowel combination. “Foreign” is included to show that a few are exceptions to the rules; other exceptions that I know of are weight, leisure, neither, either, and science. The English language is irregular enough that any rules will have a few exceptions.

4. effect instead of affect
5. affect instead of effect
6. effected instead of affected

Numbers 4-6 illustrate a confusion of two separate words. 99% of the errors involving these words can be avoided by remembering that effect is usually a noun and affect is usually a verb. Note that sentences 4 and 5 have slightly different constructions. In 4, a noun is used, and so “effect” is correct. In 5, the difference in sentence construction calls for a verb, and “affect” is correct there. Sentence 6 illustrates the relatively uncommon use of “effect” as a verb. Its meaning as a verb is “to bring about”; this meaning can be distinguished from “affect’s” ordinary use as a verb meaning “to change.” The word affect has a specialized meaning in psychology when used as a noun.

7. its instead of it’s
8. it’s instead of its

Numbers 7 and 8 illustrate the principle that an apostrophe is used for the contraction of it but not for the possessive form of the pronoun it. Notice that sentences 7 and 8 spell “science” correctly, as noted earlier it is an exception to the “*i before e except after c*” rule.

9. occurring
10. differing

Numbers 9 and 10 are examples of errors in deciding whether or not to double an end consonant before adding a suffix. For words of more than one syllable that end with a consonant immediately preceded by a vowel (words such as occur, differ, refer, and prefer), the rule is that if the new word (root word plus suffix) will be accented on the last syllable of the root word, then the end consonant of the root should be doubled before adding the suffix. Note that in sentence 9, occurring is accented on the last syllable of the root word occur, and therefore the *r* is doubled before the suffix is added. Differing, on the other

hand, is accented on the first syllable, and therefore the *r* is not doubled in adding the suffix. The rationale for this rule is that doubling the end consonant of the root keeps vowel, which precedes it short. Doing this to keep the vowel short is much more important when the syllable containing the vowel is an accented one. For instance, try pronouncing the (misspelled) word “occurring” as it should be pronounced based on its spelling. The *u* would be pronounced as a long *u*, as in “curing the common cold.” Doubling the *r* to spell it “occurring” makes its spelling consistent with its pronunciation (Note in the preceding sentence the correct use of “it’s” without the apostrophe). In a word like differing, where the last syllable of the root is unaccented, the *e* is much more naturally kept short without doubling the *r*. Try to pronounce differing with a long *e* while continuing to accent only the first syllable. It’s awkward to do.

Note that I stressed above that the key factor is whether the new word (root plus suffix) is accented on the last syllable of the root. Sometime adding a suffix to a word affects its accent pattern. For instance, the root word prefer (accented on the last syllable) becomes preferring to keep the *e* short. However, in the word preference, the accent shifts to the first syllable, thus eliminating the need to double the *r* to keep the *e* short. Other words do not change their accent patterns in adding *e-n-c-e* (for instance occurrence and deterrence) and thus need the doubled consonant.

11. lose

Number 11 illustrates a very frequent error caused by the peculiar pronunciation of the word lose. It rhymes with choose, and I think this is what makes people think it should be spelled loose. Loose, of course, is a different word.

12. quantity

This error arises out of a tendency to be lazy in pronouncing the word. People who misspell this word do so because they hear others mispronounce it and probably mispronounce it themselves. Pronouncing the first *t* does make it less easy to say quickly but will make you more likely to spell it correctly.

13. paid

14. hired

I do not know if any explanation of these is helpful or not. I suppose one could notice that *payed* and *highered* would be strange spellings of one-syllable words. These are both very common errors. The word employee is increasingly being spelled without the final *e*. Either spelling is now considered correct.

15. benefits

The Latin root is bene, as in benediction and benefactor. Note that sentence 14 spelled the word correctly.

16. complementary

Complimentary, of course, is a word too, but has a completely separate meaning.

17. competitive

18. comparative

I can suggest no rule or explanation for 17 and 18.

The American Economic Association Style Sheet: Sample References¹

Journal Articles

Published Articles

Author Last name, First name. Year. "Article Title." *Journal Title*, Volume (Issue number if applicable): Page numbers.

Example: Acemoglu, Daron. 2002. "Technical Change, Inequality, and the Labor Market." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 40(1): 7-72

In the case of two authors, only the first author's name is inverted and a comma must be placed before and after the first author's first name or initials. Use "and" between the two author'(s') names.

Example: Baker, George, Robert Gibbons, and Kevin J. Murphy. 2002. "Relational Contracts and the Theory of the Firm." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 117(1): 39-84

Forthcoming Articles

Example: Bikhchandani, Sushil, and Joseph M. Ostroy. Forthcoming. "Ascending Price Vickery Auctions." *Games and Economic Behavior*

Books

One Author

Author Last name, First name. Year. *Title of Book*. City of publication: Publisher.

Example: Friedman, Thomas L. 2005. *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Two Authors

Example: Helpman, Elhanan, and Paul Krugman. 1985. *Market Structure and Foreign Trade: Increasing Returns, Imperfect Competition, and the International Economy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

¹ The American Economic Assoc. 2015. The American Economic Association hosted by Vanderbilt University. <https://www.aeaweb.org/aer/styleguide.pdf>.

Chapter in a Book

Author Last name, First name. Year. "Chapter or Article Title." In *Book Title*, followed by ed. and editor'(s') names if appropriate, and page number(s). City of publication: Publisher.

Example: Freeman, Richard B. 1993. "How Much Has Deunionization Contributed to the Rise in Male Earnings Equality?" In *Uneven Tide: Rising Income Inequality in America*, ed. Sheldon Danzinger and Peter Gottschalk, 133-63. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Reprint or Modern Editions

When emphasizing the earlier date: Author Last name, First name. Earlier printing date. *Title*. City of publication: Publisher, Later date.

Example: Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

When emphasizing the later date: Author Last name, First name. *Title*. City of publication: Publisher, (Orig. pub. Date).

Example: Rawls, John. 1999. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, (Orig. pug. 1971).

Editions Other than the First

When an edition other than the first is used or cited, the number or description of the edition follows the title in the listing.

Example: Strunk, William, Jr., and E.B. White. 2000. *The Elements of Style*. 4th ed. New York: Allyn and Bacon.

Multi-volume Works

Multivolume works include works such as encyclopedias, multivolume works published over several years, and multivolume works published in a single year. Below are a few examples.

Example: Kohama, Hiroshisa, ed. 2003. *Asian Development Experience*. Vol. 1, *External Factors in Asian Development*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Example: Kusukoa, Shiego, and Akira Yamazaki, ed. 2006. *Advances in Mathematical Economics*. Vol 8. New York: Sprigner.

Example: Mokyr, Joel, ed 2003. *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Economics History*. 5 Vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Unpublished Papers

Working Papers

Only papers appearing as part of an institutions' working papers series should be classified as working papers. These should always include a specific working paper number as assigned by the institution.

Author Last name, First name. Year. "Title." Type of Working Paper (such as institution, working series title) and number.

Example: Ausubel, Lawrence M. 1997. "An Efficient Ascending-Bid Auction for Multiple Objects." University of Maryland Faculty Working Paper 97-06.

Example: Heidhues, Paul, and Botond Koszegi. 2005. "The Impact of Consumer Loss Aversion on Pricing." Centre for Economic Policy Research Discussion Paper 4849.

Lectures and Papers Presented at Meetings

Author Last name, First name. Year. "Title." Paper presented at followed by meeting name, place, and city where lecture/meeting took place.

Example: Romer, Christina D., and David H. Romer. 2006. "The Evolution of Economic Understanding and Postwar Stabilization Policy." Paper presented at the Rethinking Stabilization Policy Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas Symposium, Jackson Hole, WY.

Example: Goldin, Claudia. 2006. "The Quiet Revolution That Transformed Women's Employment, Education, and Family." Paper presented at the annual meeting for the Allied Social Science Associations, Boston.

Unpublished Papers

When a paper has not been published but can be found on the web (such as the author's website or the university website), use the following format:

Author Last name, First name. Year. "Title." Web address. Please provide a URL that links to the full text of the article.

Example: Zeitzewitz, Eric. 2006. "How Widespread Was Late Trading in Mutual Funds." <http://facultygsb.stanford.edu/zitzewitz>.

When a paper has not been published and does not appear on a website (such as the author's website or university website), use the following format:

Author Last name, First name. Year. "Title." Unpublished.

Example: Acemoglu, Daron, Pol Atras, and Elhanan Helpman. 2006. "Contracts and Technology Adoption." Unpublished.

Theses and Dissertations

Author Last name, First name. Year. "Title." PhD diss. University.

Example: Nash, John. 1950. "Non-Cooperative Games." PhD diss. Princeton University.

Data

When citing datasets, please include the author name or the name of the provider hosting the data, the year the data were collected or posted, the name or title of the dataset, the name of the database if applicable, and any other information necessary for one to retrieve the data. Please include the date accessed in parentheses at the end.

Example: Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2000-2010. "Current Employment Statistics: Colorado, Total Nonfarm, Seasonally adjusted – SMS08000000000000001." United States Department of Labor. <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/surveymost?sm+08> (accessed February 9, 2011).

Example: Liess, Amelia. 1999. "Arms Transfers to Developing Countries, 1945-1968." Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor, MI. ICPSR05404-v1. doi: 10.3886/ICPSR05404 (accessed February 8, 2011).

For references to data specifically associated with a published paper, please include the author name(s), year paper title: the words "dataset." Journal name. Location of the data.

Example: Romer, Christina D. and David H. Romer. 2010. "The Macroeconomic Effects of Tax Changes: Estimates Based on a New Measure of Fiscal Shocks: Dataset. *American Economic Review*. <http://www.awaweb.org/articles.php?doi=10.1257/aer.100.3.763>.

Websites

This is to reference research done on a website. If you are looking to reference a specific article, document, lecture, speech, etc. see the sample references for those types of documents.

Website Name. Year accessed. Publisher/Company. URL (access date).

Example: Factiva. 2006. Dow Jones Reuters Business Interactive LLC. www.factiva.com (accessed June 5, 2006).

Example: Biography Resource Center. 2006. Thomas Gale.
<http://www.galegroup.com/BiographyRC/> (accessed September 25, 2006).

Newspapers, Online Dictionaries, Encyclopedias, and Reference Works

Because newspapers, magazines, online dictionaries, and encyclopedias are continuously updated, they should be cited as a footnote in the text. It should *not* be included in the reference list. The footnote should always include an access date along with the URL. If possible, use the appropriate URL for the site entry rather than the general URL. If you are citing the definition for “nepotism” in the Merriam-Webster Online dictionary, use <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/nepotism> rather than <http://www.m-w.com/>.

Magazine Articles

Authored Articles

Author Last name, First name. Year. “Title.” *Magazine*. Month or date, page number(s).

Example: Belkin, Lisa. 2003. “The Opt-out Revolution.” *New York Times Magazine*. October 26, 23-32.

Articles with No Author

Magazine. Year. “Title,” Month or date, page numbers.

Example: *The Economist*. 1991. “The Ins and Outs of Outsourcing,” August 31, 54-56.

Online Magazine Articles

Author Last name, First name. Year. “Title.” *Magazine*, date. URL.

Example: Becker, Gary S. 1993. “The Evidence Against Black Doesn’t Prove Bias.” *Business Week*, April 19. <http://bwarchive.businessweek.com/index.jsp>.

In-Text Citations

For in-text citations, follow the Chicago: In-Text Citations System (Author-Date System).

For Exact Quotes

Rule: The basic form of in-text citations consists of the author's (or editor's) last name and the year of publication of the work cited. No punctuation is used between the author's name and the date of publication. The page, section, or other element of the cited material follows the date and is preceded by a comma. Author date citations are usually placed before a punctuation mark.

Example: "The fight to save the banking system opened the Hundred Days; the fight to save the farmers opened the New Deal proper" (Schlesinger 1958, 87).

Rule: When quoting from a work by two or three authors, all names are included in the citation.

Example: "Democracy in America has always been played roughly by all parties and political adversaries have indulged in harsh and sometimes vicious assaults on each other since the nation's founding" (Canason and Lyons 2000, xiii).

Rule: When quoting from a work by more than three authors, use the name of the first author followed by et al. or and others.

Example: "Studies of interpersonal functioning among individuals with bulimia nervosa consistently reveal issues of social dependency, need for approval, and fear of rejection" (Hayaki et. al 2003, 172).

Rule: When quoting from a work by an association, government agency, or corporation, the name of the group may serve as the author in the citation.

Example: "To fulfill the Peace Corps mandate, men and women are trained for a 9 to 14 week period in the appropriate languages, the technical skills necessary for their particular job, and the cross-cultural skills need to adjust to a society with traditions and attitudes different from their own" (Office of the Federal Register 2002, 500).

Rule: In general, quoted material that runs more than one hundred words, or eight or more typed lines, is usually set off from the text (i.e. with indented margins). Quotation marks are not used in this case. The source of a block quotation is usually given in parentheses at the end of the quotation and after the final punctuation mark, so that it will not be read as part of the quotation.

Example: McCullough lays out the contradictions between Truman's personal background and his presidency plainly.

Born in the Gilded age, the age of steam and gingerbread Gothic, Truman had lived to see a time of lost certainties and rocket trips to the moon. The arc of his life spanned more change in the world than in any prior period in history. A man of nineteenth century background, he had had to face many of the most difficult decisions of the twentieth century. A son of rural, inland America, raised only a generation removed from the frontier and imbued with the old Jeffersonian ideal of a rural democracy, he had to assume command of the most powerful nation on earth and the very moment when that power, in combination with stunning advances in science and technology, had become an unparalleled force in the world. (McCullough 1992, 991)

For Paraphrased Material

Rule: Writers need to give credit for words and ideas taken from others, even if the material used is not a direct quotation. In this case, a parenthetical reference in the text, keyed to the reference list, is sufficient. No quotation marks are required if the material is paraphrased.

Example: There are some interesting juxtapositions of Islamic and democratic institutions in Malaysia (Feldman 2003,114).