

Writing Project

e105writ

Project Overview: It is all too easy for a student to complete an introductory course in economics without learning about how economists *learn* about the economy. This assignment is designed to provide you with some insight about the sources and limitations of economic knowledge. You are to find an article written by an economist for economists on a topic of particular interest to you; then you will read the paper carefully and write a report summarizing the main features of the article.

Due Dates: (See below for detailed information)

- October 11st: Inform me of the author and title (appropriate bibliographical style (see item 2 of Report Format, below). I will compile a list of titles and circulate it in order that you will know the range of topics your classmates are working on.
- November 15th: Draft for peer review.
- December 1st: Final draft ¹ (Hard copy ~ not email attachment or fax)

Procedure:

- Find an article that interests you in one of the economics journals in Olin Library – look ahead in the text and/or the syllabus if a topic does not spring immediately to mind. Select an article written by and for economists.
- Perhaps the best research strategy for locating an article is to use *EconLit*, the wonderful electronic data base listing all articles published in economics journals for the last twenty five years (see below). Alternatively, you might randomly browse through the economics journals on the shelves of the periodical room in the basement of Olin.
- Your article should not be from a non-technical source, such as *Business Week* or *The Economist*. It should not be from a non-economics journal such as *Science*; it should not be from an interdisciplinary journal, such as the *Journal of Economics and Sociology* or a pedagogically oriented article in the *Journal of Economic Education*.

Examples:

For a list of some of the articles students reported on in prior years, see Table 2 of Chapter 1:

Examples of student papers:

<http://mlovell.web.wesleyan.edu/StudentPapers/StudentPapers.html>

Ask your instructor, if you are not sure that the article you have selected is appropriate for this project.

EconLit: This wonderful resource provides an index for locating articles written by economists on your favorite topic that have been published in economic journals, conference proceedings and a variety of other sources. For many of the listings, EconLit will provide a short abstract summarizing the argument of the article. You reach EconLit on the Web from the Wesleyan library home page (<http://www.wesleyan.edu/library/>) by selecting Indices and Databases and then clicking on the Connect button for EconLit. You then enter a topic of particular interest to you in the search window. The program will respond with a list of articles on that topic. If you get too many hits (“Comparative advantage” generated 847 hits) you should narrow your topic. If you draw a blank, rephrase your topic and try again (and check the instructions to make sure you are entering your search words correctly). Many of the articles have a brief abstract, which may help you decide which article to select. Although Wesleyan subscribes to an amazingly large number of economics journals, you may well find that the first

¹ If December 1st is not feasible I will be willing to consider a later date if you request it by November 15th.

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article you select is in a journal that is not in the library — pick another article unless you want to bother with CTW or interlibrary loan.

Technicalities:

You should not expect to understand fully all the details of the technical article you select. Indeed, if your article is appropriately technical there may well be mathematical, statistical or econometric techniques, that are only understandable after graduate school. But you will be able to understand the gist of the article and write a fine critique without getting bogged down in nitty gritty details.

Report Format:

Your grade will depend on both the quality of what you write and the care and skill with which you prepare your report. You should organize your paper in accordance with the following rules, unless your instructor approves an alternative mode of presentation in advance. Limit your report to a maximum of three pages

1. Place your name and date at the top of your report.
2. Next, carefully reference the article you have found in appropriate bibliographical format: author's name, the title of the article, journal name, and date of publication, pages, etc. You must use the format employed in the list of references at the end of the article on which you are reporting, the format used in an article published in the *American Economic Review*, or the format specified in a standard style manual. Put titles of articles in quotes; underline or italicize the titles of books and journals.
3. Explain how you found the article.
 - If you used the *EconLit* database to find the article, how many hits did you get on your topic. How did you narrow down your search?
 - If you did not use *EconLit* to find your article, demonstrate that you have a working knowledge of this new technology by looking up the topic of your article: how many hits do you find? Also, look up the author(s). How many other articles by the same author(s) are listed in the *EconLit* database?
4. State the basic theme of the article in a short paragraph: What is the author trying to establish? Is it relevant to a particular topic in the textbook or on our reading list?
5. Write a few paragraphs summarizing the major points of the article.
6. Critique the article: Is the analysis convincing? Was the analysis skillfully executed? Was empirical evidence carefully presented? What were the primary strengths and weaknesses of the article?

Peer Review:

After you have completed your next-to-final draft, ask a friend (not necessarily a student in Econ 105) to review your product. Or present your preliminary draft to the instructor at the end of class on November 16th and I will arrange to have it peer reviewed. Ask our peer reviewer to provide detailed suggestions about how you can refine your presentation and improve the effectiveness of your analysis. You might also consider taking your paper to the Writing Workshop. You must submit the preliminary draft with the signature and comments of your peer reviewer along with your finished paper.

Polish your product:

Have the word processor take care of such details as page numbering, creation of footnotes, etc. Avoid embarrassment by using the computer to spell-check your manuscript.

(Confusion of “effect” and “affect” was the most common grammatical mistake last year and the year before.)

Alternative Assignment: You are invited to submit a proposal for an alternative assignment by October 11th if you believe it will be more appropriate for your particular needs and interests.