

Your Econ 110-2 Writing Project

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You have a choice of writing projects:

Project I: Write a report summarizing the main points of a technical article written by economists for economists OR (only one)

Project II: Write an op-ed piece analyzing an important policy issue

Either way, you choose the topic for your writing project.¹

Examples: Some successful projects from prior years are posted on the web:

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

Due Dates: (See below for detailed information)

- October 12th, Prospectus: Specify your topic and sources (See specific details 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.
- Noon, November 20th, Peer Review: After you have completed your next-to-final draft, ask a friend (not necessarily a student in Econ 110) to review your product. Or present your preliminary draft to the instructor at the end of class on November 15th and I will arrange to have it peer reviewed. Ask your peer reviewer to provide detailed suggestions about how you can refine your presentation (organization, grammar, etc.) and improve the effectiveness of your analysis. You might also consider taking your paper to the Writing Workshop. You must submit the Peer Review draft with the signature and comments of your peer reviewer along with your finished paper.
- Noon, December 4th, Final Draft: (Hard copy – no Email or Fax).² You must attach to the final draft both your original prospectus and the Peer Reviewed Draft.

Polish your Product:

Write less; think more. Do not write more than you have to say – two to three pages should suffice; don't pad!

Word process everything, and 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.

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 instructions below, unless your instructor approves an alternative format in advance.

Project I Details – Technical Article Summary

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

¹ You are invited to submit a proposal for an alternative assignment by October 11 if you believe it will be more appropriate for your particular needs and interests.

² If December 1st is not feasible I will be willing to consider a later date if you request it by November 15th.

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.

Procedure:

- Find an article on a topic that interests you in an economics journal – look ahead in the text and/or the syllabus if a topic does not spring immediately to mind. Alternatively, you might randomly browse through the economics journals on the shelves of the periodical room in the basement of Olin
- Your article should be written by and for economists. It 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*. And it should not be a review of the literature, such as most of the articles published in the *Journal of Economic Literature*.

Finding an Article: You can link to any of the following sources (except NBER) from the Wesleyan library home page(<http://www.wesleyan.edu/library/>) by selecting Indexes and Databases, selecting the desired source, and then clicking on the Connect button.

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.

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 what article to select. Although Wesleyan subscribes to an amazingly large number of economics journals, you may well find that the first 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.

JSTOR: This gigantic electronic data base contains all the articles ever published in more than 40 economic journals, including all the articles in the *American Economic Review* since the first issue was published more than 90 years ago.

You find *JSTOR* in the same way you found EconLit on Olin’s Indexes and Databases page (see above).

Social Science Citation Index: Once you have found an article of interest, the SSCI will find all the economic journal articles that have cited that paper. Find SSCI on Olin’s Indexes and Database page.

NBER: <http://nber.org/> contains a giant compendium of working papers

Also <http://www.nber.org/jel/>

For other web resources, try <http://mlovell.web.wesleyan.edu/mikeswebsites.html>

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

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.

Prospectus Format:

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 your 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?

Report Format:

1. Place your name, date, and article citation at the top of your report, as in the prospectus.
2. 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?
3. Write a few paragraphs summarizing the major points of the article.
4. 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?

Project II Details – Policy Issue

Overview: Professional economists seldom agree on policy issues of the day. There are at least two sides to every issue. Your task is to write a short balanced article suitable for publication on the Op-Ed page of a major newspaper, such as the *New York Times*, on an economic policy issue of particular interest to you. Your paper should fairly summarize opposing viewpoints of professional economists on your topic before presenting your own conclusions.

Procedure: Once you have decided on your topic you should try to find statements by professional economists on both sides of the issue. One place to look is on the web sites listed on <http://mlovell.web.wesleyan.edu/mikeswebsites.html>, such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, and the Tax Policy Center.

Ask the instructor if you need help finding appropriate articles on your chosen topic.

Prospectus Format (one page maximum)

1. Place your name, date and the title of your report at the top of your prospectus
2. Carefully reference your sources. For web based material, specify the author, organization, and the precise link and date of your access. For hardcopy sources you should provide full documentation in the format specified by a standard style manual or that used in an article published in the *American Economic Review*.

3. Clearly state the issue you have selected and briefly indicate the contrasting positions of your sources

Report Format for Project II:

1. Place your name and date and the title at the top of your report.
2. Carefully summarize the major opposing viewpoints of professional economics on the issue.
3. Critique the opposing viewpoints and present your own position. Justify your position.
4. Carefully reference the articles you have found in appropriate bibliographical format.