

## Guidance for Term Papers and Projects

The Economics Department is keen to encourage you to gain the highest mark possible for your term papers and/or project. However, there is concern that many students lose marks because of poor presentation --- style and layout --- of their work. This note is intended to help you in presenting your work to its best advantage.

The advice below is mainly about *layout* (organisation and structure) of your work. There are many guides to *style* and plenty of scope for differences of opinion about what constitutes good style. This does not mean that all styles are equally acceptable! Your task is to avoid the bad ones.

A recommended reference on style is:

Strunk, W. and E. B. White *The Elements of Style* (published Allyn and Bacon, ISBN: 020530902X, latest edition August 1999).

This excellent little book is worth keeping close at hand. If you need a really professional guide, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* (in the University library class mark Z 253, located on floor 2 towards the far end on the right). This book is a remarkable compendium of good practice for all aspects of presentation and style.

### Layout

One economics project examiner commented recently: “Structure is not quite all but it is a lot!” If your paper is well organised you stand a much better chance of getting the reader (examiner) on your side.<sup>1</sup> Well-organised papers receive their just rewards. *Poorly structured papers are penalised* by the examiners.

Points to bear in mind:

1. Always divide your paper into *sections* with an *Introduction* and a *Conclusion*. Each section should form a coherent element of the whole paper.
2. The *introduction* informs the reader about (a) the issues you will discuss, (b) the questions you will address, and (c) how the arguments will unfold in the following sections. It is not necessary to include a separate *abstract* (a very brief overview of the paper). Consider leaving the introduction to write last of all — by which stage you will know exactly what follows.
3. The *conclusion* can be used to summarise the previous sections, to draw the threads of the argument together and, perhaps, to offer some comments about unresolved problems that deserve future research.
4. **References.** Providing bibliographical references is so *important* that it deserves a separate section, below. *Do not ignore it.*
5. *Statistical results.* When presenting econometric results, say from MICROFIT, do not simply paste in the computer output. That suggests laziness. Usually, you will need to construct *tables* of results. Sometimes you may wish to present regression results in an equation format with standard errors in parentheses under the estimated coefficients.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point ‘papers’ should be understood to include projects as well as term papers.

6. **Very important:** you must make absolutely clear when you are reproducing statistical results obtained by others. You must cite the source. (See the section on **References**, below.) If you fail to cite the source, the reader will presume that you have obtained the results yourself. Then, if the examiners spot that the results have been copied from elsewhere without acknowledgement, you will be in serious trouble: this is evidence of cheating and will be dealt with as an academic offence.
7. On the positive side, *blow your own trumpet!* Leave the reader in no doubt about your own contribution in terms of statistical results or any other original aspect of your work. Don't hide any originality that you believe deserves credit. Be bold about what you have achieved.
8. *Footnotes* can be used for short clarifications and extensions of your argument that would otherwise interrupt the flow of your paper. Try to keep them to a minimum.
9. *Appendices* can be used for material of a detailed background or ancillary nature, too long for a footnote. Appendices are often devoted to (a) descriptions of data sources and about how the data have been transformed; (b) listing data (but only when the data have been obtained from non-standard sources<sup>2</sup>); (c) technical derivations of results (e.g. theorems) discussed in the body of the paper.
10. Footnotes and appendices should not be used in an attempt to evade the word limit. Examiners can see through this ploy with no trouble.

## References

Providing full and accurate references to your sources is a *very important* part of presenting your work. There are two aspects of this: (a) **citations** that point to references (e.g. Keynes (1936), p. 383); (b) the **bibliography**, that contains information about the references themselves.

Here are some rules:

1. You must always include direct quotations from other people's work — published or unpublished — in inverted commas: “ ”. *Failure to do so is a serious academic offence.*

Always follow a quotation with the relevant citation. Example:

Many commentators believe that policy makers are pragmatic and not much influenced by ideas. Keynes disagreed: “Practical men ... are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.” (Keynes, 1936, p. 383)  
Whether Keynes should be taken seriously is a debatable matter ...

The **citation**, *Keynes, 1936* in the example, should point to exactly one reference in the bibliography, which appears at the end of your paper.

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<sup>2</sup> It is not normally advisable to list data in term papers or projects. But you must always be prepared to provide the data if requested.

When not to quote: “Commonly known facts, available in numerous sources, should not be enclosed in quotation marks or given a source citation unless the wording is taken directly from another.” (*Chicago Manual of Style*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition, p.282.) If the wording *is* taken from another source, you must include the quoted words in inverted commas.

2. Citations should also appear when you refer to the work of others without direct quotation. Example:

... In their model of commodity prices, Deaton and Laroque (1992) postulate the existence of a single threshold price, above which stocks of the commodity have been driven to zero. ...

In this example, the citation *Deaton and Laroque (1992)* alerts the reader to the source of the work being discussed.

3. The *bibliography* is a list of references that appears at the end of your paper or project. The following information should always be included: *author*; *date* of publication; *title* of the work. For a book you should also include the *edition*, *place* of publication and *publisher*. For an article you should include the journal or book in which the article appears as well as page numbers and, if possible, the volume number.
4. For unpublished works, you will have to use your discretion but always make clear the origin of the work (i.e. from where it can be obtained). List the references in alphabetical order by author.

Examples:

Deaton, A. S. and G. Laroque (1992) “On the Behaviour of Commodity Prices” *Review of Economic Studies*, vol. 59, pp. 1–23.

Keynes, J. M. (1936) *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* London: Macmillan.

Krugman, P. (1999) “Thinking about the Liquidity Trap” (unpublished) URL: <<http://web.mit.edu/krugman/www/trioshrt.html>>, December 1999.

Symeonidis, G. (1999) “Price and Non-Price Competition with Endogenous Market Structure” (unpublished) *University of Essex Economics Discussion Paper Series*, No. 501, August 1999.

Notice that the Krugman (1999) reference is to a paper available on the www. In this case it is conventional to provide the URL (i.e. the address) between angle brackets, < >.

5. You do have discretion in terms of how you present your citations and bibliography. That is, you are not required rigidly to adhere to the style outlined above. But remember: *you will lose marks for sloppiness*. If in doubt, adopt the format outlined above.
6. You may come across non-standard cases which do not fit into the above categories, in which case try to *be as systematic as you can*. For instance, if there is no author such as for a newspaper article, give the reference by title. Example:

*The Economist* (2000) “The ECB heads for turbulence” January 29 2000, pp. 105–6.

7. Two *important rules*:

- For every citation, there must be exactly one reference in the bibliography.
- For every reference in the bibliography, there must be at least one citation. *Never* include references in the bibliography that are not cited in your paper. Why not? Because the reader is left puzzling about the role and significance of such references in your paper.

8. It is bad style to string together long quotations. Use quotations to support your argument not as a substitute for it. Examiners interpret long quotations as a sign of laziness. You will not be accused of plagiarism — so long as the quotations are in inverted commas and properly cited. But the paper will be penalised with a lower mark than otherwise.

### Other Resources

- Read the *Undergraduate Economics Handbook*, section 15 *A Guide to Good Practice in Assessed Work*. For projects, also read section 14 *Final Year Projects*.
- Visit URL: <http://www2.essex.ac.uk/essay-writing/> on the University's web site. Here you will find a wealth of useful guidance.

### Last Words

- Make sure that you *spell-check* the final version of your paper before you print it.
- Adhere to the guidance offered above and your paper will be awarded the mark that it deserves. Ignore the advice and you will be penalised.
- If you need further advice, *ask* your teacher (for term papers) or your project supervisor (for projects) *before* the work is submitted. It's no good grumbling afterwards when you get a mark lower than you expect.

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