

# ECO 359 – Reading and Writing in Economics

----- Fall 2019 -----

Núria Quella Isla

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## GUIDELINES FOR YOUR FIRST DRAFT

The purpose of this document is to help you present the results of your self-directed learning in a Draft format. In your Proposal, you presented the initial concept and tentative design of your study. Now you must proceed on to a more formal and demanding kind of writing. In this phase you need to be more aware of the conventions of economic writing, of its methods for analysis and argument. Aim for **clear and precise communication** (take your favorite textbook as an example of what clear and precise reads like). Be persuasive and always keep in mind that **your audience is composed of your economics faculty and your peers, NOT the general public**. This will require you to **think hard before you write**.

Whichever subject and format you have chosen, start by *adapting your Draft* to the typical structure of an economics paper, *then tailor it to suit your particular subject*. The typical format of an economics research paper will usually contain the following elements that will appear *in this same order*:<sup>1</sup>

Component	Suggested length
Title & Subtitle	6 – 15 words
Abstract	200 words <u>at most</u> <i>As of now, do NOT attempt to write an Abstract: leave this section blank.</i>
Key Words	3 – 6 keywords
Introduction <i>In its final version</i> , it must include: motivation, original contribution, methodology, and brief summary of your results and conclusions.	About 20% of total length of paper <i>Write this section ONLY AFTER you have written the Literature Review or Background Review and have results or findings to comment on.</i>
Literature Review or Background Review Must contain background, conceptual development or conceptual framework.	About 20% <i>→ Start here! This is the <u>first section</u> you will write.</i>
Results/Findings This section may look very different depending on what kind of paper you are writing. It may consist of a synthesis of main strands of ideas and presentation of how they connect to or contrast with one another.	About 40% <i>This is the <u>second section</u> you will write, after your Literature Review or Background Review.</i>
Conclusions Must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summary of findings</li><li>• Implications</li><li>• Limitations</li><li>• Recommendations for future research</li></ul>	Around 10 – 15% <i>This is the <u>third section</u> you will write.</i>

<sup>1</sup> All economic writing contains pretty much the same elements. Later on, in your professional life, you may want to use this same structure BUT adapt section names. E.g. ‘Executive Summary’ instead of ‘Abstract.’

## How You Should Proceed

I recommend you create a document with all the above sections. Then leave blank the sections you are not working on yet. **Note that efficient economical writing is not sequential**, that is, you will not write your paper's sections in the order in which they will appear to the reader. For example, do not attempt to write an Abstract; leave this section blank until the very end, when your paper is complete. **Start with your Literature Review**. You can call it Background Review if, for example, there is not enough scholarly literature on your subject because your subject is too new or unexplored. You will still have to explain to your audience what is relevant about your subject, and what is known (and not known) about it. Leave your Introduction blank until you finish your Literature Review (or Background Review) and you have some results and, even, until you have reached your main conclusions. This may seem counterintuitive now but, by the end of the semester, you will see it has saved you a lot of work!

Note that the above sections are a *baseline*: depending on the subject and format of your paper, the sections listed above may be different lengths and have different names. For example, if your paper is a review of a particular subject, your literature review/background review will be relatively lengthier, and your results/findings will contain your own analysis of the literature. Or, if your paper is empirical, you will need to add a section where you explain your methodology and another section where you describe the data you are using. Regardless of format, be **organized** and give a **clear and logical structure to your paper**. Always make it as easy as possible for your audience to read and identify content: create sections (and subsections) with descriptive titles and **never make your Draft one long essay**. **Do not force your audience to do your work**: motivate, explain, and engage them. See the last section of this document for a list of journals with papers you can use as samples.

Work on your literature review/background review first; this is an important section, and you may find that it takes longer that you had anticipated (it may even take the longest to complete!). This section is the core conceptual section of your paper. Then, go on to your results/findings/analysis. LATER, proceed onto your conclusions. You may or may not be ready to tackle a first version of your introduction in your First Draft. If you are not, leave it for your Final Version. It is perfectly all right to do so. In your introduction, you will incorporate what is relevant and noteworthy in the other sections. Keep in mind an introduction is a presentation of a COMPLETED piece and, therefore, it makes most sense to write it when the other sections in your paper (including conclusions) are complete. If you follow this sequence, you will not have to duplicate (or triplicate) your efforts by re-doing your introduction several times.

As of now, pencil in your title (and perhaps subtitle) and your key words and **reassess them periodically as you progress in your work**. They will acquire their final form only when you have a firm view of your paper's final structure and contents. **The title, key words and Abstract are the portal through which a reader is most likely to access your paper**. It is, therefore, extremely important to choose effective key words and a title that is descriptive, revealing of the paper's content, and that grabs your audience's attention.<sup>2</sup> Later, when your paper is complete, you will write your Abstract (ONLY for the Final Version of your paper). Your Abstract should be engaging and motivate us to read your Introduction and Conclusions. Your Introduction and Conclusions should then entice your audience to read the main body of your paper.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Never promise anything your paper will not deliver! Title, key words, and Abstract must be a *reliable* portal.

<sup>3</sup> This is how most of your audience screens papers and decides whether to read them in their entirety or not. And this is also how you should examine potentially valuable sources and references for your own research.

## Description of First Draft Components

Once your Proposal has been accepted, *you can use its components, re-arrange them, and adapt their tone to fit the structure and tone of your First Draft.* For example, in your Proposal there was a specific component called ‘Motivation.’ In your Draft, you can use this Motivation as part of your Introduction, except you will not call it ‘Motivation’: it will have no specific title (or subtitle), it will be a paragraph (or two) early on in your Introduction. And you will proceed similarly with your Methodology, etc.

When working on your Draft, take the following into consideration:<sup>4</sup>

- Title and (perhaps) subtitle.  
Although you will consider the definitive version of your title last, you should try your hand at a good title. Use a subtitle, if you think you need it.  
The title should grab the reader’s attention and clearly reflect the main theme, issue or position in your paper. Try to reflect the true nature and focus of your work and do not create false expectations.
- Abstract.  
Leave this element/section blank as of now.
- Key Words.  
When you think of your paper, what words come up more often? How would you describe your work in a telegraphic fashion? Pencil in these words or terms and look at some sample papers (or some of your own scholarly sources) for an illustration of what these words look like. Note that one ‘key word’ may actually be two or more words. For example, ‘economic growth’ (counts as ONE key word), ‘optimal taxation’ (also ONE key word), ‘greenhouse gas emissions’ (same).  
Place your Key Words right below your (as of now blank) Abstract *in one line*. Separate your key words with semi-colons.  
Advice: some of the key words you list should appear in the title.
- ➔ Note that your title, your name and affiliation (SBU), abstract, and key words should appear in your **cover page**, in exactly this order.
- Introduction.  
Wait to write this section until you have completed your literature review/background review, have results/findings to discuss and, ideally, some clear conclusions. We are discussing it now because it may help you focus on --and keep track of-- what is important as it comes up during your research, so it is easier for you to explain later.  
When you are ready to write your Introduction, keep in mind it should contain the following elements:
  - State the broad theme or topic of your paper. The **core issue**.
  - Your paper’s objective, the **purpose of your research**.  
E.g. “To investigate ...,” “To determine ...,” “To evaluate ...,” “To compare ...,” “To analyze ...,” “To describe ...,” “To review ...,” etc.  
Your objective should logically flow from the core issue or question.
  - Explain the importance of your topic. That is, give a *convincing* answer to the question: “Why should your audience want to read your paper?” This is the **Motivation** you worked on in your Proposal, except now you know more about your subject and you can present it better!<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Have a look at the sample papers. Different journals place different requirements on authors and, consequently, not all papers look the same in terms of sections and section names. However, all papers have similar structure and must contain similar elements. Above all, all papers present a clear structure and descriptive section titles according to their subject.

- Your main contribution and/or your **results/findings**.
  - Summarize your Literature Review/Background Review and tell us what is most relevant for your topic.<sup>6</sup>
  - Point to what you think is most important in the literature, the most important controversies, gaps, inconsistencies, the consensus, etc. and **relate it to your findings**.
  - In your last paragraph, outline the structure of the rest of the paper. As in: “In the next section I cover the most relevant literature on this subject; in Section 3, I present the main results/findings of my research; and in Section 4, I conclude and point to future directions of research on this topic.”<sup>7</sup>
- Literature Review or Background Review.  
The literature review/background review represents the **theoretical core of your paper**. Its purpose is to look at what other researchers have done in order to provide a background and, also, to serve as motivation and guide to your own work. You will have to do some reading!

A good overview **does not merely summarize relevant previous research**; in it you must *critically evaluate, re-organize, and synthesize the work of others*. As Kotzé (2007) puts it,

“In a sense, compiling a literature review is like making a smoothie or a fruit shake. The end product is a condensed mix that differs totally in appearance from the individual ingredients used as inputs. The key to a successful literature review lies in your ability to “digest” information from different sources, critically evaluate it and present your conclusions in a concise, logical, and reader-friendly manner.”<sup>8</sup>

Please, see the section of this document (below) for a more specific and detailed description of a good literature or background review.

- References.  
**You must cite and reference your sources according to American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines.** Check the presentation in the Documents section of Blackboard or follow instructions in this link to see how to cite in-text and list references: <https://ggu.libguides.com/c.php?g=106881&p=694051>  
Keep in mind that, although these days we all access most content online, in most cases we still have to cite ORIGINAL sources. That is, a book chapter accessed online is still a book chapter and you **NEED** to cite and reference the book chapter. If what you are citing and referencing is ORIGINAL website content; then follow these guidelines: <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2010/11/how-to-cite-something-you-found-on-a-website-in-apa-style.html>

In regard to your sources:

- ✓ Check that your list of references includes sufficient academic and scholarly sources (primary sources).
- ✓ When in doubt, consult your librarian: they are the experts.

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<sup>5</sup> Always keep in mind that your audience is composed of your peers and the economics faculty, *not the general public*. You must demonstrate competency in economic reasoning while keeping your peers interested. This will require some thinking.

<sup>6</sup> Do not ‘cut and paste’ from other sections: organize, synthesize, and summarize what is noteworthy. This is work!

<sup>7</sup> Some writing experts claim this is not at all necessary. It is, however, common practice in scholarly economic writing and your audience will expect you to do it. It works as our Table of Contents.

<sup>8</sup> Kotzé, T. (2007). *Guidelines on writing a first quantitative academic article*. Department of Marketing and Communication Management, University of Pretoria.

- ✓ Remember you can FREELY access most (if not all) academic sources online using your account via Stony Brook libraries (check the last section of your Syllabus).

In general, while you are working on your Draft, think carefully about how your choices will affect the internal coherence and quality of your final version. **Be very realistic** about your goals and the time you have available to work on your paper: do not be over-ambitious, narrow your focus, and set feasible goals. **Your Draft should contain your main arguments and show the final structure of your paper.**

And, always, **be as self-critical and honest as possible in your writing: say what you mean, be clear, and get to the point.** You will see this makes your work easier and better!

### **The Use of Statistical, Graphical, and Mathematical Information**

In order to summarize, illustrate, and support your arguments and *make them more convincing*, you may decide to use statistical, graphical, and mathematical information. This information will provide your audience with:

- Background on your problem
- Support for your claims
- Tests of your hypotheses
- Illustration of your arguments

Information presented this way will also make your paper more appealing and readable.

You can elaborate this information yourself, in which case you will have to properly format tables, figures, graphs, equations, etc. (which takes time). Or you may reproduce figures, graphs, tables, or numerical information from other studies, statistical agencies, etc. In either case, you must always cite the original source of the data you used or the visual object you reproduced, following APA guidelines.<sup>9</sup>

All visual objects (figures, graphs, tables, etc.) and equations should be included within the body of your paper, unless they are too large, in which case they should be moved to an appendix. Regardless of where they are placed, keep in mind

“The purpose of charts, tables, and other graphics is to summarize and illustrate the argument in the text. Every figure should be designed to be easily understood independently of the text.” (Greenlaw, 2006, p. 235).

**All figures, graphs, tables, etc. must be numbered and have a title.** Titles should be **self-explanatory** and state the theme of the information. They should be single spaced in a 10 pt. Times New Roman font. As a rule, do the following:

- For figures/graphs, place “Figure [Number]: [Title of figure]” at the bottom of the figure.  
Example: “Figure 1: Monthly US Unemployment Rates of Workers Age 16 and Older, 1948-2016.”
- For tables: place “Table [Number]: [Title of table]” at the top of the table.
- For equations:
  - Assign a number *only* to major equations, not minor ones.
  - Treat equations as part of a sentence:
    - If an equation ends a sentence, a period (.) should follow it.
    - If an equation is part of a clause, a comma (,) should follow it.
    - Explain and interpret parts of any displayed equation.

ALWAYS refer to your visual object (or equation) in your text, e.g. “As we can see in Fig. 1, ...” There should be no orphan objects in your paper: if you are not going to refer to them in your text, eliminate

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<sup>9</sup> Here is a very visual link where you can find the instructions to do it properly (Method 2, after MLA style):  
<http://www.wikihow.com/Cite-a-Graph-in-a-Paper>

them. Never position your objects before your text refers to them, and do not place them too far from where you are referring to them.

The information in tables, graphs, etc. is part of your argument; therefore, you need to tell your reader **what the information says as well as what the information means:**

- Do not simply refer your audience to your results and then let them do the thinking; you are the one that must draw conclusions and present them!
- Discuss the contents of the figure, graph or table:
  - Interpret the information for your reader
  - What does the figure or table show?
  - Any interesting information you want your reader to know?
  - How is the information related to your argument? How does it relate to the point you want to make?

Make your discussion of the information such that your reader cannot help but interpret the evidence in the way that you do.

### **More About your Literature Review/Background Review**<sup>10</sup>

If you are doing a survey (as in a review) of a particular issue, you need to pay particular attention to this section. Do not let the length of this section overwhelm you: read it a few times and focus on what is useful to you.

#### **What a Literature Review or Background Review is:**

- An overview of research on a given topic and answers to related research questions
- Features of such an overview:
  - Organizes literature
  - Evaluates literature (→ higher-order critical thinking)
  - Identifies patterns and trends in literature
  - Synthesizes literature (→ higher-order critical thinking)
- An overview of what we know and of what we do not know about a given topic
- Not necessarily exhaustive, but up-to-date and includes all major work on the topic
- Intellectual context for your original research
- Motivation for your original research
  - Structure of review guided by your objectives
  - Continually refers back to your thesis or research questions

#### **What a literature review is not:**

- A “laundry list” of everything written on a topic, where each source gets its summary paragraph
  - Lacks organization guided by thesis or research questions
  - Lacks synthesis of literature
  - Lacks critical evaluation of literature
- An annotated bibliography
- A literary or book review

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<sup>10</sup> This section is based on a presentation by Nicholas Shunda (Univ. of Connecticut), an expert on undergraduate economic research. I found his presentation so clear and detailed that I have included a modified version of it here for your benefit.

## Purpose of a Literature or Background Review

- Learning about research on a given topic and answers to related research questions (→ this means you will have to read on a topic that is *broader* than your subject, which is more specific and *narrow*)
- Learning about how a body of research (or knowledge on a topic) evolved
- Displaying your understanding of research on a given topic
  - Identification of important works
  - Points of agreement, consensus
  - Points of disagreement, controversy
  - Identification of areas for further research
- Providing readers with the intellectual context and some motivation for your research (→ frame the focus of your research within a wider picture)

## Starting a Literature Review

- The necessary first step:
  - Select a topic and formulate a few well-defined research objectives/questions
  - Examples:
    - Auction theory (far too broad)
    - Research on single-unit auctions (still a bit broad)
    - Empirical research on wholesale electricity auctions in the US (manageable)
- Early back-and-forth:
  - Select a topic and formulate a few well-defined research questions
  - Brainstorm a list of search terms related to your topic and then search for sources
    - Keyword searches
    - Text/bibliographic databases
    - Reviewing reference sections
  - Briefly review sources and use what you learn to refine your topic and research questions
- Working backwards:
  - Begin with a collection of recent research on a given topic
  - What authors or papers appear in the texts' introductions, literature reviews, or references sections?
- Identifying core literature, the “classics”:
  - What authors or papers do researchers keep citing?
  - What works do researchers identify as “classic,” “landmark,” “pioneering,” or “path-breaking?”
- Search out this preceding literature
- Preliminary checklist:
  - ✓ Have I formulated a topic and well-defined set of research questions?
  - ✓ Have I discussed my topic and research questions with a library staff member that can assist me with searching for sources?
  - ✓ Have I carried out some early searching to learn about the topic and to help me narrow my topic and sharpen my questions?
  - ✓ Have I talked to a faculty member about my topic, my research questions, and the results of my early searching?
  - ✓ Have I identified the core research on the topic, the “classic” works?

## Organizing Before Writing a Literature Review

- First and foremost:
  - “Filter” your set of sources: Review abstracts, introductions, conclusions
  - Determine the scope of your literature review: What you will cover and what you will not cover
- Prioritize among your sources:
  - Classics” and other studies you identify as more relevant or important warrant closer reading
- Key questions to answer in your reading and note-taking:
  1. What is the source’s topic, research questions, methodology, and central results? (Summary)
  2. How is this source related to my topic, thesis, and research questions? Does it support or contradict my thesis? (Synthesis and Organization)
  3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the research in the source? Are there biases or flaws? How important or influential is this source? (Evaluation)
  4. How is the source related to other research on the same topic? Does it employ a different methodology? Does it pertain to a different population, region, timespan? Does it work with a different data set? (Synthesis and Organization)
  5. What are the points of agreement or disagreement between the source and other research on the same topic? (Synthesis)
- Getting a sense of the big picture:
  - What are the trends and themes in the literature? What are the points of consensus? What are the points of controversy? Which debates are on-going? Where does my research weigh in?
  - Where are the areas on which there is ample research? What are the areas that need further research?
  - Which studies offer support for my thesis? Which studies contradict my thesis?
  - Where does my research fit into the larger literature on the topic?
- Checklist for notes on each source:
  - ✓ Full citation information
  - ✓ What is the author’s discipline and credentials?
  - ✓ What is the topic? What are the research questions?
  - ✓ What is the methodology employed? Theoretical framework? Empirical framework?
  - ✓ What are the study’s main results? What are the answers to the research questions?
  - ✓ What are the strengths and limitations of the study?
  - ✓ How is the study related to other research on the same topic?

## Writing a Literature Review

- Elements of the introduction:
  - Statement of thesis and/or research questions
  - Motivation for and importance of the research
  - Statement of scope of literature review: Note your selection criteria for the review
  - Hint of how you will organize the literature and your discussion of it
- Potential organizing principles:
  - Methodology: Theoretical perspective, empirical framework
  - Studies that agree with one another
  - Studies that disagree with one another
  - Extent of support for your thesis
  - Regional focus
  - Data range, sample
  - Chronological

- Tip: Organize studies according to “common denominators”
- Musts for your writing:
  - Linkage I: Continually link your discussion of the literature back to your thesis and research questions
  - Linkage II: Link studies to one another; stress relatedness of research on your topic
  - Prioritize/Classics: Identify “classic” studies and discuss them accordingly (i.e., with more detail, and with an eye for their influence)
  - Evaluate/Gaps: Identify shortcomings of particular studies and/or the body of research as a whole; be critical!
  - Frontier: Identify areas for further research; where can research on your topic go from here?
- Mechanics of writing:
  - Audience:
    - Scholarly, but avoid jargon
    - Wants to know about literature
    - Wants to know what you have to say about the literature
    - Wants to know where your research fits
  - Short paragraphs can help to keep writing crisp
  - Subheadings can help to clarify structure of review (*for full-length literature reviews or surveys*)
  - Use direct quotations sparingly; paraphrase studies
  - Prioritize studies in the literature:
    - Signal importance by discussing relatively more important studies with more detail
    - Signal importance by noting influence on subsequent studies
- Rhetorical moves:
  - Similarity: also, again, in addition to, additionally, similar to, similarly, alike, like, agrees with
  - Disagreement: contradicts, counter, opposite, differs, debate, at odds, on the other hand, disagree, disagrees with
  - Evaluation: classic, pioneering, important, influential, lacks, fails to consider, ignores, overlooks, limited by/to, confined to, restricts attention to
- Writing checklist: did I
  - ✓ include a clear statement of my topic’s importance, the research questions I am seeking to answer, and my thesis?
  - ✓ include a clear statement of the scope of my literature review and what criteria I used for including studies in it?
  - ✓ identify the “classic” works on my topic and give them priority in my discussion of the literature?
  - ✓ summarize the studies and link them to one another as well as back to my thesis and research questions?
  - ✓ critically evaluate the literature, identifying its limitations and areas where further research is needed?

### Conclusion: A Literature Review is

- An overview of research on a given topic and answers to related research questions
- An important part of research and should be treated as such
- Well-written if it:
  - Organizes literature
  - Evaluates literature
  - Identifies patterns and trends in literature
  - Synthesizes literature

## Sample Papers

Have a look at the links below to find a large number of papers you can use as samples. In the first list you will see articles published in several undergraduate peer-reviewed journals. Keep in mind *requirements to publish in these journals are above what is required in this course*. In the second list, you have links to some academic journals that focus on providing surveys (as in reviews) or telling us everything there is to know about one topic or issue, which is what some of you are doing.

**Do not spend too much time reading these articles and do not try to analyze them.** Use these papers as examples. Sift through them and observe their appearance; their structure; how they are organized in sections and subsections; how descriptive their titles are; their scholarly tone and style; their logical flow; and other elements mentioned in these Guidelines.

Here are a few undergraduate research journals:

- The Visible Hand, <http://orgsync.rso.cornell.edu/org/ces/Publication>
- Issues in Political Economy, <https://blogs.elon.edu/ipe/>
- Undergraduate Economic Review, <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/uer/>
- Stanford Undergraduate Economics Journal, <https://stanfordeconjournal.com/>
- The Developing Economist, <http://deveco.weebly.com/>

And consult the most recent issues of these academic journals:

- Journal of Economic Perspectives (JEP), <https://www.aeaweb.org/journals/jep>  
This journal fills the gap between the general interest press and academic economics journals.
- Journal of Economic Literature (JEL), <https://www.aeaweb.org/journals/jel>  
This journal is designed to help economists keep abreast of and synthesize the vast flow of literature.
- Journal of Economic Surveys (JES), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/14676419>