

The Senior Thesis

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Meeting Times: Group Meetings on Mondays via Zoom; Individual Meetings on Mon/Wed via Zoom

Thesis Writer Learning Goals

Students writing a successful thesis will:

- develop a succinct thesis question that does not have an obvious answer and that has not been sufficiently explored in prior work.
- investigate this thesis question through several possible means, including: (i) reviewing prior, related research studies, (ii) collecting new data or creating new data sets by combining existing ones, (iii) analyzing data, (iv) examining primary and secondary sources to create a historical analysis, (v) summarizing, developing, and applying relevant economic theory.
- clearly and concisely summarize her ongoing work in oral presentations with projected slides.
- develop and edit her writing so that it follows good practices for style, grammar, and organization of economics research papers—i.e., the “organization and style” criteria described in the thesis evaluation form (see next page).
- develop and edit her writing so that it provides appropriate depth and breadth for an economics research paper—i.e., “content” features described in the thesis evaluation form (see next page).

Fall Assignments: Please click on the Syllabus meeting on Courseworks to see which tasks to complete *before* each class meeting. Courseworks also lists Assignments for posting.

Required Book:

How to Write a Lot: A Practical Guide to Productive Academic Writing

by Paul J. Silvia.

Resources

- o Barnard library’s online: [economics subject guide](#)
- o Book pick-up service is now available for select print collections in the Butler library. More libraries, including Barnard, will be offering this over time (I don't have a timeline for other libraries to share, unfortunately). Eligible items will have a "Pick-up" hyperlink in the CLIO record. The [Pick-Up Service page](#) has instructions about how to request materials for pickup, how to pick up the materials, and how to return materials.
- o Scanning is now available from offsite collections and select campus locations. Scanning via Interlibrary Loan has also been enabled. Eligible items will have a "Scan" hyperlink in the CLIO record.
- o Barnard Librarian for Economics Research: Jennie Correia, jcorreia@barnard.edu, virtual [consultations](#)
- o [Barnard Empirical Reasoning Center](#)

EVALUATION OF FINAL THESIS

Organization & Style

(plus sign means good, ± means needs some improvement, - means needs a lot of improvement)

_____ Is there a clear, one sentence thesis question?

_____ Does the entire paper relate to this thesis question?

_____ Do sentences in each paragraph relate to the topic sentence of the paragraph?

Rules of Economics Writing (from Wyrick, Ch. 4)

_____ Simple, direct sentences.

_____ No unnecessary sentences

_____ Does every sentence have a subject, object, verb? Are the main ideas of the sentence placed towards the end?

_____ Introduction section is succinct

_____ Body is not repetitive

_____ Active verbs rather than passive verbs

_____ Concrete examples

_____ Avoid excessive use of This, That, These, and Those

_____ Avoid couplets and unnecessary use of synonyms. Repeat the same key term.

Content

1-5, with 5 being best.

_____ Does the paper clearly summarize the available evidence from outside sources concerning the thesis?

_____ Does the paper clearly offer an interpretation of this evidence and/or an analysis of new evidence?

_____ Does the paper explain how these findings relate to economic/policy issues?

_____ Does the paper intelligently use theoretical foundations of basic economic ideas when they are relevant? (e.g., benefits versus costs, supply and demand, opportunity cost, willingness to pay, externalities and spillovers)

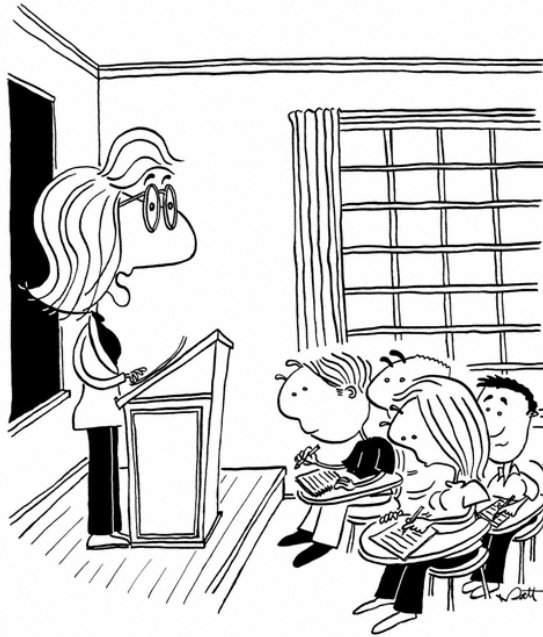
_____ Would an undergraduate economics major find the paper interesting to read?

_____ Factually informative

_____ Informative in terms of theories and ideas

Tips for your thesis:

- (1) *Pick a topic early* and continue to narrow your focus throughout the first month of the semester. Your thesis should have a *thesis*, a testable hypothesis that does not have an obvious answer.
- (2) *Pick a topic that you love*. Your interest can defy reason. You think about it on subway rides and during meals. Don't worry about what other people are interested in, allow yourself to be one of the few people in the world thinking about something. Take advantage of the fact that an economic perspective can be applied to almost any issue. If you pick a topic that just seems a bit interesting and sounds like it might impress other people, then you will be quite sick of it by the time you are doing the 10th revision of your analysis. Pick something that you are a bit crazy over.



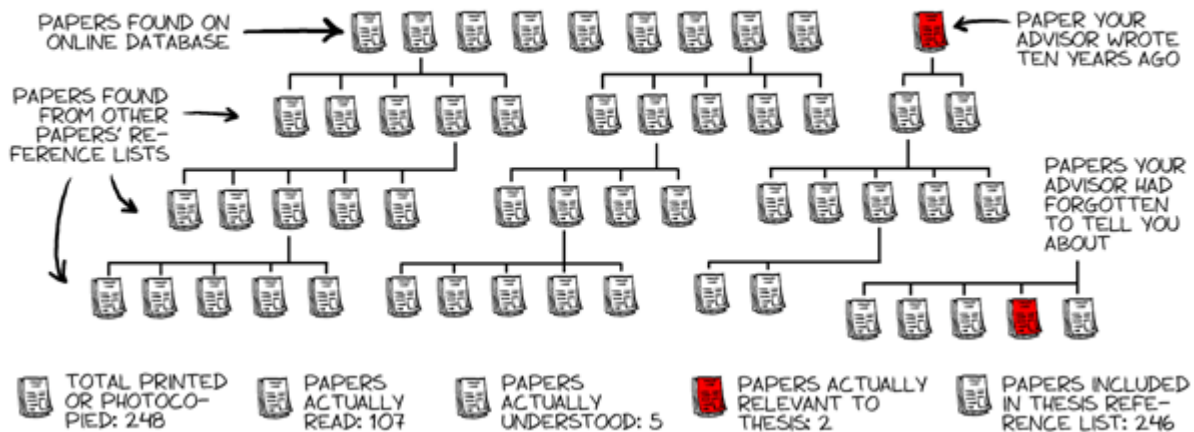
"When writing your essays, I encourage you to think for yourselves while you express what I'd most agree with."

- (3) Part of the challenge of the thesis is setting your own schedule and being disciplined about making progress without external deadlines. ***Set weekly goals for yourself. Set aside weekly hours reserved for writing/editing/note-taking and treat those hours as firm appointments.*** Aside from the Annotated Bibliography, the data set description, the preliminary oral presentation, the final presentation, and the final due date, there are not any external deadlines. You are on your own to decide which tasks to complete first and when to submit work for feedback. It is recommended that you submit at least 15 pages for feedback by the end of the fall semester, but you must decide which sections to pursue first.
- (4) Use links in the Files/Finding Sources folder of Courseworks to find data and background information. You may use Wikipedia or other public-domain websites for leads for finding information, but you CANNOT cite them. You must cite a published source that may be attributed to specific researchers or a specific organization. (Although Wikipedia may be more accurate than most encyclopedias, even Wikipedia relies on citing specific sources.) See the style guide on the next page.
- (5) Come prepared to individual meetings with me and with your writing partner. Have a list of updates and questions ready.

REFERENCES

MAKING SURE NO ONE HAS ALREADY WRITTEN YOUR THESIS

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- (6) A typical thesis will be three chapters, but there is not a set rule for the content of each chapter. One possible organization: the first chapter reviews the relevant literature, the second chapter analyzes the specific thesis question for the example/case of interest, and the third chapter discusses the implications of your results for policy-makers, social scientists, and/or future research. *The optimal organization of your thesis will depend on your topic and interests.*
- (7) *Data are rarely clean.* Make sure to get your data very early so that you will have time to explore your data set and to look for potential problems such as miscoded values. It's much better to catch those things early rather than writing up results that are misleading due to inaccurate data.
- (8) Frequently discuss your thesis with your adviser, your classmates, your friends, your aunt, your grandparent, and anyone else who will listen. This serves three purposes: (i) people might have valuable ideas and insights, even if the topic seems outside of their areas of expertise, (ii) talking helps you frame your message in a clear and concise manner, and (iii) you will maintain your own interest and excitement.
- (9) Use simple language and edit your work frequently. (see Wyrick Ch. 4) *Be as concise as possible, avoid using passive verbs, and avoid run-on sentences.* Consider making an appointment with someone at the writing center. How to Screen for Passive Voice using Microsoft Word:
 - (i) Go to Files/Options/Proofing/Grammar & Style Settings and Check the Passive Sentences Box under "Style"
 - (ii) Go to Review and click on the Spelling and Grammar Check icon

Senior Thesis Style Guide

The finished thesis, as well as any drafts that you hand in for my review, should have **double-spaced lines with 1 inch margins and use Times New Roman 12 point font.** (The main text should be double-spaced, but footnotes, tables, and the bibliography should be single spaced.) Drafts handed in for my review should be printed as double-sided pages. You **should use parenthetical references, not footnotes, to cite sources.**

The Department follows the style guidelines described in Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, Third Edition (New York: Modern Language Association of American, 1988). Some issues to keep in mind:

Footnotes and endnotes should be used sparingly, and reserved for cases where you must make a digression from the main line of your argument. Use footnotes rather than endnotes.

Tables should be given sequential numbers for easy reference. Each table should have a title that describes the substance of the data contained in it. Cite sources of the table at the bottom of each table.

Figures (including graphs) should be given sequential numbers for easy reference. Each Figure should have a caption that describes it in detail for the reader's convenience. Choose the appropriate type of graph for the data you have. For example, use pie charts to represent proportions, and line graphs to show time trends.

Bibliographical style. Here are some examples of correct usage:

Dobb, Maurice. 1973. *Theories of value and distribution since Adam Smith*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Solow, Robert M. 1988. "Growth theory and after." *American Economic Review* 78.3 (June): 307-318.

Kohn, Meir and Sho-chieh Tsiang, ed. 1988. *Finance constraints, expectations, and macroeconomics*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Hicks, John. 1988. "Toward a more general theory." In Kohn and Tsiang, ed. 1988, 6-14.

In-line citation style. Cite author and year for parenthetical references and **add the page number for direct quotations.** Here are some examples of correct usage:

According to Hicks (1988),

"Why did Keynes think he could get by, considering no more than the flow account of the industrial sector, and no more that the stock account of the financial?" (Hicks 1988, 7)