

## Incorporating Writing and Independent Inquiry into Econometrics Courses

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### Introduction

Writing-intensive economics courses use writing as a central feature of instruction and evaluation of students' work. The goal of this paper is to provide ideas for enhancing econometrics content through independent research and writing. This paper presents a design for the structure and assessment of research paper assignments in a one semester econometrics course with a significant writing component.

### Courses with a Significant Writing Component

- Students must write regularly and complete substantial writing projects
- Students' writing must make up a substantial part of the course grade
- Classes are small to allow professors to work closely with each student and provide sufficient feedback on student's written work
- Individual schools may include other requirements. For example, at the University of Texas at Austin students in writing intensive courses must receive feedback from the instructor to help them improve their writing, and be given an opportunity to revise at least one assignment

### Goals for Independent Inquiry Project

Through a research project students will learn to

- formulate a hypothesis to be tested or a research question to be answered;
- apply the appropriate empirical model to analyze the question;
- collect relevant data to test the hypothesis/question;
- provide feedback and discuss the work of peers;
- present their research findings in writing;
- incorporate feedback from the instructor and peers into a formal research paper.

Writing component design focuses on teaching economics majors to carry out and effectively communicate original empirical research. Two alternative independent inquiry projects are presented. Students are (1) given a dependent variable or (2) free to select a topic of interest and data sources.

	Topic	Importance of the study	Literature review	Empirical model	Empirical results	Conclusion	References	Writing quality	Due date
Proposal	Presents statement of the topic and question to be analyzed 40%	Justifies importance of the study/reasons for government intervention 15%	Reviews at least 4 previous research papers on chosen or similar policy; organize papers either chronologically or thematically 20%				All outside sources and numbers are referenced 5%	No grammatical errors with clear and correct use of English 10%	Met 10%
First Draft	Addresses topic concerns if any from proposal stage	Addresses any comments from proposal stage 5%	Addresses comments; add literature review if none was present in the proposal 5%	Applies one empirical model (e.g. regression, difference-in-difference) to chosen topic 15%	Provides all data sources and presents summary statistics table; defines each variable carefully; presents and interprets empirical results. 40%	Reconciles findings with previous literature; provides policy implications 10%	All sources and numbers are referenced 5%	No grammatical errors with clear and correct use of English 10%	Met 10%
Final Paper	Add a short (up to 100 words) abstract. 5%	Addresses instructor and peer comments if any. 5%	Addresses instructor and peer comments if any. 5%	Addresses instructor and peer comments. Add alternative specifications if necessary. 15%	Addresses instructor and peer comments; add diagnostic tests 35%	Addresses instructor and peer comments; point out the best areas for further research 10%	All sources and numbers are referenced 5%	No grammatical errors with clear and correct use of English 10%	Met 10%

### Short Paper with No Drafts

You have just been hired by a federal agency as a policy adviser. Your assignment is to test what policies may be effective (or not effective) at decreasing obesity rate in the United States. Propose one policy variable and use regression analysis to substantiate your answer.

- Caloric intake
  - <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/stateprograms/fundstates/pdf/Texas-State-Profile.pdf>
  - SNAP data (Kaiser Family Foundation)
- Energy expenditure
- Other policies
  - State recess and PE requirements
  - Medicaid expansion

Research question	Literature review	Empirical model	Data	Empirical results	Conclusion	References	Writing quality	Due date
Title reflects the topic; Define research topic in your introduction; Justify importance of the study 15%	Review at least two previous research papers on chosen or similar policy/variable 10%	Specifies dependent variable and all independent variables; Present estimating equation 10%	Provide data sources on all variables; Provide descriptive statistics table; Describe summary statistics in the text of your paper 15%	Provide regression results table; Interpret your results in the text of the paper 15%	Provide policy implications based on your empirical results; List data and other limitations of your research 10%	All sources and numbers are referenced 5%	No grammatical errors with clear and correct use of English 10%	Met 10%

### Research Paper with Drafts

This approach is built on the belief that the professor's comments are most effective when a student has an opportunity to revise the paper and incorporate the comments to ensure improvement.

Sample structure:

- Proposal, 10% of the grade
- First Draft, 20% of the grade
- Peer Review, 5% of the grade
- Final Paper, 15% of the grade

### Improvements

Grading Rubrics

Literature Review Guide

- UT Libraries
- JSTOR
- Google Scholar
- NBER
- EconLit
- Data Guide
  - ICPSR
  - Statistical Abstract of the United States
  - Historical Statistics of the United States

Writing Consultant

- Writing Center Help

Blogging

- Graphic Detail, *The Economist*