

ECON 231/232: Economic History Term Paper Hints and Suggestions

Choosing Your Topic

- Choosing an easier topic that more people are writing on is a low risk, but low reward strategy.
- Let your interests guide you – the better papers are always on topics that have motivated the author to learn more and dig a little deeper.
- Papers on debates may be more mechanical, and easier to write, but like easier topics, they have lower risks and lower rewards.

Structuring Your Paper

- Be explicit about the topic of your paper – what question are you asking, why are you bothering to ask it, what is the answer you have come up with?
- Your paper should be an economics paper (not a history, or sociology, or philosophy paper). This means you should adopt an analytical approach to your topic that is founded on economic theory and/or empirical evidence.
- You do not necessarily need to employ theoretical techniques or statistical methods in your paper (although you may do so if you wish), but your analysis of the literature you are working with should be informed by these techniques and methods.
- A summary of the relevant literature is a good first step towards writing a good term paper, but the very best papers will also combine, compare, contrast, and/or critique the literature.
- You do not necessarily need to “choose a side”, although adopting a particular perspective may help to focus the paper and guide your analysis of the literature.

References

- The exact format of the references and citations you use is irrelevant, but you should be consistent throughout the paper and you must provide enough information for the reader to find the source, and the exact location (ie. page number) in the source for the material being used.
- You may cite material in the text, in footnotes, or in endnotes – just be consistent from start to finish.
- You may refer to material from the course reading list, but the main sources for your particular topic should be supplementary to the material covered in the class.

Plagiarism

- The university, faculty, and department are becoming increasingly tough on academic integrity issues. Do not let yourself get caught out by inadvertently crossing the line between research/citations/paraphrasing and stealing someone else’s intellectual property.
- Make yourself aware of what you are (and are not) allowed to do when it comes to using your research when writing your term papers – read the section in the course outline and check out the Faculty of Arts web page (www.queensu.ca/calendars/artsci/pg532.html) to learn more.
- If in doubt, just throw in a citation that lets the reader know exactly where the relevant material can be found in its original form.

The Due Date

- The term papers are due by 4:00 pm on the date listed on the course outline and home page. No papers will be accepted after 4:00 pm on last day of classes before final exams.
- A late penalty of 2% per day (including weekends) will be imposed on any papers handed in after this due date. Days end at 4:00 pm.
- Because the late penalty is relatively forgiving, no extensions will be provided (except, of course, with medical documentation).
- If you wish to hand in your paper outside of class time please drop it off in the ECON 231 or 232 drop box on the second floor of Dunning Hall. At 4:00 pm each day the papers will be collected from the drop box and date stamped. If the papers are not date stamped I will assume they were submitted when I pick them up. In other words, do not slide your paper under my office door – this could cost you an additional 2% late penalty!

A Parting Thought

- These papers are not intended to be a terrible burden imposed on all economics majors. They are meant to provide you with an opportunity to use the theory you study in all your other economics courses to learn more about real world problems and events. Ask yourself how economics helps us understand what actually happened (and why it happened the way it did). Ask yourself if the “natural experiments” that history provides for us have a more contemporary parallel. If economics can help us understand what happened in a historical context, can it also help us understand/anticipate/model what is happening today?

GOOD LUCK!