

How to Write a Thesis/Paper in History of Economic Thought: Some Suggestions

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- Purpose: To assist in the preparation and production of an MA thesis or a term paper in history of economic thought.
- Product: A document of about 40 to 50 pages for an MA thesis, and around 20-30 pages for a term paper.
- Steps: Formulate a well-defined research hypothesis.
Prepare a proposal detailing how you are going to prove it.
Research the topic, expanding on your proposal.
Write up your thesis. This will require several drafts.
Make corrections and revise your work based on feedback.
- Problems: How to recognize a well-defined topic.
What research resources are available to you.
How to organize and construct a thesis.
Elements of good writing style.
Formatting requirements for the thesis.
Sources.

Summary and practical advice:

WHAT IS THE SECRET TO WRITING A PAPER/THESIS?

Write! Writing will help you to remember, to understand, to gain prospective. Write, write, and write.

Are you ready for your first draft?

You are if you have enough evidence to support your hypothesis and if you can express your hypothesis: 1) in a sentence or two

2) in a contestable, not self-evident way, one needing your evidence

3) stating with specific words the central substantive concepts of your paper

4) without being dependent on words like “interesting,” “significant,” “important,”
“relation between X and Y,” or “the influence of X on Y.”

Write an outline

To see how everything holds together.

Do it before writing.

Ask ONE question.

A general topic has many relevant aspects. Pick one only. Others may be subjects of future and different works. Your hypothesis is one single sentence about what you expect the answer to your question to be (it will change with research). Keep it in front of you when you work as a reminder to stay focused. It is the focal point of your work. Everything should revolve around it.

Focus:

List everything you researched.

Put together ONLY what you need to answer your question.

Cut everything that is not to the point, because it is irrelevant. You can use the extra material for other papers.

Your claim must be

substantive

contestable

specific

THE PAPER/THESIS ITSELF

The Title should:

- 1) be informative
- 2) be brief
- 3) catch the reader's eye
- 4) not be boring

Abstract:

It should be about 100 words. It should summarize the thesis (question, answer, evidence), and stimulate the reader's interest.

Introduction (This is what I am about to do):

It should tell the reader what to expect.

Indicate the problem and the answer

Discuss its relevance (why should we care?!?)

Summarize the work that has been done so far

What is your value added?

What you have found?

Organization of the paper

Main Body (I am doing) must contain:

Claim (Your Hypothesis)

Evidence

(Objections)

Be as clear as possible.

Use a large enough font.

Do not use any handwritten words, sentences, or variables.

Make Tables and Figures so they are as easy to understand as possible.

Minimize need for reader to bounce back and forth between the text and the Tables, or between different parts of the text.

Conclusion (This is what I have done):

Repeat the problem, indicate what your contribution is, and summarize your finding.

End strongly.

Bibliography and Footnotes:

Make sure they are professionally done. Avoid excessive footnotes.

WRITING

You are writing “for dummies.”

Your reader does not know what you are talking about, is busy, and will not read a paragraph twice.

Put yourself in the background.

Work from a design.

Be clear.

Use the active voice.

Use positive statements.

Do not be wordy.

Do not overwrite.

Do not overstate.

Do not make up words.

Revise and rewrite

Write your ideas.

Rewrite for clarity:

 Add, cut, and/or rearrange material.

Rewrite for more clarity:

 Choose the better words, and cut the unnecessary words.

Rewrite for perfection:

 Check spelling, grammar, punctuation.

DO NOT PLAGIARIZE!

The nuts and bolts of how to write a thesis or a term paper:

1. Topic selection

Getting going: The hardest part is getting started. It would be very unusual if a suitable topic for your thesis was immediately apparent to you.

The process has steps, but they are not necessarily followed in strict linear order.

Topic area: You should start by identifying a topic area that interests you – preferably an area of economics that you know something about and are motivated to find out more about.

Example: Interest rates caps in classical economics.

Focus: Narrow the topic. This is a 40-page paper, not a life's work. By focusing on a very circumscribed part of your topic area you give yourself the ability to master the literature in that area.

Example: Usury laws in Adam Smith.

Questions: Think of specific questions within your focused topic area – questions that can be phrased in a single sentence. These questions (or one of them) will define the problem which will be the topic of your thesis.

A reasonable question must be within your capability to answer (while documenting the reasons for your answer) in the time you have available.

Examples: How did Adam Smith reconcile usury laws with his free market beliefs?
What are his justifications for usury laws?
What is novel in his ideas?
How were his ideas accepted?
What influenced his ideas?
What did his contemporaries think on the matter?
What are modern scholars saying about it?

Research: Read what work has already been done that is relevant to your questions. Gather data that might help you with your answers.

Problem: What do you think the answers to your questions are? (These may well change as your research proceeds!) These answers should lead you to formulate a research problem – the problem which is the topic of your thesis. The problem should be expressible in a clear sentence or two.

Example: How does systematic perception bias affect interest rates according to Adam Smith?

Hypothesis: What, given the research you have done, is the resolution of your problem? This is the central hypothesis that your thesis will set out to prove, and should also be expressible in a single clear sentence.

The claim implied by your proposed answer must be substantive, i.e., there must be a real question at issue here. For example, a thesis topic such as “A Discussion of Adam Smith on Usury Laws” says nothing. What *about* Smith’s position is interesting and problematical?

Your claim must also be contestable. Other hypotheses than yours should be feasible – your task is to marshal evidence and argument to show that yours is the best answer.

Example: Adam Smith defended usury laws because he believed markets can fail due to systematic information biases.

Title: Your claim should inspire a title. Make it informative, brief, and free of jargon. It should be designed to arouse interest.

Examples: Delusion as market failure: Adam Smith on Usury.
Adam Smith: free market or controlled market? How self-delusion calls for usury laws

Proposal: Document your problem and your hypothesis in a short (one-page) essay. Briefly note the steps in your argument, and indicate what information you intend to use (and the methods you propose to analyze that data) in support of your argument.

This will probably (to some extent) be usable as the introduction to your thesis. So make it short, clear, and readable – designed to interest the reader in your problem and your approach to a solution, motivating him to read on.

2. Research resources

- Library:** Most of your research material will be found in or through your university library. You need to become familiar with the library facilities – especially the online catalog and the external databases of published research literature to which it subscribes.
- If you think you need assistance in figuring out how to search using the online catalog, go to the library and ask at the reference desk.
- Set up your own computer so that you can access these resources directly.
- Check at the reference desk for information on other library resources – microfilm collections, document collections, and other specialized reference material.
- Internet:** In addition to the databases available via your library, there are other publicly accessible sources of data and literature. Some of these are noted on the handout sheet.
- Note particularly the sites that house links to other sites. These should be very useful to you in finding material on the Web.
- Sources:** Not all sources are equally good. Typically, three kinds of sources are identified:
- Primary.** These are original documents that contain the raw data relevant to your research.
- Secondary.** These are reports by other researchers based on primary data or sources. The reason for quoting or citing these is to support your own research – remember that the reputation of the author of the source will feature into the reader’s appraisal of the weight of the support. (If a secondary source provides a copy of primary data or includes a quotation from a primary source that you want to use, cite the primary source but also note the secondary source in the citation.)
- Tertiary.** These are popular expositions or syntheses written for a general audience, usually based on secondary sources. Examples are newspaper and magazine articles. They are useful in the initial stages of your research for familiarizing you with a field and perhaps pointing you to relevant primary or secondary sources. They are to be distrusted as reliable sources and, if you cite them at all, make sure it is in a context that shows your understanding of their limitations.
- Note-taking:** Make notes to yourself as your research proceeds.
- When you write notes after reading a source, be careful to indicate to yourself when you are assessing the source, paraphrasing its argument, or quoting it directly. The surest path to academic death is to plagiarize, inadvertently or deliberately.
- In your notes, cite the source, and note the library call number. This will allow you to easily find it again if you want to reread and reappraise it later.

The citation information will also be necessary for building the references section in your thesis.

It is sometimes convenient to photocopy extracts from sources. Again, make sure that the citation information is there. For a book, you can photocopy the title page, but remember that the date of publication is often on the page *after* the title page.

Citation: Record the following information (if applicable) for all sources as you read them:

Author	Title (and subtitle)
Year (or date)	Collection title and names of editors
Edition	Publisher and where published
Volume	Page numbers (as a range)

3. Constructing arguments

Structure: A thesis should be structured as an argument – a logical explanation, defense, and advocacy for a central claim.

In the course of investigating your topic area, you will have accumulated a lot of notes, data, and references. But a thesis is not simply a display of these, showing how much work you have done. The amount of work you have done and the amount of time you have spent is not really anyone's concern but your own. What is needed is for you to organize these notes, data, and references into the shape of a coherent argument, designed to convince your reader that your claim is plausible and interesting.

Arguments: By the term “argument” I don't mean a contentious dispute or even a diatribe in which you flatly assert some claim and try to shove it down your reader's throat. Think more in terms of a conversation with an intelligent but skeptical associate to whom you are trying to communicate a new idea you have come up with.

In a thesis, you get to do all the talking, but you should have an ear out for your reader's possible misunderstandings and objections. You need to build the argument up, bringing your imaginary reader along with you step by step, anticipating difficulties and avoiding puzzling jumps in the sequence of argument.

Components: The argument in your thesis – or any sub-argument you make as a component of the overall argument – should contain the following elements:

A claim. This is simply a clear statement of the point you are trying to make.

Its support. This is the evidence or the supporting grounds for your claim.

A warrant. This relates your evidence to the claim, explaining why that particular evidence is to be taken as support for that claim.

Possible objections. If you can anticipate objections to your argument, explain how they can be answered.

Qualifications. These refine the explanation of the limits of the domain of your claim – under what circumstances it might not hold, for example.

Evidence: Presenting your evidence will probably take up the bulk of your thesis. If your evidence is unconvincing your argument will fail, no matter how superficially plausible it seems.

Evidence must be of sufficient quality to be convincing. Check it for accuracy – if you present evidence that is obviously incorrect or inconsistent, then at best you will be regarded as a sloppy researcher and the evidence (and anything else you present) will not be taken as contributing to your claim. Pay attention to the source of your

information. Tertiary sources are much less authoritative (and therefore much less convincing) than primary or secondary ones. And if the information isn't from a reputable (in a scholarly sense) researcher or publication, don't use it.

Evidence must be of sufficient scope to be convincing. One piece of evidence consistent with a claim is rarely enough to make the case. And lack of evidence, or negative evidence, while it may be consistent with a claim, is not proof of it.

Warrants: Take care to make clear to your reader the relevance of your evidence to the claim it is supposed to support. Don't just dump quotations on them and expect them to figure it out – explain it. Spell out the point of the evidence, its significance. Make an explicit logical bridge between the evidence and the claim.

The formal connection between the evidence and the claim is called the “warrant” – the assumption or principle that must be believed if the claim is to follow from the evidence. If this principle is an obvious part of the common knowledge of your audience, then explanation might not be needed, but it is always a good idea to be conscious of the warrant and the possible need to spell it out. Warrants are just claims themselves, but usually are claims of a more general order than the specific claims that are the subject of your thesis. Here's an example:

Claim: The 1981-82 recession occurred because the Fed tightened the money supply.

Evidence: Data showing a reduction in the rate of monetary base increase in 1980-81.

Warrant: Recessions are generally caused when bank credit is tightened, and a reduction in the rate of monetary base increase is a good indicator of tightening.

Having expressed the warrant, maybe you will find that it is not all that obvious, and maybe it will itself require theoretical or evidentiary support.

Objections: Think of the possible objections an intelligent reader could bring up against your claim, were you having a conversation or discussion with him. Explain why these potential criticisms do not dislodge the claim.

Try to come up with counterexamples to any generalization you make. This is what your readers will be doing, so it is good to try to anticipate them. If you come up with a possible problem, you will probably need to bring it up and explain why it is not, in fact, a real counterexample.

This exercise of paying attention to possible objections is a useful one for making your explanation more convincing. In addition, and more importantly, it may well alert you to weaknesses in your argument that – by finding and bringing to bear more evidence or theoretical support – need to be addressed seriously.

If you can't rebut a potential argument, then it is better to explicitly concede it than to ignore it and hope nobody will notice. They will notice, and the fact that you seemed to have overlooked it will reflect badly on their assessment of your capabilities.

Qualifications: Most claims are not completely general in scope – they refer to particular circumstances or are true only under certain constraints. You need to make sure that such qualifications to the generality of the claim are clearly spelled out.

This care in making sure that claims are properly circumscribed is one of the hallmarks of academic writing. Overblown claims are taken as a sure sign of sloppy thinking.

Words like “usually” and “probably” and “may” can easily be overused but are useful in the appropriate limiting and qualifying of your claim. Don't hedge too much (so you end up claiming nothing), but don't hedge too little, either.

In social science, causes and effects are complex and convoluted. Causes may be effective only in the presence of complementary events; causes can have multiple, interacting effects; and causes sometimes feed back into effects. Simple linear unqualified cause-effect sequences are not the norm – so don't expose yourself to easy rebuttal by failing to see at least some of the more obvious nuances in the situation.

4. Writing style

Audience: Your audience is your supervisor and the designated “second reader.” Although they have agreed to read your paper and treat it seriously, it makes no sense for you to make that task more difficult for them than necessary.

Silly mistakes of grammar, spelling, and punctuation not only are distracting to your readers (and require them to reread the obscure sentences to figure out what you are saying) but also reduce their confidence that you know what you are talking about.

Apart from adhering to the basic conventions of language, your major job is to make your thesis interesting. You are presenting a problem to be solved, so you need to explain the nature of the problem in a clear and compelling way, in order that your readers will look forward to finding out your solution.

You are presenting an argument that leads from the problem to the solution, so you need to present the argument in logical steps. Don’t make logical non sequiturs, and don’t go off on irrelevant tangents. In short, make your argument easy to follow.

You are presenting evidence to back up your argument, not to bury it. Include only data and commentaries that are relevant in furthering the argument.

You are communicating to your readers your interest in the problem, so make that excitement come through in your writing. Don’t bore them with stolid, unvarying, drab, ugly prose.

In summary, the style you should aim for (and achieve by severe editing and rewriting and editing and rewriting...) is one that embodies clarity, logic, brevity, relevance, proper grammar, correct spelling, sensible punctuation, and considerable attention to the entertainment of the reader.

For extra information look up the website www.rong-chang.com which contains links to a wealth of information useful to students of ESL. Note particularly the “Writing” and “Grammar” links.

Clarity: You might think that, because you are working with a difficult and highly technical subject, its expression requires convoluted and jargon-ridden sentences. This is not so – such sentences are more often the result of sloppy thinking than of the intrinsic difficulty of the subject. If you can’t explain something reasonably clearly, you probably don’t understand it (and that’s what your readers will assume).

Don’t be surprised if you write tangled and convoluted sentences on your first commission of ideas to paper. This is natural. But they do need to be cleaned up before being presented to a reader.

Sentences have a subject, verb, and object. You should make the subject whatever it is you are focusing on – the actual subject of your argument at that point. Consider the following:

“*Keynes* favored government control of the volume of investment because he did not trust capital markets to generate sufficient incentives to invest.”

“*The reason for Keynes’s favoring of government control of the volume of investment* stemmed from his distrust of the facility of capital markets in generating sufficient incentives to invest.”

The subject is in italics – in the first sentence it is Keynes himself; in the second, his reason. Neither is wrong (it depends on what really is the main subject), but watch out for convoluted, abstract subjects like the second one. If your thesis is filled with these, something is indeed wrong. Notice how the abstract subject (formed by “nominalization” of a verb) requires the introduction of extra prepositions like “of,” “for,” and “from” and filler verbs like “stemmed,” which tend to make your sentences seem cluttered.

Don’t be evasive. Your aim should be to avoid leaving your readers puzzled as to what you actually mean or – worse – thinking that you don’t know and are fudging. Look out for (and eliminate in your draft editing) vague words and phrases like:

“a few,” “some,” “most,” “many,” “lots,” “almost,” “often,” “generally” (all of which can read like nonspecific evasions, although they may be valuable in toning down overreaching claims);

“not much,” “somewhat,” “a great deal,” “a high probability” (maybe with a little more research you can be more specific as to how much);

“efficient policy,” “good law,” “optimal regulation” (avoid comparisons with an unstated ideal – define your ideal and its relevance, if this is a crucial part of your argument); and

“law to stop drug use,” “fiscal policy to cure unemployment” (avoid confusing assumed intention with actual results – it makes you seem too credulous).

Logic:

A paragraph should address one particular idea, and the sentences in that paragraph should chart out a logical development of that idea. Each paragraph is a major step in your argument, and every sentence in a paragraph should be relevant to and necessary for the prosecution of the argument.

The worst thing you can do in this regard is to present the reader with succeeding sentences in a paragraph that are not obviously related. The reader has to stop, wonder if he misread, and think about how to tie the sentences together into your presumed argument. For example:

“Keynes favored government control of the volume of investment because he did not trust capital markets to generate sufficient incentives to invest. He was an eloquent critic of the Versailles peace treaty.”

Make sure that, when you present evidence, it is obviously relevant to the claim you are using it for. You may know that it is relevant, but the reader may not. For example:

“Studies show that individuals reliably consume a given fraction of their income. Aggregate consumer spending is, therefore, a good leading indicator for us to use in studying the cycle.”

What’s the warrant for this generalization? Does it necessarily follow? If it’s not obvious, explain it.

Brevity: Brevity is the soul not only of wit but of a convincing thesis. Every word in every sentence should do some work – eliminate those that don’t.

You have a particular argument to make, so don’t interrupt it with discussion that is tangential or irrelevant. Every paragraph should contribute to furthering or bolstering your argument. If one doesn’t, leave it out. (If you feel compelled to retain some observation or insight that does not directly pertain to your argument, use a footnote – but do this very sparingly.)

This is difficult advice to follow, since one hates to eliminate text that one has laboriously written. But your readers will appreciate your sticking to the point, moving the argument along, and not wasting their time on irrelevancies.

Grammar: The use of acceptable English grammar is something that can’t be taught quickly – it comes with practice writing and (most importantly) reading. Read as much as you can, and not only economics literature! If you are impressed with something you read, look at it closely for its sentence structure (and how its sentences vary), its employment of adjectives and metaphors, its use of punctuation.

There are, however, a few quick pointers that address some of the problems typically faced by people for which English is not a first language:

Articles. Nouns can be modified by articles (definite “the” and indefinite “a” or “an”) which function much like adjectives. Unfortunately, there are no really useful rules as to when an article is required and when one isn’t – it’s a matter of getting a feeling for what sounds right. Why are you “in town” but not “in city” (you’re “in the city”)? I don’t know.

Articles indicate some specificity or narrowing of focus, so don’t use them to modify a proper noun. For example, you wouldn’t say “the M1” any more than you would say “the Fred,” but you would say “the monetary aggregate M1.” Use “a” or “an” to refer to any member of a set; use “the” to refer to a specific member. Use “an” rather than “a” if the noun (as read) starts with a vowel sound (including cases with a silent “h” as in “an hypothesis”).

Tense. Don’t mix verb tenses – if you are speaking in the past, consistently use the past tense; don’t throw in random future or present verb forms as is done in the following:

“The central bank set [*past tense*] the target rate down a quarter point and indicates [*present tense*] that it expected [*past tense*] the recession to deepen.”

Number. Make sure that there is agreement in number between subject and verb and between noun and pronoun. For example, you would say “if the money supply falls any lower,” not “if the money supply fall any lower”; you would say “consumers are free to express their opinions,” not “a consumer is free to express their opinion.”

Watch out for a plural noun right in front of a singular verb. For example, you would not write “each one of the goods are in short supply,” for the verb “are” should agree in number with its subject, “one,” as in “each one of the goods is in short supply.”

Reference. Pronouns such as “it” or “this” should refer to a subject – preferably the one you intend! Saying that “the FOMC intended to meet on Thanksgiving, but this didn’t happen until Monday” implies that *Thanksgiving* didn’t happen until Monday. Modifier phrases or clauses should unambiguously refer to whatever it is they are supposed to be modifying. In the following, it sounds like the credit shortage is doing the lowering:

“By lowering the interest rate, the chronic credit shortage disappeared.”

Fragments. Normally, complete sentences need at least a subject and a verb. While most of your sentences should adhere to that rule, there is no reason you can’t use a fragment for emphasis. But do so sparingly!

Spelling: Use a word-processor’s spell checker by all means – but beware! English is full of words that sound the same but are spelt differently, so it is easy to use a word in the wrong context. No spell checker can help you with this, so don’t rely on it to save you from all spelling errors.

Punctuation: Punctuation marks are used to make meaning clear and to make reading easier. The ones that give people the most trouble are commas, semicolons, and colons.

Commas. The comma can be used both as a separator and as a bracket. Any list of three or more items should employ commas, as in:

“The components of the nominal interest rate are time preference, the risk factor, and expected inflation.”

A comma can also separate an introductory clause or phrase from the main body of the sentence:

“If he wakes up in a bad mood, the Fed chairman may push for a rate hike.”

But don’t use a comma after an introductory phrase that precedes the verb it is modifying. In the following, the comma is wrong:

“Only in the last year, has the Fed acted to constrain credit.”

You should use a comma to separate a quotation or a question from the rest of the sentence, as in:

“The question is, was the Fed justified in raising rates so far?”

When a comma is used as a bracket, it must of course have a partner. The enclosed phrase or clause should be able to be taken out of the sentence without introducing any grammatical error.

“The Fed may, in fact, have raised rates too far.”

Semicolons. The semicolon is a more serious separator than a comma. It can be used, for example, to separate long, complicated, or internally punctuated elements. It can also be used as a substitute for a conjunction, as in:

“The data prior to 1930 were used for calibration; only the data for the years 1931 to 1936 were used in the analysis.”

Colons. A colon is almost as strong a separator as a period, and should not be used in cases where it will interrupt continuity. For example, the following is a poor use of a colon:

“The level of the nominal interest rate is dependent on several factors such as: time preference, risk premium, and inflation.”

Nevertheless, a colon can be a good way of introducing a list:

“The following factors combine to determine the nominal interest rate: time preference, risk premium, and inflation.”

If the list is long or the elements are complex, a colon followed on separate lines by a numbered list is an effective presentation.

Entertainment:

Would you enjoy sitting down and reading what you have written? If not, you might want to revise and reword. To be entertaining you don't have to be especially witty or overly dramatic – this is a scientific paper, and a clear and well-reasoned argument on a well-motivated problem is quite sufficient.

Above all, don't write like Roy Bhaskar in *Plato etc: The Problems of Philosophy and Their Resolution* (Verso, 1994):

“Indeed dialectical critical realism may be seen under the aspect of Foucauldian strategic reversal – of the unholy trinity of Parmenidean/Platonic/Aristotelean provenance; of the Cartesian-Lockean-Humean-Kantian paradigm, of foundationalisms (in practice, fideistic found-ationalisms) and irrationalisms (in practice, capricious exercises of the will-to-power or some other ideologically and/or psycho-somatically buried source) new and old alike; of the primordial failing of western philosophy, ontological monovalence, and its close ally, the epistemic fallacy with its ontic dual; of the analytic problematic laid down by Plato, which Hegel served only to replicate in his actualist monovalent analytic reinstatement in transfigurative reconciling dialectical connection, while in his hubristic claims for absolute idealism he inaugurated the Comtean, Kierkegaardian and Nietzschean eclipses of reason, replicating the fundamentals of positivism through its transmutation route to the superidealism of a Baudrillard.”

5. Formatting guidelines

- Cover page:** Each school mandates the format of the thesis cover page. Ask the secretary of your department for a sample cover page or a cover page from an old work to see how it is supposed to look.
- Acknowledgements:**
You may wish to acknowledge colleagues, professors, or friends who have helped you in the creation of your thesis. If you choose to include a thanks-saying section (it's optional), place it on a separate page.
- Abstract:** Provide a short paragraph summarizing your hypothesis and the evidence for it, designed to provide someone scanning several papers with enough information to decide whether to direct their attention to yours. Place it on a separate page.
- Table of contents:**
The table of contents is useful to a reader in building up a mental picture of the structure of your thesis. Its usefulness depends on your section headings being suitably descriptive. It is optional, but, if included, best placed on a separate page.
- Introduction:** This is the beginning of your thesis proper, so start it on a new page. You should not have a section heading. The idea is to tell the reader what's in store – describe your question and your claim as to its answer.
Make it as clear and compelling as possible. Don't start with turgid boilerplate such as "This thesis discusses..."
- Main body:** Here's where you present your various lines of evidence for your claim, painting the background, summarizing related work. Be careful to make clear arguments relating the evidence to the claim (i.e., show how the evidence warrants the claim).
The body should be a series of sections with short, descriptive headings. Don't overload it with technical data and derivations – use appendices for that. Don't digress – if you must make asides, use footnotes.
- Conclusion:** The conclusion should restate your claim, summarizing your argument for it. Do make sure that the claim expressed in the conclusion is compatible with the one expressed in the introduction!
If you can suggest follow-on work without going on too long, do it (it helps if you can show that your hypothesis is likely to be fruitful, i.e., useful to other researchers in pursuing their goals).
- Appendices:** Use this section to present anything that is necessary to your argument but which, if inserted into the main body, would be distracting and would divert a reader from following the main thread of your discussion.
Start the appendices on a new page.

- Footnotes: These are numbered comments, referring back to the main text.
- There are two footnote styles – in-line (footnotes appear at the bottom of the page in which they are referenced) and grouped (they appear all together in a separate section at the end of the thesis). Either is fine, but the latter may be preferable if you don't want the reading of footnotes to distract from the following of the main argument.
- References: Citations to any sources of research or data referred to in your thesis should be grouped together (in alphabetical order by first author) at the end of the thesis. This section is NOT optional – if you have no-one to cite then either you are a plagiarist or you clearly haven't done your homework.
- See the style guide for a description of how to format a citation and a host of examples of actual citations.
- Style guide: The American Economic Review publishes a “style guide” for authors of economics papers. It is available online at www.aeaweb.org/aer/styleguide.html.
- This is a guide, not a list of mandated rules. If your preferred formatting style is different in some respects, that's fine – as long as your style is clear and consistent.

6. Integrating sources

- Purpose:** Whenever you use anyone else’s work in the course of describing and explaining your own, you cite the source. This is not simply common courtesy – it is a fundamental convention of scientific procedure. As with fundamental conventions in other areas of social life, such as property and marital fidelity, its violation is a serious moral issue. Plagiarism is to science what shoplifting is to retailing or ballot-stuffing is to democracy.
- The reason for using sources is to support your argument, not to make it for you. Primary sources provide you with information and data – material that you need to analyze and integrate into your thesis. Secondary sources can supply supporting ideas or ways of expressing concepts that are particularly vivid or apt.
- The explicit use of sources does not detract from your thesis by making you seem less original. Just the opposite. It shows you to be an honest researcher who, like all worthwhile scientists, builds on the work of others and is capable of effectively integrating that work into your own.
- Principles:**
- Don’t overuse sources.** Remember that the purpose of using other people’s work is to augment your own, not to substitute for it. Make sure that your argument is made in your own words.
 - Clearly distinguish source material.** Make sure that it is very obvious where your words start and those of your source ends. Even if you are summarizing a source rather than quoting directly, make it clear whose ideas are whose.
 - Relate source material to your argument.** Make sure that it is clear to the reader what the significance of the source material is in furthering your argument.
 - Don’t distort the meaning.** When paraphrasing or selectively quoting, take care to ensure that the source author’s meaning is not misrepresented by your rephrasing or selection. It is easy to quote “out of context” – to change the meaning (sometimes even to the opposite of that intended) by leaving out parts that are material to the clear understanding of the quoted passage.
 - Make the citation meaningful.** The purpose of the citation itself is not only to acknowledge the source – it is also to enable the reader to actually locate the source material himself if he is interested in doing so. If citing a specific passage from a book, give the page number – don’t simply reference the entire book.
- Citing:** There are many ways of formally citing a source, and it doesn’t matter which you use – as long as you are consistent and the citation is explicit enough to allow another researcher to locate the material in question. For purposes of illustration, I will use the “author/year” style, in which the citation takes the form “(Author year)” or “(Author year, page)”. This is to be read as a reference to an entry in the “References” section that spells

out the path to the source. These entries are sorted by author by year. For example:

“But this *long run* is a misleading guide to current affairs. *In the long run* we are all dead. Economists set themselves too easy, too useless a task if in tempestuous seasons they can only tell us that when the storm is long past the ocean is flat again.” (Keynes 1923, 80)

Keynes, John Maynard (1923) *A Tract on Monetary Reform* London: Macmillan

Some variation on the citation format is possible – abbreviations geared to encouraging the smooth integration of quoted material into your argument. In particular, if you have already used the author’s name in close proximity, you don’t have to repeat it:

Keynes’s famous line “In the long run we are all dead” (1923, 80) comes in the context of a critique of the Quantity Theory.

Keynes (1923, 80) subjects the long-run Quantity Theory to a pungent dismissal: “In the long run we are all dead.”

If you are repeatedly citing the same work but referring to different pages, you can even abbreviate down to the page number. If successive quotes (within the same paragraph of your thesis) refer to the same article and page, you don’t need to repeat the citation.

Keynes’s famous line “In the long run we are all dead” (1923, 80) comes in the context of a critique of the Quantity Theory, and is not, as some have charged, a piece of flippant cynicism. It was the policy relevance of the theory that was at issue – Keynes claimed it to be “a misleading guide to current affairs.”

Generally, you should not alter the text you are quoting in any way. (However, see below for conventions for inserting and deleting text within quotations.) But it is permissible to introduce or eliminate italics – provided that this does not alter the author’s meaning. If you make such an alteration, it should be noted in the citation. The examples above would be more correctly written as “(1923, 80, italics omitted).”

Quoting:

In general, you should construct your sentences so that any quotations you want to include fit into them. It is common to provide a lead-in phrase, for example:

Keynes may quip that “In the long run we are all dead” (1923, 80), but we are living in his long run.

For very long quotes – which you might need if you want to ensure that the reader gets an especially clear idea of the cited author’s point – it is better to use the formatting device of the “block quotation.” The quote itself, with its citation, is placed as a separate paragraph indented from the regular text. Quotation marks are not used. The block quote should be preceded *and* followed by lead-in and follow-up explanation of your own.

If you remove text from a quote in the interest of keeping it short, indicate missing text with ellipses.

Keynes (1923, 80) argues against the Quantity Theory being a reliable guide to policy. In broad terms, the theory holds that doubling the money stock will double the price level and, as Keynes points out, “‘in the long run’ this is probably true...But this *long run* is a misleading guide to current affairs.”

If you need to add text within a quote (to make a clarification, for instance), enclose the inserted text inside square brackets:

Keynes was particularly scathing about the policy irrelevance of current theory. “In the long run [of the Quantity Theory] we are all dead” (1923, 80) was his famous dismissal.

Whether you add or remove text from a quote, it is incumbent on you to ensure that this alteration does not alter the author’s meaning. Misrepresenting an author to further your own argument is as serious a sin as plagiarism. In fact, it is possible to misrepresent simply by quoting out of context, as the following hypothetical example shows:

Keynes may cynically quip that “In the long run we are all dead” (1923, 80), but that is no justification for short-term expediency in policy.

If there are errors in the material you wish to quote (like misspellings or incorrect word choice), do not correct them but indicate you know they are there by inserting “[sic]” after the error. If Keynes had misspelled “dead” as “daid”, you would quote him as follows:

Keynes said: “In the long run we are all daid [sic]” (1923, 80).

Paraphrasing: Rather than directly quoting a source, you may want to express the ideas from the source in your own words. This is perfectly acceptable, provided that you cite the source – and provided that you do, in fact, paraphrase in your own words.

It is not acceptable to present a superficially altered piece of source text as a paraphrase. For example, the following usage of Keynes’s words is really a subtle form of plagiarism:

Keynes (1923, 80) disparaged the avoidance of short-run issues in economic theory, likening economists to weather forecasters who can only tell us that when the storm is long past the ocean will be flat again.

Such usage of Keynes’s own words should be signaled by quotation marks. A better paraphrase would be the following:

Keynes (1923, 80) disparaged the avoidance of short-run issues in economic theory, vividly pointing out the uselessness for dealing with a current problem of a theory that predicts only the long run outcome.

Summarizing and paraphrasing is the usual way to deal with the work of others. Direct quotations are used only when the author has made a point

so clearly or vividly that you can't say it better or because you think it necessary for the reader to be sure exactly what the author actually said.

Acknowledging:

In many cases you will have obtained information or inspiration from unpublished or informal sources. These should still be cited. If the assistance is of a general kind, like advice or assistance from a supervisor or fellow-student, then a footnote (indexed at the thesis title or at the point where the main hypothesis is described) is appropriate.

More specific assistance can be footnoted at the appropriate point in the text. Alternatively, an entry for a lecture series or a "personal communication" can be included in the Reference section and cited in the normal way, although it is probably better to insert something like "(Fred Nurk, personal communication)" directly into your text.

Have fun writing and good luck!

REFERENCES & READING MATERIAL

Topic Selection & Thesis Construction

The Craft of Research

W.C. Booth, G.G. Colomb, & J.M. Williams
University of Chicago Press, 1995

How to Write a Thesis

H. Teitelbaum
Macmillan, 1998

Writing with Sources

G. Harvey
Hackett Publishing Co., 1998

A Guide for the Young Economist

W. Thompson
MIT Press, 2001

Formatting

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers

J. Gibaldi
Modern Language Association of America, 1999

Manuscript Preparation Guidelines

American Economic Review
www.aeaweb.org/aer/styleguide.html

Writing Style

The Elements of Style

W. Strunk Jr. & E.B. White
Allyn and Bacon, 1979

Economical Writing

D. McCloskey
Waveland Press, 2000

RESEARCH RESOURCES ONLINE

General Economic Links

Dr. T's Econlinks	<i>econlinks.com</i>
WebEc	<i>www.belsinki.fi/WebEc</i>
AEAweb	<i>www.aeaweb.org</i>
ECONbase	<i>www.elsevier.com/locate/econbase</i>

Archives of Papers and books

Your Library Databases and E-Journals

EconLit (on-line bibliography)	<i>www.econlit.org</i>
Social Sciences Citation Index	<i>webofscience.com</i>
Social Science Research Network	<i>www.ssrn.com</i>
EconWPA (working paper archive)	<i>econwpa.wustl.edu</i>
JSTOR (on-line journal archive)	<i>www.jstor.org</i>
Library of Economics and Liberty	<i>www.econlib.org</i>
The New School History of Economic Thought website	<i>cepa.newschool.edu/het/</i>
McMaster University Archive for the History of Economic Thought	<i>socserv2.socsci.mcmaster.ca/~econ/ugcm/3ll3/</i>

Government Data

Bureau of Labor Statistics	<i>www.bls.gov</i>
Center on Budget & Policy Priorities	<i>www.cbpp.org</i>
Congressional Budget Office	<i>www.cbo.gov</i>
Federal Reserve Board	<i>www.federalreserve.gov/rnd.htm</i>

Other Sites

Economic Time Series	<i>www.economagic.com</i>
World Bank	<i>econ.worldbank.org</i>

Generalized Search Engines

<i>www.yahoo.com</i>
<i>www.google.com</i>
<i>www.webcrawler.com</i>
<i>www.hotbot.com</i>
<i>www.altavista.digital.com</i>

For a helpful tutorial on keyword and concept-based searching, see
www.monash.com/spidap4.html.

NOTE: Keep your personal computer's antivirus software up to date. You can subscribe to virus protection services at
www.mcafee.com
www.symantec.com/nav
or check with your University tech support center.

ⁱ Thanks to Thomas McQuade and Todd Seavey for his help and suggestions in preparing this document.