

# Making the Most of Your Assignments and Dissertation

## Presenting Your Work

The Economics Department is keen to encourage you to gain the highest mark possible for your term papers and/or dissertation. However, there is concern that many students lose marks because of poor presentation — style and layout — of their work.

This information is intended to help you in presenting your work to its best advantage. In what follows “paper” should be understood to include assignments, dissertation or any piece of submitted work for which you have discretion with regard to presentation.

The advice below is mainly about *layout* (organisation and structure) of your work. There are many guides to *style* and plenty of scope for differences of opinion about what constitutes good style. This does not mean that all styles are equally acceptable! Your task is to avoid the bad ones.

## Layout

If your paper is well organised you stand a much better chance of getting the reader (examiner) on your side. Well-organised papers receive their just rewards. Poorly structured papers are penalised by the examiners.

### Points to keep in mind:

- Always divide your paper into *sections* with an *Introduction* and a *Conclusion*. Each section should form a coherent element of the whole paper.
- The *introduction* informs the reader about (a) the issues you will discuss, (b) the questions you will address, and (c) how the arguments will unfold in the following sections. For dissertations (but not assignments) it is helpful to include a separate *abstract* (a very brief overview of the paper). Consider leaving the introduction to write last of all — by which stage you will know exactly what follows.
- The *conclusion* can be used to summarise the previous sections, to draw the threads of the argument together and, perhaps, to offer some comments about unresolved problems that deserve future research.
- *References*. Providing bibliographical references is so important that it deserves a separate section, below. *Do not ignore it*.
- *Statistical results*. When presenting econometric results, say from STATA, do not simply paste in the computer output. Usually, you will need to construct *tables* of results. Sometimes you may wish to present regression results in an equation format with standard errors in parentheses under the estimated coefficients.
- *Very important*: you must make absolutely clear when you are reproducing statistical results obtained by others. You must cite the source; see the section below on **References**. If you fail to cite the source, the reader will presume that you have obtained the results yourself. Then, if the examiners spot that the results have been copied from elsewhere without acknowledgement, you will be in serious trouble: this is evidence of unfair practices and will be dealt with as an academic offence.
- Leave the reader in no doubt about your own contribution in terms of statistical results or any other original aspect of your work. Don't hide any originality that you believe deserves credit. Be bold about what you have achieved.
- *Footnotes* can be used for short clarifications and extensions of your argument that would otherwise interrupt the flow of your paper. Try to keep them to a minimum.

- *Appendices* can be used for material of a detailed background or ancillary nature, too long for a footnote. Appendices are often devoted to (a) descriptions of data sources and about how the data have been transformed; (b) listing data (but only when the data have been obtained from non-standard sources); (c) technical derivations of results (e.g. theorems) discussed in the body of the paper. It is not normally necessary to list data in assignments or projects; but you must always be prepared to supply the data if requested.
- Footnotes and appendices should not be used in an attempt to evade the word limit.

## Referencing

Drawing on the wide range of reading you do around your subject area, and demonstrating how you have used this to develop your knowledge and form your own views, is a key aspect of your coursework. It's essential that you reference your source materials so it's clear where the information has come from, and to avoid any misunderstanding over whether you are presenting ideas as your own. Please refer to the section on academic offences on page 39 of this handbook for information on referencing and where to seek advice.

### A recommended reference on style is:

Strunk, W. and E. B. White *The Elements of Style* (published Allyn and Bacon, ISBN: 020530902X, latest edition August 1999).

This excellent little book is worth keeping close at hand. If you need a really professional guide, consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* (in the University library class mark Z 253). This book is a remarkable compendium of good practice for all aspects of presentation and style.

Providing full and accurate references to your sources is a *very important* part of presenting your work. There are two aspects of this: (a) **citations** that point to references (e.g. Keynes (1936), p. 383); and (b) the **bibliography** that contains information about the references themselves.

### Here are some rules:

You must always include direct quotations from other people's work — published or unpublished — in inverted commas: “ ”. *Failure to do so is a serious academic offence.*

Always follow a quotation with the relevant citation. Example:

Many commentators believe that policy makers are pragmatic and not much influenced by ideas. Keynes disagreed: “Practical men ... are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back.” (Keynes, 1936, p. 383) Whether Keynes should be taken seriously is a debatable matter. ...

The citation *Keynes, 1936* in the example, should point to exactly one reference in the bibliography, which appears at the end of your paper.

It is *not* sufficient merely to include the cited work in the bibliography. The quotation in your paper must be accompanied by a citation as described.

When not to quote: “Commonly known facts, available in numerous sources, should not be enclosed in quotation marks or given a source citation unless the wording is taken directly from another.” (*Chicago Manual of Style*, 13<sup>th</sup> edition, p.282.) If the wording *is* taken from another source, you must include the quoted words in inverted commas.

Citations should also appear when you refer to the work of others without direct quotation.

Example:

... In their model of commodity prices, Deaton and Laroque (1992) postulate the existence of a single threshold price, above which stocks of the commodity have been driven to zero. ...

In this example, the citation *Deaton and Laroque (1992)* alerts the reader to the source of the work being discussed.

The *bibliography* is a list of references that appears at the end of your paper or project. The following information should always be included: *author*, *date* of publication; *title* of the work. For a book you should also include the *edition*, *place* of publication and *publisher*. For an article you should include the journal or book in which the article appears as well as page numbers and, if possible, the volume number.

For unpublished works, you will have to use your discretion but always make clear the origin of the work (i.e. from where it can be obtained). List the references in alphabetical order by author.

### Examples:

Brittan, S. (2002) “The rules need fixing, but greed can be good”, Financial Times, 04/07/02. URL: <[http://www.samuelbrittan.co.uk/text118\\_p.html](http://www.samuelbrittan.co.uk/text118_p.html)> (accessed on 27 November 2008)

Krugman, P. (1999) “Thinking about the Liquidity Trap” (unpublished) December 1999 URL: <<http://www.wws.princeton.edu/~pkrugman/trioshrt.html>> (accessed on 19 January 2010)

Notice that the Brittan (2002) and Krugman (1999) references are to internet resources. In this case it is conventional to provide the URL (i.e. the address) between angle brackets, < >, and also the most recent date on which you accessed that URL.

You do have discretion in terms of how you present your citations and bibliography. That is, you are not required rigidly to adhere to the style outlined above. But remember: *you will lose marks for sloppiness*. If in doubt, adopt the format outlined above.

You may come across non-standard cases which do not fit into the above categories, in which case try to *be as systematic as you can*. For instance, if there is no author such as for a newspaper article, give the reference by title. Example:

*The Economist* (2000), “The ECB heads for turbulence”, January 29, 2000, pp. 105–6.

### Two important rules:

For every citation, there must be exactly one reference in the bibliography.

For every reference in the bibliography, there must be at least one citation. *Never* include references in the bibliography that are not cited in your paper. Why not? Because the reader is left puzzling about the role and significance of such references in your paper.

It is bad style to string together long quotations. Use quotations to support your argument not as a substitute for it. Examiners interpret long quotations as a sign of laziness. You will not be accused of plagiarism — so long as the quotations are in inverted commas and properly cited. But the paper will be penalised with a lower mark than otherwise.

If you have used one or more primary data sources then it is useful to provide the source and the definition of the variables (with methods of derivation where appropriate) in an appendix at the end of the paper.