

The Global Firm

Department of Economics
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Research Paper Guideline

(revised on Feb. 16, 2011)

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A General Note

The term paper is an individual work written in English, and the main objective is to train students to do independent research work, most preferably on a topic with empirical relevance. Students are expected to conduct the analysis entirely on their own, and the research paper must contain original work, i.e., it has never been submitted in any other venue in whole or part by the student or anyone else. The student may not work with anyone else on the paper and may not use any other student's paper as a model, reference, or template.

How to find a topic

Finding a good research topic is believed to be the more difficult part of research process. The bottomline is that your topic should be at least interesting to yourself. Writing with interest and passion is the first step toward success. Some tips may help you:

Read broadly. The more broadly you read, the more likely you will encounter a topic that is highly interesting to you. For economics major, you are advised to read at least from one of the following sources on a regular basis: *Wall Street Journal*, *Economist Magazine*, *BusinessWeek* and *NY Times*.

Learn to think critically. Most of the ideas come about surprisingly while you are reading. Sometimes a smart commentary, sometimes a background analytical report, or even a piece of news will trigger chained reactions in your brain. Don't let the moment pass by. Think, and think beyond. Don't be bound what we taught you, nor by the textbook.

Remember to write down your idea. Whenever you have a good idea, no matter how small and how immature it may be, write it down, and save it. This is very important. Take out a piece of paper, use one or two sentences, the shorter the better. Or you can type down all your ideas in a *Word* document. You can name it something like "research ideas". Later, when you check your "idea box", you will be amazed to find out how many brilliant ideas you once had. Lack of ideas will never be a problem. Not any more.

How to write a research prospectus

The purpose of the prospectus is to decide what you want to write about. A "prospectus" is a statement outlining the main features of the paper that you intend to write. It should be approximately 1-page long.

We want you to write this so we can provide feedback on your planned paper early in the process of writing it. Here's how you should proceed:

1. Decide on a topic that interests you and that is about some aspects about MNEs. If you have any questions about the assignment, you are welcome to come talk to us. Then see what information you can find on that topic. Find out where you can look for references in your department, the library, and other sources that are appropriate for your topic.
2. Identify your topic and several questions you would like to answer in your paper. What interests you about this particular topic? The more specific you can be, the better.
3. Indicate what you already know, especially if your previous background helped you define a topic of particular interest. Do you know where to look for references or data?
4. What sources do you think will be the most promising to start with? Remember, you are not doing the research for the final paper yet; you are learning where you can find the material to do the research. If you can, list alternate sources so you can use them if your most promising sources turn out not to be as promising as you thought, or if you need more.

You should be flexible in your ideas, because as you learn more about the topic, you will probably want to modify the focus to reflect your new knowledge. But you should have a reasonably good idea about what you want to write. This will help you focus your research.

As always, if you have questions, please come and see us, or send us email. We will do our best to get you off to a good start!

=>For **more writing tips** on a research prospectus, please refer to [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Where to find references

Once you have found a topic, next step you need to find out what has been written on this topic before, or, sometimes you simply want know what other smart people have said on this issue.

To find references in economics, a very good source is **EconLit**, a database specialized in finding economics literature. To get quick access to EconLit at CBS, follow this [link](#). You will be asked for CBS authorization if you were not on an authorized computer already.

You can search the database by typing in keywords, and search in abstract, title, author and so on. From the search results, you can read the abstract of the article, a quick way to screen out the articles that are not related to your topic. If you find an article that matches your interest, and you also find a link that says either "PDF full text", or "Linked full text", that means you can read or download the article immediately.

In the case where CBS does not have full access to the article (very rare these days though), you may consider using **ILL service**. ILL stands for Inter-Library Loan. Go to [this page](#), submit your request, and wait for *about two weeks*, your article or book will be fetched for you from other universities in Denmark or even from foreign countries. If it's a journal article or certain chapters of a book, you may be provided a link to the scanned image; if it's a book, you need to go to library to fetch it.

More tips:

- > Quick way to pin down a list of papers to read
- Most likely you will find too much information on your topic. The

question then is how to narrow it down. The most efficient way is to start from an article that was recently published on a prestigious peer-reviewed journal. Usually in this paper's reference list and literature review section, you will find the most relevant papers.

> Start early

Since getting ready all the references takes time, it's your best interest to start the process early. After you have submitted your research proposal, you are advised to write out a sketch (not even a draft yet) first and then expand from it. It'll be much easier if you write progressively. The worst scenario is that you burn the night before the deadline and work out a paper in a rush and nobody wants to read it.

> Don't think too much, just write

Some students set a very high standard for themselves. They read, read and read, but always hesitate to start writing. They are worried they did not read enough --- This is a common problem for A-level students. Remember, always have a draft first, then improve on it. Your first version is never going to be perfect, anyway.

Where to find data

You can go to [economics resources](#) at my homepage, look under "data & statistics". Google is another good choice. For special data source and their availability, you may want to consult me first.

How to cite

I treat citation very seriously. For one thing, good citation style makes your paper look professional. For the other, you show your respect for others' work and you never want to commit plagiarism. Whenever you borrow work of somebody else, you are obliged to cite. So your paper should be written with established citation style. The link below gives you a guideline:

[Chicago-style citation quick guide](#)

Also, avoid excessive direct quotation, even if you cite. Be original in your own writing, cite other's work to support your argument, not to fill the space.

Avoid plagiarism

It's very important not to plagiarize others' work. CBS, like every other academic institutions, treats plagiarism very seriously. In some cases, plagiarism will result in expulsion from the school. Check out [this CBS webpage](#) for more details.

Most of your paper should be written in your own words. You should use direct quotations only when there is something significant about the wording that is used by your source. Direct quotations must be enclosed in quotation marks or they must be indented and single spaced. Otherwise, you should rephrase everything in your own words and maintain a consistent writing style.

Avoid the temptation to copy and paste large chunks of material from the Internet. Remember, if you find information on the Internet, I can find it again just as easily.

Here is [another simple guideline](#) on how to avoid plagiarism. If you are not sure what is the right way to cite, read this: [How to cite](#).

How the paper will be graded

A good term paper is a combination of the following:

>Good application of the course materials

The topic should be related to the course. And you're expected to apply the theories and analytical framework learned in class.

>Ask the right question and stay focused

A common mistake in writing is: ask one question at the beginning and say something else at the end. While you are writing, make sure every paragraph and every statistics is used to answer the question or support your argument. Do not write down anything irrelevant just to fill the space.

>Critical thinking

A boring paper would be a simple summary of what others have said before, or describe plainly without analysis. Feel free to criticize and elaborate your idea with solid logic reasoning and rigorous statistical and econometric support. Learn to use counterfactuals. And be willing to challenge "conventional wisdom".

>Professional writing style

At the minimum level, professional writing style includes writing concisely with a professional layout and citation, and free of grammar and spelling mistakes. You will be given extra points if you write elegantly. If you are not sure about what a professional economics paper looks like, follow the [American Economic Association Style Guide](#), which is based on the [Chicago Manual of Style](#). Or you can find a paper in *Journal of Political Economy* or *Journal of Economic Perspective*, and see how professional economists have done their writing. Students will find it extremely helpful in their later career if they stick to the professional writing style right from the beginning.

The usual layout starts with an introduction, in which you introduce your question, motivation, and summarize your findings. The last part of introduction usually states the organization of your paper. This is generally followed by a section called literature review, where you review the seminal works related to your topic. Then it's the main body of your research. Finally, all paper should have a conclusion section, in which you recap what you have done or point out future research. To make your paper look better, I also recommend you include a coverage (see an [example here](#)).

There is nothing more boring than a paper that provides a long parade of facts without any interpretation. *Include your own analysis* of the information, explaining its significance. Again, be sure to include a clear statement of your own conclusions. Read [Elements of Style by William Strunk](#) to learn a wealth of other information on good writing, including maintenance of parallel structure, maintenance of active voice, and elimination of needless words.

For this course, you don't have to work out your own model. But you are encouraged to use data and statistics to support your argument in the analytical section.

Remember, **this paper is limited to around 10 pages**, excluding cover page, graphs, tables and references. For relative length of each section, follow this guideline: introduction 1-1.5 pages; literature review 1-2 pages; analysis 4-6 pages; conclusion 0.5 page.

When I grade, I will roughly use the weight below:

- Application of the course materials (20%)

- Critical thinking and analysis (50%)
- Presentation and writing style (incl. citation and language) (30%)