

# Writing in Economics: Lessons Learned

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# Writing As Thinking: Why Writing Is Still A Critical Skill In Business

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Forbes Business Council **COUNCIL POST** | Membership (fee-based)

**Small Business**

*Gregory P. Crawford is President of [Miami University](#) of Ohio.*

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# Does writing look like this?

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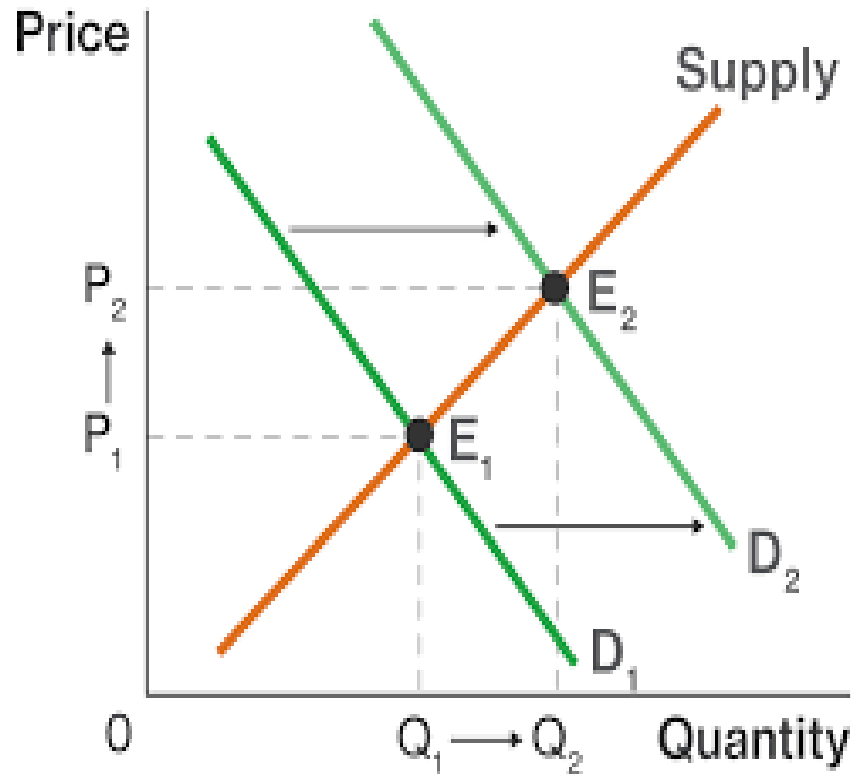




Should faculty spend their time like this?

Economists already teach  
students how to communicate  
in written form!

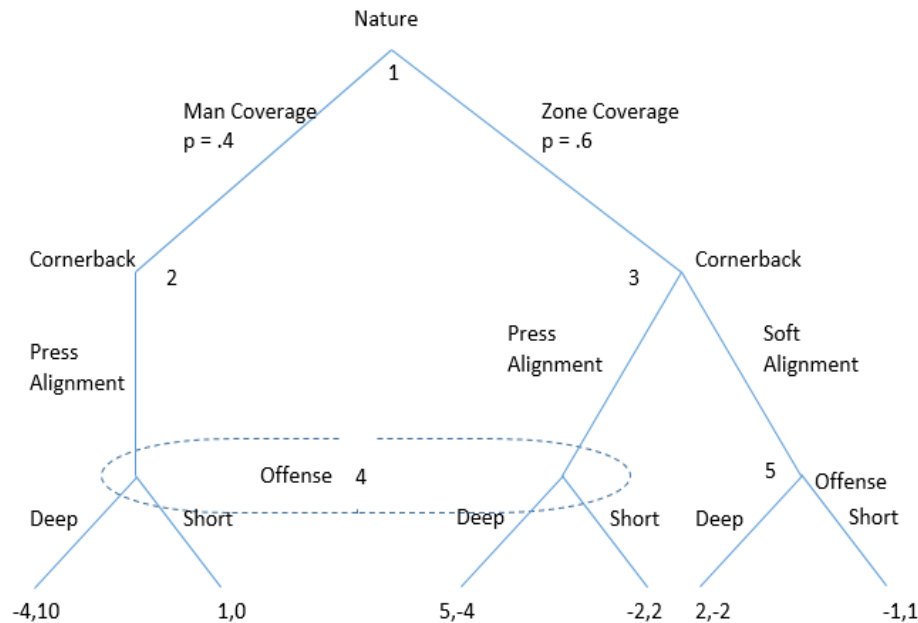
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What does this say? What is the “grammar”? Who might be the audience? What are the stylistic elements?

# Forms of Writing in Economics

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Students analyze data and construct figures/tables in many economics classes

Greater emphasis in class on how economists properly use these tools to communicate their findings

Table 1. Summary Statistics by Sex for Analysis of Determinants of Number of Children. (Sample size =446,480)<sup>a</sup>

Variable	Mean for Single People	Mean for Married People	t-statistics for equality (p-value in parentheses)
Number of children <sup>b</sup>	0.57	1.40	233.31 (0.000)
Age	28.33	30.17	155.98 (0.000)
Etc... for all the other controls			

<sup>a</sup> Sample is drawn from 2014 American Community Survey and restricted to people aged 21-35. Excludes people living in group quarters.

<sup>b</sup> Number of children represents number of own children living in same household.



# Econ 311 Empirical Project:

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## Using Econometrics to Help College Application

- Goal: Suggest a list of schools for a younger sister
- Conduct empirical analysis of college application data
- Present and interpret results in a letter to family

Econ 315:

## Problem Set 4: Cost minimization and a tiny bit of cost curves

Please turn in one **clearly written** set of solutions per group and include the names of all team members. Show your answers **and your methodology**. Due Monday 4/3.

1. **Explain why**, at an interior optimal solution to the firm's cost-minimization problem, the additional output that the firm gets from a dollar spent on labor equals the additional output from a dollar spent on capital. **Why** would this condition not necessarily hold at a corner point optimal solution?

**True/False and explain your answer for each underlined statement.**

**Remember, an explanation requires evidence supporting your claim!**

**This usually takes the form of economic logic explained in words, or a mathematical argument. Each is worth 8 points (total of 24 points).**

1) Pizza is a normal good. The Hicksian demand curve for pizza is more steep than the Walrasian demand curve for pizza. (A graph with price of pizza on the y-axis and quantity demanded of pizza on the x-axis.)

# Writing in Large Classes

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We have created relatively short (200-500 words) assignments to incorporate writing in larger sections

Principles of Macroeconomics class:

- Monthly Forecasting Game: predict major macro variables and provide rationale for forecasts
- Online discussion forums such as Packback

International Economic Relations class:


- Country Report Project: a series of scaffolded writing activity

# Writing in Large Classes

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## Should there be a price ceiling on Ubers in the United States?

In 2016 India passed legislation regulating how much ride-share companies such as Uber and Lyft can charge during peak hours. according to an article in Forbes magazine "Price ceilings on Uber fares will create shortages of available drivers, longer wait times and deadweight loss," my question is would the same thing happen in the United States if they imposed similar legislation or would it help consumers from overpaying of what often times can be double or more of a normal ride during these peak times.

 Source: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonhartley/2016/05/31/indias-price-ceiling-on-uber-rides-hurts-riders-drivers-and-the-economy/#75fc008b2e0e>  
(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonhartley/2016/05/31/indias-price-ceiling-on-uber-rides-hurts-riders-drivers-and-the-economy/#75fc008b2e0e>)

# More Explicit Instructions

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We have also developed short, in-class activities to address common issues related to student writing

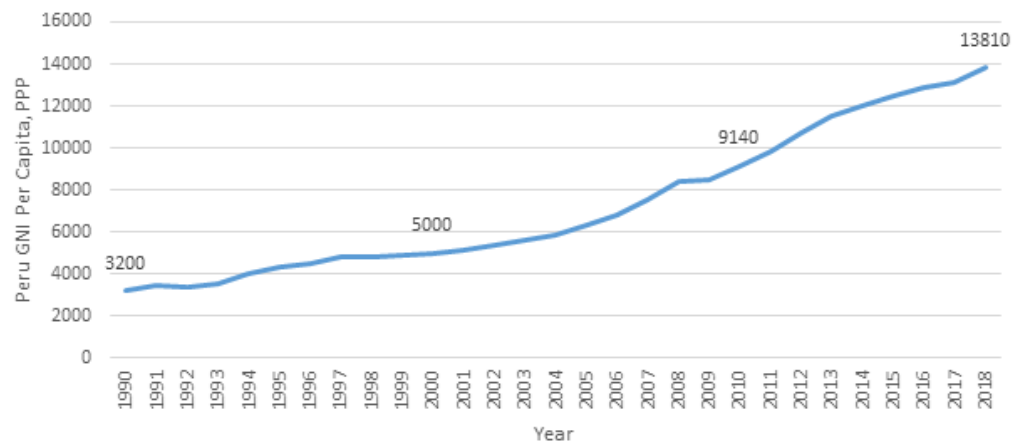
Audience awareness:

- In assignment instructions, describe the intended audience and the motivation for the writing assignment
- “The implied audience for the memo is the U.S. ambassador to that country. Remember that the ambassador is busy so it is your job to provide just enough, and never too much information. The communication should be concise, easy to read, and clearly convey your point. More detail on how to write a business memo is at <http://www.fsb.miamioh.edu/fsb/content/programs/howe-writing-initiative/HWI-handout-memo.html>.”

Exercises on plagiarism, citations, and writing an abstract

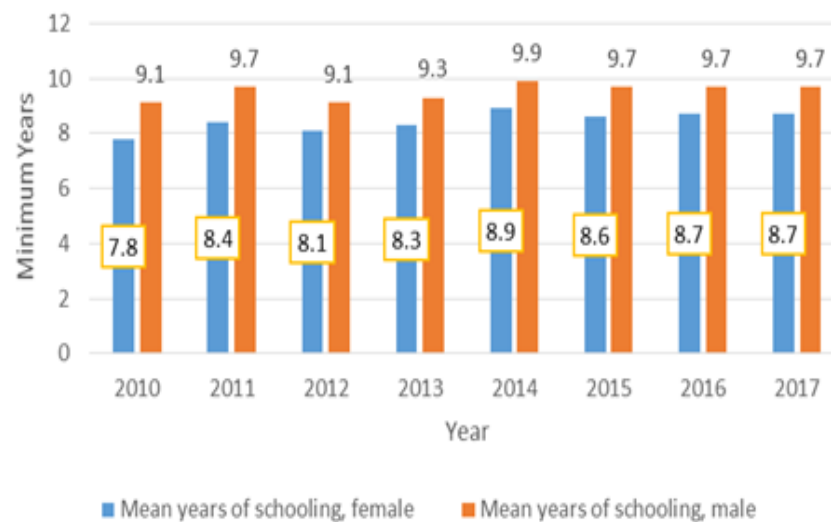
In the assignments I often ask you to describe. Economists tend to describe by using graphs and tables. As you are learning the field of economics, I want you to follow this convention. Of course your graphs and tables must be correct, clearly labeled, your source data must be cited in a way the reader can easily find it, and they must be original. Excellent graphs and tables will clearly communicate to the reader without making the reader work too hard to understand your point. The objective is not to demonstrate to the instructor that you found the requested data - I'm assuming you did that - rather to make a clear point with that data.

Peru GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$)



Source: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/peru>

Mean years of schooling



Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/data>



## Key takeaways:

1. Clear writing is clear thinking - we can use what is known about how to teach writing to teach thinking
1. Often we expect students to write like an economist without explicitly teaching it (expressing growth as an annual rate)
1. Elements of good writing instruction are simply elements of good instruction (focus on audience, provide opportunities to practice and receive feedback, model conventions)
1. Economists have conventions that are different from other disciplines (use of evidence, for example)