
⌘ Harvard University • Economics 980b Junior Seminar ⌘
EDUCATION IN THE ECONOMY

The Ec980b “Comments” Requirement

The syllabus states that one of the requirements is: “Write and post comments (about two pages) on the course readings (these will be assigned). About half of the weeks will have starred (*) readings for the prepared comments. There will also be posted questions on *Pages* for preparation but no submission. Written comments must be posted by 3pm EDT the Sunday before class. All students will be responsible for reading the articles and the posted comments. The other weeks will have posted questions.”

What exactly is a “comment” on an article that has been published?

There are various ways to write comments on an article. Just because a paper was published doesn’t mean that one can’t comment on it – critically or favorably or both.

Most often, you will begin by summarizing what the paper is about, what it is trying to address, and the question it attempts to answer. That can take a paragraph or more.

You should then comment on whether the author succeeded and why. Finally, you can comment on what you think the author should have done, could have done, did wrong, and so forth. That is critical commentary. Sometimes a paper will not merit criticism because it is mainly descriptive.

We said around two pages because we don’t want you to rewrite the paper. But we do want you to think critically and seriously about it. Should it be single spaced, double spaced, on paper the size of a postage stamp, etc.? Do what you have to do to make it a helpful comment. We generally mean two double-spaced (or 1.5 spaced or 1.15 spaced with two spaces between paragraphs) pages, in 12-point type, with 1 inch margins. But, just do what has to be done to make the convincing and forceful points you want to make.

We will grade it on a three-part scale (with a bit of shading): Exceptional, Good, Try Again. Those in the “Try Again” group (and there will be very few), will have another chance.