
∞ Harvard University • Economics 980x Junior Seminar ∞
PERSONAL ECONOMICS

Fall 2019 • Monday 12:45 to 2:45pm • Littauer M-15

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The Ec980x “Comments” Requirement

The syllabus states that one of the requirements is: “Short assignments: Write and post comments (about three pages) on two of the assigned readings. About half of the weeks will have a starred (*) reading for the prepared comments.” It also notes that these must be posted by 3pm on the Sunday before the date of the reading. They will be posted on the “Discussions” page according to the instructions given. All students are to read the comments posted by other students in advance of the class.

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

There are various ways to write comments on a paper. These are like “referee comments” that we academics write on other people’s papers for a journal. Just because a paper was published doesn’t mean that one can’t comment on it – critically or positively or both.

Most often, you will begin by summarizing what the paper is about, what it is trying to address, and the question is attempts to answer. That can take one 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 such criticism and sometimes it will be most of the comment. Sometimes the paper will just merit comments on using the findings, what we could call “an extension.”

We said around 2-3 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 2-3 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, heck, just do what has to be done.

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