

Final Project Assignment
17.871
Spring 2012

Assignment summary

You will make two oral presentations, of 15 minutes in length, and turn in a final research paper, 15–20 pages long.

Presentations

General considerations. Both presentations will be limited to fifteen minutes, followed by five minutes of response from me and others in the class. We will therefore start on time (at 5 minutes past the hour) and I will cut you off when 15 minutes have elapsed, *precisely*. Fifteen minutes go faster than you imagine. The best presentations will be those that have been practiced beforehand. Remember: you will be graded on the quality of your presentations. (Indeed, you will be graded more on the presentation itself than on whether you actually found anything interesting in your research.)

If you have PowerPoint slides to aid in your presentation, e-mail them to me at least an hour before the class meeting.

When you are not presenting, you are participating by listening and giving feedback. You must be present for all the presentation sessions.

First presentation. The first presentation should inform us of your subject, how you intend to pursue it, the data you plan to use, and any special problems you think you will encounter.

Inform us of your subject: What is the substantive issue you intend to pursue? What is *the key* puzzle or question you wish to address. To whom would the issue be of interest? Have others researched this area before? If so, what have they found?

How do you intend to pursue the subject: What are your major dependent variables (focus on one or two). What are your major independent variables? What “unit of analysis” will you be studying? (That is, will you be studying individuals, counties, countries, etc.?) Will this be a time series analysis? Cross-sectional? A combination?

Your data: What would the ideal data be to do this project? If you can’t get your ideal data, what data *can* you get your hands on? Tell us actual sources. It would also be good at this point to report descriptive statistics of your data set, graphs that show simple, basic relationships, etc.

Special problems. Perhaps there’s a crucial variable that will be difficult or impossible to measure directly, or some regression assumption will be violated. Quantitative analysis is rarely straightforward, so tell us any wrinkles you’ve encountered thus far, or anticipate encountering over the next month.

Second presentation. The second presentation should summarize the basics of your first presentation and then report your findings. The summary of the first presentation should be very brief, focusing on reminding us of the subject you are pursuing, your basic approach, and the source(s) of your data. Your findings should be reported in much the way we learned data analysis in this subject. First, present your data. Identify the variables in your analysis: how are they measured, what are their means and dispersions? Second, present the most important bivariate relationships. This may be done either with a correlation matrix or with a series of well thought-out graphs. Third, present your multivariate analysis. Draw to our attention the core results and whether they confirm or disconfirm your original conjectures. Discuss any cases that appear to be poorly described by your analysis and what might be done to correct this. Fourth, tell us what you conclude about your subject from the analysis you've done.

Research paper

The logic of exposition in your research paper should roughly parallel the second presentation. The one section you should add at the beginning of the paper that you won't want to talk too much about in the second presentation is a discussion of previous research. While you don't have to do a comprehensive search of the literature, you need to do a little library work to see if anyone has written about your topic before and (if they did) what they found. Don't worry if you've found that someone has previously done something identical to your project. Replication of others' results is an important part of normal science.

Journal articles in political science (which is the model your write-up should follow) often follow this outline:

- I. Introduction
- II. Literature review
- III. Data
- IV. Model specification (i.e., what are the variables and how are they measured?)
- V. Results
 - A. Preliminary results (simple relationships and a first cut at multivariate analysis)
 - B. Sensitivity analysis and other searches for anomalies
 - C. Re-estimation; further analysis
- VI. Discussion of results from a substantive perspective
- VII. Conclusion

The first page (after the title page) must have an abstract of no more than 250 words that summarizes your project and findings. The abstract page must contain your name and the title of your paper.

The paper should be about 20 pages long, *including text, graphs, figures, appendices, and bibliography*. There is no hard and fast page limit for the final page. Write succinctly. Edit. Hone. Eschew verbiage. Make the text flow. If there's a particularly long, involved methodological problem that you attend to, consider moving it to an appendix and only make reference to it in the body of the paper.

Read Kate Turabian's style book (*A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*) before you write your final draft. Follow this style book for most things. In addition, the *American Political Science Review's* style sheet is the authority for special cases that pertain to political science. Look at recent editions of the *American Political Science Review* or *American Journal of Political Science* to see how tables and figures should appear.

Finally, there are some mechanical issues that you must attend to in writing this paper. (Indeed, you should always attend to these issues when writing for the social sciences.) If you do not follow these strictures, your paper will be returned to you for rewriting, possibly resulting in your receiving an *I* for the subject. When you turn in your final paper, you will need to include a check-list indicating that you have made sure it meets these criteria.

Double-space everything, except footnotes and tables.

Use footnotes, not endnotes.

Use the author-date form of citation.

Properly number the pages (page 1 is the first text page).

Include figures and tables at the end of your paper, consecutively numbered. (Include all the figures first, then the tables.) Make explicit reference to each table and figure in the body of the text.

Don't use fancy fonts.. Make sure the font size is no smaller than 10pt and no larger than 12pt. **Never** use bold face. Use underscoring or *italics* for emphasis, book titles, etc.

Use a constant 1" margin on each page.

Tables and figures should be self-explanatory.

Staple the paper in the upper left-hand corner. Don't use a report cover. (Electronic versions of papers are now preferred.)

What you will hand in

According to the regulations of the faculty, all final papers are due on the last day of this class. That means by 11:59pm. Any extensions must be approved beforehand.

To receive a grade in this class you must produce the following:

Email a copy of your paper to the TA and me. The version should be either in pdf or Microsoft Word format.

Completed checklist form. Indicate to me in the e-mail that you have met all of the mechanical criteria of the paper that are on the checklist.

Your data and the STATA code capable of reproducing the results you report. See below for further instructions about this.

If any of these elements is missing, you will receive an *I*.

How to turn in your data

For the benefit of future students in 17.871, to assist me in giving you feedback, and in the interest of scientific replication, you are required to turn in the data you use to produce the results in your paper, plus the computer code used to generate the results. Here's what you have to produce.

Data. *If you gather the data yourself*, you must make available to me the computer file of that data. You must also make available a "codebook" that identifies the variables: (1) variable name, (2) data source, (3) column location of the variable in the file, and (4) any coding rules you used to create the variable. *If you used a data set produced by someone else*, such as an ICPSR data set, you must tell me the full citation of the data set. If it is not an ICPSR data set, and it is not available through the MIT-Harvard Data Center, we will treat it like you gathered the data yourself.

STATA code. You must save the STATA code from the ".do files" that produced the results you report in your paper. Give the code a file name that corresponds with the results reported in your paper (e.g., table1.do, figure2.do).

You will then e-mail the data to me, as an attachment. If the data is too large to e-mail, let us know and we'll work out something.

17.871 Final Paper Checklist

- Double-spaced, except footnotes and tables.
- Footnotes used, not endnotes
- Author-date citation form used
- Page numbers properly used
- Proper font.
 - Either 10pt or 12pt.
 - Italics* or underline used for emphasis.
 - Bold is never used.**
 - Courier or Times/Times New Roman typeface.
- Constant 1" margin on each page
- Paper stapled in the upper left-hand corner. No report covers.
- Coefficients and other statistics in tables (like regression coefficients and standard errors) have no more than 3 significant digits.
 - No STATA output dumped into the text of the paper.

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