

Writing Papers

EC200

Part A: Presenting Results

Part B: Introductions and Conclusions

Presenting Results

EC200

Notes

- Sign up for your presentation slot by **Friday Nov 19**
 - Just one Friday slot left! Just one Wednesday slot left!
 - If you do not sign up, I'll assign you
- Assignment details now available
- Sample elements (proposal, presentation, papers, etc) in **gated resources**

Data: key subsections

- Description of the data
 - What are the source(s) (cite, include in references)?
 - What years/areas/etc are you including? (ie, what is the frame)
 - Are there any restrictions you are imposing? (age, work status, etc)
 - Did you make any additional modifications?
- Descriptive statistics
 - Table + write-up
 - What should the reader know in order to interpret your results?

State X Restaurant level data

Open for take-out	35%	sd	3,023
Rates on Yelp	47%	sd	3,023
Average Yelp rating	4.5546487757686080	sd	1,567
Mean number of employees	2.797576578068	sd	3,023
<u>urban1</u>	2		
N	3,023		
Number of states	10		

Empirical specification

See a handy template!

Results

- Table of results
 - `outreg2` to make nice results
 - You can make *beautiful* results w/ `esttab` and LaTeX. But no need to go overboard
 - Report only variables of interest
- Discussion of results
 - Discuss those variables of interest
 - Economic vs. statistical significance
- Summary of discussion
 - Separate paragraph or embedded
 - What does it all mean?

Good results, bad results

- Circle all the problems with the results
- Write a really bad sentence to interpret the results.

Good discussion bad discussion

The coefficient on treatment 1 is -0.571, and it is statistically significant

Considering $fsec_1$, the coefficient on treatment 2 is the largest and has three stars, indicating that it is the most important treatment.

Because $female = -0.0472$, being female does not affect $fsec_1$

Good discussion bad discussion

All treatments improve food security, reducing the number of days households had to reduce portion sizes at meals by 0.6 to 0.7 days per week. These individual point estimates are all statistically significant at the 1-percent level, although do not see evidence that the impacts are significantly different from each other.

Even the group livelihood treatment improves food security, and recipients reduced portion sizes at 0.6 fewer days relative to a control group mean of 2.0 days, a 30% reduction.

Or flip it, because this is confusing!

Introductions

Mr. Jowett, of Birmingham, tells of a lay preachers' conference, in which a veteran described his method of sermon preparation. "I take my text," he said, "and divide my sermon into three parts.

In the first part I tell 'em what I am going to tell 'em; in the second part—well, I tell 'em; in the third part I tell 'em what I've told 'em."

"The Three Parts of a Sermon," 1908, [*The Sunday Strand*](#)

The introduction formula

Adapted from Keith Head

1. **Hook**
2. **Question**
3. **What you do/find**
4. **Value-added**
5. ~~**Road-map**~~

Organize the paper in “triangular” or “newspaper” style, not in “joke” or “novel” style. Notice how newspapers start with the most important part, then fill in background later for the readers who kept going and want more details. A good joke or a mystery novel has a long windup to the final punchline. Don’t write papers like that — **put the punchline right up front and then slowly explain the joke**. Readers don’t stick around to find the punchline in Table 12

- John Cochrane, “Writing tips for Ph.D. students”

The introduction formula

Adapted from Keith Head

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Hook | 1–2 paragraphs |
| 2. Question | 1 paragraph |
| 3. What you do/find | 2–3 paragraphs |
| 4. Value-added | 1 paragraph |
| 5. Road-map | |

Hook

- **Y matters:** When Y rises or falls, people are hurt or helped.
- **Y is puzzling:** it defies easy explanation.
- **Y is controversial:** some argue one thing while other say another.
- **Y is big** (like the service sector) **or common** (like traffic jams).

Things to avoid

- *The bait and switch:* promising an interesting topic but delivering something else, in particular, something boring.
- *“all my friends are doing it”* : presenting no other motivation for a topic than that other people have written papers on it.

The first sentence is the hardest. Do not start with philosophy, “Financial economists have long wondered if markets are efficient.” Do not start with “The finance literature has long been interested in x.” Your paper must be interesting on its own, and not just because lots of other people wasted space on the subject. Do not start with a long motivation of how important the issue is to public policy. All of this is known to writers as “clearing your throat.” It’s a waste of space. Start with your central contribution.

- John Cochrane, “Writing tips for Ph.D. students

If you’ve caught yourself being a throat clearer, check:
What if you delete your first sentence?

Question

- “I focus on a particular dimension of diversity (economic status) and **seek to answer the following question**: what effects do peers from poor households have on students from relatively wealthy families?” ([Rao](#) in AER)
- “This **paper asks** whether elite colleges help students outside of historically advantaged groups reach top positions in the economy.” ([Zimmerman](#) in AER)
- “In this paper, **we study the impact** of a novel community health delivery program.” ([Björkman Nyqvist et al.](#) in AEJ: Applied)
- “This paper **investigates how working alongside friends** affects employee productivity and whether this effect varies as a function of a worker’s personality skills.” ([Park](#) in AEJ: Applied)

[How to write an introduction to a development economics paper \(Evans\)](#)

What you do/find

State your approach

“We compare individuals and firms in locations in Africa that are on the terrestrial network of Internet cables to those that are not. We compare these two groups during the gradual arrival on the coast of submarine cables from Europe that greatly increase speed and capacity on the terrestrial network.” ([Hjort and Poulsen](#) in AER)

State what you find

Value added

The value added is what your paper contributes above and beyond the existing literature. You probably didn't invent this topic of study (good for you if you did!), so it's important to position your work relative to previous evidence.

— Dave Evans

Road map

Conventionally popular, but for our class, **skip**

“Still another piece of boilerplate, and one that kills the momentum of most papers on the second page, is the table-of-contents paragraph... Too many editors and referees demand it. Don't, please ... don't. Ninety-nine out of a hundred readers skip to the substance, if they can find it. The one out of a hundred who pauses on the paragraph is wasting her time.”

- Deirdre McCloskey, *Economical Writing*

Conclusion

Let's listen to [Marc Bellamare](#)

1. Summary of results

- Same ideas, though written differently from abstract/intro

2. Limitations

- If you already discussed in a results subsection, just summarize

3. Implications for policy

4. Implications for future research

Oh god, another one?

Abstract

Having chosen a good title and having written a good introduction, the task of writing your abstract should be relatively easy. Typically, it is possible to write a solid draft of your abstract by keeping **only the first sentence of the hook, research question, and value-added sections of your introduction**, and by polishing up the resulting paragraph some.

—Marc Bellemare, “How to write applied papers in economics”