

Microeconomic Op-Ed Writing Assignment

(15% of course grade – 90 marks)

PURPOSE

One goal of this course is to help you understand and apply basic economic concepts to daily life. Part of your role as an informed citizen involves making sound arguments about economic issues that matter to you and communicating these arguments effectively to others. This assignment will give you practice developing a convincing written argument about an economic issue for a general audience.

TASKS

1. On Blackboard under Writing Assignments, Watch the video *How to (Re-)Write an Op-Ed*, which builds on the videos you should have watched already — *How To Read Critically* and *How to (Re-)Write an Abstract*.
2. Your assignment is to write an Op-Ed, which refers to the section of a print newspaper that is opposite the editorial page and devoted to opinion and commentary rather than straight news.
3. Choose an article, editorial or opinion piece in a recent (**published since 1 September 2017**) online publication that involves a controversial **microeconomic** issue that interests you. [You may NOT use any article discussed in lectures or *Economics Out There*.] The economic issue can be Canadian or international.
4. In response, **write your own commentary in which you take a position on the issue, supporting your position by making an argument based on sound economic reasoning.**
 - Complete the Draft/Revise/Edit stages for your Op-Ed (see *How To (Re-)Write an Op-Ed*) and submit your Draft 4 to peerScholar on Blackboard by the 1st Deadline.
 - Provide feedback to classmates about their Op-Eds by the 2nd Deadline.
 - Incorporate your classmates' feedback and submit a final draft on Blackboard to both turnitin and peerScholar. On peerScholar, also include your reflection on what you learned from the writing and assessment process. Submit all by the 3rd Deadline.

FORMAT

- Your commentary must be **300-500 words** or you will lose marks.
- Include right after your Op-Ed a word count (not including title) in parentheses, e.g. "(490 words)."
- Submit your Op-Ed to peerScholar on Blackboard by copying and pasting into a text box.

DUE DATES & SUBMISSION STEPS

- 1) 1st Deadline — **20 January 2018 (Saturday)** — The first submission of your Op-Ed to peerScholar on Blackboard for ECO105Y. Your draft must be complete and written in full sentences. **You will lose marks for submitting an outline or point form draft. No pictures or graphs can be included.** All words.

Copy and paste your draft into the text box in the CREATE step, including: 1) Your Title; 2) Your Op-Ed (with word count- excluding title - in parentheses at end); 3) Leave some space; 4) Put in some cut-and-paste form of the **original article**. This could be just a URL, or text from the article. If the original article is a print-only source, provide a complete reference. When in doubt, include more original article material rather than less. Save a copy of your draft.

If you submit by this deadline, you are eligible to earn up to 15 marks for assessing your peers' Op-Ed assignments. **If you miss this deadline, you will miss the assessments in 2) and so lose the 15 marks** for assessments. You also lose the benefit of getting feedback from classmates that might improve your final draft. Without feedback from classmates you also lose on the Reflection — the highest grade you can get on the Reflection is 6 marks instead of 9.

- 2) 2nd Deadline — **27 January 2018 (Saturday)** — Submit three assessments of your fellow students' abstracts in peerScholar. For each, give: a Rating (out of 5 stars); List 1 thing done well; List 1 thing needing improvement; an Overall Rating paragraph. You can also comment on specific sections of your peer's assignment using the Highlight and Comment feature. **Address your suggestions to the writer**, not to the Professor/TA.

If you submit by this deadline, you receive a **maximum of 15 marks**, according to this grading **Rubric for Assessment**

15	Strengths and weaknesses for each assigned paper, with specifics
10	Fair attempt but weak, lacking specifics
5	No real effort
0	Missed 20 January 2018 deadline, or did not attempt assessments

- 3) 3rd Deadline — **3 February 2018 (Saturday)** — Your final submission and your reflection on what you learned from the writing and assessment process. Final draft must be submitted on Blackboard to both peerScholar and turnitin. If you submit by this deadline, you receive a **maximum of 66 marks** for the final draft (marked according to the rubric below) and a **maximum of 9 marks** for the reflection (6 marks if missed assessments). **If you miss this deadline, you lose all 66 marks as well as the 9 marks for reflection. Avoid this fate by at least submitting your first draft the day this submission opens, the resubmitting a final draft.**

Rubric for Reflection

9	Thoughtful and detailed, refers to peer comments, incorporated revisions
6	Fair attempt but lacking specifics — maximum if missed assessments
4	No real effort
0	No reflection

AUDIENCE

Your audience is the general reading public. Assume your audience has some education and background in current affairs and understands basic economic concepts, but is *not* knowledgeable about the details of economic theory or policy. In other words, you'll need to explain any economic concepts and specialized vocabulary in a way that keeps their interest and respects their intelligence. Your audience is **not** the professor or the TAs. You need to write more like a journalist than an academic.

WRITING STRUCTURE AND STYLE

1. You are writing for a public forum where other writers and readers can debate and comment on issues so you must present a clear, concise, and interesting argument that uses evidence to support your position
2. Choose a **catchy title** to capture your audience's attention and tell your reader what your main point is. Do this **AFTER** you've written a draft so you actually know what your point is. Read a few articles in *The Economist* to see examples of catchy titles.
3. **Make your main point early on:** introduce your issue and point of view in your first paragraph. Unlike an essay you don't need a long introduction.
4. **Organize your sentences into short paragraphs (about 3-5 sentences each): As this assignment is only 1-2 pages, you should have 3-6 paragraphs.** Do not use one-sentence paragraphs.
5. **Make clear any economic reasoning on which your argument is based.**
6. **Support each point with evidence** whether in the form of a statistic, an example, or economic reasoning.

THE ECONOMIST STYLE GUIDE

If you want additional advice on writing, see the *Style Guide of The Economist Magazine*. *The Economist* is widely recognized as the world standard for economic journalism. The complete *Style Guide* is at <http://www.economist.com/styleguide/introduction>.

[This has disappeared off *The Economist* website, but I am looking for another link.]

NEWS ARTICLE SOURCES

To find news articles to comment on, try the following sources. Other sources are also acceptable.

Globe and Mail Report on Business

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/>

Financial Post

<http://www.financialpost.com/index.html>

Toronto Star Business

<http://www.thestar.com/business>

CBC News

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/>

Economist Magazine

<http://www.economist.com/>

You can access The Economist through Robarts Library at <http://go.utlib.ca/cat/7704354> . Click on any link beside the word “Web” to browse by issues, or use the search box to find a specific topic.

OP-ED SOURCES

For other examples of commentaries you might use as models for your own commentary, or use as articles to comment on, try the following sources.

Globe and Mail

Report on Business Commentary

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/commentary/>

The Star Opinion Pages

<http://www.thestar.com/opinion>

Financial Post Opinion FPCOMMENT

<http://business.financialpost.com/category/opinion>

Wall Street Journal

The best source for conservative (hands-off) opinions on economic issues, but you must pay for access.

<http://online.wsj.com/home-page>

New York Times Economix Blog

<https://www.nytimes.com/section/opinion>

Look for the economics articles.

EVALUATION

The final draft of your op-ed will be evaluated on how well you make reasoned economic arguments and write clearly, convincingly, correctly, and concisely. In addition, your participation in the peer assessment and reflection processes is worth 24 of the 90 marks, based on the rubrics above for assessment and reflection.

Here is a sample rubric that will be used in marking your final draft, worth 66 marks. A 0 – 100% scale is rarely used for writing assignments, as it is impossible to discriminate that finely between papers. Letter grades are more commonly used.

Since we have to integrate the score on this assignment with your other numerical scores, your grade will be based on the marks you earn in each category of the rubric below. You will receive a numerical mark (for Excellent, Good, Competent, Problematic) in each of the four categories, which will be added to get a score out of 66 marks. For example, if you get the top (Excellent) score in each category, your score will be $(13+27+14+7 =) 61/66 = 92\%$. If you get the second (Good) score in each category, your score will be $(11+22+12+6 =) 51/66 = 77\%$. With the lowest score in each category, your score will be $(7+12+8+4 =) 32/66 = 47\%$.

	Excellent	Good	Competent	Problematic	Pts
Title, Intro, Audience, Background Information	<p>13 Title/intro get reader's attention.</p> <p>Aimed at appropriate audience.</p> <p>Right amount of background information.</p>	<p>11 Clear title/intro, but could be more interesting.</p> <p>Mostly aimed at appropriate audience.</p> <p>Some background information.</p>	<p>9 Boring title and/or too long/short intro.</p> <p>Appropriate audience questionable.</p> <p>Minimal or excessive background information.</p>	<p>7 Unsatisfactory or missing title and/or intro.</p> <p>Wrong audience.</p> <p>Missing relevant background information.</p>	14
Economic Argument, Reasoning, Counter-argument, Evidence	<p>27 Clearly stated argument, use of economic reasoning.</p> <p>Presents and effectively refutes counterargument.</p> <p>Reader convinced by at 1-2 solid reasons or examples.</p>	<p>22 Fairly clear, convincing argument. Adequate use of economic reasoning.</p> <p>Adequate use of counter-argument and refutation.</p> <p>1-2 reasons or examples, although may leave questions for reader.</p>	<p>17 Somewhat confusing argument. Weak in applying economic reasoning.</p> <p>Missing counter-argument or refutation.</p> <p>Weak or no supporting reasons or examples. Reader left confused.</p>	<p>12 No clear argument. Confused/no use of economic reasoning.</p> <p>Confused/no use counter-arguments.</p> <p>Poor quality and few, if any, supporting reasons or examples. Reader unconvinced and/or put off.</p>	29
Structure, Closing	<p>14 Logical order of ideas. Excellent paragraph structure (very clear topic sentence & 1 main idea per paragraph).</p> <p>Closing gives a clear and convincing call to action.</p>	<p>12 Mostly logical order of ideas. Good paragraph structure (fairly clear topic sentence & mostly 1 main idea per paragraph).</p> <p>Closing gives a fairly clear and convincing call to action.</p>	<p>10 Somewhat logical order of ideas. OK paragraph structure (topic sentence and attempt to structure each paragraph focused on 1 main idea).</p> <p>Closing gives a call to action, although not well supported.</p>	<p>8 Confusing order of ideas. Illogical or inconsistent paragraph structure (confusing or missing topic sentences and paragraphs no clear focus).</p> <p>No clear or convincing call to action at close.</p>	15
Quality of Writing [minus 2 from any score for not meeting word count]	<p>7 Pleasure to read. Writing enhances understanding and interest.</p> <p>Clear, correct, concise sentences with active voice.</p> <p>Very few errors and none that impede meaning.</p>	<p>6 Mostly easy to read.</p> <p>Mostly clear, correct, concise sentences with active voice.</p> <p>A few errors that slightly impede meaning, if at all.</p>	<p>5 Some problems with clarity, concision, and correctness at the sentence level.</p> <p>Some passive voice and/or jargon.</p> <p>Some errors that impede meaning.</p>	<p>4 Many problems with clarity, concision, and correctness at the sentence level.</p> <p>Considerable passive voice and/or jargon.</p> <p>Many errors that impede meaning.</p>	8
Total					66

Rating (out of 5 stars)

Comments

List 1 thing done well:

List 1 thing needing improvement:

Overall assessment: