

How to write a (policy) paper

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General principles (Thomson 2001)

- Simplicity, clarity, unity
 - These principles are universal, but putting them into practice almost always offers several choices, and advice unavoidably reflects personal tastes.
 - Judgment is needed.
- Do not assume that if your ideas are interesting, you will be read whether or not you write well.
- Putting your results on paper is not subsidiary to producing them.
 - *Learn to write but also write to learn.*

Why write an essay?

- Convey your message efficiently.
 - To answer your/our questions.
 - Many papers lack of questions!
- “Your message” includes
 - Clarify the questions
 - Explain your logic
 - Address your conclusion/proposal
- Originality is highly evaluated...
 - Question, logic, review

Keep in mind who read your essay

- Who is your target?
 - Boss or colleagues, general public, people from other countries...
- What does your target know?
 - If your target knows the background, you could skip/shorten some explanation.
 - If your target knows nothing about your topic, you have to explain from the beginning.

Procedure

- Divide your time/effort equally among three
 1. Clarify your question
 - Make it clear what is the question, and why your question is worth investigating, not for a personal reason.
 2. Analyze your topic or question
 - Qualitatively, quantitatively, institutionally, historically...
 3. Write text
 - Revise, revise, and revise.

Clarify your question

- Once you can clarify your question, your paper is half completed.
 - Ask “why?”
- What is your question?
- Why your question is a question at all?
 - Find a gap between facts and theories
 - [e.g.] Budget deficit is a problem
 - Why is budget deficit a problem? You can raise taxes.
 - Why cannot you raise taxes?
 - Political reason, administrative reason....
 - Is that true? (maybe quantitative analysis required)

Clarify your question

- If you plan to write a paper on international comparison...
 - Why do you choose these countries?
 - What aspects do you focus on?
- If you plan to estimate some parameters, or find some quantitative facts,...
 - Why do you select these “key” parameters?
 - What are the parameters?
 - [e.g.] How much will tax revenue increase if tax rate is raised?
 - Which tax rate is appropriate?

Analyze your question

- If you define your question well, you could find the relevant arguments/discussions (“literature”)
 - What have been discussed about your topic?
 - How is the situation in other countries?
- Find data
 - What data are suitable?
 - What data are available?

Write text

- Do not forget how you reach your conclusions
 - You do not have to reproduce the process
- Procedure
 1. Literature review
 - Tell a story. Do not just list up the papers.
 2. Prepare figures, tables or flow-charts
 3. Write the body (main part)
 4. Write your conclusion
 5. Write the introduction

Figures/tables...clear and simple

- Do not make your figures or tables too complex
 - So that the readers need not refer the text
 - Do not put too much information into one figure, but put into one figure the relevant data.
 - Use distinguishable marks/symbols
 - Avoid long tables, split into shorter tables.
- Figure or table?
 - Tables: to report accurate values
 - Figures: to show a trend/tendency

Outline: before writing texts

- Before starting writing texts, make an outline to decide where each part (incl. Figures and Tables) of your paper should be put.
 - How should your paper be organized?
- [e.g.]
 1. Introduction
 2. Literature review
 3. Institutional background
 4. Theoretical analysis
 5. Empirical analysis
 6. Conclusion

Outline: example

- Bribing a fee in Indonesian value added tax refund
 1. Introduction
 2. Brief review of value added tax refund procedures
 3. Research findings
 4. Lessons from Japanese experience in tax administration
 5. Conclusion, recommendation, implication and limitation

Outline: Example

- Aging East Asia: Regional cooperation and policy responses
 1. Introduction: Population aging in East Asia
 2. Aging and economic structures
 1. Economic growth, saving, Investment and saving-investment balance
 2. Asset prices and returns
 3. Social security systems
 1. Transitions and social security systems
 2. Current situations of social security systems
 3. Implications from Japanese experience
 4. Fostering the financial sector to prepare for population aging
 1. Population aging and financial markets
 2. Theoretical Analyses and empirical evidence
 3. Financial sector in East Asia under aging population
 5. Policy responses and regional cooperation
 6. Concluding Remarks

Write the main body

- Be precise and concise
- Keep in mind the whole structure of your paper
 - Try not to include the irrelevant information
- Put in one key message in one paragraph
 - Try not to include two
 - Do not make each paragraph/sentence too long
- The first sentence is important, and difficult.
 - Start other easier parts, then back to the beginning
- Do not forget your errors
 - Your error could help you give better explanations

Write your conclusion

- A compact summary of your results
 - What you have done in your paper.
- A statement of the main lessons drawn from your analysis
 - Policy implications
- General discussion of promising directions for future work
 - Critical assumptions of your logic
 - Limitations of your data availability

Write the introduction

- Again, the first sentence is important and difficult
- State clear *what* you do, *and why* you do.
 - “Because no one has examined this topic” is not a good reason.
 - Make it clear why you have selected *that* topic among many topics that has not examined.
 - Showing what you have done is easy, but showing why you have done, or why the topic is important is not so easy.

Tips on introduction

1. The fact that you/we have seen
 - [e.g.] Budget deficit is increasing.
2. The reason why that fact is a problem
 - That's a obstacle to economic growth or improving economic welfare.
 - The gap between the fact and theories
 - [e.g.] Budget deficit may cast large burden on future generations
3. Your viewpoint
 - [e.g.] Macroeconomic viewpoint
4. The analysis that you have done
 - [e.g.] Simulation analysis based on OLG model

Revise

- Once you finish your essay, leave it for a while.
- Reread your draft after a while, you could find some errors, typos, inconsistent or confusing logics.
 - Read your own draft as if you have not seen it.
 - Do not hesitate to revise your draft.
 - It may be time-consuming, thus you should start writing text early, but not in haste.

Reference

- Thomson, William. 2001. *A Guide for the Young Economist*. MIT Press.
- Iwatsubo, Kentaro. 2006. How to write an essay in economics. Prepared for Seminar on Economic Policies, PRI, MoF.