Rules for writing papers

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This is my personal short guide to students for writing term papers. It is a simple numbered list of what to do and what not to do. An excellent, more detailed and more complete advice on economic writing, with numerous lucid examples, is D.N. McCloskey (1985), "Economical writing," Economic Inquiry: 187-220.

- The paper is typed.
- Line spacing is 1½.
- Font size is point 12 for plain text, and at least point 10 for tables and footnotes (I prefer point 11).
- Paragraphs are indented and justified, but the first line after a heading is not indented.
- Footnotes are at the bottom of a page, not at the back of the paper.
- A term paper is about 10-12 pages. It should not be longer! This includes references, tables, figures and appendices, but excludes the front page.
- There is no table of contents.
- The front page is not numbered. It contains (i) the title of the paper, (ii) the name of the author, (iii) the affiliation of the author, (iv) the date, (v) the name of the course, (vi) an abstract of at most 100 words, and (vii) acknowledgements (if any) at the bottom of the page.
- Tables in the paper are not copied, cut and pasted from other papers, but typed and structured by yourself at the appropriate place in the paper.
- Figures and diagrams are also not copied etc., but made by yourself and placed at the proper place in the paper.
- Tables, figures and diagrams are numbered and given a title.
- Use the spell checker to correct for obvious errors.
- Use the dictionary to look up the correct English translation of a word, or look up the meaning of a word if you are not sure (e.g. there is a difference between "effect" and "affect"; "rent" is not the translation of "rente"; and "economic" is not the same as "economical")
- Use active and direct language. Do not write: "The objective of this paper is to make a contribution to the discussion whether economic growth has a positive influence on welfare or not." (24 words), but write: "We investigate if economic growth positively influences welfare." (8 words).
- Use Arabic numbers for sections and subsections. Do not call them chapters (6 chapters in a 10 page paper?).
- Start by writing a 16-20 page paper. Then take some time to check carefully for
consistency in style, writing and methodology. Make sure you reduce the size of the paper to 10-12 pages. This procedure will improve your writing skills (because you will combine information from different sentences into one sentence, and you will be forced to use active language to save space). It will also force you to cut out less important details.

- Delete all unnecessary footnotes (most of the stuff you put in a footnote was not important enough to put in the main text, and is therefore probably not important enough to put in the paper; perhaps you just try to impress us with this long list of papers which you also read but turned out not to be important for the topic at hand). In short, avoid footnotes if at all possible.


- The examples in the above reference system show that we use the American methodology for names, that A. de Vaal is listed under "D" as "De Vaal, A.", not under the "V", and P.A.G. van Bergeijk is listed under "Van Bergeijk, P.A.G.", not under the "B".