

Some tips for writing essays and theses

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This document provides guidelines for writing academic texts. Writing such texts is not easy. The concrete tips in this document are motivated by experience from past supervision, so they can be very helpful and may well avoid a large number of common shortcomings to texts. They complement what you have learned on writing so far. You can also obtain some tips from reading existing articles. For example, examine a few articles from the *Journal of International Economics* and learn about how to structure a text, how to use references, how to format them, and so on. Finally, you could consult websites such as

- <http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/index.html>
- http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/john.cochrane/research/papers/phd_paper_writing.pdf

These are not strict rules, and you may even disagree with some of them and deviate from them. Still, many suggestions will help improve your writing skills and make your text more pleasant to read.

1. Introduction

- In the introduction, you should work from a general and broad description of the field in which your thesis/essay is situated towards a specific theme and thus research question. The general description intends to depict the relevant background in order to enable the reader to understand why your research question is important and interesting. If you want to discuss the resource curse for Chile after 2004, it is best to start with a short account on Chile and its strong economic growth after the 1970s for instance and then gradually narrow the focus in order to move towards the challenges that were created by the resource curse after 2004.
- Write the introduction in such a way that a fellow student in economics can understand what you want to examine and also what your method will be. That means that you should not yet confront the reader with an extensive set of technicalities that are only accessible to specialists in the field. The introduction (but also the conclusion) basically aims at convincing the reader that it is also interesting to read the body of the thesis. This requires that the introduction is accessible, clear, well-written, well-motivated and attractive.
- Work towards and mention a very concrete and unambiguous research question: “Our research question is ...” or “This paper will address the issue whether or not ...”. Try to stick to one research question and try to avoid listing five secondary research questions together with one central question. You should be able to summarise what you want to do into just one question to the benefit of the reader.
- Is your topic not too wide? Would it not be a good idea to narrow down the subject further? It is advisable to treat a narrower research question in detail rather than

ending up superficially discussing various aspects of a broader research question. An example: the research question “Why do firms engage in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)?” is very broad such that you may want to focus on one cluster of driving variables in one country, for instance “The role of Turkish public policies in attracting FDI”. In moving to such narrowed cluster, you, obviously, should make clear in your introduction that you are aware of the fact that many variables affect FDI, but that you want to focus on one particular subset of variables, namely public policies.

- Make absolutely sure that you have a clear research question. However, it is of course also vital that the analysis that follows really formulates an answer to that research question. It may therefore be useful to repeat the research question in your conclusion after which you summarise the answer that you have developed in the body of your essay/thesis.
- Also make sure that the title is related to the research question since it is unpleasant for the reader to see a title that after all is not related to the research question and the content of the thesis.
- Do not be overly confident. Making claims that you cannot and do not fulfil will inevitably yield an invitation to rewrite the essay/thesis.
- Give an overview of what is to come: “Chapter 2 will focus on Subsequently, Chapter 3 will present an analysis of ...”.

2. Audience to target (in essays, but also in theses)

- Write as if you are addressing students in economics who may not be specialists in for instance international economics but of whom you can safely assume that they have a good basis in economics. For example: it is not required to define “money”, but “Dutch disease” is perhaps a concept that should be defined. If you write on the choice between using the US dollar or the euro for a country like Cuba, it is essential that you give more information on the present role of the US dollar in Cuba since that is not common knowledge. Similarly, you should not just mention the “tequila crisis” since it is not common knowledge that this refers to the economic and currency crisis that hit Mexico in 1994-1995.
- Always make sure that you explain enough. It is easily forgotten, when working on a topic for quite some time, that outsiders do not necessarily share your increased knowledge on the topic in question. Therefore, present enough detail on your arguments and make sure that the reader is sufficiently introduced to the relevant underlying facts and concepts.
- You should never address the reader directly. Do not write “In Table 1, you see that average yearly growth between 1980 and 1990 amounted to 6%”, but write “Table 1 shows that average yearly growth between 1980 and 1990 amounted to 6%” or “From Table 1, we can infer that average yearly growth between 1980 and 1990 amounted to 6%”.

- It is very important to make sure that the structure of your text reflects its content. In this way, you guide your reader through your text from the beginning to the end, and you help him/her to understand your approach and way of developing your argument.
- Be sure that you assist the reader at all times by presenting clear arguments, based on clear definitions and within a convincing structure. Also do not forget that the reader, unlike you, has not necessarily spent many weeks in studying the topic that you cover. It is therefore essential not to skip steps in your analysis that by now are obvious to you but that for the reader are not necessarily clear (e.g. not everybody knows what NACE codes are and why they are relevant to your research design)

3. Supporting and reporting claims

- The ultimate goal of an essay and a thesis is to convey a message and convince the reader that you are able to develop a coherent argument. Hence, you should first of all make sure that you have a clear message. This requires that you have developed a clear research question, have continued by presenting a clear analysis of that research question and that the conclusion bears a close relation to the research question and the treatment thereof. Second, the message must get through. This requires that the topic is introduced clearly and that all relevant concepts are carefully defined. Subsequently, the analysis of the research question must be supported by arguments that the reader can understand, accept or reject. Your arguments should also signal to the reader that you master the subject. It then is advisable not to limit yourself to a statement like “According to Krugman, monetisation of budget deficits will lead to a speculative crisis”, but explain the reasoning “The monetisation of budget deficits in Krugman’s model will, given the fixed money supply, decrease the stock of foreign reserves. The ongoing process of erosion of the stock of foreign reserves, implies that the ability of the domestic government to defend the fixed exchange rate will gradually decrease such that market ultimately will, as clearly shown by Krugman, launch a speculative attack”. Also, avoid discussing the shortcomings of, for instance, the HIPC-initiative without first clearly introducing the nature and characteristics of this initiative.
- An overview of the literature is essential to any type of essay/thesis. However, that overview should not develop into a boring type of listing results: “Author 1 did this and found that. Author 2 did that and found this, etc.” You already here should show your analytical skills and provide an attractive structuring: “The literature in this area basically worked around four issues, namely ... Concerning issue 1 we have the papers of X (2013), Y (2012) and Z (2011) who found that Q (2012) examined issue 2 and his findings were subsequently challenged by R (2013) who instead used a co-integration analysis because”. The latter is more attractive to read and assists the reader to a much stronger degree when compared with the aforementioned listing of results. Again, you signal your analytical strength in being able to create a clear structure in your account of what the literature has found on this or that topic.
- Make sure that the text that follows the introduction is closely related to the research question since extensively discussing elements that are marginally relevant inevitably implies that you have less space for elaborating on the issues and arguments that really matter. For instance, is an extensive historical overview of China’s economic

development since 1950 really essential when the research question focuses on the macroeconomic consequences of the present Chinese current-account surpluses?

- Make sure that your essay/thesis is well-balanced. Example: writing an essay/thesis on the question whether moral hazard is present in lending by the IMF requires that you devote most of your attention to that question. Writing a paper in which the treatment of that question only covers one fifth of the paper is clearly not appropriate. Delete the elements that are only marginally relevant (is an overview of the discussions in 1943-1944 between the United Kingdom and the United States on allowing the IMF to create money really necessary for your analysis of moral hazard in IMF lending?). Keeping out marginally relevant items ensures that you have more space to argue, test, debate, criticise, etc. Needless to say that the final mark for the essay/thesis ultimately depends on the quality of your argument on the research question.
- Always be aware that there is a clear difference between correlation and causality. A famous example: doctors tend to be present when there is an epidemic. This positive correlation between the presence of doctors and the occurrence of epidemics, obviously, must not be seen as evidence that doctors cause epidemics.
- Causality between the variables A and B may run from A to B, but it may also be true that B drives A or that both variables influence each other. Example, the brain drain phenomenon refers to the migration of highly educated individuals from the developing world to industrialised nations. It is possible to argue that this type of migration may then leads to inferior economic growth due to the lack of sufficient human capital in the developing nation (brain drain causes low economic growth). However, the causality is not only limited to that direction since low economic growth and low availability of well-paid jobs may also explain why highly-trained individuals seek employment elsewhere (low economic growth causes brain drain).
- Be careful not to interpret anecdotal evidence as general evidence. Example: environmental dumping is the relocation of polluting production capacities from the industrialised world, which is characterised by strict(er) environmental regulations, to the developing world in which environmental regulations are at times absent or not consistently applied. It is certainly true that examples of such relocation can be mentioned (i.e. anecdotal evidence exists), however environmental groups as well the scientific community (do not hesitate to check it!) admit that environmental dumping is a rather marginal and certainly not a widespread phenomenon.
- Unsubstantiated claims are to be avoided. Essays and theses ought to be scientific pieces of writing and hence all claims are to be supported by a clear reasoning such that the reader is able to understand how and why you moved from A to B. Your reasoning should be falsifiable: the reader should be able to obtain a clear idea what reasons led you to your claim in order to allow him/her to form his/her opinion on the validity and logic of your argument. The absence of a clear reasoning is tantamount to slogan-based phrasing that is never acceptable from a scientific point of view and that, moreover, completely undermines your credibility. It is not enough to just write “X wrote that the reasoning of Y was erroneous”. The reader should receive information that allows him/her to understand what led X to question the reasoning of Y (such that the reader may not only understand but also perhaps question the argument of X).

- Substantiate claims that are made by others when you refer to them. This assists the reader, but also signals to the reader that you understand the argument why the person in question came to that conclusion. If you fail to do that, the reader will not be convinced and in the worst case may even get to the conclusion that you do not master the topic well and/or do not really understand the underlying reasoning. Example: “Krugman (1990) was anxious about the US-American current-account situation” is not very informative. A sentence like “Krugman (1990) feared that the high US-American current-account deficits could lead to a loss of confidence in the US currency that subsequently could generate massive depreciations of the US dollar” is more informative on what Krugman meant and on your ability to summarise and understand the argument of Krugman. Make absolutely sure that you interpret your sources correctly since it gives an extremely poor impression if you misinterpret and/or misrepresent the argument of, for instance, Krugman (1990). For instance, thesis supervisors typically know the old and recent literature and as such can immediately pinpoint weaknesses in quotes and reported arguments.
- If you want to include normative statements (“the World Bank should do ...”), it is extremely important that you bring a clear, convincing and above all supportive reasoning. Failing to do so is devastating to the credibility of your statement.
- Political opinions, prejudices, nationalistic views, etc play havoc with the strength of your message and ultimately undermine the ability to convince that should be at the centre of a thesis.
- Do not use general statements like “Unemployment decreased”. Be specific and support your claim, e.g.: “Unemployment decreased by 15 percentage points between 1980 and 1990 as argued in Romer (2009)”.
- As a general rule, statements will be stronger and more credible if you can quantify them. A statement like “Unemployment increased a lot” is to be avoided. First of all, a “lot” is far too colloquial (see below). Second, a “lot” is an arbitrary notion that may range from 2 percentage points for somebody that is very concerned about unemployment to 6 percentage points for others. As a result, such statements are not informative and do not signal strength. Preference is to be given to a statement like “Unemployment increased from 11% to 17% in the period 1995-1997 as can be seen from the below table that is based on the Labour Force Survey of 1999”.
- Discussing empirical results of 25 papers is perhaps not necessary. It may be more informative to discuss 5 important and/or central papers in detail rather than superficially summarising 25 papers. Often, less is more!
- If you want to indicate that something has changed, it does obviously not suffice to give a figure concerning one level. It then is required to give a growth rate or to specify at least two levels. Suppose that you want to indicate that the net creditor position of Japan in South-East Asia has increased. In that case, the statement according to which “The net creditor position of Japan in South-East Asia was at 30% of all outstanding South-East Asian debt” is not very informative since it does not solidify your claim that the position increased. You then at least need two figures: “The share went from 20% to 30% in only five years”.

- If you run 7 regressions, it is advisable to summarise the regression output in one clear table such that the reader immediately and easily can compare the outcome of the 7 regressions. It then is unlikely to be useful to squeeze the complete output into your the main text. The reader may benefit from being able to see the complete output in the Appendix. As always: work in moderation. An Appendix with 30 pages of regression output for a thesis of 40 pages is probably too much. Hence, be critical whether presenting the complete correlation structure is of real use to the reader/supervisor.
- Regressions should obviously use the relevant econometric techniques on which you can find ample references in your textbooks on econometrics and in the papers that you are referring to. Always try to avoid using econometrics in a mechanical manner and keep track of the intuition of what you are doing. For instance, if you want to examine whether the tightness of labour regulations has an effect on inflation, you should have a regression in which inflation and an indicator for the tightness of labour regulations (and other (control) variables, of course) emerge. A regression in which inflation and the change in the tightness of labour regulations emerge tests whether the pace of change in the tightness of labour regulations has an effect on inflation, which is an interesting yet different question.
- Always plot your variables. A visual inspection of the data may point to errors in the input process, may point to sudden events that you may need to take care of via an impulse dummy (e.g. the influence of a major strike on industrial production), can point to unit root problems, etc.
- Explicitly discussing the empirical results in terms of what you have covered in the theory section and/or within the overview of the existing literature shows your analytical strength. Failing to do so produces a thesis in which the various parts seem hardly related to each other.

4. Language

- Re-read your text before submitting it. Failing to remove even basic orthographic errors will be seen as a lack of respect towards the reader/supervisor. It may be a very good idea to have an outsider to read your paper if you are not sure about your linguistic skills.
- Make sure that you use correct grammar and spelling. Employing the “spell check” and the “grammar check” is a necessary step, but it is certainly not sufficient (e.g. the incorrect usage of “then” and “than” will not always be noticed by the “spell check” and/or the “grammar check”).
- If you have the possibility to write either in English or in Dutch, be aware of the fact that a piece written in poor English is clearly inferior to a piece that is written in correct Dutch.
- The incorrect use of language is to be avoided because it is seen as a lack of effort. Moreover, linguistic errors can obscure your argument or may even give rise to a phrase that suggests the complete opposite of what you desire to claim!

- The correct usage of language – both in terms of grammar as well as spelling – is vital for obtaining a good grade. When the number of mistakes grows too large, the supervisor will interpret this as a lack of respect. Moreover, such mistakes distract from the content such that the supervisor unfortunately will have less time to focus on (improving) the content, critically evaluating the regression model that your text proposes, etc.
- All sentences need a verb. Example: “For instance, because of more efficient distribution.” is not a correct sentence since it lacks a verb. It could have been more informative to create a new sentence (that contains a verb, of course) or to include the above statement as a relative clause within the previous sentence.
- Avoid colloquial phrasing (do not forget that essays and theses are scientific papers). Therefore avoid phrasings like “a lot less money”, “fat returns”, “we will have a look at”, “last couple of years”, etc.
- Do not be too modest or timid: “I will try to discuss the functioning of the IMF” is not signalling strength. Do not be too confident either: many critiques on the IMF have been discussed already by others such that it does not look well if your phrasing appears to convey the impression that you think that you are the first one to notice this or that.
- Avoid shortening of verbs, etc. For instance, do not write: “don’t”, “till” and “it’s”. Write in full: “do not”, “until” and “it is”. Note furthermore that “it’s” is short for “it is”, whereas “its” refers to “it” being in possession of something.
- Be careful about negations and double negations. Example: a negative budget deficit is a surplus.
- Check upon the correct usage of “there”/“their“, “then”/“than”, “should”/“could” and “may”/“might”/“could”/“would”/“will”.
- “Economic” is not the same as “economical”. “Economical” means that something requires a moderate amount of input, e.g. an economical car uses less petrol than other cars.
- “Will” represents certainty, whereas “would” indicates a (future) possibility.
- Verbs: use the past tense for developments that belong to the past and use the conditional tense for (potential) future developments. Examples: “In 1991, Argentina opted for a currency board” and “If Poland would adopt the euro in 2019, this could further increase FDI inflows”.
- Try to avoid switching between the tenses. If the entire paragraph describes past developments, use the past tense and do not switch between past and present tenses.

- It may be advisable to avoid the use of passive constructions in order to create a more gentle flow. The sentence “In this chapter, the literature on topic X will be discussed.” is less elegant when compared with “This chapter brings an overview of the literature on topic X”.
- Do not “overload” sentences. Do not develop two ideas in one sentence that covers five lines. The use of multiple and short sentences (two or three lines at most) clearly enhances understanding of your argument, its structure and thus eventually the strength of your argument.
- Use plurals and singulars correctly. For example: “The Central Bank and the government *are* active”, “Fluctuations *have* an effect”.
- Logical thinking should make you avoid a widely encountered inconsistency. For instance, the statement “The three largest exporters in 2012 were China, Japan and Germany” is not convincing in terms of logic. The word “largest” implies that no other is larger since, per definition, only one can be the “largest”. Hence, referring to the “three largest exporters” is not correct unless the three abovementioned countries would have exported exactly the same amount (and that certainly was not the case in 2012). You should then write “The largest three exporters ...” to indicate that you are dealing with numbers 1, 2 and 3 in the ranking of important exporting nations.
- Another violation of logic that can be encountered often, and that equally testifies sloppiness, is the inappropriate referencing to subsets and the elements they consist of. For instance, “The UK and European countries disagreed on active labour market policies” is obviously not correct since the UK is part of the regional entity called “Europe”, i.e. the UK is a European country. The statements “The UK and continental-European nations disagreed ..” and “The UK and the other European countries disagreed ..” would both have been correct. Similarly, “Botswana and African nations noted the need for increased development spending” logically implies that the author thinks that Botswana is no African nation. A phrase like “Botswana and other African nations ...” would avoid the above (unintended) signalling of lack of geographical knowledge.
- History and geography should at all times be respected. The phrase “In 2005, membership of the EU extended to the East by inviting former Soviet States”. That is true for Latvia, but Poland and Hungary certainly have never been Soviet States. Likewise, “In 2005, membership of the EU was extended to Mediterranean countries” is in many ways a strange sentence. First, Poland is nowhere near the Mediterranean Sea. Second, Italy, one of the original members of the EU, is also located at the Mediterranean Sea.
- Use punctuation carefully. For instance, using commas where they do not belong can create undesired/hilarious outcomes. A famous example illustrates this. The sentence “The giant panda is a large animal that eats shoots and leaves” makes sense, whereas the sentence “The giant panda is a large animal that eats, shoots and leaves” is probably not a true depiction of that animal’s ordinary behaviour.

- Be consistent. Avoid writing about the “Central Bank of Greece” and later refer to this institution as the “Bank of Greece”. Similarly, try not to switch between “percent”, “per cent” and “%” or between “USD”, “\$”, “dollar” and “US\$”.
- Is it absolutely clear to the reader what “these”, “it” and “they” refer to? Try not to use such words unless you ensure that no confusion can arise. For instance, “The employers as well as the unions vehemently criticised the government’s proposal. They argued that ...”: is “they” referring to the unions, to the employers or to both?
- Concerning abbreviations: at the first occurrence give the name in full as well. Example: “The World Trade Organisation (WTO) has given its support. However, the WTO has withdrawn its support after the Chinese government failed to end its use of prohibited export subsidies”. Note: if your thesis contains a “large” number of abbreviations, it may be useful to include – immediately after the table of contents – also a list of abbreviations.
- Indicating possession or association can be pursued by saying who or what it belongs to or is associated with. So that, for example, you can write that “the book belongs to Elizabeth” or “it is the book of Elizabeth”. Also, you can express possession or association by using a structure based on apostrophes (’s). Example: “A country’s factors of production”, “the banks’ financial troubles”, etc.
- 1980s or ‘80s, but not 1980’s.
- “lose” is not the same as “loose”.
- The conjugation of the verb “to flow” is “flow”, “flowed”, “flowed”. The conjugation of the verb “to fly” is “fly”, “flew”, “flown”.
- “Private savings decreased to 7%”. This statement does not convey a clear message. Make sure that you mention the dimension: “7% of GDP” or “7% of total savings”.
- “GDP grew by 7%”. Make sure that you mention the time dimension: “by 7% in 1990”, “by 7% per year over the period 1980-1989” or “by only 7% over the entire period 1980-1989”.
- Beware of the difference between “percent” and “percentage points”. An unemployment rate of 10 percent that decreases by 10 percent drops to 9 percent, whereas an unemployment rate of 10 percent that drops by 10 percentage points decreases to 0 percent.
- When two adjectives follow each other, the first one often becomes an adverb. Do not write: “a relative important decision”, but write “a relatively important decision”.
- “who” relates to persons, “that” or “which” refer to things. Example: “Mr Trichet, who has been president of the ECB, argued that ...” and “The ECB, that has always been an independent central bank, stated that ...”.

- Be sufficiently correct. For instance, “Europe” is much wider than the “European Union”. The notion “American industry” is per definition not the same as “US-American industry”. The “dollar” must not necessarily be associated with the United States, as the “dollar” is also the name of the currency of countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, amongst many others.
- Try not to switch between American and British English, but choose one of the two and be consistent. For instance, do not write “favour” [British English] and then write “favor” [American English]. In American English, the “z” is more widely used (e.g. “to utilize”), whereas in British English one can write both “to utilise” as well as “to utilize”. In any case, adhere in a consistent way to the use of “s” or “z”. “Towards” is British English whereas “toward” is American English.
- Do not hesitate to use a dictionary. Also, try not to use “boring” words like “to do” as there are many more beautiful ways of expression activity (use a thesaurus). Using “discussion” seven times within ten lines is not exactly creative: there are many alternatives that can easily be obtained from a thesaurus (your word processing software typically offers one).

5. Using and reporting references

- Use a sufficient number of references such that you can be assured that you are not discussing an isolated opinion.
- Be sufficiently critical with respect to the opinions that you encounter. This is of the utmost importance when using the Internet since that medium knows absolutely no filtering of information with respect to correctness, logic, coherence and content. Do not blindly take over any opinion that you find on the Internet since the Internet abounds with sometimes wild and unsubstantiated speculations and even conspiracy theories. You should always be critical, question opinions that you encounter and double-check. You are being trained to develop into a scientist such that you must have a critical approach, but also a critical attitude towards critical approaches! For instance, one can find the claim on certain websites that “The reforms demanded by the IMF caused mass unemployment in Mexico after 1994”. You can check the validity of that claim very easily by simply looking at Mexican data on unemployment (do not hesitate to do that!). Be extremely careful since quite some sources on the Internet (unfortunately) bring opinions on various (economic) issues of which the content is rather polemic, politically-biased and at times even lacks any factual underpinning. Again, double-check your sources and be critical also with respect to critical appraisals. A scientific approach requires doubtfulness and double-checking!
- It is important and advisable to use scientific resources (journal papers, working papers of universities and research institutes, etc) and not only newspaper articles and Internet sites. Remember that essays and theses are scientific pieces of writing.

- Mention the sources of your statements and claims (in the text **as well as** in the reference list). Scientific work should be falsifiable such that readers should be able to check upon each quote, statement and/or find the data. Example: “A is larger than B (Krugman, 1979)”. Moreover, failing to mention your sources also in the text is tantamount to committing fraud.
- All essays and theses are nowadays routinely checked on fraud using specialised programmes. Literal quotes from scientific sources (and even other essays/theses) will be easily detected. The use of fragments from sources in which only here and there words are changed will also be detected, are perhaps technically not seen as fraud but they surely give an extremely poor impression and will yield you a very low mark for your essay/thesis. Finally, do not forget that lecturers also read the scientific literature and often can easily recognise statements and arguments!
- If you quote literally in the text, you should also mention the page number. Example: “C is larger than B” (Krugman, 1979, p. 15). Do not exaggerate when using quotes: quotes are to be used only when really required and should not be too long. Lengthy as well as too many quotes undermine the strength of your message.
- The list of references should, of course, be complete and thus mention all sources that you have referred to in the text. This should also be done if the reference was only found in one of your references (secondary references). Moreover, it should not contain any references that are not referred to in the text. Obviously, if the text refers to Krugman (2012), the list of references should not list that publication as Krugman (2011).
- The list of references should allow the interested reader to easily retrieve the references in question. Hence, you should mention in what journal the paper was published, the year of publication, the page numbers, the url (if the paper is not yet published in a book or journal), etc.
- If you use a paper from 1990 that was written by Baldwin and Krugman, your reference in the text should mention both authors, i.e. “as argued in Baldwin and Krugman (1990)”. When there are three or more authors, e.g. a publication of Baldwin, Krugman, Obstfeld, Dornbusch and Keynes from 1990, it would suffice to refer to this publication in the text as Baldwin et al. (1990). In the list of references, you should obviously mention all authors. Also be consistent, referring to a joint publication of 2012 by Baldwin, Krugman and Obstfeld as Baldwin, Krugman and Obstfeld (2012) as well as Baldwin et al. (2012) is confusing for the reader.
- If the paper that you refer to was written by Ju and Wei in 2006, refer to that paper as Ju and Wei (2006) and do not use and/or alternate between Ju (2006), Ju et al. (2006) and Ju and Wei (2006). It is not acceptable, wrong and confusing to only mention the first author when the paper in question is actually written by more than one author.
- In economics, it is customary to list references in increasing alphabetical order. Moreover, references are to be specified in a consistent manner (same layout, structure, etc).
- If you refer to a working paper of Ju and Wei (2000), examine whether it has not been published in a journal or book in the meantime.

- Every scientific discipline has its own style with respect to references. In economics, the following layout is commonly used (other styles can be used but should be used in a consistent manner):

Economist, The (2005). They have willed the ends, but what about the means?, 10 February.
 Gupta, Sanjeev, Benedict Clemens, Alexander Pivovarsky and Erwin R. Tiongson (2003).
 Foreign aid and revenue response: Does the composition of aid matter? IMF
 working paper, July.
 International Development Association (1960). Articles of Agreement,
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/IDA/Resources/ida-articlesofagreement.pdf>.
 Krugman, Paul R. (1988). Financing vs. Forgiving a Debt Overhang. Journal of
 Development Economics, Vol. 29, p. 253-268.
 Salazar, Vander Caceres (2002). Taken for granted? US Proposals to Reform the World
 Bank's IDA Examined. Bretton Woods project,
<http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org/article.shtml?cmd%5B126%5D=x-126-16169>.

6. Starting and ending chapters

- Especially in longer pieces of writing, e.g. theses, it is worthwhile and helpful for the reader to start each chapter with a brief overview of what is to follow. Example: “The goal of this chapter is to present the main theoretical insights on the issue whether or not corporations should invest abroad. Section 3.1 will therefore start by defining foreign direct investments. The main theories on the explanation of foreign direct investments will be discussed in section 3.2.”
- In theses it is also helpful for the reader that you end the chapter with a brief conclusion and a link to the following chapter. Example: “This chapter defined foreign direct investments and also gave a brief overview of the main determinants of this type of capital flows. In particular, it was noted that the market size of the host country and the wage level in that country emerge as the dominant explanatory variables. The following chapter, chapter 4, will present an empirical study on the determinants of Japanese foreign direct investments in China and therefore will be able to comment on the empirical validity of the theoretical insights discussed in chapter 3”.

7. Figures and tables

- Figures and tables should have a short but meaningful title of at most three lines.
- You should mention the source of the figure/table or of the data that you used to construct the figure/table. Example, if you use a figure that has been taken from Krugman (1979), include the following below the figure: “Source: Krugman (1979), p. 15”. If you made the figure yourself based on data that you obtained from elsewhere, mention the source of the data: “Source: International Monetary Fund (various years)” or “Source: own calculations based on data in International Monetary Fund (various years)”.
- Not mentioning the sources of all tables and figures is tantamount to fraud.

- Make sure that you discuss the figure or table in the text. Figures and tables that are not referred to or that are not discussed in the text are to be deleted as you signal that they are not relevant.
- Are the figures and tables really helpful for the development of your argument? A discussion of the recent overall growth performance in Japan would benefit from a figure of Japanese GDP growth rates over the past 20 years. Presenting additional figures on the development of output in five different Japanese economic sectors is probably not required for an illustration of the economy-wide growth performance.
- Make sure that you do not overload tables and figures. For example: 10 columns in a table is perhaps too much, maybe two tables would then be preferable. Are the ten lines in your figure really necessary? If you want to discuss the economic performance of Japan after 1980, it then is probably not so useful to give a graph that shows growth rates since the early 1950s.
- A figure can be preferable to a table or vice versa. For instance, presenting a figure for the evolution over time of the Dutch stock price index is perhaps clearer than a large table with monthly data for seven years.
- The clarity of a figure depends on its scale. If the interest rate over your sample period has moved between 6% and 8%, choosing a scale on the vertical axis that ranges from 0% to 20% will fail to present a clear impression of the dynamics of the interest rate.
- In many spreadsheet programmes, figures routinely obtain a grey background. It may enhance clarity by changing that option and choose for a white background. If the lowest number of year series is -5, it may be advisable to let the horizontal axis cross the vertical axis at -6 rather than at 0.
- The use of different colours for the lines in your graph will obviously not create a problem when the reader possesses a colour printer. However, that is not always the case such that you may want to hand in colour prints or use different ways for highlighting the lines (solid, dotted and dashed lines, thicker and thinner lines, the use of markers, etc.)
- Do not overload your essay/thesis with figures and tables. Large tables that are of secondary importance should perhaps not emerge in the text, but be shifted into the Appendix. Think well about the number of tables and figures in the text and/or the Appendix: being able to separate the wheat from the chaff signals strength.

8. Layout

- Number the chapters and sections for easier reference (e.g. “As indicated in section 2.1.3, the hypothesis is not supported by empirical research”).
- Use page numbers.

- The font size should not be “too” small (also not in the footnotes): 11 seems appropriate (14 may indicate a lack of ideas)
- Use line spacing 1.5 (1 is too little and tiring to read).
- Do not exaggerate when reducing the margins of pages.
- Use footnotes to explain interesting elements that are not crucial to the understanding. However, do not exaggerate with the number and length of footnotes. A footnote of half a page is simply too long (turn it into an Appendix? Drop it?).
- Saving on the number of pages by cramming as much text as possible on one page by reducing margins, reducing font size, reducing line spacing and lifting text into footnotes is irritating for the reader and certainly not signalling analytical strength. If there is a limit on the number of pages, first try to reduce the use of unnecessary details and woolly phrasings before changing the layout.
- Try to prevent a “visual overload” in your essay/thesis and avoid using different fonts, font sizes, switches towards bold and/or italics, underlining, etc.

9. Conclusions

- In the concluding section, you should give a brief overview of the research question, the main argument and the answer to the research question. This way you assure, also for yourself, that the content is clearly related to the research question and title of the essay/thesis.
- You can include an own opinion but make sure that you give a supportive argument (in the conclusions or in the body of the text).
- You reveal analytical strength if you show that you are aware of potential weaknesses in your approach by mentioning elements that for brevity had to be excluded from your essay/thesis. It is also a good signal if you can briefly discuss which additional questions could be approached within future research.
- Do not bring new elements, i.e. the conclusions should be connected well to the arguments that you presented. Statements that arise out of the blue are to be prevented and undermine the value of your paper/thesis.