
Research Paper Guidelines

Basic Details

The research paper should be roughly ten to fifteen pages in length and can be on any topic in American economic history. The paper should be focused on answering a specific research question or testing a particular thesis, it should not simply be a broad overview of a general topic. To get a sense of what it means to have a focused research question, you can go through the journal articles assigned for class. Take note of how the authors define a rather narrow question that they can actually test with empirical evidence.

The paper must include original empirical evidence of some form. This can mean producing graphs and tables using existing datasets or it can mean gathering new data from historical documents. If you choose to use existing datasets, I expect you to do some original analysis of the data. You cannot just rely on tables, graphs and other forms of analysis done by other authors (although you can certainly cite this in addition to your own analysis).

If you plan on gathering original historical evidence, I do not expect you to build a complete dataset or analyze hundreds of documents. You should gather enough data to demonstrate that your research approach would be feasible given more time and resources. For example, if you wanted to use account ledgers to estimate the amount of wage discrimination between males and females in the 19th century, it would be reasonable for you to gather data on one mill for one year. This would be enough data to allow for basic analysis and demonstrate that the data would be useful for answering the research question even though substantially more data collection would be needed to reach any strong conclusions. In this sense, your paper would be more of a research proposal, establishing the question to be answered and demonstrating that your approach and data could convincingly answer that question if more resources were devoted data collection.

Whether you use existing data or gather new data, your paper should present a review of the existing literature on the topic highlighting how your question fits in with that existing literature. Your paper should also discuss why your question is of interest and explain how your empirical evidence will be useful in answering the question. Continuing with the example of a paper on wage discrimination, you would want to discuss why wage discrimination is an important topic, why we might expect wage discrimination to exist in the 19th century, and what empirical evidence would convince us that wage discrimination was or was not a problem in the 19th century.

Timeline

There are several deadlines for different stages of the paper:

- **Thursday, February 23rd** We will have a special session at the Special Collections Research Center. This might give you some ideas for using historical documents for your project.
- **Wednesday, February 29th** By this day you should have discussed your research question with me. This means telling me the specific research question you are going to try to answer, not just the general topic you are interested in. You can either do this by coming in to office hours, corresponding by email, or scheduling a meeting outside of office hours. You can still change your research question after this point but I want to make certain that you are at least on the right track by this date.
- **Wednesday, April 11th** By this day you should email me a draft of your literature review. In this draft you should also include a brief discussion of the data sources you intend to use in your paper. The literature review and discussion of data should be roughly three to five pages long and should include proper citations for the all sources.
- **Tuesday, May 8th** The final version of the paper is due by **5pm**. Papers must be submitted in electronic format as either PDF or Word documents.

You will not receive grades at the intermediate stages but you will get comments and suggestions from me. Missing the deadlines at the intermediate stages or turning in a subpar effort on the draft of the literature review will be taken into consideration when I grade the final paper.

Citations

As with any paper or project, it is important to cite all sources properly. Your paper should include a list of works cited at the end of the paper giving full bibliographical information for each work. Within the text of the paper, you should include parenthetical citations where appropriate with sufficient information to locate the cited source in the works cited list. Remember that citations are also required for databases, not just books, articles and documents. I would recommend using the MLA citation format. A useful guide to using the MLA format for the in-text citations and the works cited list can be found on Purdue's online writing lab website:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/1/>

Several Useful Resources for Economic History Research

Below are a few links to resources that can be particularly helpful for economic history research. These are in addition to the standard resources useful for just about any research project (the library's standard catalog and electronic databases, reference librarians, etc.).

- **EH.net – The Economic History Services website**

URL: <http://eh.net>

EH.net is a economic history website with several useful resources for beginning your research. The encyclopedia section of the site offers very readable articles on a variety of economic history topics written by experts in the field. These articles contain a list of the key journal articles and books written on the particular topic that can provide a good starting point for your research. EH.net also maintains links to various databases containing historical economic data.

- **Historical Statistics of the United States**

URL: <http://hsus.cambridge.org/HSUSWeb/HSUSEntryServlet>

This is a very thorough collection of data on the United States from colonial times to the present. Statistics are grouped into intuitive categories (population, work and welfare, economic sectors, etc.) and cover a wide range of topics. Data can be presented in table or graph form on the site and can be downloaded for manipulation in Excel or a statistical software package. In addition to the statistics, the site provides essays on various aspects of the history of the US economy. Access to the data requires being on the William and Mary network.

- **Google Scholar**

URL: <http://scholar.google.com>

Google Scholar is one of the easiest ways to search for academic articles. Beyond being a very thorough index of journal articles, Google Scholar has a couple of additional features that make it particularly useful. It links to multiple versions of articles, making it easy to track down a pdf version or confirm that you are getting the most recent revision. It provides citations for all of the articles in bibtex and other formats. Also, it provides links to all of the papers that cite a particular article which is very useful for making certain that you are keeping up with the current state of the literature on a topic.

- **Google Books**

URL: <http://books.google.com>

Google Books is one of the more recent Google products and it is becoming more and more useful as Google scans more books. It is a search engine for books, allowing you to search not just the title and authors but the text itself. What makes Google Books particularly useful for the economic historian is that it contains a large number of academic press books and many historical documents. For many of the historical documents, full text versions are available. These historical documents include books, government reports, congressional records, textbooks, pamphlets, and a variety of other interesting sources of unique information. Many of the older government reports contain very detailed and legible tables of potentially useful data that you will not find elsewhere.

- **Integrated Public Use Microdata Series**

URL: <http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>

The Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) provides historical census data. It has an easy-to-use interface for searching for available variables by census year and then created a dataset containing the variables and years you choose. The data can be packaged for several different statistical software programs. The IPUMS site also links to other data projects including the NHGIS project which covers historical geographical data for the United States, IPUMS-International covering international data, and IPUMS-CPS which offers perhaps the best interface for downloading samples of Current Population Survey data.

- **Measuring Worth**

URL: <http://www.measuringworth.com>

It is often necessary to convert a variable from nominal to real terms or to use historical measures of GDP in economic history research. The standard GDP and price index data series used by economists often only cover the second half of the twentieth century. Measuring Worth provides historical GDP and price index data and has useful calculators for converting nominal values to real values for any year back to the eighteenth century. The site also has links to several other historical data sets including wage, stock index, interest rate and exchange rate series.