

Econ 7670 Referee Report Instructions

Overview

Due Date: Before the presentation by the author of your chosen paper.

Assignment: You will write a referee report about a paper that is presented in this semester's Murphy-Economics Seminar Series.

Schedule:

Date	Speaker	Fields
February 10	Michael Best	Public, Development
February 24	Bradley Hardy	Labor, Public
March 10	Nathan Nunn	Political Economy, Economic History
March 17	Eva Vivalit	Public, Applied Micro
March 24	Nathan Canan	Political Economy, Econometrics
April 14	Jhacova Williams	Economic History, Cultural Economics
April 21	Raquel Fernández	International Trade
April 28	Ismael Mourifé	Econometrics

Papers: Erin usually emails a reminder and attaches the paper on the Monday before the seminar. That gives you 5 days to complete your report. Some authors may not have a paper draft ready to distribute, in which case that seminar is ineligible for a referee report.

Tips: Referee reports should be 2-3 tightly-written pages. Below are referee report guidelines (originally distributed by Leora Friedberg at the University of Virginia) and an example referee report. You can also refer to Robert King's advice at http://people.bu.edu/rking/JME_files/guide_for_referees.htm and Alain de Janvry's advice at <http://are.berkeley.edu/courses/ARE251/2004/assignments/RRGuidelines.pdf>.

Grading Rubric:

	3 points: Highlights valid concerns Offers actionable items	1 points: Highlights valid concerns Some feedback is actionable	0 points: Does not highlight concerns Feedback is not actionable
Feedback			

	2 points: Summarizes paper well Technical terms well-defined Intuition is clear	1 point: Summary is vague or lengthy Technical terms not defined Intuition is not very clear	0 points: Summary is unclear Technical terms not defined Intuition is unclear
Understanding			

		1 points: Report is clear, brief (2-3 pages), and well-written	0 points: Report feed back is not clear, report is not brief, and/or report is not well-written
Writing			

Guidelines for Writing Referee Reports

Leora Friedberg

It is a good idea to plan to read the paper at least three times. The first time, read it (perhaps without taking detailed notes) in order to get a sense about the topic and approach, and then think about how you might try to answer the same question. The second time, assess the paper in detail. Take notes and draft your referee report. The last time, read it to assess whether your comments are accurate, reasonable, and helpful.

Overall assessment: Begin your report with 1-3 paragraphs that describe what the authors achieved – what question or questions did the authors try to answer, how did they try to answer it, and did they succeed. Does this paper represent a contribution to the literature? Does it advance our knowledge, or could it with additional effort?

Comments: Continue your report with detailed comments. The comments may be further divided into major versus minor, or ordered as they appear in the paper, or grouped into empirical and editorial, etc.

It usually makes sense to begin by discussing major shortcomings of the paper. In particular, you should discuss either (a) important ways in which the paper could be improved in order to better answer the question identified above, or (b) why the paper fails to answer the question it poses, why the question is uninteresting, whether any other feasible approach would be better suited to the topic, and/or whether you think the question is unanswerable, given current methods and/or data.

Next, mention less important deficiencies, both in the implementation of the theoretical or empirical work and in the exposition. Regarding the latter, consider ways in which the paper could be shortened. Ironically, it is worth spending more time on these less important issues the better the paper is; it is not worth spending much of your time offering minor comments on a paper with major problems.

Be as specific as possible in your comments. If something about the paper bothers you, think about its implications for the paper's conclusions and about potential fixes. If it cannot be fixed, decide how you think it should be discussed in the paper (e.g., if such and such an unobservable response is happening, it would bias the estimates upward). If it can be fixed, discuss how you expect the authors to do this.

It is helpful if each detailed comment cites sections of the paper or page numbers where the problem occurs. Similarly, it is helpful to number the pages of your report and to number your comments; this makes it much easier for the author to respond to your comments.

For this class, you may skip all copy-editing suggestions (those having to do with misspellings, grammatical mistakes, etc.).