

ECON GU4325: The Economic Development of Japan
Research Paper OUTLINE Assignment

Assignment goals:

In this course, you will be writing a research paper on the Japanese economy. For many of you, this will be the first formal economics research paper that you write. Writing in general is a skill, and writing a research paper in a given field is a particular skill. An economics research paper will be different from a research paper written for political economy, history, or molecular biology, not just in content, but also in structure and format. We do not expect you to write the “perfect” economics term paper for this course (for even among renowned economists, very few have been able to do so). We do expect you to follow the outlined requirements and to do your best with the assignment.

Because writing is a skill, it is something that you can practice and learn and improve. In addition to the various resources for writing your paper¹, the research paper outline will help you begin brainstorming ideas and exploring data and other components for your paper. Elements of the outline could eventually become the “skeleton” of your paper. Once you have the outline, you can begin fleshing out your paper by creating graphs and writing out your analysis and discussion.

You may change the focus and content of your paper as much as you want between the outline and the submission of the final paper. You might do so if, for example, upon further research you determine that the data you previously found is not adequate to answer your original research question. You may also decide that you would much rather write about a topic that we cover in class or you see discussed in the news between November 19 and December 1. This is all fine and is all part of the research process (research ideas are transformed, updated, and discarded all the time in the process of writing a single research paper). That being said, you should take this outline assignment seriously, as an opportunity to get feedback on your research idea and progress.

Important note: The required components for the term paper outline are listed in the order that they would likely appear in your paper. However, this does not mean that this is the order in which you should complete the assignment. We strongly recommend that early on you take a look at the available data, as this will be your biggest constraint in completing this assignment. You can come up with a great economic question, but if you cannot find suitable data for your analysis, you cannot write about that question for this assignment! You may also start by reading current articles on the Japanese economy and society, to help you narrow down the area that you would like to research.

¹ See the slides from the Term Paper Review Session and examples of successful term papers written by last year’s students, which will be posted under *Files > Research Paper* on Canvas. The slides will be posted after the review session.

Assignment content:

Your outline should contain the following elements:

1. The research question (10 points)

Your research question is the center of your research paper. Without a clear, concise research question, you cannot write a clear, insightful research paper.

Your research question can be related to a topic that we covered in class (e.g. men and women's labor force participation; Japanese bank regulation; health care expenditure). However, it should also focus on something that we have not discussed in detail in class.

- Summarize your research question in **one sentence**.
- For more guidance on how to come up with a research question and for examples of good and bad research questions for your research paper, see the "Term Paper Review Session" slides posted on Canvas (*Files > Research Paper*)².

2. Motivation for your topic (10 points)

The motivation (which will eventually become part of your introduction) is the part that explains to the reader why they should care about this particular research question. Why is this topic important to study? What can we learn about the world and the economy by answering this question? Is there a market failure or social problem to which we could find a solution by answering this question?

- In approximately 250 words, summarize the motivation for your research question.
- Include a citation for one secondary source that is relevant to your motivation. This could be a newspaper article that discusses this general topic or a related social issue, a report with an interesting graph, or something else. In your summary, be clear about how this source is relevant.
- See the Term Paper Guidelines (*Files > Research Paper*)² for a description of acceptable secondary sources.

3. An example of previous research (10 points)

Research papers should help to expand our understanding of the world. They can do this by either improving on previous research or by exploring a completely new topic. In order to be able to do either, a researcher must first know what work has been done on this or similar topics by other researchers. In addition to *knowing* about previous literature, the researcher

² The slides will be posted after the review session.

must also be able to *explain* clearly to the reader how their own research fits in with this previous work.

Published economics papers will typically cite dozens of papers on relevant topics. In your paper, we expect that you will cite about 2-3 published economics papers related to your topic.

- In your outline, include a proper citation for one research paper written on a topic that is relevant to your research question. Depending on your research question, this paper need not (and likely will not) be on Japan.
- In approximately 150 words, summarize the research question that the author(s) of this research paper answer and their findings. (*Hint:* this information can typically be gathered from just the abstract and introduction of a paper. When you write your actual paper, you should make sure to read through the papers you cite more carefully.)

4. (At least) one source of primary data relevant to your research question (10 points)

Economics papers can be broadly split into theory papers and empirical papers. For this assignment, you will be writing an empirical paper, so you must have data to answer your question.

- Include a proper citation for at least 1 (and at most 3) source(s) of primary data that can help to answer your research question.
- In approximately 100 words, summarize the content of the data and outline 2 to 4 variables from the data that you can use to answer your research question.
- If you are including citations for 2 or 3 datasets, provide an approximately 200-word summary of the data and outline 2 to 4 variables total from the data.
- Examples of primary data are included in the syllabus and the Term Paper Review Session slides³. Check in with the professor or the TAs if you are not sure if something qualifies as primary source data or not. If you are only able to find secondary source data for your project analysis, you **MUST** get your choice of data approved by either Prof. Weinstein or one of the TAs.

5. One graph based on the data that you chose for part 4. (10 points)

Whether you eventually work as an academic economist, a consultant, a government employee, a staff member at a nonprofit organization, or in any other occupation, you will need to know how to communicate effectively with your audience, be it other researchers, students, clients, citizens, elected officials, or others. Part of “effective communication” is not just knowing how to use words but also knowing how to present data and numbers in a clear,

³ The slides will be posted after the review session.

easy-to-read way. In this section, you will practice presenting empirical evidence for an economics research paper in a clear way.

- Include one graph that you make yourself using the data you cited in part 4.
- Your graph must include at least one of the variables from part 4 but **need not** include all of the variables. In other words, the purpose is to create a graph that makes sense, not to just showcase the variables.
- Follow the tips on how to create effective graphic visuals outlined in “Tips for Making Effective Graphs” posted in *Files*.
- The graph could provide descriptive statistics (e.g., time series of the share of Japanese men and women in the labor force) or direct evidence to answer your research question (e.g., time series of salmon fishing in different coastal areas around Japan, before and after the 3/11 earthquake). Either way, the graph and the presented data should be reasonably relevant to your research question.

Logistics:

- **Due date: Thursday, November 19 at 11:59 PM.**
- Submit PDF file electronically through [gradescope](#).
- You can use any citation style (MLA, APA, Chicago, etc.) as long as you are consistent throughout the assignment. Pay attention to whether your chosen style of citation requires in-text, footnote, or endnote citations. You can choose a different citation style for the paper, but again, you need to be consistent within each assignment.
- Length: follow guidelines above. Please use 12-point standard font and reasonable spacing and margins.