

THE ECON 208 JOURNAL

If the course seems a little frightening and those midterms a little intimidating then try this. **Additional credit** is available for students who write an ***Econ 208 Journal***, which can add as many as **five percentage points** to your final grade in the course – this could move you from, say, an A- to an A. I will talk about the Journal at our first class meeting on January 5. (Note that your Journal is capitalized, but the word journal is not.)

The Journal is meant to be a commentary and meditation on your **experiences in the class**, concentrating on ***how your attitudes to studying, and economics, change*** as we progress through the quarter. It is not meant to just recount what you read in the text or what I said in class. Rather it is intended to examine ***what you are learning about yourself as a student*** and the ***discipline you have chosen to major in***. As Socrates may have said “the unexamined life is not worth living”. Certainly you are forced by the quarter system, and the exigencies of your lives, to spend too much time studying and too little time thinking about what it is that you are studying.

You can also use the Journal to *ask* me *questions* about what you are reading and what I am covering in class, especially if you see contradictions between the two, or between what I say and what you are learning in your other classes. Although this should not be the primary focus of your Journal, it provides us with an invaluable way to interact about the course.

You may also use the Journal to engage me in a *dialog* concerning the *many unique features of the course* – its (and my) oddities: the fact that the *assignments usually precede the lecture treatment of the material they cover*, the use of *mathematics* and

proofs in economics, the experience of *writing* about what you are learning in the course, and the functioning of your *study group*. And you may also want to discuss *the differences between Econ 208 and what you did in Econ 206 and Econ 207*, and the differences between *Econ 208* and what are learning in *your other economics, or related, courses*.

Ideally I would like to receive from you **a thoughtful account of your reactions to the course, how it changes your conception of economics, and an account of your intellectual maturation as an economics major**. (See also the “Advice to New Majors, section 4, Written Work” below – which should give you enough to think about to fill at least one Journal entry. The “Study Hints ...” section should also give you much food for thought concerning your present study habits and hence some topics that you may want to write about.)

I will usually expect a **two-page, word-processed**, journal entry from you each week; however, I am very flexible about time. I will **try** to get the journal entries back to you at the next class. Each entry should have a **cover page** with your *name*, the *date*, and the *entry number*. **Write on only one side** of the page so that I have plenty of room to answer your questions and to comment on what you have written. I usually expect a minimum of **7 to 8** entries (14-16 pages) if you want your full five percentage points – I don’t expect journal entries at the end of the weeks during which you have exams, but students often write an entry over the weekend recounting their reactions to the exam and then make further comments on the exam experience in the same or next week’s journal entry.

Use a 12-point font, double-spaced.

Spell check and proof read what you have written. You neither lose nor gain points for style, etc., but this is your chance to impress me, so make the most of it.

If your entries don't get on track after a couple of weeks we will need to talk about how to proceed.

Keep your entries and my comments and let me have the whole Journal on the last day of class, or no later than 3:30 on Tuesday, March 15th. Those five percentage points are awarded for the **completed** Journal, including my comments, not just on the two or three entries you failed to lose. You may find it useful to keep the Journal entries with my comments in a three-ring binder safely at home so that entries do not go astray.

Try journaling. I have many comments from students that they really enjoyed doing their journals each week and that they wished that they had the opportunity to do something similar in their other classes. (I have also had students who didn't enjoy the process but they were a small minority, and I will probably give you some credit for anything that you have produced if you subsequently decide to discontinue your Journal.)

I would recommend that you make a copy of this section on the objectives of the journal and refer to it each time you sit down to write a journal entry. This avoids me having to answer continual questions in the Journal asking: what should I write about? If you are still in doubt about this then make an appointment to see me and we can talk about your problems.

**You must start you Journal no later than
January 19.**

ASSIGNMENTS

The assignments are an integral and, indeed, crucial component of the course. They are at least as important as the lectures. I do not collect the assignments (except the first one) and they do not contribute to your grade directly. However, because *the assignment questions form the basis for the exam questions*, it is absolutely crucial that you work hard at the assignments. At first it will seem strange to be doing assignments devoted to material that I have not yet covered in class, but you come to university *to learn how to learn* – this is not high school or community college; you need to change your “**mind set**” about your courses if you are to do well in Econ 208 and subsequent upper division courses. Econ 208 is probably your first taste of what we expect of our majors.

The great advantage of not having the assignments graded is that I can give you unlimited help with them. Therefore, as soon as you run into difficulties with them you should contact me – phone me, e-mail me, or come and see me in my office and I will try to sort your problems out. I would ask you to look carefully through the Manual before coming to see me (bring your Manual and your notes with you when you keep your appointment).

If you need help with basic Econ 206 and 207 economic theory please be careful to check your principles texts (which you should also bring with you) to see what they have to say before bearding me in my den. **I am most anxious to be of help to you** and I fully understand that most of you came away from your principles classes with only the most tenuous grasp of basic economics (including those students who had the misfortune to be taught by me) and that most of what you did learn has since evaporated. But, as economics majors, **you must possess the desire to**

master economics and be willing to put in the effort to learn, or re-learn, the basic theory that is laid out for you in the principles texts that you should keep by you at all times when you are studying economics. Naturally I find it very dispiriting when someone comes to me to ask a question to which I can find the answer in a couple of minutes by leafing through your texts, because that suggests to me that you have not been making the effort to learn the rudiments of the subject to which I have devoted forty three years of my life and that you are majoring in. Therefore, when you are still stumped after giving the texts and the Manual your best effort it is wise to begin by saying something like: “Elderly and venerable Sleeperson I was perusing my micro text last night and after deep and extensive cogitation I still don’t understand why it says ...”

The assignments are ideal material to cover in your **study groups**. Study groups should consist of **two to four** persons, and should **meet at least weekly**, preferably somewhere where you will have access to a white/chalkboard. Take it in turns answering questions – put the question numbers on pieces of paper and draw them randomly. Be rigorous but helpful – don’t allow confused or partial answers, but try to make certain that the atmosphere is such that everyone is happy to participate and is not made to feel a fool if they cannot answer a question or if they get the answer wrong. But do not allow “free riding”! Get rid of people who do not pull their weight and do not come prepared or who do not participate. If everyone in your study group is a “dog” then start a new study group or join an existing one that is working well.

Study groups are great places to meet other people in the class – and to find people to talk about economics with – you are all economics majors. Join the **Economics Club** where you can meet other majors and talk economics with your peers who are

farther along in the program. (Don't believe all the horror stories they may want to tell you about Econ 208; ask them what the grade distribution looked like and how many people ended taking the final! If they whine find someone more productive to talk to.)

Don't waste time in your study groups moaning about how hard Econ 208 is – it **is** a hard course, but no one said that all of the courses that you take at university should be taught at the level of a high school class. (See the two pieces at the beginning of the Manual on: "Taking Responsibility", and "Teaching at a University".)

At appropriate points – long before the corresponding exams - I will give you detailed **keys to the assignments**. These will give you an idea of what I was looking for, but **they are not model answers** to be committed to memory because they contain more information than you can probably get down in the limited time available to you in the exams. So you need to **boil those answers down to a size that will work under exam conditions**. Again this is the sort of task that works well as a collaborative effort in a study group session. (Also **pay careful attention to how I tackle these questions in class** – emphasize **how** I do the question rather than just writing down what the answer is.)

You ***must*** **practice writing out your answers under exam conditions**, i.e. writing your answer somewhere quiet (no TV or rock music – a little Mozart is allowable), without books or notes, and carefully timing yourself. In the exam you need to be able to write out the essential features of the answer **quickly and with almost no thought**. This comes only with practice at actually writing answers to the assignment questions.