

READING THE MANUAL, STUDYING THE ASSIGNMENT KEYS, AND GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE LECTURES.

Here are a few thoughts about reading the Manual and the Assignment Keys, and how to approach the lectures.

First, you should read the Manual **before** coming to class so you will know what I will be talking about and what part of the lecture is already covered in the Manual. Second, **bring the Manual to class** so that you can follow along as I cover the material in class.

The Manual is not a textbook, it is not written like a textbook, and therefore you should not try to read it like a textbook (that is what your principles texts are for!). The Manual is like a set of lecture notes. It is written in a very condensed style and so you must read it slowly, with pencil and paper to hand, and carefully work through each step of the argument as you read it.

The lectures are only one part of the Econ 208 trip. The Econ 208 learning package consists of the manuals (and the principles texts), the assignments (with their keys), and the lectures. Most of you have been locked into a learning environment that stressed short-term memorization. This approach worked extremely well for you in the context of courses where the exams were dominated by multiple-choice questions. Naturally many of you found that you were able to succeed in these courses by attending the lectures, writing a set of lecture notes that were concerned with the “bottom lines” of the lectures, and then cramming for the exams by reading your notes and skimming the text for the “bottom lines” – where the “bottom lines” were the answers to the multiple choice questions that you planned to be

able to recognize (after all, one of them was always right so why aim for anything beyond a recognition knowledge of the material?). In other words you were concerned to find, and memorize, answers to questions, not to learn how to develop those answers for yourselves. Unfortunately that has left you with an approach to learning that fails to generate much in the way of either comprehension or retention of the materials that you covered. You are therefore familiar with the paradox that you may have received an A in a course a year ago but that you now have no ability to recall its contents and would not be able to do well on an exam even though it is of the multiple choice type where one of the answers must be correct! Since I elaborate on this issue in other parts of the Manual (note that capital M – if you didn't then you are not reading carefully, and if you did, but don't know why it is a capital letter, then you need to polish your grammatical skills) I will not do so here.

But these study skills that have become so comfortable to you do have important implications for what you should expect to get out of the lectures and from reading the Manual (capital M again) and the assignment keys. *In this course, and in your upper division economics courses, you must spend time on the process not simply the outcomes.* By this I mean that you need to know not simply, say, that linear demand curves (with two exceptions) cannot exhibit constant price elasticity of demand (PED), but how to prove that fact. Therefore, when you attend my lectures (or anyone else's for that matter) **you need to pay at least as much attention to how I do something** as you do to **what** I do. So the **way** I go about explaining things – in the lectures, the Manual, or the assignment keys – is at least as important as the conclusions I arrive at. Watching how I do things teaches you how a professional economist thinks (which is what you presumably want to learn), and should lead you to **understand** what you have just seen demonstrated.

If you understand the conclusion then you are well on the way to mastering it (repetition is necessary to get that knowledge safely into your long-term memory – think of martial arts). Once you have locked what you have learned, i.e. **understood**, into your long-term memory then it may be retrieved with ease at some future date without you having to scrabble about looking things up, or, equally embarrassing, having to be told over and over again things that you were supposed to have mastered years before.

Some of you learn most effectively by writing things down. That is fine – I fall into that category myself – but **you must show discrimination in what you write down**. If something is already in the Manual and is also one of the questions on an assignment that you have been studying then you already possess the “bottom line”! So the “bottom line”/answer is really *not* the thing that you need to put into your notes, although you may wish to do so if this doesn’t distract you from listening to me explain **why** the answer is correct. Of course, this assumes that you have already carefully read the appropriate sections of the Manual, have at least glanced at the questions on the relevant assignments (and have at least tried some of them), and that you have been working diligently at your principles texts.

This should make it clear why I think that it is helpful for you to **bring the Manual to class with you** since it contains (almost) all of the answers to any questions you might encounter in one of the exams (and all of the assignments that do include (almost) all of those questions).

An alternative procedure is to apply the principle of comparative advantage to the lectures to maximize the lecture note taking productivity of your study group. (**Everyone** should be in a study group - unless you have a legitimate reason why you can’t or

don't want to join one. **Every** study group should consist of three students (although two or four may also work). And every study group should meet **every week without fail**. Some of you are good at math, some of you are good at drawing diagrams, and some of you are very good at seeing the **logic** of an argument. Therefore, as David Ricardo would have told you, divide up note taking amongst you to maximize your comparative advantages. You can then bring your notes together to come up with a complete version of what I said – with the emphasis on **why** I came to the conclusion I came to. This is a course, as will be true of all of your upper division economics courses, where you have to remember a lot of things but where you do **not** rely on your memory, but rather your **mastery of the logic**, to arrive at the correct answers.

When you re-read the Manual in conjunction with your lecture notes and the Assignment Keys and your principles texts and A&L you should be able to synthesize these different sources into a *single argument of your own*. Having done so you will probably be able to reproduce that argument at will, which means that you have mastered the material and are ready to be examined on it (no more last minute “cram” sessions).

The Assignment Keys are **not** “model answers” but are *my attempt to explain why the correct answer is correct*. There is often material in the keys that you will not find elsewhere in the course. Because I want to make as certain as possible that everyone understands the arguments in the keys they often go into a great deal of detail (that some of you will find unnecessary, even irritating – in which case you need to come up with your own shorter answers that capture the logic of the argument) and which is certainly redundant in an exam. You must first pick the answers apart so that they are crystal clear to you. This means reworking them, especially since the mathematics is often crowded onto the

page in order to save space. Therefore, when you read a paragraph of mathematics in one of the Keys you need to break that paragraph down into its constituent parts – **each line of mathematics on its own line of paper, carefully separated by equality signs.**

Having mastered the answer you will then need to condense your argument into a form that you can reproduce easily in the exams **in the limited time allowed to you.** This means that you must **practice writing the assignment questions under exam conditions** until you are absolutely certain that you can answer any question set efficiently and accurately. (The accuracy of your answers can be checked by going back to the keys, and to your boiled down answers, to make certain that you have covered the important points in the way that **I do** in the keys, the Manual, and the lectures.) Mastery means: **practice, practice, practice.**