

Advice on written assignments

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Question 1: What are the "take-aways" of the papers?

- Explain key results, but only those
- Be specific about comparison
- Be precise, but no extra details
- Take-away can also be a mechanism

Question 1: What are the "take-aways" of the papers?

"Dittmar (2011) shows that European cities where printing presses were established between 1450 and 1500 **grew substantially faster** between 1500 and 1600 **than** similar cities, which were not early adopters."

Question 1: Why are they (take-aways) important?

- Why are these papers (& their question & results) **important**? (general)
- What do we now know that we **did not know before**? (specific)
- Full points only if explain relation to earlier literature/debates (as in the paper)
- Do not repeat findings here, unless necessary!

Question 1: Why are they (take-aways) important?

"The printing press is considered a transformational innovation but measuring its economic impact has proven elusive. In fact, many economic historians have argued that its economic impact was limited. Dittmar (2011) presents some of the first quantitative evidence suggesting that the printing press did substantially increase economic growth."

Question 2: **Key** simplifying/identifying **assumptions**?

- Most important: what is the **comparison**?
- What makes it a **valid comparison (assumptions)**?
- Question/Hypothesis (what) \Rightarrow methods & data (how) \Rightarrow results (what)
- Identifying assumptions always in the context of a **method**: something is explicitly tested. What makes the tests valid?

Question 2: Do **you** find these **assumptions** reasonable? Why (not)?

- Write about whether **assumptions** reasonable and give reasons for why or why not (not results!)
- Use the word "I"

Question 3: In what respect do the papers **contradict and/or complement** each other?

- Give a reason for **why** you think the papers contradict or complement each other

Practicalities: highlighting key points

- Please underline the key sentences that give your answer to these questions
- Alternatively you can highlight the key point by separating it as a bullet point
- The purpose is that we can see your main point clearly
- But **only** highlight those sentences that you think are the central point
- Then you can elaborate (if needed) on that central point to show that you understand what it means
- If we have to search hard for your answer, we consider it a failure

Practicalities: Be specific and understandable

- Be specific, ie. show that you understand what the question means in the context of your specific papers, not in general:
 - "The instrument should be exogenous and the exclusion restriction needs to hold."
 - vs. "The threat for the validity of the IV approach is that distance to Mainz may be correlated with other factors that affected city growth."
- Even though writing style is not a key grading criterium, please write understandably, because otherwise your answers will not be clear to the reader
- Best to say one thing at a time

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