

ECON 3700 Writing as an Economist
Spring 2024
The Hong Kong University of Science & Technology
Course Site: <https://canvas.ust.hk/courses/55554>

This course consists of one economics lecture and one language workshop per week:

- **Economics Lecture: Friday, 10:30 – 11:50am, LSK 1009**
- **Language Workshop (enroll in either T1 or T2)**
 - **T1: Tuesday, 9:00 – 10:20am, CYT G001**
 - **T2: Tuesday, 1:30 – 2:50pm, LSK 1026**

Instructors

Ernest LAI Department of Economics LSK 6083	Tel: 2358 7608 E-mail: ernest.lai@ust.hk	Office hours: By appointment
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Economics Teaching Assistants

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Course Description

This course aims to (a) help you learn to think and write about economics with rigor and clarity, and (b) cultivate your ability to apply economic principles to analyze and understand social and economic phenomena.

You will identify a meaningful (microeconomic) phenomenon from daily life, formulate an economic explanation, propose concrete ways to test the implications of your theory, and defend your ideas against alternative explanations and challenges in scholarly debates. The end outcome of these endeavors is an economic essay. This essay will not be a full-fledged research paper. But it should prepare you to better undertake research and writing in your future coursework, career, or pursuit of higher degrees.

The majority of the class time will be devoted to helping you develop ideas and draft your essay. You will work with Dr. Lai mostly on the economics part and with Ms. Wu on the writing part.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs) and [UG School Intended Learning Outcomes \(SILOs\)](#)

Students who complete this course successfully should be able to:

1. Identify and interpret empirical regularities of economic and social phenomena. Appreciate the principle of empirical analysis to identify causal links. (SILOs 1 and 3)
2. Articulate a real-world phenomenon of interest, propose an economic explanation, and derive testable predictions. (SILOs 1 and 3)
3. Select and document evidence to support or refute arguments. Evaluate how predictions can be tested with data or other observations. (SILOs 1 and 3)
4. Acknowledge the plausibility of alternative explanations and the empirical or theoretical challenges to an argument so as to strengthen the argument or delineate its limitations. (SILOs 1 and 3)
5. Express an observation, an idea, or an argument in writing in a precise, concise, and engaging manner. (SILO 2)
6. Recognize the expectations of different genres of writing. Develop skills to adapt writing for different audiences, purposes, and contexts. (SILO 2)
7. Provide constructive feedback on others' writings. Incorporate feedback from others to improve ideas and writing. (SILO 2)
8. Develop and refine ideas. Draft, revise, and polish texts using a process-based and reflective approach. (SILO 2)

Pre-Requisites

You must have successfully completed the following courses (or equivalents) or be currently enrolled:

- Economics: (ECON 2103 or ECON 2113) and (ECON 2123 or ECON 3123)
- Business: LABU 2040
- Language: LANG 1002 or LANG 1003

Learning Environment and Attendance

- Classes will be held face-to-face on Fridays (economics lecture) and Tuesdays (language workshops). You must enroll in one language workshop (T1 or T2).
- Lectures and workshops will be highly participatory and discussion-oriented. Your consistent and active engagement is imperative to the success of the course.
- We expect all students to attend all lectures and enrolled workshops. Attendance will be recorded in every class. If you have to miss a class, please email the corresponding instructors or TAs (economics or language) in advance and provide a valid reason. You must attend the language workshop you are enrolled in; attending the other session is not allowed and will not be considered for attendance.

Learning Resources

- Class materials will be posted on Canvas (these are not substitutes for attending classes).
- We will use the Canvas course site for announcements, collections of assignments, and posting scores. Please set course notifications appropriately.
- Readings will be placed on library reserve and/or available through the course site. The following list may be supplemented or altered as necessary. Some of these are required readings for completing assignments, and some are for additional reference. The expectations for specific readings will be made clear during the course.
 - Akerlof, G. A. (1970). The market for 'lemons': Quality uncertainty and the market mechanism. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 84(3), 488–500.
 - Becker, G. B. & Elías, J. J. (2007). Introducing incentives in the market for live and cadaveric organ donations. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 21(3), 3–24.
 - Booth, P. and Whyte, J. (2018). Debate: The pros and cons of carbon taxes. *Institute of Economic Affairs*. <https://iea.org.uk/debate-the-pros-and-cons-of-carbon-taxes/>
 - Cheung, S. N. S. (1972). The enforcement of property rights in children, and the marriage contract. *Economic Journal* 82(326), 641–657.
 - Frank, R. H. (2007). *The economic naturalist: In search of explanations for everyday enigmas*. New York: Basic Books.
 - Frey, B. S., Savage, D. A., and Torgler, B. (2011). Behavior under extreme conditions: The *Titanic* disaster. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25(1), 209–222.
 - Harford, T. (2012). *The undercover economist*. New York: Oxford.
 - Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science* 162(3859), 1243–1248.
 - Landsburg, S. E. (2012). *The armchair economist: Economics and everyday life*. Rev. ed. New York: Free Press.
 - Li, H., Li L., Wu, B., and Xiong, Y. (2012). The end of cheap Chinese labor. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 26(4), 57–74.
 - McCloskey, D. N. (2000). *Economical writing* (2nd ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
 - Murphy, R. P. (2014, February 3). Economists debate the minimum wage. *EconLib*, <https://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2014/Murphyminimumwage.html>.
 - Oreopoulos, P. and Salvanes, K. G. (2011). Priceless: The nonpecuniary benefits of schooling. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25(1), 159–184.
 - Ostrom, E. (2007). A diagnostic approach for going beyond panaceas. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 104(39), 15181–15187.

- Strunk, Jr., W., & White, E. B. (2005). *The elements of style*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Thaler, R. H. (2018). From cashews to nudges: The evolution of behavioral economics. *American Economic Review* 108(6), 1265–1287.
- von Wachter, T. (2020). The persistent effects of initial labor market conditions for young adults and their sources. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34(4), 168–194.

Academic Integrity

We take academic integrity very seriously. Each student is expected to complete all academic course work in accordance to the standards and regulations set forth in the [Academic Honor Code](#) and [Regulations](#). All cases of suspected misconduct will be reported to the Dean's office whose decision will be final and binding.

Given the nature of this course, please be especially careful not to commit—intentionally or accidentally—**plagiarism**: presenting work that is not your own and originates from other sources as if it is your own, without appropriate attribution to the sources.

Assignments

Your final assignment is an independently written essay with about 1250 words that provides a plausible economic explanation for a real-world social or economic phenomenon that you have personally encountered or observed and find counter-intuitive. Your essay should include:

- An articulation of the phenomenon.
- An economic explanation.
- A discussion of testable predictions.
- A reference to relevant data or other observations that may serve to test the predictions.
- A discussion of potential challenges to the explanation, thereby identifying its limitations.

Your essay will be developed in a series of steps throughout the course. The initial steps include identifying a question, providing a justification for why it is interesting or important, sketching an argument, and developing an outline of the essay. The next step involves drafting a 750-word preliminary version ready to be revised and expanded with additional content, including a list of sources, and incorporating response to instructor and peer critique.

There will also be weekly writing exercises, a short analytic essay, and brief presentations.

You will have several weeks to identify and polish a question, with input from peers and instructors. **Your question cannot be changed after the start of Mid-Term Break (28 March)**. One aim of the course is to have you rework your analysis and argument in response to critique and reflection, and that cannot be achieved if you switch your question late in the course.

Assessment Scheme

Class Participation (10%) [CILOs: 6, 7, 8]

Attendance and active participation (asking questions, contributing to discussion, engaging in peer reviews, and taking part in drafting and revising essays).

Weekly Exercises (10%) [CILOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8]

Weekly writing tasks showing evidence of effort and learning. Exercises include data description and interpretation, dissecting assigned readings, outlining the arguments for your essay, and preliminary drafts of the essay. Tasks should be completed on time and will be graded complete/not complete (marked with * in the course schedule below).

Short Analytic Essay (10%) [CILOs: 1, 2, 5, 7, 8]

An essay of four to six paragraphs combining the findings of an existing study and your personal observations. The essay, which should show evidence of learning from previous weeks of economics and language sessions, serves as a “warm-up” for writing the final essay.

Question, Explanation of Puzzle, and Cribsheet (20%) [CILOs: 2, 5, 6, 7, 8]

A question identifying a puzzling economic or social phenomenon you have experienced. Two paragraphs articulating the question and justifying why it is interesting or important. A cribsheet listing the elements of an economic explanation. The submission should show evidence of learning from previous weeks of economics and language sessions.

Outline of Final Essay (10%) [CILOs: 2, 3, 5, 8]

Outline the structure of the final essay based on the previously submitted cribsheet and the feedback received from the instruction team. The outline should show evidence of learning from previous weeks of economics and language sessions.

Peer Review of Final Essay and Reflection (15%) [CILOs: 1, 3, 4, 7]

Provide feedback on another student’s essay draft. Go through the argument; provide constructive feedback on the logic of the argument, the clarity of writing, and the relevance of supporting evidence; verify consistency with the APA citation format; and reflect on the received feedback and discussion. The submission should show evidence of learning from previous weeks of economics and language sessions.

Final Essay (25%) [CILOs: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8]

An essay of about 1250 words providing a plausible economic explanation for a puzzling real-world economic or social phenomenon. The essay, which should show evidence of learning throughout the course, should include the five components listed above.

We reserve the right to call you in for a meeting at any time to discuss your written work before determining your grade.

Course Schedule

- All assignments marked with * will be graded complete / not complete..
- All assignments in *italics* will be graded for quality and evidence of learning.
- Underlined in blue due Sun 11:59am. Underlined in red due Mon 11:59am. **Bolded** due Tue 9am (T1) or 1:30pm (T2). CAPS due Thurs 9am (T1) or 1:30pm (T2).
- Library workshop will take place in the E-Learning classroom B in the library.
- Weekly exercises may change as the course progresses. Instructors will inform students of any changes.

Week	Date	Economics Lecture			Date	Language Workshop		
		Topic	Assignment	Due		Topic	Assignment	Due
1	Feb 2	Course introduction. Economic explanation illustrated: Observations with data	Chart description and interpretation*	<u>Feb 4</u>	Feb 6	Workshop orientation. Writing about data (I)	Revise chart description and interpretation*	FEB 8
2	Feb 9	Economic explanation illustrated: Observations without data/Introduce short analytic essay	Draft short analytic essay*	<u>Feb 12</u>	Feb 13	No workshop		
3	Feb 16	"Formulas" for economic explanation			Feb 20	Writing about data (II)	<i>Short analytic essay</i>	FEB 22
4	Feb 25	Identifying a question	Short-answer puzzle description* (in class) and revision*	<u>Feb 26</u>	Feb 27	From cribsheet to outline		
5	Mar 1	Refining the question and developing an argument (I); in-class presentations*	Draft question, explanation of puzzle, and cribsheet*	<u>Mar 4</u>	Mar 5	Conveying your argument; in-class presentations*		
6	Mar 8	Refining the question and developing an argument (II); in-class presentations*			Mar 12	Developing your own argument	<i>Question, explanation of puzzle, and cribsheet</i>	MAR 14
7	Mar 15	Library workshop	List of sources*	<u>Mar 18</u>	Mar 19	Outlining your own argument; in-class presentations*	Draft outline*	MAR 21
8	Mar 22	Sketching an argument			Mar 26	Revising your outline	<i>Outline of Final Essay</i>	MAR 28
9	Mar 29	No lecture			Apr 2	No workshop		
9	Apr 5	No lecture			Apr 9	Drafting your argument	Essay draft (750 words)*	APR 11
10	Apr 12	Economic debates (I)			Apr 16	Alternative explanations		
11	Apr 19	Economic debates (II)			Apr 23	Testing an argument empirically	Essay draft (1000 words)*	APR 25
12	Apr 26	Writing for different audiences	Draft peer reviews*	Apr 30	Apr 30	Incorporating peer feedback		
13	May 3	Supporting an argument	<i>Peer review and reflection</i>	May 7	May 7	Writing clinic (I)		
14	May 10	Writing clinic (II)				Study break	<i>Final essay</i>	<i>May 16</i>