

Paper discussion: some suggestions

I would like the paper discussion to consist of two parts. In the first part, which should be around 75% of the time, you should focus on *summarizing* a given paper. This should be a critical summary, and you should raise questions about the assumptions/steps taken by the author. In the second part of the discussion (about 25% of the time), I want you to consider extensions *beyond* the paper as it stands.

Please prepare a handout to go along with your discussion. You can refer to pages, tables in the paper, as everyone in the class should have a copy of the paper in front of them.

I want you to have fun and be creative: don't be afraid to have strong opinions (and perhaps be wrong), but **be precise** throughout. Nobody can tell whether you are right or wrong unless you are precise.

First you summarize the main accomplishments/contributions of the paper. You should cover at least:

- The question and goals of the paper
- The theoretical model
- The empirical methodology
- The data being used
- Summarize the main results

Be precise: don't just say "the author considers a discrete-choice model of drug choice", but describe the model: "the author considers nested-logit model where beta-blockers are nested apart from cholesterol-lowering drugs", etc.

For each point, think about what is *novel* about this paper: what are the author's contributions?

In describing the paper, you should be critical, and inject your own opinion. Things to consider:

- The general question addressed in the paper: is it the most interesting question given the data? Is it precise enough? How well do the results answer the question?
- The model: are the assumptions reasonable or realistic (too restrictive, too flexible)?
- The empirical methodology: are the econometric assumptions reasonable or realistic?
- The results: do they answer the stated question? Are the author's interpretation of the results correct? What other results would you like to see?

Again, **be precise**: do not say things like “this assumption is not realistic”, “I don’t believe this result”, or “this variable is endogenous” without being specific as to *why*. No cheap shots!

Furthermore, for every problem you raise, **suggest a remedy**. For example, if you think a right-hand variable in a regression is endogenous, suggest a possible instrument, or an alternative empirical model.

The purpose of this section is to get you to think critically about any paper: in order to find a research question, you need to know what others *have not yet done*.

Finally, I want you to consider some extensions beyond the paper as it stands. Answer the following two questions:

1. Using the author’s dataset, what *other* interesting economic questions can be answered?
2. Describe an alternative way to answer the same question (perhaps using another dataset, or exploring a different economic setting). For example, if the question concerns whether stock analysts give truthful recommendations, an alternative way to address a related question might be to consider whether the “feedback” mechanism for on-line retailing leads to truthful descriptions of a seller’s quality or reliability.

Again, **be precise**. The purpose of this part of to get you thinking about *feasible* research questions.