

Write your Best  
**Paper**  
in Economics and Business Studies



**FEELING  
CLUELESS?**

Let's see how you can get started.

**ECONBIZ**

*Find Economic Literature.*

Hi!

With this booklet we would like to help you write your best paper or thesis ever. Follow the instructions and nothing can stop you. We have also included QR codes that lead you to extra material and helpful web pages.

At the bottom of the page you find a time line that gives you an approximate idea of when you should have finished a particular stage of your work. However, this process is not necessarily linear and you can always return to certain points.



Wishing you all the best for your assignment!

The editorial team

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**You're not very keen  
on this assignment?**

**You'd rather be  
someplace else?**

**Let's see how you  
can get started.**

## → BECOMING A RESEARCHER

In your assignment you address a scholarly question and take your first steps toward doing actual research. This can be very exciting if you choose your topic well and are interested in the issue.

Your first assignments consist mainly in the critical reflection on the current state of research on your question and in discussing it. You substantiate your arguments by referring to renowned experts.

## → GET GOOD GRADES

**“First things first” – you want to get a good grade, of course.  
The essential things are:**

- the search for relevant literature,
- consultation with your supervisor,
- focus on your topic while you pursue your research question, and
- correct citations.

You can manage this with tips from this booklet.  
Just imagine that A-Excellent grade on your report!



# Brainstorming

## »topic«

**TIP:**

Now is the time to look at the requirements for the layout specifications of your paper. The faculty or the chair usually set precise specifications for the title page, line spacing, font size, citation style etc. The instructions often contain helpful tips from your supervisors.

## → FIND YOUR TOPIC

For assignments and bachelor theses, your supervisor will probably suggest a topic for you. If, however, you are allowed to choose your topic, take note of the following:

- There should be a connection with the seminar or the specialist field of your supervisor (for BA/MA).
- What are your interests and preferences (Has there been anything recently you found especially interesting? Did anything during lectures or in the media catch your attention? Have you observed any developments that you would like to explore?).
- Check: Is there sufficient literature for your topic? (p. 9) Also: Is there sufficient data or theoretical background for your topic?

**Caution:** make sure that your topic is not too broad and coordinate closely with your supervisor.

- Questions such as “Which method?”, “Which models?”, “Which actors/stakeholders?”, “At micro or macro level?” or even “When?” and “Where?” can help to narrow down your topic.

### BY THE WAY

The topic is not the same as the research question. Once you have decided on a topic, you develop the question that you want to answer – related to this topic (p. 19).



# The foundation

**The literature that you use is the foundation of your paper.**

Your assignment consists mostly in the critical reflection on the current state of research on your question and in discussing it. That is why your grade depends largely on the literature that you use – it shows which existing knowledge you build upon as a basis for your statements.

**TIP:**

Systematic reviews describe the relevant literature for a topic and present the current state of research.

To find them, use the following search terms: “systematic review”, “literature survey”, “literature review”.

**BY THE WAY:**

The Technical University Berlin offers a webpage for advanced students who would like to write their own systematic literature review.

Systematic reviews  
in EconBiz



[zbw.to/mmITq](https://zbw.to/mmITq)

Write your own  
literature review



[zbw.to/GwLE3](https://zbw.to/GwLE3)



# → LITERATURE SEARCH

For your (literature) search, you only use relevant **subject terms** (from economics or business studies), and add geographical terms if needed. Also consider **synonyms** so that you will not miss important results. You can find them in:

- the Standard Thesaurus for Economics (STW), a specialised subject vocabulary (zbw.eu/stw)
- subject-specific dictionaries (CEE – The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics, Palgrave Dictionary of Economics) and encyclopedias, including Wikipedia
- databases (p. 11) where the results that you find are often indexed with subject headings that you can use for further searches.

# → BRAINSTORMING: SEARCH TERMS

	Aspect 1	Aspect 2	Aspect n
Terms	food, "food trade"	waste	"Great Britain", Britain
Translations			
Synonyme	"food retailing"	garbage, trash	UK, "United Kingdom"
Narrower terms	dairy, vegetable*, fruit*, supermar- ket*, grocer*	disposal	England, Scotland, ...
Broader terms	nutrition, retail*		EU "European Union", Europ*
Related terms	"date label"	"sustainable consumption"	British, English, Scottish



# Understanding search tools

## GOOGLE...

... searches websites and is **not** designed to find articles for scholarly use. It is not really useful when searching for scholarly content. But you will find material to get started on your topic.

## LIBRARY CATALOGUE

- contains books, ebooks and journals in your library for all subjects
- contains items that cannot be found with Google
- contains verified scholarly sources (often including articles in journals)
- but beware! Even here you may not find all relevant articles.



ebooks

books

journal articles

### Online access?

*Use the VPN/remote access of your library to access licensed databases, articles, and ebooks from home.*

## DATABASES...

... are your first choice when searching for scholarly publications. They help you find the most important journal articles for your subject. Databases can often be used only in libraries that have bought a license.

**Ask your librarians** which databases relevant to your topic are available in your library.

## GOOGLE SCHOLAR...

... contains scholarly articles and working papers, often with a link to the full-text.

**But beware:** the ranking favours much-cited (and often older) publications.

# → SEARCHING DATABASES

Searches in databases are different from searches in search engines. With these four tricks you can find all that is relevant:

**PLEASE NOTE** that different databases use different characters.

**1.**

## Find all suffixes with an **\*asterisk**

Find singular and plural forms and compounds with a single query:

*Chin\* = China, Chinese, ...*

*Brand\* = Brand, Brands, Branding, ...*

**2.**

## Find an exact word order:

**“with quotation marks”**

*“Brand behaviour”, “Brand strategy”*

**3.**

## Combine synonyms with **OR** and aspects with **AND**

It can be useful to find synonyms with an OR query:

*(“Internal branding” OR “Brand behaviour”*

*AND (Reputation OR “Corporate image”)*

**4.**

## Filter and sort result lists

Databases often provide filters to sort results by year, topic, authors, type of publication...

Sorting by year of publication can also be useful.

Important databases for economics and business studies:

**ECONBIZ**

*Find Economic Literature.*

[econbiz.de](http://econbiz.de)

EBSCO Business Source Premier/Elite/Complete  
[search.ebscohost.com](http://search.ebscohost.com)

JSTOR  
[jstor.org](http://jstor.org)



EconLit  
[aeaweb.org/econlit](http://aeaweb.org/econlit)



# Did you know?

## → **What exactly is “Peer Review”?**

Peer review is a procedure of quality control used by most scholarly journals. Peers (researchers from the same community) review an article before it is published. If you find several versions of a publication, cite the one that has been peer-reviewed.

## → **Should I cite Wikipedia?**

Wikipedia is often useful for getting an overview of the topic. Normally it is not a suitable source for citation, but it can help you find some references.

## → **And how about textbooks?**

Textbooks should not be the basis of your assignment. They give an overview of topics and the state of research, but they present no original research findings. It takes a long time for new research findings to be taken up in textbooks. However, textbooks can be a good entry point to get an overview of a topic or to find definitions for essential concepts. In the case of methods or certain formulas (for instance from statistics or econometrics) you can also cite from textbooks.

## → WHAT IS A GOOD, SCHOLARLY SOURCE?

In your assignment you mainly refer to articles from scholarly journals (p.15) and current working papers (p. 14) from research institutes. You can find these in subject-specific databases (p. 11).

Is it 'crap' or a good source? Apply the CRAAP test – especially when you have doubts. (For publications that you find in databases you can skip this test).



**Currency:** Is the information up-to-date?



**Relevance:** Does the text refer to other scholarly publications?  
Does it have in-text references and a reference list?



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**Authority:** Who wrote the paper? Is s/he an expert in the area?  
Does s/he work at an academic institution?



**Audience:** Does the publication address an academic community?  
Only then can it be considered a scholarly source.



**Purpose:** Is scientific knowledge the main purpose of the text?  
Is it written from a neutral position? Or does it pursue other goals (political, financial, lobbying, propaganda ...)?



## → WORKING PAPERS

Working papers are usually published freely on the internet by research institutes. They are not peer-reviewed like articles in journals, but they are much appreciated because they represent ongoing research. They are an important source in economics. Relevant questions are: Has the working paper been published by a renowned research institute? Has the paper already been published as an article in a journal? If so, cite the peer-reviewed article, not the working paper.

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Research institute

Series name

Number within the series

Working paper



[zbw.to/O77EJ](http://zbw.to/O77EJ)

# → JOURNALS

Scholarly journals publish articles on specific subjects several times a year.

Journal title: **Agricultural and Food Economics**  
Volume: **5**  
No./Issue: **1**

Rossini et al. *Agricultural and Food Economics* (2017) 5:1  
DOI 10.1186/s40100-016-0070-9

Agricultural and Food Economics

RESEARCH Open Access

Argentine government policies: impacts on the beef sector

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**Abstract**

Beef is a staple food for Argentine consumers, and although the country has been a major exporter, the highest proportion of beef production is consumed in the domestic market. With rising inflation rates in the last 5 years, and given the beef prices' strong weight on the composition of the Consumer Price Index, the Argentine government began taking measures to control it. They initially forced price agreements with members of the marketing and production chain and ended up with a total ban on exports. The results were not as expected and caused serious distortions at different levels of the beef chain. This study aimed to determine whether the impact on some economic and production variables would have been different without such intervention. A VAR model was estimated in order to compare the observed behavior with intervention measures and estimated predictions in a theoretically free market.

Open full-text

[zbw.to/zskZf](http://zbw.to/zskZf)

Rossini, Arancibia & Guiguet: [zbw.to/KIRH2/](http://zbw.to/KIRH2/)  
- CC BY license: [zbw.to/KSfks](http://zbw.to/KSfks)

Rankings show which journals are read and cited most frequently:

- **Web of Science – Journal Citation Reports:**  
[zbw.to/pJvMb](http://zbw.to/pJvMb), through library licenses
- **Scopus Journal Metrics:**  
[zbw.to/YDcs4](http://zbw.to/YDcs4)
- **Scimago Country and Journal Rank:**  
[zbw.to/nl6Ab](http://zbw.to/nl6Ab)



# Time for reflection

## Sit back

Sometimes you have to put all sources aside and just think about what you have read. This will let you see connections between things and create fresh ideas.

Jogging or just taking a walk often works like a charm.

## Read critically

Do not simply copy from the publications you have read. Evaluate the texts critically.

Always keep in mind the origin of a paper and the possible intention behind it (p. 13).





## → READ

### *During research*

you will encounter many potentially interesting articles. Use reading techniques to select the relevant publications more quickly.

- **Read the abstract**, introduction, and conclusion first. This will tell you if the paper is worth while.
- **The literature you use** should clearly relate to your topic.

### **Once you have identified a source as relevant, you:**

- Read the paper thoroughly until you have grasped it completely. Look up subject terms you do not know.
- make excerpts of the most important passages, e.g. by using a reference management software (p. 24). Comment passages and note cross references to other texts. Always point out which are your own thoughts (this is the basis for your own contribution to the assignment) and which you have found in the literature.
- note down sources and page numbers. This will make citation easier and you run less risk of plagiarism (p. 24).
- develop your research question or hypothesis from your thoughts about the texts you have read (p. 19).



# Tip: Time for sleeping

When you plan your timetable, remember to include:

- eating
- sleeping
- leisure

## Time factor!

Unfortunately, finding a relevant, precise and answerable question is often as difficult as finding the answer. You should take that into consideration when you plan your schedule.

As a rule of thumb, you should start writing after one-third of the allotted time has passed.



## → RESEARCH QUESTION: YOUR COMMON THREAD

While you read the relevant literature on your topic and excerpt passages, you develop your research question.

**The research question is the centrepiece and focus of your paper.** It is a declaration of what you want to find out – it refines your topic and forms the basis of your paper.

### Recap:

- Decide on the research question before (!) you start writing.
- A good question saves you a lot of work. It helps you write the outline and search for literature.
- Chose an open question that cannot be answered with a plain Yes or No. Phrase it clearly and precisely so that you can develop an answer in the course of your paper.
- Describe your research question in your introduction: What it is, why it is relevant, how you will answer it. It announces the “agenda” of your paper.
- Your paper should only contain matter that relates to finding an answer to your question. Avoid digressions.

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BY THE WAY:  
Video on “Developing a  
Research Question”

[zbw.to/y3xPt](http://zbw.to/y3xPt)

[zbw.to/LdJZk](http://zbw.to/LdJZk)



More tips: “How to ...” at  
George Mason University



# The blueprint

→ The outline is a kind of blueprint for your paper. A good outline helps you to write your paper more quickly.

**PLUS:**

→ The outline is the basis for consultations with your supervisor. This is your best chance to get valuable feedback.

→ The basic structure of your paper is set before you start your actual writing. This saves you rewriting at a later stage and you do not risk straying from your main points. It gives you a focus for your writing.

→ Your outline prevents you from getting writer's block. Since you have a blueprint in front of you, the question of "Where do I start?" doesn't even come up. (Empty Page Syndrome)

## → THE OUTLINE

Write your outline before you commit to writing your paper. Give a rough overview of your planned paper and discuss it with your supervisor.

Write your outline after you have searched and reviewed your literature. (But keep in mind that searching and reading is an iterative process that will accompany you through your entire work.)

### The outline contains:

1. the preliminary title,
2. the research question that you want to answer,
3. why the topic/question is relevant,
4. the chosen method of research (for instance empirical paper, theoretical paper, or literature-based paper),
5. first potential results/working hypotheses,
6. a rough structure,
7. a list of the relevant literature you found so far.



# Where things go wrong

## Professors report the following problems with handed-in assignments:

- papers deviate from the original question (e.g. too many digressions), there is no focus;
- sources are not put into context; uncritical rephrasing of sources;
- the argumentation lacks logic;
- the paper is written colloquially and does not use technical terms and subject-specific terminology. It contains typos or grammatical errors;
- citations are incorrect or other people's ideas are not attributed properly (p.24).

### **TIP:**

Your paper addresses readers familiar with the subject. You do not have to explain what should be basic knowledge from your first semesters.

But: Concepts that are important in the context of the paper must be defined.

### **BY THE WAY:**

Your paper will include a lot of lists, such as table of contents, list of illustrations/ figures, list of tables, list of abbreviations, list of symbols, (followed by the text and appendices) and a reference list.

# → WRITE YOUR PAPER

- In your paper you systematically provide an answer to your research question (do not simply write down everything you have learned).
- **Evaluate** the sources you read critically and substantiate your arguments.
- Use subject terminology where appropriate. Write clearly and concisely, do not write unnecessarily complicated sentences, avoid qualifiers and colloquialisms.
- Cite your sources consistently.
- Draw a conclusion at the end of your paper.

**1.**

## Introduction

Describe your research question in your introduction. Explain why it is important and how you intend to answer it.

Give an overview of your paper's structure.

The introduction is often written last because then it is possible to give the best summary of what you have written.

**2.**

## Main section

In the main section, you present the current state of research (which means you discuss the relevant literature on the topic).

The main section also contains your argumentation, explanations and findings (depending on your question, this can be the theoretical model or the empirical test).

**3.**

## Conclusion

At the end, you draw a conclusion from the findings presented in the main section, give an outlook and name open questions.

Choose a title corresponding to the content, such as outlook, conclusion and open questions, ...



## → BEWARE OF PLAGIARISM!

Always name your sources.

Missing references can mean that you fail, even if it was mere carelessness on your part.

A paper does not have to be copied from other sources completely to be rated as plagiarism. It is enough to copy a few passages or ideas from other texts without proper citation.

### **TIP:**

With **reference management software** like **Citavi**, **Zotero**, **Endnote**, or **Mendeley** you can automatically create in-text references and reference lists. This saves you time.

Some of this software is free. In addition, many libraries offer access to licensed versions of Citavi or Endnote.

Caution: Always make a final check that citations are correct and complete.

If you use dynamic sources that underlie constant changes, such as websites, save them completely in order to be able to hand them in with your paper if necessary.

**Check your paper with free  
PlagScan software:**

[zbw.to/0OwKE](http://zbw.to/0OwKE)





## → CITATION

### Citation styles

Ask your supervisors about formal requirements. If no particular style is required, you can use the widely adopted APA or Harvard citation styles. The important thing is to be consistent and to use one style throughout your paper.

### Indirect citation/paraphrase

Paraphrasing is expressing someone else's thoughts in your own words. It is not highlighted typographically, but integrated into your text. However, the original source must be named in the text and listed in the reference list.

Luccasen and Thomas (2010, p. 136) suggest to make economics lectures more intuitive and interesting by means of episodes of the television series “The Simpsons”.

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### Exact quote

Use exact quotes only if the wording matters. Mark short quotes with quotation marks, longer ones (usually more than 40 words) by indenting the paragraph. Mark all changes to the wording: additions, omissions, and highlighting.

Do not correct errors, but mark them with [sic].

They state that: “Homer [a cartoon figure] may not understand much about economic principles, but college students can by using the television show *The Simpsons*, ...” (Luccasen & Thomas, 2010, p. 136, italic in original).



## → IN-TEXT REFERENCES

In economics and the social sciences, the short citation form is used most widely. You state the: → last name(s), year and page number(s) of the respective text passage in brackets.

### Examples for APA style:

Brand and Harig (2019, p. 5) state that ...

Since the price of coffee affects ... (Brand & Harig, 2019, p. 5), it is ...

The ... has affected the price of coffee (Brand & Harig, 2019, p. 5).

- If you have several sources by one person (or a group) from the same year, add a/b/... to the year of publication...: (Sojaran, 2015a, p. 15)
- p. and pp. indicate one or more pages: (Brand, 2017, pp. 15–22)
- If a work has six or more authors, or if a work by three or more authors is cited a second time, APA style abbreviates the list of names, using only the first author's name, followed by et al. (Wung et al., 2016, p. 4).

Find more examples in the citation guidelines (pdf) of EconBiz:

[zbw.to/LleIU](http://zbw.to/LleIU)



# → THE REFERENCE LIST

The reference list contains all details for the publications you have used in your text.

Beware: Sources that you have read but do not cite are not listed.

The list is usually **sorted** by last name(s), first name(s), year.

Brand, J. (2019)

Brand, J. (2016)

Brand, J., & Harig, R. Z. (2018)

## Examples (in APA style)

### Article in a journal

Chadi, A., Jeworrek, S., & Mertins, V. (2017). When the meaning of work has disappeared: Experimental evidence on employees' performance and emotions. *Management Science*, 63(6), 1696-1707. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2016.2426>

### Working paper/report

Boeing-Reicher, C., & Boysen-Hogrefe, J. (2017). *Estimating the effects of the „flight to quality“, with an application to German bond yields and interest payments* (Kiel working paper 2086). Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10419/162853>

### Book

Levitt, S. D., & Dubner, S. J. (2005). *Freakonomics: A rogue economist explores the hidden side of everything* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Sage.

### Article in a book/compilation

Fort, R. D. (2016). Competitive balance in North American professional sports. In J. L. FizeL & S. Roberts (eds.), *Handbook on sports economics research* (pp. 190-208). Armonk, NY: Routledge.



# Time to sit back

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# → REVISION AND SUBMISSION

Plan at least one or two weeks in order to:

- get some distance from your text,
- proof-read your paper yourself,
- have others proof-read it and
- layout your paper, print it, bind it and submit it on time.

## Checklist for proof-reading

1. Check spelling and grammar
2. Is the argumentation comprehensible?
3. Are your most important findings recognisable as such?
4. Are the footnotes numbered correctly?
5. Do titles and numbering in the table of contents correspond to those in the text? Is the numbering correct?
6. Have you cited all sources in the text?
7. Have you listed all cited sources (and only those) in the reference list?
8. Have you formatted the title page, date, page margin and font size correctly? Have you signed the no plagiarism declaration (if needed in your department)?



# Your “One-stop shop”

On these pages you can find further sources and helpful information.

The “Research Skills” section of EconBiz offers:

- video tutorials on YouTube,
- citation guidelines as PDF,
- the Guided Walk, a decision-based online tutorial.

E-Learning offers in EconBiz



WRITE YOUR BEST ASSIGNMENT!

Start here

- Search and evaluate
- Access to full texts
- Cite correctly

## → FACE-TO-FACE ADVICE

### **Supervisors**

Discuss your topics in detail with your supervisors. If you have questions or doubts, address them openly. You could ask them to give you a completed assignment of another student that may serve as a writing example to you.

### **Library**

Research Guide EconDesk ([econdesk.de](http://econdesk.de)) is a free reference service that offers the support of academic librarians via chat or email in your search for literature, statistics and data in economics and business studies.

Also ask your librarians or subject librarians on site. Many libraries offer courses or materials on reference management, research skills, databases, citing etc.

### **Academic writing**

Your university might provide writing workshops and offer courses and consultation hours for academic writing.

### **Fellow students and student council**

Learn from fellow students. Maybe they will lend you a paper to use as an example. Most important: have someone else revise your paper! Find a study buddy and exchange your papers.

The student council of your department can also provide you with advice, especially if you encounter problems.



**Our best wishes  
for a successful  
paper!**





# **Do you have questions or would you like to give feedback?**

**Contact the EconBiz team at  
[info@econbiz.de](mailto:info@econbiz.de)**

**We are grateful to everyone who  
has supported us with ideas and  
questions during the creation  
of this booklet!**



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zbw.eu

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If you have any **questions**, contact the experts in your library or the EconBiz team.

Download this booklet as a PDF at: <https://zbw.to/howtoguides>



Use this space for contact information of  
departments, institutes, professors, libraries.  
Stick an address label here, or stamp it.