

ECN 375/376 Term paper outline templates

Term paper outlines should not be viewed as a straight-jacket, but more like a tool to get a well structured term paper. That in turn makes it both easier and more enjoyable to write a good paper.

What is a good term paper in this course?

1. It manages to combine theories and insights from various parts of the curriculum in the course = enables students to demonstrate knowledge and ability to use course building blocks.
2. It is focused and has a purpose. This could be on an issue or on a particular aspect of theories presented in the course.
3. It helps if it is well written. Eloquent writers in general literature usually do not use long and elaborate sentences unless that has a purpose. In a term paper (or in any other setting) there is no need to make things more complicated than what they are:
 - (a) Short sentences. One point in each sentence. One idea in each paragraph.
 - (b) Active writing. Shy away from the passive form (It was showed that ... much better: We have showed that ... or We show that ...)
4. Use descriptive terms. One of the best academic writers I know, Alan Randall, once used a formal model involving goods and bads. The first thing he did was to rename goods to gold, and bads to dirt. That way he avoided a long discussion on definitions, and the text became much easier to read.

To the outline. It should provide the structure you need to get your main points across in a logical fashion. The sample paper demonstrates this well. It is an applied paper, and the structure promotes the multidimensionality the paper deals with.

Some common elements of any good outline:

1. An introduction that motivates the paper.
2. A background chapter that provides the necessary story behind the paper. In economics a literature review is common. (on issues related to the topic in the paper – make it focussed). You can place the literature review where it best fits, in the background chapter or as a separate chapter.
3. Theory and methods
4. Data description (if any data used)
5. Analysis and discussion
6. Conclusion
 - (a) Return to the research questions in the introduction or the background chapter, and make sure you answer the RQs to the extent your analysis permits. It is a cardinal sin in academia to claim a problem is solved, when it is not. Don't oversell your findings, but do not undersell either.
 - (b) Be a bit self-critical towards your own findings and invite to discussions
 - (c) Point to possible future work that could shed more light on the issue(s) you investigate.

Research questions can be placed either in the introduction or the background chapter. An advantage of putting the RQs in the introduction, is that brings readers faster to the core issues of the paper. It may also help you maintain focus.