**How to Read Empirical Papers**

ECON 43550, Economics of the Family

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In this class we will be reading empirical research papers (typically journal articles). This takes some practice. Here are some helpful guidelines:

1. In every paper we read, start with the introduction. Ask yourself:

What is the primary research question?

Why is this question interesting?

What is the paper’s main contribution?

1. Next, we typically find sections discussing the background and empirical approach. Ask yourself:

What empirical methods are used?

What data are used?

What is the identification strategy (how is the causal effect identified)?

1. In the results sections, ask:

What are the important findings?

1. Finally:

What are the policy implications?

What are the potential weaknesses of the data or methods used?

Are there ways the paper could be improved?

A valuable strategy is to focus your reading around the tables and figures. For each one, ask yourself, “What is the point of this table/figure?” In most cases you are in good shape if you understand the introduction, conclusion, and the tables and figures.