

Referee Report #1
ECOE 60303
Due: October 13, 2010

Bill Evans
Fall 2010

For this assignment, you are to select an article, published within the past four years and ‘review’ the paper as if you had received the paper from a journal the referee. Since we are currently working with panel data models and difference-in-difference estimation, please select a paper that utilizes this methodology.

Refereeing is an (all too) frequent and necessary component of the job of an academic actively engaged in research. Dissecting a paper and understanding the inner working of a research manuscript is an important skill.

A referee report serves two purposes. First, the referee is making a recommendation to the editor about the scientific merits and importance of a research project. Second, the referee outlines some shortcoming of the paper and some suggestions about how to improve the work.

[Just a note about your future life as a referee, speaking as an editor, you should not underestimate the importance of the first task. Editors need to know first and foremost whether the paper is worth saving. If the paper is a dog that should be put to sleep: do not spend a lot of time trying to save the patient. Write a short review and be done with it. List the two or three key reasons why the author is confused and get the report back to the journal as soon as possible. Too many times, young referees try to be helpful by writing a detailed report on a bad paper. Just remember, you are working for the editor and not the author. If the paper is bad, a one-page rejection returned to the journal in two weeks is much more valuable than a five page detailed report returned in five months.]

Most referee reports have four major parts. First, reviews contain a **summary** that is typically one paragraph and contains a brief statement of the question addressed by the author, an outline of how the author answers the question at hand, and a brief synopsis of the results. Next the review discusses the **background and significance** of the paper. Is this an important topic in your field? Are there methodological advances that are important for the field? Is the methodology path-breaking? Does the author help change the way the discipline view the problem? Alternatively, is this one of many papers addressing the same topic in a similar fashion? In this section, most reviewers also indicate whether the paper is appropriate for the journal. Many articles submitted to the major journals in our field such as *American Economic Review* or *Journal of Political Economy*, never get past this stage since most journal submissions are on narrow topics that are more suited for a field journal rather than a general-interest journal that caters to the entire profession. For this exercise, assume the paper you are refereeing has been submitted to an appropriate field journal. In order to write this portion of your review, you may need to read some other articles in the same subject matter to understand

whether the paper is an important and innovative contribution. Next, referees outline both the **strengths and weaknesses of the methodology** used by the authors. Many referees make the mistake of *only* noting what they do *NOT* like about the paper. Spend some time discussing what you like and found innovative as well. Finally, most referees make some **suggestions about how to improve the paper**. This can include such details as catching typos, to suggestions about how to motivate or structure the paper, and most importantly, other models or estimation results that can be run that help bolster the hypothesis the author is testing.

For this project, you cannot work in groups, but you can 'run an idea' by a colleague. Please do not Google reviews of the paper. Your review should be roughly 3 to 5 pages, single spaced, 12 point type, one inch margins all around. Reports are due in hard copy in my mailbox by 5:00, Wednesday, October 13th.

Please select a paper by September 29. I must approve all selection. In this case, do not pick a paper in a top 5 journal but rather, select a paper that is published in the leading field journal of your favorite field. If you need some help selecting a paper, I can point you in the right direction. Pick a paper in a topic that is of interest to you.