

Précis Writing Assignment  
ECON 40447 Health Economics

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One of the more important skills that will be required of you in the workforce is the ability to distill a large and complex set of information into a nice neat package. At many different points in your work life you will be asked “what is the bottom line?” on a particular subject matter.

For this class, you will get some practice at this skill by reading academic articles and summarizing the content in a nontechnical manner. The readings for this class are a series of academic articles listed on the class syllabus. At least a week before we discuss the articles in class, 2-4 students will be assigned to write a short paper that summarizes the key concepts in the article. The papers should be 2 pages, double spaced, 12 point type, one inch margins. Throughout the semester, students are expected to write two précis. You must sign up in advance for the précis and no more than 5 people can do one particular article. If you sign up for an article, you cannot drop the assignment and pick up another. You are responsible for that article and turning in the article late or not handing in the paper generates a zero score for the assignment. The précis will be due the day we discuss the article.

The articles you will be writing about are marked with a \* on the class syllabus. The articles identified with the pound sign (#) are more statistical articles that may require some knowledge of basic econometrics.

In your précis you are to (at a minimum) address the following questions:

- What is the research question the author is trying to address?
- Why is this an interesting question (put the topic into context – why should someone care about this issue?)
- What is the basic strategy the author uses to address the question? The article might be a literature review, an original statistical model or a theoretical exercise. Briefly outline their technique. For example, if they estimate a statistical model, outline how they
- Briefly describe the results/conclusions of the paper.
- Discuss the limitations of the work – what does the paper not address and what are some shortcomings of the analysis.

Write in text not bullet points.

Here are a few things to keep in mind. Assume the audience for your summary is a non-technical audience. For example, suppose you work for a fairly smart medical doctor who is part of some health reform task force and he does not have an economic or statistical background. How would you convey to this person the basic elements of the article?

Grades will be based on how accurately, effectively and grammatically you convey the information.

Before the start of class each Monday I will have a signup sheet for next week’s readings. Although you may not be responsible for writing a précis for a particular article, you ARE expected to read the articles none the less.

The first précis are due next Monday. This is the only time we will have a short turnaround. If at least two people do not sign up for next Monday’s assignment, I reserve the right to randomly assign people to a task.