

## Paper Assignment

**Assignment:** Write a short paper in which you will do (a modest amount of) additional research on a topic that was covered in class.

In most cases, an (approximately) three-page paper will be long enough to sufficiently cover the appropriate material. For some topics, however, students might want to vary from that suggested length. The basic instruction on length is: papers should be long enough to sufficiently address the relevant issues. Each student should judge how much space is needed — for any particular topic — to achieve that end.

**Possible Topics:** There are four possible topics listed below. Each student can pick one on which he or she will write. If any student finds that none of these topics sound appealing, that student can suggest to Prof. Trandel his or her own choice for a possible topic. As long as the project is related to material we've covered in class, and offers the opportunity for some follow-up research, there's a good chance that Prof. Trandel will approve the topic. [Please ask about topic approval before spending any time writing.]

- Select a professional sports league other than the NFL, MLB, NBA, or NHL, and collect data that can be used to calculate some numeric measure of the competitive balance of that league. [Either a within-season measure or an across-season measure (or both) of competitive balance might be appropriate. Which is computed is partly the student's choice, and partly a function of data availability.] Report the data gathered. Compute (doing the needed calculations correctly!) that competitive-balance measure. How does the league's competitive balance compare to that of the "big four" leagues? If the league is particularly balanced, or particularly unbalanced, is there any fact about the structure or the financing of the league that would explain the pattern? If the league doesn't stand out in any way, does that observation reveal anything interesting?
- There is currently a scandal brewing on the professional tennis tour related to the possibility that some matches may have been thrown. What would be the reason for a competitor to throw a match? What event(s) first brought this issue to public attention? Have there been other events that have aroused suspicion? What policies, if any, have been adopted in response to this controversy? What policies, if any, have been proposed? Based on the materials you discover through researching this topic, do you think the throwing of matches is a serious issue? What, if anything, do you think should be done in response?
- Earlier this year, Justin Wolfers wrote a op-ed column in *The New York Times* related to the possibility that the existence of wagering could lead to the corruption of athletes (or officials). Wolfers argued that the probability of corruption would be reduced if only certain kinds of betting were allowed. Under his proposal, which kinds of bets would be allowed? Which kinds would not be allowed? Why does Wolfers think changing current betting procedures would reduce the chance of compromised outcomes? Do you agree with his argument? In your opinion, would putting the Wolfers plan into practice be a good idea? Do you think the Wolfers proposal could ever be adopted?

- After the second exam, we'll consider some research into whether or not the use of a designated hitter in one of the two major baseball leagues has changed pitcher behavior in a way that leads to an increase in the number of batters who are hit by pitches. Results suggesting an effect on behavior, and other results suggesting no effect, will be presented. All of those empirical studies use data that don't include the last several baseball seasons. To address this topic, collect up-to-date data, report that data, and analyze it in an appropriate way. Do recent events tend to support one side or the other in the behavioral effect/no-effect debate? Has the evidence on this question been consistent over time?

**Due Date:** The paper is due at the *beginning of class on Thursday, December 6th*. This is the last day on which the course will meet, and part of that day's class time will be devoted to having students share what they learned while writing their papers.

Since it is very unlikely that every member of the class will choose the same topic, there will almost certainly be students who have not researched the topic on which you have spent your time. Furthermore, even students who did choose the same topic as you may have reached conclusions that differ from those you reached. Come to class on Dec. 6th prepared to briefly describe what you learned (and concluded) while writing your paper.

Of course, completed papers can always be turned in before Dec. 6th. [Students who turn in papers early should still come to class on the 6th prepared to explain their findings.]

Papers can be handed in after the start-of-class-on-the-6th deadline. Papers handed in either later on Dec. 6th, or any time on Dec. 7th, will have their numeric score reduced by 50%. Papers handed in after the 7th, but before the final exam (Tues., Dec. 11th), will have their score reduced by 75%.

**Importance to Grade:** The numeric score on this assignment makes up 10% of the overall semester score, which means it is worth 40 points out of the semester's possible 400 points.

**Format:** Papers must be word-processed (or typed). The length guideline above is based on a paper that is double spaced. Students who prefer to use single, (or one-and-a-half-line) spacing can do so — simply adjust the recommended length in the appropriate way.

**Reference List:** All papers should include a list of whatever references were used in writing the paper. There are no specific requirements concerning the format of the reference list (general neatness is, of course, helpful). Make sure to supply enough information so that I could easily find each of the references used.

There's no need to use in-text citations, footnotes, etc.

**General Information:** The following point may be obvious, but I'll mention it anyway. The score on this paper will depend not only on the accuracy of your content, but also on the quality of a your writing, the organization of the paper, etc. Make sure to spend some time editing and rewriting your paper; don't hand in your first draft.

You should write your paper so that it can be understood by an intelligent person who has not taken this class. To that end, you should explain any "jargon" you use.

You should feel free to discuss this assignment and how you will approach it with your classmates (or with me). You can often learn a lot from such discussions. However, the paper you hand in must consist solely of your own work. Any indication that you collaborated with another person during the actual writing of your paper will severely affect your grade.