

First Economic Naturalist Writing Assignment

This assignment must be turned in to the course mailbox in the Economics Department Academic Office by the due date. You are welcome to submit it early directly to a member of the teaching staff (e.g., in lecture). No collaboration is allowed.

You are also required to submit a 2–3 sentence abstract that summarizes your paper (i.e., the question you address, and your insights). The abstract should be **submitted by e-mail** to lstein@stanford.edu no later than 6 P.M., July 17, 2009. Abstracts will be compiled and shared with the class; your paper may also be distributed among your classmates.

The assignment is given in the syllabus and reprinted below. Note that you are expected to come up with **your own** subject on which to write; the examples in the syllabus and in Frank's article and book are just that: examples (and not necessarily ideal ones).

You will be required to complete two short writing assignments, which are drawn from Robert H. Frank's *The Economic Naturalist Writing Assignment* (JEE, 2006).

An important part of your experience in this course will be two short writing assignments designed to foster your skills as an economic naturalist. In each of these papers, your assignment is to use a principle, or principles, discussed in the course to explain some pattern of events or behavior that you personally have observed. . . .

Your space limit is 500 words. Many excellent papers are significantly shorter. Please do not lard your essay with complex terminology. Imagine yourself talking to a relative who has never had a course in economics. The best papers are ones that would be clearly intelligible to such a person, and typically these papers do not use any algebra or graphs. You need not include a bibliography.

This assignment is not a Ph.D. dissertation. You are not expected to do voluminous research in support of your argument, although a relevant fact or two might help convince yourself and others that you are on the right track. It makes no difference whether your topic is "important," but try, as best you can, to choose something interesting. A really successful paper is one that begins with a really interesting question (one that makes the listener instantly curious to learn the answer) and then uses an economic principle or principles to construct a plausible answer. You'll know you have a good paper if the first thing your roommate wants to do upon reading it is to tell friends about it.

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In preparing the writing assignments, you may find some food for thought in R. Frank, *The economic naturalist: in search of explanations for everyday enigmas*, Westview Press, 2007.