

## A FEW COMMENTS ON WRITING THE ESSAY

**Preface:** This document has a few comments about writing issues in the essays that came up repeatedly the previous time the course was taught. They were written by the GSIs when they provided feedback on the essays, but we thought you might find it useful to have them now. (They are definitely not a comprehensive guide to how to write the essay well, however!)

### **A. General Writing Comments**

- The goal of the assignment was for you to develop your own arguments for or against the proposed policy. Thus it was best to use few if any direct quotes. An exception would be if an author used a phrase that you thought conveyed an idea in a particularly concise or constructive way.
- It was best to say in the first paragraph what position you would argue for. (An economics essay is not a mystery novel: it's ok to give the punch line at the beginning.)
- Reasonably sized paragraphs usually made essays easier to follow. In general, a paragraph should never be longer than one-double-spaced page, and usually should be much shorter.
- If not quoting another author's words, do not use quotation marks. They are distracting. Likewise, in general it is best to avoid using bold or italics in the body of the essay.

### **B. Misused Words**

- The "Fed" as an abbreviation for "the Federal Reserve" should be lower case except for the first letter. It is not an acronym.
- "Firstly": Use "first" instead.
- "Economical" means cheap or thrifty. For example, one might say, "A Honda Civic is an economical car because it is cheap to maintain." "Economic" is the adjective that means related to economics or an economy. One makes good economic arguments, not good economical arguments.
- "Productivity" is not a synonym for output. It means output per unit of labor (labor productivity) or per unit of labor and capital (total factor productivity). Output can fall while productivity rises and vice-versa.

### **C. Citations**

- Citations for direct quotes need to include page numbers. This is so that a reader can easily find the context for the quote. For example, after a quote, you might write "(Williams, 2009, p. 11)."
- References should be in alphabetical order by the author's last name.
- Text references should be to the author, not to the publication. For example, "Volcker (2011)," not "The *New York Times* (2011)." Also, there is no need to include the title of the article in the text.
- If graphs of data are included, they need to include references to the source of the data.