

Writing your Thesis at the Chair of Public Economics

Chair of Public Economics
University of Duisburg-Essen

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1 Purpose of this document

This guide describes how thesis supervision works at the Chair of Public Economics. It tells you what we expect from you, what you can expect from us, and which deadlines are binding. Please read it in full *before* you submit your expression of interest. Doing so will save you – and us – a considerable amount of time.

This document complements, but never replaces, the examination regulations (*Prüfungsordnung*) of your degree programme and the rules of the examination office (*Prüfungsamt*) and examination board (*Prüfungsausschuss*). Where this guide and the examination regulations differ, the examination regulations prevail. If you spot such a conflict, please let us know. Where we quote rules below, we quote the examination regulations for the B.Sc. and M.Sc. Volkswirtschaftslehre and the faculty's rules for theses on [the faculty's thesis page](#) (*Studium* → *Studienorganisation* → *Abschlussarbeiten*). If you are enrolled in another programme, check your own regulations for the corresponding rules; the process is the same, the numbers may differ.

2 Who is involved

- **Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD (chairholder)** is the first examiner. He assigns topics and data sources and runs the plenary sessions on the supervision process.
- **Kai Miele, M.Sc. and Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc. (supervisors)** accompany you during the writing phase. They run the monthly group meetings and give feedback on your drafts.
- **The second examiner** is proposed by the chair on the registration form and appointed by the examination board. The second examiner assesses the written thesis independently.
- **You** are responsible for the thesis. Supervision is guidance, not co-authorship: the research questions we hand you are open questions, and the answers have to be yours.

Before writing to anyone, consult this document. Beyond that, please route your question to the right person:

- **Administrative questions** – Signing the registration, the rules at the chair, etc. Please consult the chair holder.
- **Questions about your thesis itself** – your data, your specification, your draft – go directly to whichever of Kai Miele, M.Sc. or Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc. supervises you

3 Timeline at a glance

The semester starts on 12 October 2026. The dates below are planned dates. The binding start and submission dates for *your* thesis are the ones the examination board communicates to you by e-mail after your registration has been processed.

Date	What happens
<i>Both tracks</i>	
Friday, 23 October 2026	Deadline for the expression of interest form
Friday, 30 October 2026	Topic and data source communicated to you
Wednesday, 4 November 2026	Your signed registration form must have reached us
Friday, 6 November 2026	Chair completes and forwards all forms to the <i>Prüfungsamt</i>
Monday, 9 November 2026	Planned common start of the processing period
Friday, 13 November 2026	First plenary session with Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD
monthly (master)/bi-weekly (bachelor)	Group meetings with Kai Miele, M.Sc. or Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc. (dates announced at the kickoff)
<i>Bachelor (12 weeks)</i>	
Monday, 1 February 2027	Planned submission deadline: thesis and code
<i>Master (26 weeks)</i>	
Monday, 10 May 2027	Planned submission deadline: thesis and code

The university is closed between Christmas and New Year; there are no group meetings in that period. Group meetings are not scheduled in the week of Rosenmontag (8 February 2027).

4 Step 1: Expressing your interest

If you would like to write your thesis at the Chair of Public Economics, you must submit the **expression of interest form** by **Friday, 23 October 2026**:

[To the form](#)

The form is the only channel through which we accept applications. Informal e-mails, messages after a lecture, or requests submitted after the deadline cannot be considered for the current cohort – not because we do not want to help, but because topics, data access and supervision slots are allocated as a block for the whole cohort.

In the form you will be asked about, among other things:

- your degree programme, semester, and target completion date;
- whether you already meet the admission requirements for the thesis in your programme (for the B.Sc. VWL: core studies completed, seminar area completed, at least 42 credits in the specialisation area; for the M.Sc. VWL: compulsory area completed; other programmes: see your regulations and the registration form) – the *Prüfungsamt* checks this when we forward your registration, and a registration that fails the check drops out of the cohort;
- courses you have taken in public economics, econometrics, and empirical methods;
- your experience with statistical software (Stata, R, Python) and with LaTeX;

- substantive fields you find interesting (for example taxation, social insurance, health, education, labour markets, public goods);
- the language in which you intend to write;
- any constraints we should know about (for example an internship, a semester abroad, or part-time work).

Please answer honestly. We use the information to match you to a topic that fits your skills, not to filter you out.

5 Step 2: Topic and data allocation

Topics – including the data source – are set by Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD. If you feel you have a good idea, please tell us about it in the registration form. If it is a feasible idea, we are happy to entertain it.

This is a deliberate choice, and it is worth explaining why. In empirical theses, the single most common cause of delay, frustration and poor grades is not a lack of ability: it is data. Students spend weeks negotiating access, discover halfway through that a key variable does not exist, or find that the identifying variation they hoped for is not in the data. By assigning topics together with a data source that we have somewhat pre-checked, we remove that risk. You start working on the economics in week one instead of week eight.

What this means in practice:

- The topic you receive comes with a concrete empirical question, a data source, and a rough idea of the identification strategy.
- Within that topic you retain substantial freedom: the framing, the specification, the robustness checks, the interpretation and the discussion of mechanisms are yours.
- The preferences you state in the form are taken seriously, but we cannot guarantee that everyone receives their preferred field.
- If you have a strong idea of your own, mention it in the form. We will tell you honestly whether it is feasible within the time you have. In most cases where we say no, the reason is data access, not the quality of the idea.
- The title on the registration form is the title that is assessed. Changing the topic later requires the approval of the examination board; a thesis on a different topic than the registered one can fail on formal grounds. If your data force a change of direction, tell us *before* you change the title. For this reason, please suggest a fairly broad title to us.

Topics are communicated on **Friday, 30 October 2026**.

6 Step 3: Registration and a common start date

All theses of a cohort start together. There are no rolling starts.

The reason is practical. A common start means that everybody is at roughly the same stage at the same time, which is what makes group supervision work: when your peers are also wrestling with data cleaning in week three, the session on data cleaning is useful to all of you. It also allows us to keep supervision slots fixed and predictable.

6.1 How registration works

Registration uses the faculty's form *Antrag auf Zuteilung einer Bachelor- bzw. Masterarbeit* ([Antrag_BachelorMaster_Arbeit.pdf](#)). The form has four parts, and the faculty's procedure prescribes who does what:

1. **Part A – you.** Fill in your personal details, your programme, the agreed title (in the original language and, if that is not English, in English), and the first examiner (Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD). Sign it – a visible signature inserted into the PDF or a DFN certificate signature; see the faculty page for the accepted methods. Do not lock the PDF after signing. Send it to susanne.priss@uni-due.de by **Wednesday, 4 November 2026**.
2. **Part B – the chair.** Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD confirms supervision and proposes the second examiner. **We complete Part B for all forms of the cohort and forward them to the *Prüfungsamt* together on Friday, 6 November 2026.** We do not forward forms individually or earlier. Forwarding a form earlier would start your clock earlier, which is precisely what we are avoiding.
3. **Part C – the *Prüfungsamt*** checks that you meet the admission requirements of your programme.
4. **Part D – the examination board** approves the registration, confirms the second examiner, and fixes the date of issue of the topic, the start of the processing period and the submission deadline. **You receive these dates by e-mail. Those are the binding dates.** Our planned dates (Monday, 9 November 2026 and the submission dates above) are what we ask for; the dates in the board's e-mail are what counts.

Three rules of the faculty that you need to plan around:

- The preliminary discussion of the topic and the registration may be **no more than one month apart**. This is why topics are communicated only one week before the forms are forwarded, and why we cannot hold a topic for you beyond the cohort's forwarding date.
- On the form you declare that you **will not start writing the thesis before the topic has been issued** by the examination board. Reading, planning and getting to know your data before the start are fine and expected; the written thesis starts with the issue of the topic.
- Meeting the admission requirements is your responsibility. Check them with the *Prüfungsamt* before you apply, and mention in the expression of interest form if anything is still pending.

6.2 Processing time and extensions

The processing period is fixed by the examination regulations: **12 weeks for a Bachelor's thesis** and **26 weeks for a Master's thesis** in the VWL programmes. Please check *before* you apply that this is compatible with your plans.

The topic can be returned once, and only within the first month of the processing period. A returned topic counts as if the thesis had never been registered, but you lose the cohort: the next common start is a semester away.

Extensions are granted by the examination board, not by the chair, on a written and justified application that must reach the *Prüfungsamt* at least one week before the deadline: up to two weeks for a Bachelor's thesis, up to eight weeks for a Master's thesis. Two things are important

here. First, the faculty does **not** grant extensions for illness. The faculty's position is that ordinary illness is already priced into the processing period; in the case of a serious or prolonged illness the route is a withdrawal from the examination (*Rücktritt*) with a medical certificate, not an extension. Second, an extension for reasons that lie on the chair's side – typically a data problem we should have caught – needs our endorsement on the form, which we give where it is justified. So: plan for the possibility that something goes wrong. A laptop dies, a regression takes three days to run, a family emergency happens. A thesis finished two days early is a good thesis; a thesis finished two days late is a failed one.

7 How supervision works

We use two complementary formats. Both are group formats. This is intentional: most questions that come up during a thesis are questions that ten students have, and answering them once in a room is better for everyone than answering them ten times by e-mail.

7.1 Plenary sessions with Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD

At regular intervals, Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD holds sessions in a lecture-style format in which he walks through the supervision process step by step. These sessions cover the mechanics of producing an empirical thesis, roughly in the order in which you will need them:

- what a research question is, and what distinguishes a good one from a topic;
- how to read and position yourself in a literature;
- how to move from an economic question to an estimating equation;
- identification: what your design does and does not deliver;
- how to build tables and figures that a reader can understand without the text;
- how to structure and write the thesis;
- how the thesis is graded.

The first session takes place on **Friday, 13 November 2026**. These sessions are the place to ask process questions, so that the group meetings can be used for your specific project.

7.2 Group meetings with Kai Miele, M.Sc. or Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc.

There are group meetings with Kai Miele, M.Sc. or Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc., in which individual projects are discussed. The following rules apply:

1. **Slots are fixed.** Dates and times are set at the beginning of the cohort and published in advance. Slots can only be moved by the supervisors, not by students. Please plan around them.
2. **Attendance is voluntary but strongly encouraged.** Nobody records your attendance and nothing about your grade depends on it. But in our experience the difference between the theses that go well and those that do not is largely a matter of who shows up early and often. You also learn a great deal from the problems your fellow students run into, which are usually the problems you will run into two weeks later.
3. **Send your material three working days in advance directly to whichever of Kai Miele, M.Sc. or Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc. runs your group**

- your **current draft** (as a PDF, even if it is incomplete or rough), and
- any **concrete (!!)** questions you would like to discuss.

If your material arrives later than three working days before the meeting, we cannot guarantee that it will be covered. You are still welcome to attend and to listen.

4. **Comment on a peer's draft before the meeting.** At the kickoff we pair each of you with another student in the cohort for the rest of the semester. When you send your draft (above), send it to your partner as well, and give each other short written comments – what you followed, what confused you, anything that looks inconsistent – at least one working day before the meeting. This round is not graded and does not replace supervisor feedback: it means Kai Miele, M.Sc. or Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc. can spend the meeting on what the peer round did not resolve, rather than on a first read of your draft.

7.3 How to get useful feedback

A few things that make a very large difference:

- **Send what you have, not what you wish you had.** A rough draft with holes in it is far more useful to us than a polished draft that arrives three weeks later. We would rather correct a wrong turn in week four than in week eleven.
- **Ask specific questions.** “Is my identification strategy plausible given that treatment timing is correlated with municipality size?” can be answered. “Is this good?” cannot.
- **Bring your tables in the format they will have in the thesis.** Screenshots of raw software output are hard to read and hide problems.
- **Say when you are stuck.** Being stuck is a normal state in empirical work, not a sign of failure. Being stuck *silently* for three weeks is the problem.
- **Keep a research log.** One paragraph after every working session on what you did, what you found, and what you will do next. It costs five minutes a day and it will write half of your methods section for you.

8 What we expect from the thesis

8.1 Empirical work with a public economics foundation

Theses at this chair are **empirical**. You will work with data, produce estimates, and interpret them. But a collection of regressions is not a thesis in public economics. We expect you to **embed your question in public economics theory**. Concretely, your thesis should make clear:

- **Why there is a role for government at all** in the setting you study – a market failure, an externality, an information problem, incomplete markets, a distributional concern, or a behavioural friction.
- **What the relevant theory predicts.** Which behavioural responses should we expect? Who bears the burden? What are the efficiency and equity margins? Even when you do not write down a formal model, the reader should be able to see the model in your head.
- **How your empirical estimate maps into that framework.** An elasticity, a pass-through rate, a take-up response and a deadweight-loss estimate are objects with theoretical meaning. Say which object you are estimating and why it matters.

- **What follows for policy, and what does not.** Be explicit about the population your estimate applies to and about the assumptions a policy conclusion would require.

A short theoretical section that motivates the empirical specification is usually the best solution. It does not need to be original theory, nor does it need to be formalised in equations. It needs to be the *right* theory, correctly stated, and actually connected to what you estimate.

8.2 Identification and honesty about it

We care more about a well-understood, carefully executed and honestly discussed research design than about a large number of results. A thesis that estimates one specification well, states its identifying assumptions clearly, tests them where testable, and is candid about what remains uncertain will receive a better grade than a thesis with twenty tables and no argument.

Concretely, we expect you to:

- state the identifying assumption in words that a non-specialist could follow;
- say what would make it fail, and provide evidence where possible;
- report standard errors with a stated clustering level and a justification for it;
- show your main result in a figure, not only in a table;
- report the results that do not support your preferred interpretation as well.

Null results are results. A well-executed thesis that finds no effect and explains what that means (including the effect sizes it can and cannot rule out) is a good thesis.

8.3 Structure

Unless your supervisors suggest otherwise, use the standard structure of an empirical paper:

1. **Introduction** – question, setting, data, method, main result, contribution. Write it last; revise it most.
2. **Institutional background** – the policy or institution you study, in enough detail that the identification strategy becomes plausible.
3. **Conceptual framework** – the public economics of the problem and the predictions you take to the data.
4. **Data** – source, sample construction, key variables, descriptive statistics, and an honest account of what you dropped and why.
5. **Empirical strategy** – the estimating equation, the identifying assumption, inference.
6. **Results** – main estimates first, then heterogeneity, then robustness.
7. **Discussion and conclusion** – interpretation, limitations, policy relevance, open questions.
8. **References and appendix.**

Length requirements for theses are set by the exams office, please consult them for how long your thesis should be.

9 Language

We strongly encourage you to write your thesis in English. Nearly all the literature you will read is in English, the terminology you need has its natural home in English, and being able to present your own empirical work in English is a genuine advantage on the academic **and the non-academic job market**. Writing in English also makes it far easier for us to give you feedback that maps onto the published literature.

You will not be penalised for imperfect English. Non-native speakers write non-native English; that is entirely expected. Grammatical slips, awkward phrasing, article mistakes and unidiomatic word choices do not affect your grade. What is graded is the economics: the question, the design, the execution, the interpretation, and whether the argument is clear enough to follow.

Two qualifications. First, clarity does matter – if a sentence is so ambiguous that we cannot tell what you mean, we cannot give you credit for meaning the right thing. Second, technical vocabulary should be used correctly, because “bias”, “identification” and “significance” have specific meanings.

Please indicate your choice of language in the expression of interest form. Whichever language you choose, use it consistently throughout the thesis. One exception is imposed by the faculty: the declaration of independent work (*Eidesstattliche Versicherung*) on the last page must be in **German** and must follow the faculty’s wording exactly, even in an English thesis. The faculty provides a cover-page template for English theses that includes it.

10 Use of generative AI

We do not ban AI tools, and we do not want you to pretend you did not use them. We do expect you to use them thoughtfully, transparently, and within the rules that apply at this university.

10.1 The binding framework

The relevant reference is the University of Duisburg-Essen’s guidance on artificial intelligence in study and teaching:

- *Künstliche Intelligenz in Studium und Lehre. Empfehlungen zum Umgang an der UDE*
uni-due.de/imperia/md/content/e-learning/strategie/
- *Wissenschaftliche Haus- und Abschlussarbeiten im Zeitalter von generativen Technologien. Eine Einschätzung für die University of Duisburg-Essen*
uni-due.de/imperia/md/content/e-learning/strategie/
- The UDE template for the list of permitted aids and the declaration of independent work (*Liste zugelassener Hilfsmittel und Eigenständigkeitserklärung*), and the UDE AI portal:
uni-due.de/de/digitalisierung/ki-portal/
- An overview page collecting the above:
uni-due.de/e-learning/kuenstliche_intelligenz.php

Please read these documents. Undeclared or non-compliant use of aids constitutes an attempt to deceive (*Täuschungsversuch*) with the consequences set out in your examination regulations.

10.2 What we consider thoughtful use

Reasonable, in our view:

- improving the language of text *you* have written;
- explaining an unfamiliar method or a paper you find hard to follow, as a starting point that you then verify against the primary source;
- helping you debug code, or explaining an error message;
- suggesting how to restructure a paragraph or a section.

Not reasonable:

- having a tool generate substantive text that you then present as your own analysis;
- taking references from a chatbot without opening them – fabricated citations are a well-documented failure mode, and a reference list containing papers that do not exist is treated as a serious academic integrity problem;
- running code you do not understand and reporting its output;
- pasting confidential or licensed micro-data, or extracts from it, into an external tool. This is a data protection issue as well as an academic one. If your topic involves restricted data, treat the terms of the data use agreement as binding, and ask us if you are unsure.

10.3 Documentation

Document your use of AI tools in the manner required by the examination regulations and the UDE templates: which tools, for which purposes, at which stage. A short appendix section is usually the cleanest solution. If you are unsure whether a particular use needs to be declared, declare it, or ask us in advance – both are free, and neither will hurt your grade.

The underlying principle is simple: you must be able to explain and defend every sentence, every line of code and every number in your thesis.

10.4 Detection

We also run submitted theses through a tool we built ourselves, which checks the text against more than twenty indicators associated with undeclared generative-AI use. We are not going to explain how it works. The practical upshot is simple: declaring your use of AI tools, as described above, costs you nothing; concealing it and hoping it goes unnoticed is not a bet worth making.

11 Submission: thesis and code

By the deadline in the examination board's e-mail – planned: **Monday, 1 February 2027** (Bachelor) and **Monday, 10 May 2027** (Master) – you submit **both** the written thesis *and* your code.

11.1 Where to submit

There are two submissions, and you need to make both:

1. **The formal submission to the examination office (*Prüfungsamt*).** This is the legally binding one. The faculty accepts theses **in digital form only**, through the upload

form linked on the faculty's thesis page ([Abschlussarbeiten → Einreichung](#)). Printed and bound copies are no longer required and we do not ask for one. Attachments larger than 64MB, or not in PDF format – which will usually include your code archive – go to *sciebo* as described on that page. What counts for the deadline is the arrival of the electronic thesis via the upload form.

2. **An e-mail to Mr Miele or Ms Chandra**, containing the thesis as a PDF and your code as an archive (or a *sciebo* link to it). This is what we actually work with when we read the thesis, and it makes sure the code reaches us in a form we can run. Do not send us data if the terms and conditions prohibit you from it.

The e-mail does *not* replace the formal submission, and the formal submission does not replace the e-mail. Send the e-mail on the day you submit formally.

11.2 Formal requirements

The formal requirements are set by the examination regulations, the faculty's thesis page and the *Prüfungsamt* – not by the chair – and they change from time to time. **Check the faculty's thesis page in the final month, not in the final week.** At the time of writing, the faculty requires:

- a cover page with the prescribed elements (the exact registered title; “Vorgelegt der Fakultät für Wirtschaftswissenschaften der Universität Duisburg-Essen”; your name, address and matriculation number; the two *examiners* as named on the approved registration form; your programme and the current semester). The faculty provides templates, including one for English theses;
- the *Eidesstattliche Versicherung* in the faculty's German wording, on the last numbered page, signed by hand;
- followed the formatting rules of the faculty/exam office.

What we ask for, on top of that:

- a recognised economics citation style, applied consistently. Manage your references with BibTeX, Zotero or a comparable tool from day one.
- Tables and figures formatted for a reader, not copied from raw software output.
- The declaration on aids and AI use (see the section on generative AI).

11.3 The code

Your code is the electronic appendix of your thesis. Send a single archive containing all code needed to reproduce your results – to Ms Chandra or Mr Miele, and via *sciebo* with the formal submission. We ask for this because reproducibility is a core scientific standard, and because writing code that someone else can run is a skill that will serve you well after your degree.

Your archive should contain:

- **A README** explaining what to run, in which order, in which software and version, and roughly how long it takes.
- **A master script** that runs the whole pipeline from raw data to final tables and figures.
- **A clean folder structure**, for example `/data`, `/code`, `/output`, `/paper`.

- **Relative paths only.** A single line at the top of the master script should be the only place a path needs to be changed.
- **Commented code.** Not every line, but every non-obvious decision: why a sample restriction, why that functional form, why those clusters.
- **A mapping from code to output**, so that we can see which script produces Table 3.

Do not include restricted micro-data in the archive unless the data use agreement allows it; include the code that builds the analysis file from the raw data and say where the raw data come from.

Do not leave this to the last week. Working reproducibly from the start is faster overall, because you will re-run your pipeline dozens of times.

12 How the thesis is assessed

The examination regulations set the procedure: the written thesis is assessed independently by two examiners. The examiners have six weeks from receipt of the thesis. There is no oral examination.

Broadly, we look at:

- **Framing and economic content** – is the question well posed and properly embedded in public economics?
- **Literature** – do you know the relevant work and position yourself in it?
- **Empirical execution** – is the design appropriate, correctly implemented, honestly discussed, and reproducible from the code?
- **Interpretation** – do you draw conclusions your estimates support, and no more?
- **Presentation** – structure, tables and figures, clarity of argument.

Grammatical correctness of English is explicitly *not* an assessment criterion (see the section on language). Independent effort is: the thesis should visibly be your own work.

13 Frequently asked questions

I missed the form deadline. Can I still write with you?

Not in this cohort. Apply for the next one.

Can I propose my own topic?

Mention it in the form. Topics are set by Acting Prof. Christoph Kronenberg, PhD, and the reason is data feasibility rather than a lack of interest in your ideas. The examples section gives you a sense of the kind of project we assign.

Do I have to attend the group meetings?

No. We strongly recommend it anyway.

I sent my draft two days before the meeting. Will it be discussed?

Possibly, but there is no guarantee. Three working days is the threshold.

Who registers the thesis with the Prüfungsamt?

You fill in and sign Part A of the faculty's registration form and send it to us; we complete Part

B and forward all forms of the cohort to the *Prüfungsamt* on Friday, 6 November 2026. The examination board then fixes your start and submission dates and e-mails them to you.

Can I register earlier or later than the cohort?

No. We forward forms once per cohort.

When exactly is my deadline?

The date in the examination board's e-mail. Our planned dates are what we ask for; the board's e-mail is what is binding.

Where do I get the cover page, the declaration and the layout rules?

From the faculty's thesis page and the *Prüfungsamt*. Those are their rules, not ours.

Do I really have to e-mail the thesis as well as uploading it?

Yes. The upload is the binding submission; the e-mail is how the thesis and the code reach the people who read and assess them in a form they can work with.

Is there an oral examination or a presentation?

No. The grade is the grade of the written thesis, formed from two independent assessments.

May I e-mail my supervisors between meetings?

Yes, so that they can prepare an answer for the meeting slot.

What if my data turn out not to support the planned design?

Tell us early. This happens in real research, and there are usually good options – but only if there is time left to take them. If the registered title has to change, that needs the examination board's approval; do not change it on your own.

Do I need LaTeX?

It is not required, but strongly recommended for an empirical thesis with many tables and references.

Can I get an extension?

Only through the examination board, under the conditions in your examination regulations (up to two weeks for a Bachelor's, up to eight weeks for a Master's thesis, application at least one week before the deadline). The chair cannot grant extensions, and the faculty does not grant extensions for illness – see the section on registration.

14 Recommended reading

None of the following is compulsory, but each is short and will improve your thesis:

- John H. Cochrane, *Writing Tips for PhD Students* – on structuring a paper and on writing an introduction. Applies equally to a thesis.
- Keith Head, *The Introduction Formula* – a template for the hardest section to write.
- Jesse M. Shapiro, *Four Steps to an Applied Micro Paper* – on how to present empirical work.
- Matthew Gentzkow and Jesse M. Shapiro, *Code and Data for the Social Sciences: A Practitioner's Guide* – read this before you write your first script.
- Marc F. Bellemare, *How to Write Applied Papers in Economics*.

15 Checklist before submission

- ☐ The title on the cover page is exactly the registered title.
- ☐ The introduction states the question, the design and the main result on the first page.
- ☐ The role for government in this setting is explicitly argued.
- ☐ The identifying assumption is stated in plain words.
- ☐ Every table and figure has a self-contained note (source, sample, units, standard errors, clustering).
- ☐ Every number in the text matches the corresponding table.
- ☐ Every reference in the text appears in the bibliography, and vice versa.
- ☐ Every reference in the bibliography is a paper you have actually opened.
- ☐ The code runs from a clean folder on a different machine.
- ☐ The README explains what to run and in which order.
- ☐ The *Eidesstattliche Versicherung* is in the faculty's German wording, on the last page, and signed by hand; the declaration on aids and AI use is included.
- ☐ The cover page, format and submission channel match what the faculty's thesis page currently requires (checked there, not assumed).
- ☐ The thesis PDF and the code archive have been e-mailed to your supervisor (Kai Miele, M.Sc. or Madhurima Chandra, M.Sc.) in addition to the formal upload.
- ☐ You have read the whole thesis once, on paper, **out loud**.

16 Examples of thesis topics

The following examples give you a sense of the kind of project we assign. They are illustrations, not a menu: the topics offered in a given cohort will differ. What the examples should show you is the *shape* of a topic at this chair – a concrete question, a data source that already exists and that we have checked, a design that is feasible in the time available, and a link to public economics that you are expected to develop.

16.1 Bachelor level

(1) Discrimination in the knowledge market: First-stage F-statistics and author characteristics. Instrumental-variable estimates are only as good as the first stage, and the profession has converged on the first-stage F -statistic as the standard diagnostic. This thesis builds a dataset from published IV papers in economics: the reported first-stage F -statistics together with characteristics of the paper (journal, year, field, number of instruments) and of the authors (gender, seniority, institutional affiliation and its prestige, and – where it can be coded from public information – race or ethnicity). Papers can be identified via paulgp.com/econlit-pipeline. The question is whether the strength of the first stage that a paper can get away with is systematically related to who wrote it. Do papers by junior authors, women, or authors at less prestigious institutions clear a higher bar?

Method. Hand-collection and coding of a sample of published papers, followed by descriptive and regression analysis.

Note. This is *associative* evidence and the thesis must say so plainly. Any coding of author characteristics involves measurement error and judgement calls that need to be documented, and inferring race or gender from names and photographs has well-known limitations that must be discussed rather than hidden.

(2) Marriage as insurance: ex ante moral hazard in financial behaviour. One economic function of marriage is mutual insurance: spouses pool income risk, share consumption, and provide a fallback if one of them loses their job or falls ill. Standard insurance theory then predicts *ex ante moral hazard*. If being married reduces the personal cost of a bad draw, married people may take more risk and behave in a less forward-looking way than they otherwise would. This thesis compares risk-taking and forward-looking behaviour between married and unmarried individuals: portfolio composition, saving rates, precautionary saving, insurance take-up, debt, and stated measures of risk tolerance and patience.

Method. Comparison of married and unmarried individuals in a household panel or an international survey, with careful conditioning on observables.

Note. Selection is the central problem. People who are risk-tolerant and impatient may be different in their propensity to marry, which would produce the same correlation with no causal insurance effect at all. A good thesis takes this seriously – through the choice of comparison group, panel variation around marriage, or an honest argument about the direction of the bias – rather than asserting causality it cannot deliver.

16.2 Master level

(3) Long-run health effects of nuclear testing in the Sahara. Between 1960 and 1966 France detonated 17 nuclear devices in the Algerian Sahara, four of them atmospheric tests near Reggane, with the remainder at In Ekker; several of the underground tests were not fully contained. Fallout was not confined to the test sites: contemporary and later evidence indicates that it reached Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria and beyond, and journalistic and scientific accounts describe elevated rates of cancers, eye disease and congenital anomalies in the affected regions decades later. See, for background, [this report on the Libyan Fezzan](#). The thesis asks whether exposure to this fallout has detectable long-run consequences for health and wellbeing in the affected populations, using Afrobarometer or a comparable geocoded survey (for example the Demographic and Health Surveys) combined with data on test dates, locations and modelled fallout patterns.

Method. Spatial exposure measures interacted with cohort of birth, in a difference-in-differences or event-study framework. *Public economics link.* This is a cross-border externality of a state's military programme, imposed on populations who were neither compensated nor consulted – a textbook case for asking who bears the cost, over what horizon, and what a corrective or compensatory policy would have to look like. It also speaks to the long-run health and human-capital consequences of *in utero* and early-life shocks, a large literature in public and health economics. *Warning.* Exposure measurement is the hard part, and the honest version of this thesis will spend a lot of its length on it. Migration between the event and the survey, selective mortality, and the coarseness of survey geocodes all matter. Historical fallout maps are contested and partly classified, so the thesis must be explicit about the source and the assumptions behind whatever exposure measure it constructs.

(4) The 1868 eight-hour law for US federal workers. On 25 June 1868 the US Congress passed, over President Andrew Johnson’s veto, a law establishing an eight-hour working day for labourers and mechanics employed by the federal government (see [the overview of the eight-hour day movement in North America](#) for background and further sources). Its effectiveness was limited and disputed – wages were reportedly cut in response, which prompted a presidential proclamation in 1869 forbidding such cuts – but the law creates a sharply defined group of treated workers at a sharply defined date. The thesis uses the 1860, 1870 and, if necessary, 1880 full-count US censuses via IPUMS to compare federal employees with comparable private-sector workers before and after 1868, looking at occupational composition. If hours fall and pay is fixed, the composition of the blue-collar federal labour force may change, which could spill over to other household outcomes. White-collar federal workers, who were not covered by the law, offer a triple-difference comparison.

Method. Difference-in-differences across census waves, with attention to how federal employment can be identified in the census, and to state-level eight-hour laws (Illinois in 1867, among others) as an additional source of variation or as a confounder.

(5) Does the *Blitzerwoche* reduce accidents? Announced speed enforcement in Germany. Twice a year the European roads policing network ROADPOL coordinates a *Speedweek*, known in Germany as the *Blitzerwoche* or *Blitzermarathon*: a week of intensified speed controls, in some years with a single 24-hour focus day. The campaign is deliberately and loudly announced in advance. Participation is not compulsory for the *Länder* (German federal states) – ROADPOL fixes the dates, but each *Land* decides whether to take part at all and whether to run one day or the full week, and several regularly opt out. This thesis asks whether these campaigns reduce road accidents, using the geocoded accident data of the *Unfallatlas* of the statistical offices of the Federation and the *Länder*, which records every accident involving personal injury from 2016 onwards with location, severity, accident type and the parties involved. Alternatively, the *Unfallkalender* of Destatis can be explored.

Method. A difference-in-differences design comparing participating and non-participating *Länder* in campaign months against the same *Länder* in other months and years, with an event-study version across months. Heterogeneity by road type, accident severity, time of day and urban versus rural location is where most of the economic content lies.

Note. The *Unfallatlas* gives you year, month, weekday and hour of each accident, but *not the day of the month*. You therefore cannot isolate the campaign week directly. The feasible estimand using the *Unfallatlas* is a monthly one, in which a seven-day treatment is diluted across roughly four weeks – so a true effect of x percent during the week appears as roughly $x/4$ in the data, and the thesis must state the implied scaling explicitly rather than quietly reporting the diluted coefficient. Three further problems deserve attention: non-participating *Länder* are not untreated, since at least one of them runs its own intensified controls outside the ROADPOL umbrella while others justify abstention by already-dense year-round enforcement; the announcement invites displacement in time and space rather than a genuine reduction; and the decision to participate is itself endogenous to a *Land*’s accident record and road-safety politics. Verify the panel coverage before designing anything – confirm year by year which *Länder* the geocoded data include.

There is also further variation over time in whether the exact locations were announced beforehand, whether the campaign had a focus such as day-care centres and hospitals, and so on; see bussgeldkatalog.org/blitzermarathon/.

(6) Does a guaranteed income improve mental health? Evidence from a US randomised trial. Between 2020 and 2023 the non-profit research organisation OpenResearch ran one of the largest randomised trials of unconditional cash transfers in the United States. In 19 counties in Illinois and Texas, 1,000 adults aged 21–40 with household incomes at or below 300 % of the federal poverty level received \$1,000 a month for three years; 2,000 controls received \$50 a month. Participants answered monthly surveys as well as baseline, midline and endline surveys (see [the study page](#)). A public-use dataset is available at data.openresearchlab.org. The thesis asks whether the transfer improved recipients’ mental health, how any effect evolved over the three years, and for whom it was largest – for example by baseline financial stress, by whether there are children in the household, or by rural versus urban residence.

Method. An intention-to-treat comparison of recipients and controls, controlling for the baseline value of the outcome, with effects estimated separately by survey year and a small number of pre-specified heterogeneity splits. The student writes a short pre-analysis plan before looking at outcomes by treatment arm.

Cash versus in-kind support, guaranteed income and the expanded Child Tax Credit are live policy debates. Whether income itself, rather than targeted services, improves mental health is central to them, and a mental health benefit has to be weighed against the labour supply response – the study team’s own working papers on health and on employment (see [the findings page](#)) are the starting point for both. *Note.* Randomisation removes the usual selection problem, so the difficulty lies elsewhere. The study team has already published a paper on the health effects, and the thesis must say plainly what it adds. Mental health is self-reported by people who know whether they receive the money. Survey response may differ between the two groups, which needs to be checked and, if necessary, bounded. And many subgroup comparisons produce false positives unless the splits are fixed in advance and the thesis corrects for multiple testing.

16.3 Common theme

The part of the work we will push you hardest on is not finding a result, but understanding what your data and your design can and cannot tell you. We do not care how many stars your coefficients have.