

PhD Assignment Guidelines

Students choosing the Ph.D. grading option will not take the quizzes or complete a policy brief. Instead, these Ph.D. students will complete a referee report of a working paper in the field and develop a research proposal. Ph.D. students will work individually on all assignments. The purpose of these assignment is to get you thinking about doing your own research, and to think more carefully about the methods used by environmental economists.

I will provide more detail about the referee report in a separate document. For the research proposal, the assignment is divided into two parts. Note that I do not expect you to carry out your proposal by the end of class. One semester is not enough time to do Ph.D. quality research.

To help you develop your ideas, the research proposal assignment is split into two parts. First, PhD students will complete a critical literature review (approximately 10 pages) on a topic of their interest related to the course. Students should meet with me to discuss both possible topics and to generate a list of relevant papers. The goal of the literature review is to get you thinking about potential research topics. The literature review should summarize the existing work in your chosen topic area. It should think critically about the strengths and weaknesses of these studies and consider what gaps remain in the literature. The hope is that exercise will help you discover how you can contribute to the literature on your chosen topic. This literature review is due on **Wednesday, March 6**.

The full research proposal is due at our last class meeting on **Monday, April 29**. The final research proposal should:

- 1) State the question that you propose to address (note that for most of you, the question is likely to be inspired by a policy issue, although that isn't necessary),
- 2) Summarize the existing literature on this topic,
- 3) Show how your proposed research contributes to the literature in this area, and
- 4) Propose how you would go about answering your question.

A typical research proposal will be 10-15 pages in length. It should provide enough detail on the methodology that a reviewer can assess both whether the proposed work is feasible and if it is likely to succeed. The proposal should describe what type of data you would need. It should consider about potential limitations to the work. Do the methods take into account potential challenges to answering the question you propose? Research is uncertain, so a good proposal often includes a "Plan B" if unexpected things occur while carrying out the research.

Note that you can use your critical literature review as a building block for the summary of existing literature in your final proposal. However, the literature review in your final proposal should be more concise. While lengths may vary depending on the question asked, a typical literature review in the final proposal should be no more than 3-4 pages in length. You need enough detail to show how what you propose contributes to a broader literature. But the focus of your proposal should be on what *you* will do, not what others have done.