

Editing Tasks

The tasks below are based on some unusual assignment that I set as experiments in successive years, shortly before commencing the writing of *Principles of Behavioral Economics*. The students were initially rather bemused by these tasks but what they ended up submitting had a normal kind of distribution and the best papers were superb. Overall, these assignments seemed to work well as assessment instruments.

The bemusement of many of the students seemed to come because (in many cases as second-year first-semester students) they had done little extended writing previously, so they were not used to the challenge of shortening a piece of writing without losing its key messages. Given this, the point of such an assignment may be clearer if it is used in teaching behavioral/evolutionary economics to final-/honours-year undergraduates or within postgraduate coursework. If the article to be shorted comes early in semester, relating to material covered in the first month of lectures, we might hope that students will be better able to do a good job if their second written assignment is a research essay or report.

An alternative approach to developing editing skills while teaching behavioral/evolutionary economics would be to set, say, a 2500-word essay, provide feedback on how well the students has done the essay, and then requires, for a smaller percentage credit, that the student prepares a 1200-word version of the essay that takes account of the feedback while trying to convey the essence of the analysis much more briefly.

Editing Task 1: Why Bounded Rationality? – A Very Short Version

This assignment is designed to give you some experience in the activity of pruning substantially an existing piece of work, a task that you will probably have to do at some point in your studies or later career with your own work. The focus for this task is a well known survey article written by John Conlisk, the original version of which was published after its well-known version as 'Why Bounded Rationality? The Much Too Long Version', in P. Earl (ed.) (2000) *The Legacy of Herbert Simon in Economic Analysis* (Cheltenham, Edward Elgar). The word count for this 'much too long version' of the paper is 27598 words. Conlisk pruned it substantially to produce the well-known version that appeared in the 1995 *Journal of Economic Literature* (pp. 669-700). But it is still a long article, about double the length of a typical economics article. Your task is to produce a much shorter version of this paper, *of no more than 3000 words*, including references and footnotes. This would be about a third of the length of a typical article in an economics journal, so you will have to get to the essence of Conlisk's view and only cite what seem to be his key sources.

You can use as much of Conlisk's original wording as you like, with no fear of being accused of plagiarism. However, you should note that effective editing often requires rewriting, rather than merely removing some sentences, paragraphs or words.

Editing Task 2: Editing an Article on Schumpeter and Darwinism

Your task is to prepare a shortened version of the following article:
Geoffrey M. Hodgson (1997) 'The evolutionary and non-Darwinian economics of Joseph Schumpeter', *Journal of Evolutionary Economics*, 7, pp. 131-145.

To do this well, you will need to understand the article, which goes beyond what we have covered on Schumpeter in lectures. Your version of the paper can use any of Hodgson's phrases or sentences (there is no need to worry about plagiarism in this respect) but the total length of your paper, including references, must not exceed 2500 words. It must be submitted electronically as a Word document so that its length can readily be verified.

The length limit is something that you will probably find easier to deal with by writing parts (or even the bulk) of your version of the paper in your own words, rather than just using selected passages from the original. You are free to do this and should note that this may help to make it clear how well you understand the article you are trying to shorten. You will also need to consider removing some of the references: some will be more important than others to keep.

This is probably a new kind of task for you, but it involves skills that it is very useful to develop. For example, quite often in presenting a paper at a conference, one is only allowed 20-30 minutes even though the paper might be 10,000 words long and would take an hour or more to present in detail. The crucial thing is to know what the key messages are and present them succinctly.

Note that if you 'select all' in a pdf version of the article and then 'paste' into a blank Word document you can save time in working out which cuts to make and by avoiding retyping passages that you retain.

Some possible marking criteria for these kinds of assignments:

- (i) Evidence of ability to distinguish the core points from less essential peripheral ones.
- (ii) Evidence of ability to write succinctly and thereby retain as many points as possible from the original without exceeding the word limit.
- (iii) Evidence of the extent to which the paper that has been edited has been well understood.
- (iv) Quality of judgments about which of the original references should be retained.
- (v) General clarity of the writing.