

111.471-2010: Targeting the Poor–Local Economic Development in Developing Countries
Assignment 1

Written assignment #1 covers the readings from the start of the class through Session 6. To prepare for writing the paper, stand back a bit from the readings done so far (augmented by the class discussions), and think about things that intrigued, struck, or surprised you—revealing something you did not know before. You can also write about how the readings made you think of particular things you had witnessed in prior fieldwork or volunteer work, and helped you to put them in a larger context. You can react to each reading separately, or to a subset of readings, or tell of a new understanding or insight that came from the cumulative reading of these particular assignments—triggered in part, perhaps, by the discussions of the readings in class.

Say what it was that struck or surprised you, and explain it. Examples are: "I had always thought that... but the reading(s)—and/or a particular point made by them—made me see things differently, namely....." Or, "this case example of a particular point surprised me because from other things I have read, or experience I have had, I had always thought that..." You are encouraged to write in the first person—i.e., use "I," if it feels comfortable. Choose surprises that made you see things differently or, even, that created a perplexity in the place of previous certainty. Write about the surprise concisely and concretely—with examples, where possible. At the same time, go beyond saying simply that you found something “surprising”, “interesting,” or “intriguing”—without going into the specifics. The reader needs to know what was it exactly that made something intriguing—show the reader the actual path traversed in your mind.

Whichever approach you choose, be sure to list in parentheses at the end of the paragraph or other appropriate place the author's or authors' last name(s) for the required readings to which you are referring and date (e.g., Portes 1995). You are more than welcome to include any of the Recommended Readings that you may have read. A list of references at the end is not necessary—at least for the readings on the syllabus. By the end, your paper should have referred to all of the assigned readings. The best way to handle the written and oral assignments is to keep a journal of your thoughts as you read each session's required readings, when the thoughts and examples are still fresh in your mind. This will allow your learning to be more continuous during the semester.

Common mistakes to avoid: Do not summarize the articles. Do not try to cover all the points made in the readings. You may well be able to mention only one thing that struck you from any particular reading. Do not write an introductory paragraph and/or conclusion to the paper—the exercise is not one of summing up the whole body of work you read, but describing possibly unconnected reactions, and doing so concretely—with specifics, examples, etc. At the same time, be sure to write a topic sentence or two that leads the reader into the particular point and example, so that the reader is prepared to understand the significance of the particular specifics that are laid out, without which the general point might seem banal and like “nothing new.” Keep in mind that there is no “right” answer or set of answers in this assignment.

Also, be sure to avoid simply criticizing the article, or saying what was left out and should have been considered. Most writings leave out certain things and cannot cover everything—indeed, some of the most important contributions to research have resulted from one outstanding piece of empirical research and analysis capturing the imagination of subsequent researchers, who want to go beyond what the first researcher did, and explore the “left-out” issues. You may disagree with or simply not like the article as a whole, but there is almost always something new you can learn from it.

Papers should be no more than eight double-spaced pages.

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