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**Lecture 11: Fixing Your Paper**

1. Writing
   1. Now that you’ve ran some regressions and written your first draft, it’s time we expand on our writing lessons in preparation for your final draft.
      1. This is also our chance to correct common mistakes I saw while reading your papers.
   2. As we discussed, the key to any paper—or really anything you are writing—is a **thesis statement**: what are you arguing? Reading takes time and there’s plenty out there to read. No one wants to waste time reading something that goes nowhere.
      1. An article entitled “Some Possible Causes of Cancer,” is simply not as interesting as “Potatoes Cause Cancer.” In the former title, it’s not clear you’ll learn anything new. It’s not even clear the author’s listed items actually cause cancer.
      2. Many of you made this mistake, though to a lesser extent. Saying you’re exploring the causes of suicides isn’t as interesting as picking one of your explanatory variables and highlighting it as an important cause.
      3. A common mistake is that your thesis statement didn’t match your regression. The regression is evidence you are correct. If the regression didn’t match your thesis, change your thesis.
   3. It’s not enough to have a thesis statement; you need to be **confident**. Remember, you are making an argument. Suppose you start reading the “Potatoes Cause Cancer” paper and the author uses phrases such as…
      1. “It seems that this is a good test for potatoes’ link to cancer.”
      2. “I feel that this technique is sufficient to control for the majority of the complications.”
      3. “I’m pretty sure the results are significant.”
      4. “I think this is a very important finding.”
      5. “I tried to run a valid experiment.”
   4. You’d begin to wonder if the author knows what she’s talking about. You’d probably stop reading it, too. And even if you were open to being convinced, you’ll be less likely to change your mind. *Don’t be a wuss*. Use bold phrases to signal confidence.
      1. Of course, you don’t want to be confident and wrong, so make sure you’re right. A few people did things wrong (e.g. compare the F-stat to the Significant F value).
   5. Even if you have their attention, everyone’s time is short. To quote poet Robert Southey “If you would be pungent, be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams. The more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.” In other words, **keep it short**. There are many ways to do this:
      1. Cut out useless or redundant phrases. Many of you rambled, adding extra words when they weren’t needed. Some of these were “wuss words” (I think, I believe) but others were just saying something straightforward in a very round-about way. Read the paper out loud after you’ve written it. This problem occurs because what we are thinking is not translating as well to paper as we think it is.
      2. Another source of superfluous sentences was what I call “cooking show syndrome.” Many of you narrated what you were about to do (run a regression, check for multicollinearity) as if you were hosting a cooking show. (“I will now add the flour.”) I’ll be able to tell you ran a regression when you report the regression. I’m not going to think you divined the results.
   6. **Review** your work. I saw many awkward phrases or incomplete sentences. Make sure you read what you wrote—out loud—after you wrote it.
   7. For clear, **compelling** writing, I have a list of miscellaneous suggestions:
      1. Don’t be afraid of referring to yourself; it avoids awkward sentencing. (I suspect people advise against referring to yourself is so you’ll avoid wuss words.)
      2. Avoid the passive voice.
      3. Quote only if (1) the quote is very pithy and there’s no way you can improve or (2) if you need to argue that someone believes/said/wrote something. Both instances are rare.
   8. Keep your causation straight. Several of you got it backwards, arguing for why, say, income should predict suicide when your regression was predicting suicides predicting income.
2. Structure of Final Paper
   1. I mentioned this before, but let me elaborate so we are clear for the final draft. I recommend you add section headings to your paper to help you with organization. Again, this particular order isn’t written in stone but all the parts have to be there.
      1. *Introduction*. Why should I care about the determinants of your dependent variable? What is your thesis statement? Make sure to narrow it down to one explanatory variable.
      2. *Literature review.* This is what others have said about the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable. Mention what your controls (other variables) are and why they would be important. If it’s not painfully obvious, cite a source to justify. It’s a good idea to cite even if it is painfully obvious since what’s clear to you may not be to others. By now, you should have at least two sources.
      3. *Description of data*. Describe exactly what the variables measure and state the sources. Include a table of descriptive statistics. Make sure the table is easy to read (no formatting issues).
      4. *Regression*. Include a table of your regression output (make sure this is also easy to read) as well as a description of your regression, highlighting the dependent variable you crafted your thesis statement around.
      5. *Complications*. Check for multicollinearity, including a table of correlation coefficients. Make sure the table is easy to read. Interpret the results and, if necessary, correct your regression by reporting a second regression output. Make sure this table is easy to read as well. Include a test of heteroscedasticity, reporting just the Chi test and interpretation of it. Then explain the implications on your regression (is it still good?) State your punch line (for every one more of X, there is this much more/less of Y) to highlight how correct your thesis statement is. You may wish to do this earlier (in the previous section) is there were no multicollinearity problems. Acknowledge and describe any reverse causation or confounding variable issues.
      6. *Conclude*. Restate your thesis statement and summarize your argument, repeating your punch line.
   2. Your ***maximum*** page limit is now 5 pages.