

Writing Assignment

ECON 1B

San Jose State University

Professor López

Basics:

Your assignment is to write and solve two economics “puzzles.” First, come up with two original questions about human behavior in the world—questions that at first seem paradoxical (i.e. puzzling) but require relatively simple economic analysis to solve and understand. Next, apply economic reasoning and factual knowledge to analyze the puzzle. Finally, write your puzzles and solutions.

Hints:

If you think about it, you encounter economic puzzles everyday: in the newspaper, on the radio or television, while shopping, while hanging out with friends (it might be fun to analyze some of their decisions), driving home for the weekend, going to church, watching sports, sitting in class, and nearly every aspect of your daily life. There are also plenty of puzzles from politics, pop culture, and throughout human history. Heck, we discuss economics puzzles most days in class. The key is to keep your eyes and ears open, and always search out the *rational economic tendencies* in people, their decisions, and events. In short, think like an economist.

Ground Rules and Grading:

- 1) Originality is a must. Your puzzles and solutions have to come from your own observations. Don't use puzzles that we've solved in class.
- 2) You will be graded for both the quality of your puzzles and the quality of your solutions. The tougher the puzzle, the better your grade. Your solution to the puzzle does not have to be absolutely the right answer—especially the more truly interesting and original your puzzle.
- 3) Economic reasoning. You should definitely apply economic reasoning to any solution. The best way to ensure that you do so is to explicitly apply some economic theory/model to your puzzle. For example, the model of rational individual behavior, or the model of supply and demand, or the model of production possibilities. Then clearly convey your reasoning through the model. Avoid graphs unless you think they're really necessary to make your point. Instead, convey your solution using intuitive words that anyone could understand.
- 4) Professional presentation. Grammar, spelling and neatness definitely count. For some good examples, check out my web site: http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/lopez/teaching/waexs_public.htm
- 5) As it says on the course syllabus, this paper counts 10% of your overall course grade.

Length:

A typical question will be one or two sentences. A typical answer should be one or two paragraphs—or somewhere close to that range. For complicated puzzles, 250 words might be necessary, but typically not. Your entire assignment should come in under 400 words. Turn in both your puzzles on the same page.

Due Date: Last regular Thursday class meeting of the semester.