

ECO1014 Communicating Economics - Syllabus



Availability and prerequisites

Level-1 module for BSc Economics. No prerequisites.

Teaching schedule

Lectures: 12 weeks, 2 hours per week

Tutorials: 8 weeks, 1 hour per week

Module description

Economics is a challenging subject that has a very specific vocabulary. Yet most consumers of economics are non-economists. This has sometimes hindered the ability of economists to persuade the general public of their insights, and even to justify their societal function. This module aims to equip students with an ability to communicate complex economic arguments in ways that can be understood by wider audiences, beyond academia. In so doing, students will learn how economists persuade by unpicking the economics of the arguments presented by politicians, commentators and other public figures. They will learn how to use, and spot the abuse of, economic and financial statistics. They will learn first-hand how to write like a financial journalist or economic analyst. And they will also learn how to present their arguments like a political commentator.

Module aims

1. To acquaint students at an introductory undergraduate level with the skillset required to communicate their economic ideas to both economists and non-economists.
2. To help students to appreciate the purpose of economics as an academic discipline, and how academic insights can be used to improve our understanding of, and participation in, controversial public debates.
3. To provide students with an awareness of key concepts from the philosophy of science and the history of economic thought, and how these influence the way economists attempt to persuade.
4. To develop students' ability to critically evaluate economic arguments written and presented by journalists and other public commentators, including how to interpret data, weigh evidence, and draw independent conclusions.
5. To provide students with the requisite skills to identify and frame important societal questions.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding: Students should have a greater understanding of how economics is communicated to diverse audiences. They should be equipped with the knowledge to critically evaluate economic arguments presented in the media and elsewhere. They should

have a better understanding of key economic concepts that will be useful in their other economics modules. They should be familiar with how key (macro-)economic indicators are constructed, presented and used in public discourse.

Intellectual skills: Students should be familiar with the arguments presented in controversial issues and how they are presented in different media. They should be able to identify and use objective arguments, critically evaluate the use of evidence in public discourse, and decide for themselves on the validity of economic opinions.

Practical skills: Students should develop the necessary oral and written communication skills to be able to function effectively as an economist. In particular, students should learn how to speak in public, for different audiences. Additionally, students should learn about big data analysis and data visualisation tools, and how these can be used to communicate with different audiences.

Study skills: Students should develop the ability to independently investigate and analyse controversial economic questions. They should develop the ability to read complex economic arguments in an efficient manner, and then communicate these to others in simple ways.

Teaching and learning

Lectures: This module has 24 hours of lectures covering five different perspectives on the societal function of economics and how this determines the way it is communicated. Lectures serve as the main vehicle through which students are guided through important principles and applications. Further information about lecture topics is included at the end of this module outline.

Tutorials: This module has 8 one-hour tutorials, which complement lectures by allowing students to engage directly with the different ways in which economics is communicated. Tutorial exercises expose students to the key skills necessary to achieve this module's learning outcomes and complete assessments. Detailed instructions for each tutorial are provided separately, and students are expected to complete each week's tutorial exercise and upload this to the relevant Canvas discussion before attending their tutorial group.

Reading list

This module has no core textbook. The reading list below consists of titles which may aid in the completion of the various assessments, or which provide additional material on the subjects introduced in class. Those marked with an asterisk (*) are particularly recommended. Additional resources are also be made available on Canvas.

Students are expected to read the Financial Times each day: [FT.com](https://www.ft.com).

Certain units/chapters from [CORE The Economy 1.0](#) and [CORE The Economy 2.0](#) provide further context and complement the material covered in lectures. Relevant units are indicated under lecture topics in the following section.

- Athow, Jonathan, and Grice, Joe (2021), *Measuring the Economy* (Newport: Office for National Statistics). URL: <https://measuringtheeconomy.uk/>
- Carlin, Wendy; Bowles, Samuel; Stevens, Margaret; Tipoe, Eileen (2019), *Economy, Society, and Public Policy*. URL: <https://www.core-econ.org/project/core-espp/>
- *Chang, Ha-Joon (2014), *Economics: The User's Guide: A Pelican Introduction* (London: Penguin Books).
- The CORE Econ Team (2022), *The Economy* 1.0. Available at: <https://www.core-econ.org/project/core-the-economy/>
- The CORE Econ Team (2025), *The Economy* 2.0. Available at: <https://core-econ.org/the-economy/>
- Coyle, Diane (2021), *Cogs and Monsters: What economics is, and what it should be* (Oxford: Princeton University Press).
- Davies, Richard (ed.) (2015), *Economics: Making Sense of the Modern Economy* (4th Edition, London: The Economist).
- Davies, William (ed.) (2018), *Economic Science Fictions* (London: Goldsmiths Press).
- Davis, Evan (2017), *Post-Truth: Peak Bullshit - and What We Can Do About It* (London: Little, Brown).
- Hall, Joshua (ed.) (2014), *Homer Economicus: The Simpsons and Economics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).
- Harford, Tim (2012), *The Undercover Economist* (Revised Edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Kay, John, and King, Mervyn (2020), *Radical Uncertainty: Decision-Making for an Unknowable Future* (London: W. W. Norton).
- Klein, Daniel B. (1999), *What Do Economists Contribute?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).
- Levitt, Steven, and Dunbar, Stephen (2005), *Freakonomics* (London: Penguin).
- *McCloskey, Deirdre (2019), *Economical Writing* (3rd Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- O'Rourke, Kevin (2019), *A Short History of Brexit: From Brentry to Backstop* (London: Pelican).
- *Pryce, Vicky; Ross, Andy; Birdi, Alvin; and Harwood, Ian (2022), *How to be a successful Economist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Saadia, Manu (2016), *Treconomics: The Economics of Star Trek* (San Francisco: Pipertext).
- Tipoe, Eileen, and Becker, Ralf (2018), *Doing Economics*. Available at: <http://www.core-econ.org/doing-economics/>.
- Weldon, Duncan (2021), *Two Hundred Years of Muddling Through: The Surprising Story of Britain's Economy from Boom to Bust and Back Again* (London: Little, Brown).
- Wheelan, Charles (2013), *Naked Statistics* (New York: W. W. Norton).

Lecture topics

1. Economics as science

Lecture description: Economics is science in that it deals in causal relationships, relies on measurement and metrics, and purports to be inherently falsifiable. Like other sciences, economists move between abstract theory and real-world evidence to build their analyses and prescribe their policy initiatives. And like other sciences, there is economic knowledge that is considered scientific consensus, and other economic insights that are highly contentious and actively contested. This topic aims to expose students to the scientific method and how economists use, and abuse, scientific language to communicate their economic ideas.

Application: The environment and the economics of climate change.

CORE The Economy 1.0: [Unit 20, Economics of the Environment](#). CORE The Economy 2.0: [Macroeconomics Unit 8, Economic dynamics: Financial and environmental crises](#)

2. Economics as literature

Lecture description: Economics is literature in that its narratives and metaphors can have intrinsic artistic or intellectual value aside from its intended practical function of understanding the economy. More fundamentally, economists share the art of storytelling with novelists, playwrights and scriptwriters as a method of communicating their ideas. But just as science borrows its methodology from art, art also mirrors science: economic forces and economic inequality are integral to the plotlines of some of history's major works of literary fiction. This topic takes a closer look at the ways the economy is conceptualised, and economic ideas are communicated, both inside and outside of academia.

Application: Economies of the future, from Star Trek to Star Wars.

3. Economics as politics

Lecture description: Economics is politics in that it is used to justify partisan communications, and inform government policy decisions. Economists have fostered a schism, and developed an associated language, to keep positive ("what is") and normative ("what should be") economic insights distinct and separate. This topic concerns the ways politicians and public intellectuals use, and abuse, economics to persuade their electorates and readers. It focuses on the duties and responsibilities of economists when engaging in public discourse.

Application: The political economy of European integration and disintegration.

CORE The Economy 2.0: [Macroeconomics Unit 6, The financial sector: Debt, money, and financial markets](#); [Macroeconomics Unit 10, Government as economic actor: Economics, politics, and public policy](#)

4. Economics as history

Lecture description: Economics is history in two distinct ways: (1) economic evidence is historical by definition and benefits from historical methods to assess its reliability and

relevance; and (2) historical events and processes help to explain many present-day economic outcomes. This topic focuses on the ways in which economic history can, and should, influence economics and economists today. The contrasting ways in which economists and historians communicate their views is a particular focus.

Application: Irish economic development during the twentieth century.

CORE The Economy 1.0: [Unit 17, The Great Depression, Golden Age, and Global Financial Crisis](#)

5. Economics as philosophy

Description: Economics is philosophy in that it deals with fundamental questions of existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind and language. This topic links together the key insights from across the syllabus with more formal ideas from theories of existence, knowledge and value in order to better understand economic rhetoric. Core assumptions made in mainstream economic modelling will be discussed in light of ideas from moral philosophy. Special attention is drawn to the written word of one of history's most influential economists.

Application: Adam Smith and the concept of natural justice.

Indicative timetable and submission deadlines

Week	Lectures	Tutorials	Deadlines
1	Introduction	No tutorials	
2	Topic 1	Tutorial 1	
3	Topic 1	Tutorial 2	
4	Topic 2	Tutorial 3	
5	Topic 2	Tutorial 4	
6	Topic 3	<i>No tutorials</i>	Assessment 1
7	Topic 3	Tutorial 5	
8	Topic 4	Tutorial 6	
9	Topic 4	Tutorial 7	Assessment 2
10	Topic 5	Tutorial 8	
11	Topic 5	<i>No tutorials</i>	
12	Conclusion	<i>No tutorials</i>	Assessment 3