

William Thomson. *A Guide for the Young Economist: Writing and Speaking Effectively about Economics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001, 118 pp. ISBN 0–26270–079–4 (paperback). \$17.95.

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Every graduate student in a typical Ph.D. program experiences a learning process on the proper techniques for writing academic papers and speaking in front of an academic or professional audience. Often these experiences involve occasional blunders and embarrassments that most audiences can forgive. However, in an increasingly competitive market for high-level positions, a quicker acquisition of effective writing and speaking techniques is essential for greater success. William Thomson's *A Guide for the Young Economist: Writing and Speaking Effectively about Economics* presents the reader with a set of lighthearted, yet very practical, stories and advice for the aspiring researcher to help in this important transition. The book is divided into three self-contained chapters, with one each devoted to writing, speaking, and producing referee reports. Within each chapter, the numerous subsections (each of which are clearly titled) are also highly self-contained; thus, this book lends itself to use as a reference guide for all researchers.

A large proportion of the book is devoted to the first chapter on producing effective written papers, with particular emphasis on the goal of publication in an academic journal. Because the type of research (theoretical, empirical, or literary review) will often determine the structure of a paper, Thomson is quite thorough in addressing elements of each type. He begins with general suggestions; for example, all papers should be clear, concise, error free, and—perhaps most important—should highlight the paper's contribution to the existing literature. One of the book's strengths is Thomson's advice on components that are often given only as an afterthought, such as writing the paper's title, abstract, and acknowledgements. He continues with a more detailed discussion on the introduction and use of notations, definitions, and concepts, the central idea being to use them uniformly throughout the text, and even advises that one should be able to pronounce the notations! Next, ample attention is given to the effective techniques of presenting a model, theorem, or proof, including the setup, the use of assumptions, and the presentation of results. It is emphasized that the author should present these in a way the reader can easily follow, utilizing careful and complete steps (even when seemingly trivial). The remainder of the chapter describes how to use pictures and graphs, how to write an effective conclusion, and how to provide a reference sec-

tion. Finally, Thomson was gracious in providing readers with additional sources to consult for further advice, a rather humble implication that the book is not all inclusive, although one may argue that it comes very close.

The second chapter is used to discuss elements of giving presentations. Again, attuned to the overall lightheartedness of Thomson's writing style, he provides structured advice as well as solutions to rather odd (and sometimes comical) circumstances. He begins by emphasizing the need for preparation, practice, speaking/explaining clearly, the use of gestures, voice pitch, and how to interact with the audience (for example, in answering questions). An important section focuses on effective time management, in particular, the ability to add or delete presentation material when necessary. In regard to more comical, yet quite common instances, Thomson offers advice on what to do when one's mind becomes blank, when making mistakes, and even what not to do when an audience member falls asleep! Thomson concludes by describing the use of visual aids, including transparencies and the use of a chalkboard. He advises on how the little touches (e.g., the use of colors) can affect the ability to hold an audience's attention.

The third and final chapter is short, yet truly valuable for those who begin a career in academia, because one of the most important responsibilities is participation in peer-review reports. This chapter describes the components of a typical referee report to be submitted to an editor of a journal and eventually back to the author. The basic structure of the report—its summary, overall evaluation, specific comments, and the assessment of the exposition of the paper—is described in detail. Perhaps most importantly, Thomson offers advice on how to make one's suggestions more binding on the author before consideration of publication. Thomson concludes with pointers on writing the cover letter, as well as the general responsibilities that one should accept as a referee.

The most profound characteristic of William Thomson's *A Guide for the Young Economist: Writing and Speaking Effectively about Economics* is that the book itself epitomizes the main elements of its content. The book encourages academic literature and presentations to be thorough yet concise, accessible, and clear. Perhaps the most significant praise of the book is that the author exercises the suggestions he offers, and the end result is a wonderfully written "manual" that every academic student and researcher should own.