My Setup for Productive Research
Workflow, Apps and Technology, Thoughts on Productivity

Sangmin S. Oh (Chicago Booth / (soon) Columbia GSB)

May 21, 2024

Quotes that helped me during the PhD

"Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom."   - Søren Kierkegaard

"The only normal people are the ones you don't know very well."
   - Alfred Adler

"If you're going through hell, keep going." - Winston Churchill

"We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be."
                                                                    - Kurt Vonnegut

"When a man is in despair, it means that he still believes in something."
                                                                    - Dmitri Shostakovich

"*Uncertainty is an uncomfortable position. But certainty is an absurd one.* - Voltaire"
                                                                    - Lars Peter Hansen

I will share how I operate; you should choose to your taste
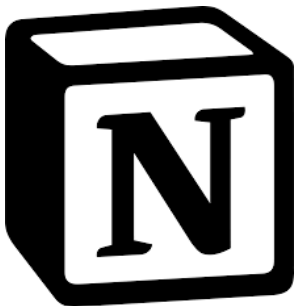
Workflow

Workflow

File Management

- I try to maintain the same file management system (at least for solo projects)

Workflow

File Management

- With a large Dropbox, I keep copies of the file after revisions

Manuscript 20231027 03 SO.lyx	__pycache__
Manuscript 20231027 03 SO.pdf	DD LOB Price 01.do
Manuscript 20231031 01 SO.lyx	DD LOB Price 02.do
Manuscript 20231031 01 SO.pdf	DD LOB Price 03.do
Manuscript 20231101 01 SO.lyx	DD LOB Price 04.do
Manuscript 20231101 01 SO.pdf	DD LOB Price 05.do
Manuscript 20231102 01 SO.lyx	DD State Price 01.do
Manuscript 20231102 02 SO.lyx	DD State Price 02.do
Manuscript 20231102 02 SO.pdf	df_wildcluster.csv
Manuscript 20231102 03 SO.lyx	Obsolete
Manuscript 20231102 03 SO.pdf	simon_preliminaries.py
Manuscript 20231103 01 SO.lyx	
Manuscript 20231103 01 SO.pdf	
Manuscript 20231105 01 SO.lyx	

Workflow

Coding

- Languages: Python + Stata
  - I had to read a lot of Matlab and R code, so don't limit yourself ex ante
- Editor: Visual Studio Code, Sublime Text

Version Control

- I make local copies of the code and documents I write
  - I don't use Github or other version control services
  - Difficult to convince co-authors to use version control

Writing

- Lyx + Local Latex + Overleaf
  - Lyx is heavily underrated!

Flexibility is key!

Apps and Technology

Apps and Technology

Project Management

- Tool: Notion
- Each page corresponds to a project (potential paper) and allows you to nest information

✍️

Project Vox

↙ 36 backlinks

📌 Research Log: Project Vox

Internal Notes

▼ Media Articles   ▼ Data

  ■ Monetary P...   ■ CB Commun...

  ■ CB Commun   ■ Preliminary

📌

🖼 Add cover

Research Log: Project Vox

↙ 34 backlinks

Research Question

Literature Review

   Useful Commentaries

   Useful Data

Background

   Econometrics

   Text Analysis

   Institutional Background

Empirical Analysis

Apps and Technology

Project Management

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Meetings

Aa Name	≔ Participants
📄 Meeting 2020-11-17 T	Brent Neiman
📄 Meeting 2020-11-30 M	Zhiguo He Eric Zwick Ralph Koijen
📄 Meeting 2020-12-11 F	Lars Hansen Yueran Ma Pietro Veronesi
📄 Meeting 2020-12-15 M	Ralph Koijen
📄 Meeting 2021-01-12 M	Ralph Koijen

Meeting 2020-12-11 F

≔ Participants   Lars Hansen   Yueran Ma   Pietro Veronesi

\+ Add a property

⚫ Add a comment...

📎 Slides 2020-12-11 01 SO.pdf   190.0KB

Eurozone

- Leo — Local banks are like regional governors in the US

Apps and Technology

Project Management

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↗ 📖 논문

Aa Title	≡ Citation
📄 Channels of US monetary policy spillovers to international bon	Albagli, Ceballos, Claro, and Romero (2019)
📄 The Joy of Giving or Assisted Living? Using Strategic ↗ OPEN	Ameriks, Caplin, Laufer, and Van Nieuwerburgh (20
Spread the Word: International spillovers from central bank comm	Armelius, Bertsch, Hull, and Zhang (2020)
Central Bank Swap Lines: Evidence on the Effects of the Lender of l	Bahaj and Reis
📄 Central Bank Communication and Monetary Policy: A Survey o	Blinder, Ehrmann, Fratzscher, De Haan, and Jansen
How Do Central Banks Talk	Blinder, Goodhart, Hildebrand, Wyplosz (2001)
📄 Monetary Policy with Opinionated Markets	Caballero and Simsek (2020)

Conferences + Add a view   Sort 🔍 Search ↗ ⋯ **New** ⌄
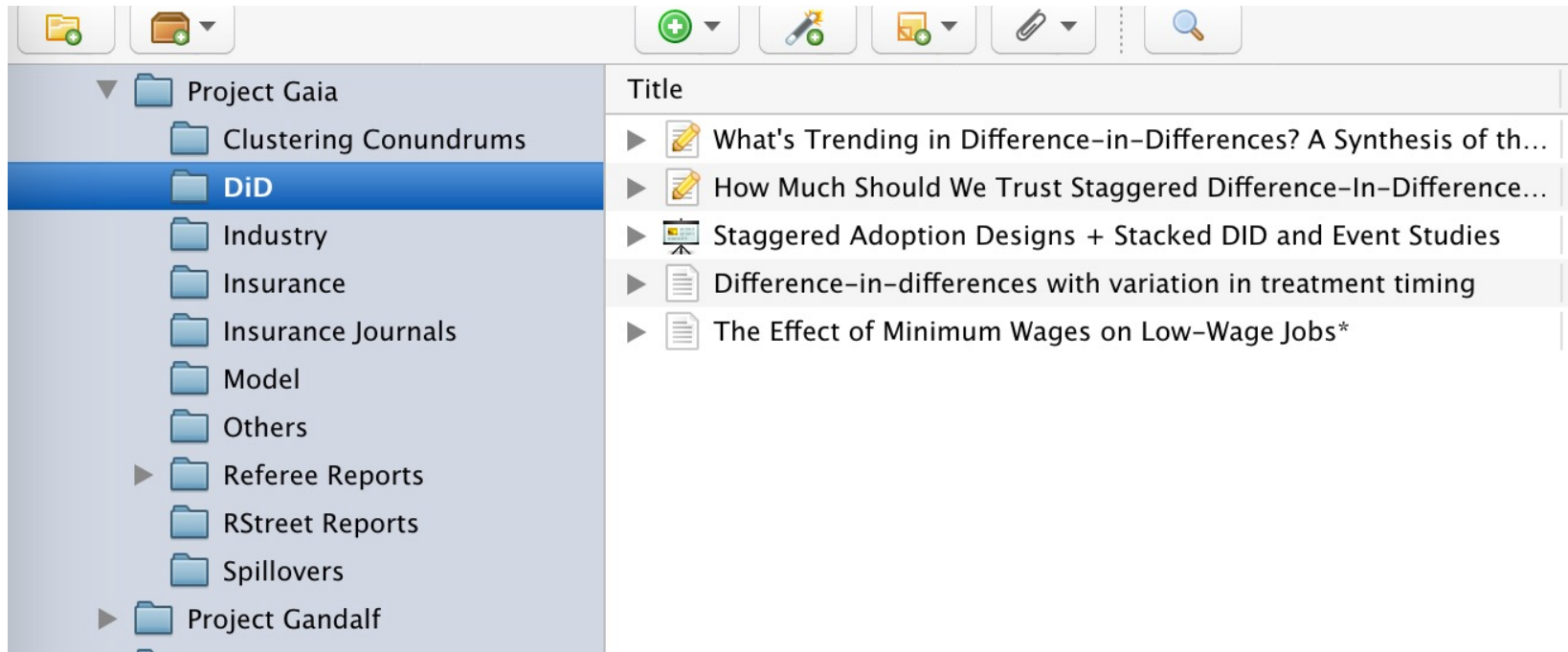
Aa Name	🗓 Submission Due	≡ Conference Date
AFA Ph.D Student Poster Session	Jul 31, 2020	January 2021
📄 The 15th Annual Conference on Asia-Pacific Financial Markets (CAFM)	Aug 21, 2020	December 4-5, 2020
International Risk Management Conference 2020	Aug 24, 2020	October 9-10, 2020
📄 Economics Graduate Students' Conference of Washington University in St. Louis	Aug 24, 2020	November 7, 2020

Apps and Technology

Reading Papers & Keeping Track

- Tool: Zotero + Notion

Apps and Technology

Reading Papers & Keeping Track

* Tool: Zotero + Notion

jlegewie/**zotfile**

Zotero plugin to manage your attachments:
automatically rename, move, and attach PDFs (or
other files) to Zotero items, sync PDFs...

43 Contributors   274 Issues   4k Stars   275 Forks

PaperBank

Name

📄 ScharfsteinStein_2000_The_Dark_Side_of_Internal.pdf   ✅

📄 Schenone_2010_Lending_Relationships_and.pdf   ✅

📄 Schickinger_etal_2022_Same_same,_but_different_-.pdf   ✅

📄 SchillingUhlig_2019_Currency_Substitution_under.pdf   ✅

Apps and Technology

Attending Seminars

- Tool: Notion

📊 세미나 및 워크샵

🔲 Master ⌄   Properties   Filter   Sort

Aa Title	🗓 Date	☰ Authors	☰ Type	☰ Topic Category
📄 New Perspectives on Liquidity	Nov 17, 2020	Ricardo Reis, Monika Piazzesi, Stefan Nagel	Virtual Finance Seminar	Asset Pricing Macro
📄 Can the Covid Bailouts Save the Econo ↗ OPEN	Nov 5, 2020	Vadim Elenev (Johns Hopkins University), Tim Landvoigt (Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania), and Stijn Van Neiweurburgh (Columbia Business School)	2020 IMF Annual Research Conference	International Macro & Finance

📖 논문

🔲 Master ⌄

Aa Title	☰ Citation	☰ Topic	☰ Journal
A Calculation of the Social Returns to Innovation	Jones and Summers (2020)	Productivity & Innovation Entrepreneurial Finance	Working Paper

Apps and Technology

Reading Papers & Keeping Track

- For each paper, I note: Motivation – Research Question – Methodology – Main Results
- You can embed subset of the table into other pages

Motivation

- University quality is believed to be one of the key drivers for a successful professional career of university graduates.

Research Question

What is the effect of faculty quality on PhD student outcomes?

Methodology

1. Give a brief description of historical details
2. Describe the data sources in more detail
3. Outline the identification strategy
4. Analyze the effect of faculty quality on PhD student outcomes

Overview

Dismissal of mathematics professors in Nazi Germany as a source of exogenous variation in university quality

Identification

OLS framework:

$$\text{Outcome}_{idt} = \beta_1 + \beta_2(\text{Avg. Faculty Quality})_{dt-1}$$

Apps and Technology

Reading Papers & Keeping Track

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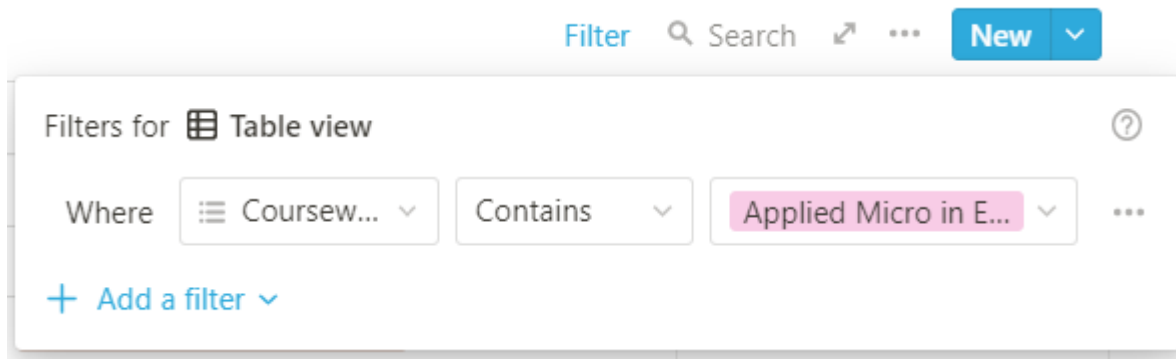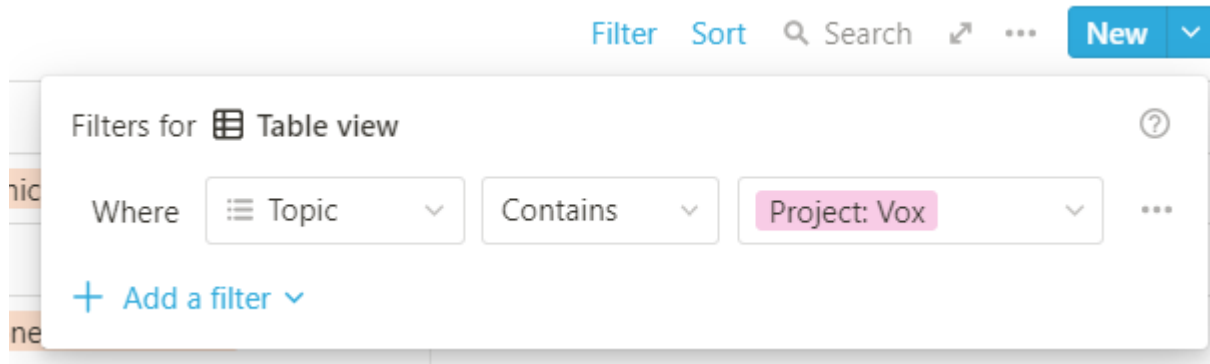
Apps and Technology

Scheduling and Time Tracking

- Daily time tracking: Toggl
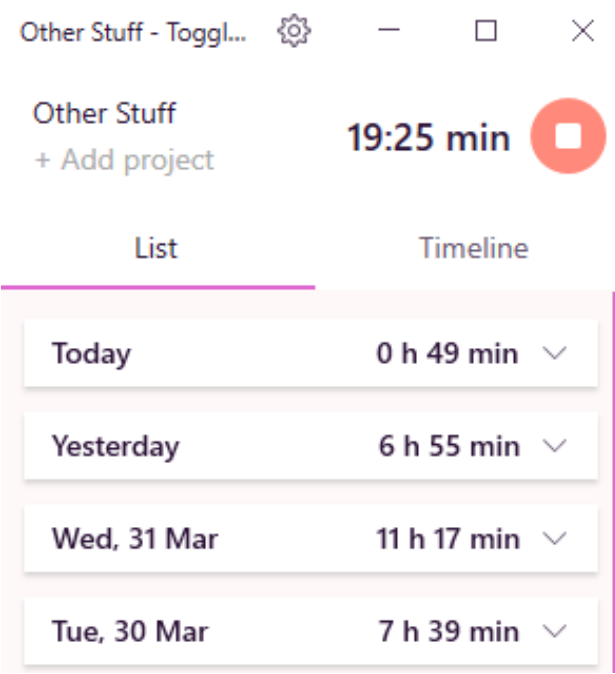
Apps and Technology

Scheduling and Time Tracking

- Task-based Calendar: **Sunsama**
- Schedule-based Calendar: **Google Calendar**

Apps and Technology

Getting Ideas

• Read-It-Later App: **Readwise Reader**

Apps and Technology

My Usage of Generative AI (as of May 2024)

- Writing drafts
    - Feed in table (latex) or figure → Generate description, in-body paragraphs
    - Feed in outline in bullets → Generate paragraphs (subject to certain style constraints)
    - Emails, Letters, Apologies

- Writing code
    - Generating programs in less familiar languages
    - Optimizing my existing code
    - Repeating blocks of code (for better readability)
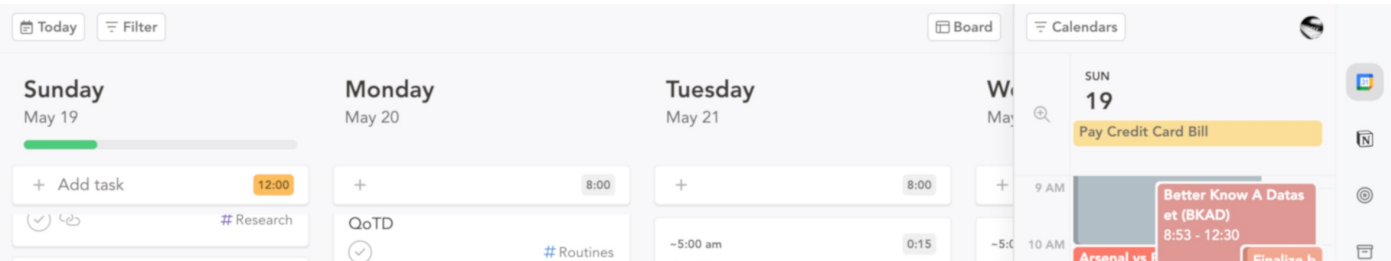
- Generating ideas
    - Getting feedback on drafts
    - Brainstorming ideas for revision
    - Gift ideas
    - Explaining things to non-academic audience

- Learning
    - Asking questions
    - Creating apps

Thoughts on Productivity

Thoughts on Productivity

1/ It's important to generate high-frequency fluctuations in your life

- Low-frequency fluctuations: college, grad school, marriage, dating, moving, etc
- High-frequency fluctuations affect your happiness significantly!

2/ Find your own pace, and take breaks effectively

- Ask yourself: do you require small frequent breaks or one large break?
- Ask yourself: "will I still be worrying about this problem at Christmas?"

3/ One needs to spend conscious efforts to improve productivity

- Try experimenting with various productivity hacks and see what sticks

Read up on what others have to say!

Sangmin Simon Oh

Incoming Assistant Professor, Finance Division, Columbia Business School

Home   CV   Research   Teaching   Discussions   Notebook   Public Goods   **Resources**

Aggregators

- **General Resources** for Macroeconomics and Financial Economics
- **Brendan Price** with resources for PhD students
- **Pavel Solís** with a wide array of recommended resources
- **Shanjun Li** with resources for PhD students
- **Masayuki Kudamatsu** with tips for economists
- **Alex Albright** with resources focusing on R and data science
- **Awesome Economics** with a collection of links for economists
- **Christine Cai** with a collection of links
- **Guillaume Dalle** with a collection, mostly in French
- **Chris Blattman** with a great collection of personal advice

Evaluating Other Work

Discussions

- **Chris Blattman** on the art of discussing
- **James Choi** on how to give a good paper discussion

Sample Discussions

Macro & Macro Finance

Monika Piazzesi, Daniel Greenwald, Itamar Drechsler, Urban Jermann, John Cochrane, Lawrence Schmidt, Jonathan Parker, Nicolas Crouzet, Amir Kermani, Annette Vissing-Jorgensen, Hanno Lustig, Gabriel Chodorow-Reich, Princeton MMF Reading Group, Fabrice Tourre, Eric Swanson, Wenhao Li, Robert Hall,