

CEPR / VOXDEV WEBINAR

# AI Agents for Economics Research

Practical workflows, budget tradeoffs, and why economists should care now

**Aniket Panjwani**

PhD Economics, Northwestern  
Director of AI/ML at Payslice

March 12, 2026

# Something Is Happening

---



Dylan Patel  

@dylan522p



Being in SF is like being in Wuhan right before the pandemic  
Something is happening, it's gonna hit everywhere but so few people  
know it

10:36 PM · Mar 8, 2026 · **1.6M** Views



Read 300 replies

<https://x.com/dylan522p/status/2030850153117327542>

# What Is Dylan Talking About?

---



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E5B0cS6XRkg>

## Later in the interview

- “You already see the junior software engineering market is nuked.”
- “You look at Claude Code spend, right? It’s freaking nuts.”
- “Claude Code is not a coding thing. It’s for all people.”

# Does this matter for economists? (Paul Novosad, Dartmouth)

---



**Paul Novosad** ✓  
@paulnovosad



I wrote a decent paper with AI.

It took me about 3 hours from start to finish, including an interactive choose-your-own-border-RD-adventure, it's a what are we even doing here kind of day.



**Paul Novosad** ✓ @paulnovosad · Feb 11

I was writing about land reform in West Bengal last night and was curious if it had persistent effects on the ownership distribution.

So I did what anyone would do, I\* wrote an academic paper on it

...

**Long-Run Effects of Land Reform in West Bengal**  
Evidence from State Borders



<https://x.com/paulnovosad/status/2021655122351468684>

# Does this matter for economists? (Gauti Eggertsson, Brown)

---



**Gauti Eggertsson**  

@GautiEggertsson



AI is a game changer for economic research. We will look back and think: before and after.

The junior job market used to place enormous value on technical skills — and rightly so. We wanted to pass on the latest research methods to new PhD students. But the cost of mastering frontier solution techniques has dropped dramatically. I now find myself replicating papers and experimenting with frontier methods in an evening or a few days using Claude Code. That would have taken weeks before — which in practice meant I wouldn't have done it at all.

So what does the new equilibrium look like? Some are pessimistic: ChatGPT can write PhD dissertations, they say. Maybe. But those

<https://x.com/GautiEggertsson/status/2027168324703179130>

# Does this matter for economists? (Chris Blattman, Chicago Harris)

---



**Chris Blattman** ✓

@cblatts



4w ago I was a Claude Code skeptic. I'm not a coder. None of the use cases were relevant. I managed teams & projects, drowning in email & overdue reminders. So I tried creating tools that would help me and... holy crap.

Now I'm sharing the tools I built:

[claudeblattman.com](https://claudeblattman.com)



# Does this matter for economists? (Chris Blattman, Chicago Harris)

---

The screenshot shows a dark-themed interface with four article cards arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each card has a title, a status badge, a short description, and a link.

- Teaching AI Your Voice** (NO CLAUDE CODE REQUIRED): AI has a house style and it's not yours. Build a voice file that captures how you actually write — ban list, annotated examples, sentence-level rules — and load it into any chatbot or Claude Code project. → Build your voice file
- Continuous Improvement**: Email yourself tips and discoveries from any device. Two skills curate them, then propose concrete changes to your CLAUDE.md, skills, and rules — so your system gets better every week. → The Tips Pipeline
- Tax Season Case Study** (NEW): A complete case study: using Claude Code to collect tax documents from email, compile deductions, and catch errors with a three-year review. What worked, what AI got wrong, and transferable patterns for any document-heavy workflow. → Tax Workflow
- Data Analysis Co-Pilot** (COMING SOON): Using AI to write, debug, and audit statistical code in Stata, R, and Python. Replication verification, robustness checks, and the "Referee 2" pattern. In the meantime, see AI for Economists resources.

<https://claudeblattman.com/>

# Economists I've Trained (MIT, NYU, Penn & more)

---

"Aniket introduced me to a whole new magical world of agentic coding and helped me get up to speed far faster than I could have on my own. My productivity across many tasks skyrocketed, and my reliance on research assistants decrease...



**Alexey Makarin**  
MIT Sloan  
Assistant Professor of Applied Econom...

"Aniket is an amazing teacher and showed me how to effectively incorporate Claude Code into my research. Highly recommended for any economist trying to level up their workflow. For economists working with messy data or complex...



**Arpit Gupta**  
NYU Stern  
Associate Professor of Finance

"Learning the frontier of agentic coding practices from Aniket has been a rewarding experience! Aniket is passionate about the topic and extremely knowledgeable. He has a talent for explaining complex topics clearly. Much...



**Gideon Bornstein**  
Wharton, University of Pennsylvania  
Assistant Professor of Finance

"Aniket has quickly gotten me up to speed on Claude Code for applied microeconomics research. My comfort zone is Stata and Dropbox, but he's helped me learn to be effective in a terminal, which I would have never...

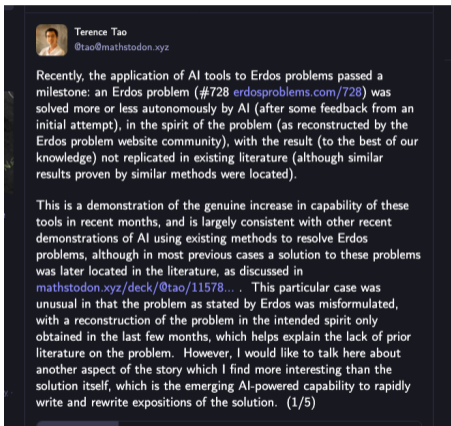


**Heyu Xiong**  
Case Western Reserve  
Associate Professor of Economics

<https://ai-mba.io/cohorts/claude-code-economists>

# Does this matter for economists? (Terence Tao, UCLA)

---



<https://mathstodon.xyz/@tao/115855840223258103>

# This Talk

---

- Which agentic coding tool should you use?
- A practical first exercise you can do today
- Beginner mistakes and how to avoid them
- How to keep learning agentic coding for research

# Table of Contents

---

- **Which agentic coding tool should you use?**
- A practical first exercise you can do today
- Beginner mistakes and how to avoid them
- How to keep learning agentic coding for research

# Two Options: Claude Code or Codex



Aniket Panjwani ✓

@aniketapanjwani



Economists - what agentic coding tool are you using?

For purpose of poll, economist is a PhD in economics/finance/accounting/marketing OR PhD student in one of those fields.



459 votes · Final results

9:59 AM · Mar 6, 2026 · 12.1K Views



3



3



12



15



<https://x.com/aniketapanjwani/status/2029934969141760234>

# I Recommend Codex

---

- The GPT 5.4 model is an order of magnitude better than Opus 4.6.
- Codex at \$20/mo gets you much better usage than Claude Code at \$20/mo.
- The Codex Desktop App is currently the best agentic coding interface for >98% of users.

I've been using Codex for 95% of my work for the last month.

# Will this make it difficult for me to work with Claude Code users?

---

- Skills are an open standard.
  - Claude: `~/.claude/skills`
  - Codex: `~/.agents/skills`
- `CLAUDE.md` == `AGENTS.md`
- But this space changes quickly. Today it's Codex, tomorrow it's back to Claude, the day after something else...

# Table of Contents

---

- Which agentic coding tool should you use?
- **A practical first exercise you can do today**
- Beginner mistakes and how to avoid them
- How to keep learning agentic coding for research

# Practical Exercise: Clean up your old code

---

- Economists are horrible programmers.
- Horrible horrible horrible.
- Let coding agents reorganize and rewrite your code for you.
- But how do you do it non destructively?
- And how do you validate it's correct?

# Practical Exercise: Prerequisites

---

1. Install Codex or Claude Code.
2. Install git.
3. Create a GitHub account.
4. Install gh, the GitHub command line tool, and authenticate it with your GitHub account.
5. Set up Stata with either Claude Code or Codex:  
`https://ai-mba.io/tutorials/how-to-create-a-stata-skill`

# Practical Exercise: Prompt

---

**I want your help cleaning up this project and setting up a git repo. First, copy it all over to a backup directory.**

**Next, suggest an initial gitignore and create a first repo.**

**Then, push the initial repo to a private repo on GitHub.**

**Then, check out a new branch and suggest how to restructure the repo to have best practices with data/code/docs/paper organization and lineage.**

**Then just do it on the new branch.**

**Finally, actually run any code you've modified/restructured to make sure it lines up with the prior results.**

# Table of Contents

---

- Which agentic coding tool should you use?
- A practical first exercise you can do today
- **Beginner mistakes and how to avoid them**
- How to keep learning agentic coding for research



MISTAKE 1

**Don't Use Git**

# Git Makes Codex/CC 10x More Powerful

---

- You don't need to know git to use git.
- Put in your AGENTS.md/CLAUDE.md something like: "Make atomic git commits as you go along."
- What does Git give you?
  - Safely try new things and roll them back.
  - CC/Codex get **memory**.
  - Worktrees allow you to work on multiple aspects of a project **at the same time**.

# Want To Better Understand Git?

---



Why Git Makes Claude Code 10x More Powerful: Complete Beginner's Guide



MISTAKE 2

# Underutilize Skills

# What are skills?

---

## Definition

Skills are reusable instructions that teach Codex or Claude Code how to do a task your way.

- Think of them as saved playbooks.
- They bundle prompts, workflows, tool usage, and conventions.
- Instead of re-explaining everything, you invoke the skill and the agent starts with context.

# Skill Example: review-paper (Pedro Sant'Anna)

---

## Exact Front Matter

```
--  
name: review-paper  
description: Comprehensive manuscript review covering argument structure,  
econometric specification, citation completeness, and potential referee  
objections  
argument-hint: "[paper filename in master_supporting_docs/ or path to  
.tex/.pdf]"  
allowed-tools: ["Read", "Grep", "Glob", "Write", "Task"]  
--
```

review-paper skill source

## Exact Workflow Lines

- "Read the full paper end-to-end."
- "Evaluate across 6 dimensions (see below)."
- "Generate 3-5 'referee objections'."
- "Save to  
quality\_reports/paper\_review\_[sanitized\_name]."

# Skill Example: data-analysis (Pedro Sant'Anna)

---

## Exact Front Matter

```
--  
name: data-analysis  
description: End-to-end R data analysis workflow from exploration through  
regression to publication-ready tables and figures  
argument-hint: "[dataset path or description of analysis goal]"  
allowed-tools: ["Read", "Grep", "Glob", "Write", "Edit", "Bash", "Task"]  
--
```

## Exact Workflow Lines

- “Run an end-to-end data analysis in R: load, explore, analyze, and produce publication-ready output.”
- “Phase 1: Setup and Data Loading”
- “Phase 2: Exploratory Data Analysis”
- “Phase 3: Main Analysis”
- “Phase 4: Publication-Ready Output”
- “Phase 5: Save and Review”

<https://github.com/pedrohcg/claude-code-my-workflow/tree/main/.claude/skills/data-analysis>

# Skill Example: proposal-write (Chris Blattman)

---

## Exact Opening Lines

```
# Write Proposal
*v1.0 -- Public release*
```

```
Draft a funding proposal from structured inputs, using project context and donor intelligence. Use when drafting funding proposals, LOIs, or project summaries for grant applications.
```

## Exact Workflow Lines

- “This skill produces a first draft of a funding proposal in markdown.”
- “The flow: Input Checklist → Auto-Gather Context → Donor Profile → Context Brief → Analyze & Plan → Draft → Save.”
- “Present this checklist immediately and collect all inputs before proceeding.”
- “No application template provided... type ‘proceed without template’ to continue.”

<https://github.com/chrisblattman/claudeblattman/blob/main/skills/proposal-write.md>

# How to make your own skill

---

- In Codex, use the built-in `skill-creator` skill.
- In Claude Code, install Anthropic's `skill-creator` skill.
- Then just tell it what skill you want to make.
- It will help scaffold the front matter, workflow, and validation steps.

Claude Code skill: <https://github.com/anthropics/skills/blob/main/skills/skill-creator/SKILL.md>

# Want To Go Deeper on Skills?

---



The Only Claude Code Skill You Need



MISTAKE 3

**Don't Make Plans**

# Why plan first?

---

- Coding agents often try to plan, implement, debug, and revise in one thread.
- Long threads get noisy.
- As context fills up, performance drops.
- Planning first protects the context window.
- Once you trust the plan, write it to a file and continue in a fresh session.

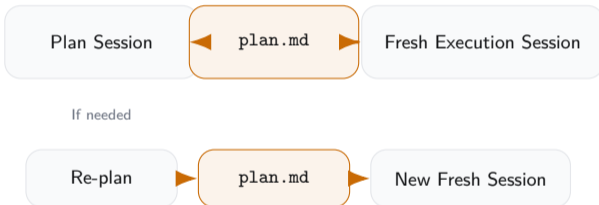
# A Better Workflow

## One Long Thread



One session gets crowded.

## Split the Work



Agree on the plan first. Save it.  
Then execute in a fresh session.

# Table of Contents

---

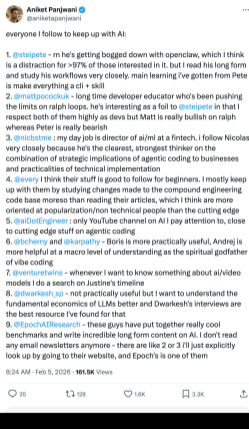
- Which agentic coding tool should you use?
- A practical first exercise you can do today
- Beginner mistakes and how to avoid them
- **How to keep learning agentic coding for research**

# Get on X.

---

- There is some serious discussion on agentic coding for economics on LinkedIn.
- Bluesky is a total dead end.
- There's a lot more discussion among economists on X, and **all** the discussion among developers is on X.

# Who I Follow on AI



<https://x.com/aniketapanjwani/status/2019401717364748767>

# Economists to Follow on X on Agentic Coding

---

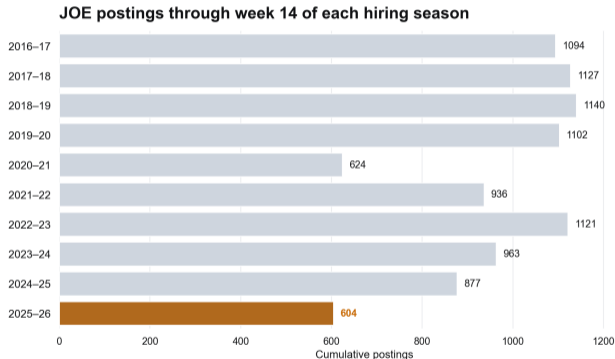
- Alex Imas: @alexolegimas
- Chris Blattman: @cblatts
- David Yanagizawa-Drott: @YanagizawaD
- Ethan Mollick: @emollick
- Soumitra Shukla: @soumitrashukla9
- Kevin Bryan: @Afinetheorem
- Andy Hall: @ahall\_research
- Alexander Kustov: @akoustov
- Antonio Mele: @antoniomele101
- Anthony Lee Zhang: @alz\_zyd\_
- Aniket Panjwani: @aniketapanjwani
- Scott Cunningham: @causalinf
- Pedro H. C. Sant'Anna: @pedrohcgsg

# Is \$20 enough for Agentic Coding?

---

- You can do almost everything someone with a higher budget can do, but you will hit your limits.
- Why this is a problem:
  - You'll learn to use these tools slower.
  - You'll fall behind peers in your field who learn faster and spend more on AI.
- Think hard about how to reallocate toward an **\$200/mo** budget.

# The Job Market for Economists was Terrible



Source: JOE exports compiled in paulgp/joe-tracker. Academic year starts August 1.

Source: [paulgp.com/2025/12/10/quick-update.html](https://paulgp.com/2025/12/10/quick-update.html)


- 2025-26 JOE postings are down **31%** versus the same point last year.
- I think it will get worse. Demand for economics undergrads is plummeting.
- Learn these tools to preserve your own employability.

# Agentic Coding Training

COHORT PROGRAM

## Claude Code for Economists

Double your economics research productivity with Claude Code in one week.

 Aniket Panjwani

### Introduction

A 3-day intensive workshop to take economists from zero AI knowledge to being able to:

- Create extensions **in hours** to dynamic discrete choice estimation procedures which previously took **months**
- Clean and analyze massive, poorly documented datasets in minutes
- Prove significant microeconomic and econometric theory results
- Parallelize literature review across dozens (hundreds) of papers

### ENROLLMENT CLOSED

Enrollment for this cohort has closed. Sign up below to be notified about future cohorts.

### Interested in the next cohort?

Sign up for the **The AI Economist** newsletter and I'll let you know exactly when the next cohort opens up.

**Notify me**

[ai-mba.io/cohorts/claude-code-economists](https://ai-mba.io/cohorts/claude-code-economists)

# AI for Economics Newsletter

AI MBA

## AI Economics for economists

In *The AI Economist* newsletter, Northwestern Economics PhD **Aniket Panjwani** breaks down how PhD economists are accelerating research with agentic tools, plus cutting-edge breakdowns of AI economics research.

Enter your email

"It's good. I promise." - Aniket

**Alex Tabarrok** @ATabarrok

I completed my first Claude Code project! Following @aniketpanjwani's video (link below), I used CC to download metadata from @MRRevUniversity videos, then had CC write an "MBA" analysis and create a visual dashboard which I deployed on GitHub pages here [atabarrok.github.io/MRU-Video-Anal...](https://atabarrok.github.io/MRU-Video-Anal...)

72.4K Views

16 30 447 688

[Read 16 replies](#)

Alex Tabarrok, Professor of Economics & co-founder of Marginal Revolution - the most read economics blog in the world

[ai-mba.io/newsletter/econ](https://ai-mba.io/newsletter/econ)