

Suggestions for Writing About Music

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Before you begin writing...

1. Start *as soon* as you get the assignment!
2. Choose music you really care about, or *find* something to care about in the music you've been assigned.
3. Immerse yourself in the music by listening to it, reading its score, listening while reading the score, and by playing the musical lines *before* attempting to write about it.
4. Reflect on the music by asking: "What do I remember *most* about what I heard?"
5. Identify passages that attract your interest, and re-listen to them often.
6. If you own the music, or have made a legal photocopy for yourself, annotate the score with observations and identifications of interesting elements.
7. Develop your *own* opinions about the music, describe your *own* discoveries about the music, devise explanations for *your* discoveries, and draw conclusions *you* feel are significant: DO NOT PLAGIARIZE ANYTHING!
8. Assemble your assertions, arguments, and supporting evidence in a logical order.
9. Identify musical excerpts that can serve as evidence and illustrate your beliefs.
10. Form a particular point of view, develop a brief and clear thesis statement that conveys it, outline a concise hierarchical argument that will persuade your readers to agree with you, and organize convincing evidence that will support your conclusions.

When you start writing...

1. Get to the point!
2. Begin by expressing your observations, opinions, discoveries, explanations and conclusions in simple, clear, and assured declarative statements... and SAVE YOUR WORK FREQUENTLY!
3. Include references to specific measure numbers, specific musical elements, and specific musical effects.
4. Develop paragraphs around your declarative statements and prepare musical examples for the most telling passages and features using *Finale*.
5. Consciously aim to write short, punchy, active-voice sentences, instead of long, rambling, run-on sentences or passive-voice sentences, seeking to write more short paragraphs instead of fewer, longer spans.
6. CITE EVERYTHING YOU BORROW OR QUOTE IN YOUR FOOTNOTES!
7. Communicate the structure of your argument within your text by using appropriate "signaling" words, like "First," "For instance," "Finally," etc.
8. Don't try to discuss everything, provide a label for everything, or feel you need to describe the ordinary; instead, illuminate innovation, explain essential features, and help your reader understand what is *most* important or intriguing about the music.

9. Don't write from beginning to end and in deep detail; instead, consider sketching your conclusion before surveying your evidence, and work on the various parts of your argument in whatever order seems most productive and convenient.
10. If you get bogged down, work on another section that seems easier to write; if you get completely stuck, set your work aside to rest for an interval so you can return to it later... **AND MAKE A SEPARATE BACKUP!**

When you begin editing...

1. Revise: eliminate everything unessential to your arguments, fill in any gaps, **AND SAVE FREQUENTLY!**
2. Proofread: look for obvious mistakes like incomplete sentences, subject/verb disagreement, illogical tense use, inappropriate adjectives, incorrect punctuation, etc.
3. Spell-check: use the word-processor's own editing tool to help you!
4. Revise: look for long sentences that can be split into shorter ones.
5. Proofread: make sure you have fully and correctly documented ALL of the external sources you used to prepare your work, and have footnoted any quotes or ideas you gained from other writers: **DO NOT FAIL TO DOCUMENT YOUR SOURCES!**
6. Spell-check: use the spell-checker after every revision and proofreading.
7. REST: let your work "set" so you can return to it with fresh eyes... and make a backup: **DO NOT TRY TO WRITE THE NIGHT BEFORE IT IS DUE!**
8. Revise: assure that there are smooth transitions between sections, that you've chosen the best words express your ideas, and that you have avoided words that will distract.
9. Proofread: look for lapses in writing style.
10. Spell-check: use the spell-checker once more before printing.

When you're ready to submit your work...

1. Ask someone else to proofread your work **FOR GRAMMATICAL ISSUES ONLY!**
2. Make sure your work corresponds to ALL of the criteria required in your assignment.
3. Print out a clean hard copy and check its appearance and quality.
4. Make sure your musical examples appear in the appropriate places.
5. Make sure your name is on the front page and that your work is titled as directed.
6. Make sure you've got all of the pages.
7. Make sure each page is numbered.
8. Make sure you've got at least two (2) electronic copies of your work, including a main copy on your computer and a separate backup saved on a flash drive or within a "backup file" you've e-mailed to yourself for safekeeping in a "backup folder" within your e-mail account: **DO NOT FAIL TO MAKE AND UPDATE BACKUPS AS YOU PREPARE ANY PROFESSIONAL-QUALITY DOCUMENTS!**
9. Consider making a hard copy for yourself.
10. Submit your work *on time*—**WITHOUT FAIL!**