

## WRITING ABOUT MUSIC

### I. General Purpose

Music has two different types of writing—scholarly research writing and more casual, practical writing—each with its own audience and conventions. Research writing explores a topic and makes an argument based on evidence from both primary and secondary sources. **Audiences** include students, professors, scholars, and performers. Practical writing is geared more toward the general public. Other **audiences** include musicians, music historians and researchers, concert audiences, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

### II. Types of Writing

- Response papers (personal reflections)
- Concert program notes
- Reviews/ criticism/ performance study (evaluation, commentary)
- Journal articles (research and analysis)
- Press releases (publicity)
- Grant proposals
- Term papers/ research

### III. Types of Evidence

- Primary sources: material that comes directly from the piece, composer, performer, or time period you are studying. Examples include musical scores, recordings of performances, letters, reviews, and newspapers.
- Secondary sources: material that analyzes, synthesizes, or evaluates an event, which may support an argument. Examples include books, articles, reviews, documentaries, or newspapers about the event.
- Some sources, such as newspapers and reviews, can be both primary *and* secondary sources. For example, if a musicologist were writing about the public's initial rejection of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, he or she might cite reviews from the time period as primary sources.

### IV. Writing Conventions

- In academic writing, use specialized vocabulary from music theory and history, but in practical writing, do not use specialized vocabulary that would be foreign to a layperson unless you define it.

- Compositions are categorized by detailed, specialized titles
- 1<sup>st</sup> person is acceptable in reflective pieces and in grant proposals but used sparingly in reviews
- Use third person in press releases, program notes or research papers
- Reviews should be fair and analytical, not based on personal taste
- Past tense is used for past events such as performance or composer's life
- Present tense is used for review or analysis of piece of music
- Active voice and active verbs are preferred
- Specific examples are used for support

## V. Citation Style

- MLA (Modern Language Association), CMS (Chicago Manual of Style) or Turabian
- Citation styles are up to individual teacher, but Author-Date System for in-text citations is often used
- Bibliographies are not included for reviews and less formal writings but often required for class assignments
- Footnotes or end notes are up to discretion of author, instructor, and/or editor/ publisher

## VI. Research Sources

- *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*
- *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.
- RILM, *Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale* (Music bibliography)  
<http://www.rilm.org/>
- Wingell, Richard J. *Writing about Music: An Introductory Guide*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990.

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### SOURCES:

Belman, Jonathan. *A Short Guide to Writing About Music*. New York: Pearson Education, 2007. Print.

Cullick, Jonathan S. and Terry Myers Zawacki. *Writing in the Disciplines: Advice and Models*. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2011. D-94-100. Print.

Herbert, Trevor. *Music in Words: A Guide to Researching and Writing in Music*. Oxford University Press, 2009. Print.

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