Writing about Music

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Before you begin writing...

1. Choose music you care about, or find something to care about in assigned music.
2. Immerse yourself in the music by listening to it, reading its score, listening while reading the score, and by playing its lines yourself—before attempting to write about it.
3. Determine what seems most remarkable about what you heard.
4. Identify passages of interest and annotate them in your personal copy of the score.
5. Develop your own opinions about the music, describe your own personal discoveries, devise explanations for your them, and draw conclusions you feel are significant.
6. Identify supporting evidence for your beliefs.
7. Learn what others have written about this music.
8. Identify a central problem you believe deserves being address by your writing.
9. Sketch a thesis statement that expresses the problem and conveys your personal attitude.
10. Arrange reasoning that will persuade another musician to agree with you.

When you structure your project...

1. Assemble a small amount of introductory context that locates your topic for your reader.
2. Clarify the problem you plan to address.
3. Express your thesis in a paragraph of clear, persuasive language.
4. Organize the reasoning of your argument in a logical sequence.
5. Prepare a hierarchical outline oriented toward your conclusion.
6. Identify connections between the components of your argument for transitions.
7. Assemble authoritative references, preserve essential data for citation, and notate specific musical examples for illustrative evidence.
8. Review and remove anything unessential from your outline.
10. Sketch an emphatic concluding summation that restates your thesis in light of your argument and evidence.

When you start writing...

1. Expressing your observations, opinions, discoveries, explanations and conclusions in simple, clear, and assured declarative statements that speak to your reader.
2. Include references to specific measure numbers, specific musical elements, and specific musical effects.
3. Develop paragraphs around your declarative statements.
4. Consciously aim to write short, punchy sentences, instead of rambling run-on sentences.
5. Consciously aim to write more short paragraphs instead of fewer, longer spans.
6. Get to your point immediately.
7. Communicate the structure of your argument within your text by using appropriate signaling words, like “First,” “For instance,” “Finally,” etc.
8. Avoid discussing everything, providing a label for everything, and describing the ordinary; instead, illuminate innovation, explain essential features, and help your reader understand what is most important or intriguing about the music.
9. Write from beginning to end as long as you can; then work on the various parts of your argument in whatever order is most convenient.
10. If you get bogged down, work on a section that is easier to write; if you get completely stuck, set your work aside for an interval and return to it later.

**When you begin editing...**

1. Revise: eliminate everything unessential to your argument; when in doubt, leave it out.
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 to help you improve the quality of your writing.
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 and have footnoted any quotes or ideas you gained from other writers.
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.
8. Revise: assure that there are smooth transitions between sections and that you have chosen the very best words to express your ideas.
9. Proofread: look for lapses in writing style or engagement with your reader.
10. Spell-check: use the spell-checker once more before printing.

**When you think you are done...**

1. Evaluate your work according to these twelve criteria:
   - Context
   - Problem
   - Thesis
   - Argument
   - Evidence
When you're ready to submit your work...

1. Ask someone else to proofread your work.
2. Print out a clean copy.
3. Check the appearance and quality of the printed copy.
4. Insert your musical examples in the appropriate places.
5. Make sure your name is on the front page
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 electronic copies of your work.
10. Submit your work on time.