SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS FOR

10

STYLE

In the following sections, we present practices common to academic writing generally, offering advice on a variety of topics ranging from writing with concision to employing general prose conventions that affect tone, formats for numbers and terms, and punctuation.

Concise Writing is Persuasive Writing

Whether you are writing in music or in another discipline, unnecessary words will obscure your points and make your reasoning more difficult to follow. In this section, we offer tips on making your prose more concise and thus more persuasive.

Avoid Unnecessary Words

1. *Conversation Fillers*: Conversation fillers are terms or expressions that fill pauses and facilitate fluency in informal speech and writing. Common fillers include *like, really, so, sort of, you know, actually, basically, um, well*, and *definitely*. Although such words are generally forgiven in informal situations, you should avoid them in formal writing and wherever you want your meaning to be absolutely clear.

Remove conversation fillers in formal writing:

~~Actually~~, in Salina Fisher's orchestral work *Rainphase*, the players use ~~stuff like~~ extended techniques—exhaling and whistling through the wind instruments, circular bowing and *col legno* in the strings—to ~~basically~~ represent the timbres and rhythms of wind and raindrops.

2. *Empty Sentence Starters*: Empty sentence starters are words or phrases that fail to convey clear meanings when they begin sentences.

a. *This . . .*

Avoid starting sentences with "This" without also naming the person, thing, idea, or event that "This" stands for.

Example	This [?] is evident in the song's second verse . . .
Replace with	**This technique** is evident in the song's second verse . . .

b. *There is . . .*

Avoid starting sentences with "There is, "There are," "There were." Use a specific agent to begin your sentences.

Example	~~There is~~ a modulation in m. 5.
Replace with	**A modulation** occurs in m. 5.

c. *Basically; It is of interest that . . .*

Avoid starting sentences with adverbs or empty introductory word groups that do not add to the meaning of the sentence. Even musical terms used as adverbs at the beginning of a sentence are extraneous if the remainder of the sentence is clear and informative.

Example ~~It is of interest that~~ **some claim** Paul McCartney's song "Martha My Dear" was about his longtime girlfriend, Jane Asher; others claim it was about his English Sheepdog named Martha.

Avoid starting sentences with these adverbs and word groups:

Adverbs:	Basically, . . .	Interestingly, . . .
	Actually, . . .	Harmonically, . . .
	Essentially, . . .	Rhythmically, . . .
Word groups:	As far as . . .	As a matter of fact, . . .
	In terms of . . .	All things considered, . . .
	Due to the fact . . .	At the end of the day . . .

d. *As previously stated . . .*

Avoid starting sentences with reminders about information already stated. Unless the paper is very long and complex, readers do not need such reminders.

Cut As previously stated, . . .
As already discussed, . . .
As mentioned earlier, . . .

e. *In my opinion . . .*

Readers assume that all statements in a paper are yours unless you attribute them to another source. Thus, it is unnecessary to begin sentences with phrases like those crossed out here. Acceptable uses of "I" are discussed later within "General Prose Conventions."

Cut ~~In my opinion~~ the performance was successful because . . .
~~From my perspective~~, prior scholarship has largely overlooked this problem . . .

f. *The paper as agent . . .*

Avoid starting sentences that assign agency to the paper itself.

Cut	***Replace with***
It is this paper's hope to . . .	The purpose of this paper is . . .
This paper has demonstrated . . .	I hope to have demonstrated . . .

3. *Overuse of Prepositions:* In writing about music, prepositional phrases (e.g., "in the Adagio") easily accumulate. Use these strategies to eliminate unnecessary prepositions and make your prose more concise.

1. Convert "of" phrases into the possessive:

Instead of	***Use***
the opening *of* the recapitulation	the recapitulation's opening
the downbeat *of* m. 75	m. 75's downbeat

2. Substitute concise terms for wordy expressions and phrases:

Instead of	***Use***
Over the course *of*	in, during, throughout
Around the time that	when

Avoid Vacant Statements

1. *Grandiose Claims*: Grandiose claims contain exaggerated or over-the-top ideas. Although such statements may seem to signal the importance of your paper, they actually have the opposite effect because, under scrutiny, they are neither meaningful nor subject to support by evidence.

Beethoven was an unparalleled genius.
Prince's *Diamonds and Pearls* is the best album ever produced.
Music is a universal language.

2. *Statements of the Obvious*: Statements of the obvious offer generally accepted ideas. Such statements might seem like a good way to start a paper or introduce an idea; however, like grandiose statements, they are neither deeply meaningful nor subject to support by evidence.

Bach is well known for his compositional craft.
Bob Dylan composed a lot of great songs.

3. *Broad Pronouncements Derived from Limited Findings*: When you make discoveries in your research, you may be tempted to assume that your findings hold true for a broader swath of music or music history. Unless you do the research to show that your broadened claim is accurate, avoid making pronouncements like the following, which can undermine the credibility of your work.

In Mozart's music, the Neapolitan chord represents tragedy.

General Prose Conventions

Authors writing about music should follow not only those prose conventions that are specific to music but also those applicable to academic writing generally. Our discussion of selected general conventions separates them into three categories: those affecting tone, those concerning the formats of numbers and terms, and those concerning punctuation.

Conventions That Affect Tone

1. *Active vs. Passive Voice*: Both active and passive voice have roles in writing about music. In general, active voice, which conveys actions more vividly, is preferable. To use the active voice, make the sentence's subject the agent of action.

Active vs. Passive Voice

Active voice: The song's introduction establishes a groove to set up the A section.
↑ ↑
sentence subject (agent of action) action

Passive voice: A groove is established in the introduction to set up the A section.
↑
established by . . . ?
(agent of action unknown)

Writers commonly employ passive voice for these three purposes:

1. To introduce illustrations.

Passive voice: As shown in Example 4, . . .
↑
shown by . . . ?
(agent of action unnecessary)

2. To feature the action rather than the agent performing the action.

Passive voice: The symphony is performed annually over fifty times.
↑ ↑
subject performed by . . . ?
(agent of action is not the main point)

3. To describe an element within the sentence without changing the sentence's subject. In the following excerpt, ***passive voice appears in bold*** and *active voice in italics*:

> The first section (mm. 1–61) *opens* with repeated agony gestures, **expressed** in dark and heavy timbres, and *moves* through a gradual expansion of register, activity level, and volume before the bright, startling strokes of the epiphany gesture *intervene*. These gestures *provide* a continuum against which other musical materials **are set**, such as the melancholy tritone-inflected melodies and the staggered ostinatos **formed by** twelve-tone row fragments **noted** earlier.[1]

2. *First-Person Pronouns*: Although you may have been advised to avoid first-person pronouns (I, me, my) altogether in your academic writing, this prohibition is now considered out of date.

When used judiciously, first-person pronouns can create a sense of voice, promote concision, ensure accountability, and establish a stronger connection with readers.

Use first-person pronouns when you wish to:	**Examples**
convey a personal reaction, opinion, or approach to the subject, as in some reviews, blog posts, and interviews	**I** spoke with Soper in her office in a ninety-four-year-old building overlooking a river and sprawling athletic fields.[2]
strengthen an argument by referencing your own experience or authority on a subject	During **my** orchestration lessons with composer Dominick Argento, . . .
distinguish clearly between the ideas of others and your own	Whereas Tovey's analysis locates the movement's retransition as beginning in m. 90, **my** analysis shows . . .
guide the reader throughout the course of the paper	In the following section, **I** trace the history of . . .
Note: Use first-person plural pronouns (we, us, our) *only* when the paper has more than one author.	

Conventions Concerning Formats for Numbers and Terms

1. *Centuries:* Spell out and hyphenate centuries when they appear as compound adjectives. Do not use Arabic numerals and do not elevate the ordinal suffix.

eighteenth century	*not*	18th century
eighteenth-century piano	*not*	18th-century piano

2. *Common Numbers and Ordinals*

a. *In-text use of common numbers and ordinals*: *The Chicago Manual of Style* offers two options for using common numbers and ordinals in your text. Choose one style and employ it consistently throughout your writing.

In-Text Use of Common Numbers and Ordinals	
Option 1: Spell out whole numbers up to and including one hundred. Numbers above one hundred should be written as numerals. Spell out whole numbers up to and including one hundred when followed by "hundred," "thousand," "hundred thousand," and beyond. Spell out ordinal numbers up to and including one hundredth.	one, five, fifty-nine, one hundred, 101 one thousand, five million, fifty-nine million, one hundred thousand, 101 thousand first, fifth, fifty-ninth, one hundredth, 101st
Option 2: Spell out common numbers and ordinals from zero to nine.	two, four, six, nine, 10, 12

Numbers and ordinals 10 and above should be written as numerals unless they serve as the first word of the sentence.	second, fourth, sixth, ninth, 10th, 12th

b. *Number spans*: Use an en dash (not a hyphen) to separate spans of pages, measures, years, and the like.

pp. 256–57 mm. 1–9 1914–16 Examples 2a–2e

c. Plural numbers: To make a plural out of a number, add an "s" (but no apostrophe):

It was not until the late **1820s** that . . .

d. *Use of inclusive page numbers in citations and references*:

Use of Inclusive Page Numbers in Citations and References[3]		
If the first number is . . .	the second number will . . .	Examples
less than 100	use all digits.	1–8 11–13 76–99
100 or a multiple of 100 (numbers ending with two or more zeros)	use all digits.	100–105 700–778 1200–1211
101 through 109, 201 through 209, etc. (numbers in which the penultimate numeral is zero)	use changed portion only.	101–8 307–14 2002–3
110 through 199, 210 through 299, etc.	use two digits unless more are needed to include all changed parts.	111–13 245–46 1789–802 5067–68

3. *Foreign Terms:* Italicize all foreign words and phrases that have not been naturalized into the English language. A simple rule of thumb: If the word or phrase is in a standard English dictionary (e.g., Oxford, Merriam-Webster, Harper-Collins, Random House), you need not italicize.

langsam *vs.* concerto
scordatura nocturne

4. *Historical Periods, Eras, and Events:* Capitalize terms or numerical designations that indicate a specific historical period. Employ lowercase when these terms are used in a more general sense.

Specific historical era, period, or repertory	General use of the term
During the Postmodern era	postmodernist concerns
the Romantic period	a romantic evening
Classical music	classical guitar
the Roaring Twenties	the twentieth century

Conventions Concerning Punctuation
When employed effectively, punctuation is an essential tool that brings clarity to prose and guides readers toward immediate understanding of the meaning of your words.

1. *Apostrophe:* As a rule, use an apostrophe followed by "s" to indicate a possessive noun, as in:

> The rondo**'s** theme is characteristically playful.

If, however, you mention the rondo earlier in the paragraph and want to rewrite this sentence by substituting the pronoun "it" for "The rondo," you would run into an exception to the rule. When using "it," an apostrophe followed by "s" is a contraction for "it is." The possessive form of "it" omits the apostrophe. Thus, you would revise the sentence as follows:

> **Its** theme is characteristically playful.

Beware!		
it's	=	it is
its	=	of it (possessive; belonging to previously mentioned person, place, or thing)

For singular nouns that end with "s," create the singular possessive by using "s's" (e.g., Daniels's, Brahms's) *unless*:
(a) the word already contains a sibilant (e.g., s, sh, x, z) before the last syllable (e.g., Moses', Xerxes'), or
(b) the addition of "'s" would make the word difficult to pronounce.

To show joint possession, add "'s" to the last noun only:

> "Stravinsky and Balanchine**'s** collaboration"

2. *Comma:* For a series or three or more items, place a comma after each item except the last. Between the second-to-last and last item, put the last comma before "and."

> ↓
> "The album's first, second, third**,** and fifth tracks . . ."

Commas also function to set off supplementary information by marking the beginning and end of the clause. To check that you have used the commas correctly, read the sentence without the enclosed clause to ensure that the remainder makes sense on its own. For example:

> Samuel Barber's opera *Antony and Cleopatra~~, based on William Shakespeare's play of the same name,~~* was commissioned for the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera House in Lincoln Center.

Use a comma after:

Introductory clauses starting with the adverbs *after, although, as, because, before, if, once, since, though, unless, until, when, whereas*	↓ As written by Agathe von Trapp, The Trapp Family Singers began performing together in . . .
Introductory phrases, including prepositional phrases	↓ Composed before his eighth birthday, Mozart's first four sonatas for keyboard and violin date between 1762 and 1764. ↓ Throughout January 2004, . . .
Introductory words such as *furthermore, however, meanwhile, nevertheless, still*	↓ Furthermore, Ruth Crawford Seeger's *Nine Preludes for Piano* show the influence of Alexander Scriabin.

The following abbreviations are *always* followed by a comma:

> i.e., (*id est*, "that is") e.g., (*exempli gratia*, "for example")

3. *Ellipsis:* The ellipsis—a series of three spaced dots—is used to indicate the omission of a word, phrase, line, paragraph, or more from a quoted passage. Other punctuation (a comma, semicolon, or question mark) may precede or follow three ellipsis points, depending on its placement in the original.

If a full sentence is omitted, a period will come prior to the ellipsis. Thus, there will be four dots:

> ↓
"Metaphorical language is essential to communication about music. . . . You would have to try very hard to avoid metaphor when writing about music."

Do not use an ellipsis to join two statements that are far apart in the original source; this may misrepresent the original meaning. Furthermore, ellipses are *not* normally used before the first word or after the last word of a quotation even if the portion you quote derives from the middle of the original passage.

4. *Em Dash:* An em dash (not hyphen) is used—without spaces before or after—to demarcate a parenthetical thought interpolation, interruption, or end-of-sentence elaboration. If you use a pair of em dashes to set off a phrase in the middle of a sentence, as in the first line of this paragraph, apply the same test you did for commas that demarcate clauses to ensure that the remainder of the sentence makes sense on its own. Use the em dash *only* for the purposes described here; it is *not* an all-purpose punctuation mark that can be used anywhere.

5. *En Dash:* Use the en dash (not hyphen) to indicate a clearly defined range such as pages or years or for items in succession, such as chords within chord progressions.

pp. 444–529 (pages)	1951–55 (years)	mm. 3–4 (measures)	I–V–I (chords)

6. *Hyphen:* Hyphens are used to join individual words, most commonly to create compound adjectival phrases such as, "neighbor-note motion," "four-measure phrase," and "nineteenth-century music." Do not split or hyphenate words at ends of lines.

7. *Quotation Marks:*
a. *Short quotations* are those shorter than four lines. They should remain within the double-spaced body of your text, distinguished by *double quotation marks*. In American English, commas and periods at the end of quotations are positioned *before* the closing quotation mark.

(comma precedes closing quotation mark)
↓
In his discussion of "The Dangerous Kitchen," Frank Zappa explains: "The words were completely written out, but the melody and the accompaniment were improvised nightly, in a style we call 'meltdown.'"[4]
↑
(period + single quotation mark + double quotation mark)

b. *Quotations within short quotations*: Use *single quotation marks* to offset quotations within short quotations. If the single and double quotation marks appear one after the other (see the end of the previous quotation), no space is required between them.

c. *Long quotations*—those longer than four lines—should be used in moderation and only when the entire passage is essential. Long quotations should be offset in a block: left-indent the entire block five spaces, and single-space the quotation. *Do not enclose* block quotations with quotation marks. (See Chapter 11 for an example of a block quotation.)

d. *Quotations within long block quotations*: Use *double quotation marks* to offset quotations within long block quotations.

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1. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, "Chen Yi, Symphony No. 2 (1993)," in *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music, 1960–2000,* eds. Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 141.

2. Kate Soper, "An Interview with Kate Soper," interview by Andrew Leland, *The Believer* 120, August 1, 2018, https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-kate-soper/.

3. *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, 566.

4. Frank Zappa and Peter Occhiogrosso, *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (New York, NY: Poseidon Press, 1989), 185.