Literacy Loops and Online Groups: Promoting Writing Skills in Large Undergraduate Music Classes

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Twenty-first century undergraduates integrate the latest communication, information, and management technologies seamlessly into their daily lives.[1] This enjoyment and competency can be turned to effective educational ends. Researchers have shown how interactivity is essential to the most effective learning scenarios, that the online environment is an ideal place in which to foster student interactivity, and, more specifically, that online discussion has proven a highly effective tool for achieving student engagement.[2] In the context of music history teaching, discipline-specific literacy—comprising the skills, attitudes, and conceptual understandings associated with the study of music—can be developed in "low risk" online

1. See for example Diana M. Andone, Jon Dron, Lyn Pemberton, and Chris Boyne, "E-Learning Environments for Digitally-Minded Students," *Journal of Interactive Learning Research* 18, no. 1 (2007): 41–53.

2. See for example Bill Anderson and Mary Simpson, "Learning and Teaching at a Distance: A Social Affair," *Computers in NZ Schools* 10, no. 1 (1998): 25–29; David D. Curtis and Michael J. Lawson, "Exploring Collaborative Online Learning," *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks* 5, no. 1 (2001): 21–55; Martha A. Gabriel, "Learning Together: Exploring Group Interactions Online," *Journal of Distance Education* 19, no. 1 (2004): 54–72; Pamela Hodgson, "How to Teach in Cyberspace," *Techniques* [Association for Career and Technical Education] 74, no. 5 (1999): 34; Nancy November, "Integrating Online Group Work into First-Year Music Studies in New Zealand: 'This IS a University,'" in *Interaction in Communication Technologies and Virtual Learning Environments: Human Factors*, ed. Angela T. Ragusa (Hershey, PA: Information Science Reference, 2010), 314–30; Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt, *Collaborating Online: Learning Together in Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); and Wilhelmina C. Savenye, "Interaction: The Power and the Promise of Active Online Learning," in J. Michael Spector, ed., *Finding Your Online Voice: Stories Told by Experienced Online Educators* (Mahwah, NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 141–62.

group interactions, which can lead to higher level disciplinary understandings and feed into "higher stakes" formal essays.[3] Why and when does this work, and how can one achieve this connection most effectively?

I am investigating how students' digital literacy and energy for online interactions can be used to enhance music-specific literacy and writing skills. This article describes a productive learning cycle, which I term a "Literacy Loop." At the beginning of each semester I have measured the digital literacy of the students. Of the one hundred and twenty-three students in my 2008 first-year music history course, "Turning Points in Western Music," 99% had a home computer, 75% used a memory stick to transfer data, 35% had completed a computer science course, and 16% could actually write computer code. Seventy-two per cent used online communication via e-mail, wikis, chatting, and blogs at least once daily; 82% had registered with Facebook, Bebo, or another form of social communication; and 72% agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed using online environments. This data is summarized at the conclusion of the paper in Appendix A.1. I then designed online assignment sequences (carried out in 2008 and 2010 respectively) to use this very high-level digital literacy to help the students to improve their writing through the use of online group work and online writing tools. In 2009 I did not use the online assignment sequences, and this provided a useful point of comparison.

This teaching practice ultimately came full circle: the students who participated in the online assignments believed their engagement in music history was enhanced by their newly developed digital literacy, and, as we shall see, their valuation of online learning increased correspondingly. My own reflection on the process of developing Literacy Loops in my music history classes has led me to develop guidelines for using online group assignments to improve both student digital literacy and their engagement in music history.

Background

To date few teachers of music history at the collegiate level have documented how they are using information and communication technologies to enhance student learning.[4] In designing online writing assignments, I have drawn on

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3. For a relevant and broad definition of literacy, see the section "Towards a Definition of Historical Literacy" under "Historical Literacy" in Tony Taylor and Carmel Young, *Making History: A Guide for the Teaching and Learning of History in Australian Schools*: http://www.hyperhistory.org/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=220&op=page.

4. An exception is José Antonio Bowen, "Teaching Naked: Why Removing Technology from your Classroom will Improve Student Learning," *National Forum for Teaching and Learning* 16, no. 1 (2006): 1–5. Full text available at http://www.ntlf.com/html/ti/naked.htm. See also Thomas Rudolph and James Frankel, *YouTube in Music Education* (New York: Hal Leonard Books, 2009).

recent e-learning scholarship that translates well into the music history course context. Gilly Salmon's seminal work demonstrates how to structure and guide online group interactions to encourage students to participate in discussions, and also to lead them towards high-order tasks involving critique and reflection.[5] Toni Bellon and Richard Oates have considered the relationship between student personality types and learning types and effective online learning, providing hints on how to motivate the kinds of diverse learners that we find in the undergraduate classroom.[6] More specifically, Scott Warnock has discussed how one can separate the process of teaching writing online into steps, which include collaboration in virtual groups and peer review.[7] On a broader pedagogical level, e-learning experts provide valuable guidelines for dealing with the ideological implications of implementing online learning, as well as hints for mitigating the clashes of desires, expectations, and learning styles that can lurk in the online environment.[8]

"Turning Points in Western Music" is part of a suite of "General Education" courses offered at the first-year level at the University of Auckland, which are open to both music majors and non-majors, and are designed to introduce the student to the ways of thinking within the given discipline. The course can be described as "blended," in that assignments largely take place online, but there are also face-to-face lectures on campus. Increasingly more courses are offered this way at the University of Auckland, alongside both traditional face-to-face lecture courses and fully online courses that are offered as "distance education." Since the course is open to students of all majors, one cannot assume a high level of music literacy. However, students often come with a considerable background in listening to music and sharing and discussing music with friends. It was notable, for example, that although only 32% of the 2008 student cohort were music majors, the class as a whole showed exceptional digital literacy in music. Eighty-four percent had an iPod

5. Gilly Salmon, *E-Moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online*, 2nd ed. (London: Kogan Page, 2003); and idem, *E-Tivities: The Key to Active Online Learning* (London: Kogan Page, 2002).

6. Toni Bellon and Richard Oates, "Best Practices in Cyberspace: Motivating the Online Learner," paper presented at the National Education Computing Conference, San Antonio, Texas, 2002. Full text available at http://168.144.129.112/Articles/Best Practices in_Cyberspace.pdf or by searching the article's title online at the Technology-Mediated Learning Resource Center (http://168.144.129.112/).

7. Scott Warnock, *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why* (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2009).

8. Loralee LaPointe and Marcy Reisetter, "Belonging Online: Students' Perceptions of the Value and Efficacy of an Online Learning Community," *International Journal on E-Learning* 7, no. 4 (2008): 641–55; and John M. Dirkx and Regina O. Smith, "Thinking out of a Bowl of Spaghetti: Learning to Learn in Online Collaborative Groups," in *Online Collaborative Learning: Theory and Practice*, ed. Tim S. Roberts (London: Information Science Publishing, 2004), 132–59.

or another mobile music player, and 93% had used the Internet to find music-related information. The figures were yet higher in 2010: 85% and 97%, respectively (see Appendix A.1). These statistics point to relevant energies and competencies, which the music educator might use in various ways.

Implementation

The assignment sequences that I designed drew on students' capacities for sharing ideas about music informally, and sought to extend these so that they developed more informed and critical responses. In the 2008 course, students were involved in three collaborative steps, designed as a sequence that would lead to individual essays on the following topic: "Discuss the significance of X in the history of Western music, where X is the landmark recording chosen by your group." First, student groups compiled and annotated bibliographies on their chosen recordings using Google Docs; they then took part in small-group online discussion; next they posted reflections on their own groups' discussions in larger online groups.[9] Finally, they wrote their own individual papers, building on the scaffolding that was put in place earlier in the semester. This design ensured that students would move from the "lower stakes" writing assignments, carried out in small groups online, to the "higher stakes" writing of their own essays, which was both more public and more formal.

In 2010 the group discussion assignment was modified based on student and instructor feedback and was specifically directed towards improving the standard of writing in the final assignment for the course, a concert review (see Appendix C). This time the online discussion in small groups was based around E. T. A. Hoffmann's 1810 review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Students were asked to think about persuasive language in the context of writing about music in three steps. They first analysed the rhetoric of Hoffmann's text using one of two online text analysis tools: Wordle and Helen Sword's Wasteline Test.[10] They then responded to each other's analyses, tried using their own persuasive language in writing about a composer of their choice, and finally commented on peers' work. A new step introduced in the 2010 course was the peer reviewing of the students' final concert reviews. Students used the online peer review system Aropä, developed at the University of Auckland, for this last step.[12]

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9. For Google Docs see http://docs.google.com.

10. For Wordle see http://www.wordle.net/; for the Wasteline Test http://www.writers-diet.com/wasteline.php. Another online writing analysis tool of direct relevance to the Hoffmann review is included in the online study guide for Mark Evans Bonds' *A History of Music in Western Culture*, http://wps.prenhall.com/hss_bonds_hisofmusic_2/31/7996/2047100.cw/content/index.html.

12. John Hamer, Catherine Kell, and Fiona Spence, "Peer Assessment Using Aropä,"

An important part of my research process was to obtain feedback of various kinds from relevant parties, in order to improve the assignment sequence in subsequent iterations of the course. E-learning experts at the University of Auckland provided me with advice and feedback on the design of the assignment sequence before I launched it in 2008, and again when I refined it in 2010. Three e-moderators played a vital role in overseeing the online discussions in both years, and also provided feedback.[13] These e-moderators were graduate music students in music history, whom I coached on non-intrusive online group facilitation skills. This meant that they were to act as discussion facilitators, rather than discussion leaders, allowing students active and responsible roles in the discussion while still offering guidance. The e-moderators served in both 2008 and 2010, and were thus well placed to make comparative assessments of the process. The students themselves were also a vital source of feedback. Students filled out questionnaires before and after they completed the assignment sequences in each iteration of the course, and I examined the results of these questionnaires more deeply in student focus groups (two groups of six students each) at the end of the respective courses.

Results and Developments

The results of the two online assignment sequences are summarized below from the student perspective and then the teacher perspective. Appendix A summarizes the statistics from the pre- and post-course student surveys on digital literacy and online learning that were conducted in each course. Appendix B presents selected anonymous comments from the 2010 students and e-moderators.

Student Perspective

Student surveys before and after the online group work showed an improvement in their attitudes towards the use of online interactions in

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Proceedings of the Ninth Australasian Computing Education Conference (ACE 2007): 43–54. Full text available at http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/%7Ej-hamer/peer-assessment-using-Aropa.pdf. For further details on Aropä see http://www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~hcp/aropa/. Another example of an online peer review writing program, the Calibrated Peer Review or (CPR)™, has been developed at University of California, Los Angles and is used nationwide in the US, http://cpr.molsci.ucla.edu/.

13. For valuable guidelines on the role of the e-moderator in empowering learners to take charge, see Salmon, *E-Moderating*. Valuable tips on promoting collaborating learning online are found in Rena Palloff and Keith Pratt, "Promoting Collaborative Learning," in *Building Online Learning Communities: Effective Strategies for the Virtual Classroom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 157–84.

helping them learn during the course. In 2008, before taking the assignment sequence, 44% of students agreed or strongly agreed that interacting online helped them to learn; afterwards, this number rose to 61%. In 2010, a greater number of students (51%) either agreed or strongly agreed that interacting online helped them to learn; following the sequence this figure also rose, in this case to 64%. In both years, the students were also asked to identify which of the online interactions were most beneficial to their learning, and to give reasons for their selections. In 2008 almost half of the survey respondents found the online discussion (entailing a probing question and critical response) in small groups to be the most beneficial. Twenty-four percent of respondents nominated the group annotated bibliography using Google Docs as the most beneficial online assignment, and 21% selected the online reflection in larger groups. The 2010 cohort also identified online discussion in small groups as a highly beneficial step. Students gave the following reasons for this choice, showing several key learner advantages of online asynchronous discussion in small groups:

- *Autonomy* in constructing their own knowledge and using their own critical skills to give peer feedback
- *Comfort* and *congeniality* of sharing ideas in small groups
- *Diversity* and range of resources and viewpoints shared
- *Ease* and *efficiency* of idea exchange and knowledge building
- *Time* to give a considered response (as compared to face-to-face interactions)

These results demonstrated that the students' digital literacy skills and enthusiasm for online environments readily translated into the educational context. A vocabulary of engagement emerged in their survey comments about online discussion, indicating their enthusiasm for the approach. The 2008 students made notable use of gerunds in describing the online group work: they were "hearing," "answering," "grouping," "sharing," and "uncovering." The 2010 students found the online discussion of Hoffmann's writing to be "enjoyable," "engaging," and "motivating." Regarding literacy skills, the 2010 students were asked to respond to the statement "I rate online interactions highly for improving my written communication skills." Before the assignment sequence, 37% of students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement; after the assignment sequence this number rose to 54%.

Both cohorts clearly identified additional and vital educational benefits of online group work and the online peer review tasks: they experienced meta-learning, that is, learning about learning itself, as a product of the interactive process. One 2008 student observed: "[online discussion] helped me to understand how others think about the topic and through this it helps open new ideas for yourself." In focus groups held in 2010, the students noted that

taking on the role of a teacher or instructor (a "semi-marker") afforded them a new critical perspective on their own work. Comments from two students illustrate this:

1. Feedback from others in small groups [was] very helpful as they picked up on what I missed, giving insight to me for future reference and being a semi-marker (writing posts on others' reviews) also stimulates my own brain, gets me thinking and becoming very particular in review writing.
2. The most beneficial was the peer review interactions online as it helped me self-evaluate my work better, and see the improvements I needed to make in certain areas of my work more clearly.

Teacher Perspective

The positive responses indicate that the students liked working in online environments, an important finding that was corroborated in the student survey results. Yet how did those marking the online and offline assignments rate the resultant student writing? Both the e-moderators and I closely tracked the quality of writing produced at each step of the assignment sequences. In 2008, the e-moderators noted that it was the critical reflections phase in large groups online that engendered some of the highest quality work. Students seemed to feel that the stakes were higher and thus the quality of response had to be higher in that more public forum. The "low stakes" online tasks, which the students carried out first, were conceptually relatively easy: contributing to an annotated bibliography, posting a single comment, responding to another student's posting, or reviewing another student's writing according to a simple rubric. The students were learning that writing is an extensive process, rather than something that normally takes place the night before the deadline. It was important to reinforce this message by assigning a percentage of the overall grade to the "lower stakes" or "process" tasks. More importantly, we sought to provide formative feedback during the process. The online peer review step was ideal for the latter, especially given the large class size.

The "highest stakes" task—an essay or concert review—entailed a more formal writing style and a bringing together of the literacy skills developed in the previous steps: synthesis of viewpoints, critical commentary, argumentation from evidence, correct use of music terminology, and appropriate referencing and citing. I further encouraged students to draw on the knowledge and discursive experience gained in the online group work by asking them to include relevant reference to the online discussions in their final essays, a step that was also worth part of the overall grade. In the resultant writings students showed understanding of how the less formal online discussion and reflection could feed into their more formal reflective discursive essays. In the best essays

they wove together the voices of their peers and scholars in service of their own arguments.

In the 2010 iteration of the course I made an even greater effort to emphasize connections between the online discussion-based writing and the individual final essays. This involved adding in the extra steps mentioned in "Background" and "Implementation," above, and reiterating, in course assessment documents and verbally in class, that the final essay was just part of a larger writing development process. The students took this to heart: this was one factor in the improvement of the average grade for the final written assignment, from B+ (77%) in 2008 to A- (81%) in 2010. In the intervening year (2009), when the online writing assignment sequence was not included in the course, the students simply handed in hard copies of their final essays, which they had written and researched according to their own personal processes. It was notable that the grades for the final essays were lower that year, averaging 74% (B).

The e-moderators in 2010, several of whom had also been involved in the 2008 iteration of the course in the same capacity, noted that the quality of comments and reflections was higher in 2010 due to the more tightly-focused sequence of online tasks. They observed more critical insight and the development of students' personal voices. The following comments from two 2010 e-moderators contain relevant student examples:

1. I was impressed by some of the critical and insightful comments on Hoffmann's writing in particular. For example: "Despite his subjective view, the writing is very persuasive as he offers not only a description of the music, but also evidence as to how this emotion is evoked. References to specific spots in the music and musical techniques are employed in an effort to justify his reasoning."

2. The quality of written responses was high [quotes the following student's response to part 3-group 4, a task involving taking on the persuasive voice of an early nineteenth-century reviewer of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony]: "Could we say, if we were to glance back at the music of the past as one swirl of colour and glory and fire, that Beethoven is to his time as Handel was to yesterday? That the poignant echoes of his majestic oratorios set free the same romantic voice that pervades Beethoven's greatest symphonies and concertos? Certainly, Handel was not the rebel that Beethoven is; his music does not ignite the same frenzy of discussion. But in spirit, in energy, in tragic sweetness, and in might, there is something comparable, something too explosive to be contained [etc.]."

Despite improvements in their abilities to write persuasively about music, students still encountered some quite significant problems. In interviews with

the teachers who graded the final essays, and in student focus groups, the following areas of concern were identified:

- Difficulties using the appropriate musical term or concept in context
- Difficulties crafting higher-level arguments that go beyond simple comparisons towards more critical responses
- The need for students to further develop their personal voices in writing

E-learning strategies for dealing with these issues within and beyond first-year music history courses include the following:

- Student creation of a course glossary (such as that in the learning/course management system Moodle) that is specifically geared to the development of the vocabulary of the discipline[14]
- Extended online discussion tasks, based around a focal topic or issue (possibly introduced in class), which specifically promote student learning and contextual use of new music terminology (e.g., from the course glossary)
- An emphasis on peer analysis of writing, exploring positive and negative aspects of the writing (for example using Helen Sword's online Wasteline Test), and trying to identify hallmarks of the writer's personal "voice"

Conclusion: Four Guidelines

Based on feedback from students and staff in 2008 and 2010 using Literacy Loops in music history classes, I have developed the following four guidelines ("the four Ms") for using online group work to improve student writing within and beyond the first-year music history course:

1. Modularize, and think beyond the online module
    In his provocative article on integrating new learning technologies into the music course, José Bowen makes the excellent point that online discussion can be used to motivate, reinforce, and reflect on the lecture material.[15] In "blended courses" (those employing both on- and offline learning and teaching), integrate online components with a variety of other appropriate learning modalities; choose the best tool (whether on- or offline) for the learning task;

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14. http://moodle.org/.
15. Bowen, "Teaching Naked."

and make sure that the connections between on- and offline writing tasks are clear to the students.

2. Motivate, from a student perspective

Students are concerned about their online presence. Moving from low-stakes (small-group, non-assessed, less formal) online writing tasks to higher stakes (large-group, assessed, more formal) tasks creates a safe environment in which they can express themselves and use their digital literacy to educational ends. The online student work generated in my courses was only viewable by class members, myself, and the e-moderators.

Motivating online interactions from the student perspective also means allowing the students plenty of room to bring their own ideas, responses, and examples into the discussions. In the discussions of Hoffmann's prose, particularly productive conversations resulted when students compared their own reactions to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to those of Hoffmann, and brought in examples from their own listening background that had motivated them to similar levels of praise and awe to those of Hoffmann.

3. Model the process, and permit the "teacher role"

Consider gathering high-quality student writings (with permission of the students and used anonymously) as models that show, for example, how online discussion can feed into formal essays. Such authentic examples help students to see ways in which they, too, can enter the "discourse community" of the music scholar, proceeding from their own perspectives and vocabularies. Such models are at least as useful to students as are scholarly examples of good writing drawn from within the discipline.

Since students often delight in taking the role of teacher, it makes sense for instructors to allow them room to use and develop this skill, for example by using peer review assessment rubrics that are simple and open-ended. When we first used online peer reviewing, we found that we had been too stringent in telling students how to respond. Focus group discussions revealed that students had ideas for their peers at many levels, following on from the multi-layered prose analyses they had carried online. They wanted space to provide this feedback.

4. Moderate, and also guide

As one 2008 student observed, his group had generated many good questions, "but no one could answer them." Ways around this issue include bringing experts into student discussions, who can help students to generate and find good answers. For first-year students, in particular, the e-moderator can play a significant role in guiding discussion. E-moderators can model the process of the enquiring mind, suggesting routes to answers and showing students ways to validate their own voices.

APPENDIX A: Results of Student Surveys

In the 2008 version of the course 123 students completed the first survey and 103 students completed the second. In the 2010 version of the course 103 students completed each questionnaire. In the first survey carried out in the respective years, information was gathered concerning student online literacy (among other items). The idea was to gain a base-line understanding of the degree of online competence among each student cohort; thus the students were asked various questions concerning their social and educational use of various digital media and online tools/websites. In the tables below only the percentage of students who answered "yes" to each question are shown (i.e., the answers "no" and "n/a" are not shown). The results of the two surveys are divided into three tables: digital literacy, attitudes to online learning (before and after the class), and attitudes to online discussion assignments.

1. Pre-course survey results on student digital literacy (% survey respondents)

So that I know how computer literate you are please tell me if you:	2008	2010
a) have a computer at home	99	96
b) mostly use a computer at the university	31	37
c) have an iPod or other form of mobile music player	84	85
d) use a memory stick to transfer data	75	81
e) use all your fingers when you type on the keyboard	86	76
f) have done a basic course in computer science	33	28
g) can write computer code (programming)	16	16

Regarding your social/educational use of the Internet, have you:	2008	2010
a) used the Internet to make a booking or buy something	87	95
b) done Internet banking	80	83
c) registered with Facebook, Bebo or another social network	82	90
d) created or used a personal or family website	25	31
e) used Google Scholar for your studies	41	42
f) used Google Docs for your studies	29	33
g) used Wikipedia for information about anything	93	92
h) surfed YouTube and/or published anything on YouTube	88	98
i) surfed for music-related information on the Internet	93	97

2. Pre-course and post-course survey results on students' attitudes to online learning (% survey respondents)

2008 Results

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Interacting online helps me to learn	Before:	8	35	31	17	9
	After:	23	38	35	3	1
b) I rate online interactions highly for information gathering and exchange	Before:	10	44	18	24	6
	After:	17	52	26	5	0

2010 Results

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Interacting online helps me to learn	Before:	9	42	39	9	1
	After:	10	54	27	8	1
b) I rate online interactions highly for information gathering and exchange	Before:	17	60	18	5	0
	After:	19	50	24	6	1
c) I rate online interactions highly for improving my written communication skills	Before:	4	37	44	13	2
	After:	12	41	38	9	0

3. Post-course survey results on students' attitudes to the online discussion assignment sequences (% survey respondents)

2008 Questions: Please rate each step of the online assignment. Was it beneficial in helping you to learn?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Compiling the annotated bibliography in Google Docs	9	32	25	24	10
b) Online discussion in small groups (probing question and reply)	8	41	24	20	7
c) Online critical reflection in large groups	6	31	28	24	11

2010 Questions: Please rate each step of the Discussion Assignment. Was it beneficial in helping you to learn?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Using Wordle or The Wasteline Test to analyse the Hoffmann review	13	41	29	15	2
b) Your own online postings on the Hoffmann review in small groups	17	57	22	4	0
c) Peers' reactions to your online postings	25	45	26	4	0

APPENDIX B: Written Comments from Students and E-Moderators

1. Selected student comments regarding the overall effectiveness of the 2010 assignment sequence

The following are a selection of comments from the second MUSIC 144/G survey that was delivered in 2010, related to Appendix A.3: the students were asked which of these steps was the most beneficial to their learning, and to briefly explain why. In these comments, "A," "B" or "C" refers to that particular step in the 2010 assignment sequence, as follows: A) Using Wordle or The Waistline Test to analyse the Hoffmann review; B) Your own online postings on the Hoffmann review in small groups; C) Peers' reactions to your online postings.

- "B was very helpful though C was the most, as it allowed anonymous critiques from three different points of view/people allowing you to see problems where you previously hadn't noticed."
- "C and B I found the most useful and enjoyable. Online simplifies this process (peer review) greatly."
- "Writing my own response because it forced me to relate to and interact with the content in an active manner."
- "B and C. Feedback from others in small groups [was] very helpful as they picked up on what I missed, giving insight to me for future reference and also being a semi-marker (writing posts on others' reviews) also stimulates my own brain, gets me thinking and becoming very particular in review writing."
- "The most beneficial was the peer review interactions online as it helped me self-evaluate my work better, and see the improvements I needed to make in certain areas of my work more clearly."
- "Probably C as it makes me think about aspects that I had missed before. To write response(s) to other members it forced me to

think about issues more deeply and in details so to sound more reasonable."
- "B allowed me to engage with reviews of Beethoven and let me critically analyse it."
- "Online discussion forum motivated me to do the work, to see what others think."

2. Selected e-moderator comments regarding the overall effectiveness of the 2010 assignment sequence

The following is a selection of the responses to various questions posed to the e-moderators after the course was over. The bulleted responses to each question are from different e-moderators.

1. Please comment on the assignment in terms of the engagement of the students. Did they appear enthusiastic?

- "I found the students were very engaged with the group discussion assignment."
- "I found that the vast majority related to this assignment very well and responded positively both to the task and to each other with enthusiasm."
- "The quality of writing improved with each posting overall."

2. Please comment on the assignment in terms of the quality of written responses that were produced. Did it encourage them to think critically and constructively about review writing?

- "The assessment is not too challenging, and not too easy, but perfectly pitched. I was impressed by some of the critical and insightful comments on Hoffmann's writing in particular [etc.]."
- "The students thought critically and constructively about review writing and further encouraged the students to think carefully about their own response."

3. There is evidence to suggest students feel at home online, at least in a social context. Did you find this to be so in this educational context? If so, what are the indicators, and if not, how could this be improved?

- "I think the students do 'feel at home online' even in this educational context. I think this was evident by the large number of students who participated in the group discussions with only a couple of students having technical difficulties. While it may not be a 'social network' per se it is a means of communication which

students seem to relate to and I do think the convenience of online work (for most students) encourages participation."

4. How did the students react to the task of responding to each other?

- "I think the students' reaction to responding to each other was generally a positive one. Students were generally forthright and generous with praise. There were very few negative comments if any, and any negative ones were constructive."
- "The main difficulty is for those who feel themselves to be at a disadvantage possibly because they are General Ed[ucation] students not music specialists, or because of language problems. Others in the group were positive and encouraging in their feedback for these students."

APPENDIX C: Examples of Assignments, Feedback forms, and Assessment Rubrics from Spring 2010

1. Individual Paper with Group Discussion on E. T. A. Hoffman
Weighting 15% of Final Grade (marked out of 15)
Overview
In this assignment you will analyse E. T. A. Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and have a group discussion about your analyses. You will then start to develop your own reviewing style.

STEP 1 Choose a group
You will need to go into CECIL (the University of Auckland's online Learning Management System) and sign up to a group of five people during the period 18-25 March
During this period only, you can self-stream into one of the numbered groups listed in CECIL 'Streams.'
You will be able to see how many places are left in a stream, but not who has already signed up. So if you would like to sign up with friends you should arrange with them which group number you will all choose.

STEP 2 Read & Analyse Hoffmann's review (by 12 midnight, 26 March, on the Internet)
Please read carefully through Hoffmann's review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The review can be accessed at
http://www.raptusassociation.org/hoffmann_e.html

Post a brief (max 200-word) statement in your group's discussion forum, answering the following questions:
1. What do you think Hoffmann's main point is in his review? [1 mark]
2. How does he use language to try to convince his readers? [2 marks]
3. Are you convinced? If so, why; if not, why not? (i.e., consider what makes someone's writing persuasive) [2 marks]

STEP 3: Responses to your group, and to Hoffmann
By Monday, 29 March, 12 midnight, in your CECIL Discussion Group:
Post ONE response to ONE of your peers' answers to the questions above (max 50 words). Please be polite and constructive!
[2 marks]

By Wednesday, 31 March, 12 midnight, in your CECIL Discussion Group:

Now choose another pre-1800 composer (not Haydn or Mozart)—it could be someone we have studied in the course so far—and write a paragraph comparing him/her to Beethoven, as either a more or a less important composer, using the most persuasive language that you can muster. You may choose to mimic Hoffmann, if you find his style compelling (max 300 words). Post your paragraph to your group's discussion forum.
[5 marks]

By Friday 2 April, 12 midnight, in your CECIL Discussion Group:
Now read your peers' comparison paragraphs and then make ONE short (max 100-word) constructive comment on the language/writing style adopted by one other member of your group: what is it about their style that you find compelling, or how could it be made even more convincing?
[3 marks]

2. Individual Music Review Paper with Peer Feedback
Weighting 20% of Final Grade (marked out of 100)
Since the review needs to be written by 19 May, it is a good idea to start thinking about your choice of event to review early in the semester.

STEP 1: Background and support
1. To provide yourself with some background on the idea of music review writing in general, please see Graham Reid's article at http://www.elsewhere.co.nz/culturalelsewhere/370/the-role-and-responsibilities-of-the-critic-essay/

2.   You can also familiarise yourself with review style by reading reviews in *The New Zealand Herald* and considering what works and what does not.

STEP 2: Write your review and have it peer reviewed by Wednesday 19 May, 12 midnight, on Aropä (online)
Write an 800-word review of any recent public musical event that you have attended between March and late May this year. The review should summarise the kind of even it was, the performers and programme, and at least half of it should be devoted to your opinion of it—what was different about it, what you enjoyed and disliked, and, most importantly, *why*. Submit your review to Aropä, the University of Auckland's online, anonymous student peer review system at https://aropa.ec.auckland.ac.nz/src/aropa.php.

STEP 3: Review your peers' work by Wednesday 26 May, 12 midnight, on Aropä (online)
You will be allocated a maximum of three other reviews from MUSIC 144/G class members. You will be asked to fill out a simple feedback form for each, and submit these to the Aropä system (200 words in total per review). Your feedback to your peers will be assessed by staff for its quality, constructive-ness, and timeliness [5 marks].

STEP 4: Submit your final review by Friday 4 June, 4 PM
In return, you will receive feedback from your peers on your own work, which you can use to revise your work before submission [15 marks].

3. Online Feedback Form for Music Review (for student-student feedback when using Aropä)

Comment constructively on the author's:

Explanation of the event

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Critical assessment of the event

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Use of persuasive language

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Use of evidence

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Offer two-three concrete suggestions to help the author to improve his or her review

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4. Assessment Summary of Music Review Assignment

CONTENT

Explanation of Event	A	B	C	D	/20
Critical Assessment	A	B	C	D	/20
Use of Evidence	A	B	C	D	/20
Persuasive Language	A	B	C	D	/20
Revisions	A	B	C	D	/10
Grammar & Spelling	A	B	C	D	/10
Grade					/100

COMMENTS
The main strengths of this assignment:

The areas that could be improved: