

# Writing about Music in Large Music Appreciation Classrooms Using Active Learning, Discipline-Specific Skills, and Peer Review

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For general students in music appreciation courses to write successfully about music—even for short, focused assignments—they must learn discipline-specific language, develop higher-order thinking, and communicate their ideas in a clear and coherent writing style. The typical lecture format in a large classroom does not create an environment conducive to achieving these learning objectives.<sup>1</sup> It assumes that all students already understand the types of questions asked by experts in the field, that they are all auditory learners, that they are independent enough to transfer knowledge from one lecture to the next on their own, that they know how to take notes, and that they can remain focused on the instructor for the entire class period.<sup>2</sup> Teaching writing skills to general students in a large classroom also poses the practical issues of grading and evaluating a large number, even hundreds, of student essays.

Large class sizes significantly affect student learning; students feel uncomfortable asking unsolicited questions when confused, they want more

An earlier version of this paper was presented at Teaching Music History Day 2011 at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte on 18 March 2011.

1. Courses with high enrollments are taught in spaces where the instructor is separated from the students, whose desks are usually arranged in fixed rows. Students experience spaces like this not only for university lectures, but also in some worship spaces, at the cinema, and at more formal performances, where they passively receive information or are expected to sit quietly and be entertained. Maryellen Gleason, “Better Communication in Large Courses,” *College Teaching* 34, no. 1 (1986): 20–22 and Nancy Van Note Chism and Deborah J. Bickford, eds., *The Importance of Physical Space in Creating Supportive Learning Environments*, New Directions for Teaching and Learning 92 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

2. David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, and Karl A. Smith, *Active Learning: Cooperation in the College Classroom*, 3rd ed. (Edina, MN: Interaction Books, 1991) and John Medina, “Rule #3: Every Brain is Wired Differently,” in *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School* (Seattle: Pear Press, 2008), 49–70.

*Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 117–32. ISSN 2155-1099X (online)

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interaction with the instructor,<sup>3</sup> and they find it difficult to stay focused on the instructor speaking for long stretches of time. Because the human brain is capable of staying truly focused on one thing for only ten minutes,<sup>4</sup> instructors and students communicate, learn, and teach best when activities and formats for learning shift periodically throughout a class session and when their roles in the classroom dynamic change. Maryellen Gleason notes that “communication works best when senders and receivers depend on each other for the construction of mutually agreed upon meanings,”<sup>5</sup> and because large rooms lean toward linear direction in learning, from sender to receiver, that it is vitally important to change the role of students from receiver to sender in order to engage them in the process of learning.

While active learning techniques for large classrooms have proven useful and effective for instructors and students alike, they require careful preparation. Formal, semester-long applications of writing methods, however, are neither necessary nor essential in achieving basic, introductory-level goals in higher-order learning and disciplinary writing. This paper describes the preparation and evaluation of a Song Essay Assignment used in music appreciation courses of 220 students at Purdue University that combines research on active learning strategies, the pedagogical method described in *Decoding the Disciplines*, and Calibrated Peer Review™, a web-based peer review program.

### Teaching Disciplinary Skills

At the heart of teaching disciplinary thinking is the realization that most undergraduates enroll in at least four courses per semester, each demanding that they think in a specific, disciplinary way. In a single day they may have to think like an economist, a literary critic, a biologist, and an historian. And unless they are taught that economists, literary critics, biologists, and historians all think differently, students will focus on the simplest kinds of learning, such as rote memorization, and miss the more sophisticated and unique approaches of each discipline. If their classroom experiences consist of receiving information in a lecture format, that will be the extent of what they do with that information. They will know how to receive it, but they will not

3. A survey of over 800 students conducted by Wulff, Nyquist, and Abbott at the University of Washington over three years shows students' desire to interact more with the instructor. Donald H. Wulff, Jody D. Nyquist, and Robert D. Abbott, “Students' Perceptions of Large Classes,” in *Teaching and Learning in Large Classes*, eds. George S. Bridges and Scott A. Desmond (Washington, DC: American Sociological Association Teaching Resources Center, 2000), 28–30.

4. Medina, *Brain Rules*, 74.

5. Gleason, “Better Communication,” 22.

know how that information can lead to controversial ideas, unanswered questions, active debates, and conflicting conclusions.

The method proposed in *Decoding the Disciplines: Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking* is one of focused inquiry: through a series of seven questions, the instructor identifies one isolated problem in the course and then carefully develops a solution from a disciplinary point of view.<sup>6</sup> These questions are:

1. What is a bottleneck to learning in this class? In other words, what is the point in the semester when the number of students who demonstrate an understanding of the material drops dramatically?
2. How does an expert do these things? At the point when student learning suffers, how would an expert deal with it?
3. How can these tasks be explicitly modeled?
4. How will these students practice these skills and get feedback?
5. What will motivate the students?
6. How well are students mastering these learning tasks?
7. How can the resulting knowledge about learning be shared?

The focused nature of this method alleviates the overwhelming feelings associated with addressing each and every pedagogical problem over the course of an entire semester. It allows instructors to thoughtfully examine their own assumptions about thinking and learning within their respective fields and encourages them to be more explicit when explaining that process to students.

### ***1. What is a bottleneck to learning in this large Music Appreciation class?***

Although multiple bottlenecks exist in every course, no matter how well-run or how carefully-planned, they need to be solved individually. The Music Appreciation course I teach at Purdue University has an enrollment of 220 students, and the bottleneck chosen for this essay is the students' inability to describe a song's musical style in a short essay. Students begin the semester actively learning how to hear elements of music through a variety of diverse styles by clapping, singing, and discussing. After understanding two or three concepts, they engage in "quick-thinks," a strategy proposed by Susan

6. David Pace and Joan Middendorf, eds., *Decoding the Disciplines: Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking*, New Directions for Teaching and Learning 98 (San Francisco: CA, Jossey-Bass, 2004). For an application of this method in courses for music history students, see J. Peter Burkholder, "Decoding the Discipline of Music History for Our Students," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 1, no. 2 (2011): 93–111, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/22/46>. A similar method, a "model-practice-feedback loop," is described in Barak Rosenshine and Carla Meister, "Scaffolds for Teaching Higher-Order Cognitive Strategies," in *Teaching: Theory into Practice*, ed. A. C. Ornstein (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1995).

Prescott Johnston and Jim Cooper that allows students to practice recall and apply concepts learned only a few minutes earlier to a new situation without receiving a grade. The “quick thinks” also allow the instructor to get a sense of which concepts the class is mastering and which ideas need further explanation.<sup>7</sup> After learning about musical elements, students write a Song Essay, a 300–350-word analysis about a song they choose that summarizes the meaning of the lyrics and describes how the musical elements effectively communicate that message (Appendix A). Initially, students reacted positively to the assignment; they were excited to have the freedom to choose their own song and to share their music with the instructor. Unfortunately, the level of excitement was not directly proportional to the quality of the resulting essays. While students were able to master the basic identification of elements, they did not have a model of how to put all of the pieces together in writing. They had jumped from guided listening for isolated elements to trying to describe musical style (a combination of elements) on their own and write clearly and thoughtfully about it.

## ***2. How does a music expert do these things?***

When analyzing a song and then writing about it, experts do a variety of things. They analyze the poetry or lyrics of the song by describing their form and content, and if the words were written by someone other than the composer, they may also investigate the context in which the words were originally written. Experts also carefully study the music, which may be in the form of a score, sheet music, or an audio or video recording, depending on when in history the music was created and how it was originally preserved. They rely on the research and writings of colleagues to gain alternative perspectives on the music when putting forth their own. Experts have the ability to aurally isolate the various parts making up the sonic whole, instead of hearing a single wall of sound. What appears to be an effortless activity, then, is actually the result of years of training and a vast knowledge of repertoire that has resulted in a distinctly personal approach to listening. It is often a systematic approach involving careful observations about melody, harmony, rhythm, instrumentation, and so on. The expert discerns which elements are the most important in conveying the meaning of the song. This is accomplished by combining clues and information about the lyrics with the description of musical elements, or

7. Susan Prescott Johnston and Jim Cooper, “Quick-Thinks: Active-Thinking Tasks in Lecture Classes and Televised Instruction,” *Cooperative Learning and College Teaching* 8, no. 1 (1997): 2–7, quoted in James L. Cooper and Pamela Robinson, “Getting Started: Informal Small-Group Strategies in Large Classes,” in *Strategies for Energizing Large Classes: From Small Groups to Learning Communities*, eds. Jean MacGregor, James L. Cooper, Karl A. Smith, and Pamela Robinson, *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* 81 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 19.

rather, by joining lyrics with musical style and noticing where the songwriters use elements of style to express, emphasize, or perhaps even elude, the meaning of the lyrics. Experts draw on a vast knowledge of repertoire, genres, conventions, and history in their analyses and then communicate their ideas through writing by crafting a thesis statement, choosing only the most convincing evidence to support it, and presenting it in an organized manner.

### ***3. How can these tasks be explicitly modeled?***

Experts spend years developing their reading, writing, listening, thinking, and analytical skills within their discipline. In most Music Appreciation courses, however, students typically have only one semester in which to develop basic disciplinary skills. Therefore, only the most basic skills are chosen for development in the Song Essay assignment and their essences distilled and modeled in both an in-class interactive experience and written form during a lecture titled “Music and Poetry.” Students begin the analytical activity by reading through the lyrics of a song the instructor chooses and answering questions in specific and detailed language.

After addressing text-related issues, students listen to a recording of the song to familiarize themselves without any specific instructions on how to listen. The class is then divided into six groups, each of which focuses on only one element or group of elements (such as, harmony, melody, rhythm. . .), noting how and when it changes over the course of the song.<sup>8</sup> After a second listening, students engage in “think-pair-share;”<sup>9</sup> they are asked questions by the instructor, they are given a few minutes to think and write their thoughts informally, and then they share their ideas with a neighbor or small group before the discussion opens to the entire class. As students contribute to larger class discussion, they notice that changes in one element are often paired with changes in others, and the class tracks the moments in the song when that occurs. Once completing a discussion of the music, students choose only a few elements that most effectively communicate the message of the song as the evidence for their essay. Their answers and explanations form the evidence

8. Also called “cooperative action learning,” this method allows students to work with information in small groups, solve problems, and make decisions together. See Martha Snead Holloway, “The Use of Cooperative Action Learning to Increase Music Appreciation Students’ Listening Skills,” *College Music Symposium* 44 (2004): 83–93. In Team-Based Learning, instructors divide the class into smaller, permanent groups of students who work together the entire semester as a learning community. They engage in higher-order learning by struggling with information, coming to consensus, and presenting ideas to the larger class. [www.teambasedlearning.org](http://www.teambasedlearning.org); Larry K. Michaelsen, Arletta Bauman Knight, and L. Dee Fink, eds., *Team-Based Learning: A Transformative Use of Small Groups in College Teaching* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2004).

9. Elisa Carbone, *Teaching Large Classes: Tools and Strategies, Survival Skills for Scholars* 19 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 47–56.

and examples for a verbal essay, a real-time demonstration of the thought process needed to create a convincing argument. Its oral form takes less time than actually writing the essay in class. Students use the assignment description as a thesis (the meaning of the song in one sentence followed by a short list of the elements that are used to convey that meaning most effectively) and then provide thorough descriptions of those elements, including specific examples from the song that illustrate why that element is so effective.<sup>10</sup>

After completing the verbal essay, students assume the role of evaluator and grade two essays written by the instructor: one of high quality (Appendix B.1) and one of low quality (Appendix B.2). Before evaluating them as a class, they review the rubric for grading, a series of ten yes-no questions that address issues of content, organization, style, and the ability to follow specific instructions (listed in Appendix A at the end of “Step Two”). Without knowing which essay is of which quality, students read through them and answer the questions, give explanations for their answers, add up the number of “yes” answers, and assign the essay a grade from 0 to 10, which converts to a letter grade from F to A. Students then return to the verbal essay constructed in class and assess it using the same rubrics.

#### ***4. How will students practice these skills and get feedback?***

Students practice disciplinary listening, thinking, and writing by working through the entire process described above and by receiving immediate instructor feedback in class. Although only a small percentage of students (perhaps 20%) participate by offering suggestions and engaging in discussion directly with the instructor, the entire class learns from the experience. Students receive positive responses (“good observation,” or “excellent”) to comments and statements, and then they are asked follow-up questions (“what do you mean by ‘up-beat’?,” or “point out a moment in the song when that happens”). As the conversation continues, the class chooses the strongest pieces of evidence and verbalizes why they are most important for the in-class essay.

The class joins forces to tweak individual ideas until they satisfy the requirements of the assignment and assumes the responsibility of correcting one another and often finds several viable solutions to each problem. Students

10. Some educators get students accustomed to using the written word as a means to communicate their ideas by asking them to write informally in every class period. Henry Steffens, “Using Informal Writing in Large History Classes: Helping Students to Find Interest and Meaning in History,” *Social Studies* 82, no. 3 (May/June 1991): 107–9. For a variety of informal writing ideas, from the one-minute responsive essay to letters and poetry, see essays in Mary Deane Sorcinelli and Peter Elbow, eds., *Writing to Learn: Strategies for Assigning and Responding to Writing Across the Disciplines*, New Directions for Teaching and Learning 69 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). Barbara Gross Davis reminds instructors that it is not necessary to grade every piece of student writing in *Tools for Teaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 206.

learn that the analysis of a song does not result in one correct essay, but rather a range of correct and incorrect pieces of information assembled to create a more or less convincing argument.

### ***5. What will motivate the students?***

Students are highly motivated by this assignment for a number of reasons. First, they choose a song in any style, in any language, and on any subject (as long as they can provide an Internet link to a video or recording of it). Second, when students are encouraged to share music that is meaningful to them individually, they feel connected to the information in a more personal way and enjoy assuming the role of expert by introducing the instructor to something new. Third, students are routinely surprised by how much time and effort they have to devote to this assignment for a song they thought they knew well, and they are equally shocked by how much more they learn about a favorite song when actively listening to it. For some, then, acquiring the disciplinary skill itself becomes their motivation.

### ***6. How well are students mastering these learning tasks? Using Calibrated Peer Review™***

Student assessment consists of in-class observations during the “Music and Poetry” lecture and an evaluation of their written essays.<sup>11</sup> In large classrooms, evaluating writing often proves difficult and time-consuming. Although some of this burden can be alleviated by teaching assistants, especially if they are trained properly and utilized efficiently, not all instructors have this luxury and, therefore, must develop creative alternatives. Calibrated Peer Review™ (CPR), one such solution, is a Web-based program that takes students through a peer review process and then figures their grade.<sup>12</sup> Funded by the National Science Foundation and the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, it is the brainchild of Orville Chapman, a chemistry

11. Also known as Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATS). For more, see Thomas Angelo, ed., *Classroom Assessment and Research: An Update on Uses, Approaches, and Research Findings*, New Directions for Teaching and Learning 75 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

12. <http://cpr.molsci.ucla.edu>. Erik Stokstad, “Reintroducing the Intro Course,” *Science* 293, no. 5535 (2001): 1610. Ralph Robinson presents a more detailed description of the process with a sample biology assignment in “Calibrated Peer Review™: An Application to Increase Student Writing, Reading, & Listening Skills,” *The American Biology Teacher* 63, no. 7 (2001): 474–75. CPR™ is not the only web-based peer review program; see also Michelle Trim, *What Every Student Should Know About Practicing Peer Review* (New York: Pearson, 2007), 21–35. For another example of using online peer review in music history teaching see Nancy Rachel November, “Literacy Loops and Online Groups: Promoting Writing Skills in Large Undergraduate Music Classes,” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 2, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 5–23, <http://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/31/59>.

professor at University of California in Los Angeles, who believed students would understand the course material better if they wrote about it and realized that instructors do not have time to grade hundreds of papers each week. Chapman, in collaboration with Arlene A. Russell and Michael A. Fiore, developed a four-step, anonymous virtual peer review process on the scientific academic model: 1) submit an essay; 2) complete calibrations; 3) review peers' essays; and 4) self-assessment.<sup>13</sup>

In the calibrations stage, students learn what their particular instructor considers high-, medium-, and low-quality writing by evaluating three essays of varying quality on the same subject. If the student evaluates the essay in the same manner as the instructor, the student passes that step and is allowed to continue to the next stage of the process. If not, the student must reassess the essay to learn how to evaluate correctly before moving on. For the third stage, peer review, students are automatically assigned three anonymous essays written by their peers that they evaluate, relying on the same process and rubrics for grading as were used in the "Music and Poetry" lecture. In the final stage, students assess their own essays. The entire process, therefore, involves evaluating seven total essays using the same process each time.<sup>14</sup> The high degree of repetition reinforces concepts discussed and modeled in class.

### ***7. How can the resulting knowledge about learning be shared?***

There are growing numbers of opportunities for sharing ideas about the pedagogy of music with interested colleagues at professional conferences, through publications, and in workshops. Universities and colleges have centers of learning where instructors can share issues and problems as well as suggestions and solutions with one another in workshops and seminars. The CPR™ website offers its members the opportunity to share assignments with one another in an assignment library, searchable by institution, instructor, and subject area. Other instructors can borrow these assignments whole-cloth or may also modify them to serve the needs of their unique circumstances.

13. Orville L. Chapman, Arlene A. Russell, and Michael A. Fiore, "Calibrated Peer Review™," <http://www.molsci.ucla.edu/presentations/Ede/speech.htm>.

14. In their experiment on the effect of peer review and self-assessment on the content of writing, Elizabeth A. Flynn, George A. McCulley, and Ronald K. Gratz discovered that students who were taken through the process of writing a lab report and then reviewed peers' work as well as their own produced better products than students who did not go through this process. "Writing in Biology: Effects of Peer Critiquing and Analysis of Models on the Quality of Biology Laboratory Reports," in *Writing Across the Disciplines: Research into Practice*, ed. Art Young and Toby Fulwiler (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1986), 167.



## Reflections

Even in classrooms that employ active learning techniques (such as small groups, student participation, and “quick thinks”), roadblocks to learning can appear when instructors leap over steps in the disciplinary process. *Decoding the Disciplines* provides a process of thoughtful and systematic reflection on what experts do that ultimately makes the learning process smoother and more understandable for students. The case studies shared in the book involve introductory courses at the undergraduate level. Instructors of these courses begin with the assumption that general students are new to the material and are not familiar with even the most basic concepts. The Decoding method assists students in developing higher-order learning at the introductory level, thus laying a strong disciplinary foundation for further inquiry.

The Decoding method also works well for upper-division undergraduate courses for majors.<sup>15</sup> In music, students take several semesters of theory, ear training, and sight-singing in their first years of study. Yet, although students learn a variety of skills, they often do not understand how to transfer those skills to situations outside of the classroom in which they originally learned them. Those skills are vital to the expert, and students are greatly assisted when they are showed how to apply them in different situations. By applying the Decoding method in upper-division classrooms, instructors clarify the lines of communication with students and may introduce music majors to new ways of thinking that are more closely aligned with course objectives and to real world situations. Instructors cannot assume that students with the extensive practice in basic musical skills over several semesters will automatically have a more sophisticated level of factual knowledge, analytical skill, and critical thinking and listening than the general student.

While Decoding provides a useful method, it suggests merely a framework for making transparent the disciplinary thinking involved in a particular field of study. The method asks instructors to model, practice, and assess student skills, but it does not provide a cookie-cutter solution to problems. Instructors must choose and utilize the pedagogical tools that are most applicable, that make the most sense, and that can be incorporated most efficiently for their particular classrooms and individual situations.

In all class sizes, technology can be a highly effective pedagogical tool, but only if it is tied seamlessly to the overall purpose and goal of the assignment, if it is used to reinforce the other tools used to facilitate the steps of Decoding, and if its use is carefully planned and demonstrated to students. When educational institutions subscribe to Calibrated Peer Review™, instructors have access to an effective support staff on campus that explains how to use it, how

15. Burkholder, “Decoding the Discipline of Music History for Our Students.”

to incorporate it into an existing course or apply it to an existing assignment, and how to prepare students to use it. If it is used by instructors of other courses, then many students are already familiar with it, giving them a sense of continuity across the curriculum.

CPR™ also helps instructors communicate better with students, it alleviates the administrative tasks of teaching a large course without an assistant, and it aids students in learning particular disciplinary skills more effectively. Regardless if instructors create their own assignments on CPR™ or use those from the website's assignment library, they can maintain continuity between what students experience in class and what students see on the website, therefore clarifying communication about the assignment in one central location.

Administrative duties are greatly reduced with CPR™. Peer review groups are automatically assigned by the online program, and all information provided by the instructor and students is stored online from semester to semester. Instructors assign values for each stage of the process and determine how the grade of each stage is weighted in the final grade for the assignment, and the CPR™ program figures students' grades at the end of the process. If students submit Regrade Request forms and their grades change, then the CPR™ program automatically changes the grades of all students who reviewed the same essays or were reviewed by one of those students. Completing the peer review process is efficient for students and instructors; they may work through the entire process anywhere they have access to a computer instead of using invaluable class time.

Most importantly, CPR™ is a useful educational tool. Students learn more about a subject when they teach it to someone or when they evaluate another person's understanding of it, and that experience of peer review and self-assessment is at the heart of the CPR™ program. They understand how education is an interactive experience in which they assume some responsibility not only for themselves but also for their peers. Students also take an honest look at their own work (an essential skill in the process of rewriting) and work with technology in new ways (a necessary skill in today's world).

Instructors may also apply CPR™ in other ways than the one described here. For example, students complete a second, related assignment in which they rewrite their first essay based on the comments from peer reviewers, submit it to the CPR™ program, and complete the review process a second time. Virtual peer review programs alleviate issues of time management in smaller classes as well. When blended with in-class peer review, students meet their reviewers face-to-face and develop a more personal, academic online relationship with their peer group. CPR™ is also useful in teaching other disciplinary skills, such as summarizing scholarly articles or primary sources in detailed and specific writing.

\* \* \*

In today's world of growing class size, increasing number of credit hours taught, and rising call for more on-line course offerings, instructors must develop creative solutions to common pedagogical issues. Unfortunately, writing assignments are often the first mode of assessment relinquished when one feels pressed for time to prepare, to teach, and to evaluate students. It is important to remember, however, that not all college-level writing needs to be in the form of a research paper. Students are served equally well by learning how to think through active learning strategies and disciplinary-specific ways in new contexts while using basic, universal writing skills of proper grammar, spelling, and organization in short assignments. By blending the Song Essay with CPR™, students learn how to follow directions, how to write concisely, how to choose only the most convincing evidence to support an argument, how to evaluate their peers' writing, and how to engage in self-reflection—all necessary skills in successfully writing research papers in music and being an active, contributing member of an academic institution.

#### APPENDIX A: Song Essay Instructions

##### Step 1: Getting Started [for institutions using CPR™]

- Go to: \_\_\_\_\_. [insert your institution's local website address for CPR™]
- Log in with your university username and password and complete the tutorial and pretest by \_\_\_\_\_. [insert date]

##### Step 2: Writing Your Song Essay

- The goals of the Song Essay are to explain music's role in conveying the message of a song (of your own choosing that we have not discussed in class), and to demonstrate your understanding of musical terminology by applying it correctly.
- To successfully write a Song Essay, you will want to do the following:
  - Read though the Sample High-Quality Essay and the Sample Low-Quality Essay to know your goals and expectations.
  - Choose a song you enjoy that can be shared with your peers with an Internet link.
  - Listen to the recording several times and answer the following questions just as we did in the "Music and Poetry" lecture. Pay close attention to how musical elements change over the

course of your song. For example, your description of melody at the beginning of the song may not be true of the melody in the middle of the song. Remember to use musical terms as we've learned them in class.

- What is the general idea of the song text, in one sentence?
  - What is the basic form of the lyrics? Do any stanzas of text repeat?
  - Does the text reach a highpoint, and if so, where? Is there one line of the song that seems to be the most important? If so, what is it?
  - What is the musical form of the song?
  - What voices and instruments are used in this recording? How many are used? Solo voice? A choir of voices?
  - What instruments/voices are added or subtracted during the song, and when do they enter/stop playing?
  - How would you describe the main melody? What is its shape? Does it move by steps? By leaps? When does the shape of the melody change?
  - How would you describe the rhythm of the melody? Is it busy, tranquil, consistent, shifting? Are there places in the song where the rhythm gets noticeably busier or drastically slows down?
  - What is the meter of the song? Is it duple or triple? Does the meter change? If so, when?
  - How does the dynamic level change during the song?
  - How would you describe the timbre of the singer's voice? Describe if and when the timbre changes.
  - What is the prevailing texture of this piece (homophonic, polyphonic, monophonic, or a combination of these three), and does it change at any point?
  - Which of the elements are the most striking, unusual, or effective in your opinion?
  - Which are used to communicate most effectively the message of the song?
- Use your answers to these questions to guide your written discussion of the song.
  - The final submission must be your own creation, 300–350 words, free of typos and spelling errors (following the rules of proper English grammar), and submitted through CPR™. Begin your essay with the

title of the song and the name of the singer or performing group with an Internet link to a video or recording of it.

- Proofread your Song Essay before submitting it for a grade. Consult the Sample High-Quality Essay and the Sample Low-Quality Essay to prevent common mistakes.

Ask yourself the following ten questions from the Rubrics for Grading and make sure you can answer “yes” to every one of them before submitting your essay on the CPR™ website. These are the questions you will be asked when evaluating Calibrations, Peer Reviews, and Self-Assessment.

**The Rubric for Grading:**

1. Did the author include a website address, so you could hear the song online?
2. Did the author summarize the main idea of the song’s lyrics in just a few (1–2) sentences?
3. Did the author describe the form of the song correctly?
4. Did the author tell you where the climax or highpoint of the song occurs?
5. Did the author list the musical elements that are used to communicate the main idea of the song most effectively?
6. Did the author then describe how the musical elements effectively convey the main idea of the song?
7. Did the author use musical terminology correctly?
8. Did the author use correct spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation?
9. Did the author include only necessary details about the music? In other words, did the author succeed in focusing on the music only, instead of writing extensively about the lyrics and historical/biographical information about the performers and songwriters?
10. Is this essay organized clearly? In other words, is it easy to follow the author’s argument?

**Step 3: Submitting Your Song Essay**

- Go to: \_\_\_\_\_. [insert your institution’s local website address for CPR™]
- Copy your essay and paste it into the submission box.
- Click the “submit” button. Once CPR™ accepts your essay, you will see a message informing you when the next step of the assignment is available.
- If the word count is below 300 or above 350, CPR™ will not accept your essay.

Step 4: Calibrations

- After the submission deadline passes, you will begin the calibrations portion of the assignment, which is due \_\_\_\_\_. [insert date]
- For the Calibrations step, you will evaluate three essays written by the instructor using the Rubrics for Grading (like we did in the “Music and Poetry” lecture). You will answer the 10 yes/no questions, provide an explanation for each answer, add up the “yes” answers, and assign that number as a score at the end. For example, if you answered “yes” to 5 out of the 10 questions, that essay earns 5 points. If you answered “yes” 8 times, the score is 8.
- You will be judged on how closely your evaluating skills match those of the instructor, so do not rush through this step. If the score you give is too different from the instructor’s assessment, you must repeat the process until you are closer. Each time you have to repeat a calibration, your calibration grade goes down, and the system rates you a poor reviewer.

Step 5: Peer Reviews and Self-Assessment

- After you complete the calibrations, you will evaluate three of your peers’ essays.
- Be very careful and thoughtful. Your peers will not know who evaluated their essays, but your instructor will know. You are graded on how consistently you grade each essay compared to the other reviewers.
- After you have reviewed the essays, you will be asked to evaluate your own essay.
- Be thorough and honest in your self-assessment. You will be judged on how closely your evaluation matches that of three peers who evaluate your work.

Grade Reports:

- After all evaluations are finished and the final deadline is past, you will receive a grade report on CPR™. This grade report assesses a grade for each step of the assignment and allows you to see the comments made by your peer reviewers.
- CPR™ depends on all students finishing each step of the assignment. If you do not complete a step, you will not be allowed to continue the process. All incomplete steps earn 0 points.

### Optional Step 6: Regrade Request Form

- If you have concerns about the grade reports for any completed step of the Song Essay process, you will have the opportunity to complete and submit a Regrade Request Form. Requests need to be submitted in person to your instructor by the end of class on \_\_\_\_\_. [insert date]
- When you ask for a re-grade, you are essentially asking your instructor to grade your paper from scratch and to assign a “fair” grade, not necessarily a higher grade. Your overall grade could be raised if your reviewers did not do a good job, but it could also be lowered. If upon review, your assignment deserves a different rating, your reviewers’ grades may also change.
- No grade is final until the re-gradings have been processed.
- Do not submit a request form if you want to complete a step that you missed. The deadlines for each step of the process have passed, and all incomplete steps earn 0 points.

### APPENDIX B.1: High-Quality Song Essay

“Piggies” by George Harrison

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKggq6EsqIU>

“Piggies” is about social inequality and points out the extreme differences between those who have and those who have not. George Harrison’s musical choices emphasize the differences between these two unequal groups and highlight the satire of the text.

The form of “Piggies” is Intro-A-A-B-A instrumental-A with a coda at the end. The instrumentation is what is expected in a popular song, including bass guitar, tambourine, and acoustic guitar. There are several instruments and sounds that are atypical, however, including harpsichord, string quartet, and pig grunts. The first A section introduces the little piggies with their pig grunts. When the bigger piggies are described in second A section, more instruments are added, which makes the dynamics louder. The climax of the song is the B section in which the singer provides his own idea about what should be done (give the bigger piggies a “damn good whacking”). This climax in the poetry is matched with changes in harmony (sounds more minor than the A sections), in timbre (the voice shifts from airy and smooth in the first two A sections to more distorted), dynamics (the B section is louder than A and also crescendos into an instrumental version of A), and the music of the accompanying instruments (their music changes from smooth lines to a bluesy sound to pulsing music with a driving rhythm). The following A

section for instruments only continues the crescendo in the previous section, which eventually leads to a final A section sung by a chorus of men singing in the style of a concert group (with vibrato, clear pronunciation of words, and precise singing from note to note).

George Harrison mixed popular and classical musical styles to express the differences between the working class who get dirty and the elite class with their lovely harpsichords, string instruments, and professionally-trained choral singing.

## APPENDIX B.2 Low-Quality Song Essay

### “Piggies” by George Harrison

George Harrison was a Beatle and likes to write songs. One of those songs was Piggies. Harrison’s objective in writing the song was to make some people feel ashamed of their wealth while promoting a socialist lifestyle whereby those who work must be forced to share them with those who are farming (represented by “playing in dirt”). This is a typical view of modern “intellectuals” who are seldom found observing the way of life in the real world.

Harrison was a singer, songwriter, guitarist, sitarist, and a record producer and music innovator. In 1969, Harrison commented: I believe that if I’m going to sing songs on record, they might as well be on my own. So he did that with Piggies. The song helped George launch later his solo career which ended when he died. The song is pop-y with a decent beat. I tried to dance to it, but I couldn’t, but I think people back then didn’t dance as much. The words to this song don’t make any sense. I mean, how often do pigs eat bacon? It’s like they are cannibals. That is gross. I bet the Beatles were high when they wrote this song. Most of the song went forwards and backwards between choruses and melodies. I liked Harrison’s Piggie song and I hope that you do to. I like when there is pig snorts in the song. Oink, Oink, Oink. ☺

In conclusion, Harrison is wrong to suggest that people will be better off if they are denied the aspiration of making a good living, buying fine shirts, and resort to cannibalism. The country is getting better, not worse, and anyone who criticizes it does not deserve to have his music played in a state school. I know I will probably be censured for this opinion, but that is the price you have to pay to stand up for what you believe in. The End.