**“Sonata, what do you want of me?” Teaching rhetorical strategies for writing about music[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In their 2013 article, “Making disciplinary writing and thinking practices an integral part of academic content teaching,” Kerry Hunter and Harry Tse remark that “Educators and researchers are increasingly calling for the process of writing and knowledge construction to be an integral part of disciplinary learning.”[[2]](#footnote-2) In saying this, the authors imply that students need guidance beyond the traditional Freshman English courses, and that further guidance should be located within the student’s major discipline. In many institutions, the burden of teaching students academic writing falls entirely on the Freshman English courses required as part of the general education component of the student’s degree. Earlier this year, I was involved in a program review for precisely these courses (Freshman English) at a local community college, and it caused me to think in detail about what the goals of these courses are, and what a huge challenge is faced by the faculty teaching them. Introducing students to the general principles of academic writing and the “five-paragraph essay” is complicated enough, but having students write any sort of research paper where the standards and citation styles differ so widely between disciplines is daunting to say the least. Small wonder that students need more guidance when it comes to writing within their discipline. Few would expect a student to take a year of piano classes and then be able to play proficiently; similarly, why do we expect our students to “get it all” in Freshman English?

Most musicologists involved in teaching undergraduates know this on some level, yet finding ways to integrate teaching discipline-specific writing into the curriculum can be challenging and can be met with resistance from already over-burdened faculty and from students who are unable to make the connection between the mechanics of writing and their ability to engage with music and musical discourse. In this article, I will discuss the ways that I have used Gerald Graff and Kathy Birkenstein’s *They Say – I Say: The moves that matter in academic writing[[3]](#footnote-3)* in the undergraduate music history classroom and show how I have developed their approach to make it relate even more specifically to our discipline by helping students engage with musical scores as well as verbal texts.

At this point, some musicologists may object that it is not their job to teach students how to write or that the amount of material they have to teach is such that there is no space in their syllabus to teach writing as well. However, I maintain that if we want musicology to flourish in the future, it *is* our job to teach students how to write. Musicological discourse is written discourse and if our students are unable to engage in written discourse, they lose the ability to engage in our discipline. If we want to see vibrant new PhD graduate musicologists joining the profession and if we want to have the standard of discourse maintained or even improved in our discipline, we need to provide our graduate programs with students who have mastered the basic mechanics of academic discourse so that they can hone their skills during masters and doctoral work. Furthermore, as faculty members teaching a series of classes that undergraduate students take sequentially, we are often placed in an excellent position to teach and reinforce discipline-specific academic writing. Indeed for many undergraduate music majors, the music history classes are one of the only classes in their major in which they are required to write significant research papers.

I would like to bet that many of you reading this article learned to write by reading sophisticated texts widely even while in High School, and certainly in college. You may not have been perusing academic journals, but perhaps checked out and read a book in the library on a composer whom you were interested in or a book on an instrument you played. In other words you learned in much the same way that a child learns language, by repeated exposure to the rhetorical strategies of academic writing. And yet, we know that our students do not read in this way. In the introduction to a study of “The impact of Internet and Television Use on the Reading Habits and Practices of College Students,” Kouider Mokhtari, Carla Reichard, and Anne Gardner cite reports from the National Endowment for the Arts in 2004 and 2007 and the National Center for Education Statistics in 2005 that show not only a decrease in the practice of reading, but a decrease in how well Americans are reading[[4]](#footnote-4). How then do we go about teaching our students to do what we as writers now do almost automatically? It was exactly this question that led me to Gerald Graff and Kathy Birkenstein’s work. In “Hidden Meaning or Disliking Books at an Early Age[[5]](#footnote-5),” Graff has talked about his own experience as a child who read comic books and sports magazines widely, but not material that would have introduced him to the strategies of academic writing (books). Together, he and Cathy Birkenstein have developed a way to teach students the rhetorical strategies of academic writing in a systematized way.

The basic premise of Graff and Birkenstein’s work is found in the title of the book: *They Say / I Say.* They explain:

The central rhetorical move that we focus on in this book is the “they say / I say” template that gives our book its title. In our view, this template represents the deep, underlying structure, the internal DNA as it were, of all effective argument. Effective persuasive writers do more than make well-supported claims (“I say”); they also map those claims relative to the claims of others (“they say”).[[6]](#footnote-6)

In making this comment, Graff and Birkenstein are emphasizing to students that their ideas are important (I say) and that it is not only acceptable, but imperative to engage with what others have said on the subject (they say) as part of the process of putting forward their own ideas. This in-and-of-itself can have a huge impact on students who are used to accepting everything they read and who worry they are not qualified to put forward opinions that might differ from a published source. The layout of *They Say – I Say* can be seen in Table 1, where you will notice that the first part focuses on helping students grapple with the ideas of other scholars (that is the “they say” component).

Table 1: Graff and Birkenstein *They Say / I Say* -- contents.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Section** | **Chapter Titles** |
| Part 1: Summary | “THEY SAY”: *Starting with What Others are Saying* |
| “HER POINT IS”: *The Art of Summary* |
| “AS HE HIMSELF PUTS IT”: *The Art of Quoting* |
| Part 2: I Say | “YES/NO/OK BUT”: *Three Ways to Respond* |
| “AND YET:: *Distinguishing What You Say from What They Say* |
| “SKEPTICS MAY OBJECT”: *Planting a Naysayer* |
| “SO WHAT? WHO CARES?”: *Saying Why It Matters* |
| Part 3: Tying It All Together | “AS A RESULT”: *Connecting the Parts* |
| “AIN’T SO/ IS NOT”: *Academic Writing Doesn’t Always Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice* |
| “BUT DON’T GET ME WRONG”: *The Art of Metacommentary* |
| “HE ~~SAYS~~ CONTENDS”: *Using the Templates to Revise* |
| Part 4: In Specific Academic Settings | “I TAKE YOUR POINT”: *Entering Class Discussions* |
| “IMHO”: *Is Digital Communication Good or Bad – or Both?* |
| “WHAT’S MOTIVATING THE WRITER?”: *Reading for Conversation* |
| “ON CLOSER EXAMINATION”: *Entering Conversations about Literature* |
| “THE DATA SUGGESTS”: *Writing in the Sciences* |
| “ANALYZE THIS”: *Writing in the Social Sciensces* |

In Part 1, Graff and Birkenstein help students identify and summarize only the relevant parts of sources they are engaging with. They stress the importance of providing a summary that is true to the original in both its facts and its tone as well as helping students understand that the reader they are writing for will need some context for the summary the student provides. Graff and Birkenstein encourage students to use direct quotation as a way to enhance their summaries while instilling the importance of introducing and explaining what is important in the passages that the student chooses to quote. In addition to providing examples in their text, Graff and Birkenstein provide templates for students to apply (for example they give the following as one of the templates for introducing a quotation: “Writing in the Journal *Commentary,* X complains that “ .”)[[7]](#footnote-7) Exercises are also provided at the ends of chapters for students to practice their skills. It is on this first part of the writing process that I will focus in the remainder of this paper, for although the other elements are important, I find that the “they say” techniques have the greatest impact on my students’ writing because, as we shall see, they compel students to focus and organize their ideas in ways that set them up for success in the remainder of the writing process.

Once students have mastered the “They say” component, Part 2 of *They Say / I Say* enables them to respond to the arguments and opinions they have summarized. Graff and Birkenstein help students understand that there are basically only three ways to respond – to agree, disagree, or agree partially and disagree partially. The crucial element here is that they instill in students that if you disagree you need to explain why you disagree, if you agree you need to add some of your own supporting evidence to show why you agree, and if you want to agree and disagree simultaneously, you still need to support your opinions. In effect, this helps students develop their own voice, and claiming that voice while differentiating it from those of the sources students quote is dealt with in the second of the three chapters of Part 2. The final component in the “They say” section introduces students to a particular rhetorical strategy for strengthening their arguments – the naysayer. Part 3 of the text deals with more general issues that can strengthen both the “they say” and the “I say” components. Graff and Birkenstein have designed their book to be non-discipline-specific; however, recognizing that in some disciplines the rhetorical strategies are idiosyncratic, the final section (Part 4) of their text devotes chapters to some strategies that apply to particular academic areas.

In my particular teaching situation, I require students to write research papers (and program notes) in the last two (upper division) courses in the music history sequence. I therefore use Graff and Birkenstein’s *They Say / I Say: The moves that matter in academic writing* in the preceding course. In order to make this textbook more relevant to the music history classroom, I revised the assignments at the end of each chapter of the book so that students were looking at and writing about texts that related specifically to music. This is a relatively simple process, for example at the end of chapter 1, Graff and Birkenstein provide students with a list of six “I say” statements on a broad range of subjects and ask students to create a counterview, a “they say” component. I replace Graff and Birkenstein’s list (a-f) with the following list of “I say” statements that relate to music or the students’ writing process:

1. My analysis suggests that the sonata is in the key of G minor.
2. Aesthetic ideas drive musical innovations.
3. Proponents of Free Jazz question standard notions of structure.
4. Female musicians often outnumber their male counterparts in an orchestra.
5. The opera is about the moral and philosophical questions aroused by the development of the atomic bomb.
6. I am afraid that the templates in this book will stifle my creativity.

Students are required to think of a context or situation in which these “I say” statements would have more significance; that is, they are required to provide a “They say” component that could precede the given sentences. For example, a student might look at the first sentence in the list and decide that the fact that their analysis suggested the key of G minor would be very interesting if someone else had come to a different opinion. In such a case they would provide a sentence (using one of the many templates Graff and Birkenstein supply) that reads something like: John Smith apparently assumes that the sonata is in G major. In this case, the student is free to make up the name of the scholar (John Smith) for the point of the exercise is not to find factual information, but to think imaginatively about what sort of context would make the given sentences more interesting and relevant. For another example of an exercise I modify, we can look at the end of chapter 2 (on the art of summarizing) where Graff and Birkenstein include this assignment:

Write two different summaries of David Zinczenko’s “Don’t Blame the Eater” (pp. 241-43). Write the first one for an essay arguing that, contrary to what Zinczenko claims, there *are* inexpensive and convenient alternatives to fast-food restaurants. Write the second for an essay that questions whether being overweight is a genuine medical problem rather than a problem of cultural stereotypes. Compare your two summaries: though they are about the same article, they should look very different.[[8]](#footnote-8)

I simply substitute David Morrison’s piece “Why are Opera and Concert Programme Notes so Consistently Awful?[[9]](#footnote-9)” I have students write their first summary for an essay arguing that contrary to Morrison's opinion, there *are* excellent program notes to be found at operas and concerts and the second for an essay that questions the viability of the American tradition of providing concert and opera programs for free.

By the end of the first academic year in which I used their text, I was able to see that using Graff and Birkenstein’s book in the fall semester had produced a better quality of writing in the research papers written during the subsequent music history course in the spring semester; but feedback from students and my own observations led me to believe that I could improve the results further. Students were confused about two things: Firstly, why were they being asked to learn about writing in a music course, and secondly, what were my expectations for the assignments. I am now careful to explain to students that writing is a skill that needs to be practiced and honed just like the skill of playing music. The Freshman English courses give them a good foundation and now it is time to build on that foundation. I also explain that I want to prepare them to write high quality research papers on musical topics that they can be proud of and can use to show future graduate schools or employers as samples of their writing skills. In addition, I provide clear grading criteria for all assignment and use grading rubrics where appropriate.

As I continued to use Graff and Birkenstein’s text while analyzing the resulting student papers, I became aware of a particular area that was not being addressed. As we have already seen, Graff and Birkenstein assert that effective academic writing involves presenting your own ideas in response to the ideas of other people. This strategy helps students engage with other *verbal* texts, but my students were also engaging with musical texts (scores). This led me to ask myself how we engage with a musical text and then to experiment with applying the same principles that Graff and Birkenstein use for verbal texts to musical texts (scores). I proposed that the basic rhetorical moves used to summarize (and then respond to) verbal texts could equally well be applied to a piece of music (a musical text) and I prepared documents for my students to supplement Graff and Birkenstein’s text--documents that related specifically to engaging with musical texts. The results were encouraging and students began engaging with musical texts (scores) in a much more sophisticated way. They engaged with both the large-scale structure and the small-scale details and thought about how these two levels inter-relate. They chose quotations (notated musical examples) to make specific points rather than to bulk up their papers, and they thought about how the music worked within the context of the musical and cultural expectations of the time in which it was composed. Finally, they were more ready to indicate their own opinions and support those opinions with well-reasoned observations.

The material that follows is based on some of the documents I share with my students. I have focused this discussion on the “they say” portion of Graff and Birkenstein’s “they say / I say” template--that is, on how to summarize and quote from the musical score in a way that sets the author up to make meaningful observations in the “I say” component.

If I want my students to consider a musical text as a voice to engage in discussion, I have to help them face the challenge of how to translate the language of music (as represented by musical notation) into the language of dialogue (words). While this might initially seem like a daunting task, I show them that approaching the musical score as if it were a verbal text can prove very helpful. Depending on the type of writing they are doing, a musical text may be the main voice with which they engage (an analytical discussion of a single work, for example) or it may be one of many voices that substantiates or contradicts a particular viewpoint they want to express or discuss. That being said, it is worth reminding students that during the course of a research paper they will still want to engage the voices of other people as well as that of the musical text, because in so doing they will be relating their discussion to the ongoing academic conversation about music.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**How to Summarize a Musical Text**

I start by asking my students to consider how (and why) one would want to summarize a musical composition. The reasons are basically the same as summarizing a verbal text – usually we want the reader to have a context for our ensuing discussion; a “big picture” before we get into the details. The composition that students summarize may be a short, two-minute song, a 20-minute sonata, or a 40-minute symphony, but no matter the length of the piece (and just as with any verbal text) I believe that there are two main things students need to think about: the large-scale structure of the work and pertinent smaller-scale details. The emphasis that they place on either will depend on the type of assignment being undertaken. If they are discussing large scale formal issues in a work of some length, their summary should focus on the large-scale issues and surface detail will be subsidiary or not feature at all in the summary; on the other hand, if they are illustrating an aspect of text-setting in an Art Song, they will want to craft a summary that focuses more on local details rather than the overarching form of the work.

At the beginning of her article on “The Fandango Scene in Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*,”[[11]](#footnote-11) Dorothea Link provides a summary of the Finale of the opera that focuses on its large-scale structure:

In his examination of the early copies of the score of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Alan Tyson was puzzled by something he observed in some scores but is missing from others. In its longer version, which is the one performed today, the Finale consists of five sections. The first is a march which commences the wedding ceremony for Figaro and Susanna. The second is a duet for two maidens and chorus, which accompanies the Count’s placing of the bridal veil on Susanna’s head. The third is the Fandango, where the Count reads the note Susanna has slipped him. The fourth consists of accompanied recitative, in which the Count invites everyone to the festivities. The fifth and final section consists of a reprise of the Chorus. In the version of the finale from which the Fandango is missing, the second section leads directly into the fourth section via an altered cadence that makes the appropriate key change.[[12]](#footnote-12)

By concentrating on the large-scale structure, Link has allowed the reader to see clearly not only the difference between the two versions of the Finale (one has a Fandango, the other is modified to accommodate its omission), but how the musical components she references relate to the plot. Using this example, I point out to my students that Link has kept the summary focused and has not clouded the issue with comments about key relationships or small-scale details.

In contrast, Rufus Hallmark focuses much more on surface detail when he summarizes Schubert’s “Gefror’ne Tränen” as part of his discussion of “The Literary and Musical Rhetoric of Apostrophe in *Wintereisse*” when he states:

In “Gefror’ne Tränen” the wanderer first declares (stanza 1) that he was unaware of his weeping until frozen tears fell from his cheeks. Then he addresses his tears (stanza 2) and reproaches them for freezing as easily as morning dew even though they had sprung from his breast hot enough to melt the winter’s ice. At this turn to address his tears, the voice and piano drop in register and move to a predominantly unison texture; the voice sings the text to a decidedly less lyrical melody, one that initially consists of only one note and its half-step upper neighbor.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Here I encourage students to notice how Hallmark has skillfully given the reader a sense of the larger-scale structure (with the contrast between the first two stanzas in text and music) while focusing detailed attention on the point at which the poet/singer addresses their tears.

Both of the previous examples are summaries of works with text and they make significant reference to the text or dramatic situation in the summary; however, students often have to summarize works that have no text or story associated with them. As an example, I share the following quotation with my students in which Seth Monahan faces just such a situation when summarizing the first movement of Mahler’s first symphony in his discussion of “Success and Failure in Mahler’s Sonata Recapitulations.”

The opening movements of the First and Second symphonies offer vivid early examples of sonata success and failure respectively. At first I/I might seem an unlikely candidate for a model of “normative” sonata form. The exposition is among Mahler’s most unusual: a single stream of lyrical melody, based on the *Wayfarer* song “Ging heut Morgen über’s Feld,” unfolds in three broad stanzas without conflict of contrast…. The development’s eccentricities are just as numerous: a lengthy return to the slow introductory music; a tumultuous premonition of the F-minor finale (m.305); and the first of Mahler’s famed *Durchbruch* passages (m. 352), one that barrels forward so forcefully that it overwrites the recapitulation of the main theme.[[14]](#footnote-14)

This succinct account not only helps the reader see that Mahler utilizes a sonata structure for the movement, but shows how this is stretched and modified to accommodate Mahler’s musical ideas.

**On the one hand: Suspend your aesthetic judgments**

In their discussion of the art of summarizing, Graff and Birkenstein encourage students to put themselves in the “shoes” of the author they are summarizing. They maintain that:

This means playing what the writing theorist Peter Elbow calls the “believing game,” in which you try to inhabit the world-view of those whose conversation you are joining—and whom you are perhaps even disagreeing with—and try to see their arguments from their perspective. This ability to temporarily suspend one’s own convictions is a hallmark of good actors, who must convincingly “become” characters whom in real life they may detest. As a writer, when you play the believing game well, readers should not be able to tell whether you agree or disagree with the ideas you are summarizing.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In other words, when anyone reads an article or a book, they react to the ideas expressed in a range of ways anywhere along the continuum from agreeing wholeheartedly with what the author says to completely rejecting her or his ideas; however, this reaction should not form part of the summary. Music too creates a reaction in its audience: a reaction based on aesthetics and value-judgements that also falls along a continuum from the listener being completely enamored with the work to their rejecting it vehemently. I want my students to realize that as musicians and writers about music, it is vitally important that they know what their reaction is to the music that they perform, study, and write about and they know why they react the way they do; but this reaction is part of the “I say” portion of the equation that they will contribute later in the writing process. Here they are concerned with the “They say” segment – the summary of how the musical text unfolds. Graff and Birkenstein maintain that “To write a really good summary, you must be able to suspend your own beliefs for a time and put yourself in the shoes of someone else.[[16]](#footnote-16) ” Their point is that a summary that is liberally peppered with the author’s own opinions gives a biased impression of the text that is being summarized. I propose this is equally true with a musical text.

**On the other hand: Know where you are going.**

Again, if we take Graff and Birkenstein’s approach as our model, we find them reminding students that: “A good summary…has a focus or spin that allows the summary to fit with your own agenda while still being true to the text you are summarizing.[[17]](#footnote-17)” In making this comment, the authors are urging students to select information for the summary that is pertinent to the points they want to make, the thesis they want to prove, or the theory they want to discuss. In my experience, this is also good advice for summarizing a musical text. Here is an example of just such a summary by Susan McClary taken from a book-chapter entitled “Reveling in the Rubble.”

The first segment of Philip Glass’s *Glassworks* (1982), “Opening,” evokes an earlier era, even more than most pieces by Glass. Not only does it employ triads consistently throughout, but it makes use of the piano, with all its attendant nineteenth-century cultural baggage. Its two-against-three rhythmic figuration, with its implicit melodic lines that appear only hazily from the web of cross-accented triplet patterns, recalls the Romantic piano music of Schumann or Brahms. Moreover, it parses itself out in tidy, symmetrical four-bar periodic phrases.[[18]](#footnote-18)

This summary leaves no doubt that McClary wants her readers to notice the references to vestiges of a nineteenth-century (Romantic) tradition.

**Music as a temporal art: avoiding the list summary**

Music is a temporal art form; that is, an art form that unfolds over time unlike painting or sculpture which exist in space. Perhaps it is for this reason that a chronological summary of a piece of music can initially seem like a good idea; however, a writer can very easily fall into the trap of turning a chronological summary into a “list” summary, the effect of which is shown in the illustration on p. 36 of *They Say-I Say* where the speaker puts her audience to sleep. I like to point out to my students that many features of music demand a chronological summary (that is a summary that emphasizes the order in which things appear) but there are also many aspects that can more profitably be discussed outside of this chronological sequence. For example, consider Colin Lawson’s summary of Brahms’ Clarinet Quintet:

The character and mood of Brahms’s Clarinet quintet is markedly influenced by the degree to which the tonic key of B minor prevails. Even though the Adagio is in B major, it contains a tinge of minor and has a middle section emphatically within that mode. The third movement begins in D major, but the single definite modulation in the first section is to B minor. Its Presto is a complete sonata movement in B minor, turning to D only at the end. Within the finale there is only one excursion from the tonic for the fifth variation in B major. There can scarcely ever have been a work of such length so bound to one tonality. Another extraordinary feature is that each movement closes at a quiet dynamic. The thematic material of the Quintet is equally characteristic, with a falling motto theme permeating each of the four movements…to produce a cyclic effect.[[19]](#footnote-19)

The first part of this summary focuses on the harmonic relationship to B minor and because harmonic relationships unfold over time, Lawson has chosen to give a chronological account looking at each movement in turn. He has also been very concise and has not stated what is musically obvious – that the first movement (Allegro) is in the tonic key of B minor (because the reader knows that the tonality of the first movement always defines the tonic for a multi-movement composition). Note that the remainder of the summary is not chronological but clusters together the quiet endings of all movements and the falling motto theme found in all movements. Consider how much more difficult this information might have been to comprehend if Lawson had relied entirely on a chronological summary.

**Helping the reader to process your summary: Using a table**

Referring my students back to Lawson’s summary of Brahms Clarinet Quintet, quoted above, I point out that the first part of the summary is a little challenging to follow. This is partly because music works with its own logic and to explain it verbally requires the reader to process a lot of information in a short space of time. For this reason, writers often present their summary in the form of a table, where the complex relationships can be more readily assimilated by the reader. Horace J. Maxile, Jr. makes good use of a table when he discusses the structure of David N. Baker’s (b. 1931) song “Early in the Mornin”[[20]](#footnote-20):

The ritornello statement is four bars in length and the chord in bar 5 serves as a dominant preparation for the ensuing blues in F. In subsequent restatements of the ritornello, the content of bars 1-4 is unaltered. The chords corresponding to bar 5, however, harmonically prepare the sections that follow. The chord in bar 5 is a jazzy sonority with C7 as the foundation and with altered extensions that reach up to the thirteenth. We also note that this sonority maintains some of the ninth stacks that characterize the introductory sonorities (C/D-flat and A-flat/B-flat). Baker sets the first section of the poem with three twelve-bar blues choruses in F (see table [2])[[21]](#footnote-21).

Table 2. David Baker, “Early in the Mornin” précis

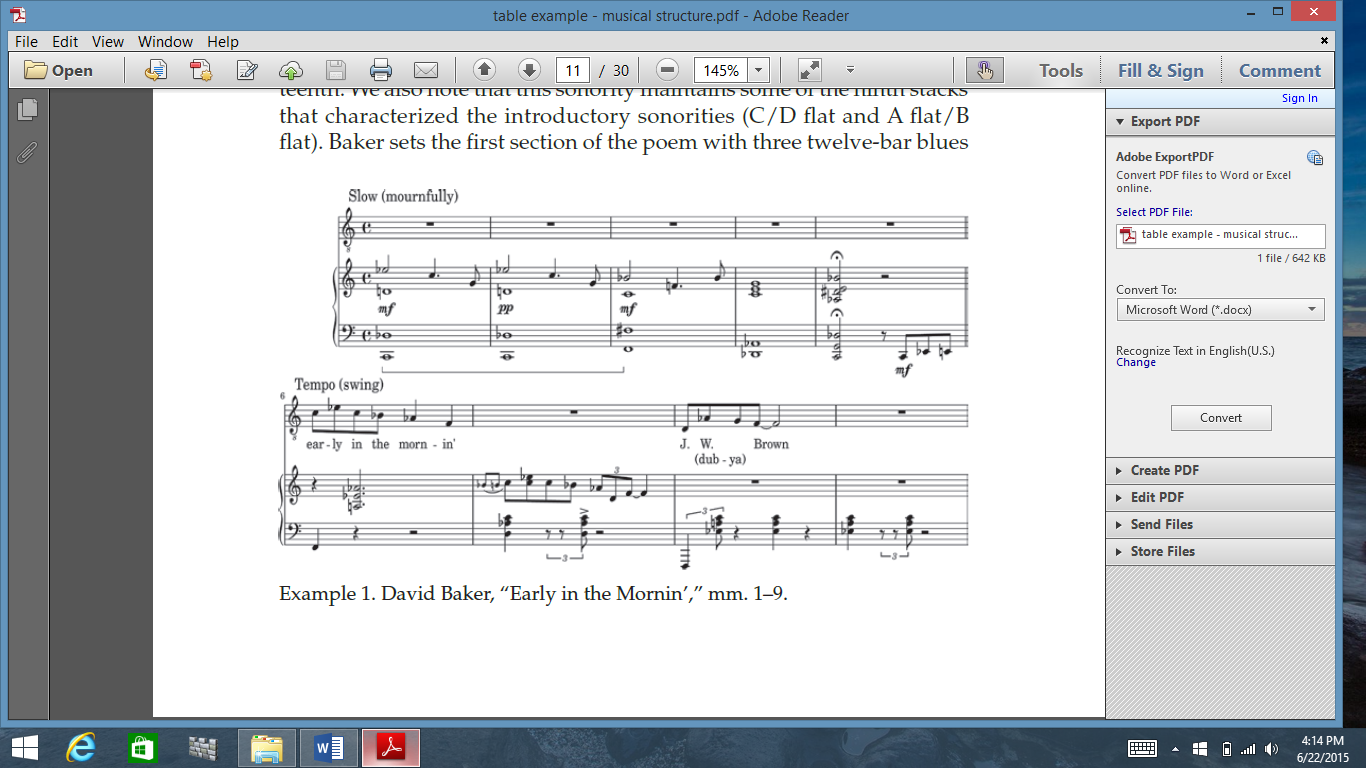
|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Bars | Text | Description |
| 1-5 |  | Ritornello (introduction); marked  “Slow (mournfully)” |
| 6-17 | Early in the mornin’, J.W. Brown whippin’ his woman knockin’ her around | Blues in F; call-and-response texture: marked “Tempo (swing)” |
| 18-29 | answer my question if-a you please (hum\_\_), how she gonna answer down on her knees | Blues in F; thicker texture in the piano and added harmonic complexity (tritone substitutions at the end of the chorus) |
| 30-45 | groanin’ “Buddy, Buddy” (yeah yeah) wake up and go (hum\_\_), get L.C. and Marg’ret he’s hurtin’ me so | Blues in F; walking bass; more harmonic complexity; chords with colorful extensions (e.g. 11ths and lowered 13ths) |
| 46-50 |  | Ritornello |
| 51-69 | Buddy went a flyin’, down the stairs, brown pants over his underwear, but L.C. and Marg’ret wouldn’t stir said “Buddy we sympathize with her, but from what you say as far as can see, if she’d answer his question, he’d let her be | Gospel-Blues in G marked “Moderately fast” |
| 70-74 |  | Ritornello |
| 75-99 | she never did answer, as far as we could hear, but the sight of that child in his underwear, his head bent down his shoes untied and all comin’ back alone down the empty mall was sad. More than I could bear. Makes you wonder if anybody cares anywhere. | F (Dorian mode) quickly gives way to more dissonant chords; Ritornello returns as accompaniment for last words in text. |

Students need to be reminded that tables are valuable tools when presenting complex information, but just like quotations, they should be explained thereby linking the information they present to the ideas the student wants to discuss. This particular quotation and table is useful to illustrate how Maxile could have made the reader’s job even easier had he drawn attention to his table before he explained it. I also show students that Maxile’s table includes details that he does not mention at this point in the text, but which he will reference later in his discussion.

**Musical quotation as part of the summary**

Just as Graff and Birkenstein can claim that a verbal quotation “functions as a kind of proof of evidence, saying to readers: “Look, I’m not just making this up. She makes this claim and here it is in her own words,[[22]](#footnote-22)” I argue that musical quotations (quoting musical notation) add credibility and accuracy to a summary of a musical text. The quotation will need to be both introduced and explained (i.e. “framed”) in the same way that Graff and Birkenstein recommend introducing and explaining a verbal quotation. This can be illustrated with the following extract, where Horace Maxile frames a musical example consisting of the opening of Baker’s “Early in the Mornin’” by first introducing the example and then telling the reader what he wants her/him to notice:

The song begins with a slow, contemplative introduction marked “mournfully” (see ex. 1, mm. 1-5). Because it is a recurring event, Ivey referred to the opening measures as a kind of ritornello statement and I will use that term as well.[[23]](#footnote-23) This statement includes chordal complexes that involve stacks of ninth intervals, a sonority that Baker favors throughout the song cycle. Also note the chord in measure 4. This is another type of sonority that Baker prefers consisting of major triads (or open fifth chords) with roots that are separated by a step or a half-step. The ritornello statement is four bars in length and the chord in bar 5 serves as a dominant preparation for the ensuing blues in F.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Maxile has helped the reader by drawing attention to the musical example before he explains it (in contrast to the way he referred to his table in the previous quotation). By doing so, he allows the reader to reference the notation while reading the explanation—far easier than reading the explanation and then discovering that the author has provided a notated excerpt. In the latter case the reader has to go back over the previous explanation now with the added benefit of the musical notation.

**Conclusions**

I have indicated six broad strategies for constructing the first part of a template that might be rendered “The music says / I say.” The first involves the student balancing out the large- and small-scale details in a summary of a composition with or without verbal text. The second helps the student avoid making aesthetic judgements during the summary. The third shows the student how to craft a summary to serve their own ends by pointing out things they want to emphasize and discuss. The fourth has students consider carefully what parts of their summary needs to follow a chronological ordering and what parts can better be presented in other ways (avoiding the list summary). The fifth shows students how to use a table to present multi-layered, complex information to enable their readers to absorb it more readily (being sure that they explain the table in the body of their text), while the final strategy encourages students to select notated musical examples to add veracity to their assertions while being sure to introduce and explain each example. It is my contention that encouraging students to utilize these strategies in their writing helps them organize their thoughts about a composition and allows them to move more smoothly into the “I say” portion that is an integral part of academic writing.

As my students have taken these ideas on board, students who initially were resistant to the material have come back to me and told me how much this approach has helped them in writing projects for other courses, and some who have gone on to graduate school have written to me telling me how this material has helped them write their first graduate papers. What I have presented here is only a portion of the way that Graff and Birkenstein’s work can be adapted to the process of engaging with a musical composition. The “I say” component is, of course, also important in academic writing and I believe that Graff and Birkenstein’s methodology here is equally adaptable to writing about a musical text.

1. I am grateful to Virginia Christy Lamothe of Belmont University and Marian Kelly of Maryville College for commenting on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to the members of the South-Central chapter of the American Musicological Society for the useful discussions that ensued when I presented some of this material at our local chapter meeting in 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kerry Hunter and Harry Tse, “Making disciplinary writing and thinking practices an integral part of academic content teaching,” *Active Learning in Higher Education* 14 (2013): 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Gerald Graff and Kathy Birkenstein, *They Say /I Say: The moves that matter in academic writing*, third edition (New York: Norton, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Koudier Mokhtari, Carla A. Reichard, and Anne Gardner, “The Impact of Internet and Television Use on the Reading Habits and Practices of College Students,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 52 (2009): 609-19; see p. 610. The studies cited are National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education* NCES 2005-094 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005. National Endowment for the Arts, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literacy Reading in America* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). National Endowment for the Arts, *To Read or Not to Read: A question of national consequence* (Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gerald Graff, “Hidden Meaning or Disliking Books at an Early Age,” in *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education* (New York: Norton, 1992) pp. 64-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Graff and Birkenstein, p. xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Graff and Birkenstein, p.46. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Graff and Birkenstein, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. David Morrison, “Why are Opera and Concert Programme Notes so Consistently Awful?” *BBC Music Magazine*, September 2009, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This may be as simple as going to a respected authority to establish what was the expected norm for that genre at that particular place and time in history. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Dorothea Link, “The Fandango Scene in Mozart’s *Le Nozze di Figaro*,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 133 (2008): 68-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. p. 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Rufus Hallmark, “The Literary and Musical Rhetoric of Apostrophe in *Wintereisse*,” *19th-Century Music*, 35 (2011): 3-33; see pages 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Seth Monahan, “Success and Failure in Mahler’s Sonata Recapitulations,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 33 (2011): 37-64; see 42-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Graff and Birkenstein, p. 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Graff & Birkenstein p. 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The content of musical form* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Lawson, Colin: *Brahms: Clarinet Quintet*, Cambridge Music Handbooks, edited by Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 47-9. The ellipsis in this quotation omits reference to example 5.1 where the author provides the musical notation of the motto theme as found in each movement. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Horrace J. Maxile, Jr, “On Vernacular Emblems and Signification in David N. Baker’s *The Black Experience,”* *American Music* 32 (2014): 223-51; see 233-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The original lists this as Table 1; however, for the purposes of this article, I have re-numbered it as Table 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Graff and Birkenstein*,*  p. 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ivey, “Willis Patterson’s Anthology of Art Songs by Black Composers,” 123. Ivey probably chose this descriptor because he likened the song to a mini “opera” and ritornello forms were associated with some forms of opera. [footnote from Maxile] [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Maxile, p. 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)