

Teaching Research and Writing Across the Music History Curriculum

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Teachers of music history often have many pedagogical aims. Not only are they responsible for covering historical content, but they are frequently tasked with teaching bibliographic skills, the process of scholarly inquiry, and components of good academic writing. Final research papers often serve as a capstone project in music history courses, allowing faculty to evaluate these myriad skills. Yet, these final research papers are often well-below instructor expectations. Musicologist Pamela Starr, for example, describes grading research papers as one of the most discouraging aspects of a professor's job, concluding that students are not prepared to engage with sophisticated scholarly discourse.¹ Pedagogical literature abounds with potential solutions to the "final paper problem." Suggestions include providing students with intermediary assignments to better guide them through the research process on the one hand or advocating for the replacement of research papers with other styles of assignment on the other.² While both of these solutions have merit, each focuses on the teaching of writing from a semester-long perspective. This view is logical as faculty tend to teach courses that are a semester in length. Musicologists and other teachers of music history, however, often have the advantage of teaching the same body of students across a sequence of classes. Therefore, I advocate for a multi-semester approach to teaching writing in the music history classroom. Few would argue

1. Pamela Starr, "Teaching in the Centrifugal Classroom," in *Teaching Music History*, ed. Mary Natvig (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 172.

2. Carol Hess advocates for requiring outlines and multiple drafts in her chapter "Score and Word: Writing About Music," in *Teaching Music History*, 193–204. Other sources advocating for other assignments include Michele L. Henry and Laurel E. Zeiss, "Musicians as Authors: Teaching the Art of Writing Program Notes," *College Music Symposium* 44 (fall 2004): 121–31; Erinn E. Knyt, "Rethinking the Music History Research Paper Assignment," this *Journal* 4, no. 1 (2013): 23–37, <http://ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/95/123>; and Nancy Rachel November, "Literacy Loops and Online Groups: Promoting Writing Skills in Large Undergraduate Music Classes," this *Journal* 2, no. 1 (2011): 5–23, <http://ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/31/59>.

that the art of scholarly inquiry and discourse could be taught in a semester's time, yet institutionally that tends to be the most common mode of instruction and assessment. By using a multi-semester model, faculty can better prepare students to write in the discipline of musicology. Even if multiple instructors teach the various courses of the sequence, it is often a relatively small number of faculty who can collaborate to create a multi-course writing pedagogical plan.³

The approach to writing pedagogy laid out in this article relies on a systems approach to instruction. A system is simply a collection of interrelated components that work together toward a common goal, often providing a method of feedback to determine whether a goal has been met. (In current higher education parlance, we often refer to this feedback loop as assessment.) While teaching has always been a systematic process below the surface, it is only when a system is explicitly laid out that it can be evaluated, critiqued, and changed.

This article provides a three-step approach to designing a writing curriculum. First, I rely on the model of backward design as discussed by Mary Huba and Jann Freed in order to create both a final learning outcome as well as a series of sub-goals related to it.⁴ Second, I use the Dick and Carey model of instructional design and analysis in order to determine an effective order for the teaching of sub-skills related to the final learning outcome.⁵ Finally, I utilize curriculum mapping to create a complete system of teaching writing that shows what skills will be introduced, reinforced, and assessed in various courses. While Huba and Freed focus primarily on large-scale curricular learning outcomes, Dick and Carey focus on the instructional design within individual courses. For programs that utilize a sequence of music history courses, a hybrid approach to the two models proves particularly effective.

Backward Design

The methodology of backward design is predicated on the seemingly obvious idea that learning outcomes at all levels of instruction should be compatible with each other. For example, learning outcomes in the various courses of a music program should align with the broader learning outcomes for the music degree as a whole.⁶ The degree outcomes should, in turn, support the learning outcomes of the institution. The backward-design model argues that this is best achieved if learning outcomes are conceived as part of a broad-to-narrow progression,

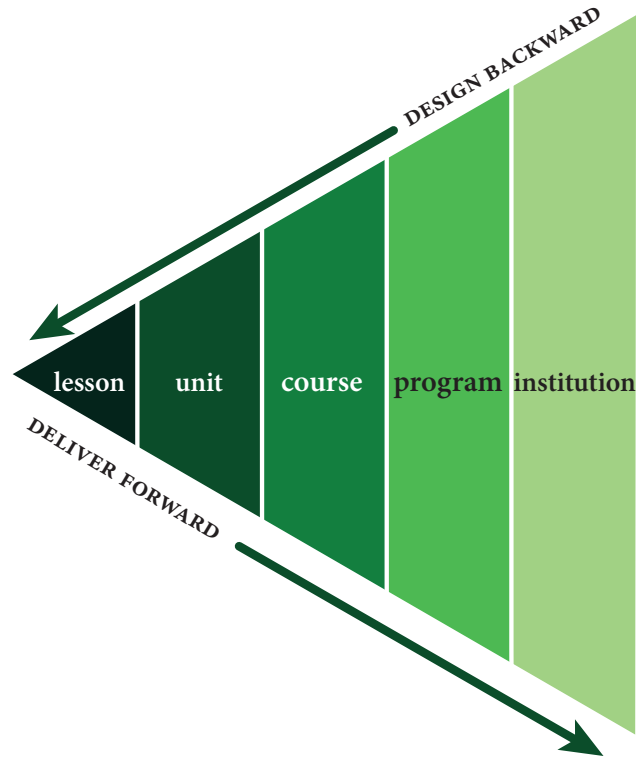
3. The multi-semester approach to teaching and the concept of skills sequencing is not entirely novel within the music history classroom. Instead, this article presents but one specific approach.

4. Mary E. Huba and Jann E. Freed, *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2000).

5. Walter Dick and Lou Carey, *The Systematic Design of Instruction*, 4th ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1996).

6. Huba and Freed, *Learner-Centered Assessment*, 107–11.

Figure 1: Huba and Freed, *Learner-Centered Assessment*, 108. Image adapted from “Assessment Primer: Curriculum Mapping,” UConn Assessment, <http://assessment.uconn.edu/assessment-primer/assessment-primer-curriculum-mapping/> (accessed 10 January 2016).



but instruction is delivered in a forward manner. **Figure 1** provides a visual aid for this relationship. Although the teaching of writing within the music history classroom may not occupy enough of an individual course’s curriculum to have learning outcomes for every level of instruction (i.e. individual class periods), instructors can tailor this model to their own individual approaches.

For example, I teach a two-semester music history survey at my current institution. Additionally, I teach a first-year experience course that functions as an introduction to the study of music/how-to-survive-college course. Taken together, these three courses may constitute a multi-semester program of writing instruction. My final desired learning outcome with respect to writing is stated in the syllabus for the last course in the sequence: “the student will be able to construct a musicological argument and effectively defend a position in a paper of approximately 3000 words.”⁷ Using the process of backward design, I

7. For the sake of brevity, I am discussing backward design solely with respect to my three courses, but it is worth noting that this final learning objective is in line with broader

formulate various sub-goals that must be achieved before students can successfully achieve this final learning outcome.

In order to successfully construct a musicological argument, students must be able to do several key tasks. First, they need to be able to identify appropriate scholarly sources. Second, they need to have the ability to evaluate these sources and the arguments they present. Students must also know what the components of an academic argument are, and finally they must be able to demonstrate proper grammar and the principles of good writing. When laid out in this way, it becomes apparent that mastery of all of these tasks over the course of a single semester, particularly in a course not solely dedicated to writing, would be near impossible. By dividing the instruction of these tasks across multiple semesters, students have more time to achieve mastery of these skills and are ultimately more successful.

Instructional Design and Analysis

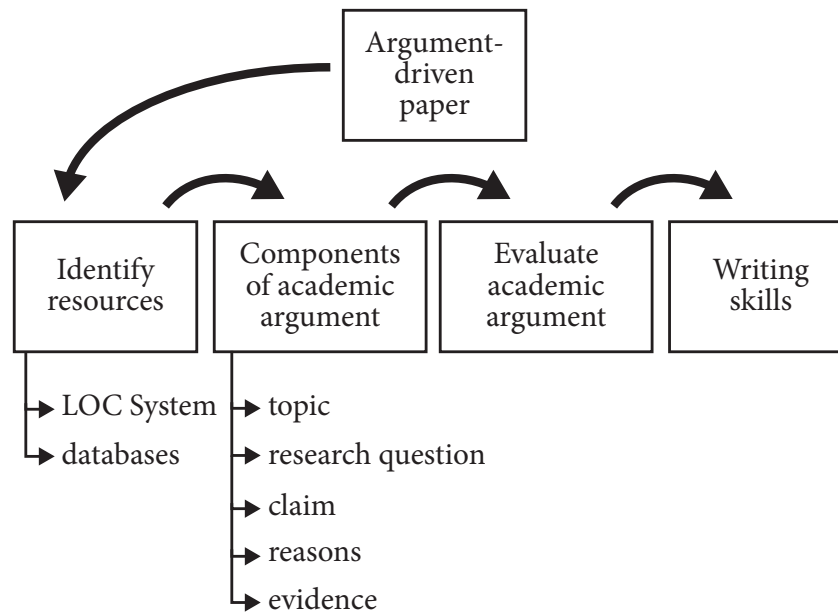
Having created a list of sub-goals, one can create an instructional design to configure a pathway of instruction that most effectively teaches these skills. Walter Dick and Lou Carey identify ten components of the systems approach model for instruction. In this article, I will only focus on the first five components as they provide the most global perspective for creating a system of writing instruction.

1. Determine instructional goal
2. Analyze the instructional goal
3. Analyze learners and contexts
4. Write performance objectives
5. Develop assessment instruments

Having already completed the task of determining an instructional goal and various sub-goals that complement it, I have completed a significant portion of the analysis of the instructional goal (components 1 and 2). The primary purpose of an instructional analysis, however, is not only to identify the skills that a student must master in order to accomplish the instructional goal but rather to determine the sequence in which these skills need to be learned.

Figure 2 presents a visual chart of the instructional design for my writing curriculum. The top of the chart shows my ultimate learning outcome and under this is a flow chart of the various sub-goals that I identified, but in a precise instructional order. For example, I feel it necessary to teach students to identify resources before I teach them the components of an academic argument.

departmental goals for all music majors.

Figure 2: Instructional analysis

Further, it is necessary for students to know the elements of an academic argument before they would be prepared to evaluate another author's argument. In my instruction, as reflected in Figure 2, I use the elements of an argument as presented by Booth, Colomb, and Williams in *The Craft of Research*, but any other model an instructor adopts can be effectively substituted.⁸

Step 3 in the Dick and Carey model analyzes learners and context, focusing on key traits regarding the target audience of instruction. The process of sequencing sub-goals in step 2 makes implicit assumptions with respect to the students and the context in which they are being taught. For example, I assume a set of behaviors and prior knowledge that students possess before entering my course. For instance, I do not begin my writing pedagogy by teaching the alphabet. Although this is a key component in being able to write, I assume that my student population has already achieved mastery of this. Depending on a program's academic admission standards, the entry behaviors and prior knowledge will vary from institution to institution. But entry behaviors are not solely based on students' prior knowledge. It is also important to be aware of student attitudes toward course content and their motivations for learning. As teachers of music history are all too familiar, students in undergraduate programs often

8. In my undergraduate courses, I use the abridged version of Booth, Colomb, and Williams as presented in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers*, 8th ed., rev. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 1–62.

have a negative attitude with respect to music history and being aware of this can help to understand our students and influence our instruction.⁹

In step 4, one creates performance objectives for the skills outlined. A performance objective states what it is that a learner will be able to do in order to demonstrate mastery of the skill and under what conditions. For example, one of the sub-goals laid out in my instructional design is that a student will be able to evaluate another author's argument. Although this statement reflects a key component and skill with respect to my writing pedagogy, it does not state how the learner will demonstrate achievement of this goal. A performance objective has three components: the skill identified in the instructional analysis, the conditions under which a student will carry out the task, and the criteria used to evaluate the student's performance.¹⁰ In order to create a performance objective for the skill of argument evaluation, I need to add the additional information. Instead of stating merely that students will be able to analyze an author's argument, I say:

Given a musicological article published in an academic journal (condition), the student will be able to write a 3–4 page paper (condition) that outlines and evaluates the article's argument (skill) by correctly identifying the article's thesis, supporting reasons, and evidence (evaluation).

This performance objective is much more specific and strongly influences step 5, the development of assessment instruments, which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Curriculum Mapping

With a completed instructional design, I can proceed to map the various sub-goals onto the courses that I am teaching. Curriculum maps provide a visual representation of how instruction is aligned with particular desired learning outcomes. Traditionally, curricular maps are used in assessment of curricular-wide learning objectives, but in this scenario I will use a scaled-down model focusing just on writing across my sequence of courses (**Figure 3**).

The top row of the map lists the sub-goals laid out in my instructional design and the left-most column lists the courses that I teach: the first-year experience course, the first course in the music history sequence, and the second course

9. A full learner and context analysis goes beyond these questions, though these areas are the most pertinent to developing a global writing pedagogy. For more information see Dick and Carey, *Systematic Design*, 90–97; Robert Davis, Lawrence Alexander, and Stephen Yelon, *Learning System Design: An Approach to the Improvement of Instruction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 129–58; and Robert M. Gagné, *Conditions of Learning and Theory of Instruction*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985).

10. Dick and Carey, *Systematic Design*, 119–27.

Figure 3: Curriculum map

I = Introduced; R = Reinforced and practiced; M = Mastered and assessed.

Course	Identify resources	Elements of argument	Evaluate resources	Writing
1. First-year experience	I	I and R	I	I
2. Music history 1	R		R	R
3. Music history 2	M	M	M	M

in the sequence. Within the map, I mark where sub-goals are introduced (I), where they are reinforced and practiced (R), and where they are mastered and assessed (M). Curriculum maps ensure that topics are being taught and assessed in an appropriate manner.

Not surprisingly, in my first-year experience course I make sure to introduce all of the sub-goals. Instructionally, this means that I do the following: introduce the students to the structure of the Library of Congress system and the way in which our library is set up; have students read the abridged portion of *The Craft of Research* to understand the elements of an argument; guide the class through several texts to provide students with a low-stakes opportunity to evaluate an argument; and provide students with many opportunities to complete low-stakes writing assignments. Most frequently, I employ “Reading Response Assignments.” These assignments are short, 1–2 page writing assignments that foster the students’ critical thinking and provide me with a baseline for assessing their writing. In this course, principles of good writing are only being introduced, thus I provide extensive comments on writing style and grammar within the body of the text, but I give the student a grade based on a “good-faith effort.” I find that this allows for the exercise to be more instructive as the student sees my comments as constructive critique as opposed to a destructive force to their grade. Further, after reading each student’s paper, I focus on one element of writing that I would like to see improved for the next assignment. This specificity provides a focused approach to writing instruction at the introductory level. The final writing project for my FYE course is an analysis of an author’s argument where, in prose, they are asked to identify an author’s main thesis, the supporting reasons and evidence used, and provide an assessment of the article’s effectiveness, thus reinforcing the skill of an academic argument.

In the second course in the sequence (Music history 1), I reinforce a majority of the skills introduced in the earlier class with the exception of analyzing elements of an argument. Because this is a course covering early music topics with which students tend to be less familiar, I focus more on identifying

resources and bibliographic development as opposed to the creation of an academic argument. With this in mind, I have students complete both an annotated bibliography as well as a performance-practice literature review on a piece of their choice. This not only reinforces the students' abilities to identify and evaluate resources, but it also makes a connection in their mind between the music history curriculum and the performance focus that the majority of students tend to have.

In the final course of the sequence (Music history 2), students are expected to demonstrate mastery of the learning outcome of constructing their own musicological argument. By this point, I rely on students to review each other, and all of the writing assignments lead to one final musicological paper on a topic of the student's choice. Assignments in this class include a topic proposal with preliminary bibliography, a research report, partial drafts, a complete draft, and then the final paper. For each assignment, at least one student critiques his/her peer's work. All of the assignments include a rubric on how the student will be assessed.

Using this systems approach across multiple semesters provides numerous benefits. First and most importantly, it allows extra time for students to achieve the learning outcome. The process of research and writing is one that takes time to develop and too often faculty attempt to restrict it to a one-semester time frame. Second, it provides a model to ensure that all areas of writing are being taught and assessed in a logical order. Third, it borrows "content time" (time devoted to music history or whatever the main topic of the course is) from several courses so that no single course is being sacrificed in order to teach writing. And fourth, it provides a model for assessment and change. By laying out the various sub-goals, it is possible for the instructor to identify where students begin to fall behind with respect to writing. If a student turns in a final research paper that is poorly constructed (and this is the only artifact of assessment), it may be difficult to determine whether the paper's true shortcoming lies in the student's writing skills, a lack of argument development, or a lack of bibliographic control. But by completing an instructional analysis, it is possible to diagnose where precisely students begin to struggle and to adjust the instructional design accordingly. Ultimately this thorough systematic pedagogical model allows faculty to assess and alter their teaching in productive ways that will likely lead to increased student learning.