



**WRITING AN EXTENDED ESSAY
OR
DISSERTATION
ABOUT MUSIC
A PRACTICAL GUIDE**

BARRY MITCHELL



A
Theory of Music
publication

Title Page

Writing an Extended Essay or Dissertation about Music

A Practical Guide

Barry Mitchell

Published by Theory of Music, December 2015

www.theoryofmusic.eu

enquiries@theoryofmusic.eu

About the Author

Barry Mitchell studied music at Queen's University Belfast where after completing a first degree in music he studied for an MA in composition. He is also a graduate of the Open University. He has held several posts as a tutor and examiner with higher education institutions in the UK. These include: visiting examiner for A level music with Edexcel Foundation, music and arts tutor for the Open University, tutor, course writer and dissertation supervisor for Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance. He has also worked as a marker for the International Baccalaureate Organisation, marking the diploma extended essay in music. He founded Theory of Music (www.theoryofmusic.eu) in 2007 to publish free or low cost resources for the study of the history and theory of music. He can be contacted at barry.mitchell@theoryofmusic.eu.

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	1
About the Author	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Chapter 1 Introduction	6
1.1. How to use this book	6
Chapter 2 Designing the Question	8
STOP AND THINK 1: What makes a good question?.....	8
2.1. Seven-point question checklist	8
2.2. Seven-point question checklist: discussion.....	8
Chapter 3 Sample Questions 1.....	11
3.1. <i>Les Misérables</i>	11
3.2. Indian flute.....	12
3.3. African American culture and jazz	13
3.4. Debussy and gamelan music.....	14
3.5. Super Mario series	15
3.6. Hip Hop and American society.....	16
3.7. Melodic Death Metal	17
3.8. Celtic folk music	17
3.9. Mozart's version of <i>The Hallelujah Chorus</i>	18
3.10. Comparison of Beethoven and Schubert.....	19
Chapter 4: What should be in your Essay?	21
STOP AND THINK 2: What should be in your essay? Part 1	21
STOP AND THINK 3: What should be in your essay? Part 2	22
STOP AND THINK 4: What should be in your essay? Part 3	24
Chapter 5 Sample Questions 2.....	26
5.1. 10 Sample Questions 2	26
5.2. 10 Sample Questions 2: discussion	26
Chapter 6 Elements of an Essay.....	30
6.1. Introduction	30
6.2. Evidence you have carried out the research needed	30
STOP AND THINK 5: What research do you need to do before starting your essay?.....	30
6.3. Primary and secondary sources	31
CHECKPOINT 1: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES	31

6.3. Primary and secondary sources continued.....	31
6.4. Showing you can analyse music.....	32
6.5. Extract showing how to present a short music example	32
6.6. Discussion of music example in 6.5.	33
6.6.1. Writing about music examples	34
6.7. Using the right language for the subject.....	35
6.8. List of presentation elements	35
CHECKPOINT 2: HOW TO FORMAT MUSIC EXAMPLES	36
6.9. Abstract.....	37
CHECKPOINT 3: THE QUESTION MUST ALWAYS BE THE SAME	37
6.10. Conclusion.....	37
Chapter 7 Constructing an Argument	38
7.1. What makes a good argument?.....	38
7.2. The question: Debussy and gamelan music.....	38
7.3. Debussy and gamelan music, answer structure 1	38
STOP AND THINK 6: Assess answer structure 1	39
7.4. Debussy and gamelan music: answer structure 2	40
STOP AND THINK 7: Assess answer structure 2	40
CHECKPOINT 4: ONE REALLY BIG THING TO REMEMBER	41
7.5. Answer structure 2: weaknesses	41
Chapter 8 Making a Plan	42
8.1. Making a plan: 6 point checklist	42
8.2. First draft: 3 point checklist	42
Chapter 9 Final Checklist for your Essay	43
9.1. Concluding comments	45
9.2. More to read on www.theoryofmusic.eu	45

Chapter 1 Introduction

This book is a short practical guide to writing a dissertation or extended essay about music. It is short because it focuses on the points that will help you write a good essay. It is practical because the focus is on what you should do. There are action points and checklists to help you make sure you are doing the right things in your essay. You will learn about how to avoid common mistakes which, if you make them, will lower the mark you get for your essay.

This book is about writing an essay about music. It is not a general guide to essay writing, though students writing about other subjects may find it of use. In order to write a successful essay about music you will have to include the elements an essay about music needs. You will need to show knowledge of music techniques. You will need to include music examples. You will need to create an argument where the evidence used is mainly music. But it is important to stress this point at the outset: your essay must focus on the analysis of specific pieces of music.

This guide is aimed at pre-university level students. If you are a 16-18 year old writing an extended essay about music then this guide is suitable for you. I have assumed you are writing an essay of 3000-5000 words.

1.1. How to use this book

The main topics covered by this guide are:

1. How to design a question, including discussion of ten sample questions.
2. What should and should not be in your essay.
3. Discussion of another ten sample questions.
4. The elements of an essay: what each part of your essay should do.
5. How to present a music example.
6. How to construct an argument: a comparison of two different answers to the same question.
7. A checklist for your essay plan.
8. A final checklist for your essay.

There are sections called STOP AND THINK. Here you are asked to think about your own answers to important questions about your essay.

There are sections called CHECKPOINTS, which are there to remind you about the most important points. For example, CHECKPOINT 4 tells you about the one big thing you can do to make sure your essay has the right structure.

I would recommend you read all of this guide. However, you do not have to read it starting at the beginning and ending at the end. You might not want to work through all the sample

questions in Chapter 3 in one go. You might want to study a few of these sample questions and come back to the rest later. You might want to go straight to the chapters about essay planning, Chapters 7 & 8, or even go straight to the final checklist, Chapter 9. No matter how you approach using this guide, reading it all will give you a complete picture of what you need to do to write a successful essay about music.

Chapter 2 Designing the Question

For most essays you have to answer a set question. When writing an extended essay about music you have to decide for yourself what you are going to write about. The first step is to decide what topic you want to write about. The second step is to design a question.

Unless the question is a good one your essay will not score very highly. Answering the wrong type of question, even if you answer it well, will not score a good mark. We are now going to study what makes a good question. I have created a seven-point checklist for you to use when designing a question. But before you have a look at it I would ask you to think about this important subject for yourself.

STOP AND THINK 1: What makes a good question?

Make a list of seven features a good question should have.

Your answer could cover issues such as: will you have time to do all the necessary reading; how easy will it be to find scores; is the subject something that has been written about a lot already; is the question clear and focused. Remember that the question will also be the title of your essay.

2.1. Seven-point question checklist

A successful question has these features.

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.
2. Has the right scope: it does not try to cover too much or too little.
3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.
4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.
5. Has had something written about it by other writers.
6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.
7. Is clear and accurate.

2.2. Seven-point question checklist: discussion

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

You must write about specific pieces of music. You must not focus on topics which are only related to music. Such a topic would be the social context of the music you are writing about. You can focus on just one piece of music.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

If your essay tries to cover too much you are unlikely to be able to show the examiner that you have the right skills. You may not be able to devote enough space to analysing music. You must be able to answer the question within the word limit. It is more difficult to define a question that is too narrow in scope, as this is a less common problem. Here is an example of a topic that would be too narrow. If only a small section of a piece is studied, without reference to the rest of the piece, then this would be considered to be too narrow a topic.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

You have a limited amount of time to spend on writing your essay. You should not spend most of this time searching for materials. Writing your essay is going to be time consuming. You want to organise your time so that you spend most of it writing. Your essay has to focus on specific pieces of music. This means the main materials you will be using are music scores. If you can't find scores you should be prepared to create your own scores by making transcriptions. Making transcriptions is a high level musicological skill. It is also very time consuming. This is an important point to think about before starting an essay for which you need to produce transcriptions. If you select a topic where scores are already available this will save you a lot of time. Either way, your essay must include the analysis of music examples. This is one of the main ways you can help your essay score a high mark.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

In order to score a good mark your essay will have to present an argument and not just present information. It is not enough just to present the materials you have found during your preparation. You must construct an argument which is based on analysis of these materials. This very important point is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

It is important your essay is not written in a vacuum. You should discuss how your ideas relate to what other writers have written about the subject. This will be especially the case with the introduction to your essay. You will also have to be careful to not just reproduce the ideas of other writers. You can write about a piece of music that no one else has written about before. You can even write about a topic no one has written about before. If this is the case you will always be able to find some relevant ideas by other writers. If your topic is, for example, music in computer games, you might find some relevant ideas in what has been written about film music.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

The question should not assume something is true which needs to be argued for. It is not good to assume that something is true when designing a question. After all, the main purpose of your essay is to present an argument. Something that is known to be true does not need to be argued for. For example, think about the following question: "What made Mozart the greatest composer ever?" The question says that Mozart is the greatest composer ever. It can easily be argued that other composers, such as JS Bach or Beethoven, were just as good if not better. This is why this question is not a good one.

7. Is clear and accurate.

The question should be written using correct terms and in a clear style. The titles of pieces should be correct. Do not just use nicknames such as *The Moonlight Sonata*. Titles of works should usually be in the original language: *Die Zauberflöte* not *The Magic Flute*. The extra symbols needed for foreign languages should be included. *Die Zauberflöte* is better than *Die Zauberflote*. Titles of works should be in italics. The examiner must be able to read your question and immediately know what exactly your essay is about.

Chapter 3 Sample Questions 1

Maybe you are now thinking that designing a question isn't as easy as you first thought. If so, you are right. Designing a question takes a lot of thought. You will have to carefully consider the wording of your question. Designing your question is one of the most important tasks you will have to do when writing your essay. When you think about your question you are also thinking about the answer. This means you are thinking about what will be in your essay.

So how can you use the seven-point checklist in 2.1. to help you create a good question? What follows will show you how to do just that. Ten sample questions follow. Assess each one using the seven-point checklist. I suggest you don't work through all ten questions in one go, but do a few and come back to the rest later. Otherwise this exercise will be very long. But if you do one or two at a time it should be all right.

3.1. *Les Misérables*

The question is: Characterisation in the musical *Les Misérables*.

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

This does focus on a specific piece of music. The question can be answered mainly through the analysis of music. The question will probably be answered mainly by a discussion of word setting. That is, explaining how the music fits the words.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

The scope is right but the question could be more sharply focused. It could mention specific characters.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

There should be no problem finding scores. The scores most readily available will be vocal scores. This is fine, but might be a problem if you want to discuss instrumentation.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

It is not obvious what argument is needed to answer this question. As long as the essay does contain an argument this will not be a problem. The question actually answered might turn out to be something like, "What techniques of musical characterisation are used in *Les Misérables* and how effective are they?" This might make a better question.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

You will have to find answers to the following questions. What has been written about musical characterisation? What has been written about *Les Misérables*? What has been written about the twentieth-century musical? Will you develop other writers' ideas? Will you take a different approach from other writers? You do not have to find everything that has been written about these topics. You will have to find some relevant writings.

Avoid describing performances of *Les Misérables* you have been to. This might be relevant if you were writing about a subject such as set design or the role of the producer, but it is not relevant in an essay about music.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

No problem here.

7. Is clear and accurate.

Les Miserables should be in italics because it is the title of a work. The composer and librettist could be mentioned. As you may have noticed, the correct title is *Les Misérables*, with an acute on the "e".

The best version of the question might be: "What techniques of musical characterisation are used in the musical *Les Misérables* by Claude-Michel Schönberg and Alain Boublil, and how effective are they?"

3.2. Indian flute

The question is: To what extent is the flute significant in Indian Classical music?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

No specific pieces of music are mentioned. The question needs to be changed to focus on a specific piece or pieces.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

While the question is about music, the topic is too broad. No period is mentioned. No specific composers or performers are mentioned. More seriously, the focus is on an instrument. This is wrong. The focus should be on specific pieces of music. Detailed descriptions of instruments or of how instruments are made should be avoided. They will distract you from writing about specific pieces of music.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

There may be a problem finding scores. You might have to make transcriptions.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

Given the broad scope of the topic, constructing an argument will be difficult. The question gives no clue to what the argument might be.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

There will be a lot to read about this topic. The amount of reading is too much. This will not be the case if the question is more focused.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

No problem with this.

7. Is clear and accurate.

The question is clear enough, despite its other shortcomings.

The use of capitals needs to be changed. "Indian classical music" is better than "Indian Classical music." The question should be shortened to "How significant is the flute in Indian classical music?"

3.3. African American culture and jazz

The question is: How was African American culture influenced by jazz?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

No specific pieces or composers are mentioned. The focus is wrong as the question is about the influence of music on society. This question belongs more to sociology than to music. It can't be answered mainly with reference to music. The question is likely to lead to a general description of a style or genre. General descriptions of styles or genres should be avoided because they do not focus on specific pieces of music. You should avoid writing a detailed description of the historical background to a style. You should also avoid a detailed description of the social context of the music. Both these things are bad because they will lead you away from writing about pieces of music.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

As the focus is not right the issue of scope is not relevant. However, the scope is far too broad.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

As there are no specific musicians or pieces mentioned no comment can be made about this.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

The question should produce an argument, but it is not the kind of argument that is suitable for an essay about music. An essay about music needs to include an argument that uses as evidence specific pieces of music.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

The reading list for this question will be very large.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

The question states that African American culture has been influenced by jazz. While this may be true, it is not a good idea to make this assumption in the question. This can be corrected by removing the “How” at the start of the question. The question then becomes: “Was African American culture influenced by jazz?” This is an interesting question. It is just not a suitable question for an essay about music.

7. Is clear and accurate.

No problems with this.

3.4. Debussy and gamelan music

The question is: To what extent is Debussy’s piano music influenced by gamelan music?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

The focus is on a specific composer and on a specific aspect of that composer’s music. The question can be answered mainly with reference to music. No specific pieces are mentioned but the answer can bring these in. Specific pieces could be mentioned in the question.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

The scope is right as the question focuses on one issue. One thing to watch out for is getting the balance right between discussing gamelan music and discussing Debussy’s music. The focus needs to be on the music of Debussy.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

You will have no problem finding scores of Debussy’s piano music. It may be more difficult to find scores of gamelan music. Scores of both piano music and gamelan music will be needed.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

You will have to present an argument that Debussy’s piano music is influenced by gamelan music.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

There will be no problem finding writings about this topic. You will then have to decide how your ideas relate to what other writers have written about Debussy and gamelan music. Are you going to put forward any new ideas? Are you going to develop the ideas of other writers? What about the influence of gamelan music on western music in general? Did other composers use features of gamelan music? If so, did they use features of gamelan music in a way different from Debussy?

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn’t.

No problems here.

7. Is clear and accurate.

No problems here.

As this question deals with music for a specific instrument there are a couple of points worth mentioning. Students often write about music written for instruments that they themselves play. This is understandable, as playing an instrument can give you extra insight into the music written for that instrument. However, you should avoid mentioning in your essay personal information such as what instruments you play or your experience of playing the pieces you are writing about. Your essay must not include any personal information.

3.5. Super Mario series

The question is: How is music used in the Super Mario series?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

This question can be answered by reference to specific pieces of music.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

The scope is right.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

The availability of scores might be a problem.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

The question should lead to the development of an argument about the function of music in the Super Mario series.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

What has been written about music in the Super Mario series? There may be nothing or very little. You might then have to look at what has been written about music in computer games. You could make a comparison with music in new media or film music. It will be important to show some awareness of what has been written about related areas.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

No problem here.

7. Is clear and accurate.

The question could include more detail about what the Super Mario series is, e.g. mentioning that it is a computer game and composers and dates.

You might be tempted to start writing about music technology when answering this question. You should avoid writing in detail about recording software such as Steinberg Cubase, Logic Pro or Ableton Live. If you do need to describe software you should only write about those aspects that are relevant to the musical content. Details should be kept brief. A relevant point might be that the technology only allows for a certain number of voices to be used at the same time. The history of the development of music technology is not an appropriate subject for a music essay. It is very unlikely that items such as screenshots of recording software will be useful.

3.6. Hip Hop and American society

The question is: How effective is Hip Hop in criticising the injustices of modern American Society?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

This question is about the social context of music. It is not about music. The question therefore belongs more to sociology than it does to music. The question is likely to lead to a discussion of the meaning of lyrics, which is not the right focus for an essay about music. An essay about music needs to focus on specific pieces of music.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

As the emphasis is wrong the scope does not really matter. However, the scope is probably too broad even for a sociology question.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

Even if the question was rewritten, scores might be difficult to find.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

The question does have to be answered by an argument. However, the argument will not be mainly about music.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

The reading list will be very long, but it will not be about music.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

The question assumes there are injustices in modern America. While this may be true, it is not something the question should assume.

7. Is clear and accurate.

The question is clear and accurate. It is the focus of the question that is the problem.

3.7. Melodic Death Metal

The question is: What are the main characteristics of Melodic Death Metal?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

The question mentions a specific genre and can be answered by analysing pieces of music. Specific pieces could be mentioned in the title, but the most important thing is that specific pieces are analysed in the essay. It is important to keep the focus on music and not to get distracting into writing about related areas such as band history and record sales statistics. If the focus is on music this question should lead to a good answer.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

The scope is right.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

Scores should be easy to find. References must be to scores and not to track timings. This is because all the material the examiner needs to mark your essay should be included in what you submit.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

The question should generate an argument about what are the main characteristics of the genre. It would not be enough to just list the characteristics of the genre. The use of the word "main" in the question is therefore important.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

What has been written about Melodic Death Metal? If not very much then what has been written about Heavy Metal? How do your ideas relate to the ideas of other writers? If there is not much on Melodic Death Metal the argument might take place in a vacuum. You need to find a way to show your knowledge of what has been written about the subject already.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

No problem here.

7. Is clear and accurate.

No problem here.

3.8. Celtic folk music

The question is: What techniques does the folk music of the Celtic regions have in common?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

The question does not mention any specific composers or pieces of music.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

This is a genuinely musicological question, but the scope is too broad. It would need a full length book to answer this question. The question will lead to a broad survey with not enough detailed analysis of music. This question needs to be changed to give it a sharper focus. The focus could be on music for one instrument, or on one type of music such as dance music. Your interest in this topic might stem from personal experience of performing. However, avoid writing about your own performing history, such as the instrument or style of music you play, or any groups you are a member of.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

Scores might be available but this might be a problem. You might have to make some transcriptions.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

The question will generate an argument. The problem is with the scope of the argument.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

You will be able to find books and articles about this subject. The question is what will be original about your approach. There should be scope to carry out some original research.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

No problem here.

7. Is clear and accurate.

“What techniques do...” is grammatically correct, not “What techniques does...”. You would say, “The music of the Celtic regions do have something in common.”

3.9. Mozart's version of *The Hallelujah Chorus*

The question is: A comparative analysis of Mozart's edition of the Hallelujah Chorus and Handel's original version.

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

The question refers to specific pieces of music and can be answered mainly with reference to them. The focus is on compositional techniques, which is exactly what is needed.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

The scope is right. The way is left open for the argument to deal with broader issues, for example, the differences between classical and baroque oratorio. This would set the topic in the appropriate context and would enable discussion of other examples of music.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

Scores will be easy to find. You will use at least two scores when answering this question. The best technique to use is to discuss short examples which are pasted into the main body of the essay. But it is often useful to include complete scores in an appendix. In the case of this question, it would be appropriate to include the scores of the two pieces in an appendix. It is important that any scores included in an appendix have bar numbers. If the scores as printed do not have bar numbers then you must add these yourself, even if it means writing them in by hand. It is also a good idea to annotate the scores to draw attention to the main points of your argument. While this is not compulsory, it can be worth doing.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

This question should lead to the development of an argument. You will have to be careful to present an argument that moves towards a conclusion. It might be easier to do this if the issue of the differences between classical and baroque oratorio is raised.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

This is something that will already have been written about. It is important to read some of what is available and to relate what you are writing to what has been written already. Ask yourself what is original about your approach. You might have a problem saying anything new about this subject. You therefore have to be careful that your essay will not just be a survey of what other people have written.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

No problem here.

7. Is clear and accurate.

The style of the question can be improved. It is more accurate to say "arrangement" instead of "edition", because Mozart was an arranger not a publisher. Because it is a title *Hallelujah Chorus* should be in italics.

3.10. Comparison of Beethoven and Schubert

The question is: How does Beethoven's Kreutzer violin sonata and Schubert's String Quintet show the similarities and differences between the Classical and Romantic periods?

1. Can be answered mainly with reference to specific pieces of music.

The focus is on specific pieces. The question can be answered mainly with reference to pieces of music.

2. Has the right scope: does not try to cover too much or too little.

The scope is right as a comparison between two substantial works is a suitable subject for an essay about music.

3. The materials needed to answer the question, especially scores, are fairly easy to find.

The scores will be easy to find.

4. Has to be answered by an argument, not just by giving information.

There will be a problem developing an argument. The problem will be caused by the fact that the comparison is between pieces in different genres. It is difficult to see any useful comparisons being made between these two pieces, because they are very different. It would make more sense to compare two works belonging to the same genre, e.g. a string quintet by Beethoven and a string quintet by Schubert. If two works from the same genre are discussed it is much easier to make meaningful comparisons.

5. Has had something relevant written about it by other writers.

The reading list relevant to this question is vast. You will need to find a manageable reading list. The problem is made worse by the way the question raises the very broad issue of the difference between the Classical and Romantic periods.

6. Does not say something is true when it can easily be argued that it isn't.

The main problem with the question comes under this heading. This question contains some questionable assumptions. One is that there are clear differences between the Classical and Romantic periods. This may well be true but this does not mean very much unless the dates of these periods are identified. The question does not acknowledge that when the Classical and Romantic periods begin and end is very debatable. An even bigger assumption in the question is that Beethoven and Schubert belong to different periods of music history. It can easily be argued this is not true.

7. Is clear and accurate.

The Beethoven piece should be given its proper title, not referred to by its nickname or subtitle. Schubert's string quintet needs to be described properly, giving the opus number and the key.

How does Beethoven's Violin Sonata Op. 47 "The Kreutzer" and Schubert's String Quintet in C major D. 956 show the similarities and differences between the Classical and Romantic periods?

Chapter 4: What should be in your Essay?

I hope Chapter 3 has helped to make it clear what makes a good question. I also hope it has helped you have some ideas about what you should include in your essay. I hope you have realised that your essay should definitely contain analysis of examples of music.

But what else should your essay include? STOP AND THINK 2 is designed to help you decide what should be in your essay and what should not.

STOP AND THINK 2: What should be in your essay? Part 1

Which of the following should you include in your essay? Mark each item on the list below YES, NO or MAYBE and then read the answers.

1. How writing the essay has contributed to your personal development.
2. What instruments you play.
3. A description of a concert you attended.
4. Detailed biographies of composers or performers.
5. Discussion of the meaning of song lyrics.
6. A history of the band you are writing about.
7. Details of record sales.
8. Analysis of short examples from a piece of music.
9. Discussion of what other writers have written about the subject.
10. Brief details of who wrote the piece you are discussing and when it was written.
11. Your opinion of the piece you are writing about.

Answers

1. How writing the essay has contributed to your personal development.

NO. Do not include personal information in your essay.

2. What instruments you play.

NO. Do not include personal information in your essay.

3. A description of a concert you attended.

NO. Do not include personal information in your essay.

4. Detailed biographies of composers or performers.

NO. Any biographical details about composers or performers must be very brief.

5. Discussion of the meaning of song lyrics.

NO. The focus should be on the discussion of music. This can include the discussion of how words are set to music.

6. A history of the band you are writing about.

NO. Any comments about any band you are writing about should be very brief, e.g. the date they were formed or were disbanded. These details should be limited to a couple of sentences. If you are writing about band history you are not writing about music.

7. Details of record sales.

NO. These are not relevant in an essay about music.

8. Analysis of short examples from a piece of music

YES. Definitely. This should be the main feature of your essay.

9. Discussion of what other writers have written about the subject

YES. This will let the examiner know you have carried out some research into the subject. It will also help you relate your ideas to what else has been written about the subject.

10. Brief details of who wrote the piece you are discussing and when it was written.

YES. The important word here is "brief".

11. Your opinion of the piece you are writing about

NO. Your personal opinion of the piece you are writing about is irrelevant.

Discussion

Some of these answers may have surprised you. It may seem obvious to include biographical details of composers or band history, or details of record sales. But these topics will just distract you from your main task, which is to write about specific pieces of music. If you find yourself writing about something other than a specific piece of music you should stop and think. You are writing an essay about music so why are you writing about something that isn't music? The more you write about music, the greater your chance of scoring a high mark.

STOP AND THINK 3: What should be in your essay? Part 2

1. Descriptions of instruments or how instruments are made.

2. Descriptions of recording software such as Steinberg Cubase, Ableton Live or Logic Pro.

3. Short extracts from the score of the piece you are discussing.
4. General descriptions of a genre or style.
5. References to track timings in a recording of the piece you are writing about.
6. In an appendix, a score that has no bar numbers.
7. A score in the appendix with bar numbers and comments relating to points made in your essay.

Answers

1. Descriptions of instruments or how instruments are made.

NO.

2. Descriptions of recording software such as Steinberg Cubase, Ableton Live or Logic Pro.

NO.

3. Short extracts from the score of the piece you are discussing.

YES. This is one of the most important things you must include.

4. General descriptions of a genre or style.

NO. You should focus on specific pieces of music.

5. References to track timings in a recording of the piece you are writing about.

NO. References to track timings are not acceptable. References should be to scores. This is because the examiner must be able to check your references using materials you have provided in your essay.

6. In an appendix, a score that has no bar numbers.

NO. Including a score is a good idea, but it must have bar numbers. If it does not have bar numbers you must write them in yourself.

7. A score in the appendix with bar numbers and comments relating to points made in your essay.

MAYBE. Comments on scores in an appendix can be very helpful in explaining your analysis to the examiner. If you think a score with comments on it will be useful to the examiner, then include it.

These answers raise one very important point. References to pieces of music should be to scores, not to track timings, and the scores must be included with your essay. The best way to present your discussion of the music is to paste short examples from the score into your essay. But you can also include scores in an appendix. If you do this the scores must have bar numbers. It will also help if you write comments on the scores that help to illustrate points in your essay. The key point is that any statements you make about the music must be supported by evidence. That evidence should be presented in the form of an example of music the examiner can see. If this is not

the case the examiner will not have any way of judging if what you are saying about the music is right or not.

STOP AND THINK 4: What should be in your essay? Part 3

1. Photographs of performers or portraits of composers.
2. Transcriptions of pieces you could not find the scores of.
3. A detailed account of what people thought of the piece when it was first performed.
4. An analysis of the piece by another writer.
5. Detailed historical background to the period your piece belongs to.
6. Detailed description of the social context of the piece you are writing about.
7. Evaluation of different points of view about the topic you are discussing.
8. Lines of further enquiry into the subject.

Answers

1. Photographs of performers or portraits of composers.

NO.

2. Transcriptions of pieces you could not find the scores of.

YES. But remember making transcriptions is very time consuming. If you do make your own transcriptions include references that make this clear to the examiner. You will be demonstrating a high level musicological skill which you deserve to be rewarded for.

3. A detailed account of what people thought of the piece when it was first performed.

NO. The study of what people thought about a piece when it was first performed is something worth studying. This subject is called Reception. Writing about Reception is not the same as writing about music. You need to focus on writing about music. The study of Reception is useful and worthwhile and has a place in the study of the history of music. However, it should not be the main focus of an extended essay about music. Of course, if you are asked to write about Reception in any other essay you must do so.

4. An analysis of the piece by another writer.

MAYBE. This can be included but you have to be careful. You should not just present the thoughts of another writer without adding any ideas of your own. You can, for example, expand on the other writer's ideas. You are also free to disagree with the other writer's ideas.

5. Detailed historical background to the period your piece belongs to.

NO. This kind of background is not necessary and is a distraction from your main task, which is to write about the music.

6. Detailed description of the social context of the piece you are writing about.

NO. This is not necessary and will just take up space you should devote to writing about music.

7. Evaluation of different points of view about the topic you are discussing.

YES. This will show you have carried out the necessary research and are able to think critically about what you have read. You are not just accepting the ideas of other writers but are able to use them creatively in your own argument.

8. Lines of further enquiry into the subject.

YES. This can be included in the conclusion and shows you are aware you have not said everything there is to say about the subject. Your essay may well have raised further questions, and these should be mentioned.

Chapter 5 Sample Questions 2

We are now going to move on to the important subject of the different parts of an essay and what should be in each part. But first I would like to return to the vital question of what makes a good question. It is worth repeating that if the question is not right your answer, no matter how well written, will not score a good mark. It is not enough to write a very good essay: you have to write a very good essay about music. This means writing about specific pieces of music.

In this chapter you are asked to evaluate another set of questions. There is no need to use the seven-point system used before. This would be a bit laborious. Instead make a few notes on what you think are the strengths and weaknesses of each question. You could go straight to Chapter 6 Elements of an Essay, and come back to this chapter later.

5.1. 10 Sample Questions 2

1. To what extent are George Gershwin's Three Piano Preludes influenced by jazz?
2. How are teenagers affected by modern pop music?
3. The function of the score of Star Wars. How does the composer John Williams use the score of Star Wars to emphasise certain aspects of the film?
4. How do film scores create mood in the romance and action genres?
5. How controversial was Igor Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring in the decade after its first performance?
6. How does Maurice Ravel's orchestration of Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition retain the character of the original?
7. In what ways did the Symphony evolve through time and in line with relevant composers?
8. What impact on society did the Nueva Cancion movement have in 1970s Chile?
9. How does Vivaldi's concerto Estate depict the season summer in the accompanying sonnet?
10. To what extent can the first movement of Beethoven's Moonlight sonata be used to relax a person?

5.2. 10 Sample Questions 2: discussion

1. To what extent are George Gershwin's Three Piano Preludes influenced by jazz?

It is good that the question mentions a specific composer and pieces. The question focuses on musical techniques and can therefore be answered mainly by analysing music. The scope of the question is right. The title of the work should be in italics.

It will not be difficult to find something which has been written about Gershwin and about the influence of jazz on classical composers. You should read some of this literature and ask yourself what is original about your approach. You will need to be careful to avoid just reproducing the ideas of other writers.

2. How are American teenagers affected by modern pop music?

This question is not about music. It is about the effect music has on people. The question is vague and unfocused. This is therefore not a suitable question. The term “popular music” should be used instead of “pop music”.

3. The function of the score of Star Wars. How does the composer John Williams use the score of Star Wars to emphasise certain aspects of the film?

This is about a specific piece of music and composer. Scores should be available, even if they are piano versions. Give the date of the film. Be careful not to wander away from writing about the music. Do not, for example, describe in detail the plot of the film. It will be good to discuss the relationship between the music and the action in the film, but keep focused on the music. This question provides the basis for a good essay. The title of the film should be in italics.

4. How do film scores create mood in the romance and action genres?

This is a good topic but the question is too broad. No specific composers or pieces are mentioned. The question needs to be rewritten to mention specific composers and pieces. There might be a problem obtaining scores. It is likely that only piano versions will be available. A lot has been written about film music so you will need to show you have read some of this literature. You might have a problem writing an essay that contains original ideas. One solution to this problem would be to write about the music of specific films. You can then write about film music that has not been written about before. This will help you produce an original essay.

5. How controversial was Igor Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* in the decade after its first performance?

This question is good because it mentions a specific piece and composer. But the focus is on Reception, not on the piece itself. The question needs to be revised so that the focus is on the music. A lot has been written about Stravinsky and about the *Rite of Spring*, which is probably the most famous piece of classical music of the 20th century. You might find it difficult to produce an essay that contains original ideas. The title should be in the original language and in italics: *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

6. How does Maurice Ravel’s orchestration of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* retain the character of the original?

It is good that this question can be answered with reference to music. This subject has probably been written about before. You will therefore need to find out what other writers have

said about the subject. You will then ask yourself what is original about your approach. You could also try to find out if anything has been written about orchestral arrangements of piano music. There are not many pieces like this in the repertoire, so why is Ravel's arrangement so well known? There should be no problem with the availability of scores. In this case you can write the title in English. The title in French, and therefore of Ravel's arrangement, is *Tableaux d'une exposition*.

7. In what ways did the Symphony evolve through time and in line with relevant composers?

This question is about music but is far too broad and unfocused. "Evolve through time" should be replaced with just "evolve". The question states that music evolves. The idea that music evolves is something that can easily be argued against. The question should therefore not state that music evolves. The question does not mention specific composers or pieces. This question is more like a first idea and needs to be changed to focus on specific pieces of music. The amount of relevant reading is vast, so some way of reducing this needs to be found. The key to this is a more focused question.

8. What impact on society did the Nueva Cancion movement have in 1970s Chile?

This question mentions a specific period and musical movement. No composers or pieces are mentioned. Specific pieces and composers should be mentioned. The emphasis is wrong and should not be on the impact the Nueva Cancion movement had on society. This question belongs more to sociology than to music. The focus needs to be changed. If the question is not changed you will be writing too much about social context. The question needs to be answered mainly by analysing pieces of music. This question therefore needs to be rewritten to focus on specific pieces of music.

You need to find what other writers have said about the music. There will be a lot of background reading needed. Your essay could end up being a summary of what others have written. You will need to relate your own analysis of the music to the ideas of other writers. There shouldn't be any problem finding scores. The name of the movement needs to include any special symbols so should be Nueva Canción. You could also use Nueva Canción Chilena.

9. How does Vivaldi's concerto Estate depict the season summer in the accompanying sonnet?

It is good that this question is about a piece of music. However, the focus is not right. The problem is that the question is about how successful the music is at describing something non-musical. It is extremely difficult to definitely say that any piece of music successfully describes anything. The argument is likely to get no further than describing the music and then linking the music to ideas about summer. This will make it difficult to create a convincing argument.

The concerto does not have its correct title. The title of the concerto is *L'estate*. The title should be in italics.

Vivaldi is one of the major composers of the baroque period. A lot has been written about Vivaldi and the baroque concerto so you will need to read some books or articles about these subjects. In your answer you will need to refer to baroque ideas about music. These ideas are often quite different from ideas about music we have today. You will need to show you understand this. Music that has the aim of describing something is known as "programme music". Vivaldi's *The Four*

Seasons can be described as programme music. You could find out what has been written about programme music in the baroque period and refer to those ideas in your essay. The original title of the set of concertos known in English as *The Four Seasons* is *Le quattro stagioni*. It is important for references to the titles of pieces to be accurate.

10. To what extent can the first movement of Beethoven's Moonlight sonata be used to relax a person?

This is about a specific piece, which is good. However, the emphasis is wrong. The subject of this essay is not music but psychology. This is because the subject is the effect music has on people. This question is therefore not suitable for an essay about music. The title of the work needs to be more accurate. The piece should be referred to as Beethoven's *Piano Sonata in C sharp minor*, Op. 27 No. 1.

Chapter 6 Elements of an Essay

Once you have a suitable question, how do you go about answering it effectively? We have already started to consider what things should and should not be included in your essay. It is now time to take a look in detail at the different elements of an essay about music.

6.1. Introduction

Your essay should begin with an introduction. The introduction is probably the part of an essay that is most misunderstood. The introduction needs to do a number of things. It needs to say why the subject is important enough to be worth writing about. It needs to place your essay in the context of what is already known about the subject. This is done by referring to the work of other writers. In other words, you are explaining to the reader why the subject is worth writing about and how your ideas relate to what is already known. The introduction should therefore contain some references to works by other writers.

There are some things which might at first thought appear to be good to include in an introduction but should not be included. Examples are: a general introduction to a genre or a period of music history; biographical details of composers; band history.

Do not include any personal information in the introduction. Do not write about why you are interested in the subject or what instruments you play. Do not write about the role studying the subject has played in your personal development. Do not write about what you have learned about performing from learning how to play the piece or pieces you are writing about.

6.2. Evidence you have carried out the research needed

This is not a separate section of your essay. Nevertheless, research plays an important part in your essay. This is because the results of your research will be present throughout your essay and is therefore something the examiner will take into account when deciding what mark to give your essay. Your essay needs to show you have carried out the right research. The examiner is looking for evidence you have planned your research well and selected relevant source material.

STOP AND THINK 5: What research do you need to do before starting your essay?

Make a short list of what things you need to do before starting to write your essay. What kinds of sources do you need to read? What scores do you need to find? What kinds of evidence do you need to present in your essay? These are some of the questions you will need to think about.

Answer

There are a number of things you need to do before starting to write your essay. You will need to consult a range of sources. These sources will include books, articles, encyclopaedias, websites and, most important of all, scores of the pieces of music you are going to write about.

6.3. Primary and secondary sources

All the things you need to study before writing your essay are called “sources”. Sources are usually divided into two main groups. One group is called “primary sources”. The other group is called “secondary sources”. There is a simple difference between primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources were created during the period you are studying. For example, if you are writing about a piece by Mozart any source created when Mozart was alive would be a primary source. This would include music written by Mozart. Mozart’s letters would also be a primary source. Secondary sources are sources that were created after the period you are writing about. For example, if you are studying Mozart a book about Mozart written during the twentieth century would be a secondary source. As a general rule your essay will be stronger if it refers to more primary sources than secondary sources.

CHECKPOINT 1: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES

Your essay must refer to primary sources. As a general rule you should devote more space to discussing primary sources than secondary sources. The most important primary sources are scores of the pieces of music you are writing about.

6.3. Primary and secondary sources continued

You will need to collect relevant primary sources, especially scores of the pieces of music you are going to write about. You will need to make sure any statements of fact you make can be verified by the examiner. This means the examiner must be able to check if what you have written is true. The examiner needs to be able to do this without having to check anything outside of your essay. Your essay therefore needs to include all the evidence you need to convince the examiner that what you are saying is correct.

This is why references to sources such as YouTube videos or recordings will not be of much use to you. The reader cannot check up on these without going away from your essay. Using scores is the only way you can reference the music in your essay. If scores are not available you will have to include transcriptions.

You should avoid general descriptions of music that do not have references to scores.

If using an encyclopaedia something like Encyclopaedia Britannica is better than Wikipedia. Wikipedia is an open source site and therefore subject to change. This is not the case with Encyclopaedia Britannica.

All statements of historical fact must be supported by references.

Your essay can include references to anything that is relevant to answering the question. You can refer to history, social context, the ideas of other writers, but your main focus must be on the specific pieces of music you have chosen to write about. It is all about getting the balance right. The main sources referred to must be scores.

6.4. Showing you can analyse music

The main skill you need to demonstrate in your essay is the ability to accurately analyse music. The best way to do this is by analysing short examples. These examples will need to be presented in the right way.

Here is an example of a good presentation of a music example. This is an extract from an essay about *Lucia di Lammermoor*, an opera by the Italian composer Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848). *Lucia di Lammermoor* was first performed in 1835. The novel referred to in the extract is Walter Scott's *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), which the opera is based on. The subject of the essay is the relationship between the opera and the novel.

6.5. Extract showing how to present a short music example

Enrico still refuses to listen to Raimondo's pleas and sings his first aria, [a reference to the score is included in a footnote], which is repeated with ornamentation. This is typical of the form of an aria in Italian romantic opera. Considering the gravity of the impending situation the music is still strangely melodious, without strident chords or unusual harmonies. **(example 1c)**. It portrays Enrico's anger, evident throughout the second half of the novel.

ENRICO

La pietade in suo fa - vo - re mi - ti sen - si invanti

EN.

det - ta... semipar - li di ven - det - ta so - lo in.

Example 1c. (Act 1 Sc 11) Enrico sings:

La pietade in suo favore miti sensi invanti deta...
Se mi parli di vendetta solo intenderti ti potrò.
 (On her behalf your pity pleads in vain...
 If you speak to me of revenge only then will I hear you.)

The reason that the music for this scene is not as dramatic as one might expect is, perhaps, that Donizetti wanted the more intense drama to be reserved for the first appearance of Lucia in Act 1 Scene 1V. Here the soprano is able to display her voice to great effect.

6.6. Discussion of music example in 6.5.

This example is well presented because the reader can see the score of the music that is being discussed. There is also enough information presented for the reader to be able to know what part of the opera the example is taken from. The example has been given a reference (1c) and an English translation of the words is included. The example is about the right length. There is one thing that needs to be added to this example. The example does not include a time signature. This is because the example is taken directly from the score. You should indicate what the time signature of the piece is in every example. If the time signature is not in the extract from the score you have quoted you must mention it in the commentary. You can say something like “the time signature is twelve eight” just before the extract. Or you could make a note about the time signature beside the example.

Handwritten music examples are perfectly acceptable, and in fact demonstrate a skill. Make sure that examples are large enough to read.

6.6.1. Writing about music examples

It is important to format music examples correctly. But what should you write about your examples? You may be surprised there is not more focus in this guide on explaining how to write about music examples. There are reasons for this. The first and most important reason is that the most common problem with essays is a lack of music examples. This is also the problem that causes most essays to lose marks. So easily the most important point about music examples is that there should be plenty of them. Every point you make about the piece of music you are discussing should be illustrated by an example. If this is the case you will have a very good chance of scoring a good mark even if your comments on the examples are not perfect. Imagine two essays. The first has only a few music examples and the comments are perfect. The second illustrates every point about the music with an example but there are some mistakes in the comments. The second essay will probably score better despite its imperfections. This is because the second essay is doing the right thing.

As you have to design your own question there is an unlimited range of genres, styles and periods you could write about. Every style and period will have its own terminology. In a relatively short guide like this it is impossible to go into detail about how to write about examples. There are, however, some general principles you should follow.

Examples should be formatted correctly, as explained in 6.5.

Comments should use technical terminology, e.g. chord symbols, identification of keys etc.

Technical terminology should not only be accurate but should be appropriate to the period the piece of music belongs to.

Terminology should be consistent. For example, if you start using a specific system to describe chords you should use this system in all of your essay.

This guide assumes you have an understanding of music terminology. You will therefore have enough knowledge to be able to successfully write about music examples. This is a point you might not feel very confident about. If this is the case my advice is “just do it” : go ahead and write about the music without worrying too much about making mistakes in your comments. Your comments on the music do not have to be perfect for you to score a good mark. If you include plenty of examples, and write about them reasonably well, then the examiner will be impressed. This is because you have approached writing your essay in the right way and have been willing to get to grips with the most important aspect of your essay: writing about music.

If you would like to read in more detail about how to write about music there are some free resources available on www.theoryofmusic.eu.

1. Writing about instrumental music.

www.theoryofmusic.wordpress.com/2008/06/14/writing-about-music-instrumental/

2. Writing about opera.

6.7. Using the right language for the subject

You must show you can use the right language for the subject. This means you must show that you understand and can accurately use music terminology. You do this by using musical terms correctly and by using language that is appropriate to the period you are writing about. For example, if you are discussing the work of Beethoven, don't use a term like "riff".

If you are writing about a score that uses transposing instruments you must show that you understand how the transpositions work. If you are analysing chords in a full score that includes transposing instruments make sure you take account of this. You must identify the heard notes correctly.

6.8. List of presentation elements

Your essay must be presented correctly. The following are the usual elements in the formal presentation of an essay. You must make sure all the elements required by your examining board are present. This guide does not deal with each element in detail as the elements are common to all essays, not just essays about music.

Title page

Include any cover sheets required, with the necessary signatures. If you do not include these your work may not be marked.

Word count

Include the word count on the title page. Keep to the word limit set by the examining board.

Anti-plagiarism statement

You may be asked to include a signed declaration saying that the essay is all your own work. This is an anti-plagiarism declaration. Make sure you include an anti-plagiarism statement if the examining board asks for one.

Table of Contents

Insert a table of contents, usually after the title page.

Page numbers

You must include page numbers.

Use of one of the recognised referencing systems

Your essay must include references to the source material you have used. You must use one of the recognised referencing systems. Examples of these are the Chicago and Harvard systems. You should make it part of your research project to learn how to use a recognised referencing system. This is an important part of your research project. If you give references to internet sources you must give the date you accessed the website.

Bibliography

This should include all the sources referred to in your essay. The bibliography is part of the evidence that you have carried out the right research.

Discography

List any recordings you have used.

Appendix

This is an optional element. You can include in an appendix any source material you think the examiner would find useful. It may well be useful to include the score of any piece you write about. Appendix items should include annotations that are related to comments in your essay.

The appendix should not be too large.

Illustrative material

Examples of music will be the main illustrative material you use. It is essential that your essay includes the analysis of music. This is best achieved by pasting short examples of music into the main body of your essay.

Formatting of music examples

Include clefs, key signatures, time signatures, instrument names and a reference to where in the piece the example can be found. Also include a reference to the bar numbers as in the full piece, if available.

Font size, line spacing and formatting of paragraphs

Follow the guidance given by your examining board.

CHECKPOINT 2: HOW TO FORMAT MUSIC EXAMPLES

Music examples must contain:

- clefs
- key signatures
- time signatures
- instrument names including identification of transposing instruments
- a reference to where in the piece the example is.

Do not print out your essay with comment boxes at the side (review feature in Word) as this format is unacceptable for an academic essay.

Do not use footnotes for adding extra comments. Footnotes should only be used for references.

Do not go over the word limit as anything over the word limit will not be marked. The examiner will not read further than the number of words specified in the brief. You may be given room to exceed the limit or go under it by 10%. Follow the examining board's instructions carefully.

6.9. Abstract

You may be asked to produce an abstract. An abstract is a short summary of your essay.

Abstracts are usually under 500 words. An abstract should state three things:

- what the question is
- how you have carried out the research
- what the conclusion of your essay is.

Note that the question must be exactly the same as on the title page and in the introduction. When it comes to discussing "how" you must be quite specific. The conclusion must be specific and must be the same as the conclusion at the end of your essay. Only write an abstract if your examining board's instructions tell you to do so.

CHECKPOINT 3: THE QUESTION MUST ALWAYS BE THE SAME

You might have to write out the question several times. It might appear on the title page, in the abstract and possibly in the introduction. Every time the question appears in your essay it must be exactly the same.

6.10. Conclusion

The conclusion must be relevant to answering the question. It should be consistent with what has gone before and draw together all the strands of your argument in a concise way. It should refer back to the essay. You can raise any further lines of enquiry that your essay might have opened up. Do not introduce new arguments about the topic in the conclusion. The conclusion should not just be the final section of the main body of your essay.

Chapter 7 Constructing an Argument

If your essay is to succeed it is vital that you construct a good argument. But what is a good argument? Just how do you go about constructing a good argument?

A good argument is more than just presenting information. Just presenting information is not enough to score a good mark. Including biographies of composers, band history or general historical background, will not help you score a good mark. The description of a piece, including technical details will score marks. However, even this is not enough to score a high mark.

7.1. What makes a good argument?

To have a good argument your essay needs to contain:

- an idea that you want to show is true or false
- discussion of the evidence for and against the idea being true or false
- a conclusion.

As you are writing an essay about music the evidence will mainly be taken from specific pieces of music. This means when you discuss the music you will be using your analysis as evidence in an argument. You will not be just describing the music.

7.2. The question: Debussy and gamelan music

The best way to show how to construct an argument is by looking in more detail at one of the questions you have already thought about. This question was discussed in 3.4.

The question is:

To what extent is Debussy's piano music influenced by gamelan music?

In the following section there are two examples of an argument about this question. The two arguments have different structures and therefore present their arguments in different ways. By comparing them you will be able to see what kind of structure is used in a very good essay.

7.3. Debussy and gamelan music, answer structure 1

The essay consists of these sections.

1. A biography of Debussy, including a survey of all his piano music.

2. A description of gamelan music: where it originated, the social context, the instruments.
3. Discussion of examples of gamelan music.
4. Discussion of Debussy's music, showing how features of his music are similar to gamelan music.
5. A conclusion saying that Debussy's piano music was influenced by gamelan music, and mentioning that other writers agree with this statement.

STOP AND THINK 6: Assess answer structure 1

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of this structure. First, make a list of the five main strengths of this argument.

Answer

1. Demonstrates knowledge of the subject. Debussy's music is covered as is gamelan music. The historical context of both types of music is covered.
2. Shows that appropriate research has been carried out.
3. Answers the question, as it discusses Debussy and his piano music. Gamelan music and its relationship to Debussy's piano music is also discussed.
4. Shows an awareness of what other writers think.
5. Has a conclusion.

This is far from being a bad structure, as the points above show. But I hope you noticed some weaknesses as well. Now make a list of the five main weaknesses of this argument.

Answer

1. Does not discuss the music of Debussy early enough. The music of Debussy is the subject of the essay. The music of Debussy should therefore be discussed early in the essay.
2. Does not devote enough space to analysing examples of Debussy's music.
3. The conclusion is that the piano music of Debussy is influenced by gamelan music. The argument relies too much on what other writers think as evidence for the conclusion. This is because there is no other evidence presented to prove that the music of Debussy was influenced by gamelan music. The argument shows similarities between the two types of music. However, this is by itself not enough to show that one influenced the other.
4. The introductory section is too long with, for example, too much space given to a biography of Debussy.
5. The argument is very basic. The material is presented in a rather predictable way.

Can you think of any ways in which this argument could be improved?

7.4. Debussy and gamelan music: answer structure 2

1. An introduction that summarises what other writers have written about the topic. Also summarises the relationship between the ideas of other writers and your own ideas. Explains why the subject is significant and what specific pieces of music you are going to discuss. Summarises how you carried out the research.
2. The main body of the essay includes the following.
 - a) Analysis of short examples from the pieces of music specified in the introduction.
 - b) Identification of the features of the music that you are going to use as evidence for the influence of gamelan music on Debussy.
 - c) Discussion of examples from gamelan music that demonstrate the similarities to Debussy's music.
 - d) Evidence that Debussy came into contact with gamelan music. This evidence will not be pieces of music but documents such as letters, concert programmes etc.
 - e) Presentation of evidence that the musical features discussed only appeared in Debussy's music after he came into contact with gamelan music.
 - f) An argument that the features identified are unusual enough to be attributed to influence and not just similarity.
 - g) More discussion of musical examples to expand on the musical issues raised and to explore the relevant techniques in more detail.
3. A conclusion

The conclusion summarises the argument for Debussy's piano music being influenced by gamelan music. The conclusion identifies what further research into the subject could be carried out.

STOP AND THINK 7: Assess answer structure 2

What are the five main strengths of this argument?

Answer

1. Gets quickly into discussion of the music. There will be a discussion of a short example of music on page 1 or 2 at the latest. The main body of the essay begins with a discussion of an example from Debussy's piano music.
2. Has plenty of scope for including analysis of music. The music analysis is used as evidence in an argument. The music is not just described.
3. Has an in-depth argument that shows not just similarity but the makes a case for influence.
4. Demonstrates knowledge of the historical context, but with the right amount of space devoted to this.
5. Demonstrates knowledge of secondary sources (see 6.3.) but does not rely too much on them.

CHECKPOINT 4: ONE REALLY BIG THING TO REMEMBER

It is important to realise that the more quickly you start to discuss the music the better. The one big thing you can do to help give your essay a good structure is to use the "music on page 1 or 2 rule".

The music on page 1 or 2 rule: the most important point in this guide!

The "music on page 1 or 2 rule" is -

You should have an analysis of a short example of music on page 1 or 2 of the main body of your essay.

What this means is that after the introduction you should quickly start analysing the music. Using the "music on page 1 or 2 rule" means that your essay has a very good chance of starting to score marks immediately after the introduction.

7.5. Answer structure 2: weaknesses

Though there may be weaknesses in the finished essay it is difficult to see any weaknesses in the overall structure.

Chapter 8 Making a Plan

Your essay plan should include a plan of the structure of the argument. The structure outlined in 7.4. provides a good model. After you have made a plan you can start to write the final draft of your essay.

This guide ends with a final checklist for your essay. You should work through this checklist when you have finished the first draft of your essay.

8.1. Making a plan: 6 point checklist

1. Decide on a topic.
2. Decide what your argument is going to be.
3. Design a question.
4. Decide what evidence your argument will be based on. This will be mainly scores of the specific pieces of music you are going to analyse in the main body of your essay.
5. Decide what short extracts from the scores you are going to analyse and paste into the main body of your essay.
6. Plan the structure of your essay making sure you use the “music on page 1 or 2 rule”, and that all the points you make are illustrated with music examples. These examples will mostly be short extracts from the scores you are using as evidence.

8.2. First draft: 3 point checklist

1. Have you used the “music on page 1 or 2 rule”?

If not there is something wrong with the structure of your essay and you will need to change it.

2. Are all your statements about the music illustrated with examples?
3. Is most of your essay devoted to analysing specific pieces of music?

Chapter 9 Final Checklist for your Essay

This chapter contains a checklist for you to work through when you have completed the first draft of your essay. There are also actions to take if you find something is wrong. You can use this checklist again once you have completed your essay.

1. The introduction

Does it explain why the topic is important enough to be worth writing about?

Action: Revise using “This topic is significant because...” and giving reasons.

Does it make references to the ideas of other writers, showing how those ideas relate to your own?

Action: Add some comments about how your ideas relate to the ideas of other writers.

Does the introduction include any of the banned elements identified in Chapter 4?

Action: Remove the banned elements completely.

2. The abstract

Does the abstract state the question?

Action: Make sure the abstract states the question. The question must be exactly the same as in other places in your essay.

Does the abstract state how you carried out your research?

Action: Revise to make sure you give specific details about how you carried out your research.

Does the abstract state a conclusion?

Action: Write a clear summary of the conclusion you arrived at at the end of your essay.

3. Is every point you make in your analysis of the music illustrated with an example?

Action: Insert more music examples until all the points you have made about the music are illustrated with examples.

4. Have you used the “music on page 1 or 2 rule”?

Action: Review the structure of your essay to start discussing the music on page 1 or 2 of the main body of your essay.

5. Have you included any of the banned elements identified in Chapter 4?

Action: Remove the banned elements completely.

6. Are all music examples pasted into the main body of your essay?

Action: Paste all music examples into the main body of your essay.

7. Do all music examples have clefs, key signatures, time signatures and instrument names, including the identification of any transposing instruments?

Action: Revise all examples to include clefs, key signatures, time signatures and instrument names, including the identification of any transposing instruments. If necessary make hand written additions to the examples.

8. Does every music example contain a reference to where the example is in the piece?

Action: Add a reference to each example showing where it is in the piece.

9. Is all terminology appropriate to the period of the music being discussed?

Action: Check all terms for historical appropriateness and replace them if they are not right.

10. Is there a title page?

Action: Add a title page, using the format specified by your examining body.

11. Is there a plagiarism (or anti plagiarism) statement?

Action: Include a plagiarism statement if one is required and make sure that you have signed it.

12. Have you included a word count?

Action: Insert a word count where appropriate, probably on the title page.

13. Is your essay over the word limit?

Action: Revise so that your essay keeps to the word limit.

14. Have you included page numbers?

Action: Add page numbers.

15. Have you included references for all quotations used?

Action: Add references for all the quotations you have used, using your chosen recognised referencing system such as the Harvard or Chicago systems.

16. Are all statements of fact supported by a reference?

Action: Add a reference to support every statement of fact. This can be done as one reference for a number of ideas, provided they are from the same source.

17. Have you included a bibliography?

Action: Add a bibliography consisting of all the sources referred to in your essay.

18. Do all references to internet sources have access dates?

Action: Add an access date for every internet source you have used.

19. Have you used the correct font, line spacing and formatting of paragraphs?

Action: Make sure you have followed your examining board's instructions.

20. Have you included comment boxes in the margins?

Action: These must be completely removed as they are not acceptable in an academic essay. If they are included you will lose marks because of it.

21. Is the question exactly the same each time it appears?

Action: Check each appearance of the question and make sure it is exactly the same each time.

22. The conclusion

Does the conclusion contain references to ideas in the main body of the essay?

Action: Add references in the conclusion to earlier in the essay, e.g. to discussion of music examples.

Does the conclusion just repeat the introduction?

Action: Revise the conclusion and if necessary, the introduction. See section 6.1., which is about the introduction. The conclusion and the introduction should perform quite different functions.

Does the conclusion bring in new ideas and arguments?

Action: Revise to remove new ideas and arguments as these will not be developed. However, it is a good idea to mention any further lines of enquiry which have been identified in your essay.

9.1. Concluding comments

I hope you will find this guide useful as you write your music essay. Perhaps some of the recommendations have surprised you. If this is the case I hope you have found the reasons for all the recommendations convincing. It now only remains for me to wish you every success with writing your essay. The experience should be a rewarding one, and there is more chance this will happen if you feel confident about what you are doing. If anything, I hope this guide will make you feel more confident about the challenging task you have ahead.

9.2. More to read on www.theoryofmusic.eu

As mentioned in 6.6.1., if you would like to read in more detail about how to write about music there are some free resources available on www.theoryofmusic.eu.

1. Writing about instrument music.

www.theoryofmusic.wordpress.com/2008/06/14/writing-about-music-instrumental/

2. Writing about opera.

www.theoryofmusic.wordpress.com/2007/11/03/writing-about-music-opera-tutorial-notes/

THE END