

Course Intro Essay

All information for this assignment is also available online: <https://drjonesmusic.me/course-intro-essay-fall-2017/>

This essay will be your first piece of formal writing in Music 101. It serves as an introduction to the class and will get you thinking about your relationship with course material. It will be completed in several steps, and we'll be spending a large chunk of time on this assignment for a couple reasons:

1. It's the first assignment of the semester (or maybe of your college career!)—this is an opportunity for you to understand the expectations, standards, and processes of this class, so there will be many steps along the way to help you do the best you can.
2. This assignment will familiarize you with another aspect of the class website that will feature more substantially in another assignment later in the semester.
3. Good writing takes time, attention, and effort. There will be at least 4 opportunities for feedback on your writing and writing process over the course of this assignment.

Assignments given later in the semester will not receive as much feedback as this assignment—you are expected to build upon and adapt the feedback and guidance from this essay in subsequent assignments. This is how you improve as a writer: consciously incorporating skills and tools in new situations.

Project Timeline and Due Dates

	Section J2 (Tuesdays)	Section C3A (Wednesdays)
In-class brainstorming, group discussion, and first draft of one paragraph	8/29	8/30
Essay prompt distributed and discussed	9/5	9/6
First draft due <u>via email</u>	9/19	9/20
First draft returned with instructor comments in class	9/26	9/27
Final draft due <u>in class with revision reflection</u>	10/3	10/4
Final draft returned with instructor comments in class	10/10	10/11
Post one revised paragraph <u>to section website</u>	10/15	10/15
Constructive criticism discussion period on section website	10/17-23	10/17-23

Late assignments

If you know that you will be absent, make arrangements to submit your work *before* it is due—send it via email, send it to class with a friend, or drop it off in my mailbox.

First drafts are not graded, and late drafts will not be accepted. The only “punishment” for not submitting a first draft on time is, however, quite severe—you will not receive any feedback that would help you craft a stronger final draft, and this means that your final grade will likely suffer, not only on this assignment but on future assignments as well, which expect you to incorporate and build upon your previous work.

Final drafts will lose 1 point per day, up to 14 days. After that, late assignments will not be accepted. Assignments are marked as “submitted” the day that I receive them, whether as a hard copy placed in my mailbox in the Music Department office or the date stamp on an email. If a final draft is submitted via email but does not follow the submission requirements below, I will not accept it and it is still late until it is properly submitted.

Formatting and submission

Every instructor has different requirements for what the essay you produce looks like. This is because different disciplines have different standards and expectations. One of the things you learn by doing the scholarly work of different disciplines is how to communicate like a scientist does to other scientists, or how a sociologist does to other sociologists, or how a musicologist does to other musicologists. Here are the expectations for all writing in Mu 101—practice them on this essay so they become a habit for all essay-format (non-blog) writing this semester:

- Basics: 12-point font, double spaced, 1” margins, no extra blank lines between paragraphs, indent (tab) the first line of each paragraph
- Do not include a heading – your name and section number will be included in the name of the file you email or written on the rubric attached to your hard copy submission
- Naming files for email submission: LastName, FirstInitial. – Assignment – draft version (example: Jones, A. – Course Intro Essay – first draft)
- Acceptable file formats for email submission: attach as .doc, .docx, or .pdf only. I will not accept a file that is a Google Drive, OneDrive, or other cloud service link. You must attach your essay directly to the email you send to me.

First draft, stapled in order: 1. Rubric, 2. Draft

Final draft, stapled in order: 1. Rubric, 2. Revision reflection, 3. First draft with graded rubric, 4. Final draft

The revision reflection is a one-page essay in which you explain how you thought about and incorporated feedback into this draft. In your reflection, you must answer these two questions: 1) what specifically did you do differently for this version of the essay, and 2) what have you learned about yourself as a writer in the process? Even if you did not turn in a first draft, you can (and must) still complete this portion of the assignment. This reflection is required and I will not grade your essay without it.

Prompt

Write a well-crafted 3-page essay in which you explore your thoughts about this course and its content based on the four prompt questions below. Your essay should express a coherent story about you, the budding musicological scholar, as you begin your journey in Mu 101 in the fall of 2017.

1. What do you think the most important thing is when it comes to determining what a piece of music means?
2. Why do you think you'll be a good musicologist? What aspects of learning about music do you think will be difficult for you?
3. What aspect of the course/calendar are you most looking forward to? What aspect of the course/calendar are you least looking forward to/are worried about?
4. What's the point of musicology? Or, why bother learning to think deeply about music at all?

All of these prompt questions *could* be answered with simple one- or two-word answers—but that's not the point of writing an essay! The purpose of an essay is to explain, to show your thought process, and to persuade the reader to understand how you approach a topic. No two-word answer can capture your whole line of thought!

You can take these questions in a lot of different directions—they're open-ended and broadly framed on purpose. Think especially about your identity (who you are in terms of personality, past experiences, or cultural/social groups), your career (your past academic challenges, your academic and professional goals, your strengths), and how both of those inform, relate to, and will draw up on your experience in Mu 101.

What am I looking for? Or, what makes for a successful essay in Mu 101?

You may organize essays in this class however you like. You won't see any formulaic 5-paragraph essay topics in this course (although you can certainly write one of those if that's comfortable for you!). The important thing is that your essay displays the features of good writing, and note that these are the same parameters outlined in the grading rubric:

Good writing contains interesting ideas. This is the most important aspect of good writing—are you saying something new, exciting, provocative, and that's not predictable?

Good writing expresses those ideas clearly. Clarity is one of the most difficult things to master as a writer—have you stated your ideas in such a way that the reader understands where you are coming from, has all the pieces, and receives information in a logical order? This means supporting your ideas with specific, vivid examples—musical details from a specific song, an anecdote or brief story, or a detail that brings your idea to life and grounds it in reality.

Good writing is engaging. The most enjoyable things to read feel like a conversation between the reader and the author—as you read, you have a sense of the person writing, their sense of humor, their personality, and the things that make them unique, and this makes you want to keep reading. This comes through in their word choice, their style, how they convey their ideas (e.g., what imagery, metaphors, similes they choose to use), and the artfulness of their presentation.

Sound a little vague? That's because we're talking about the *art* of writing, and art, as you know (even after only a week or two in this class!) is subjective.

Good writing follows through. Building on the concept that good writing expresses interesting ideas in a conversational manner, keep in mind that good writing also impels the reader to keep thinking about the subject in a new way. Your essay can do this by answering questions like: "Why does it matter?," "So what?," "What happens next?," or "How does this relate to the world or the bigger picture?" Be aware of the implicit questions your writing raises, and don't just leave them hanging there, unanswered.

Good writing isn't repetitive. This is the trickiest thing for many young writers coming out of high school! We're often taught to reuse whole phrases from the introduction to form topic sentences or to restate the introduction as the conclusion of our essays, for example. Practical, formulaic, easy to teach—but BORING! Uninspired! Unexciting! Another trap is redundancy, or saying the same thing with different words (see what I did there?). As you reread your drafts, watch out for the habit of saying the same idea multiple times or in multiple places in your essay—pick the strongest version and get rid of the others!

Some writing techniques and tips:

There are more links to tips, descriptions, and guidance for effective writing on the class website.

Read the assignment prompt. Begin every assignment by reading the essay prompt all the way through, making sure that you understand everything that's expected of you. Return to this step throughout the writing process—it's your job to make sure that you're fulfilling the assignment requirements!

Writing takes time. Do a little bit each day. Ten minutes a day over the course of a week is more effective than an hour crammed in the night before a due date. Give yourself time to mess up and recover. Schedule time in your calendar to just write without distractions—no friends, no music, no TV, no Internet, no phone, no multitasking.

Brainstorm. List words or short phrases that pop into your mind as you think about the topic. Set a timer (5-10 minutes is usually good) and stop when it goes off. Reread your list and try to notice (or mark) any patterns or themes that emerge. If nothing jumps out, repeat (this can be done immediately or a few hours later). Similar ideas should end up in the same paragraph in your essay, or closely related ideas can help your essay flow naturally from one paragraph to another. "Themes" are the underlying concepts that unite all or many of your ideas—think of them as the hidden purpose behind everything you write. Once you've figured out what theme is really motivating your ideas, you can use it to make sure your essay is cohesive. You can brainstorm at any time in the writing process, not just at the beginning! Targeted brainstorming is a good technique when revising.

Write. Everyone develops a different writing process—it may be done by hand, at a computer, one paragraph at a time, stream of consciousness (and then editing into paragraphs), etc. Here are some general tips:

1. The introduction is usually a bad place to start. You don't know what you're going to write about until you start writing, but the intro requires you to know what you're about to write—it's a recipe for writer's block!
2. Pick an idea from your brainstorming and simply start writing. Don't edit, don't second guess, just get your ideas on paper (or on the screen). You'll often find that you can get into a "groove" if you just keep writing (10 minutes is a good goal if you're using a timer) with no distractions (put the phone away, turn music off, find a quiet space).
3. After you've written, take the night off! Reread what you've written the next day. It's important to give yourself distance from what you've written so you can approach it a little more objectively, and you'll also find that a good night's sleep can help you figure out new things to say, better ways to phrase an idea, or see how good (or weak) your previous work was.
4. Try putting your sentences (or even whole paragraphs!) in different orders—the flow of how your ideas is presented is important and can change the entire scope of an essay. Oftentimes the order that we come up with ideas isn't the best order for sharing them with a reader.
5. Write your introduction last. Once you've figured out what your essay says, it's easier to welcome a reader into it.
6. Read your essay or sections of it out loud. Imagine that you're speaking to someone as you do so. It's easier to notice awkward grammar, usage, or word order when you have to say it out loud.
7. Let someone else read your essay and tell you what they liked about it and something they still don't understand after reading it. Fix whatever is unclear—if one reader had difficulty understanding your wording, logic, or point, someone else probably will, too!
8. Use the campus Writing Center. They're there to help you expand and deepen your skills as a writer so that you feel more confident about this assignment and more prepared for future assignments.
9. Don't print at the last minute. Technology can be problematic, and there's not always a stapler handy when you need it.
10. Reread the essay prompt and rubric to grade yourself before you turn anything in.