

Informal Writing in Mu 101

Mu 101 is a Writing Intensive course, which means that each student is required by the university to submit and revise at least 10 pages of writing during the term. Every writing intensive class is different, and the topics of writing in this class are reflective, creative, and open-ended—there will be many opportunities to explore topics familiar and unfamiliar to you as well as express yourself and your interests. This is not a research-based course (no prompts are research papers), although there will be instances in which you will do guided investigating of appropriate outside sources to support our in-class activities. The purpose of writing in this course is to deepen your understanding of music by really, really, *really* thinking about it: making connections between different ideas, putting yourself in other people's shoes, listening, describing, comparing, contrasting, noticing details, questioning your assumptions, and understanding your role in the musical experiences we come across in this class.

I have three goals for your writing in Mu 101:

- **That you improve as a writer.** This may mean that you improve your skills, that you increase your confidence, or that you learn to write in new styles and new ways.
- **That you have an epiphany.** I want you to have a joyful, putting-the-pieces-together, “aha!” moment about something as a direct result of what you do this course.
- **That you do something I could not have anticipated.** I cannot know what this is, and that excites me about this process.

What will we do to make these goals happen?

Improving at any skill requires *intentional practice*—repetition that's purposeful and guided. You'll practice the skills of writing in many ways in this class: in-class discussions, online discussion forum writing, quick essays in class. You'll be guided in many ways: reading and discussing examples of excellent writing, interaction from peers in online discussion forums, peer critique sessions, and feedback from the instructor.

You'll write many more words in this class than will be directly graded, or even read, by me—this is intentional. Writing skills are like muscles; the more you flex them the stronger, more fluid, and more comfortable they become. All writing is teaching: we teach ourselves what we can do, we teach ourselves how we think, we teach ourselves what we don't know—and at the same time we teach others about who we are, what we know, and what matters to us. The learning will happen as you continue to read, discuss, and write.

I have planned several activities that will be part of your developing writing practice, as outlined here. Although this list is not exhaustive, it is an outline of what you can expect to do this term and the range of things you'll do in Mu 101. Everything we do in this course is a valuable part of your growth as a writer, but not every student has the same strengths, interests, work habits, or time constraints. Therefore, some of these activities take place in class, while others can be completed asynchronously (at your own pace and at whatever time works for you). These activities allow you to practice your writing—while engaging deeply with music—in many ways, drawing upon your various strengths and allowing you to explore new skills, techniques, and methods of writing:

| Date | Topic | Format |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Jan 27-Feb 2 | Myths, Misconceptions, and Learning | Online discussion forum |
| M Jan 27 / W Jan 29 | Good writing and good reading | In-class reading and discussion |
| Feb 3-Feb 9 | Music and the brain | Online discussion forum |
| M Feb 3 / W Feb 5 | Good writing: The power of nouns and the first paragraph | In-class reading and discussion |
| Feb 10-Feb 16 | Musical educations and the educations of music | Online discussion forum |
| M Feb 10 / W Feb 12 | Good writing: Why write? | In-class reading and discussion |
| Feb 17-23 | Instruments and voice types | Online discussion forum |
| Feb 24-Mar 1 | Music and gender | Online discussion forum |
| Mar 2-8 | Music and disability | Online discussion forum |
| M Mar 2 / W Mar 4 | Aesthetics | In-class student-led discussion circle |
| Mar 9-15 | The ethos of 2020 | Online discussion forum |
| Mar 16-22 | Peer critique | Student-based feedback on your choice of writing, online |
| M Mar 16 / W Mar 18 | Good writing: The creative process | In-class reading and discussion |
| Mar 23-29 | Musicking | Online discussion forum |
| Mar 30-Apr 5 | Sound migration | Online discussion forum |
| Apr 6-19 | Peer critique | Student-based feedback on your choice of writings, online |
| M Apr 6 / T (not W) Apr 7 | Living classical musicians | In-class student-led discussion circle |
| Apr 20-26 | Music and economics | Online discussion forum |
| M Apr 20 / W Apr 22 | The listening experience | In-class guided full-length essay |
| M Apr 20 / W Apr 22 | Developing grading criteria for Portfolios | In-class discussion |
| Apr 27-May 3 | Voyager 2020 | Online discussion forum |
| May 4-10 | Music and violence | Online discussion forum |
| M May 11 / W May 13 | Portfolio (revision of previous writings) and Reflection 3 | Individual writing (due in class) |
| M May 18 / W May 20 | TBD | In-class student-led discussion circle |

Although not listed in the calendar above, you can expect that nine (9) classes will begin with a 7-minute essay based on the reading assigned for the day. These essays cannot be made up if you are late or absent.

Activity descriptions

Aside from in-class reading/discussion led by the instructor, the other activities on this list may require further explanation as to what they entail. Here is a brief explanation of each:

Online discussion forums (student-to-student interaction)

Due dates (online): Weekly, except Mar 16-22 and Apr 6-19. There are 12 online discussions in total, each beginning on a Monday at 12:01am and ending the following Sunday at 11:59pm. The final discussion takes place May 4-10.

Creating online content and participating in an online discussion forum (a blog) are easy ways for people on the Internet to share ideas, engage with communities of people with common interests, and do so from the comfort of any location—it's the cliché of an interconnected global world in action. Computer literacy and fluency in online fora ("fora" is the plural of "forum") are important skills to have, and practicing the skill of writing in this medium—as both a blog poster and as a forum commenter—is part of being a citizen of the modern world.

Because our class meets once weekly, it can be challenging to stay engaged or keep our course content at the front of your brain. In an ideal learning environment, you should revisit a topic every day in order to build the synapses and recall necessary to internalize and feel ownership of it. These weekly assignments, which you can complete at any time and in any place that you have internet access (at home, while commuting, at the park) require you to think about our materials at least once (but hopefully more!) outside of class. You can come back to these discussions and ideas as many times as you like and learn from each other's ideas.

Online discussion forums will focus on a different topic in the world of music each week, drawing upon areas of interest, experience, and expertise that you have beyond this classroom and allowing you to practice your writing.

These activities will support your growth as a writer by allowing you to practice expressing yourself concisely and clearly in writing, engaging in new ideas, and getting timely feedback in the form of interaction with your peers—which of your ideas are interesting, stated clearly, and timely enough to elicit responses from other classmates? The most effective comments in a discussion forum are brief (only including one or two ideas in a post), clear, supported with examples (like a link to an example of what you're thinking of). Your participation requires that you make three different kinds of posts in each conversation:

- **Add:** Add your own ideas to the conversation, take issue with a claim made by the post's author, and/or share a link to another article/book/blog that the discussion reminds you of (with contextual commentary from you) that adds new depth to the conversation
- **Respond** to questions posed by the blog post/author/another participant and/or take issue with a claim made by another participant
- **Ask** an open-ended question (not yes/no)

In the past, students who've said they got the most enjoyment and value out of these online discussions have been those who visited the discussion multiple times during the week (e.g., posing a question or posting a comment early in the week, and then responding to other students'

ideas later in the week). I do not participate in these discussions, although I read all comments and will “like” those that I think are especially effective and valuable.

In-class student-led discussion circles

Due dates (activity takes place in class): (1) M Mar 2 / W Mar 4; (2) M Apr 6 / T (not W) Apr 7; (3) M May 18 / W May 20. Every student must participate in either Discussion #1 or Discussion #2, and all students must participate in Discussion #3.

On three dates during the year, you will hold a discussion circle on an assigned topic, led entirely by yourselves. A loosely-structured seminar discussion is the typical format of upper-level undergraduate courses as well as all graduate work (masters and doctoral level). The point of a seminar discussion is precisely that: to discuss. In the process of discussing, you are forced to clarify what you think by articulating your ideas in a clear and persuasive manner, and at the same time you learn from the wide array of perspectives and experiences that your peers bring into the conversation. The discussion may organically move to unexpected topics, but the main takeaway from a learning experience like this one is that all of your knowledge and resources are related—there is no such thing as a separation of academic subjects when you really approach a topic critically. Your familiarity with the assigned material, your own initiative in doing additional research, and your engagement with each other is what will make for an effective and enjoyable class.

Before:

- Read any assigned materials (article, guided web-based research)—not just once. Skim for major points, read again closely, define words you’re unfamiliar with, read again, read as much of the linked material as possible, read again, take notes, reflect on it—in other words, do what we do in class on your own.
- Refer to notes you’ve taken in class over the course of the semester, past lecture slides, and previous Online Discussions to make sure you’re correctly understanding as many concepts as possible. Read additional sources as necessary to ensure that you know what you’re talking about with this topic.
- Prepare thoughts, questions, and ideas that you have about the article. Draw upon your other educational experiences, life experiences, or other expertise. Make use of the various brainstorming methods you’ve come across in your other classes.

During: In each discussion, your participation will mean using the same techniques of good conversation that we use in the discussion forums: adding your own ideas, responding to other students, and asking provocative questions. I do not participate in these discussions.

After: I’ll ask you to reflect in writing about how you and others contributed to the discussion.

Peer critique

Due dates (online): Your submissions to be critiqued are due Mar 14 and Apr 4 and will be submitted to the website for your section of Mu 101. The critique periods occur during Mar 16-22 and Apr 6-19. Every student must provide constructive criticism on a minimum of 25* pieces of other students’ writing during the term. I do not participate in these critique sessions.

*If fewer than 25 pieces of writing total are submitted for peer critique in your section of Mu 101, that total lower number will be the requirement. You do not have to critique your own writing, although you may choose to respond to other students' comments!

What about grades?

In the list above, excluding the Portfolio and final discussion (which are required of all students), there are 31 activities that fall into five categories: (1) in-class warm-up essays based on assigned reading, (2) in-class reading and discussions, (3) student-to-student online discussion forums, (4) in-class student-led discussions, and (5) peer critiques. In a perfect world, every student would complete every activity, but we live in the real world and we can be practical about balancing our goals with what is reasonable. Here are my criteria for grading:

- Every student must complete at least one of each kind of activity in the manner described above
- Every student must complete at least two-thirds of all the assignments listed between January 27 and May 10 (i.e., 21 assignments/activities).
- Assignments are due on their due dates and I won't accept late work unless we've discussed it ahead of time (see below).

I will make note of whether or not you submit an assignment according to the criteria (e.g., number and kind of contributions to a discussion, participation during an in-class activity) and will provide you with an updated accounting each week. If you submit more than the minimum requirements, I will add +0.3 points to your overall course grade for each activity (up to 3 points total).

If there is an activity that you know you cannot complete by its due date, request an extension, no explanation necessary—life happens. Please send me an email at least 24 hours before the scheduled due date and set your own new due date. You may do this on up to 3 assignments.

If you are absent for an in-class activity, you may submit a written version of your participation within one week. If you need an extension for this make-up, the same process applies (send me an email telling me your new due date at least 24 hours before it's due).

If there are extenuating circumstances that prevent you from doing either of these, please email me and make an appointment to talk to me during my office hours (Monday 5-6, Wednesday 12-2).

Extra credit

There are two (2) and only two (2) ways to earn extra credit in Mu 101:

- Completing more than the minimum informal writing requirements (see above; +0.3 points each)
- Creating a blog post that responds to additional supplemental readings available (+0.5 points each). Readings and instructions are available here: drjonesmusic.me/qcc-extra-credit-spring-2020