

Guidelines for Writing an Analytical Paper

During the term, you will be asked to write a series of short analytical papers on assigned pieces. These are some suggestions to help you organize your work.

1. Begin by studying the piece as thoroughly and systematically as you can. Take notes, on the score and in prose, as you go. Much of the information you gather will not find its way into the final paper, but you can't know in advance what will work and what will not. Keep an open mind and follow any promising leads.
2. Decide on a central unifying thesis for your essay. You should have a particular point to make: "In this paper, I will show that..." "This piece is most centrally about..." "The most striking feature of this piece is its..." The paper should not be a series of unrelated observations, but a tightly constructed argument in support of some clearly articulated thesis. Everything in the paper should relate to the thesis. Anything not related should be ruthlessly jettisoned.
3. Organize the paper by topic, not by chronology. There is no need to begin your paper by talking about the first measure, then the second measure, and so in. Instead, stick to a topic, and jump around in the piece as necessary to make your point.
4. Provide musical examples to illustrate your points. Normally, these will be photocopied excerpts from the score on which you have written analytical annotations (circles, labels, arrows, etc.).
5. Make use of the technical vocabulary we are developing in the course. These papers are an opportunity to put the new tools to use.
6. These paper should represent your own, original work. Cite your sources in the proper way. If you get an idea from a published article or book or from any other source, provide a footnote.