

Writing Guidelines:

- 1) Write a clear thesis that either explicitly or implicitly contains not only a good, clear idea but how the idea will be unfolded in the course of your work.
- 2) The body of the paper should clearly reflect the explicit or implicit structure of your thesis. Avoid a “blow-by-blow” account of details; have details serve an unfolding idea latent or explicit in the thesis.
- 3) Make sure that your language is clear and perfect on the sentence level. Use language that you would speak in an every day academic environment. Avoid lame “to be” verbs whenever possible; avoid flowery inversions, such as “Knowledge about the deep middleground of Schubert’s ‘Die Stadt’ is what interests me.” Avoid the passive voice whenever possible. (“A lovely song was composed by Schubert”).
- 4) Make sure that your paragraphs are coherent; make sure that groups of paragraphs are coherent; make sure that there is a large-scale coherence to the essay as a whole.
- 5) Write an interesting conclusion that does more than reiterate a thesis or introduction.
- 6) The main rhetorical unit of language should be: a) introduction to an idea, b) and idea and / or musical example, c) comment on the example. This ternary structure can, of course, be shortened from time to time, and it can be extended. For example, the comment on one musical example can become the introduction to the next (like the resolution of one dissonance becoming the preparation for another).
- 7) Musical examples must be clearly labeled with a short tag, such as “Example 1: mm. 1-7 of Schubert’s “Die Stadt”. Quadruple spaces separate your introductory prose from the Example tag, and quadruple spaces separate your example tag from the example itself.
- 8) Make sure that all musical examples are as perfect as you can possibly make them. Make sure to have measure numbers, correct staves, braces, instrument names. If you use notation software, make sure that accidentals don’t collide with barlines, noteheads, stems, etc.
- 9) Make sure that musical examples reflect a clear distinction between what a composer has written and what you are interpreting.
- 10) Examples should be incorporated directly into your paper; do not list examples separately at the end of your paper.
- 11) Include page numbers; double-space all written work; proofread your work (see why?); don’t just rely on spellchecks. They will miss: “He book by Heine is fool.” Staple papers with a staple in the upper left-hand corner.
- 12) Papers must incorporate scholarship accurately. Use informal, internal documentation. Short quotes (10 lines or less) are incorporated directly into your language; they are set-off with double quotes. Use single quotes ONLY for quotes within quotes. For corrections or interpellations necessary for quotes to mesh with your language use brackets. Use long quotes very sparingly. They are indented, double-spaced, with NO quotation marks.
- 13) Make sure that all documentation is accurate. Nothing undermines your work as much as a reader going to a source and not finding something you have said is there.
- 14) Use footnotes or endnotes for more full versions of informal documentation. Use footnotes or endnotes, as well, for parenthetical observations that you find important but which would interrupt the flow of your paper if they were incorporated directly.
- 15) Before final editing, read your work aloud and make sure it sounds good and that your “voice” is audible.
- 16) As you are writing, maintain a rigorous system of backups
- 17) Make sure you have at least two different plans for printing in case one fails.
- 18) The final paper should be the result of pre-writing, a draft that fleshes out all details of a thesis without particular regard for redundancy; an edited that draft that omits the effects of redundancy and achieves appropriate emphasis on large-scale portions of your argument, a penultimate draft that is lean and works on all levels with everything present and checked with a perfect sense of proportion, a final draft with last minute corrections, fine-tuning of thesis utterances across the work, final work on the introduction and conclusion with proofreading, the final printed paper with appropriate backup.