

**University of Central Florida
Department of Music**

**MUH 3211 Music History & Literature I
Program Notes Style Guide
Version 042413**

This style guide is provided to help you with general tips on writing more effectively, conventions of writing about music, and common writing errors and solutions.

The First and Last Rule of Effective Writing

Know the readers for whom you are writing. Write to their educational level, interests, and sophistication. When writing imagine you are communicating directly with your readers.

General Tips

1. Writing is a skill that is developed with practice much as playing your instrument is a skill developed with practice. To perform really well you must practice your instrument regularly; to write really well you must practice writing regularly.
2. A style manual is helpful. One of the classic general style manuals is *The Elements of Style* by Strunk & White. It is brief, inexpensive, and enormously helpful.
3. *Writing about Music: A Style Sheet*, 2nd ed. By D. Kern Holoman is an excellent detailed style manual specific to music writing conventions. It is available in the UCF library in hard copy and also electronically.
4. The University Writing Center exists solely to help students with their writing. Visit <http://uwc.cah.ucf.edu/> for more information.
5. Writing well is a process that takes time and effort.
 - a. Write—Proofread—Revise—Read aloud—Revise. Repeat as necessary.
 - b. It is generally better to write in third person. Use first and second person sparingly if at all.
 - c. Scrutinize every word you write asking is it the right word; does it help convey your meaning; is it necessary? Chop away unnecessary words to reveal a clean, flowing prose in the same way a sculptor chips away unnecessary stone to reveal the statue within the stone. Be merciless in eliminating superfluous words.
 - d. Use spell check, but remember that spell check only tells you if a word is spelled correctly, not whether it is the right word.
 - e. Make your first draft with plenty of time to revise and rewrite. Don't wait until the last minute to start your first draft.

- f. Have someone else read your program notes aloud to you, reading exactly what you have written. Does it make sense and is it clear? If not, revise.

Conventions for Writing about Music

1. Program notes should be in performance order.
2. Programs should include composer birth and death dates.
3. Separate paragraphs either by indenting or double spacing but not both.
4. Commas and periods go inside quotation marks. All other punctuation marks go outside quotes.
5. Modern usage is only one space, not two, after periods, colons, etc.
6. Italicize titles of compositions and most foreign words or terms. Use quotation marks for names of songs within a larger composition.
7. Use printers' quotes and apostrophes.
8. Use headers and footers to put your name and page number on every page except the first page.

Common Errors

1. Make certain you are using the correct word. Look it up if you have any doubt. Using a similar-sounding but contextually inappropriate word can be embarrassing!
2. Avoid ending a sentence with a preposition.
3. Make certain subject and verb agree in number, case, and gender.
4. Make certain pronouns agree with antecedent nouns in number and gender.
5. Make certain it is clear which noun is the antecedent of a pronoun.
6. Avoid
 - a. colloquial or trite words or words that have been so overused they have lost all meaning; e.g., "awesome," "interesting," "great," etc.
 - b. personal references
 - c. cute or clever expressions
 - d. rhetorical questions
7. Be careful when using metaphors or similes to ensure that they are clear, meaningful, and appropriate.

Finally, you may ignore any and all of these rules after you have been awarded your first Pulitzer Prize for Literature.