

Incorporating music examples

How to incorporate music examples into your writing

Music writing tasks will often require you to illustrate and support your arguments and ideas with examples from musical scores. The careful selection of relevant music examples will help to illustrate your points clearly and succinctly, and enhance the quality of your work.

In deciding when to use a music example in your essay, keep in mind that it should be integral to your argument.

It is essential that you **discuss** the example in the body of your text and make clear exactly what point it illustrates. It is not sufficient merely to include the example and leave the reader to draw their own conclusions (See the **Sample Student Essay**).

Presentation of music examples

- Choose the amount of music to be included in examples carefully; don't simply include scores of entire works. At the same time, you need to include enough of the excerpt to create a context for the section you discuss [See **A**].
- Each example should be placed, wherever possible, immediately following the paragraph in which it is discussed. Include the example in the body of the essay rather than in an Appendix at the end [See **B**].
- Where a larger excerpt is used (for example more than a whole page of a score), it may be more appropriate to include the example in an Appendix at the end of your essay.
- Include clefs, key and time signatures, instrumentation and bar numbers [See **D**].
- It is helpful to annotate the examples in order to demonstrate clearly the particular features of the music being discussed [See **D**].

Labelling music examples

Each example should be numbered so that it can be easily referred to in the text; e.g. 'Figure 1', etc. [See **C**].

Your label should also give the composer's name, the title of the work, the movement, if appropriate, and the bar numbers.

All labels should end with a footnote giving the source of the example.

- Labels for musical examples should go above the excerpt. [See **C**].
- Your use of labels should be consistent throughout your writing.

Sample student essay

A Monteverdi also used ornamentation to make his works more expressive. Caccini had already published *Le nuove musiche*, advocating, amongst other things, the use of ornamentation to better convey the meaning of the text, rather than to demonstrate the singer's ability.¹ Monteverdi, however, went further, specifying exactly how his music could be ornamented.

B In *Possente spirto*, from Act III of *Orfeo*, Monteverdi wrote two vocal lines, one with no ornamentation and the other highly decorated (Figure 1). This innovation is noteworthy in that it prevents the music from being rendered less expressive by virtuoso singers wanting to display their skill with little regard for the text.

C Figure 1: *Possente Spirto* from *Orfeo*, Act III, Bars 160-165²



¹ Burkholder, *et al* 312.

² Claudio Monteverdi, *L'Orfeo: favola in musica*, ed. Denis Stevens (Borough Green, Sevenoaks, Kent : Novello, 1968) 80.

Sourcing music examples

- As a rule, it is better to take your examples from complete scores or collected editions, rather than using the examples in books or articles. If you use an example from a secondary source, make sure you cite the source in a footnote.
- Footnoting of music examples should be consistent with your chosen citation style. See the *Researching Music* website (in **Further Resources**) for information about citation styles.

Alternatives to music examples

- Sometimes a diagram or chart may be more convenient than a few bars of music, such as when noting the changes of key in a movement or outlining the structure of a work. The table below, taken from a student's thesis¹, is preceded by a discussion on the use of particular rhythmic motive in a composer's work:

Table 3: "Havanaise"

Section	Bars	Key	Effects
Intro	1–10	C Major - I	<i>Habañera</i> Rhythm, popular theme
Theme	1-41 (30 bars)	I	Triplets at end of phrases and cross rhythms fragmented <i>habañera</i> rhythm
Interlude	42-47 (6 bars)	I	<i>Habañera</i> rhythm
Var 1	48-78 (30 bars)	I	Fragmented <i>habañera</i> rhythm in acc.
Interlude	79-80 (6 bars)	I	<i>Habañera</i> rhythm, popular theme
Var 2	81-111	I	No <i>Habañera</i> rhythm, melismatic phrases, comprised of triplets
Coda	112-126 (15 bars)	I	<i>Habañera</i> rhythm, some cross rhythms in vocal line

¹ Angeline Brasier, 'Pauline Viardot: Her Music and the Spanish Influence' MA thesis, Melbourne 2000, 65.

Foreign language terms

- Foreign language terms, for example titles of works, should be *italicised*.

Examples;

Caccini had already published *Le nuove musiche*, ...

In *Possente spirto*, from Act III of *Orfeo*, Monteverdi wrote two vocal lines ...

Further Resources

Bellman, J. (2000). *A short guide to writing about music*. New York, N.Y.: Harlow: Longman.

Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (2010). *Researching Music* Retrieved December 10, 2010, from <http://www.music.unimelb.edu.au/research/rm/index.html>

(This site has been designed by the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music as a general introduction for undergraduate students to the resources and tools available to the music researcher. Note: This URL address may be subject to change.)

Wingell, R.J. (2009). *Writing about music: an introductory guide* (4th ed). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall.

Academic Skills