

Writing a Readable Analysis Paper

...that doesn't make your analysis professor wish he were dead, or in Cincinnati

Shun Program Notes

Program notes, or CD liner notes, may be as of yet the closest approximation to analytical writing you have encountered. Therefore you might be tempted to write program notes, instead of analysis. You know the style: *After a short introduction in the lower strings, the oboe enters with a lilting, plaintive melody.*

It's very easy to fall into this style, given its pervasiveness in most of our lives. We go to the symphony and read the program notes; we buy a new CD and read the liner notes; we buy one of Michael Steinberg's books—which are collections of his program notes—and read that.

It gets even trickier given that some of those books may contain information we can use in an analysis paper, thus obliging us to separate out the analytical wheat from the liner-notes chaff.

But analysis isn't program notes. Go through your writing and be on the alert for anything that smacks of a tour-guide approach to the piece. That's what program notes are: they are a verbal roadmap through a piece of music.

Perhaps the clearest way to put it is: *don't point out anything that a reader or listener can ascertain easily by reading the score or listening to a performance/recording, and rformance/r*

manuscripts, as witnessed in critical notes to the Barenreiter Critical Edition Vol. 346F.

Now, I'll admit that I've made up that previous paragraph, but I have been obliged to slog through similar writing on a number of occasions.

Organization is Crucial

Analysis writing is difficult, but good organization will work wonders to make your product

Modern technology has given us music notation programs like Sibelius and Finale, plus word processors. Every music notation program can save a music file as a graphic image, and every word processing program can place graphic images within a body of text. Any halfway-decent word processing program can automate captions for those images as well—and can create a table of contents for your images. The tools are there, and quite easy to learn and to use.

Some General Tips (from past experience with analysis papers...)

1. Decide how you are going to describe measures: are you going to write “measure 4” or “m4”? It doesn’t matter — but be sure to pick something and stick to it.
2. The same holds true for keys and modes: are you going to capitalize “Major” and “Minor” or leave them lowercase? What about hyphens: are you going to write “B-flat” or “B flat”? Or are you going to take the trouble to mix fonts and write “B \flat ”? It doesn’t matter in and of itself, but you need to be consistent.
3. Another consistency issue: abbreviations.

which you've actually consulted and used in your paper. It should not be a list of books and articles that you copied from a Google article and never used. The main reason a bibliography is critical is that you just might present outdated or questionable information from a particular source, and your reader needs to be able to know that it isn't necessarily your mistake.¹

10. Citations and formatting: when you cite a block of text (more than one sentence), format it in a slightly smaller size of the same font as your main text, and indent it by 1 inch in both left and right margins.
