

History of Western Music I - Research Paper Information

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This is a Formal Research Paper. Approximately 6-7 pages with bibliography, use Times Roman, 12 point, double spaced.

Directions:

1. Choose an element from the Baroque Music Period - this can be a nationality, style, genre, composer, specific piece of music, etc.
2. See: <http://courses.music.indiana.edu/m401/M401sareas.html#Baroque> for examples and skim the Baroque chapters in Grout for ideas.
3. Read around in the literature on your subject area or areas--quickly, without taking copious notes (there's time for that later). If a subject involves specific pieces of music (such as Monteverdi's operas Orfeo and Poppea), get familiar with those pieces; if it involves a repertoire (such as trio sonatas), listen to and look at enough examples to have a sense of what the repertoire is like.
4. Select a specific topic based on your interests and the information you are finding. You should select just one or two things to write about, and let go of all the other interesting ideas you have developed along the way. Write down the limits of your topic. You should be able to describe your topic in one to four sentences. If not, you may be trying to do too much in one paper.
5. There are two main kinds of writing in the field of music history: (1) writing that summarizes existing knowledge on a topic, like an encyclopedia article or a passage in a textbook, and (2) writing that states a thesis (a main idea) and presents an argument to support that thesis. Here you must try to come up with something to say about your topic--and again, only one or two things. **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF YOUR PAPER!** You can spend some time on (1) but what makes a research paper different from a "report" is focusing on (2)!
6. After you have hit upon a topic and become familiar with it, you really have to start thinking. You have to figure out what to say about it.
7. After you've decided what you're going to say about the subject, write it out as one sentence. This is the thesis of your essay. A thesis is a one-sentence statement of your main point. It is a full sentence: for example, "Seventeenth-century Italian composers of violin sonatas often imitated the style, ornamentation, and rhetorical gestures of vocal music." It is not a sentence fragment ("The relation between violin music and vocal music in the seventeenth century"). Notice that the sentence fragment doesn't say anything, it only names the topic. The complete sentence says something, something that is specific and can be proven (or disproven).
8. The thesis is often the answer to some question that you have asked about the topic. If you aren't sure yet what the answer will be, but you know what question you would like to ask, start with the question, and the thesis will develop as you try to answer the question.
9. Try to come up with reasons why you believe your thesis. That is, try to find arguments for what you believe. When you have some, write them down in a kind of list.
10. Turn in your Thesis sentence and a brief description of what you are going to write about (your "list") to me in an email with your name, the course name and Thesis in the SUBJECT.

11. At this point, go back to the books, articles, music, and whatever else you are using as sources for your paper. Don't read every word or analyze every note. Instead, look for more reasons to believe your thesis, bits of information that can serve as evidence to support your main point. Jot these down, and note where you found them. You might also keep your eye out for reasons someone might NOT believe your thesis; you will need these later. (And if any of them persuade you, you may want to revise your thesis to account for them. Remember, you're a human being, and human beings reserve the right to change their minds.)
12. Using this new information, revise your list of reasons to believe your thesis. Try to make the order of the list reflect the logical order of your thought. Imagine that you are trying to convince your best friend to believe your thesis: would you start with the most convincing reasons first, or save them for last? Try to find the most persuasive order for making the case that we should all believe your thesis.
13. You are now ready to write the first paragraph of your paper. Copy down your thesis. Then write another sentence that begins something like "I will demonstrate this by arguing that . . ." and then copy down your list of reasons to believe your thesis.
14. Believe it or not, you have just written the first paragraph of your paper! That is, your first paragraph should present your thesis and summarize your argument. Do not "introduce" or "present background" or anything else, you should do that in the second and subsequent paragraphs. After presenting your thesis in the first paragraph, set the stage by summarizing the Baroque Period in general in the next paragraph or two.
15. Take the first reason or the first step in your reasoning in your list (from step 9) and "develop" it. That is, tell us why it argues for your thesis, why you believe it (you may have to make another little list), and so on. That is, try to write a paragraph (or more) to explain what this is and to argue for its truth. Then do the same for the other items on your list. If you've done the initial list correctly, your whole paper will have a logical order to it.
16. You are now at the end of your paper. Now, most people want to summarize their paper at the end. You have already summarized your paper in your first paragraph. Do not do it again at the end. Instead, tell us the significance of what you have said, or tell us what paper remains to be written now that this one is finished. Try to imagine that your reader asks you the killer questions "So what?" and "Who cares?" and missed the significance of what you have said. Answer those questions.
17. Revise for Style and Smoothness, Make Sure the Format is Correct and PROOFREAD!
18. Hand it in - either in hard copy or via email

Due Dates:

Tuesday, October 15 - Research topic (Thesis statement, title and brief description)

Tuesday, December 3 - Questions/description - i.e. "Reasons" (see above) and then turn all of this into an outline.

Friday, December 13 - Final completed paper