

The Preparation of Performance Notes (Program, Critical or Analytical)

Overview

The following guidelines apply to assessed Program Notes, Critical Notes and Analytic Documentation submitted in connection with Honours and Postgraduate recitals.

Program notes are required for performances undertaken in Honours, GradDip and MMusStudies. The notes must include an assessment cover sheet, should be approximately 1500 words in length, and should be written with an informed audience in mind.

Critical notes are required for performances undertaken in the MMus(Perf) and DMA. The notes must include an assessment cover sheet, should be approximately 3000 words in length, and should be written for an expert reader.

Analytic documentation is required for performances undertaken in the PhD by performance and thesis. The notes must include an assessment cover sheet, should be approximately 5000 words in length for each recital, and should be written for an expert research reader.

Submission: Four copies of the notes should be submitted through the Administration office on Level 2, addressed to the Chair of Unit. An electronic copy of the notes should also be emailed to the Chair of Unit.

The submission date for Honours Program Notes is as specified in the course documentation. Higher degree performance notes are to be submitted no later than one week prior to the performance. Notes submitted after a performance will incur an academic penalty and will receive a fail grade if more than a week late.

Chairs of units will distribute the notes to the examination panel prior to the performance, accompanied by a marking guide. One member of the examination panel will collate comments on the notes to provide a final grade and summarise feedback. Feedback will be made available to students following the examination period.

Specific guidelines for each type of performance notes are given below.

Guidelines for Program Notes

Aim

The aim in providing program notes is to stimulate interest in the music, to provide interested readers with a context for informed and intelligent listening, and to provide general information which may enhance the listener's experience of the work. The learning aim is to provide an opportunity for students to understand the context and importance of the works performed and gain practice in writing this specific form of musical document. The notes should be informative, clear, engaging in style, demonstrate and promote understanding, make connections and provide intelligent insights into the music.

Readership

You should carefully consider the readership of your notes and provide something useful to that readership. In general, it is best not to assume the readers have an understanding of detailed technical or historical knowledge of music. Technical terms may be used provided that they are explained or used in such a way that they increase the possibility of understanding the performance. Take care that the writing is in a general, inclusive style and does not use language which would alienate those who are not practitioners or who are new to the style. Notes will usually be read by people with a wide variety of background knowledge. The challenge in writing notes is to cater for this range and provide something of interest to both the well informed listener and the novice, while avoiding being either too patronising or too esoteric.

Heading information

You should provide accurate information about the works performed. You should use full title or genre title, including, as appropriate, keys (use capital letters: "a minor" is confusing; "A Minor" is clear), numbers, opus numbers, relevant catalogue number (K. BWV, etc), nicknames of works (usually in quotation marks in brackets), date of composition (if known) in a separate set of brackets, composer's full name followed by dates in brackets. Under the primary heading you should list all movements, or song titles. Always italicise titles (such as *Winterreise*) but not genre titles which should simply have initial capitals (such as Sonata No. 1). If the opening section is not in the main tempo it is customary to indicate both and separate by a dash (*Adagio - Allegro molto*) although it is not necessary to indicate every tempo change in a movement. Look at the example below, taking note of the format used.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)	Sonata No.9 in A minor for Piano and Violin Op.47 ("Kreutzer") (1803) Adagio sostenuto – Presto Andante con variazioni Presto
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If listing a section from a larger work, such as an aria from an opera, it is usual to use quotation marks (without italics even if the subsection is in another language) and use italics for the main work. Thus:

"Come scoglio" from *Così fan tutte*

There are several acceptable formats for punctuation and abbreviation ("Op." Versus "Opus", etc). Keep punctuation in titles to a minimum and either follow the style above or that given in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Titles should normally be given in their original language. Where the original title is unlikely to be recognised by an English speaking audience and a translated title is in common use, give the original title followed by the translation in parentheses, for example:

Příhody Lišky Bystroušky (The Cunning Little Vixen)

A similar format may be used where the original title is in a non-Roman script (eg Cyrillic, Greek, Hebrew, or Chinese). In these cases a transliteration into Roman script (that is, standard Western European lettering, like this document) may also be given in place of the original script.

Content and style of program notes

Program notes should, as a minimum, give basic historical, and biographical information and may also include cultural, analytical and interpretative information. Give information which will attract the reader's attention and interest, including insightful or provocative quotations by the composer or by a significant critical commentator. It may be interesting to provide polemical statements about the work (eg initial adverse criticism, which has not been borne out by posterity), or significant biographical information which could be said to have had a significant impact on the work.

Make your writing engaging by using wit, metaphor, allusion, irony, etc. If the work has a text or program this should be given, preferably in the performed language and also in translation, where feasible. (Texts and translations are additional to the expected word count for the program notes themselves).

Program notes can be structured in various ways, for instance, some programs are best introduced by a substantial discussion of the research findings or conceptual framework that informs the program, with shorter notes on the individual works. A program made up of many short pieces would also demand a different approach from one consisting of one very substantial work. Nevertheless, the notes on individual works will typically contain the following kinds of information.

1. An initial statement or section which captures something of the overall significance of the work. This should not be just bland praise but should give an indication of what is unique or special about this work. Comments by the composer, by significant musicians, or a comment which, in your view encapsulates something important about the work can help in engaging the reader's interest in the work.
2. Basic facts about dates, places, biographical information and other circumstances of the work's composition, first performance, dedicatee or commissioner, subsequent revisions, etc. It is often useful to refer to works written at the same time or comparable works either by the composer or another composer. These should be related in prose, not point form, and should form an interesting narrative. If possible try and lead the discussion from the "when" and the "where" into broader issues of "how" and "why". For example, where appropriate, include what is known about the motivation for the composition of the work, how it fits into the history of its genre (sonata, symphony, etude, etc), how it relates to other works by the composer, and in what ways it is original (or conventional).
3. Historical and cultural information particularly of a kind which throws light on events or cultural trends which influenced the work's composition.
4. A description of the layout of the work, significant ideas or moments, and analytical observations. In general, this should be understandable by a reader without specialist knowledge, though in some cases, technical terms may be appropriate if they throw significant light on a passage. The aim here is not to give an analysis but to give information which might help a listener's appreciation. Bear in mind that your readers will not have the score in front of them, and that your note will be read by both novices and those who may know the work well. It should cater for both.

5. A concluding remark. This doesn't need to contain a major conclusion or summary but try to bring the note to a logical conclusion and avoid looking as though you have simply run out of space.

Information

Your sources of information will depend on the works being discussed. As a guideline:

- Use recent and up-to-date sources. Even with well known works, knowledge changes as a result of research. You should aim to present the most recent available knowledge on the music. Use *MUSIC INDEX*, *RILM* (<http://www.library.usyd.edu.au/databases/music.html>) and other research tools to locate the most authoritative and current sources. The Conservatorium Library's subject guide for music also has many helpful links and guides for finding information. See: <http://libguides.library.usyd.edu.au/music>.
- Where possible use more than one source. This helps cross check the currency of information and can provide a diversity of views.
- Be careful about dates. Dates of composition may differ from dates of first performance, so be sure you don't confuse these. *The New Grove* has reliable catalogues for many composers and should usually be consulted.
- Don't rely exclusively on CD notes. While these are often written by scholars in the field and are therefore a useful source of information, this cannot be relied upon. Information should be checked against reliable sources. Similarly, Wikipedia may be useful in directing you to other sources for some topics, but do not rely on it directly as this is an un-refereed source.

References and citations

As with any academic writing, you must give the sources of quotations and give credit when making use of the ideas of others. This should be done through footnotes (Chicago style) or in-text references (APA) in the usual way. A bibliography must also be provided. If in doubt about referencing requirements, consult the Conservatorium Assignment Guide, *What's Expected*, at http://www.music.usyd.edu.au/docs/GDE_FSU_whats-expected.pdf

Other resources

Bellman, Jonathan D. *A Short Guide to Writing about Music*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2007.

Cowdery, James R. ed. *How to write about music: the RILM manual of style*. 2nd ed. New York: Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale, 2006.

Wingell, Richard J. *Writing about Music: an introductory guide*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990.

The Chicago Manual of Style. Fifteenth edition. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003.

Conservatorium Assignment Guide, *What's Expected*. See:

http://www.music.usyd.edu.au/docs/GDE_FSU_whats-expected.pdf

Guidelines for Critical Notes

Critical Notes are similar in format to Program Notes (above), but go beyond them in a number of respects.

Aims

As part of a research degree the Critical Notes should be

- well researched: the product of scholarly investigation
- prepared thoughtfully, demonstrating critical thought and the student's insight
- thoroughly documented in the usual ways expected in academic writing.

Critical Notes will document the aims of the performance and its place in your research program, as well as giving a scholarly discussion of the music being performed. This is unlike Program Notes, where the aims are to inform and to engage the interest of the listener. Critical Notes will resemble Program Notes but they will be in more depth and written for an expert reader.

The development of critical notes is integral to the development of your performance as a whole. It is a good idea to start researching your program early in the semester so that your findings can inform your performance decisions. This critical research into the overall theme of your performance should then be encapsulated in the critical notes. The critical notes provide expert readers with a scholarly insight into the performed works. They should be informative, clear, engaging in style, demonstrate and promote understanding, make connections and provide intelligent insights into the music. They should show evidence of research and demonstrate an academic flavour through correct use of academic referencing protocols.

Readership

The readers of the critical notes will normally be instrumental experts in your field. In this form of writing you can use disciplinary specific language, make critical comments regarding compositional or performance styles, provide new information or insight into the works, and follow specific themes present throughout the performance. You are not limited by the need to simplify for a general audience, but should also be challenged to write creatively and well.

Heading information

Details of composers and works should be set out in the format specified for Program Notes (above).

Content and style of critical notes

The advice given in the Program Notes section of this guide should be attended to. In addition, critical notes have to give evidence of scholarship and rigour. Others' ideas must be referenced appropriately with the use of footnotes and bibliography, as for an essay. The five stages presented above in the Program Notes section are a good guide to the development of the notes, but at this level some critical interpretations are required.

Grade Descriptors for Program Notes and Critical Notes

(Based on the standard Conservatorium Academic Grade Descriptors. *These descriptors supersede those given in the Principal Study (Honours) course information handout, 2010.*)

- Fail:** (Below 50%) Work not of acceptable standard. Work may fail for any or all of the following reasons: Unacceptable paraphrasing; irrelevance of content; poor spelling; poor presentation; grammar or structure so sloppy it cannot be understood; failure to demonstrate understanding of content; insufficient word length; absence of referencing; late submission without explanation.
- Pass:** (50% - 64%) Work of acceptable standard. Written work meets basic requirements in terms of reading/research; makes a reasonable attempt to avoid paraphrasing; reasonably coherent structure; often has weaknesses in particular areas, especially in terms of narrow or underdeveloped treatment of subject matter; acceptable documentation.
For Critical Notes: relevant material but tendency to descriptive summary rather than critical commentary.
- Credit:** (65% - 74%) Highly competent work demonstrating potential for higher study. Evidences broader understanding than pass level; offers synthesis together with some critical evaluation of material; some evidence of independent thought; clear and engaging in style; good referencing. A high credit (70% - 74%) shows some evidence of the ability to think conceptually.
For Program Notes: Provides something of interest to both the well informed listener and the novice.
For Critical Notes: Demonstrates critical thought drawing on a range of relevant evidence.
- Distinction:** (75% - 84%) Work of superior standard. Demonstrates initiative in research and wide, appropriate reading; complex understanding of the repertoire and its historical and cultural context; analyses the works performed and/or other source materials consulted in relation to empirical and theoretical contexts; properly documented; clear, well-developed structure with some signs of literary style.
For Program Notes: Elegantly caters for a wide range of readers without being either patronising or too esoteric.
For Critical Notes: Demonstrates an ability to critically review material in relation to underlying assumptions and values, together with a high level of individual insight into the works performed.
- High Distinction:** (85% - 100%) Work of exceptional standard. Demonstrates high level of initiative in research and reading; innovative use of reading/research material and impressive command of underlying debates and assumptions; properly documented and written with style, originality and precision.
For Critical Notes: sophisticated critical analysis of evidence; high level engagement with theoretical issues.

Guidelines for Analytic Documentation

The analytic documentation that accompanies a PhD performance should represent an act of research scholarship. The documentation should be developed in conjunction with the performance preparation and used to inform performance decisions. In addition, the documentation should have a strong relationship to the overall research questions posed. This form of writing is qualitatively different from other forms of program notes. There should be evidence of scholarly evaluation and analysis of the works performed, their historical context, an analysis of genre specific nuance etc. The level of this work must be high; it should be presented in a form that is similar to a research-based publication. The content and presentation of this documentation should be discussed with your research supervisors as part of your on-going research program.

Analytic Documentation will be assessed against the following Grade Descriptors:

- Fail:** (Below 50%) Work not of acceptable standard. Work may fail for any or all of the following reasons: Unacceptable paraphrasing; irrelevance of content; poor spelling; poor presentation; poor grammar or structure; failure to demonstrate understanding of content at the required level; descriptive summary rather than critical argument; insufficient word length; inadequate referencing; late submission without explanation.
- Pass:** (50% - 64%) Work of acceptable standard. Written work meets requirements in terms of reading/research; relevant material but critical argument is not fully sustained; avoids paraphrasing; coherent structure; may have weaknesses in particular areas, especially in terms of narrow or underdeveloped treatment of question; acceptable documentation.
- Credit:** (65% - 74%) Highly competent work. Evidences broader understanding than pass level; offers synthesis together with critical evaluation of material; coherent argument using a range of relevant evidence; shows evidence of independent thought; good referencing; shows evidence of the ability to think conceptually at an advanced level.
- Distinction:** (75% - 84%) Work of superior standard. Demonstrates initiative in research and wide, appropriate reading; complex understanding of question and ability to critically review material in relation to underlying assumptions and values; analyses material in relation to empirical and theoretical contexts; properly documented; clear, well-developed structure and argument with good literary style.
- High Distinction:** (85% - 100%) Work of exceptional standard. Demonstrates high level of initiative in research and reading; sophisticated critical analysis of evidence; high level engagement with theoretical issues, innovative use of reading/research material and impressive command of underlying debates and assumptions; properly documented and written with style, originality and precision.