

Final Paper Project

We are going to have a final paper instead of a big exam. Not super long, a minimum of about 5 or 6 pages, including some diagrams and stuff.

The goal is to do some analyses and organize them into a theme. The subject can really be almost anything – last year we had a variety of rock topics (Beatles, Strokes, My Chemical Romance, Monument, shoegaze), one on video game music, one on R & B bass lines, a musical, and one comparing two jazz standards. You can even do classical music!

I think the ideal paper might briefly tackle a few different tunes, but if you are getting a lot of mileage out of a single piece that's also great.

An easy thesis would be to briefly examine three songs by one artist, and come to vague conclusions about what they like to do. OR, if you can find three tunes by different artists that all do a similar thing that would be a cool organizing principle.

Three Phases - Proposal, Draft, Final

I want us to write this in three phases so that you can really develop your ideas and write something good.

I. Proposal

This is due **Friday, March 28**. Minimum is a decent-sized paragraph, max is about a page. Here you will just talk about what you want to write about - you can discuss one focused idea or even list off multiple possibilities. Do a little leg work to find out what sheet music or internet sources are available, if you plan to use that sort of thing. You are not locked into whatever you propose here, you can change your mind later. :)

II-III. Draft + Final

The first draft will be due **Tuesday, April 15**. We'll have to allow time for feedback before the final deadline, which will be **Tuesday, May 6**. Even if your first draft is excellent I will probably push you to modify it in some way for the final, since part of the point of having drafts is to see your creative process in action.

Music Sources

You can base your analysis off of any musical resources that are available. You can use your own ears and write stuff down (full transcription, chord progressions, rhythmic sketches etc.), you can buy officially published sheet music, and you can consult the internet for progressions, playalongs et cetera. Be aware that BOTH the internet and commercial sheet music can sometimes be inaccurate - try to test out whatever source you use so you can be confident it is right.

(Amazon is a good source to check for songbooks + guitar tabs. Another interesting site is musicnotes.com, which publishes commercial sheet music online. This is where you can get the kind of piano arrangements of pop songs that people used to buy at the local music store. Also, Musescore is an interesting hub for amateur arrangements of random things.)

Not a Research Paper

Aside from getting the music, I'm not expecting you to use outside sources for this project. The challenge is to apply the tools we've learned to music you like and get interesting results. I'm probably going to be excited to read whatever you come up with yourself.

If you *do* end up using an outside source of information, for whatever reason, please cite it using the method of your choice. (Footnotes, endnotes, encapsulated footnotes, et cetera. One method that I think is underrated is simply discussing the source directly in the flow of your paper, writing something like "The Wikipedia entry on this song asserts that..." That might be sufficient here.)

These days it is pretty easy to find the kind of analysis we are talking about on youtube! I really don't want you to rehash the opinion of some music vlogger. A lot of those people don't know anything you don't know - they are just applying the techniques they learned in college. So don't listen to some dork on youtube - be your own music dork.

And of course, if I think you used a source without citing it in an effort to pass it off as your own material I will dropkick your butt to the moon. That's an F on the paper and maybe the whole class.

General Ideas

So far we've talked a lot about chord progressions, and that's a perfectly good focus for your analyses. I'll have a chapter on rock harmony ready for you after break. Other aspects you might examine could include...

- the way the melody fits into the harmonies
- the way the melody + harmonies support the lyrics
- cool rhythmic stuff: syncopation, odd meters, cross rhythms, metric modulation, etc.

In general we are looking for interesting observations about compositional technique and musical structure. I'm less interested in production details or broad cultural themes (though you can reference those things a little.)