

Different types of writing: finding the right content, form and style

Content, form and style are the three elements that constitute a piece of writing. The *content* (as the word implies) is the substance that is contained in it. *Form* (or structure) is the way that the writing is ordered and laid out, and the *style* is the tone, the manner of address. In academic writing there is a legitimate need to use certain formal procedures and these are described elsewhere in this book. But formal academic writing is not the only type of writing that musicians engage with. Neither does it have a monopoly over intelligent, stimulating and important literature about music. Later in this book I explain why formal academic writing conventions are used, but it is important to stress that there are other modes of writing for which such conventions are unnecessary and inappropriate.

Popular writings about music – those contained in popular books, magazines, and programme and CD liner notes, for example – account for a large proportion of literature about music. This type of literature is hugely important to musical discourse because it reaches such a wide audience. It informs the people who make up the audience for live and recorded music. This audience has exacting standards and requires literature that is no less engaging, authoritative and accurate than music academics and students require. It is neither necessary nor appropriate to use formal academic conventions in popular writings, but it is important to stress that more popular (or, should I say, less formal) writings are not *formless*. It is simply that, because their content is different from academic writing (shorter, less detailed and aimed at the non-specialist reader), they require a different approach so that the ideas can be conveyed in a way that is clear, accessible and attractive to the readership.

Writers use different styles in recognition of the different functions or purposes of particular pieces of writing. The wide range of publications about music provides evidence of this diversity. Academic essays, dissertations and theses are the main types of writing that students are involved with. Essays (sometimes they are called projects) are usually relatively short pieces, anything from about 1,000 to 2,500 words. As a rule, essays are written in response to a given question or rubric. Dissertations and theses – the two