A number of years ago, when I was a new professor at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, I needed to design a senior research proseminar: a basic bibliography and research methods course for students who were interested in pursuing academic careers or graduate study in general. Traditionally, such courses involve a number of library and research assignments meant to familiarize students with research methodology, leading to a final project such as a research paper or annotated bibliography. Since I had taught all of the students entering this course, I knew all too well that they needed more than just the nuts and bolts of research methodology—they needed to learn how to write, and how to apply critical thinking to the material they found. The course in question had at one time been two semesters long: the first semester taught research skills, the second applied those skills to an in-depth study of a composer or genre. This two-part structure was created when my department had three more full-time faculty members. Now we had fewer faculty members, less time to cover much of the same material, and I found that students in my program were not as well prepared in the areas of writing and critical thinking as I had been decades earlier in my own undergraduate education. Not only did I sense a greater need to develop writing and critical thinking skills, I also perceived that many of the students from our university (a liberal arts university in which music can either be taken as a major within a BA or as a Bachelor of Music degree) were going on in record numbers to the field of musicology. This discipline engages analytical, historical, and critical approaches to (mostly) Western art music of the past few centuries. The rich liberal arts environment combined with student proclivities toward research and graduate study made musicology something of a growth industry at our institution. This set of circumstances created an urgent need for an intense writing and critical thinking course. I could not send students unprepared for the rigours of the increasing interdisciplinarity of my field, where expectations for students’ intellectual maturity were high.

My diagnosis of the clever students who graduated from our program and wanted to apply for musicology graduate programs was that they needed help in some fundamental areas. These students did not have enough grounding in the methods and issues of musicological research—they had done well in music history courses, but in an undergraduate survey sequence they missed the important disciplinary issues. Their research skills were not sufficient to allow them to succeed in this area. Although many wrote well, in general their writing and critical thinking skills needed vast improvement. The students did not always understand professionalism: the expectations that would be held for them in work or graduate study. Finally, they did not understand how further education in musicology would allow them to earn a living—apart from a life in the academy. Talented and accomplished students were self-effacing and downplayed some of their strongest skills—they needed to build confidence in their intellectual abilities and learn how to be assertive. Essentially, I needed to turn undergraduates into graduate students in one semester. This new course was to be the answer.

I completely reworked this bibliography and research methods course (which had been on the books for a number of years), into a graduate-preparation course. Instead of randomly choosing topics for a large research project, a great deal of their research would be conducted in the field of musicology and on the career options available in that discipline. By nature, it was and remains a small-enrollment course for six to eight senior students, offered every second year in the fall semester (to make sure students acquire the skills they need before writing graduate school applications in late fall and winter). Although ostensibly still a research course, my primary agenda was to foster critical thinking and writing skills through specific and directed research projects.

The objectives that I discussed and distributed on the first day of class were as follows:

- Familiarization with fourth-year, university-level study and workload
- Introduction to major scholars and recent scholarship in musicology
- Inspire critical thinking about music history and musicology
- Hone writing and essay skills
- Develop advanced library and research skills
- Develop a research topic and angle
- Produce a large research project
- Develop teaching, presentation, and professional skills
Like many of my courses, I designed the semester to fall into three sections (I learned long ago that a tripartite structure avoids important assignments or tests coinciding with other instructors’ midterms). This configuration would encompass three large areas of concern for the course: what is research? what is musicology? and developing professional skills. Although all these issues were raised throughout the course, the first section focused on more traditional bibliography and research methods, library and electronic resources, and the process of writing about music. The second section dealt with issues within musicology and ethnomusicology (the study of non-Western music), life in the academy, and the challenges of teaching music history. The third section focused on undergraduate portfolios (increasingly important in graduate applications), academic CVs, effective oral presentations, and the preparation of annotated bibliographies and abstracts. The final project for the course was a large annotated bibliography, a short presentation to the class about this project, and the preparation of an abstract for the paper that would be written from the annotated bibliography. Students were expected not only to amass research data, but to posit a thesis that would arise from that data. I allowed students who became wedded to their research project the opportunity to pursue an independent study on their topic for the second semester—this study gave them time to continue research and write the paper.

In order to keep students thinking and writing continually through the course (not just in the last weeks when a large project was due), I organized each week’s work to include some kind of research, some kind of reflection, and some kind of writing. The research methodology changed throughout the course depending on the content (or the skill development sought), so the assignments were quite different each week. I tried to combine revisiting old student writing and research with new methodologies and models, and I tried to keep musicology alive as a field of interest in each week’s work. My first task in designing the course was to select textbooks that would support my objectives for the class. The first choice was relatively easy, since it came well recommended by colleagues teaching research courses at the graduate level: Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams's *The Craft of Research* (currently in its second edition). This text appealed for a variety of reasons, not least of which was that it is appropriate not only for the beginning researcher but for the professional academic. Unlike the usual text on how to write an undergraduate paper, *The Craft of Research* details the process by which all researchers pursue their craft. This book reflects the real world of research and how it actually unfolds, not the way it might in an idealistic method. This text's three authors operate in different field specializations, so it has a wide coverage of a number of research areas, and deals explicitly with argumentation, developing a thesis, and revising not just the writing, but also the ideation behind it. As an adjunct to *The Craft of Research* I included two recommended texts: one specifically on music history research methodology (Cook), as well as a volume of essays dealing with current issues in musicology (Wingell). From these recommended texts I could assign specific readings for class discussion and individual presentation, as well as cover some of the quotidian details of research in my field (both print and electronic). These texts would help guide students to specific research topics within musicology. For students who felt they needed a little more remedial help, I recommended a standard text for first-year undergraduate students on writing research papers (Walker). I also recommended an excellent volume on academic careers that features an eye-opening chapter on the realities of graduate school (Goldsmith). Altogether, these texts made for a broad collection of material that contributed a good deal to the discussion and presentation portions of the course.

The one thing that I was missing was a book on writing. Although a number of excellent books on grammar and writing undergraduate papers were available, I needed something even more fundamental. My students often could not differentiate between opinion and fact, and in general, I found they needed to learn how to structure their thoughts and arguments in a more persuasive way. Accordingly, I chose for my writing text a small book that had been on my shelf for years: Lucille Vaughan Payne's *The Lively Art of Writing* (originally published in the 1960s, subsequently reprinted a number of times). Upon revisiting this text I found a number of issues that could be insurmountable. *The Lively Art of Writing* is replete with gender and cultural bias, and outdated essay topics. Payne’s text is very strict with grammatical rules, and even outlines the classic five-paragraph argumentative essay—something that surely has gone the way of the dinosaur. My biggest issue with the text was that I learned to write from this book in the eighth grade.

Upon further reflection, however, I realized that *The Lively Art of Writing* offers some distinct teaching advantages. By asking students to identify the biases in the text, I could teach them how to read for author agendas and see how texts reflect their time and cultural context. What is implied by the text, who is excluded, and how do these biases reflect the art of teaching and societal circumstances of forty years ago?
These questions could be my first assignment in reading between the lines of a text. Payne's book is clear, organized, and short. *The Lively Art of Writing* moves logically through the following topics: distinguishing opinion from fact, developing a thesis, the role of introductions and conclusions (many of my students never truly understood this role), the size and shape of middle paragraphs, linking from one paragraph to the next, and common writing problems with their solutions. I also imagined that this book's greatest weakness could perhaps also be its greatest strength: if I learned how to write from it in the eighth grade and went on to become an academic, maybe it did its job. I thought it could be useful, and at a cost of less than seven dollars there was little to lose for either students or instructor.

THE WRITING AND THINKING PROCESS

Once I had laid out the large view of the course and selected textbooks, I imagined an ideal process that would be continually at work in the course:

**BRAINSTORMING AND CREATIVITY**

I feel it is absolutely essential for effective writing and original research to allow a process of brainstorming and unedited creativity in the pursuit of research topics. I initially fostered brainstorming by asking students to free-associate using branch diagrams (included in Walker's *Writing Research Papers* amongst numerous other examples). Thereby, students could focus on areas they were particularly passionate or curious about. I then met with each student individually to go over the diagrams, helping to guide them into areas where research material would be available, but mostly finding the "ah-ha" moment for each student—the topic in which they were most deeply invested. When it came time to work on the art of oral presentations, I asked the students to pick a topic they already felt they knew a great deal about (not one they were just starting to research). I wanted them to focus on the act of presenting—how they spoke, stood, organized, exemplified, took questions—rather than spending time researching the topic. We had a number of fascinating presentations (ranging from marathon running, to Canadian military uniforms, to editing a student newspaper) in areas which the students felt comfortable and could show what they knew. We could focus on their technique, not worry about the topic. These presentations increased the students' confidence. They were already experts in areas they had never before considered from an academic perspective, and all the presentation topics came from the creative side of their research interests.

**RESEARCH**

Like finding a topic, I find research to be a natural process that does not lend itself particularly well to textbook methods. False starts, fascinating diversions down various paths, and sometimes the complete recasting of the research problem, are all parts of research as it actually happens. To encourage my students to think of research as something that is continual and iterative, I asked them to report regularly on their research progress in an informal way. One of our first assignments was to self-diagnose: to draft a blueprint for how each student has traditionally conducted research. Some were eleventh-hour writers, others went through meticulous drafts, and still others could only engage with topics they truly found interesting. No one method or approach was deemed better than another, but all the students critiqued themselves and made suggestions as to how each could improve their research process, whatever that may be. Instead of asking for a number of drafts of research in progress, I had the students spend the majority of their time conducting the research itself. I wanted to get these students out of the model of doing it all in a mad rush a week or two before a paper deadline or according to a set procedure. Once the students realized that research is never truly over, they could relinquish their more destructive habits and work malleably with their topics.

**WRITING**

Writing is a skill like any other and regular practice is essential. Instead of asking for one long essay at the end of the semester, students were required to submit simple writing assignments twice per week. Mostly these assignments were taken from Payne (replacing some of her more outdated assigned topics with those on musicology and music history) and most were quite short. I wanted to provide constant feedback to keep students thinking about and working on their writing. We focused not on content but on structure, style of argumentation, and the shaping of paragraphs and sentences.

**CRITICAL THINKING**

I wanted to start the students in an area where they felt most knowledgeable: their own previous work. One of their first assignments was to mark one of their recent papers from another course, distinguishing their own comments from those of the instructor. They were amazed at how many things they found to critique in their own work. They did not have to give themselves a grade, but had a chance to evaluate their work from a reader's perspective. I also asked them to give presentations (in the "what is musicology?" section) on...
issues in musicology as gleaned from assigned articles. The point was not for them to impart historical or factual information, but to be able to describe and discuss the issues underlying that data. They did the same thing with Payne, discerning when it was published and what cultural, gender, and ethnic biases were implicit in the text. Once they had critiqued their own work and Payne's text, they critiqued each other. Each student anonymously submitted a section from a paper and we reviewed each selection carefully. I included one of my own papers from my second year as an undergraduate. The anonymity allowed students to be free with their comments and critiques (brutal honesty was a class mandate from the start). At the end of the process some students revealed which papers had been theirs. I, of course, told them which one was mine (they had been particularly harsh with it) just to show them how much things change over time.

INTRODUCTION REWRITE
The following example emphasizes how dramatically this particular assignment changed student writing and thinking. The students were given this simple instruction: "take the introduction and conclusion to one of your papers and make copies for the class, removing your name or any identifying features. We will then look at these in detail at the next class meeting."

Here is the first version of an introduction by one student:

This paper will focus on the family upbringing, relationships and education of Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn and their influence on the similarities and differences between music and mediums for which they composed. It will also discuss social conventions of the time, the Mendelssohn family's social position and how this affected Felix's and Fanny's career choices. This paper looks at the first of Felix Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words and work number eight from Fanny Mendelssohn's 10 Songs for Pianoforte (1836-1837). Although the choice of songs does not reflect their differences in medium or orchestration, it gives a clearer picture of the grown composers' use of form, harmony, texture, phrasing and melody. Historical evidence will serve to better explain the contrasting choice of mediums for which they composed throughout their lifetimes. (Andreissen)

There are many things to criticize here. There is the formulaic and deadening opening: "this paper will" and "this paper looks at." I wanted to move students away from these kinds of constructions. The introduction seems to suggest that a large number of topics (some of which go together, others do not) will be addressed in just one essay. One of the compositions is provided with dates, while the other is not. The parameters the writer posits for analysis (form, harmony, texture, phrasing, and melody) are too numerous and too different to be addressed. Also, it does not convey what the paper is really about—the writing is unclear. For instance, what is "the grown composer?" "Historical evidence" will be mustered, but to what end? Why do we want to know that Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn wrote for different mediums? What does this tell us about them or their music? This paper offers nothing to someone interested in anything other than these two composers—it does not promise wide-ranging or relevant thought on the bigger picture. The introduction is muddled, lacks direction, and does not stimulate the reader. After the class and I gave suggestions, the student came back with this version just a week later:

A French composer during WWII was confined to a Nazi prison camp in 1940, with little access to instrumentalists to perform works. Reduced in resources to no more than a violinist, a clarinetist, a cellist with three strings, and himself, the composer composed Quartet for the End of Time. Messiaen's struggle of reduced resources and freedoms led him to create one of the most unique and powerful compositions of the twentieth century.

Fanny Mendelssohn, although long before the atrocities of WWII, suffered her own external constraints. Like Messiaen, she was limited by a small selection of mediums in which to compose, and exercised her creativity not in orchestration, but rather in an expansive harmonic and melodic palette. Fanny's lack of composition training removed her musical boundaries, allowing her the freedom and the focus to forge a new, distinct style. Tales from her childhood, a look into her missed-out education, and some insight into her powerful relationship with her brother Felix, now suggest that her external limitations, such as a lack of performing ensembles and instruction, actually pushed her to develop her own unique style—a style that is now renowned amongst vocalists. (Andreissen Revised)

Suddenly this topic springs to life. A galvanizing opening brings disparate periods of music history together, combining a well-known work (the Quartet) with lesser-known repertoire. Now the paper is about Fanny Mendelssohn and the role of gender in her musical development and output. The scope and content of the essay is clear and achievable. The writing is clear and persuasive. This new introduction presents the reader with a focused look at important repertoire. In short, critical thinking and writing have come together.

SAMPLE WEEKS
Although the scope of this thirteen-week course cannot be included here, these sample weeks convey the tone of the course and how each part of the process is engaged.
Week Two

- Creativity: brainstorm research topics and meet with instructor
- Research: attend library seminar and read chapter one of *Introduction to Research in Music* for overview of field
- Writing and critical thinking: come up with three theses regarding music history, music theory, and musicology respectively
- Critical thinking: write down biases, prejudices, and agendas found in Payne
- Class time: discuss individual styles of research with brutal honesty

Week Three

- Creativity and writing: write a five-paragraph, argumentative essay on one of topics given (piano music, money problems, student societies, etc.)
- Research: electronic treasure hunt searches
- Writing and critical thinking: rewrite introductions and conclusions after class critique
- Class time: musicology article summaries

Later Week

- Creativity: design undergraduate portfolio contents
- Research: preliminary bibliography on research topic
- Writing: sentence structure and parallel structure in writing—short exercises
- Critical thinking: discuss issues in academia using individual articles from *Teaching Music History*
- Class time: presentations on music history and musicology careers based on interviews and teaching discussion

EVALUATION

Anonymous student evaluations of the course revealed several positive aspects—some unexpected. I worried that Payne's work (because it was originally aimed at high school students, and because of its stringency) would alienate students. I found the opposite was true. Overall, most students felt that the Payne text was the most useful element of the course. One student wrote: "I really liked the fact that we talked about the academic world in realistic terms, not as some glorified wonderland. I know what to expect and what to watch out for now." Another student wrote: "I really liked going over the intros and conclusions. Those were very much the weakest parts of my essays before. I hope I have improved." Students seemed to accept the heavy workload as good preparation for graduate studies, and without exception the students took the course seriously and devoted themselves to it. Perhaps most importantly, since the course's inception in 2003, my department has sent five students to fully funded placements in graduate programs at major Canadian research institutions. Feedback received after course assessments has substantiated that the class had long-term effects on success in graduate work.

Although this course was designed specifically around music history and musicology, it could be easily adapted to another field. An instructor could simply replace the music-specific methodology and texts with those appropriate to his or her field in order to cover the disciplinary content. If Payne is too old-fashioned (or if you are dealing with students who need to break the habit of the five-paragraph essay) an instructor could select another writing text. In an era of increasing expectations and decreasing resources, intensive courses like this one may be the best tools available to help our students make the transition from stellar undergraduate results to successful graduate studies.


