

Course title: How To Write About Music

Length: 15 Weeks

Instructor: _____

We'll focus on reading and writing about music from vantages obvious (record reviews) to esoteric (the kind of historical-aesthetic criticism practiced by Greil Marcus, for example). We'll consider examples of biography, the profile, interviews, lyrical analysis, cultural criticism, personal essay, and technical scholarship to gain a sense of the range and development of popular music criticism and to serve as prompts for our own writing. Working together as editors and writers, we'll develop and produce a final project that we'll 'publish' in some form—online, in print, or as part of a multi-media event.

TEXT: *How To Write About Music*, Ally-Jane Grossan and Marc Woodworth, eds. (Bloomsbury 2015)

GRADING

Writing — 75%

Album Review / Isolated Track / Cultural Criticism / Profile / Personal Essay (total: 50%)

Final Project — 25 % (15% personal project / 10% class grade for project as a whole)

Participation — 25%

- Attendance
- Preparedness / contributions to class
- Critiques in Workshop
- Final Project contribution

WEEK ONE

Class 1: “Record Club” Song and Introductions

Please come to our first meeting with a song that is important to you (we will play it in class from a website such as youtube or soundcloud or as an MP3 or CD). Choose a song that you love or a song that is especially important to you. Be prepared to say a few words about the song and your connection to it. We'll introduce ourselves to one another by playing and talking about these songs.

Class 2: Album Review

Discussion: please read the introduction (p. 18), expert advice section (p. 20), Ann Powers' Daft Punk review (p. 24) and Jim DeRogatis' Simon & Garfunkel review (p. 27) from **Chapter 1: The Album Review**

Choose an album to review per the assignment “The Blind Review” (p. 36).

WEEK TWO

Album Review Draft Due

Class 3: Album Review

Workshop: discussion of several drafts. Students chosen to have their drafts work-shopped should come to class prepared to play a track from the album under review.

Class 4: Album Review

Workshop: discussion of several drafts. Students chosen to have their drafts work-shopped should come to class prepared to play a track from the album under review.

WEEK THREE

Album Review Final Due

Class 5: Isolated Track

Discussion: please read the Introduction (p. 298) and Expert Advice (p. 299) in the How It Sounds chapter. Then go on to read Andy Babiuk on the Mellotron (p. 303) and John Perry on Hendrix’s version of “All Along The Watchtower” (p. 317).

Class 6: Isolated Track

Discussion: please read Ted Gioia’s “Music Criticism Has Degenerated Into Lifestyle Reporting.” The Daily Beast. March 18, 2014. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/03/18/music-criticism-has-degenerated-into-lifestyle-reporting.html>. Prepare to argue for why you think it’s important to have a technical understanding of music or not as a music writer.

Complete a draft for the Isolated Tracks assignment (p. 320)

WEEK FOUR

Isolated Track Draft Due

Class 7: Isolated Track

Workshop: discussion of several drafts. Students chosen to have their drafts work-shopped should come to class prepared to play their isolated track and the full song from which it comes.

Class 8: Isolated Track

Workshop: discussion of several drafts. Students chosen to have their drafts work-shopped should come to class prepared to play their isolated track and the full song from which it comes.

WEEK FIVE

Isolated Track Final Due

Class 9: Culture Criticism

Discussion: Please read the Culture Criticism chapter Introduction (p. 346).

Analyzing lyrics. Discussion of the lyrics of two songs (we looked at Elliott Smith's "Rose Parade" and Guided by Voices' "Hardcore UFOs"). Consider the uses and limits of analysis when it comes to writing about 'rock.'

Read the Cultural Criticism assignment on page 364 and come up with a song you'd like to consider for this assignment before the next class.

Class 10: Culture Criticism

Discussion: Please read the Greil Marcus excerpt on Clarence Ashley (p. 361). Listen to Clarence Ashley's "The Coo Coo Bird" and discuss the lyrics of this song (comprised of folk lyric fragments), a very different kind of text to analyze than the songs discussed last class.

Come to class with the song you've chosen to write about and something to say about why you chose it.

WEEK SIX

Culture Criticism Draft Due

Class 11: Culture Criticism

Workshop: discussion of several drafts.

Class 12: Culture Criticism

Workshop: discussion of several drafts.

WEEK SEVEN

Culture Criticism Final Essay Due

Class 13: Local Artist Profile

Discussion: please read the Introduction (p. 212) and Expert Advice (p. 214) sections of the Artist Profile chapter. Please read Alex Ross on Radiohead (p. 217).

Read the The Local Artist Profile assignment (p. 256) and choose a local artist to write about before next class.

Class 14: Local Artist Profile

Discussion: Please read the Introduction (p. 112) and Expert Advice (p. 113) from the Artist Interview chapter along with Thomas Sayers Ellis' interview with Bootsy Collins (p. 122)

WEEK EIGHT

Local Artist Profile Interview and Preliminary Writing Due

Class 15: Local Artist Profile

Introduce and discuss the artist who is the subject of your profile. Come to class with music to play from this artist.

Class 16: Local Artist Profile

Introduce and discuss the artist who is the subject of your profile. Come to class with music to play from this artist.

WEEK NINE

Local Artist Profile Draft Due

Class 17: Local Artist Profile

Workshop: discussion of several drafts

Class 18: Local Artist Profile

Workshop: discussion of several drafts

WEEK TEN

Local Artist Profile Final Due

Class 19: The Personal Essay

Discussion: please read the Introduction (p. 144) from the Personal Essay chapter along with Lester Bangs on Van Morrison's Astral Weeks (p. 152) and Rick Moody's "On Celestial Music" (p. 169).

Class 20: The Personal Essay

Discussion: please read the Off-the-Radar Music that Matters assignment (p. 180) and come to class prepared to discuss your subject for the personal essay you'll write.

WEEK ELEVEN

Personal Essay Draft Due

Class 21: The Personal Essay

Workshop: discussion of several drafts

Class 22: The Personal Essay

Workshop: discussion of several drafts

WEEK TWELVE

Personal Essay Final Due

Class 23: Final Project

Discussion: Choose a single artist that the class will consider for the final project. Discuss the form your work on this artist will take given that the final project must have a public dimension—performance, presentation, publication, etc. Possibilities include a ‘zine, a blog, a ‘concert’ comprising readings and musical performances, an audio show, a gallery installation, or any other presentation you can come up with.

Class 24: Final Project

Discussion: please read the Introduction (p. 262) to the Alternatives chapter along with all the short pieces in the section. Students should come up with an “alternative” response to the artist under consideration using the prompts on pages 288, 289, and 290 or one of their own along with a more substantial writing assignment that fits with the Final Project you’ve devised.

WEEK THIRTEEN

Alternative assignment due

Class 25: Final Project

Workshop and discussion of Alternative assignments

Class 26: Final Project

Discussion: extensive listening to the artist as a class and discussion.

Assignment: determine the assignment you’ll complete for the more substantial writing you’ll do for the Final Project.

WEEK FOURTEEN

Draft of Final Project assignment due

Class 27: Workshop: discussion of drafts.

Class 28: Workshop: discussion of drafts.

WEEK FIFTEEN

Class 29: **Final Project Due.** Preparation of/for final publication/performance

Class 30: **Final Project Presentation / Performance**