

Music 507 – Writing About Music

Fall 2026, Wednesday 1:00 – 3:50 PM

Instructor: Dr. Patrick Nickleson

As scholars in music studies, writing is a key part of our discipline – though we often forget to address it as its own point of attention, craft, and practice. This course will support each student in developing a clear, personal, and professional voice for writing about music and sound through short, weekly assignments. We will discuss tactics ranging from reverse outlining and peer editing through to working in different citation styles, details of the peer review process, professional formatting, submitting to journals and presses, and mapping out a productive writing practice. Weekly reading and writing assignments will span a variety of genres including academic writing (ethnography, history, analysis, book reviews), program notes, music journalism, text scores, fiction, poetry and song lyrics, with much of our attention placed on engaging with authors' writing styles. The class will involve lots of peer editing with the emphasis on giving constructive and supportive feedback, as well as visits from guests who will speak on their own writing style and practice.

Format:

Each session will last 2 hours and 50 minutes, with a short break around the midpoint that will divide the course into two halves. Each week, half of class time will be spent discussing assigned readings that students are expected to have prepared notes for in advance. The focus here will fall mostly on analyzing how the author organized their argument or thoughts, and how we might describe their style and approach. In the other half of the class, we will focus on our own writing. Some weeks this will involve sharing the results of short writing assignments, practicing peer feedback in pairs, or in discussions about specific tools and practices to support students in their own writing.