

21M.260: STRAVINSKY TO THE PRESENT
Paper 1 Prompt

Overall Prompt: Become well acquainted with a piece of music composed between 1900 and 1945 (not otherwise covered on the syllabus) and use references to specific musical features to develop and substantiate an argument about that piece's "artistic purpose."

Amplification: While we might superficially think that all pieces of music have the same general purpose (e.g., to be beautiful, to be interesting, or to express the composer's ideas and feelings), when we focus closely on one work we find that there are much more refined artistic stakes to discuss. Some works seem wholly indifferent to form and structure, for example, while others are obsessively constructed. Some works have a kaleidoscopic and innovative approach to the orchestra, while others are more conventional in their use of instruments and do not seem too concerned with pushing the envelope. You can picture similar oppositions for every major musical parameter we have discussed: texture, melody/gesture, mode/scale, consonance/dissonance, rhythm, structure/form, timbre/orchestration, dynamics, articulation, and so on. Your task is to determine which of these parameters is most essential to the work's musical "thesis statement." Another way to ask this question is: to which musical parameters is the work asking its listeners to devote most of their attention?

The answer will be different, of course, depending on what you decide to write about. But the most important procedural note is to listen a lot, with the score, until you figure it out. "Figuring it out" means taking lots of detailed notes, which will form the basis of evidence for your argument about the piece's artistic purpose.

This first version is an analysis paper and, as such, should cite specific details from the score by measure or rehearsal number to substantiate your claim. You can also use pasted musical examples if you like, but they are not necessary if you direct me to the correct passage in the score. Please note that the first version of this paper is not research-based and must consist primarily of your own original ideas, analysis, and interpretation.

To achieve the highest possible grade, your essay will:

- demonstrate a strong understanding of the works' musical techniques and styles.
- use expert musical terminology correctly to analyze what you hear and see in the score.
- thoroughly and specifically cite all sources used.¹
- be double-spaced in a 12-point font with a title and heading, with a length \geq 1500 words.
- be proofread carefully for correct grammar, spelling, and syntax.

You should turn the paper in by email by 5pm on March 17. Please also either send a link to an electronic score or place a hard copy (library or printout/photocopy) score in my mailbox. Late papers will be assessed a penalty unless MIT Student Support Services is involved, preferably in advance.

Finally, please note that I will grade this paper as if it is a final draft. The revision process, due on April 7, will involve making suggested improvements and incorporating citations to secondary literature. Each version will count equally, for 10% of your subject grade.

¹ Appropriate minimum sources to cite would include the New Grove article about the composer, the textbook for basic historical context, and the score and recording you used to do the work. But you should cite anything – even websites that you Googled to get or the program notes from your recording.

MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu>

21M.260 Stravinsky to the Present
Spring 2016

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.