

Guidelines for Writing Papers about Musical Theatre

Adapted from Prof. Dan Melamed, Indiana University Department of Musicology

1. Make a point. Find something you want to say about the material, state it in the first paragraph, and stick to it. Make sure you end up in the same place that you start.
2. Organize your paper around your point. Present musical, lyrical, plot, and character evidence to support it. Be concise with any synopsis you include. Exclude extraneous material, however fascinating.
3. Write in well-organized paragraphs that have clear roles in your argument. Make certain that each paragraph has an evident topic and contributes to your argument. State the point of your paragraph at its beginning, not at the end as punch line.
4. Make an outline and write from it. When you have completed a draft, re-outline it from the text to see whether its logic is still clear.
5. Do not narrate or simply describe music, lyrics, or plot—make a point about them. Do not supply musical or lyrical detail until you have first explained why it is worth noticing. Find some way to organize other than going through a show in song order.
6. When writing about songs, write in musical, dramatic, or historical terms—avoid subjective or purely descriptive words. Write in plain English, though; don't clutter the paper with unnecessary jargon. Do not write about the process (about analyzing, noticing, or “this paper”) or that things are interesting or notable; write directly about the song. Make the composer, lyricist, performer, character, or another figure the subject of many of your sentences.
7. Edit. Read your paper aloud to yourself and to your friends. Choose every word carefully. Jettison each unnecessary word. Stick to the assigned length.
8. Proofread.
9. Use italics for show titles. Use quotes for song titles.
10. Give your paper an interesting title. Do not be cute, or clever, or cryptic; be interesting.
11. Print the paper double-spaced with one-inch margins in Times New Roman. Do not put extra blank lines between paragraphs. Do not justify the right margin—leave it ragged. Number the pages.