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On Teaching Composition:

Similarities, Differences, and Aesthetics of Teaching Music and Prose (2008)

## Abstract

During the fall semester of 2006 I found myself in the unique position of teaching courses in both music composition (18<sup>th</sup>-Century counterpoint) and introductory college writing. My background as a musician prepared me well for the Counterpoint class, but I was about to teach the composition of scholarly prose for the first time, and I was a bit apprehensive. I needed to develop a guiding aesthetic for the course: a system of priorities and goals; an approach that could serve as a path for my students to follow even after the class; a way to give purpose to the assignments; and, perhaps most importantly for the students, a method by which I could evaluate the students' work. It was while ruminating on this that I began to notice similarities between the composition of music and the composition of prose. As this list of similarities grew, my aesthetic for the course came into focus, and I could begin to create meaningful assignments which would reinforce both the departmental goals and my own for the students.

This paper will discuss and develop these similarities, and how the teaching of the composition of music has influenced my teaching of the composition of scholarly prose. It will detail the assignments I have incorporated into my course, and discuss the musical origins of those compositions. Finally, the theme of this paper will address the CMS Common Topic by providing one example of how a study of music is relevant to other fields.