

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ACADEMIC ENGLISH WRITING AND MUSICAL FORMS

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Academic English writing rules and musical form rules have much in common. Both language and music use sound wave as a communicative tool; this uses musical sound whereas that utilizes speech sound which writing systems transcribe and preserve by means of letters. Such musical forms as came into being in and have gone through changes since the classic ages of the Greeks and the Romans to whom the western culture and civilization owe their development and progress, may safely be assumed to share much, in terms of structure, with their language systems. This is nothing to be wondered at, since both language and music go a very long way back together in human history as means of expressing human thoughts and emotions.

As Matthew Arnold once observed, “the governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness.... Hellenism speaks of thinking clearly, seeing things in their essence and beauty, as a grand and precious feat for man to achieve.” This also goes for music.

## **1. Academic English Writing Rules**

Academic English writing, as it is discussed here, is the kind of writing process apart from product, that one is required to do at a U.S. academic institution. It differs from other kinds of writing such as personal, journalistic, business or literary/creative writing; it is formal and

serious in tone. Academic writing covers writing an expository essay and a persuasive essay which are governed by the same basic rhetorical rules and forms as control single paragraphs and multi-paragraph essays alike. (Oshima & Hogue)

### **A. Single Paragraph Writing**

A paragraph has three major structural parts: a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence.

- a. The topic sentence states and introduces the topic and the main or controlling idea of the paragraph. The topic sentence may be the first or the last sentence in a paragraph. It may also be the first and the last sentence of the paragraph—"the sandwich style" in which the second topic sentence also serves as a conclusion sentence.
- b. Supporting sentences develop and expand the topic sentence, by means of reasoning, exemplifying, giving facts and resorting to other reinforcing resources. The supporting sentences are equal in importance and written in parallel form.
- c. The concluding sentence signals the end of the paragraph and leaves the reader with important points to remember. It should agree with the main idea presented by the topic sentence. (Oshima)

Examples (Quoted from *Academic Writing of English*):

— Topic sentences underlined.

### **Hurricanes**

Hurricanes, which are also called cyclones, exert tremendous power. These violent storms are often a hundred miles in diameter, and their winds can reach velocities of seventy miles per hour or more. Furthermore, the

strong winds and heavy rainfall that accompany them can completely destroy a small town in a couple of hours. The energy that is released by a hurricane in one day exceeds the total energy consumed by humankind throughout the world in one year.

### **Medic Miracles to Come**

By the year 2009, a vaccine against the common cold will have been developed. By the same year, the first human will have been successfully cloned. By the year 2014, parents will be able to create designer children. Genetic therapy will be able to manipulate genes for abilities, intelligence, and hair, eye, and skin color. By 2020, most disease will be able to be wiped out. These are just a few examples of medical miracles that are expected in the next few decades.

### **Synonyms**

Synonyms, words that have the same basic meaning, do not always have the same emotional meaning. For example, the words *stingy* and *frugal* both mean “careful with money.” However, to call a person stingy is an insult, while the word *frugal* has a much more positive connotation. Similarly, a person wants to be *slender* but not *skinny*, and *aggressive* but not *pushy*. Therefore, you should be careful in choosing words because many so-called synonyms are not really synonymous at all.

Two other elements also apply to paragraph writing: unity and coherence.

- a. Unity means that only one main idea should be discussed in and throughout the paragraph. Irrelevant off-the-topic statements should be avoid-

ed. A good selection of vocabulary and writing style is required to achieve unity.

- b. Coherence means that the supporting sentences should be presented in a logical order and connected by appropriate transition or connecting signals such as *and, but, yet, or, although, in fact, in addition, furthermore, accordingly, therefore, consequently, hence, thus, in contrast, for instance, in conclusion, in brief, if, unless, because, since*, and many more.

The above-given examples show how they meet the unity-coherence requirements.

### **B. Multi-Paragraph Essay Writing**

Essay writing is governed by writing rules similar to paragraph writing rules. The same organization principles apply to writing both paragraphs and essays which include a number of paragraphs.

An essay has three parts:

- a. An introductory paragraph. It consists of two parts: a few general statements about the subject—a specific topic and the controlling ideas.
- b. A body. It includes one or more paragraphs or subdivisions dealing with subtopics. These paragraphs are to the body what the supporting sentences are to a paragraph.
- c. A concluding paragraph. This, like a concluding sentence in a paragraph, is a summary or repetition of the main points discussed in the body. The conclusion should be in agreement with the controlling ideas which were set forth in the introductory paragraph. (Oshima & Hogue)

Both paragraph writing and essay writing are of the same sandwich structure, although the former is shorter and simpler, while the latter is longer and more complex in structure and theme development, because it usually pursues a more complex proposition by employing a better

developed and complicated logic than a paragraph usually does. Good examples of this essay writing are frequently found in the editorials of leading newspapers.

A Logical Division Essay Example:

### **Woodpeckers of North America**

Woodpeckers have long been a favorite bird amongst bird-lovers. Their unique habit of knocking a sharp beak against the bark of a tree distinguishes them from other birds. North America is home to many varieties of woodpeckers. Three common North American woodpeckers are: the pileated woodpecker, the white-headed woodpecker, and the hairy woodpecker.

Perhaps the most widely-known type of woodpecker is the pileated woodpecker. The largest woodpecker in North America, this bird gets its name for its bright red crest and beard. It makes a loud “kak kak kak” sound when hunting for its supper of carpenter ants in the forests of California, Canada, and Oregon.

Another type of woodpecker is the white-headed woodpecker. This small bird is black with a white head, throat, and wing patch. The white-headed woodpecker, unlike the pileated woodpecker, is almost silent. It feeds by removing the bark off trees to reach insects underneath. The white-headed woodpecker lives in south-central British Columbia, north-eastern Washington and Idaho.

A third type of woodpecker is the hairy woodpecker. The hairy woodpecker is a medium-sized bird with a white head, black crown, and whiskers. This bird’s voice has been described as a sharp “peek!”. It makes its home in forests and river groves across North America.

In conclusion, the pileated woodpecker, the white-headed woodpecker, and the hairy woodpecker can be found in the forests of North America. Both the pileated, and the hairy woodpeckers make loud noises during their search for food, but the white-headed woodpecker does not. Woodpeckers are interesting to bird-lovers for their colors, sizes, eating habits, and habitats. If you visit the forests of Washington, California, Idaho or Oregon, keep alert for the woodpeckers!

Example Outline:

Funnel: Birds—North American Birds—Tree-clinging birds—Woodpeckers

Logical Division: Woodpeckers—Hairy Woodpecker, White-headed Woodpecker and Pileated Woodpecker

Introductory Paragraph: General statements and thesis statement

Body: First topic sentence—Support/Explanation—Examples—Concluding sentence

Second topic sentence—Support/Explanation—Examples—Concluding sentence

Third topic sentence—Support/Explanation—Examples—Concluding sentence

Concluding paragraph: Restatement or summary of thesis statement—Final comment/Closing statement

(Reed)

## **2. Musical Forms and Composition Rules**

The kind of music under examination here is limited, for convenience' sake, to the baroque and the classical periods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with Bach, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven among their

musical structures specifically of binary and ternary varieties.

**A. One-Part Form: *A(a-a')***

(N.B. The apostrophe as in *a'* signifies musical similarity.)

A musical piece usually containing only one period of eight or more bars is referred to as one-part-form music, an example of which is given below:

Example: (fig.1)

*Prelude* by Chopin, Op.28, No.7



This form may have been one of the oldest and most primitive musical forms quite likely handed down from the ancient Greek and Roman periods. It is still popular in some musically unsophisticated areas, some of the examples being Japanese folk songs such as *Oharabushi*, *Aizu-Bandaisan*, *Sado Okesa*, and more modern *Akatombo* and *Konomichi* by Kosaku Yamada, and *Fujisan Mitara* by Kunihiko Hashimoto, and the like, along with a Russian example of *Stenka Rasin* and many others.

**B. Two-Part or Binary Form:  $A(a-a') + B(b-a')$**

The binary form is also adopted by English poetry. The little poem quoted below beautifully embodies the binary principle  $A(a-a') + B(c-a)$ , showing that literature and music share the same notion of form.

“I am busy,” said the sea.  
 “I am busy; think of me.  
 “Making a continent to be,  
 “I am busy,” said the sea. (Anonymous)

Music comprising two periods belongs to this category. The second period contains a *b* element, which musically contrasts with, but supports its succeeding *a'* element, thus making for a natural and more effective development of the one-part form. Musical unity and coherence must be maintained. This form was popular in the Baroque period, frequently with the *b* element concluding on the dominant before returning to *a'* which comes to a full ending on the tonic. A great many church hymns were composed in the binary form, as well as most of Stephen Foster’s songs.

Example a: (fig.2) *Old Black Joe* by Stephen Foster



Example b: (fig.3) *My Old Kentucky Home* by Stephen Foster



Example c: (fig.4) *Wiegenlied* by Brahms



### C. Three-Part or Ternary Form: $A + B + A$

This form is also referred to as the *da capo (repetition) aria* form. It was established as *the* perfect form, which consists of two sections followed by a repetition of the first, thus producing a tripartite structure  $A-B-A$ . Its another appellation is a sandwich form. Within the *da capo* form a considerable variety of musical arrangement is possible in thematic and tonal relationships. The  $B$  period or section in between is called a trio, since it used to be played by a trio of solo instruments in olden times. The trio is usually composed of beautiful *cantabile* motives. Marches abound in beautiful trios.

Example: (fig.5) “Funeral March” from the Third Movement, Sonata in B<sup>b</sup> Major by Chopin, Op.35

Scheme of the *da capo aria* form:

A	B	A
<i>a-a'-a''</i> -.....-	<i>b</i> .....-.....-	<i>(a', a'')</i> <i>a</i> -.....-
T T D T	R D R R	T T D T (Tonality Sequence)

(T: Tonic, D: Dominant, R: Related Keys)

Single Forms: Variation Form (*a-a'-a*)

Sonata Form (*a-a-b-a*)

Rondo Form (*a-b-a-c-a-b-a*)

Compound Forms (consisting of plural movements):

Instrumental: sonata, concerto, suite, toccata, etc.

Vocal: cantata, mass, passion, oratorio, opera, etc.

Single Form Example (fig.6): *Gemütlich* by Nägeli

**A Gemütlich**

Freut euch des Lebens, u.s.w.

*Fine.*

*mf*

**B**

Man schafft so gern sich Sorg und Müh, u.s.w.

*D.C.al Fine.*

Compound Form Example (fig.7): *Minuetto* by Mozart K.331

**Minuetto**

*f* *p* etc.

Mozart, K.331.

*f* *p* etc.

*f* *p* etc.

*p* etc.

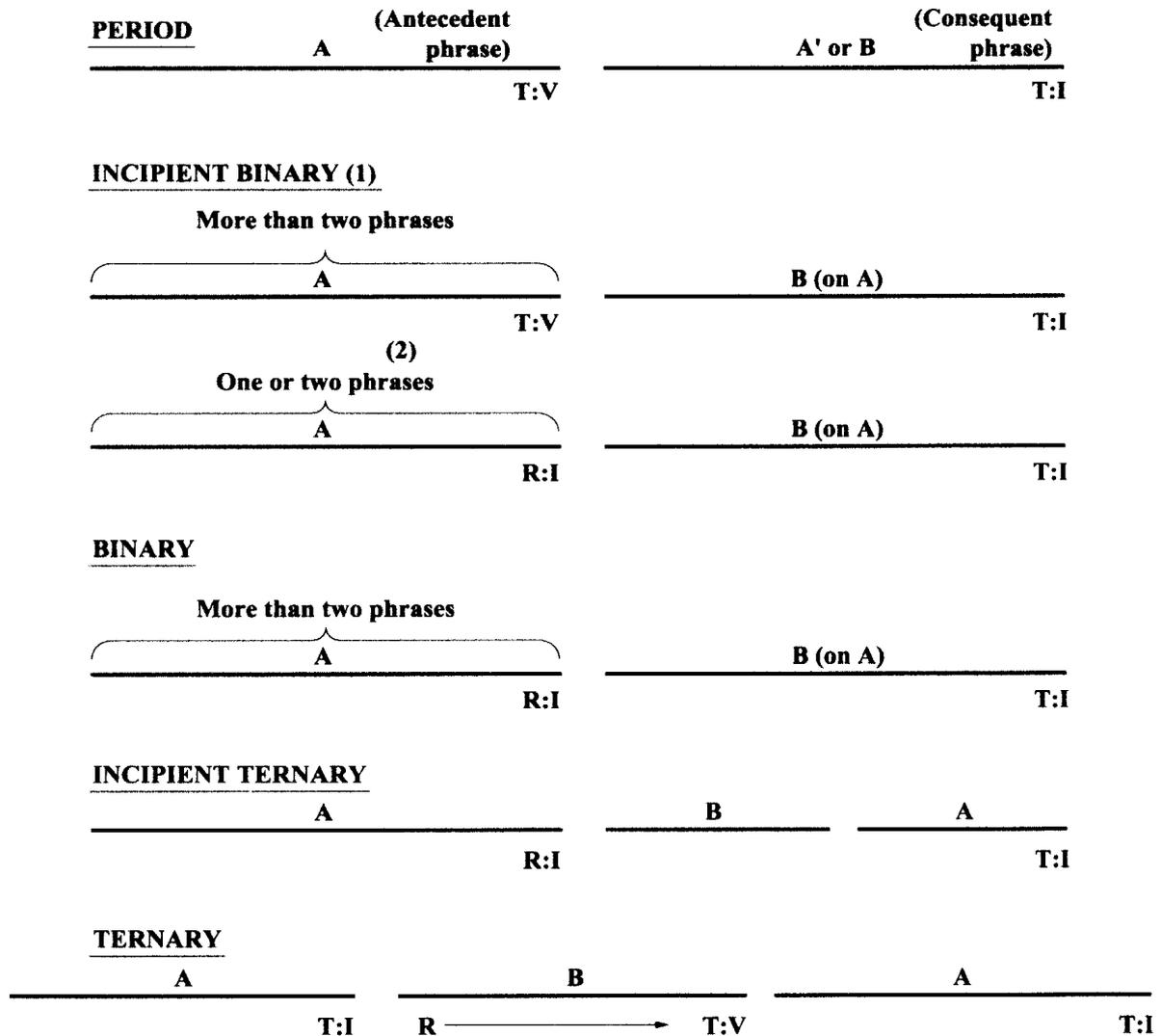
*p* etc.

An outstanding example of this form is Robert Schumann's *Träumerei*, *Kinderszenen* Op.15, No.7 (fig.8).

The image shows a musical score for Robert Schumann's 'Träumerei'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is the right hand, and the bottom staff is the left hand. The tempo is marked 'Moderato' and the dynamics are 'p'. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score is divided into two sections: 'A' and 'B'. Section 'A' is the first two bars, and section 'B' is the next two bars. The score ends with 'etc.' on both staves.

This piece is of an *A-B-A* structure, with the first half (two bars) of every clause (four bars), of which there are sixteen, repeating the almost identical motive all the way through. This is an extremely effective use of repetition, impressing and imbuing the listener's mind with this omnipresent musical theme.

fig.9 SUMMARY OF DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF SMALL FORMS



T: Tonic Key    R: Related Keys (Berry)

**D. Sonata Form : A + B + A'**

The Sonata Form includes three major parts or movements:

- a. Exposition: two major themes are presented in conspicuous contrast, usually in Tonic and Dominant/Related keys respectively, connected by a bridge passage.

- b. Development: the two major themes are musically developed.
- c. Recapitulation: a repetition of the exposition in a slightly different manner, with both the first and the second theme repeated in Tonic.

Example (fig.10): Piano Sonata in G Major by Beethoven, Op.14, No.2

First Theme:



Bridge Passage:



Second Theme:



The sonata form may be regarded as similar in structure to the *da capo aria* because of its repetitive features, although it develops its two major themes on a far grander scheme, occasionally preceded by an introduction and followed by a coda. This form is usually adopted for the first and the last movement of a sonata (played by a solo instrument) and a symphony, so that it may be safely concluded that a sonata and a symphony accomplish a still more perfected development of the musical form concept of repetition.

### 3. Academic English Writing Rules and Musical Form Rules Compared

The comparison is hereby made on four levels: A. phrase/*Motif* level; B. paragraph-components / clause level; C. paragraph / period level; and D. essay/sonata level.

#### A. Phrase/*Motif* Level

“The phrase structure rests on the postulate that the pattern weak-strong is the sole basis for all musical construction. This fundamental unit is called a *Motif* /motive, which represents a single unit of energy passing

from growth to decay by way of central stress point. It is thus a dynamic trace, a flux, and is far removed from the traditional notion of 'beats' in a 'bar', each beat being separate and carrying its own 'weight'. When two such *Motif* units occur in succession, they form the two elements of a *Motif* at a higher level of structure" (Grove) of four measures or a clause.

This musical phrase structure, being inconclusive in itself, is equivalent in function to the phrase structure in the English syntactic system, which is part of a clause, a higher grammatical unit. An English phrase is not self-contained, in that it lacks the subject-predicate structure. A musical *Motif* or motive, likewise, is not self-conclusive, either, because it usually is without the tension-resolution perfect cadence signaling a full close or Dominant-Tonic (V-I) ending structure.

## **B. Paragraph-Component/Clause Level**

Paragraph-components are a number of sentences comprising part or subdivisions of a whole paragraph. Many of them, functioning as they do as a topic sentence and/or a support sentence, are, however, insufficient to conclude an independent paragraph.

A musical clause (usually of four measures), likewise, does little to close a period, because it more often than not concludes with the tonality element of imperfect cadence or half close: the chord of the Tonic followed by that of Dominant (I-V). The clause ends in a way suggestive of something more to follow.

At this level, therefore, both paragraph-components and clauses definitely fail to function as a full-close element, although they seem/sound much more organized than at the phrase/*motif* level.

### C. Paragraph/Period Level

A paragraph, starting with a topic sentence, which compares well with the opening musical *Motif* of the first phrase of the first clause, and followed by support sentences, ends with a concluding sentence—a full close.

A period of music, frequently composed of two clauses of four measures respectively, is self-sufficient to conclude itself by means of the perfect cadence, i.e. the chord of the Dominant followed by that of the Tonic (V-I), which signals a complete close. The only exception is the Plagal cadence or the so-called *AMEN* cadence: the chord of the Subdominant followed by that of Tonic (IV-I). This cadence is almost exclusively employed as a coda to mark the full close of a musical work of Christian faith. Examples are profusely provided by Christian hymns. Händel's *Messiah* is replete with the Plagal cadence; one outstanding example of which is the *Hallelujah* Chorus to conclude Part II of the oratorio.

### D. Multi-Paragraph Essay/*Da Capo* Aria and Sonata Level

As a multi-paragraph essay is composed of three parts—an introductory paragraph, a body comprised of plural paragraphs and a concluding paragraph, so are the *Da Capo* Aria form and the sonata form composed of three parts—*A-B-A*—each of them often including two or more periods. The second part *B* usually renders an diversionary tonality-related ending—transition—with the effect that Part *B* musically concludes itself, after developing its own *Motifs* independently of Part *A*. Part *B*, through transition, modulates from its original key to another using the original Dominant or a related key as its new Tonic (cf. Beethoven: Piano Sonata Op.14, No. 2), as is invariably observed of the second theme of the sonata form,

following a transition passage which links the key transitions.

Both the *Da Capo Aria* form and the sonata form come to a complete conclusion after passing through a number of musical developments centered around definite themes. They thus communicate to the audience their intended artistic/musical effects and objectives.

Academic Essay writing, likewise by following a logical order, goes through its three stages of verbal development and conclusion. Its ultimate objective is to communicate correctly and completely what the author intends to impart to the audience.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Both writing English in a logical way and composing music in a systematic manner are the products of the human mind and intelligence specifically in the western culture which has long been under the Hellenic influence. It, therefore, is no illusion or nothing to marvel at that there exists a conspicuous and systematic similarity between the two; to learn and understand one improves the other. The conclusion is that an effective repetition rule, when properly applied, can and does enhance and magnify the human's intellectual productivity, artistic joy and beauty in the fields of academic writing and musical composition alike.

Common to both academic writing and musical composition is a conclusion-access process which is characterized by predictability; one could foresee where and how the conclusion is to be reached. In music the process of musical development is based on the tension-solution or dissonance-consonance pattern in terms of melody contour and harmony structure which perpetually resorts to the dominant-tonic solution pattern: a totality of structures and functions such as tonic note (or tonic chord) and

dominant, or final, cofinal and repercussion, and lastly of melodic or harmonic formulae such as the typical initial and cadential figures. They are usually tonal by association of notes based on the principle of consonance, that is, on a direct or indirect relationship of 5<sup>th</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>. As a conclusion is duly anticipated of a well-organized essay, so should it be of a well composed piece of music almost always—almost always because the romantics were at times inclined to go awry as did Robert Schumann with his *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai, Dichterliebe* (Op.48, No.1) which he concluded with an unconventional dissonance, leaving the melody contour at a loose end instead of using the conventional Dominant-Tonic cadence, but suggesting there was more to come to finish what the song had started. The conclusion of this first song of the songcycle “*Dichterliebe*”, therefore, had to be a beginning, but no end or solution. Exceptions of the kind are negligibly few.

This co-relationship between the western tradition of essay writing and that of musical composition is in sharp contrast with the non-western traditions of essay writing and musical composition. Take Japanese culture for instance. As very little Japanese essay writing has been or is done in accordance with the above-discussed western standard, so has Japanese music, instrumental and vocal alike, been and is composed on a completely different scheme from western music. True some celebrated Japanese musicians of the modern-era pioneer school, such as Rentaro Taki, Kosaku Yamada, Kunihiko Hashimoto and many others were educated and trained in European musical tradition in the late nineteenth through early twentieth centuries. Their works proved acceptable by the conventional western standard. They, however, naturally and frequently took the liberty of compromising the rigorous demesne of western music, to a permissible degree of course, as did the European romantics, such as Frederic Chopin

with his *Berceuse* (Op.57) which barely remains in the *A-B-A* category.

These Japanese musicians were exceptions, because others kept themselves aloof from the western musical theories and principles, but composed their own music in their own way, intentionally or unintentionally. Take for instance Michio Miyagi, the best Japanese *Koto* musician and composer ever, and his *Haru no Umi*, or *Spring Sea*. It is roughly of a *A-B-A* form; its first theme, repeated twice at the beginning, only reappears many scores of measures later. The same could be said of the late celebrated Toru Takemitsu, who composed his music in his own particular, unconventional, non-European manner; he was free from the good old repetition formula of western musical tradition, but went on seeking for more music as it flowed spontaneously out of his musical mind. Interestingly, many Europeans and Americans find Takemitsu's music exotically fascinating in a strangely unconventional way, although it is nothing new or unconventional to the Japanese ear and mind which have been and are alien to European culture. The same could be said of *Enka* and other Japanese songs.

Examine Japanese academic writing and how it is done. Take for example an editorial of a leading Japanese newspaper, and see how regrettably it fails to satisfy the western or American requirements of academic writing, to which it is foreign; it hardly ever reveals its conclusion or intentions completely at the threshold where its opening remark meaninglessly rambles on, possibly touching upon its intended theme but briefly. Its support paragraphs seem to do anything but support, before the conclusion is supposedly reached, but rarely does it so in an obvious manner, for it is a Japanese virtue to be politely vague and ambiguous. Wait and see until the same article appears in an English version of the same newspaper, where it is invariably rendered in impeccable English in conformity to

academic writing rules, clearly conveying every shade of meaning possible that it intends to. The discrepancy in language style is amazingly striking.

Differences between western music and Japanese music account much for differences between the American academic writing of English and the Japanese way of writing. Granting that this phenomenon is due to their innate, ethnic mentalities resulting from their respective age-long cultures, traditions and customs, it may be suggested that Japanese students learn to write better English through familiarizing themselves with the structure of the classical European music in relation to academic writing of English.

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