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Asking Good Questions: A Way Into Analysis and the Analytical Essay

LYNNE ROGERS

Developing an analytical conception of a musical work is typically difficult for students. A fruitful and rewarding way to address this challenge is to teach students to ask good questions about compositions, that is, questions that lead to further and more profound analytical investigation. In this article, I explain the four-step pedagogical procedure that I developed to teach students this skill. Tested repeatedly in many of my courses, this procedure has consistently yielded exciting class discussions and notable improvements in students' essays and presentations.

Introduction

Familiar to many music theory instructors are the dreaded words "In measure 1" at the opening of a student's analytical essay. Experience tells us that we are in for a monotonous, measure-by-measure recitation of minimally contemplated details. Much more significant than the instructor's dismay at having to read such an assignment, however, is what such a plodding account implies: that the student who wrote the essay lacks an analytical conception of the musical work under study.

Finding a general topic of interest or a fascinating piece to discuss is usually unproblematic for music students. After all, they gravitate to the discipline because of their passion for it. In contrast, forging a path within the broader landscape of a chosen topic to the development of a well-defined and compelling claim is typically difficult for students, including for those with an aptitude for analysis. Even more seasoned scholars know the challenge of distilling from many interesting observations a focused idea that provides a reason for making them.

One way to address this challenge is to teach students to ask good questions about pieces, that is, questions that can lead to further and more profound analytical investigation and thought. There are many motivations for instructors to teach this skill. When students ask probing questions, they apply their natural curiosity to music. Doing so can be highly pleasurable; indeed, many reading this article might be able to trace their desire to specialize in music theory to such undeniably gratifying experiences. In addition, students can transfer their interrogative skills to works they are preparing for performance, thus becoming more mature and

independent interpreters. In theory courses, thoughtful questions posed by students convey that something important is at stake and create excitement that invigorates class discussions. Furthermore, because the answers to good questions can become analytical claims, developing such a question can be the important step that launches a thoughtful presentation or a dynamic essay. To foster the posing of such penetrating questions, I developed the pedagogical procedure presented in this article. First, however, I offer a brief discussion of the role of asking questions in learning.[1]

The value and challenge of asking good questions

The ability to pose good questions is an important component of developing critical thinking. According to Lucy McCormack Calkins (1994, 492), "the ability to ask appropriate and probing questions is a crucial part of comprehension."[2] For Max Wertheimer, the formation of questions both serves the thinking process and is a goal of that process: "the function of thinking is not just solving an actual problem, but discovering, envisaging, going into deeper questions."[3] Indeed, the authors of *The Craft of Research* so value this skill that they devote numerous pages to the functions of questions in research and writing and to their formulation.[4] For those involved in music, learning to ask perceptive questions about pieces enhances musical growth by demanding collaboration between the intellect and emotional, aesthetic, and physical awareness.

How might an instructor teach students to create questions that require deeper and broader exploration? In his work on teaching critical thinking, Chet Meyers asserts that children are inherently curious; however, because children often learn to suppress this curiosity as they grow to adulthood, "college instructors must strive to create a classroom atmosphere in which students' natural inquisitiveness can once again come to the fore."[5] Fostering curiosity is an important initial step, and one that may require extra effort by the theory instructor because pre-college music instruction tends to emphasize how to play music rather than how it might be contemplated. Thus,

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1 The focus of this essay is the crafting of good analytical questions. For a discussion of and procedure for teaching the creation of music-historical research questions, see Haefeli (2016). Many of Haefeli's ideas are also pertinent to music theory courses.

2 Although Calkins's subject is teaching writing to children, many of her observations about the writing process apply equally well to college students.

3 Wertheimer (1945, 123).

4 Booth, Colomb, Williams, Bizup, and Fitzgerald (2016), esp. Chapters 3 and 4.

5 Meyers (1986, 9).

inquiry about musical compositions, especially analytical inquiry, may strike many students initially as mysterious or make them uncomfortable. Indeed, students may be passionate about a particular piece without ever stopping to wonder about it. The practice of asking good questions can be what sparks the desire to look more closely at a work and thus to meet the obstacles posed by music's essential abstraction, that is, its non-representational nature. A significant challenge for theory instructors, then, is to teach students how to build upon their feelings, intuitions, and "favorite moments" to craft questions that demand continued analytical exploration and a view of the work that is both deeper and broader.

Within the context of the course

The pedagogical procedure I offer below guides students to develop good analytical questions. I developed it as an antidote to students' papers and presentations that offered one observation after another without being guided by a main point. I used the procedure initially in upper-division undergraduate courses in music theory while teaching at a small state university. Most students in these courses were music majors who focused on repertories other than classical music, although learning the history and theory of classical music was a mainstay of the core curriculum. In contrast, at the conservatory where I now teach, students are immersed in classical music—many since childhood. I adapted the procedure for use in my current theory courses, which range from the core through master's level. In neither institution, however, are analytical writing and presentations routinely incorporated into all sections of the theory core; thus, it is not unusual for students to make their first attempt at extensive verbal analysis in an upper-division course.

I describe the procedure here as it is used in my upper-division and master's-level courses on tonal form and analysis. The main focus of these courses is music, not prose writing. Writing, however, is essential to the curricula and serves two extremely important functions. First, it enhances critical thinking in the discipline, involving the development of music-analytical skills and analytical rigor, and helps students refine their musical judgment and ability to evaluate their own observations and ideas. Second, writing in music theory courses, which nearly always addresses some level of abstraction, can improve skills in verbal communication, including making and asserting a claim, and provides practice in choosing and applying appropriate technical terminology accurately.[6]

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6 Although developing a good question is an essential step in the process of writing a sound analytical

Because so many students come to the courses in tonal form and analysis with little or no experience in music-analytical writing—and some students with little background in prose-writing generally—I typically begin by assigning very brief essays from one-half to one page in length and progress during the first half of the semester to essays of two to three pages. During this period, I review (or, if necessary, introduce) important components of the analytical essay, including overall structure, the thesis statement, support for the thesis, charts and musical examples, conclusions, and titles. Neither time nor the necessary emphasis on musical topics permits detailed exposition of these elements of writing; thus, I typically discuss those issues and features that affect the assignments most directly. In addition, the students and I discuss the application of technical musical terminology and the implications for wording of tricky discipline-specific issues, including musical agency, compositional intention, and the use of metaphor. For these early essays, I provide the questions for students to answer. I design them so that their answers, if thoroughly considered, can become the essays' claims.

About halfway through the courses, I begin to teach the students to develop the questions that they will address in their essays. The essays remain frequent and short –generally two to four pages– so that students have multiple opportunities to receive comments and thus improve their writing and analysis skills. The procedure for creating effective questions, however, could work easily for lengthier documents.

The remainder of this article explains my pedagogy for prompting students to ask effective analytical questions. Although developing the skill of asking good analytical questions serves many purposes both inside and outside the classroom, the four-step procedure presented below is geared to what is, perhaps, its most challenging goal: preparing students to write an analysis paper. This orientation is most obvious in steps three and four. In addition, although each of the procedure's steps gains in value from succeeding the previous one, the individual steps can be modified to be useful on their own. Readers can, as I have done, easily tailor the procedure to fit their own aims, courses, and pedagogical styles.

As a demonstration of the use of the procedure, I provide questions authored by students in reference to the rondo finale of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E♭ Major, Op. 7, a movement that has consistently yielded fruitful inquiries and persuasive essays in my upper-division and graduate courses. This article supplies as an example

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essay, prose-writing is not the main focus of this article. For discussions of prose-writing—both formal and informal—in the music theory classroom, see Attas (2016); Bakker and Chenette (2014); Davidson, Scripp, and Fletcher (1995); Kelley (1999); McGee (1993); Miyake (2014); and, Rogers (2018).

only the first sixteen bars of the movement; readers may wish to have a complete score available for consultation.

Step One: Preparatory Assignment

The procedure's first step is an assignment on a specified movement or song. The assignment, which students complete outside of class, prepares for discussion that typically takes place at the next class meeting. The assignment involves three tasks: listening to the chosen work; making note of first impressions, which frequently provide fertile ground for questions; and acquiring accurate analytical information about the basic elements of the work.[7] Students carefully record their answers in writing. Depending upon the specific work and the stage of the semester, students may be encouraged to do the assignment in collaboration with classmates, which can jump-start the learning process. Conversely, they may be required to complete the assignment on their own to foster independent thinking.

To temper the anxiety sometimes associated with the analysis of an entire movement, I grade this assignment on a relatively liberal Pass/No-Pass basis. Nonetheless, because the assignment is a prerequisite for successful class discussion, it must be completed on time to be eligible for credit. I check the assignments quickly at the beginning of class on the due date; those that are complete and look like serious attempts—even if they contain errors—receive credit. I find consistently that most, and often all, students complete the assignment carefully and on time.

As shown in Example 1, the assignment begins by asking students to describe briefly the events or features that most vividly caught their attention while listening. "Describe" should be taken quite literally here; at this stage, students are not expected to analyze what engages them, but rather to portray it verbally so that what they've noticed is clear to others in the class. Students are encouraged to value their intuitions and the feelings evoked by the music; how one reacts to a specific moment often provides an effective starting point for further study of a work. What students choose to describe must be sufficiently concrete, whether stated plainly or in a combination of literal and figurative language. Saying that a piece overall is "beautiful" or "surprising" would be appreciated as a sincere sentiment but, because it is too general, not as an adequate answer; however, choosing a specific event that the student finds beautiful or surprising would be.

7 For a preparatory assignment that includes both the acquisition of information and the creation of research questions, see the "Guided Analysis Assignment" in Attas (2016, 10–13). Attas's assignment is one step in a well-designed capstone project for fourth-semester music theory.

BEETHOVEN, PIANO SONATA IN E♭ MAJOR, OP. 7, IV

Striking events and/or features

On a separate sheet, describe briefly any events and/or features in the movement that caught your attention and list the numbers of the measures in which they occur. No analysis is required; just describe the events and/or features so that others can understand what you hear.

The "Play-by-Play"

ROTATION 1

1. Key and form of opening refrain:
2. On your score, mark the cadences that occur within the opening refrain.
3. Measure in which the transition begins:
4. Measure in which the first episode begins:
5. Key and form of the first episode:
6. First measure of the retransition:

ROTATION 2

7. Measure in which the first return of the refrain begins:
8. Key of the return of the refrain:
9. The first return alters the original refrain significantly. Explain briefly, referring to the relevant measures in the return and in the original refrain.
10. Measure in which the second episode begins:
11. If you hear a transition to the second episode, list the measure(s) in which it occurs:
12. Key and form of the second episode:
13. First measure of the retransition:

ROTATION 3

14. Measure in which the second return of the refrain begins:
15. Key of the return:

Example 1

First page of a two-page preliminary assignment on the last movement (Rondo) of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 4 in E♭ major, Op. 7.

After describing one or more striking events or features, students write responses to the "play-by-play" exercise, a list of standard questions designed to elicit the analytical fundamentals of the piece.[8] Other formats, such as charts or tables with blanks to be filled in, also work well. In Example 1, each item of the play-by-play provides the name of a section or event and asks for other information, primarily about key, location, or form. Other formats for questions might provide a different feature, such as location, and expect a name as part of the answer. A play-by-play could also include questions about motives, harmonies, rhythms, textures, and other aspects. Alternatively, the instructor could leave such questions to arise in discussion. So that the assignment isn't overwhelming, I generally limit the play-by-play to a moderate length.

The play-by-play is chiefly a "just-the-facts-ma'am" document, with the caveat that the word "fact" may not always be the optimal term for the findings of even basic analysis. A thorough and accurate assemblage of such findings is an essential step in the mental process required for more profound analysis and the writing of an analytical essay. As cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham notes, "it… makes no sense to try to teach critical thinking devoid of factual content."[9]

I learned this lesson the hard way early in my career, when reading my first batches of student papers forced me to reconsider the assumption that all or even most students would note a work's basic attributes before beginning to make claims about it. As a young teacher, I optimistically assigned analytical essays without having students engage in any preparatory activities, thinking that they would be excited to make all discoveries independently and would find professorial guidance intrusive. Although that was true of the occasional student, most by far were insecure about their abilities in certain crucial but sometimes difficult areas—commonly (and unfortunately) form, harmony, and the identification of keys—and would ignore these as much as possible, routinely defaulting in their papers to a relatively context-free type of motivic analysis. Braver students would valiantly confront the more challenging musical components, although at times basing their claims on erroneous information, thereby invalidating much of their hard work. In the wake of such disheartening experiences with both undergraduate and graduate students, I began to develop preliminary exercises that would give students the knowledge and ensuing confidence that might make further analysis and essay-writing more successful and satisfying.

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8 Prior to beginning their project on this movement, students in the course would have learned the principles and terminology associated with rondo form and analyzed at least one other Classical-Era rondo in detail.

9 Willingham (2007, 10).

The obvious purpose of the play-by-play is to prompt students to discover what any analyst should know about a work; the accuracy of the findings is ensured through the class discussion that follows, to be described shortly. A less apparent but equally important aim of the exercise is to provide opportunities for students to discover the ambiguous and unexpected, which are inevitably brought to the fore during the discussion. A compelling bi-product of having students complete and discuss the play-by-play is that doing so seems to get that format out of their systems so that they are much less likely to make their essays into play-by-play documents as well. In sum, describing what drew their attention initially and answering the play-by-play give students a place to begin analysis, thus modeling a possible routine for when they must perform an analytical project independently.

Step Two: Discussion of the Preparatory Assignment

After I check each completed assignment for Pass/No-Pass at the beginning of the class meeting, I lead the discussion for which the assignment prepared. All students participate, offering brief depictions of what grabbed their attention and supplying answers to the play-by-play. We typically start by going around the room to encourage participation by the entire class and move later to a more spontaneous format. I encourage students to take notes during the discussion to correct errors in their answers and to record interesting ideas.

The always lively conversation about the answers to the play-by-play often circles back to the striking features noted initially and unearths additional aspects of interest that frequently speak to the individuality of a work, including—among many possibilities—formal ambiguities and expansions, metric conflicts, expressive harmonies and tonicizations, divergences between expectations and actual events, and, if the subject is a vocal work, text-music relationships. Indeed, even students most comfortable with "right-or-wrong" answers begin to feel the attraction of the musically ambiguous and unexpected. Thus, the apparently pedestrian play-by-play document, with its short answers, can yield more than initially meets the eye. As Douglass Green notes (1979, vii), "a label—that is, a name—can be very useful if the student grasps that it is no more than a means, never an end in itself. The search for a meaningful name necessitates asking questions and finding answers about the structure of the music that might otherwise never have been asked or answered." In this way, the play-by-play and ensuing discussion prepare the ground for the development of promising questions.

The assignment and discussion boast another advantage: they encourage all students to contribute. For example, most instructors have taught students who are so shy that they never volunteer to speak and seem anxious when called upon. In the discussion of the preparatory assignment, however, all students know that they will respond at some point. Going around the room, at least when we begin review of the play-by-play, lets shyer students predict when it will be their turn to answer, which can increase their comfort in the situation. Furthermore, since class members have prepared their answers in writing, those who are habitually timid often feel bolder answering questions. Once the ice is broken, these same students may offer impromptu comments and even volunteer.[10]

The instructor's role in the class discussion is pivotal. Reframing students' statements for clarification and focus, inviting follow-up responses from other students, and posing additional questions to stimulate further thought and invite students to make connections among points raised: in these and other ways, the instructor subtly directs the discussion toward potentially rich issues, but without actually articulating them. That will be the students' job later on.

The instructor can also bring related matters and approaches into the mix as another way to plant seeds for future good questions. For example, in a discussion about a debatable phrase ending or an expansion of a phrase, the instructor might ask how a particular interpretation might be conveyed in performance. Or, during examination of proposed connections among temporally separated events, the instructor might invoke Edward T. Cone's "Three Hearings" ([1977] 1989, 85-87), and inquire if and how such analytical findings are likely to be heard by an actively engaged listener. Welcoming thinking that incorporates metaphor, agency, or narrative—application of which seems to come naturally to most musicians—can free students to uncover relationships and transformations of material and ideas.[11]

Step Three: Crafting Good Questions

With the third step of the procedure, students compose effective questions, from which they will later choose when they write their essays on the movement. Thus, the

10 Some instructors advocate asking students to post their findings in advance of the class meeting on a discussion board available through their institution's learning management system. Reading these postings allows instructors to prepare for the in-class discussion by, for example, pinpointing areas of confusion or special interest and making note of answers that warrant further examination.

11 For discussion of pedagogies involving agency and narrative, see BaileyShea (2011) and Sly (2005).

questions that the students craft must be directed to the class as a whole. Although a question that cites a personal reaction (e.g., Why does this passage give me goose bumps?) can be an excellent starting point for further analysis for the individual who made the inquiry, it can be too personal for use by others, who may not have experienced the work in a similar fashion.

To create good questions for use by the entire class, the students evaluate evidence; judge which points and observations made during the discussion might be important, interesting, and subject to support; and consider the activities required to provide sound answers. In other words, they think critically about a musical work and their own ideas. As Willingham (2007, 17) advises, critical thinking requires not only domain knowledge but also practice. The routine of creating and evaluating questions during class time provides opportunities to learn and strengthen this important thought process.

Especially fruitful for practicing the development of questions—particularly during the first attempts to do so—is cooperative learning, which, as defined by David W. Johnson, Roger T. Johnson, and Karl A. Smith, is "the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning."[12] John C. Bean advocates such "goal-directed use of small groups" as "one of the best ways to coach critical thinking–and to promote the kind of productive talk that leads to thoughtful and elaborated writing."[13] Bean finds that "the use of small groups did not lead simply to a pooling of knowledge, as if each student held one piece of the solution. Rather, collaborative learning promoted argumentation and consensus building."[14] Another advantage of small-group work is that it models aloud the kind of internal argument that students can hold while working independently; in effect, while conversing with their peers, students can teach themselves how to think through a problem creatively and with discernment on their own.[15]

If the class meeting lasts for 75 minutes or longer, it may be possible to discuss the play-by-play and to craft questions during the same class meeting. This is ideal because the discussion of the play-by-play is fresh in the students' minds. If the crafting of questions must occur during the subsequent class meeting, a brief review

12 Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (2014, 87). The authors emphasize that their instructional methodology is based on extensive research studies within university environments (2014, 95–103).

13 Bean (2001, 183). For more on the use of small groups in the classroom, see Chapter 10.

14 Ibid., 185.

15 For discussion of other important benefits of small-group work, see Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, (2014, 96–103 and 106–110); and Zbikowski and Long (1994, 153–56).

of the discoveries of the play-by-play will likely be necessary to refocus students' attention on the relevant elements of the musical work.

Immediately before the onset of the work in small groups, I offer an explanation of the upcoming activity: The students will divide into small groups of three or four to create one or two good questions about the work that could be answered effectively according to the requirements—including length—of the essay assignment. Students should expect to collaborate for about 20 minutes to produce the questions and devise clear, concise wording for them. A group-appointed scribe will record the questions, which will be read to the entire class for evaluation.

As part of this explanation, I summarize the nature of good questions, emphasizing that answering them should require analysis beyond the findings of the play-by-play and discussion. Questions should neither be so narrow that they can be satisfied with a simple fact (e.g., "the dominant") nor so broad that their answers would, of necessity, be unable to go beyond the superficial. Perceptive questions should have the potential to yield answers that can help readers of the essay understand a work—or a passage within it—in a way they hadn't considered before. I encourage students to follow up on the observations and discoveries that intrigued them during the discussion of the play-by-play: the things that made them want to listen to the piece more closely. At this point, it can also be useful to scrutinize the questions designed by the instructor for essays assigned earlier in the semester. The class can analyze these as "model" questions, examining their structure, length, scope, implications for specific analytical actions, and other features.

After this preamble, the students form their groups and move their chairs so that they are facing each other. Instructors can ask students to choose their own trios and quartets—this has yielded good results in my courses—or can assign the groups to avoid having the participants become too sociable, to promote particular types of diversity, or for other reasons.[16] I've noticed repeatedly that as students deliberate, the room hums quite audibly; Bean claims that this sound itself promotes intensified activity.[17] I circulate regularly among the groups, paying short visits to check on progress and address concerns. As I do so, and overhear snippets of their discussions, I note how the students consistently take ownership of the musical work and the issues

16 For conditions necessary for cooperative learning, see Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, (2014, 92–95). For discussion of these conditions as specific to music theory courses at the post-secondary level, see Zbikowski and Long (1994, 137–41). Zbikowski and Long also offer four sample cooperative lessons appropriate to the music theory core (1994, 141–53). Regarding the formation of effective groups, see Bean (2001, 187 and 196–98).

17 Bean (2001,188).

that intrigue them.[18] Furthermore, the members of the groups take great pains with the wording of the questions.[19]

Step Four: Assessing the Questions

When the group work concludes, the entire class hears and assesses the questions. In the initial round, each group offers one question, read aloud by one of its members. Groups with additional questions read these during a second round. The class and I examine and—if necessary, suggest modifications to—each proposed question with the following criteria in mind: Is the question's meaning clear? What tasks must be performed to answer the question? Given the time allowed for completion of the assignment, does the question require a reasonable amount of analysis or research beyond the answers to the play-by-play? Can the question be answered effectively in an essay of the specified length? Is the question appropriately focused, implying a suitable scope for inquiry? This last condition can make or break the question's usefulness, as some students tend instinctively toward monumental queries, such as "What makes this Beethoven sonata different from all other Beethoven sonatas?" Generally, undergraduate and beginning graduate students' knowledge of the repertory and compositional practice is not sufficient to permit meaningful answers to such grandiose questions.

The instructor's function is essential to the discussion of the groups' questions. Although students should be active in evaluating each question, usually the instructor is the only person present with the experience to address fully the issues raised in the preceding paragraph. Thus, the instructor can help students to understand whether a question defines an appropriate problem for analysis. Furthermore, the instructor can lead students through the process of refining and rewording potentially good questions. In this way, students learn what makes a question suitable, how it might be improved, and why word choice and other aspects of prose are essential to its effectiveness.

Although students' skills in formulating and recognizing good questions improve

18 Similarly, Haefeli (2016, 7) claims for her courses in music history that "focusing on questions encourages the students to *own* their research projects."

19 Although I have found small-group work to be extremely constructive and often exciting, other instructors may prefer different arrangements for the creation of questions, especially later in the semester. For example, individual students might create and pose questions during class. Small groups or individual students might create questions outside of class for in-class discussion, online discussion, or private comments from the instructor.

substantially with repetition of the procedure during the course of the semester, the first attempts may yield questions that require substantial refinement or even complete revision. Vague inquiries are especially common. They often arise when students already know which aspects or passages of the piece they wish to discuss and yet aren't objective enough to see that their question might not point a classmate to those aspects. For example, the query "What is special about this movement?" lacks focus and provides no context with which to understand the term "special." Asking "How is texture used in this movement?" at least provides a topic (texture); however, the question still fails to give adequate direction for further examination of the work. Modifying the question so that it specifies a relationship between texture and another component (e.g., formal structure) is one way to transform it into an effective query.

In contrast, some questions can be too limited in scope for the desired length of the essay. "How is expansion used in the first episode?" could prompt a satisfactory answer occupying one-to-two pages of text but would be unlikely to generate enough material for a longer essay. If, however, expansion is an important feature in the movement overall, the scope of the question could easily be enlarged.

Sometimes, students who are anxious about going beyond what was discussed in class may pose overly conservative questions. For example, "What makes this movement an example of rondo form?" calls for a rehashing of the play-by-play without going beyond it. This type of question is often worded ambiguously as "Why is this movement in rondo form?" leaving unclear whether it calls for a discussion of the features of rondo form or refers instead to the reasons for the composer's choice of form. Except for references to standard forms for final movements, however, the latter interpretation of the question is likely unanswerable without archival documentation or a musicologically-themed seance.

A further element of the instructor's role can be the raising of the "So what?" query, which asks why it's worthwhile to answer a proposed question. That is, a good question defines a "*conceptual* problem," which "arises when we do not understand something about the world as well as we would like."[20] Asking "So what?" goes beyond that original problem to its "consequence . . . a lack of understanding that keeps us from understanding something else even more significant."[21] For example, a consequence of answering a perceptive question about the expansion of a particular phrase might be an inquiry into its expressive value, narrative function, or relationship to performance strategies. Asking the "So what?" question can help students direct their analytical

20 Booth, et al. (2016, 51). Italics in the original.

21 Ibid., 55.

investigations and, once writing, to compose thesis statements for their essays.

It is essential to note that Step Four –the evaluation and polishing of the groups' questions– eliminates a particular messiness inherent in the investigative process. As experienced scholars know, the question launching an inquiry is likely to be modified or even abandoned during the course of analysis and writing. In the procedure I propose here, the discussion of the questions replaces the frequently lengthy back-and-forth that leads investigators to revise their questions and potential claims as they learn more. I find that, given the time constraints of the semester and the quantity of repertory, skills, and knowledge that many of us wish to teach in a given course, this "assisted" version of the analytical process is appropriate and enhances learning. Instructors with more advanced students and longer projects, however, might prefer that students experience the analyst's struggle fully and thus opt to alter the procedure.

In a class of twenty students or fewer, from three to six of the students' suggested questions will likely emerge as fitting for an essay assignment. Immediately following the discussion, the groups submit the written versions of their questions to me. After class, I post the suitable questions (edited as necessary), along with the instructions for the essay, on the course's website through the institution's learning management system. Each student chooses one of the questions and answers it with an essay written to the specifications of the assignment. These specifications include information on the weighting and type of assignment (e.g., analytical), due date, number of pages, formatting details, requirements for musical examples, overall organization, and similar matters.

Questions about Beethoven's Sonata in E♭ Major, Op. 7, IV

To provide a sense of the types of questions that might result from the procedure just described, I'll list some pertaining to the rondo finale of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 7. Over the years, many of the classes preparing to write short essays—typically three to four double-spaced pages—on this movement arrived at the questions below in some form; moreover, these questions frequently yielded stimulating and convincing analyses. Each question appears in italics below. Explanatory comments for readers of this journal follow in regular typeface. Because a number of the questions require knowledge of the movement's refrain (mm. 1–16), it appears below as Example 2.

Example 2

Beethoven, Piano Sonata No. 4 in E♭ major, Op. 7, IV (Rondo): mm. 1–16 (refrain).
The asterisk above m. 12 marks the quadrupled B♭ cited in Question 3.
Boxes in mm. 2, 6, and 14 highlight the B♭[–B♮]–C figure cited in Question 4.

1. *How do the returns of the refrain differ from its original appearance in mm. 1–16?* This question, which suits the fourth movement of Op. 7 very well, can also be applied to other movements in rondo form in which returns differ from the original refrain in notable ways. In addition, with slight adjustment, this question can be applied to any movement—no matter what its form—that includes a modified return. On the play-by-play document, students are asked to describe briefly differences between the opening refrain and any returns that alter it significantly. As geared for an essay, this question requests a more thoroughgoing examination, which can also include commentary on, for example, the effects of these changes on the design of the entire movement.

2. *How does the final appearance of the refrain differ from the first and what is the effect of these differences on the dramatic arc of the movement?* This two-part question, which also applies to certain other rondos, works well for this movement because the final return of the refrain is by far the most adventurous and expressive of its appearances. Since the question focuses on only two sections, its second part mandates a broader view as well. As with question #1, this question can be altered to accommodate movements in other forms that involve modified returns, such as a sonata-form movement in which the secondary theme undergoes notable expansion in the recapitulation.

3. *How does the quadrupled, sforzando B♭ in m. 12 play a pivotal role when it returns at later points in the movement?* This movement-specific question uses the analytical strategy of seeing a surprising or disruptive event (starred on the example) as an instance of Cone's "unfinished business," one of a "variety of musical gestures that, by demanding eventual formal or rhetorical completion, make effective pledges for the future."[22]

4. *Why might the refrain's B♭–B♮–C figure, heard in mm. 2, 6, and 14, be understood as the seed for important events later in the rondo?* This movement-specific question highlights a subtle melodic figure in the refrain (boxed on the example) that attains prominence at important junctures later in the movement. The analytical strategy here is to see the original appearances of the figure as "latent" in the sense described by Ramon Satyendra (2005) in reference to Chick Corea's "Starlight."[23] Similarly, one could understand the figure, seemingly innocent and hardly noteworthy when first introduced, as having unexpected narrative potential in the manner described by Susan McClary (1997) for the opening melody of Schubert's Impromptu, Op. 90, No. 2.

5. *What makes Episode 2 the dramatic peak of the rondo, and how is this episode related to the rest of the movement?* This two-part question, which also applies to certain other rondos, encourages students to consider both the second episode and its context, as well as the role of the episode within the trajectory

22 Cone ([1984] 1989, 201–02).

23 Satyendra's focus is on latent elements in works harboring strong contrasts. In the finale of Op. 7, the passages that realize the potential of the figure do not consistently express a high level of contrast; however, the prominence and unexpectedness of the figure's manifestations could be understood to behave similarly to the music discussed in Satyendra's analysis.

of the entire movement. This question could be generalized to address the climax of a work in a form other than rondo.

6. *What are the functions of the movement's coda?* This generic question can apply to any movement with a coda. It expects students to consider the coda as a response to the main body of the rondo.

Conclusions

My awareness of the challenges to thinking analytically arose from reading student essays that lacked a clear claim and other evidence indicative of a well-defined analytical conception of a work. My development of the four-step procedure for asking good questions was thus aimed initially at helping students prepare to write better analytical essays, and in this it has succeeded consistently. I have found over many semesters that following the procedure yields significant improvements in students' essays in comparison to those produced when students are left primarily on their own. These "post-procedure" essays reliably contain more accurate information and exhibit evidence of increased engagement, focus, critical thinking, and creativity. They're also much more pleasant—and often even exciting—to grade. I emphasized the effect of the procedure on essays in this article because I've heard so many instructors describe student writing in their classes as—to use the PG-rated version—"the bane of my teaching." Yet, instructors persist in assigning writing because they know that students can learn so much from it, because it is a necessary skill that assists thinking and communication, or because they feel otherwise obligated to do so.

The skill of asking effective questions—those that beget other, even more important questions—is essential in music for much more than formal writing. In music theory courses, learning to create such questions can help students to generate insightful informal writing, such as in journals or in-class writing activities, and prepare focused and well-organized oral presentations. In addition, good questions from students can launch or intensify animated class discussions and debates in which the instructor learns as much as the students do. Furthermore, acquiring this important skill enhances critical thinking and increases facility with abstract concepts. The skill of posing probing questions supports student performers in becoming more self-reliant musical thinkers and interpreters. Lastly, asking good questions about musical works can engender great intellectual and musical satisfaction, whether the questions serve as the endpoint of contemplation or the beginning of a longer journey.

To be sure, the development of good questions for an assignment does not

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guarantee an exciting debate, a strong thesis, or a thoughtful presentation. Nonetheless, it makes them more likely because, in order to arrive at such questions, students must engage seriously in critical and creative thinking about a musical work. Certainly, more effort will be required from students as they continue analysis to answer the chosen question, determine a claim, and design the presentation or craft the essay. Nevertheless, designing a good question can propel the process and make it easier and more productive. Some students may need guidance when moving from a good question to choosing lines of analytical investigation to pursue and from analytical findings to defining the main point of an essay or presentation. Meetings with individual students outside of class, class discussion, and in-class work in small groups all present opportunities for bridging these gaps effectively.

Students are the primary recipients of the benefits of the procedure described in this article. Nonetheless, teaching the skill of asking effective analytical questions also benefits their instructors, who must regularly devise questions for assignments, class discussions, exams, and other platforms.[24] As many instructors realize, crafting questions that yield the kinds of responses we desire is surprisingly difficult. This is especially true of queries intended to spur deeper analytical thinking. Indeed, some of us may be able to remember times when a question whose intent appeared perfectly clear to its author caused panic on an exam or confused looks during class discussion. Furthermore, the success of our scholarly work may also depend on the quality of questions we ask during investigative stages. When we teach our students the skill of asking good questions, we simultaneously teach ourselves and thus make our classrooms a place to share the thrill of collegial inquiry.

24 Scott Dirkse's discussion of creating questions (2014, 73–76) focuses primarily on those intended to elicit short answers; however, some of his recommendations pertain as well to questions requiring longer responses.

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