

Grace Davis

Dr. Hocks

ENGL 3090

15 March 2019

An Essay about an Essay

In my essay “When Passion Turns into Burnout,” I write on the topic of clinical burnout within academic musical programs. Through emotionally heavy language, an informal tone, and varying syntax, I foster the support and trust of my audience. Through the use of experts’ research and a formal tone, I appeal to the logical side of the argument for mental health support in college and high school music programs.

The title is where my audience learns of my topic, but it is also where they learn how they should feel about that topic. “When Passion Turns into Burnout” assumes that music can be a place of passion and joy, but that same passion can easily turn into something much more emotionally and mentally affecting. I continue this pathos throughout the first two paragraphs.

As anxiety, depression, and burnout are deeply affecting and emotional issues, the essay I wrote must work to find a balance between the pathos and the logos. The first introductory paragraph of the essay presents burnout through the lens of the “tortured musician.” This lens allows for more impassioned and informal diction. Here, I use affective words like “overwhelming,” “neglect,” and “deteriorating,” which establish empathy within my audience—even if they have never picked up an instrument before. Also, within the context of my familiarity, I allow myself to use figures of speech like metaphor and personification. For example, I personify music by writing, “Those who suffer from anxiety and depression at the hand of the arts have a harder time being successful.” In choosing to give the fine arts action, it

makes it clear that the state of fine arts cause burnout. These figures would otherwise not fit with the well-researched tone of the rest of my paper, but they help strengthen the emotional nature of the first two paragraphs. My informal tone and word choice also render my relationship with the audience as familiar through the use of personal and collective pronouns. The informality is strongest in my second paragraph, wherein I declare a collective call to action, writing, “We need to do a better job of equipping both music teachers and their students with coping mechanisms and understanding the consequences of following such a demanding personal calling.” By addressing the audience as allies, they will be more likely to support the findings I offer later in the essay.

Once pathos and ethos have both been established in my paper, the majority of the remaining seven paragraphs work on logos. Without logos, the paper might have had a “why-me” tone without much basis in the facts. These facts walk the audience through each facet of the issue: time management, anxiety and depression, and financial troubles. I transition from informal and emotional to a more informative and detached tone. The transition is necessary because, in the third paragraph, I begin sharing my research, which should remain impartial and unbiased. The third paragraph is where I must establish logos. The expert I cite the most is Hellen Orzel: As Helen Orzel continues writing in her thesis “Undergraduate Music Student Stress and Burnout,” she defines burnout as “the condition of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of perceived personal accomplishment resulting from long-term stress”(1). The information and research help the audience understand the logistics of being a music major at Georgia State University and inform them that “the full-time student requirement is 12 credit hours, which for most majors, means a handful of courses each semester... to gain full-time status, students must be in class at least twenty hours a week.” The central focus of the

remaining paragraphs is to discuss the multifaceted nature of burnout and how the current state of music education and performance programs at Georgia State University fails to address the rising burnout of their students.

The syntax of “When Passion Turns into Burnout” is mostly composed of compound or compound-complex sentences. Because of this composition form, my average sentence length is about twenty-six words. This lengthy average allows for more room to integrate quotes and concentrate on all the facts. In fact, some of my longest sentences help reinforce a bit of pathos with my audience. In the third paragraph, I write, “Courses required for undergraduate music majors are primarily either one or two credits (some are zero credit hours), so to gain full-time status, students must be in class at least twenty hours a week.” By including a large amount of information in one long sentence, I mirror the amount of stress that information induces.

There are a few exceptions to my compound(-complex) sentence length. In each paragraph, there is a main focus on one of the facets of music program-induced burnout. To pull more attention from my readers, whenever I introduce each focus, I keep the sentence length short. These simple sentences often look like this: “This leads to burnout,” or “Very little of the music student population actually addresses the issue in a healthy, constructive way,” or “Secondary education in the United States is expensive.” In my essay “When Passion Turns into Burnout,” I write on the topic of clinical burnout within academic musical programs. Through emotionally heavy language, an informal tone, and varying syntax, I foster the support and trust of my audience. Through the use of experts’ research and a formal tone, I appeal to the logical side of the argument for mental health support in college and high school music programs.

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more attention from my readers, whenever I introduce each focus, I keep the sentence length short. These simple sentences often look like this: “This leads to burnout,” or “Very little of the music student population actually addresses the issue in a healthy, constructive way,” or “Secondary education in the United States is expensive.” Varying syntax is an intentional way of highlighting the purposes of each paragraph. Short sentences require a pause at the end, which allows the information or claim to fully sink into my readers’ understanding of the issue. It is an effective writing technique.

KEY:

Highlighted words – emotional diction

Red words – informal tone

Blue words – reinforces logos

Green words – reinforces ethos

Italics – thesis of each paragraph

Bolded – simple sentences

Underlined – rhetorical strategy / figure of speech

Brackets – word count per sentence

Pink words – quotes from resources

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EDUC 2110

Investigation of Current Issues in Education

M. Anderson

23 February 2018

When Passion Turns into Burnout

Western society has an overwhelming tendency to romanticize the unhappy artist

[11]. **We**, as a nation, love the idea of a tortured musician, but neglect the actual mental and emotional torment musicians undergo [21]. Classical composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, known for delightful pieces such as his Nutcracker Suite and Swan Lake, spent the majority of his life and career battling depression—even attempting to end his own life at the peak of his career [40]. **As a result, his compositions and performances suffered** [8].

Often, depression and anxiety are dismissed as minor issues—that they are both somehow less important than academic success [19]. **We** gloss over musicians' deteriorating mental health as if it were the inevitable price of going against the grain of society, but it does not have to continue this way [30]. **Those who suffer from anxiety or depression at the hand of the arts** have a harder time being successful within their studies, and there is a vacuum where mental health support should be [33]. **We need to do a better job of equipping both music teachers and their students with coping mechanisms and understanding the consequences of following such a demanding personal calling** [29].

In order to tackle such a deep and relevant subject, I looked to my peers for their individual perspectives [19]. **They cited their stressors as financial strain, academic and musical performance, and time management** [14]. At Georgia State University, the full-time

student requirement is 12 credit hours, which for most majors, means a handful of courses each semester [23]. However, music majors (both performance and education) end up taking anywhere between nine and thirteen classes each semester [18]. Courses required for undergraduate music majors are primarily either one or two credits (some are zero credit hours), so to gain full-time status, students must be in class at least twenty hours a week [34]. **As one could imagine, this leads to massive amounts of stress [11].** Jordan M. Edmonson writes in his study “Differences in Music Performance Anxiety Levels between Underclassmen and Upperclassmen Music Education Undergraduates” about the many stressors of majoring in music [28]. He surmised that “undergraduates who focus primarily in performance generally are concerned with ensembles and practicing, while music education undergraduates have many of the similar tasks combined with the pressure to go into schools and teach as early as possible”(1) [40]. Though a certain percentage of music majors end up taking longer than four years to graduate, there is the pressure to stay on track to graduate, which comes with all sorts of course load implications [35]. Students find it difficult to manage their time outside the classroom, and it is especially hard to find a balance between academic and personal pursuits [25]. Helen Orzel wrote at length on the causes of the poor mental health in music schools, and **her study shows** that “many music students were overburdened with schoolwork and music commitments… (and) expressed that they had no time for the things they enjoyed” (5) [43]. Even when class is dismissed, most undergraduates must rush to ensemble rehearsals, recitals, and to the practice rooms [18]. To cope with lofty performance expectations, a music student should assume that one to three hours of his/her day would be spent alone in a practice room [27]. **Then comes the non-music related coursework of math, science labs, and English [12].** If music students do not develop time management skills or prioritize time to decompress from their stressors, they

can easily find themselves drowning in personal and academic expectations [28]. **This leads to burnout [4].**

Though the term burnout has been normalized by everyday use, it originates from a clinical perspective and is used to describe a serious mental health issue [26]. As Helen Orzel continues writing in her thesis “Undergraduate Music Student Stress and Burnout,” she defines burnout as “the condition of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of perceived personal accomplishment resulting from long-term stress”(1) [34]. *It comes as no surprise when students in musical concentrations burnout early on in their studies [16]. They have hardly any time to unwind from the pressure of composition and recording projects, performances, and lesson plan writing [20].* “Pushing beyond reasonable psychological and physical limits is common practice [10]. This can be brought on by high expectations and unrealistic goals which leads to feelings of inadequacy” (Orzel, 2) [19]. For many, the first step of getting help is asking for it; however, thirty-five percent of music majors “expressed they felt that some teachers and administration were unsupportive, and this significantly influenced stress levels” (Orzel, 40) [36]. As music students traverse the challenging mental health landscape without outside support, they turn to unhealthy solutions [17]. Some skip class to practice or abuse substances to relax or diminish the value of sleep in order to have more time to complete assignments [25]. **Very little of the music student population actually addresses the issue in a healthy, constructive way [16].** Orzel concludes that the most successfully utilized ways of coping with stress is sleep and spending free time with loved ones (37) [22]. How can a student who is in class nearly 24 hours a week, practicing 10 hours a week, performing in ensembles, and perhaps working a part-time job supposed to find time to visit with family and get a healthy seven hours

of sleep every night? [45] Not to mention that heightened levels of stress are **detrimental** to sleep patterns and cause **strain** in relationships [18].

Secondary education in the United States is expensive [8]. *Young adults often go into debt before they gain a career, but for music students, it is more extensive than that [21].* They must pay for instrument rental fees, additional (and sometimes required) equipment [12].

Therefore, many turn to part-time employment to start working towards paying off their loans. This is usually a realistic way to combat outstanding balances [24]. However, *when* one spends eight hours a day in a classroom and two in a practice room, there is little time to apply for a part-time job. Orzel calls this a “**significant concern.**” [33] Music students often feel an **overwhelming** stress to get out of the hole that has been dug for them by schooling costs, but without the proper time, getting a job is either not an option or stretches their schedule even further than it was before [45]. Going into debt without a way out creates another cause for anxiety and depression because students are helpless; they cannot change their schedule to help the situation [27]. **There is nothing to be done but suffer** mentally or **suffer financially (or drop out of the program) [18].**

Students who experience burnout also experience its side effects [9]. *All levels of anxieties and depression run rampant in music schools as a product of the high level of burnout [20].* Brenda G. Wristin analyzes the unsettling nature of mental health in music schools in her essay “**Depression and Anxiety in University Music Students.**” [24] She writes that “**the high rate of untreated anxiety and depression among the music students is concerning,**” and asserts that in order to **combat** this concern, educators should help prepare their high school students “**for the stressors of university music study by helping them develop coping strategies,** **fostering awareness of anxiety and depression as common and treatable conditions**” (1) [59].

Suffering of these mental **afflictions** is lonely, and it only leads to the worsening of other issues, like falling short of academic success [23]. Instead of letting students continue carrying the burdens on their own, more music instructors can supply growing musicians with an understanding of how they can tackle depression and anxiety [29]. **This way, they can build a foundation of practical habits [10].** While tackling the **taxing** demands of music-making, students can seek out time to exercise, meditate, and relax—maybe even pursue medical attention [22]. However, as stated above, music students do not have much free time, so they primarily need to learn time management skills [21].

*Music making is a **vulnerable** process [6].* It takes an emotional investment to create something truly **beautiful**, and when developing artists are criticized, the process takes a **painful** turn [22]. Usually, if the criticism is positive and constructive, it leads to growth [12]. **However, this is not always the case [7].** The archetypal tenured professor is known to easily lose interest in a student's emotional wellbeing and drag his or her self-esteem further [22]. Given that most musicians are already perfectionists, they can either be driven by instructor criticism, and, it is more likely that those who **struggle** with burnout will feel **discouraged** and **exacerbate** their symptoms [33]. “Teachers are trusted authority figures who students depend on for support and misusing this role **sabotages** a supportive working environment. If a teacher is too critical towards students, they often take it personally... (and) often respond with emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, diminished self-esteem, and a lack of personal accomplishment, which are all integral to burnout... (T)edious forms, rules, prevalent errors in advising, and strict procedures can hinder the results of a student’s hard work.”¹

¹ Orzel, Helen Jane. “Undergraduate Music Student Stress and Burnout” (2010). *Master’s Thesis*. 3887. 10.

As burnout takes over students' minds, they begin to **loathe** getting on stage because they lack a feeling of musical progress and assume the worst of themselves [27]. **This leads to performance anxiety [5].** “Musicians, frequently required to perform under an array of stressful conditions, are particularly susceptible to anxious thoughts or feelings” (Strong, “Music Performance Anxiety and Teaching Anxiety” 1). It is common knowledge that public speaking is one of the most common fears that people have, so when one’s entire career revolves around performing in public, they must either develop a coping mechanism or **succumb** to their performance anxiety (or seek medication, as many musicians do) [47]. Tim Patston and Margaret S. Osborne report their findings in a survey of the prevalence of perfectionism and music performance anxiety, calling it “The Developmental Features of Music Performance Anxiety and Perfectionism in School Age Musicians” [36]. They write, “levels of MPA and perfectionism increase with years experience”, so it is safe to assume that those pursuing an undergraduate music degree are highly affected by criticism [29]. It is hard to succeed in music programs because once **overcome** by burnout—as a result of falling short of expectations—students start to expect future personal shortcomings in their musical careers [33]. **This is especially problematic for those who are also perfectionist [10].** Patston and Osborne define perfectionism as “striving for self-imposed unrealistic standards” and they recognize it as a “vulnerability factor for psychopathy and poor mental health”(42) [25]. **Those who identify as perfectionist are used to performing at their peak and not allowing for public failure [18].** Consequently, if a piece is not up to their standards, they begin to question why they should try at all [20].

As music students **struggle** under pressure, it is likely that they will also **struggle** with depression [16]. Often anxiety and depression work hand-in-hand with each other, and if left

untreated, mental health will only deteriorate [18]. In a study led by a charity in the United Kingdom, 2,211 musicians were interviewed. Of the 2,211, seventy-three percent admitted to feeling high levels of anxiety, and sixty-nine percent said that they suffer from depression (5) [37]. The nature of music making is intrinsically vulnerable, which leads to heightened stress levels, which leads to depression when one fails to meet his or her expectations [27].

Society views the fine arts as **ethereal**, but only when in addition to “**normal**” careers [15]. **We** perpetuate this idea that music classes are extra through words like “extracurricular,” so when developing musicians get into collegiate music programs, and they are **ill equipped** to succeed [29]. They have hardly any idea the extent of stress and **dissatisfaction** they may feel at the hands of the sheer workload, costs, and expectations [24]. It is only through productive coping mechanisms and instructor support that undergraduate music students can **find solace** [17].

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