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Annotated Music essay

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Understanding and answering the **essay question** is imperative for attaining good marks! The beginning of this particular question 'What do we learn' is very open and it signals to students that they are expected to **discover for themselves** the particular characteristics of Bach's music. The rest of the question is more directive as it narrows the focus of which aspects of Bach's music students need to consider and which sources they need to refer to.

The **topic sentence** in the introductory paragraph provides the context and background for the essay. Here, the writer captures the readers' attention by skilfully presenting three perspectives of Bach by using a series of noun phrases and succinctly ties them together to make a general statement

What do we learn about J. S. Bach's musical style and musical thought from texts written by and about the composer? You must include both primary and secondary source material.

A genius by some accounts, a humble servant of God or mere organ teacher by others, Johann Sebastian Bach is **undeniably** a complex figure. Scholars have variously considered the nature of his musical thought, **suggesting** that he understood music to have religious, professional, educational and **perhaps** artistic significance. His musical style – particularly its economy and contrapuntal complexity – has similarly fascinated such historians as Laurence Dreyfus and John Butt. This essay will attempt to consider what exactly primary and secondary texts reveal about aspects of Bach's musical thought and style.

The **introductory paragraph** provides the context, introduces the topic, and defines the thesis (point of view) and scope of the essay. The introduction is normally about 10 – 15% of the total essay length.

The **thesis statement** outlines the specific claim to be defended in the essay through reasoning and by providing evidence (Rowland, 2016). As demonstrated in this example, the thesis statement can also list the subtopics to be addressed in the order that they are to appear in the essay (with the exception of the last two – economy and contrapuntal complexity, which are addressed in reverse order).

Note further use of **signposting** in the final sentence which signals to the reader the overall essay organisation and the writer's intention of what will be covered in the essay.

Rowland, D.R. (2016). *Exploring the Typical Features and Structure of an Argumentative Essay with a Simple Example*. The Learning Hub, Student Services, The University of Queensland. Retrieved from <http://uq.edu.au/student-services/pdf/learning/annotated-argumentative-essay.pdf>

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The **body of an essay** consists of a number of paragraphs in which the writer addresses each subtopic in turn from the thesis statement.

This paragraph begins with a **topic sentence**, which is a general statement indicating what will be discussed within this particular paragraph. Note the way in which the writer links this paragraph to the last sentence of the Introduction with the repetition of the words "musical thought".

Note the way in which the writer **positions herself** in this paragraph by varying the strength of her claims. Mostly, the writer makes **tentative claims** by using **hedging devices** (perhaps, suggest) to avoid drawing unjustified conclusions. Once, (in the second sentence) when the facts are indisputable, she makes a **strong claim** by beginning the sentence with 'Certainly'.

Note the use of the **Chicago referencing style** in this essay. Footnote numbers are used in the text to show another person's ideas or words are used. This number directs the reader to a footnote at the bottom of the page where footnotes are placed in numerical order; these include the authors' names, details of the works cited, and relevant page numbers.

Perhaps the most popular view of Bach's musical thought is that it is based on devout religiosity. **Certainly**, Bach was an ardent Lutheran: he not only worshipped in and often worked for the Lutheran Church, but also owned and meticulously annotated multiple volumes of Luther's writings and translations.¹ Luther saw music as a gift of God and endorsed its role in worship – and Bach's dedication to Luther suggests he concurred.² **Additionally**, Bach's Bible annotations (made after 1733) **suggest** concern with music's religious function.³ Beside 2 Chronicles 5:3 he wrote, "where there is devotional music, God with his grace is always present", **suggesting** sacred music actually summons God's spirit.⁴ **Furthermore**, alongside 1 Chronicles 29:21 he wrote "besides other forms of worship, music especially has...been ordered by God" **suggesting** he believed God himself ordained music in worship.⁵ John Butt considers these annotations, alongside the fact that Bach wrote plenty of sacred music, indicative that Bach understood music as "a fundamental tool of religion", proclaiming the Gospel as powerfully as the sermon.⁶

Note the way in which the writer skilfully develops a **coherent and logical argument** in this paragraph. Each sentence is clearly connected to the one that precedes it. The writer achieves coherence by:
(1) **elaborating on a claim**; e.g., The writer's claim "Bach's musical thought ... is based on devout religiosity", is elaborated on in the next sentence with the statement, "Bach was an ardent Lutheran..."
(2) **using transition signals** at the beginning of sentences (e.g., Additionally, Furthermore).

Throughout this paragraph the writer **supports her argument** by providing **direct evidence from the literature** for each point she makes in the form of direct quotes or paraphrases. Depending on where the writer wants to put the emphasis, some citations are **author-prominent** (e.g., John Butt ...) and others are **information prominent** (i.e., the author's name is not mentioned in the body of the text.)

¹ Robin A. Leaver, 'Music and Lutheranism', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 39.

² *Ibid.*, p. 40, p. 45.

³ Johann Sebastian Bach, 'Excerpts from Bach's marginal comments in his copy of Abraham Calov's edition of the Lutheran Bible (Wittenberg, 1681)', c. 1733, in Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, *The New Bach Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), p. 161.

⁴ John Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 54.

⁵ Johann Sebastian Bach, 'Excerpts from Bach's marginal comments in his copy of Abraham Calov's edition of the Lutheran Bible (Wittenberg, 1681)', c. 1733, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 161.

⁶ Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music', p. 55, p. 50.

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Additionally, C.P.E. Bach's 1750 obituary of his father suggests Bach viewed music as a "service" to God – a form of personal worship.⁷ Bach dedicated much of his music to God (with the manuscript inscriptions J.J. (*Jesus Juva*; Jesus help) and S.D.G. (*Soli Deo Gloria*; To God alone be the glory)) – including secular works such as his cello suites.⁸ This suggests his personal dedication to God underpinned all his compositional activity: serving and glorifying God was his "ultimate [compositional] purpose".⁹ Furthermore, evidence suggests Bach understood music to possess inherent divinity. His 1738 foreword to a harmony treatise suggests that music is itself, through its "perfect" thorough bass foundation, divine.¹⁰ Perhaps, as Butt puts it, Bach viewed music as actively "constituting a religious reality"; as itself powerful or holy, quite independent of any divine text¹¹. However Butt also highlights that Bach apparently understood music to have multiple functions. Many of his dedications refer to pedagogical intentions or delighting the heart: only the *Orgelbüchlein* title page (c. 1717) makes the "Praise of God" specific.¹² This suggests Bach saw music as having functions in pleasing or instructing the human world, in addition to glorifying or embodying God.

Some scholars suggest that Bach understood music as a livelihood. Bach's own writings suggest he saw himself as a professional agent for organising or bettering music in his community. In 1708, he wrote of a hope of establishing a "well-regulated Church Music" – that is, competently executing music for every church occasion.¹³ Similarly in a 1730 memorandum to the Leipzig Town Council he outlined his concern with creating a "well-appointed church music", by writing to list the resources he needed (and lacked).¹⁴ Clearly Bach cared about music-making as a profession – about doing his job (variously as music director, composer, cantor and teacher) well. Indeed, in Bach's era, music was certainly a professional occupation: an appropriate economic option for a man who had to "maintain and educate" many children.¹⁵ In addition, Otto Bettman highlights that Bach grew up

⁷Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Johann Friedrich Agricola, 'The World-Famous Organist, Mr. Johann Sebastian Bach, Royal Polish and Electoral Saxon Court Composer, and Music Director in Leipzig', 1750, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 303.

⁸David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 16.

⁹Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music', p. 53.

¹⁰Johann Sebastian Bach, 'Introduction to "The Precepts and Principles of Playing Four-Part Thorough-Bass or Accompaniment"', 1738, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, pp. 16-7.

¹¹Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music', p. 46, p. 54.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹³ Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music', p. 53.

¹⁴Johann Sebastian Bach, "'Short But Most Necessary Draft for a Well-Appointed Church Music, with Certain Modest Reflections on the Decline of the Same": memorandum to the Leipzig town council', 1730, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 145.

¹⁵1 Johann Nikolaus Forkel, 'Johann Sebastian Bach: His Life, Art and Work', 1802, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 461

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in a family of professional musicians and, because of his parents' deaths, had to earn his way with music from adolescence.¹⁶ For Bach, then, music was necessarily a professional service to society as much as a religious tool.

In extension of this, Bach seems to have understood music as an educational tool (which contributed to his livelihood). He became a respected music educator in his lifetime, particularly in Leipzig (1723-50), where he taught hundreds of composition, organ and singing students, often with his own music.¹⁷ C.P.E. Bach in 1775 noted that his father was an instructive, thorough teacher who wrote pedagogical music specifically for his students, although reputable resources were already available.¹⁸ And certainly Bach presented many of his works as didactic. The title page of his *Inventions and Sinfonias* (c. 1720-3), for instance, promises "upright instruction" for "especially those desirous of learning", while *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (1722 and 1742) was described* as being "for the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning".¹⁹ As Hans David and Arthur Mendel suggest, Bach's dedicated, enthusiastic involvement in writing pedagogical music suggests he thrived on teaching.²⁰ Thus Bach seems to have appreciated music's educational capacity – both for its contribution to his income and the satisfaction he apparently gained from teaching.

Finally, some argue that Bach understood music as an art form. A decided lack of evidence from Bach himself suggests he did not consider himself an artist. He promoted his musical achievement as the product of sheer industry, reportedly declaring, "I have had to work hard; anyone who works just as hard will get just as far".²¹ However Bach did attempt to express Baroque Affekt (mood or emotion) in his music.²² One student in 1746 recalled Bach's concern that his compositions be played "not...merely offhand but according to the Affekt", which suggests Bach believed in the importance of, and tried to write, music which conveyed emotional expression and sensitivity.²³ Bach's work is often openly expressive: David and

¹⁶ Otto Bettmann, 'Bach the Rhetorician', *The American Scholar*, vol. 55, no. 1 (1986), p. 114.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁸ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, 'Letter answering questions about Bach', 1775, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 399.

¹⁹ Johann Sebastian Bach, 'Title page to *Inventions and Sinfonias*', c. 1720-3 and 'Title page to *The Well-Tempered Clavier*', 1722, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 22.

²⁰ David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 20.

²¹ Johann Sebastian Bach, reported speech, date unknown, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 20.

²² David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 17.

²³ Johann Gotthilf Ziegler, 'On Bach's instructions for playing chorales', 1746, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 336.

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Mendel highlight his use of word-painting (e.g. setting the word 'fall' to a descending leap) and expressive melody (e.g. John the Evangelist's "tortured climactic line" (an extended, minor-key recitative line, unmistakably conveying anguish) when he tells of Peter weeping in the *St. John Passion* (BWV 245; movement 12c)).²⁴ That Bach's music seems to purposefully and intensely convey feeling, mood and meaning suggests Bach understood music as an art form. As Bettman states, Bach seems to have written music to "stir the emotions" and "delight" – to please the ears and affect the hearts of listeners as well as communicate religious messages or educate.²⁵

Writers have also considered Bach's musical style. Perhaps most universally, Bach is noted for his densely contrapuntal textures. A 1774 letter from C.P.E. Bach to Johann Forkel betrays J.S. Bach's skill and interest in counterpoint: "when he listened to a...fugue, he could soon say, after the first entries of the subjects, what contrapuntal devices it would be possible to apply, and which of them the composer...ought to apply".²⁶ Many others have noted – admiringly and disparagingly – the contrapuntal richness of Bach's music. Johann Scheibe in 1737 criticised Bach's music as "overladen", "turgid" and "confused", suggesting (albeit negatively) its extended, overlapping lines.²⁷ Similarly early nineteenth-century Berlin audiences (as described in 1869 by Eduard Devrient, a friend of Felix Mendelssohn's) considered Bach an "unintelligible...arithmetician" suggesting the intricacy, seriousness and almost mathematical, meticulous quality of his music.²⁸ By contrast Devrient himself in 1869 admired Bach's "abundance of melody", and Johann Birnbaum in 1738 praised Bach's harmonic skill and smooth integration of contrapuntal voices ("the voices...work wonderfully in and about one another, but without the slightest confusion").²⁹ This sense of order and refinement is similarly captured in David and Mendel's suggestion that in Bach's music parts behave "like persons...convers[ing]".³⁰ Additionally Wilfrid Mellers notes Bach's focus on order (as evident in his methodical, exhaustive treatment of keys and adherence to counterpoint rules) with the universe's divine order.³¹ Despite different readings of its value, Bach's style is thus widely appreciated as densely contrapuntal, ordered and meticulous.

²⁴ David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 18.

²⁵ Otto Bettmann, 'Bach the Rhetorician', p. 116.

²⁶ Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, 'Letter [to Johann Forkel] on Bach's personal and artistic traits', December 1774, in David et al. *The New Bach Reader*, p. 397.

²⁷ Johann Adolph Scheibe, 'Letter from an Able Musikant Abroad', 14 May 1737, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 338.

²⁸ Eduard Devrient, 'My Recollections', 1869, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 509.

²⁹ Eduard Devrient, 'My Recollections', 1869 and Johann Abraham Birnbaum, 'Impartial Comments on a Questionable Passage in the Sixth Number of "Der Critische Musicus"', 1738, in David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p.516, pp. 342–5.

³⁰ David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 21.

³¹ Wilfrid Mellers, *Bach and the Dance of God*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), pp. 256–60.

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This **topic sentence** outlines the topic of the **final body paragraph**. Note the use of the transition signal 'additionally' which indicates the writer is going to discuss another aspect of Bach's musical style.

Observe how the writer continues to **support her argument** by providing direct evidence from the literature. In this paragraph she skilfully interchanges between using **author-** and **information-prominent citations**. She also weaves in a number of **direct quotes** for key concepts and for specific terminology.

Evidence from Bach himself **additionally suggests** his stylistic economy – in both his expansion of short motifs to build a piece and his musical parodying. Laurence Dreyfus notes the concentration of musical ideas in Bach's work, **declaring**, "in the case of most Bachian genres, the set of significant ideas will be relatively small".³² This allows Bach to exhaustively explore all of a **motif's** melodic possibilities (to follow the "logic of invention"); to filter it through his "toolbox" of **compositional** procedures to create something inventive, but controlled and methodical.³³ **Likewise** David and Mendel recognise that Bach's music is built of short **motifs** to illustrate "the technique of elaboration": the initial two bar **motif** of Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, I. Allegro, **for instance**, grows into a whole melodic world.³⁴ **In other words**, Bach's economical style is characterised by a thorough exploration of a motif or fragment's **melodic** and **harmonic** possibilities. **Additionally** Bach's economy emerges in his recycling of music. He reworked **Vivaldi** and **Corelli** works, **suggesting** both his respect for these composers and his own thriftiness; his sense that music should be worked out to its full potential.³⁵ Bach also **parodied** his own music. Norman Carrell

Here the writer '**hedges**' by using the verb 'suggests', which has a **tentative meaning**. The writer may do because there is not strong evidence to support the claim she is making.

See the way in which the writer **logically presents the argument** by connecting one sentence to another using a range of **cohesive devices**: (1) The **referent 'this'** provides a link to the previous sentence and in this case is used to refer to 'the small number of significant ideas'. (2) The **transition signal 'Likewise'** indicates that a similar idea is being added; 'for instance' signals that an example is being given; and 'In other words' shows that there is a restatement or perhaps an extension of the point being made.

Note the switches between **tenses** here: (1) **Present tense** (emerges) used to narrate the essay. (2) **Past tense** (reworked) indicates that the action of reworking, which was undertaken by Bach, was completed in the past.

³² Laurence Dreyfus, 'Bachian invention and its mechanisms', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 173.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 181, p. 173.

³⁴ David et al., *The New Bach Reader*, p. 22.

³⁵ Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music', p. 58.

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identifies hundreds of works where Bach reworked or improved upon his own compositions – **for example** the melody of *Prelude to the 3rd Violin Partita* (BWV 1006; 1720) is recycled in *Sinfonia in D to Cantata 29* (BWV 29; 1731).³⁶

Similarly he set the Lutheran chorale *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her* ten times.³⁷ **Clearly** Bach was resourceful, and enjoyed revisiting and reconsidering (perhaps further 'working out') material.

To summarise, Bach's musical thought and musical style have been variously appreciated since his lifetime. He is thought to have conceptualised music as a religious reality, a church tool, a livelihood, and an art form. **And** his style has been viewed as richly contrapuntal, economical and ordered. What emerges from wide reading is a multi-faceted, altogether human picture of Bach as a composer who understood music to have multiple functions and an ultimately expressive, thorough style. **In terms of**

further research, I would suggest a consideration of how Bach's conception and execution of music compares with that of later composers. I particularly think his meticulous, almost mathematical style would offer a fascinating contrast with 20th century serialism.

Words: 1633

³⁶ Norman Carrell, *Bach the Borrower* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), p. 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Note the expert way in which the writer's **opinion** about Bach is expressed here. By beginning the sentence with the adverb "clearly" the writer is signalling that she is expressing strong views about Bach's character and attitude to work.

Here in the concluding paragraph, the **topic sentence** begins with the signal 'To summarise' to indicate that this is the end of the essay. Alternative expressions that can be used include "In conclusion", "To sum up", and "Finally".

Note how in the first half of the **conclusion**, the writer restates the **thesis statement** and summarises the **main points** presented in the essay in the order in which they were addressed.

Note the writer's first use of the **first person pronoun 'I'**. This use helps to personalise her response while she considers avenues for **further research**.

Note the inclusion of the **word count**, something students are often expected to provide. Do your best to keep to the word count (although you may be allowed to write 10% more or less words). Do not make the mistake of thinking "the more words, the better!"

The **concluding paragraph** provides the opportunity for the writer to signal that this is the end of the essay, sum up the argument and restate the thesis. If the essay is research-based, the writer may finish by suggesting possible avenues for further research.

Note the skilful use of the **passive voice** in this paragraph. The third sentence, for example, begins, "And his style has been viewed as...". Here, the passive voice allows the writer to focus on the topic - Bach's style - and avoid having to specify who made the claim. Written in the **active voice**, this sentence might say, "People have viewed his style as...".

See how the writer **concludes** the essay by making a suggestion about a **future research topic**. Such an approach can be taken in research-based essays, although it is possible that the writer did this as a form of **hedging**, to indicate that she is aware that there is much more that she could have explored about Bach's music.

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Mellers, Wilfrid. *Bach and the Dance of God*. London: Faber and Faber, 1980.

The **bibliography** contains references to all the sources (books and journal articles) referred to in the essay. In this essay the Chicago referencing style is used. Often this list is referred to as 'References' particularly (as in this case) when the list only consists of the texts cited in the essay.

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Essay writing

The above text is an excellent example of an academic essay. This particular essay was written for a Music course assignment and achieved a high grade because careful consideration was given to the following:

Structure and coherence

As this example illustrates, essays must be well-structured and coherent so that each idea clearly links to the one that precedes it and the one that follows. Essays normally have the following sections: introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, and concluding paragraph. The introductory paragraph provides the context, introduces the topic, and defines the thesis (point of view). The body paragraphs give the writer the opportunity to address each subtopic in turn. The concluding paragraph provides the opportunity for the writer to signal that this is the end of the essay, sum up the argument, and restate the thesis.

Within the broad structure of an essay, it is important to develop a coherent argument that clearly links one idea to another. One way that coherence can be achieved is through the use of “transition signals” or “connecting words” that smooth the transition from one idea to another and provide logical links between sentences. Such transitional signals include these adverbs: additionally, furthermore, however, similarly. Another way to develop a coherent argument is through “signposting”, through which the writer signals to the reader what is coming next in the essay or how the essay is being organised as a whole; For example, the writer clearly signals the overall essay organisation in the introductory paragraph:

Scholars have variously considered the nature of his musical thought, suggesting that he understood music to have religious, professional, educational and perhaps artistic significance. His musical style – particularly its economy and contrapuntal complexity – has similarly fascinated such historians as Laurence Dreyfus and John Butt.

Through these sentences, it is possible to see the subtopics that will be addressed in the essay in the order in which they appear (with the exception of the last two – economy and contrapuntal complexity, which are addressed in the reverse order).

Clear expression of the writer’s opinion or “voice”

The writer’s “voice” or opinion is clearly expressed in this essay even though the essay is written almost entirely in the third person. Indeed, as this essay shows, it is not necessary to use “I” to make your opinion clear. Rather it is possible to express your views by using words that express certainty (thus making a strong claim) or uncertainty (thus making a weak or tentative claim).

Strong claims are made by using adverbs that have a strong meaning (e.g., undeniably, certainly, clearly). These adverbs along with their adjective counterparts (i.e., undeniable, certain, clear) are sometimes referred to as “boosters” or “intensifiers”. As the following example shows, when making such a claim in the essay, the writer first provides evidence for the claim she is to make:

Similarly he set the Lutheran chorale *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her* ten times.³⁷ Clearly Bach was resourceful, and enjoyed revisiting and reconsidering (perhaps further ‘working out’) material.

Weak or tentative claims are made by using “hedging” devices such as “perhaps” and “seems”. Hedging is a way that writers can express uncertainty, avoid drawing unjustified conclusions and acknowledge that they are not experts. In this essay, the writer makes tentative claims or “hedges” by using adverbs (e.g., perhaps, apparently), verbs (e.g., suggest, seem, attempt), and modal verbs (e.g., could). The following example illustrates the writer using the adverb “perhaps” to indicate that she is uncertain about the claim she is making about the popularity of Bach’s music:

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Perhaps the most popular view of Bach's musical thought is that it is based on devout religiosity.

The extent to which strong or weak claims are made in essays often depends on the topic and the room for interpretation within this. This particular essay provides considerable scope for interpretation as the writer seeks to interpret the opinions of authors about Bach's musical style and thought from primary and secondary sources.

Careful attention to verb forms

Writing an excellent essay requires the writer to give careful consideration to tense (present, past), aspect (simple, perfect, progressive), voice (active and passive) and use of modals (e.g., might, could). Each of these serve a variety of functions in academic essays. Indeed, the writer can switch between different verb forms even within or between sentences for specific purposes. Verb forms used in the essay include the simple present and simple past, present perfect, modal verbs, and much less frequently, passive voice. A brief overview of the reasons why different verb forms are used is given below.

Tense

The most frequently used tense in this essay is the present tense. The present simple is used for:

- (1) narrating the essay; e.g.,
Additionally Bach's economy emerges in his recycling of music.
- (2) referring to generally accepted ideas e.g.,
Bach is undeniably a complex figure.

The past simple tense is used to refer to events that have been completed in the past; e.g.,

Bach was an ardent Lutheran: he not only worshipped in and often worked for the Lutheran Church ...

Aspect

The present perfect refers to an action which started in the past and is still of current relevance; e.g.,

Scholars have variously considered the nature of his musical thought ...

Modal verbs

Modal verbs are used for a number of reasons which include:

- (1) showing the intention of the writer; e.g.,
This essay will attempt to consider what exactly primary and secondary texts reveal about Bach's musical thought and style.
- (2) suggesting possibilities for further research; e.g.,
In terms of further research, I would suggest a consideration of how Bach's conception and execution of music compares with that of later composers.

Although not used for this purpose in this essay, modal verbs can also be used making tentative claims or statements; e.g., Bach may have taken this approach because ...

Voice

The active voice is primarily used in essay writing because it places the focus of the sentence on the *doer* or *performer* of the action rather than the receiver of the action; e.g.,

Luther saw music as a gift of God and endorsed its role in worship.

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The passive voice is used minimally in essay writing, and in this essay it is either used in quoted material or when the writer does not want to specify the author of the source material; e.g.,

To summarise, Bach's musical thought and style have been variously appreciated since his lifetime.

Specialised vocabulary

As this example shows, an important feature of a well-written essay is that specialised vocabulary is correctly used. Indeed, as a Music essay, this essay includes a number of musical terms; e.g., contrapuntal, melodic, and compositional. Using specialised vocabulary means that the word's correct form is used in an appropriate collations; that is, with words that frequently combine together; e.g., The adjective "compositional" (from the noun "composition") is used in the following sentence to modify the nouns "activity" and "purpose", both of which can combine with this adjective:

This suggests his personal dedication to God underpinned all his compositional activity: serving and glorifying God was his "ultimate [compositional] purpose".⁹

Given the importance of correctly using specialised vocabulary, you may find it useful to build a glossary with these words and focus on learning their meaning, the words they frequently collocate with, and their various forms.

Referencing style

Also of importance is the need to pay special attention to referencing and to ensure that you consistently follow the referencing style of your discipline. In this essay, the Chicago referencing style is used. Numbered superscript figures are used within the text (e.g., ¹) to refer to the full reference, which is given on the same page below the text in the footnotes (e.g., ¹Robin A. Leaver, 'Music and Lutheranism', in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 39.)¹