

Part I

Question: Music often plays an important role in our lives no matter whether our tastes are classical, country, jazz, rock, or rhythm 'n blues. This music may merely be in the background when we drive or study, provide a refuge from our problems, offer a trigger for our memories, or be an integral part of our lives, memories, and culture. **Write an essay of approximately two pages in which you explain the role that music plays or has played in your life.**

(Untitled)

Everyone knows that music can set the mood in various settings. Music also has the power to help in studying for some, and even sleeping, or both for people like me. Music plays a bit of a bigger role for me, it was one of the main factors that helped me get through a tough situation about two years ago. Music is probably one of the most influential things throughout my life.

Music helped me through my high school years and is still helping me in college. I have ADHD, and if I'm studying in a room with silence, I have to do something to stir things up a bit. I've found that I don't like taking medication for this problem, and listening to music helps take my mind off of everything else.

Another way that music helps me through life is it helps me sleep better. For some reason, if I have something playing in the background, I can fall asleep in about ten minutes. There is some scientific reasoning behind this; scientists have found that rock music makes you mentally tired. Unfortunately, if you would have music playing all night, most people would not go into the NREM sleep cycle, or deep sleep. Fortunately for me, Apple has my back by making the iPhone, which turns off after a designated time, helping me fall asleep and reach the deep sleep cycle.

Also, music has helped me through some rough times. I hit rock bottom about two years ago. I reached the most amount of debt in my life. I worked a job I hated and my girlfriend left me after being together for about five years. To me, it didn't seem like anyone around me knew what I was going through. I kept having the same old crap about how it was going to get better. That's when I started listening to the lyrics to some of my favorite songs. Before, I more or less listened to the catchy beat and the chorus. I became less self-centered when I found that a lot of people went through this, and in most cases, it was a lot worse.

Sometimes music can bring up memories, some happy, some sad. When I hear "Bad Moon Rising" by Creedence Clearwater Revival, I remember the drives I went on with my dad to some land we own. I always remember the vivid fall colors out on the farm as we would go scout for deer. Music can also bring up tough times in my life. A lot of the songs I listened to when I had a "rough spot" in my life I can't listen to anymore. Almost every time I hear one of those songs, I go right back to how I felt at that moment.

Even though there are some negative aspects of music, I believe the good far surpasses the bad. Without music, this world would be a horribly dull place. Music stands to be one of the most significant things in my life. I'm not sure where I would be without it; with the way that I was thinking, I probably wouldn't be alive today.

Commentary

Strengths: Like the "4" essay, this essay is adequately focused and organized. In the introduction, the writer presents the points of the "case" he will make for the importance of music in his life, and he follows the same order of those points in the body that follows, with a separate paragraph for each point. (This is not to imply that such introductions are always the best way to begin, of course. Writers often state the thesis at the end of the introduction, and appropriately so, because this is a position of emphasis, and the thesis should be clear, but writers

can do more in this paragraph than simply state the ideas they will develop below. For suggestions about writing introductions, [click here.](#)) Development is better in this essay than in the one scored “4.”

When explaining how music helps him get to sleep, for example, the writer refers specifically to the NREM sleep cycle and to his use of the iPhone, details that are informative in themselves and improve the writer’s credibility (and thus, his argument), since we trust that this writer has actually experienced what he is talking about; he isn’t speaking in generalities that everybody already knows. And when he discusses how music can trigger memories, he includes a concrete example, explaining that listening to Credence Clearwater Revival’s “Bad Moon Rising” triggers memories of the drives he took with his father. He begins each section in a way that achieves coherence (“Another way that music helps me . . .” and “Also, music has helped me . . .”), and he varies the patterns of his sentences to good effect (“Even though there are some negative aspects of music, I believe the good far surpasses the bad.”). He uses signal words effectively (e.g., “Unfortunately,” “Before,”). There are few, if any, errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and the style is highly competent. In summary, the essay is competent in terms of focus, organization, development, style, and correctness. Compared to the essay scored “4,” this essay is better in terms of development, style, and correctness. It received a “5.”

Weaknesses: Development could be improved. For example, after stating that listening to music helps him study, the writer might have given an example of the music that helps him study or possibly refer to a specific time he studied while listening to music. Discussing how listening to music helped him recover from the pain of breaking up, he might have given an example of one of his “favorite songs” that helped him realize he was not alone in this experience. It is not possible to go into great detail about every point, of course, but good writing achieves an effective balance between generalizations that present ideas and specific details that back them up. The details make for vivid and interesting writing. In deciding which points to bring up, writers should also consider whether they have enough to say about them—in terms of specific detail—to fill a complete paragraph.