

MUSIC 3736A: VOCAL PRE-PRODUCTION, TRACKING, AND EDITING

Dr R. Toft, TC-114, ext. 85104

Thursday, 9:30-12:30, TC-200

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Practical application of basic principles essential for singers, producers, and engineers to record vocals.

Topics: Pre-production – singing (phrasing, accent, emphasis, messa di voce, legato, staccato, portamento, appoggiatura, tempo rubato, register, tonal contrast)

Production – microphones, principles of operation and use

Post-production – editing (EQ, compression, de-essing, reverberation, etc.)

The course consists of a mix of lectures and workshops.

CONTENT AND TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

The central focus of virtually all pop/rock records is the vocal track. This course teaches the practical skills necessary for singers to deliver texts convincingly and for producers to help vocalists reach their full potential. Producers regularly coach singers in the pre-production phase of a project, and this role requires them to assess performances and address problems before tracking begins. Singers, for their part in the process, need a set of performing skills – everything from sibilance and plosive control to various aspects of phrasing and dynamics – that will minimize the amount of work engineers must do to enhance the track after it has been recorded. Audio engineers track vocalists through microphones capable of rendering voices in a flattering manner and edit the performances to optimize them for a variety of playback systems.

From at least the sixteenth century, musicians have realized that knowledge precedes practice, and because performers find it difficult to execute their craft well if they do not have a firm grasp of the concepts involved, this course combines academic comprehension with practical application. Students will be expected to read about vocal procedures, microphones (dynamic, condenser, ribbon), and digital editing tools. This information will guide our practice, and at the end of the course, participants will be expected to understand the material well and to apply the concepts studied skillfully. The goal of the lectures and workshops is to show both singers and producers how to employ principles quickly and effectively in a studio environment. As the term progresses, participants will be expected to take an increasingly active role in workshops.

During the course, singing will take place over pre-recorded backing tracks.

COURSE MATERIALS

Textbook: Robert Toft, *Vocal Pre-Production, Tracking, and Editing* (Talbot Productions)

Available on the course website (OWL)

ASSESSMENT

33 1/3% Recorded vocal track (a fully edited vocal over a pre-recorded backing track) – due (place the assignment in my mailbox in the main office)

66 2/3% Two mid-term tests, one on principles of singing and the other on principles of microphones, mic placement, and digital editing (each test is worth 33 1/3% of the final grade)
A test will be held on the completion of each of the first two segments of the course.

COURSE OUTLINE

- Part 1 Delivering words
lectures and workshops
mid-term test on terminology, principles, and concepts (covers part 1)
- Part 2 Microphones and their use, tracking
lectures and workshops
- Part 3 Digital editing and work on final project
lectures and workshops
mid-term test on terminology, principles, and concepts (covers parts 2 and 3)

PROTOCOL

Cell phones, computers of any kind (including laptops), tablets, and personal listening devices (iPod, etc.) are not permitted in class – notes are to be taken by hand. I have found that the use of laptops/tablets is almost universally abused and regret the fact that I cannot accommodate those who find laptop computers and tablets helpful for taking notes. Although these devices are convenient, they are not necessary for the work we do in class. Note: students with a documented need for the use of a laptop or tablet will be exempt from this restriction (documentation from Western's Student Accessibility Services must be provided).

Any student using a prohibited device or engaging in disruptive behaviour (including excessive whispering/talking) will be asked to leave the class.

CLASS ATTENDANCE

Not everything covered in the lectures is included in the text for the course, and students will acquire much of the framework necessary for listening to and discussing recordings through material presented in class. Regular attendance is essential as part of the preparation for tests and the class presentation.

CONSULTATION

I am available for consultation outside class by appointment. Please see me either before or after class to arrange a time. I prefer to conduct business 'in person' rather than by email, and I do not answer questions about course content by email. On the rare occasion that a student misses a lecture for legitimate and medically documented reasons, I will provide assistance with course material, but please be advised that I do not give private summaries of lectures. Students should rely on their peers to gather, and understand, material from classes they miss. See me only to clarify what you and your peers cannot grasp independently.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Music 2736A/B

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you will be removed from the course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

GRADING SCALE

A+ = 90-100%, A = 80-89%, B = 70-79%, C = 60-69%, D = 50-59%, F = 0-49%.

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION FOR STUDENT ABSENCE & MISSING WORK (≥10%)

Students are responsible for making up any missed classes or assignments as soon as possible. The University recognizes that a student's ability to meet their academic responsibilities may, on occasion, be impaired by medical illness. Illness may be acute (short term), or it may be chronic (long term), or chronic with acute episodes. The University further recognizes that medical situations are deeply personal and respects the need for privacy and confidentiality in these matters. However, in order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student's overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet their academic responsibilities.

Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Associate Dean, Undergraduate (TC210), together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. Students are directed to read the Senate policy on accommodation for medical illness at the following website for further details regarding requirements and procedures for the supporting documentation:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Whenever possible, students who require academic accommodation should provide notification and documentation in advance of due dates, examinations, etc. Students must follow up with their professors and their Academic Counselling office in a timely manner.

ACADEMIC CONSIDERATION FOR MISSING WORK (<10%)

In cases where students miss work that is worth less than 10% of the total course grade (ie. two or fewer assignments) due to medical illness or compassionate grounds, if documentation is voluntarily submitted to the Associate Dean's office and the Associate Dean grants an accommodation, then the missed assignment(s) or quiz(zes) will be discounted in the calculation of the final grade for the course. If documentation is not voluntarily submitted then the missed assignment(s) will receive a grade of zero. Students who have been denied accommodation by an instructor may appeal this decision to the Associate Dean's office but will be required to present appropriate documentation.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Submission of work with which you have received help from someone else (other than the course instructor or TA) is an example of plagiarism, which is considered a major academic offence. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, as found at:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

Students that are in emotional/mental distress should refer to the Health and Wellness at Western page (<https://www.uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help or to go to the Wellness Education Centre located in UCC room 76. **Students in crisis in need of immediate care are directed to go directly to Student Health Services in UC11 or to click on the green "I Need Help Now" button on the Health and Wellness page above.**

ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students work with Accessible Education Western (AEW, formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here:

https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/Academic%20Accommodation_disabilities.pdf

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the Western Multicultural Calendar.

<http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>

CONTINGENCY PLAN

Although the intent is for this course to be delivered in-person, the changing COVID-19 restrictions may necessitate some or all of the course to be delivered online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will **not** change. Any assessments affected will be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

GENDER-BASED AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence, either recently or in the past, you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at

https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca or call 519 661-3568.

EXAMINATIONS & ATTENDANCE

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Dean of the Faculty of registration.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN EXAMS

Electronic devices of any type will not be permitted during Midterm Tests and/or Final Exam in this course (unless required for accessibility reasons based on an approved accommodation request from Accessible Education).

ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN CLASSROOMS

The in-class use of electronic devices (other than for instructor-approved in-class uses) is expressly prohibited. Students found guilty of disrupting the class with electronic devices will be asked to leave the class and may be subject to disciplinary measures under the Code of Student Conduct.

PLAGIARISM DETECTION SOFTWARE USAGE

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<https://www.turnitin.com/>).

COMPUTER-MARKED MULTIPLE-CHOICE TESTS OR EXAMS

These may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.