

## Music Theory's Role in Mainstream Digital Journalism

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Recently, digital journalists have published many articles that attempt to analyze musical works for a general audience. Many of these blog posts and essays claim to utilize music-theoretic concepts as the means to elucidate and convey material. The rise of short-form digital journalism allows stories by staff writers and freelancers to be written and published rapidly. These pieces, often called “quick hits” or “hot takes,” may be well-meaning, but their underlying goal is to generate engagement for their publications in the form of clicks and comments from as many readers as possible. This pressure leads to click-bait headlines and catchy turns of phrase that barely do justice to the act of analysis.

The issues pertaining to mainstream journalism and music theory are multifaceted: (1) The authors of the material are non-experts in the field of music theory, and their work does not demonstrate engagement with scholarship; (2) Qualified scholars in the field have not yet effectively communicated with mainstream audiences; (3) The problematic process of data visualization: what are effective strategies for communicating with the public when they cannot read notated music? These topics are addressed by offering concrete solutions to theorists who are interested in taking on the task of public music theory within short-form digital journalism. These suggestions are based on interviews with editors and journalists from prospective publishers that reveal the goals of such articles and information about the readerships. Further, I will share my experience—for better or worse—pitching to editors at mainstream publications.