

sample assignment for 40,000 Years of Music Technology for use with Deirdre Loughridge, *Bone Flute to Auto-Tune* (University of Chicago Press 2026) and sample syllabus [for general course](#) or [for more advanced course](#)

“Museums... are places for telling, and telling again, the stories of our time...”

-Tony Bennett (cultural sociologist who happens to share a name with the singer),
The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics (2013, 147)

Assignment #1: Museum Exhibit

This assignment is an opportunity for you to explore music technologies beyond the specific ones we are examining in the course. It involves doing some independent research, as well as critical and creative thinking in order to put together an original exhibit of musical instruments/technologies.

As we learned in our discussion of “How Do(n’t) Music Technologies Change,” museum exhibits are a powerful way of presenting views of history and of how the world works. This is something to keep in mind: what do you want your museum visitor to learn from your exhibit? By bringing together a particular selection of artefacts, what broader view or insight will your exhibit communicate?

For this assignment, you will play the role of a museum curator to design an exhibit of music technologies. There will be two main components to what you submit (described further under “The Write-Up” below):

- 1) A **selection of five artefacts**, each with an image, audio example, your original curatorial note of ~150-200 words, and appropriate identifying information and citations
- 2) A **Curator’s Introduction**, contextualizing your selection of artefacts in ~350-400 words, with appropriate citations

This project is not high quantity in terms of word count; to make it *high quality*, however, will involve substantial research and thought work. (See the grading guide at the end of this document).

The Research

You’ll do independent research for this project to find and learn about artefacts for your exhibit. Good resources in which to find particular artefacts, as well as to find out more contextual (historical/cultural) information, are listed below. An excellent project will draw on multiple quality sources in order to develop an original exhibit. So, for instance, you might find an object of interest in MIMO-international, and then search for more information about that kind of instrument or its musical culture in the resources listed below and/or through our institutional library catalog. Avoid getting all your information from one source (which would result in a lack of originality), and avoid relying on websites of unknown authorship (which are of questionable reliability). If you find interesting information on a website of unknown authorship, try to corroborate it with a scholarly source (via the channels previously mentioned). Wikipedia or AI tools can be a starting place, but use them as a pointer to credible (and creditable) sources to use rather than as the basis for your information.

The Write-Up

Your **Curator's Introduction** will explain the organizing concept and significance of your exhibit. What should we know and notice about the technologies presented in your exhibit? Crucially, what do we learn by considering these instruments together?

Possible types of organizing concept include: varieties of instrument that share a design element or playing technique; the development of an instrument through time; instruments from a particular place and time; music technologies used by a particular artist, or in a particular genre; experimental instruments/technologies responding to a similar problem or desire; etc. Feel free to think expansively about what a musical instrument/technology is (for instance, a concert hall or music venue could be a technology of music dissemination).

Sources you use to inform your curator's introduction should be cited in Chicago-style (https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

You can draw your **selection of 5 artefacts** from the sources suggested below and/or from others you find (you can even use your own or friends' instruments), with the following stipulations:

- Each artefact needs an image (if you have a great concept that's a challenge for images, discuss with me rather than rule it out)
- At least four of the artefacts need an audio example (it doesn't have to be literally the instrument pictured, but some sound recording or video that illustrates the artefact's musical use or capacities)
- Each artefact needs basic identifying info, provided in list format (not part of word count):
 - Maker: (typically an individual or company)
 - Date made:
 - Place made:
 - Current location/owner (if applicable – like if it's currently in a museum)
 - Photo credit (cite source, and provide photographer name if available)
 - Audio example credit (cite source, and provide available info on performer(s), composer(s))
- Each artefact needs an **original curatorial note** by you, with sources of information cited in Chicago-style (https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html) Your curatorial note about each item should provide context for the item (about its creation, design, use, etc. as is most relevant to your exhibit's theme), and relate it to the organizing theme developed in your Curator's Introduction.

Our course website has two example works in the genre of this project:

- the percussion exhibit from Darcy Kuronen, *Musical Instruments: MFA Highlights*
- the Museum of Imaginary Musical Instruments (imaginaryinstruments.org)

In these examples, the curators have written both overarching introductions to a collection of instruments and individual notes on the selected items. Look to these as models of the kinds of observations and arguments one can make about a collection of music technologies.

Relevant Resources

Instrument Collections (which are good places to find instruments):

<http://www.mimo-international.com/MIMO/>

<https://www.mfa.org/collections/musical-instruments>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search#!?department=18>

Places to research instruments:

Oxford Music Online

An authoritative encyclopedia of music, Western focus

Search our institutional library catalog for Oxford Music Online and select the matching database result

Garland Encyclopedia of World Music

Comprehensive resource on non-Western music

Search our institutional library catalog for Garland Encyclopedia of World Music and select the matching database result

JSTOR

Includes the *Galpin Society Journal*, which features research articles on historical instruments

Search our institutional library catalog for JSTOR and select the matching database result

American Musical Instrument Society Journal

This journal aspires to provide “information on the history, design, construction, restoration, and usage of musical instruments in all cultures and from all periods.” The search box at the following link searches specifically within this journal:

http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.neu.edu/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=mlin_b_northeast&id=GALE|5UAD&v=2.1&it=aboutJournal

For more digital-age music technologies, it is appropriate to use music product review sites such as:

<https://www.soundonsound.com/>

<https://www.musicradar.com/>

Avoid websites of unknown authorship; if you find something interesting on one, corroborate it with a credible source.

Museum Exhibit Grading Guide

	A	B	C	D	F
Ideas and Content	Curator has thought deeply to develop an original and significant exhibit concept; curatorial notes are informative and reflect research using multiple quality sources; the whole is persuasively presented to leave the viewer-reader with a new perspective.	A significant exhibit concept well illustrated by the selected instruments; informative curatorial notes, reflecting good if somewhat less extensive research; the whole is coherent and engaging.	An overly general or simplistic exhibit concept, or concept from which it is unclear what the viewer-reader is supposed to learn; selection of instruments is coherent, if a bit redundant; curatorial notes reflect use of more than one source but sometimes omit relevant information and/or dwell on aspects not related to the exhibit concept.	Though curator's intro and notes on five items are present, the exhibit concept is weak, selected instruments are not coherently related, and/or information provided is incomplete, inaccurate, or overly derivative of single sources.	Basic assignment requirements are not met
Style and Mechanics	The writing is smooth and cohesive; there are few, if any, mechanical errors; thorough, correct citations	The writing is clear and appropriate; relatively few distracting errors in word usage or mechanics; thorough, correct citations	The writing is mostly clear; there are few mechanical errors; partial or inconsistent citations	The writing is frequently awkward, indirect and confusing. Mechanical errors distract the reader regularly. Incomplete or inconsistent citations	Mechanics and style are highly distracting. Deficient citations.