

Writing Prompt

You have been asked to write an argumentative essay for your school's blog in which you support or oppose the use of an artist's music in advertising. Use information from the "Should Musicians Change Their Tune?" passage set in your essay.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages;
- plan your response;
- write your response; and
- revise and edit your response.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims;
- use evidence from multiple sources; and
- avoid overly relying on one source.

Your response should be in the form of a multiparagraph essay. Write your response in the space provided.

Read the “Should Musicians Change Their Tune?” passage set.

Should Musicians Change Their Tune?

Source 1: The Changing Landscape of the Music Business

by Jacob Carter

- 1 The music industry is in the midst of a large upheaval. In decades past, artists made money through physical sales of records, CDs, and cassettes. However, those forms of media are quickly fading away. And while downloading songs from services such as Amazon or iTunes has become the most common way for people to purchase music in recent years, the whole idea of buying music to own may be falling by the wayside. To take its place are Internet services that stream music directly to listeners on their smartphones, tablets, or computers. These apps are typically available either as ad-supported free versions or ad-free monthly subscription services. And while this is great for fans, who now have access to millions of songs at the flick of a touchscreen, it has shattered the traditional model of how an artist manages his or her career.
- 2 With music lovers increasingly moving away from making one-time purchases towards an all-you-can-listen-to service, what is a hard-working artist to do? The main problem facing many musicians is that payments-per-stream of a song are much lower than what an artist would receive from a download. According to data journalist David McCandless, a signed solo artist would need about 5,478 iTunes downloads of a song per month versus 4,200,000 YouTube streams per month just to make the U.S. minimum wage. Some big-name artists have called attention to the issue. In November of 2014, award-winning musician Taylor Swift pulled her entire music catalog from Spotify, a popular streaming app, claiming that their business model suggests that music does not hold much worth.
- 3 Others have embraced the idea of streaming music, claiming that it offers smaller artists a chance for their music to get heard by a wider audience. Zoë Keating, a cellist who describes herself as established but non-mainstream, suggests that these services should be viewed as a way for musicians to get their music out there and not as an income

source. Brian Message, manager of the band Radiohead, has come out in support of streaming services. He sees them as a way for musicians and fans to interact.

4 Regardless of what artists may think about this shift in the music industry, there's no arguing that they need to adapt in order to make money. While touring and selling merchandise have always been tried-and-true revenue streams, one major shift in recent years has been the growth in partnership between artists and businesses. Corporate sponsorship can be a risky option for musicians. A band can make hundreds of thousands of dollars by agreeing to promote a product or license its music for use in advertisements, but there are many ways that this can backfire. Alex Scally, instrumentalist for the indie-pop duo Beach House, notes that when bands take on corporate sponsors they may lose the image they have worked to create. However, Scally does assert that the rules could be different for smaller bands just starting out.

5 It's clear that for artists big or small, trying to maintain credibility while struggling to sustain a career is certainly tricky. Artists must develop an image that appeals to their fans in order to remain unique and authentic, or they risk striking the wrong chord, which could leave them struggling to sustain careers in this new business landscape.

"The Changing Landscape of the Music Business" by Jacob Carter. Written for educational purposes.

Source 2: Selling Out Not Worth the Risk

by Darrius Johnson

6 With so much hype about how difficult it is to make it in the music business these days, it's understandable why artists would turn to large corporations to help bring them a bigger audience and, most importantly, a bigger paycheck. But is this really a good idea in the long run?

7 Artists considering an endorsement deal need to remember that their sponsors are out to benefit as well. As soon as a musician signs on the dotted line of a corporate partnership, he or she has a responsibility to represent the company and help it sell its products. This can be tremendously stressful for artists who are just starting to build their careers, as they need to spend energy creating good music and a unique image that appeals to fans. Endorsement deals can keep

a musician afloat, but can also take the focus away from what really matters—the music.

8 Sometimes popular, well-established artists who seemingly have little to gain from these deals end up having the most to lose. Take U2 for example—one of the world’s most popular rock bands who, after landing a deal with Apple that had their 2014 album *Songs of Innocence* installed into 500 million iTunes subscribers’ libraries for free, faced a storm of negative feedback from fans and critics alike. People resented the idea that an album they didn’t ask for was forced on them, likening the album to “musical spam,” and the reputations of both U2 and Apple were damaged. Over-exposure is a huge risk for popular bands who license out their music as well; people often tire of hearing the same music every time they turn on the radio, watch television, or go to the movies. When the electronic artist Moby released his critically acclaimed album *Play* in 1999, he licensed out each one of the album’s 18 tracks. Fans simply lost interest because they heard his music everywhere they went, and the artist himself has suffered the stigma of going a bit too far in licensing his songs.

9 Many songs are written with specific intentions and meanings; they express an artist’s values and beliefs about the world. In many situations, a record label owns the rights to an artist’s music, and if they license a song to a company or other party the artist has no control over how the song can be used. Neil Young, an artist known for his politically charged lyrics, expressed disappointment when his music was used by a U.S. presidential candidate without his permission, saying that he would not have allowed the candidate to use the song had he been asked. If a band has already created an image of itself as being somewhat rebellious or part of the counter-culture, selling its music to a corporation can leave fans feeling betrayed. Robert Schneider, member of the band Apples in Stereo and a Beach Boys fan, tells of the days he heard the song “Good Vibrations” in a soft drink ad, noting that it took him a while to stop associating the song with the commercial.

10 The music business is just that—a business. It exists to make money, and artists need to make money in order to continue making music. But when outside interests enter the mix, they can replace the passion in an artist’s music and turn the art into just another tool for corporations.

“Selling Out Not Worth the Risk” by Darrius Johnson. Written for educational purposes.

Source 3: The New Necessity in the Music Business

by Stacia Coates

- 11 Years ago, when people still bought full albums and artists were paid a decent percentage of the sales, the idea of “selling out” by accepting corporate sponsorships or licensing out songs was seen as a sure-fire way to lose credibility and respect in the eyes of fans. “How could they?!” fans would cry, at the shock of hearing their once-loved underground indie band in a commercial for a family-sized sedan. But these days, thanks to the rise of online music streaming and cheap digital downloads, what once was taboo has now become the norm. It is now accepted, and even necessary, for bands to put their music in commercials or promote products for sponsors in order to sustain a career in the music business.
- 12 Some argue that any loss in album sales can be offset by touring and selling merchandise. But with rising costs and other factors, even this is not enough. Booking agents and tour managers must be paid, gas and food must be bought, t-shirts and posters must be manufactured—all of these costs add up. A post on social media by Shane Blay, a member of the metal band Oh, Sleeper, details the bite these costs can take out of a band’s touring revenue. Out of the \$600 of gross income per night that a mid-level touring band such as his typically makes, they will be left with only \$78.75 of net income after deductions for all their other costs. This doesn’t even include hotel costs, which are usually \$50–\$60 per night. By the end of the tour, his band may even end up losing more money than it makes.
- 13 A corporation paying for these costs can make the difference between artists growing their careers, or completely giving up on the music business altogether. The Shins, a relatively unknown indie-rock band, grew massively in popularity after getting their single “New Slang” in a McDonald’s commercial, as well as a few other movies and TV shows. And while the sums of these deals aren’t disclosed, a band can earn anywhere from \$10,000 to \$150,000—plenty of money for equipment, touring, and living expenses.
- 14 Some bands have thoroughly embraced branding and see it more as an opportunity rather than a necessity. For example, the massively successful pop group, the Black Eyed Peas, focuses on exposure before

a paycheck. For years, they've allowed corporations to use their music in advertisements for cars, electronics, and jeans, among many other goods. In 2001, the trio did a 30-second commercial for Dr. Pepper soda. They made those 30 seconds a priority, even as they were preparing material for their next album. Then, in 2003, when Apple unveiled its iTunes store, the Black Eyed Peas' song "Hey Mama" was the first of the now-famous ad campaigns for the store. For the Peas, this business model has more than paid off. Now a household name, the group discovered that the more invested they became in marketing and branding, the more successful they became with fans.

- 15 For artists serious about their careers, turning down any form of corporate sponsorship or licensing agreements could be a mistake. At times, it's not only necessary, but a smart way to make it in today's music business.

"The New Necessity in the Music Business" by Stacia Coates. Written for educational purposes.