



How To Write an Artist Statement

ARTIST STATEMENT: A QUICK GUIDE

Your artist statement is a written description that gives your audience deeper insight into your work. It may include your personal history, the symbolism in your materials, or the issues you address. Your statement should include whatever is most important to you and your work.

Your artist statement supplements the visual information in your portfolio. Other uses include the following: helping dealers and other arts professionals discuss and sell your work; providing background information for writers of articles, reviews, and catalogues; functioning as the basis for cover letters and grant proposals.

WHAT A STATEMENT COVERS:

- Your work's purpose or philosophy
- Your methods and materials

DO'S:

- Keep it short, coherent and clear; no more than one page, double spaced.
- Write in simple sentences using simple words.
- Focus on topics not apparent from viewing your portfolio, such as symbols or metaphors, themes and issues underlying your work, materials, scale, etc.
- Proofread your statement for misspelled words, bad grammar and confusing content. Have a friend review as a second set of eyes.
- Rewrite your statement every time you complete a new body of work.

DON'TS

- Imitate the theoretical or intellectualized style of writing used in critical art magazines.
- Try to impress the reader by your extensive knowledge of art criticism or art history. You want to impress them with your art.
- Never use weak phrases that reflect insecurities like "I am hoping to," "I am trying to," or "I would like to."



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DEVELOPING YOUR ARTIST STATEMENT

An artist statement is never finished for long. Like your resume, it will be revised frequently as your work changes and as you find new ways of expressing what you are creating. Practice makes perfect!

THREE TYPES OF ARTIST STATEMENTS

ONE - PAGE :

Artist statements are rarely longer than one page, double spaced. More information than that is usually unnecessary and will probably not be read.

- It can address a large body of work, or work in different media, all concerning the same ideas.
- This longer statement will accompany an exhibition or performance of your work.
- It can be included in a portfolio or grant application.
- It can be used as a reference for: promoting, describing, selling, or writing about your work by gallerists, curators, publicists, critics, journalists, etc.

ONE OR TWO PARAGRAPH STATEMENT

- No longer than half a page
- Addresses the most pertinent information about the work, a series or media
- Can be incorporated into the heading of a portfolio description sheet, which accompanies a portfolio, grant application, etc.
- Can be the lead-in to a longer project description

25 WORD STATEMENT :

- This statement contains the central idea of your work to catch the reader's attention.
- This statement can be inserted into correspondence: cover letters, letters of intent, artist biography.
- Memorize your statement. Be prepared to deliver it anytime. For example, when asked "What do you do?", when meeting someone for the first time, at social occasions, openings or on the elevator, you'll be ready to respond. Think of your statement as a verbal business card.



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DEVELOPING YOUR ARTIST STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

A GOOD ARTIST STATEMENT SUPPLEMENTS THE VISUAL INFORMATION IN A PORTFOLIO OR AN EXHIBITION SO THAT THE VIEWER CAN BETTER UNDERSTAND IT.

Compose your statement with a sympathetic friend in mind, one who is genuinely interested in your work and who wants to understand it. To get started writing your statement, try describing one or two recent works. What do you want the reader to know about them? Your statement should stand on its own. Your reader should be able to imagine what your work looks like—even if they haven't seen it. Make people want to see your work!

SOME DO'S & DON'TS:

- DO write a strong, compelling statement without art jargon.
- DO develop a strong first sentence. Explain clearly and precisely why you make art, what it means to you and what materials you use. Tell a story about something that moved you making a specific body of work. Draw the reader into your thought process.
- DO keep it as short as possible. It should be no more than one typed page, double spaced, less is better. It is an introduction and a supplement to the visual information, not your life story.
- DO focus on topics that may not be apparent from viewing your portfolio and/or exhibit, such as influences in your work, themes and issues. The techniques, materials used, or scale of the work can also be important information to include.
- DON'T imitate the writing often used in art magazines. Avoid art speak and pretentious language. If your statement is difficult to read, it will NOT be read.
- DON'T try to impress the reader with your extensive knowledge of art criticism or vocabulary.
- DON'T announce what you are attempting to do, just clearly express what you have accomplished.



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SAMPLES OF SUCCESSFULL & NOT SO SUCCESSFUL ARTIST STATEMENTS:

EXAMPLE #1: LESS SUCCESSFUL

T.S. Eliot spoke of how the present shapes the past as much as the past affects the present. These paintings aspire to blur the distinction between the two and enter into a free-flowing dialogue between my present and my past. They ask fundamental questions as to the nature of time, the nature of change, and the meaning of invention. The ambition, which inspires their making, is to step outside of the linear, chronological unfolding of events and celebrate the eternal present that is the time art shapes.

Evaluation:

This statement, although poetic does not really address any specific aspects of the body of work. The reader is given very little information. Try to avoid using words like “aspire” along with “hope” and “attempt.” They are weak and may reflect insecure feelings on your part. Try to use more active and strong phrases. Notice how much more active and strong the phrase is without the word “aspire”: “These paintings blur the distinction between...”

EXAMPLE #2: LESS SUCCESSFUL

“The body, however, consists of an indefinite multiplicity of parts and arbitrary manifestations which are subjected to movement and divided into substances, moments, and details.” - Marsilio Ficino from About Love or Platon’s Feast

The works deal with a fragmentary corporeality which seeks its stimulation in the natural sciences, such as botany and neurology. The drawings construct and illustrate an intellectual model of deconstruction of corporeality and the search for unity. The central question here is the sense of time. Do different time levels exist parallel to each other? Does the unity of the individual exist in time, which is characterized by acceleration, rotation, and speed? The drawings reflect an internal world view which revolves around fragment, unity, and rupture. The simple pencil drawings are made on former construction plans, on the reverse sides are old sketches of pattern designs. The structure of the folds and the paper collage further emphasizes this vision.



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EXAMPLE #3: SUCCESSFUL

I began using a typewriter for its obvious function - to record my thoughts and ideas. Communicating is a crucial yet constant struggle for me. The more I typed the more the letters and words on the pages began to take on a new function, a new language. My discovery of this new language created with my typewriter and paper was one made up of patterns and grids formed by punctuation marks: commas, colons, apostrophes, and brackets. It was as if the typewriter was experiencing a breakdown, and this breakdown was my breakthrough. I had discovered a new way to communicate. There is an endless source of information that can be created through a limited use of materials: paper and a typewriter. I became, and am still, intrigued by this process.

Evaluation:

This is a good statement. It is precisely written and fun to read. The sentences are strong and simple. It answers the kinds of questions that arise when viewing the work, in this case, how are these marks being made, while providing supportive information about the artist's process and thinking.