

Writing an Artist's Statement

When it comes to writing an artist's statement, there are no simple formulas. Artists' statements vary in length, form, and substance. Generally, most are written in the present tense but the tones in which they are written vary significantly. Some are scholarly, some are playful, some play with the visual form the words take on the page, etc. Depending on the situation that prompted your need to write, you may have to take all or most of the following elements into account, though it is often impossible to break this information down into separate categories as it is all somewhat interrelated:

- the subject of your work
- your audience, your purpose or motive
- the materials and medium in which you work
- the theories and methodologies that influenced your work
- your own personal perspective or background

What you include in your artist's statement and how you write it will vary considerably depending on your prospective readers. An artist's statement that you write for your personal website or blog, for example, might be very different in style and content from an artist's statement that you write as part of an exhibition proposal or a grant application.

ABOUT YOU AND YOUR WORK

- Are you a student, a practicing artist, or both?
- What is your educational background? How does your background influence your work?
- What are your interests?
- What medium do you prefer to work in?
- Are you writing about a single work or a larger body of work?
- How do your ideas develop? Are you a collector, an observer, a traveller, an adventurer?
- Are you interested in exploring other cultures, gender issues, theories, memories, questions of identity, the relationships between form and function, certain shapes, brush strokes, shots, etc.?
- What did you initially set out to explore, investigate and discover? How does this perspective change throughout your work?

AUDIENCE AND CONTEXT

What prompted you to write this statement? Is this a fifty word statement for the Foundation Show, a three hundred word statement that's meant to accompany a grant proposal, or a 1500 word statement that will accompany a catalogue or book? If you are writing the "50 Words or Less" for the Foundation Show (see [handout](#)), for instance, your viewer/reader will already be aware of who you are, your purpose and the occasion. This will not be the case when you're applying to the Canada Council, writing for a catalogue, or providing information that will be used on a didactic panel that's part of a larger exhibition.

- Who is your intended audience? That is, who will be reading your artist's statement? And who do you envision viewing or experiencing your work?
- What is your purpose or motive for writing this statement?

MATERIALS AND MEDIUM

- Why do you chose to work film, sculpture, paint, wood, mixed media, etc?
- How do the materials reflect your purpose, the occasion, your process, and your theoretical interests? For example, how do you handle the camera, the clay, the brush, the wood?
- How the materials create or set a certain mood, and how do they reflect a certain culture, history, or attitude?

Your audience might be interested in the tools you used, whether you made them yourself, and how you applied or challenged certain techniques.

If you're writing about a particular work for an exhibition:

- What did you became aware of as you put the show or work together?
- How do your technique, process and materials contribute to the overall theme, meaning or subject of the work? In other words, what is your work about?
- Your choice of materials will usually be integrally related the space in which it is presented, and you might consider discussing this relationship as well.

HISTORICAL, CRITICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- What kind of research did you conduct while engaged in this work? Were you influenced by certain ideologies or theories?
- Does the work of other artists, visits to galleries, or travel to other countries contribute to your ideas, your process, your finished work?

- What are the historical precedents for your work? Does your work make a statement about the future, does it challenge the theories of others, and/or does it provide a new way of looking at an “old” idea?

EXAMPLES AND MORE INFORMATION

Because artists' statements vary so much, it will probably be useful to look at examples written by others. The library has an excellent collection of exhibition catalogues. Perusing the statements provided in many of them may be helpful.

Artspeak, a local artist-run centre, has a website with good examples of statements in press release-form:
www.artspeak.ca

The Richmond Art Gallery provides artists' statements that are often accompanied by images of the work:
www.richmondartgallery.org

The Artes Magnus Gallery provides good examples of short, descriptive statements:
www.artesmagnus.com/artists