

AMPLIFY ARTS

Artist Statements Resource Guide

What is an artist statement?

An artist statement is a general introduction or overview of your work, a body of work, or a specific project. Typically written in the first person and no longer than one page, a statement should be a singular reflection of your attitudes and influences and talk about how those inform your work.

Why do I need an artist statement?

Artist statements are a required component of almost every application. Whether you're applying for a grant, residency, grad school, or teaching position, you'll need a solid artist statement on hand. Being able to articulate the conceptual underpinnings of your work on paper will give selection panels for any of the above a stronger sense of your interests and specific point a view in a way that could distinguish your work from that of other applicants. It's also helpful when preparing for an artist lecture, if someone is writing a review of your work, for press releases and bios, or to have ready to include with other printed material during an exhibition.

What should my statement include?

Your artist statement should give the reader a clear picture of your process without necessarily having a visual frame of reference. In fact, in many cases, it will be the first introduction or exposure an individual will have to your work. Each artist will include different material in their statement tailored to their specific practice. There really is no one size fits all answer to this question. However, here a few helpful questions to ask yourself when writing a statement:

1. Does my statement address major or recurring themes present in my work?
2. Does my statement give an idea of what my work looks like?
3. Does it frame my work as part of a larger cultural, political, or historical discussion?
4. Does it expose how my process or materials inform or influence the content of my work?

Whether you're submitting a statement that's one page or one paragraph, the reader should have a clear and concise idea of not only *how* you work, but also *why* you work, and *where* you situate your work culturally or historically.

What is the tone / voice of an artist statement?

Tone is another aspect of your statement that can be highly individualized and vary widely across the board. Avoid jargon and art speak. Use direct and concise language. If your work tends to have a more academic bent, your statement may be more academic in tone. If your work is messy and informal, a more casual tone might work to your advantage. At the end of the day, the tone of your statement should capture your own voice, be honest, and support your artistic practice in a way that makes your statement an integrated extension of your creative output.

What pitfalls should I avoid when writing an artist statement?

There are a few traps artists sometimes fall into when writing a statement. Here is a quick list of things to avoid:

1. Art speak and jargon.
2. Pompous or grandiose statements about your work or role in the world as an artist.
3. Folksy anecdotes about your family or childhood, unless specifically relevant to your work.
4. Language that makes your writing sound more like a press release than an artist statement.
5. Clichéd or empty expressions that lack specificity. For example:
 - a. Identifying yourself as an “artist” in your statement; this should be a given
 - b. Calling yourself a creative person or art lover
 - c. Saying you’ve loved art since you were a child or emerged from the womb creating
 - d. Using broad generalities that could apply to anyone like, “I’m inspired by nature.” What about nature inspires you? Be specific and give the reader a reason to keep reading.

How long should my statement be?

Generally speaking, most statements you will use for applications will fall somewhere between one paragraph and one page (or 500 words) in length. Both short and long format statements have their advantages and drawbacks. In a shorter statement, brevity and economy of style can peek a reader’s interest right off the bat. In a longer statement however, you have the opportunity and space to describe two to three specific projects in greater detail, giving the reader a more fully developed idea of how your practice functions that can be harder to convey in a short overview. The length of your statement will also depend on the application guidelines determined by the award or position for which you’re applying. An artist statement included as part of a packet when applying for a tenure-track teaching position will typically be much longer and delve into more detail than a statement included with an application for a two week residency.

What if I’m happier with my one page statement and want to submit it even though the application only asks for a paragraph?

For any application, always follow instructions. Submitting a one page statement when an application asks for a one paragraph statement will usually result in disqualification. Expanding or adding additional, unsolicited material to your application does not help you. Imagine you’re sitting on a selection panel with hundreds of statements to review. Those that don’t adhere to the application’s guidelines are typically the first to be thrown out.

How often should I revise my statement?

While having a basic skeleton for your statement is great, it’s important to leave room for it to grow and change as you grow and change as an artist. It’s also important when putting together an application that your statement speaks to the work sample you submit. If you recently completed a new body of work, for example, that you think is particularly strong and would like to submit it as part of an application, take time to revise your statement too. That way, it reinforces your visual material and those two things work together to create a stronger application.

Where can I see examples of other artist statements?

1. Individual artist pages on gallery websites
2. Individual artist websites
3. Artist interviews
4. Exhibition catalogs
5. Collections of artists’ writings

Additional Resources

1. <https://www.gyst-ink.com/artist-statement-guidelines/> (Getting Your Sh*t Together)
2. <http://www.saic.edu/media/saic/pdfs/lifesaic/careerco-opcenter/Artists-Statements.pdf> (School of the Art Institute of Chicago)
3. <http://www.bmoreart.com/2009/04/best-professional-practices-for-artists-2.html> (Bmoreart)
4. <https://www.mica.edu/Documents/Career%20Services/ArtistStatementBio11.pdf> (Maryland Institute College of Art)
5. <https://thepracticalartworld.com/2011/02/26/suggestions-for-writing-your-artists-statement/> (The Practical Art World)