

# How to Write an Artist Statement

Advanced Digital Photography I PHO 2700  
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*Quoted content is courtesy of the Emily Carr Institute, Writing Centre*

Artist statements are generally very difficult for an artist to write. Often, it is difficult to know where to begin, or what topics to cover. Depending on the situation, you may require an artist statement that is only a few paragraphs, or several pages. I have assembled some of the best tips and topics for writing your statements and compiled them below.

## **Write in the first person.**

It is generally best to write these in the first person because it is *your* interpretation of *your own work*.

## **Who are you and what is your background (relevant to this work)?**

*"How did your ideas develop? What did you initially set out to explore, investigate and discover? How did this perspective change as your work took shape?"*

Be careful not to let this turn into an Artist Biography! Any info you list should all be relevant to **this specific photography series**. Think of it as an introduction to your work, but not an introduction to you as a photographer. You must keep it specifically relevant to the work displayed.

## **Audience, occasion or situation:**

*"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?"*

In our example, you are writing an approximately 250-500 word statement to explain your artistic process as it reflects your efforts for your Final Project Photo Series.

## **What is your purpose or motive?**

At the very least, you should explain what your concept is, and how you are interpreting it with your series. Be descriptive, and make sure that it makes sense to others. If you are trying to convey a particular message or reveal something through your work, be sure to articulate it.

## **The materials and medium and how you make your work:**

*"As long as it isn't too obvious, your audience will almost always want to know why you chose to work in film, sculpture, paint, wood, mixed media, etc. They'll want to know how the materials reflect your purpose, the occasion, your process, and your theoretical interests."*

In our instance, we are working with a digital photography course. Is your entire process digital? Do you begin with film, then scan? Have you used Photoshop for retouching or compositing? Any other use of tools that might be interesting to a person viewing your work?

*"Your audience might be interested in the tools you used, whether you made them yourself, and how you applied or challenged certain techniques. Most importantly, they will want to know how your technique, process, materials, contribute to the overall theme, meaning or subject of the work -- in other words, what your work is 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, theoretical framework

*"What kind of research did you conduct while engaged in this work? What did you read? Did the work of other artists, visits to galleries, or travel to other countries contribute to your ideas, your process, the 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? However you go about introducing this information into your artist statement, it is often necessary to use framing when you place your work within a larger context."*

Don't assume that viewers will know exactly where you are coming from. It's helpful to at least touch on any research you have done for your series to help viewers understand your work better.

For more information on using framing to cite sources: <http://www.eciad.ca/wc/writingcentreframe.htm>

## Web Links for Artist Statements

Here are a few links to get you started with good advice, guidelines and also samples:

- Emily Car Institute, Writing Centre - <http://www.eciad.ca/wc/artstate.htm>
- ArtBusiness.com - <http://www.artbusiness.com/artstate.html>
- NAIA - <http://www.naia-artists.org/work/statement.htm>
- Molly Gordon.com - <http://www.mollygordon.com/resources/marketingresources/artstatemt/index.html>