

WORKSHEET

Artist Toolbox Lab: Putting Your Words on Paper

Advice on Writing an Artist Statement & More

Provided by Rontherin Ratliff

MINDSET IS KEY IN EVERYTHING WE DO.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CAN'T DO IS ONLY TRUE *BASED ON WHAT YOU TELL YOURSELF.*

- It is the lens through which you look at the world that shapes your skills, thoughts, feelings, actions and defines your ability to be yourself to influence the environment. If you have a positive mindset, you will be more optimistic, motivated, and focused on achieving your goals and meeting your needs.
- It's not about knowing how; it's about understanding that you have the ability to do so.
- It's not the not knowing that keeps us from achieving our goals; it's the not doing anything.
- If you are thinking 'I create so I don't have to write/speak,' let me inform you that if you want someone to show your work or someone to fund your work, you will need to write or speak about your artistic practice. If you don't plan on showing work or don't need funding to create your work, you won't need to write/speak about it. (There are Artists who have someone write and speak about their work for them, but they often spend years of their life working only to be discovered late in life. And the words are often what someone else wants them to be.)

If a baby could communicate its body aches and hunger pains by quietly laying and looking cute, we would have no problems with them on the airplane or in movie theaters, but parents aren't mind-readers, so babies cry and parents do what's needed to care for them.

- Your art is a cute baby with no voice so you're going to have to do the crying to get y'all's wants/needs met. And by crying, I mean writing and speaking. (Not my best analogy, but I hope you understand what I'm trying to say)
- I'm not interested in showing you how to write but instead encouraging you to see the patterns in how things are written.
- There's a format to things. Once you can see the format, you can begin looking for the reasons it's formatted that way and recreate it for yourself.
- Art making is about problem solving, (I want to do../ how do I...) so the fact that you've been creating for as long as you have says a lot about your ability to problem solve. Writing is just another art form to solve. You say to yourself, 'I need words, where do I find them?'
- Where do we find the words?

If you have created a piece of art and need to speak about it or your process of creating it, the words are already there. The words were with you every step of the way. You just didn't write them down. You have a language that's your own that you understand but it needs translating for others to understand.

Example: You are walking and you approach a collection of rose bushes along the sidewalk in front of a house.

- Your first reaction: *Ooh!*
- Next reaction: You bend over to smell the first bush.
- Next reaction: You look up and see there are six more.
- Next reaction: You begin smelling them all.
- Next reaction: After smelling them all, you take a picture of the third bush because it smelled the best to you.
- Next reaction: Getting home and seeing your picture and remembering that experience
- Next reaction: You decide to paint the picture.
- Next reaction: Someone sees the painting and asks you why you painted it
- Next reaction: You say, "I don't know, I liked it". Six words. End of story.

So, lets go back and look at all the words in that scenario:

- Ooh! = I'm excited about the opportunity to explore the sights and scents of this collection of rose bushes.
- I wonder if they have a smell (bending down to smell them) = Questioning if my understanding of a given situation holds true to the reality of that situation.
- Seeing more, smelling all = Engaging in a curious exploration of nature's effortless beauty and its affect on your mood and senses
- Picture of bush 3 = These roses have had the highest level of positive affect on my senses. I'm documenting them to be reminded of the impact they have made on me, my day, my trip to (pick a place).
- You paint the picture = there is a positive emotional experience I have when looking at the picture of roses, reminding me of that time and place. To have access to this experience more often, I have decided to paint it on a large canvas with acrylic paint.
- "I liked it" = By painting it, I'm able to combine two things I enjoy, nature and painting.... Nature because Painting because.....

The words are a combination of your internal dialogue and descriptive actions you are taking.

The first step is to understand why you do what you do.

The more you learn about yourself, the easier it is to share your understanding with others.



Here is a method that has been used for problem solving and self-improvement. Basically, you ask yourself “why” over and over again until you can’t get a deeper answer. Sometimes, it’s 7 whys. But it can be more or less than 7.

Here’s an **example** of how this can play out: Let’s start with... **Question:** *What do you want to do?* **Answer:** I want to be a writer.

- *Why do you want to be a writer?* To be able to share my story with the world.
- *Why do you want to share your story?* To help someone who has gone through a similar ordeal.
- *Why do you want to help someone?* I know how it is to feel lost and have no one to turn to, so I want my readers to feel less alone.
- *Why do you want your readers to feel less alone?* The road to success can feel lonely at times and having someone who understands can multiply their output by tenfold.
- *Why do you want them to 10x their output?* So they can live better lives.
- *Why do you want them to live better lives?* Because we only have one life, so we should live it to the fullest and enjoy the journey.
- *Why should you live it to the fullest and enjoy the journey?* Because when you’re on your deathbed and someone asks if you’ve regretted anything, you wouldn’t want to answer, “I wish I had done (a certain activity).”

By question 7, you might realize it’s become unrelated to your initial “why.” That’s okay because now you know what you truly desire. Try **repeating the above process** for the question: *What is your reason for making art?* What questions does the answer lead to?

- *What is your reason for making art?*
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?
- ?

Based on your answer to question number seven, 'Why _____?,' answer the following two questions:

- *What are your immediate goals for you artwork?*
- *What are your future goals for your artwork?*

The answers to the previous ten questions can become building blocks for your artist statement. Don't make excuses or apologize for your work. Avoid dwelling on personal situations or traumas; if need be, speak of it in the greater context - 'My work is about me always getting stopped by police' vs 'My work address racial profiling.' Include comments that clarify and support your work.

It helps to be solution driven. When looking for help, people won't be interested in solving your problems; they have their own. But it makes people feel good to help, so if you present them with a solution, the chance of getting their help is higher.

Example:

A rabbit is driving a car and it breaks down on side the road. A raccoon sees the hood up and stops to help.

Raccoon: "What seems to be the problem?"

Rabbit: "I don't know, it just stopped on me."

Raccoon: "Has it done this before?"

Rabbit: "No, and I have no idea where to start looking for the problem."

Raccoon: "I'm not a mechanic, so I don't think I'll be able to help you. Im sorry."

Raccoon leaves slightly disappointed they were not able to help.

Rabbit sits there for almost an hour - checks things out under the hood, sits in the car looking at all the warning lights on the dash and sees a no carrot stems light flashing in red. Just as he stands up out the car, a Raven arrives.

Raven: "What do we have here?"

Rabbit: "It would seem I'm out of carrot stems, so the car stopped on me."

Raven: "That sucks, but I know a patch nearby full of carrots. I'll fly there and be back in a second."

Raven gets back with the carrots. Rabbit breaks off the stems and stuffs them in the stem tank. Just like that, Rabbit is back on the road and Raven is happy they were able to help.

Everything you do should be moving you toward a desired goal. If your artist statement communicates what you are doing now and what you are working toward, you create an opportunity for someone to help bring you closer to your goal.

Note: Money is not the solution. The value you bring in exchange for money is the solution.



WORKSHEETS AND WRITING SAMPLES

Possible topics for inclusion in your Artist Statement:

- What is your intention as an artist?
- What is your method of execution? Does it differ on individuals works or are your works series-oriented?
- What is the content (meaning) of your work?
- Do you deal with multiple subjects or do you concentrate on particular images?
- Are your works realistic, abstract, symbolic?
- Comment on your composition or picture building process.
- What are the formal elements and principles employed?
- What remarkable formal techniques are employed in your work, realitive to line, shape, texture, value, color?
- Does your work employ any unusual qualities relative to format, techniques, etc.?
- Has your experience in a course improved your efforts in your major area of concentration (i.e. certain drawing assignments suggesting a direction in painting)?
- Without being over the top, what does your art mean to you?

PERSONAL ARTIST'S STATEMENT & CRITIQUE WORKSHEET

Your Name _____ Date _____ Project Name _____

1. Description of Artwork (What colors are used? Warm, cool, primary, secondary, mixed? What is the subject matter/imagery?)
2. What is your favorite thing about your artwork and WHY?
3. If you could change anything about your project, what would you change and WHY?
4. Which of the "Elements of Art" listed below are used in your artwork? Circle the Element(s) you used (circle as many as apply).
LINE COLOR SHAPE VALUE TEXTURE SPACE
5. HOW?
6. Respond to the following questions regarding your artwork.

Describe-

Find a ruler, and in inches, provide the correct horizontal and vertical "size" of your artwork. Next, state which "medium" you worked in (paint, pencil, ink, mixed-media, etc.). Next, describe what the project assignment was and how you developed your individual idea.

SIZE:

MEDIUM:

DESCRIPTION:

Analyze-

Describe how the Elements and Principles you circled above are used in the composition/arrangement of your piece.

Interpret-

Describe the mood, content, emotion or meaning you were trying to express in your artwork.

EXAMPLE

Artist Statement /Short Bio

AnnMarie Fitzsimmons

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I have been interested in art & artists my entire life. I began painting as a very young girl. I began painting images of chairs thirty years ago. The chairs are usually very specific chairs, with names such as Windsor, Wassily or Stickley. I am fascinated by many different types of chair designs; however, I am more interested in what a chair does to someone's personality, even for a short time. For example, an individual will "act" very proper while sitting in a Queen Ann style chair and, in contrast, they will "act" very informal while sitting on an inexpensive metal folding chair, especially if it has some dings, dents and perhaps paint spattered on it. People are seldom present in my paintings. And, after careful planning and positioning I decide on a composition. How my lines and objects interrelate on the picture plane is just as essential as the subject I am depicting. My images are quiet glimpses into three-dimensional spaces that are meticulously arranged. I invite my viewers to look in.

I graduated with honors and received my Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Art from Montclair State University. I regularly exhibit my art in juried shows throughout the NY, NJ & CT area. I am currently teaching painting and drawing classes to children, teens and adults at the Around the Corner Art Center in Freehold, NJ.

ARTIST STATEMENT WORKSHEET

Intention: What was your intention in making the work in terms of what you wanted to communicate to the viewer or to yourself?

Personal Decision-Making (Manner of Working): What personal decision-making did you engage in when making choices about what to include in the art form/subject matter? This might also reflect decisions having to deal with physical conditions that needed to be considered due to the nature of the work.

Content: What is visible in the work's content? Be as detailed and specific as you can in describing what you included in the image.

Design Concept: Explain your incorporation of the elements of art and the principles of design, as they relate to the design concept of the work.

Process/Technique/Procedure: What process, technique, and procedure did you use in the creation of your work? Discuss steps, materials and tools that you used.

Discovery: What did you become aware of while creating the object or after its completion, including connections to other experiences, art history, and the source(s) of your exploration as a part of the discovery process?

Each of these topics must be addressed in a clear and concise way in your written artist statement. The artist statement has no length restriction, but needs to cover all of the topics above. A highly engaging artist statement uses proper grammar, well-formed paragraphs, and reads smoothly.

Artist Statement is worth 30 points. Score each of the categories below with 1, 2, or 3.

1= not included in statement

2= vaguely included in statement

3= clearly included in statement

___ Intention

___ Content

___ Design Concept

___ Process/Technique/Procedure

___ Personal Decision Making

___ Neat Penmanship or Typed

___ Reads Smoothly

___ Proper Grammar/Spelling

___ Discovery

___ Well-formed Paragraphs

___ **total out of 30**

ARTIST STATEMENT WORKSHEET

From the information you assemble, we will create a three-paragraph Artist's Statement to include in your portfolio.

STEP 1: On a separate sheet of paper, answer all of the questions asked on this worksheet. You may use one-word answers or short sentences. Try to be brief, direct, and thorough. Keep the answers in groups by heading, such as:

- Why your artwork is important or interesting
- Why you create your artwork
- Who you are as an artist

Fill in answers to the following questions without restricting your thoughts. If there is more to your work than is answered by these questions, continue writing; the more you have to work from, the better.

What makes your work important? These are the main “whys” about your work: Why should a person look at it? Why is it important for a gallery to show your work?

1. What imagery or ideas do you use in the artwork in your portfolio that is unique?
2. How did you use art media differently from the way other artists have in the artwork in your portfolio?
3. Why is the meaning of your work in your portfolio unique or important for other people to understand?
4. What is interesting about the subject matter you've chosen for your artwork?

Why do you create the things you do? The questions here are intended to encourage thought about the personal reasons for creating the important “whys” listed above.

1. What made you want to draw or paint the ideas and images seen in your portfolio?
2. If you've used art media in a unique way, how did that happen? Why?
3. Why did you choose the meaning in your artwork? What personal reasons do you have for this?
4. Why do you think you addressed the subject matter of your artwork the way you did?
5. Why were your approaches so different from those of other artists in your group?

Who are you as an artist? The questions here fill in the background that may have inspired the personal responses to the questions in the previous section.

1. When you think of your artwork, what music, films, or TV shows does it resemble?
2. In your personal life, what do you do differently from your friends or family?
3. When you think about the personal reasons you have for the meaning of your work, what other things in your life do you have similar feelings for?
4. Describe the personality of one of your friends who you agree with frequently.
5. How are you the same and how are you different?

ARTIST STATEMENT WORKSHEET

STEP 2: Form your answers into complete and readable paragraphs. Create a topic sentence from the headings under which the questions were answered. The paragraphs you create should be understandable and relatively seamless. Have a friend read them out loud and listen to hear whether or not they “sound right.” If something does not sound right, change it.

STEP 3: Remove the headings and rearrange your paragraphs into this order:

1. Who you are as an artist
2. Why you create
3. Why your work is important

Then, craft “transitions” from paragraph to paragraph. These are one to two sentences at the end of a paragraph that make the change between subjects/paragraphs smooth and readable.

STEP 4: Write a rough draft that is double spaced and title the page “Artist’s Statement.” Your name should appear at the top of the page along with the date.

ARTIST’S STATEMENT: The purpose of the artist’s statement is to help the reader gain insight into your intentions and provide them with a window into your creative process as an artist. In essence, your artist’s statement is where you get to speak in your own words about what drives and inspires you to create! An artist’s statement can be as brief as one paragraph, but it is usually no more than one page in total.

An artist’s statement is a place for you to explain:

- What draws you to your medium
- How you became interested in doing this particular type of artwork
- The ideas, issues or concerns that you aim to communicate in your artwork
- How you approach starting a new piece
- What motivates and inspires you to continue the work
- How you know a piece is complete

Your artist’s statement is not a rigid piece of writing and can be adapted depending on the context of what you need it for. In fact, it is not unusual for artists to have a variety of versions of their artist’s statement. For example, you may have an artist’s statement that accompanies a specific work of art, another statement that remains with your arts resume/CV, as well as others that you include with applications (i.e. grant applications or applications for artists’ residencies, exhibitions and/or festivals).

ARTIST STATEMENT WORKSHEET

An **example** of an artist's statement that accompanies a specific work is:

As a (tribal name) textile artist, I receive most of my inspiration by attending feasts and potlatches. Through attending these events, I am able to see how textile pieces will be used in ceremony. As a result, I am able to design my work to be both aesthetically appealing and practical.

It is important that your artist's statement reflects your unique art practice. As a result, the questions listed below are meant as a starting place to help you begin a first draft. **Feel free to adapt these suggestions to suit your needs:**

- Where are you from? What are your tribal (local) affiliations?
- Does your work originate from your tribal (cultural) traditions? Please describe.
- Do you consider your work to be traditional, contemporary, or both?
- What is it you hope to convey to people through your work?
- What materials and methods do you use and why?
- What events or influences have affected your work?
- What aesthetic concerns do you have?
- What subject matter do you use and why?
- Does your First Nations' (native) language play a part in the work you do? How so?

EXAMPLE

Anne Labovitz
Artist Statement

The driving force behind my portraits is an enduring interest in people; in the human spirit, its emotional resonance and the way over time it manifests in our relationships with others. (Why?)

Utilizing painting, drawing, and printmaking techniques, my work examines the personal universal exchanges found in contemporary portraiture, yet through expressive color, luminosity, and gestural mark making, dislocates portrait painting from historical and hierarchical structures. Informed by German Expressionism and embracing exaggerated hues and boldly simplified or distorted forms, I desire to startle the viewer. The notion of the graphic impulse, with its raw, immediate, and unflinching emotional extremes delivering a directness and frankness, characterizes my work. Layered, abstracted marks are cumulative, each stratum revealing visceral and emotional intensities. I attempt to draw the viewer inward to experience an encounter with the subject and the collective consciousness. (What?)

The notion of temporality is central in my process; documenting human connections, dialogues and relationships as they morph over time. Fascinated by the development of an individual, the relation and dependence to others, imagery at times consists of the human form, in others the content contains the written word - text that is layered in legible and illegible mark making. (How?)

In the “word” paintings I am expressing my immediate emotions deliberately to convey them. Certain words have universal and visceral connotations and I am compelled to put them on canvas. (Example of work)

There is also a time-based quality to the physicality found in my work. Each piece is created over several months, using layers of polymer mediums between layers of mark-making, I aim to fossilize, preserve and record each set of marks as a single event in the building or rendering of the portrait. By working across multiple pieces at one time, documenting and recording my experiences, memory, and emotional responses to the subject means that what lies beneath is sometimes subdued or intentionally hidden. I am compelled by what might be revealed and obscured by this approach. These compilations, with imagery and text sometimes masked, develop over time. Marks made today require a response to the mark of yesterday. (What, How, Why, What else?)

Anne Labovitz: An American artist whose artwork challenges isolation, loneliness and disconnection by activating color and light in large-scale work.

How do you want to identify?

What do you want your artwork to do?

How does your artwork do what you want it to do?