

Interior Architecture

Ohio University

College of Fine Arts

School of Art+Design

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Examples of Concept Statements

ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT: Steven Holl

Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Extension
Kansas City, MO, USA

The expansion of The Nelson Atkins Museum of Art fuses architecture with landscape to create an experiential architecture that unfolds for visitors as it is perceived through each individual's movement through space and time. The new addition, named the Bloch Building, engages the existing sculpture garden, transforming the entire Museum site into the precinct of the visitor's experience. The new addition extends along the eastern edge of the campus, and is distinguished by five glass lenses, traversing from the existing building through the Sculpture Park to form new spaces and angles of vision. The innovative merging of landscape, architecture and art was executed through close collaboration with museum curators and artists, to achieve a dynamic and supportive relationship between art and architecture.

As visitors move through the new addition, they will experience a flow between light, art, architecture and landscape, with views from one level to another, from inside to outside. The threaded movement between the light-gathering lenses of the new addition weaves the new building with the landscape in a fluid dynamism based on a sensitive relationship to its context. Rather than an addition of a mass, the new elements exist in

complementary contrast with the original 1933 classical “Temple to Art”:

<u>Original Building</u>	<u>New (in Complementary Contrast)</u>
Opaque	Transparent
Heavy	Light
Hermetic	Meshing
Inward views	Views to landscape
Bounded	Unbounded
Directed Circulation	Open Circulation
Single Mass	Transparent lenses

The first of the five “lenses” forms a bright and transparent lobby, with café, art library and bookstore, inviting the public into the Museum and encouraging movement via ramps toward the galleries as they progress downward into the garden. From the lobby a new cross-axis connects through to the original building’s grand spaces. At night the glowing glass volume of the lobby provides an inviting transparency, drawing visitors to events and activities.

The lenses’ multiple layers of translucent glass gather, diffuse and refract light, at times materializing light like blocks of ice. During the day the lenses inject varying qualities of light into the galleries, while at night the sculpture garden glows with their internal light. The “meandering path” threaded between the lenses in the Sculpture Park has its sinuous complement in the open flow through the continuous level of galleries below. The galleries, organized in sequence to support the progression of the collections, gradually step down into the Park, and are punctuated by views into the landscape.

The design for the new addition utilizes sustainable building concepts; the sculpture garden continues up and over the gallery roofs, creating sculpture courts between the lenses, while also providing green roofs to achieve high insulation and control storm water. At the heart of the addition’s lenses is a structural concept merged with a light and air distributor concept:

“Breathing T’s” transport light down into the galleries along their curved undersides while carrying the glass in suspension and providing a location for HVAC ducts. The double-glass cavities of the lenses gather sun-heated air in winter or exhaust it in summer. Optimum light levels for all types of art or media installations and seasonal flexibility requirements are ensured through the use of computer-controlled screens and of special translucent insulating material embedded in the glass cavities. A continuous service

level basement below the galleries offers art delivery, storage and handling spaces, as well as flexible access to the "Breathing-Ts."

The ingenious integration of art and architecture included a collaborative effort with artist Walter De Maria, one of the great minimalist artists of our time. De Maria's sculpture, *One Sun /34 Moons*, is the centerpiece of the expansive granite-paved entrance plaza with a reflecting pool that forms a new entry space shaped by the existing building and the new Lobby "Lens". The "moons" of the art work are circular skylight discs in the bottom of the pool that project water-refracted light into the garage below. Conceived as a vehicular Arrival Hall, the garage is generously proportioned, directly connected to the new museum lobby on both levels, and spanned with continuous undulating vaults by an innovative pre-cast concrete 'wave-T'. A strong relationship between the architectural concept and the Museum's important oriental art holdings is illustrated by works in the permanent collection such as *Verdant Mountains* (1090) by Chiang Shen or *The North Sea* (16th century) by Chou Ch'en, which demonstrate the timeless merging of art, architecture and landscape. The new addition celebrates this fusion with the new Isamu Noguchi Sculpture Court, setting a binding connection to the existing Sculpture Gardens.

Steven Holl

"How To Write An Architectural Concept Statement" by Sheryl Faber, eHow Contributor.

1. Describe the location of the structure. List details including the address it will be situated at, the main intersections it is located near, how much land has been appropriated to place the building on, land elevations and the direction the building will be facing. Details such as the amounts of area allowed for parking, [storage](#) and landscaping can also be listed. Water, electricity and sanitary sewer access should also be included.

2. Determine and describe the style of the structure. Provide pictures of similar structures and other works in progress. Explain the reasons for selecting a particular style. For example, you may choose a Mediterranean style for a particular area because that is the style of adjacent structures. The style of building should not necessarily be the same as those around it but it should blend well with its surroundings, which include nearby structures and the landscaping.

3. Determine the needed square footage of the structure and what it will be used for. This will depend on the business or businesses that will occupy the new building. Designate what will be utilized as storage, for kitchens and/or employee break rooms and for office space and living areas or waiting rooms. Allow space for elevators, stairs, housekeeping closets and heating and air conditioning units. Cite reasons why the square footage is designated as it is. Give style details and locations of main entrances, windows, stairs and other doors.

4. List the quality and types of materials specific to the project. This is extremely important in order to maintain the original integrity and aesthetics of the structure. It will provide the means to estimate costs. It will also provide a plan for all involved helping them to stay on course. They will follow this detailed architectural plan and use superior building materials and interior products and provide quality workmanship.

toward the future while remaining rooted in past tradition). Does the designer adopt one of each? Of course not. How can a designer arrive at a dominant concept then?

You may begin to realize the challenge of working with and selecting “the concept among concepts.” Is there a best approach? Although there is no simple answer to this question, we can say that all projects have salient aspects that become important design drivers. These may be external, such as contextual forces, or internal, driven by function, desired image, or brand characteristics. Many projects have more than one such driving factor, and it is up to the design team to decide which factor or factors will drive the overall design response. The design response will, of course, translate into how the project’s floor plan is organized (most visibly at first through diagrams and loosely drawn floor plans), what architectural forms and elements are adopted (most visibly at first through loosely drawn elevations and three-dimensional sketches), what detailing approach is used (most visibly at first through loose sketches), what materials are chosen (most visible at first through samples or rendered sketches), and what furnishings, accessories, and other appurtenances are incorporated.

In some cases, a particular way of performing the functions that occur in the project will drive the design. One example of this is the way the Swedish furniture company IKEA has chosen to display and sell their products. Their approach is quite different from the approach taken by conventional furniture retailers. At IKEA, the customer selects products from showroom areas on the upper floors, writes down the product information (name and number) on a note pad provided, and, ultimately, picks up the “boxed” products from the rows and rows of shelves on the warehouselike ground floor. One then proceeds, with oversized shopping carts full of boxes, to the checkout areas and pays and finally loads up the goods in the convenient loading areas just outside. To address this unique way of selling furniture, the entire facility is designed to facilitate the flow from one stage to the next.

Sometimes the main concept is driven by style, image, or theme. These tend to occur in highly creative environments such as restaurants, stores, clubs, and hotels. The intentionally minimalist showrooms designed by Claudio Silvestrin for Giorgio Armani are an example of these high-image kinds of projects.

At other times, a series of more pragmatic organizational concerns, such as relationships between departments and clear circulation systems, determines the main concept idea. Design concepts can only be determined on a case-by-case basis when the particularities of a project are known. They are externalized through verbal statements, concept diagrams, and concept sketches.

Design Concept Statements

Written statements are most often used to convey character (image) concepts. They come in many varieties. Upon examination of the many kinds of concept statements ordinarily written by students and practitioners alike, one notices a broad range of approaches with different degrees of clarity. Some designers repeat, sometimes in great detail, the needs and wants of the client; others write detailed play-by-play accounts of the experience, starting with the moment one enters the space; some talk about their intentions to create a productive office or a stimulating restaurant. The list goes on and on. The problem is that many written concept statements never get to the point.

The point of design concept statements is to tell the audience, as efficiently as possible, about the designer’s approach to solve the design problem. Your statement may be as brief as “to create an intimate candlelit environment comprised of multiple zones” or “to place all the important public functions along the perimeter of the space to take advantage of the magnificent views.” The main thing is that the design concept statement needs to address what you will do (or have already done) to solve the design problem.

As straightforward as this may appear, many young designers struggle with written concept statements. Let’s examine four of the most common problems.

Problem 1: Statements that regurgitate the project goals from the program.

For example, someone may repeat “the concept is to create a new office facility for a client that wants to consolidate units” directly from the information given in the program. This information is not a design concept but part of the design problem definition.

Problem 2: Statements that state the obvious.

For example, “the concept is to create a productive and functional office environment” or “the concept is to design a restaurant that will attract customers.” It is obvious that offices need to be productive and restaurants need to attract customers. Those things go without saying. A design concept statement has to go beyond that.

Problem 3: Statements that use many adjectives without really saying much.

For example, “the concept is to design a grand and magnificent space that will be a source of delightful inspiration to all.” This may be an adequate beginning but is still too vague; plus, there are many ways of producing grand and magnificent spaces and no hint is given here about the specific approach to be taken.

Problem 4: Statements that are lengthy descriptions of every single feature of the project.

There is no need to describe every feature of the project in the concept statement; the statement should include only the main aspects that are driving the design.

What then makes a good concept statement? Although there are many approaches to the verbal externalization of concept statements, the best concept statements share the following three attributes:

1. Design concept statements speak more about the design solution than the design problem.
2. Design concept statements are selective.
3. Design concept statements are economical.

Let’s examine these one at a time.

Design concept statements speak about the design solution.

The first attribute requires that the concept state something about the design solution and not the design problem. These are two closely related but different elements that together help to give the project definition. The design

problem, however, precedes the design strategy to be used. Consider the following statement: “The concept was to create a luxury residence for discerning, affluent empty-nesters and semiretired executives seeking a California coastal lifestyle.” Is this a design concept? To test a concept to determine whether it is a design concept, simply ask yourself the following question: Does this statement tell me anything about the approach to the design solution? In the example above, the answer is no. While the statement tells us a great deal about what kind of residence the project will be, it defines the problem without stating the solution. Nevertheless, having a clear project definition is an important step that needs to take place before the design concepts are generated. Clients have to define, with some level of specificity, what type of project it will be, who is it for, whether it will be formal or casual, and so forth.

Consider now the following statement for a restaurant: The idea is to deliver “excellent food and service at a reasonable cost in a casual but intriguing environment,” attracting “a wide range of customers—from formally dressed theater-goers to casually dressed diners.”² Here again, the statement is helping to define the kind of restaurant it will be but, so far, is not saying anything about the designer’s idea of how to accomplish this. The statement is part of the design problem statement, which speaks to the owner’s goals and vision.

If the preceding statements are about design problem definition, the design concept has to be a response to these kinds of statements. So, the designer studies the situation, and after some consideration decides on a design approach to take. After all, many design solutions could reasonably produce the luxury residence and the casual and intriguing restaurant prescribed above. Let’s examine a design concept statement written by a student to address an office project: “The concept behind my design . . . is openness and visual stimulation. All spaces are designed to pull you from one to the next smoothly. The angular rooms and shapes are intended to create an energetic feel in the workplace.” Notice that the statement is talking about the designer’s response to the design problem. Notice too that the statement mentions both the student’s intentions (openness, stimulation, creating an energetic feel) and some specific ideas about how to achieve these (spaces that pull you, angular rooms and shapes). Now, consider another stu-

dent's design concept statement for the same project: "The goal of this design is to create an innovative and dynamic environment that is attractive to Identity Consortium's image-conscious clients and employees. This is achieved through an open and flowing configuration of space and the use of modern classic pieces paired with an exposed and slightly industrial contemporary setting." Once again, notice the presence of both design intentions and more specific strategies for accomplishing them.

While the designer's initial design concept statement might be somewhat vague and broad, as the design progresses the means for achieving it become progressively more defined. Consider the following example, a Levi's Dockers Shop by Bergmeyer Associates, Inc. One can imagine how the designer (perhaps with help from the owner) may have come up with the main idea and how over time the more specific strategies (and other discarded ones) may have evolved.

What? (design idea): Design a store that "recalls soothing images of days on holiday."

How? (design strategy): Use "a nautical theme and vacation vignettes."

But how? (more specific design strategies): "Merchandise backdrops of wicker furniture and sailing, plus V-grooved panels stenciled with the Dockers logo, cherry soffits, and backlit art glass and props."³

Design concept statements are selective.

The second attribute of good design concept statements is selectivity. One cannot possibly hope to address every single issue of the project in the design concept. The process requires the designer to assess the design problem and exercise proper judgment in selecting the concept's driving forces. When we examine the design concept statement for an office project stated earlier ("The concept behind my design . . . is openness and visual stimulation. All spaces are designed to pull you from one to the next smoothly. The angular rooms and shapes are intended to create an energetic feel in the workplace.") we notice that the designer chose to focus on just two things: openness and visual stimulation. Surely there were many other important factors of that project but, for this designer,

openness and visual stimulation drove the main design direction. Here is another example: "The main concept behind my design is energy. By using an organic plan and strong color I hope to energize people and draw them through the entire space." A single idea—energy—was selected to lead the design approach.

Design concept statements are economical.

The third attribute of good design concept statements is economy. Consider the following succinct concept statement for a Los Angeles restaurant "featuring space-age dining for the jet set": "Use high-tech lighting and a lunar-look interior to invoke a futuristic fantasy that reflects the building's flying saucer architecture."⁴ Beyond selectivity, this statement also exercises a great deal of economy by packing a lot of information into a rather brief statement. Even when one has more to say, it is possible to slim down the concept statement through selectivity and proper editing. In the concept statement for the Identity Consortium office project introduced earlier, the designer's main goal and three strategies to achieve it are packed into a 48-word statement. That's economical.

Design Concept Drivers

In the process of conceiving a design concept for a project, the designer will look at the realities of the project and decide how to express the main concept. This will depend on many factors, including the project type, inherent challenges of the site, the twist given to the project, personal intuition, and so on. Design concepts will range from the pragmatic to the symbolic and emotional. Next are some examples showing a variety of concepts driven by different aspects of the project.

The first example is driven by existing physical constraints on the project site. An Italian restaurant in Philadelphia occupied a space that was left over following the construction of a mezzanine office space. As a result, the ceiling over most of the restaurant was low, presenting a difficult design challenge. The design concept involved finding an inventive solution to this problem. The designer's response? "Create a vaulted ceiling in the high space along the window dining section to achieve volume. Use floating abstract planes in the low-ceilinged areas to provide relief and achieve an attractive sculptural effect."⁵

What Is a Design Concept Statement?

An interior design concept statement is the essence of an interior design proposal. If you are bidding on a project or entering a design competition, the design concept statement lays the groundwork for the visual components of the presentation. Never assume that your design can speak for itself!

An interior design concept statement must effectively convey your inspiration and vision for a space. It briefly addresses how you went about creating the design and handled specific design challenges. The statement should also articulate the room's overall ambience.

It tells your client the origin of the design and demonstrates your ability to create a symbiotic relationship between physical elements. Think of your design concept statement as a mission statement or the “Eureka” moment of the project.

Each designer has their own way of composing and formatting an [interior design](#) concept statement. Just make sure you include a few essential pieces of information. You will become more confident in your ability, as you do more proposals. Follow these basic pointers and your concept statement will surely impress!

Keep It Simple

Be succinct. Write several descriptive sentences that communicate the purpose, focus and fundamental concept of your design. Resist the urge to sell yourself. Your design concept statement is not an advertisement.

First, state the intent of your design and then explain how you accomplished your objective. Example: The intent of this design is to take advantage of the home's classic architecture, bring in additional natural light and utilize a combination of vintage and contemporary furnishings and accessories.

You can elaborate on your selection of specific design elements and the principles employed when covering the visual presentation portion of your proposal.

Address Client Requests

Sometimes you may need to adjust your design concept statement to conform to client guidelines. You may have a killer design and spot on concept statement, but don't forget to follow special client instructions.

Often times a client will have input which greatly influences your design direction and concept statement. If your client has a specific vision in mind and wants a lengthy account of the design concept, follow their wishes and instructions to the letter.

Things to Avoid

Avoid using overly descriptive and flowery language. Even common adjectives such as "beautiful" and "marvelous" are ambiguous and do not aptly describe the look or feeling of an interior space.

Avoid long, drawn out statements. Use short sentences for your design concept statement. This may require sidelining your creativity while you put on your editor hat. As with any proposal writing, long sentences dilute the effectiveness of your core concept. Brief statements are much more impactful and will hold your audience's attention.

Avoid being egocentric. Do not write your design concept statement in first person. Your personal opinions and desires are not relevant to this piece of information. A design idea, vision or solution should not be about you. It should reflect what works best for your client.