

Writing an Artist's Statement / Statement of Purpose

An artist's statement is, simply, a brief description of the work and an explanation of how the work came to be. Typically, visual people are not that great at writing and, to compensate for that, they tend to write too much or cloud the issue with difficult to understand hyperbole.

Artist statements that are peppered with art jargon or artspeak may sound great and make perfect sense to insiders, but mean little or nothing to everyone else. Keep your statement and other introductory materials clear, to the point and brief; somewhere between 200 and 400 words is a good length.

Below, in worksheet fashion, are some questions to ask yourself when thinking about writing an artist's statement. Write down your responses to the questions (you needn't use all of them; they are simply guidelines) and you'll be on your way to creating an effective artist's statement.

The key to an effective artist's statement is to provide a clear answer to this question:

“Why does your work look the way it looks?”

- **Part 1: History/Artistic Genealogy (Where do you come from?)**

In establishing your artistic genealogy, where does your work sit? With what types of photography do you find yourself aligned?

- **Part 2: Genre (Think like a Photo Editor)**

Landscape/Travel

What is the importance of place in your work?

Still Life

What is the role of objects in your work?

Portrait/Figure

What is the role of the human figure in your work?

To what extent are you investigating character?

Documentary

What is the role of naturalism (things arising from natural properties and causes) in your work? Do you depict it as stark or stylized?

Culture/Lifestyle

In what ways does your work veil, reveal or otherwise comment on the way people live?

- **Part 3: “Information Processing” (How are you delivering data to the viewer?)**

Specificity vs. Generality

To what extent are you revealing time and place?

Visual Clues

How would the addition or subtraction of various clues alter the work?

Viewer’s Background

What sort of knowledge and/or cultural references are you assuming on the part of the viewer? What do you want the viewer to understand or process intellectually?

Your Goal

What do you hope the viewer to be surprised or moved by? What do you want them to think?

- **Part 4: Personal Trajectory (Where have you come from, where are you going?)**

What formative choices have you made?

Where do you think you might be going from here?

Do not use the passive voice!