HOW TO WRITE AN ARTIST STATEMENT & BIO Toolkit
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INTRODUCTION

Here’s what we’ll cover in this toolkit.

1. What is your why?
2. Translate your why to your statement.
3. Translate your why to your bio.

The purpose of this toolkit is to get you started on writing the two pieces of information that give people the most information about you and your art – the bio and the artist statement.

*In these pages, we will cover the basics and will do a couple of writing prompts to get your brain going.*

First, before we do anything, we need to know what the artist bio and the artist statement have in common. This will make it easier to write.

Don’t worry about who the audience is or what the project is you may be submitting this too. Everything starts with the why.
**THE WHY PROMPT**

Part of being an artist is answering the big question of why. The why is the first step of creating any buzz about your art. So let’s brainstorm:

**WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO?**

You can answer this in sentences, with bullet points, a story, etc. Don’t limit yourself, however, don’t over think it. You have 90 seconds to write. Go!

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**WHY IS THE WHY IMPORTANT?**

Understanding why you do your art helps focus your statement and your bio. It also helps keep everything in perspective. How can you talk about where your art comes from if you don’t know yourself? People want to be able to connect with you, your story, and your art. This is a way to do it. It’s also a selling tool. You are selling yourself and what you do. You’re worth every bit of attention (and hopefully dollars). The artist statement is the gateway to that.

*Be ready. Know your why.*
THE ARTIST STATEMENT

There are three kinds of artist statements to have at the ready.

**The Super Short**
- This is about a paragraph.
- It’s not supposed to be long at all.
- It’s a snapshot of who you are and what you do.

**Medium**
- This is about three paragraphs.
- Think about this bio having a beginning, middle, and end
- This one is pretty commonly asked for.

**Long**
- This more than three paragraphs
- This is so luxurious and nice. Take your time with this one.

Note: These are rough guidelines. Depending on the requirements of what is being asked, you may have to trim or add to your bio. However, this is easier to do once a basic bio has been completed.

Also note that there are different forms of statements. One talks about the artist specifically and the other discusses the art mostly. Depending on what you are using it for will depend on what you’ll be writing.

STOP! Before you write your bio consider the following:

1. Who is your audience? / Who are you writing for?
2. What is the purpose of this statement?
3. Throw away the thesaurus, please! Sound like YOU!
4. Take your time, i.e. don’t do it at the last minute.
5. In general, keep it to one page double spaced
6. Be honest and genuine.
7. Avoid art jargon
8. Have someone look at it for you. Revision is your friend.
9. Use strong statements, not weak ones like “I hope to” or “I wish to”.
10. **Be confident!**
THE ARTIST STATEMENT CONTINUED

WRITING PROMPT 2

As artists, we don’t create work in a vacuum. We are constantly inspired, enraged, and enthralled with the world around us.

WHAT IS YOUR WORK (OR YOU AS AN ARTIST) CURRENTLY IN CONVERSATION WITH?

Feel free to take the following prompts outside of these pages.

ANATOMY OF A STATEMENT

Your statement will answer several questions about you and your art. These six questions should be the guiding questions as you write. You’ll want to demonstrate these six things in one way or another.

1. Who are you as an artist?
2. Why do you create?
3. Why is your work important?
4. What is this art?
5. Why was it created?
6. Why is this work important?

Let’s take a look at an example to see what it looks like. Let’s also see if we can identify the answers to the six questions. Next there is an example of an artist statement about the a particular piece of art.
I think of my installations as unfinished inventories of fragments: objects, drawings, paintings, photographs, and other inventions. They are improvisational sites in which the constructed and the ready-made are used to question our making of the world through language and knowledge. My arrangements are schematic, inviting the viewer to move into a space of speculation. I rely on our desires for beauty, poetics and seduction.

The work thus far has used the frame of the museum to propose a secret history of modernity, and in the process, point to stereotypes of difference, which are hidden in plain sight. I have found the histories of surrealism and minimalism to be useful in the rearranging of received ideas. The objects I make are placed in the canon of modernist art, in hopes of making visible what is overlooked in the historicizing of the artist. This project has always been grounded in pleasure and aesthetics.

As you can see all the questions are represented but one question in particular, what is this art, stands out the most. Why do you think that is?

Let’s consider it.

The purpose of this statement is to talk about the art so the “what is the art” question would be the most answered in this example. This tell us that purpose plays a strong role in how we write our statements.
You also can see that some of these phrases answer two questions. For example, “The objects I make are placed in the canon of...” answers why it was created but also answers why is this work important. That means, that because of the nature of the questions and what is being revealed, there will be some answers that will overlap. Conversely, there will be more than one way to answer a question. For example, the question why is your work important was answered twice in this paragraph. Both of the answers were different and seem to expand the thought.

In other words, these six questions are a guide. Answer them to the best of your ability. However, when you organize the information, don’t be afraid to mix it up.

Let’s do another prompt.

**WRITING PROMPT 3**

HOW IS YOUR WORK NECESSARY? WHY DOES THE PUBLIC NEED TO KNOW AND CONSUME YOUR WORK?

Feel free to take the following prompts outside of these pages.
Now that you’ve done all three prompts, let’s go back and look at them and see what they were really asking.

Here they are all together:

1. Why do you do what you do?
2. What is your work (or you as an artist) currently in conversation with?
3. How is your work necessary? Why does the public need to know and consume your work?

If you put them together, you get the start of an artist statement! Viola! You’ve been writing it all along!

The questions have asked you to identify your why, the what, and the urgency of your work. Depending how you’ve answered those questions, you’ve probably hit all six of the guiding questions.

Now that you know what is going on, go back and expand on some thoughts. Go deeper with the explanations. Do some revisions. Look at the example provide to know how to finesse your statement. What you will end up is a base statement. From that statement you’ll be able to expand it how you need depending on what you will use it for.

THE ARTIST BIO

While the artist statement may be about your work and how you come to the work, the artist bio is completely about you and what you have done.

An artist bio is a biography about you, the artist, and your work. It highlights the most prestigious awards, accolades or events in your career thus far and gives the reader a snapshot about your artistic career.

This item can also have three lengths. However, the longest length bio is not as long at the longest length statement. That means bios, in general are short.

Let’s look at a couple of examples. Next we have Amy Barkow’s bio. The first is the long bio. The second is the short bio. Let’s see what she decided to include and what she decided to exclude.
How to Write an Artist Statement and Bio Toolkit

ARTIST BIO CONTINUED

AMY BARKOW – LONG BIO
Amy Barkow was born in Great Falls, Montana. After completing her MFA from Hunter College in 2002, she had her first solo exhibition at New Jersey City University. She has worked in New York City as an architectural photographer since 2000, an occupation that has influenced her photography and sculpture.

Her work has been exhibited worldwide. She has received support from the Santa Fe Art Institute, Times Square Business Improvement District/ Times Square Alliance, The Artists’ Museum in Lodz, American Institute of Architects and the Golden Seed International Art Residency, Mt. Abu India. She has been a visiting critic at SUNY New Paltz, New Jersey City University, and the Montana State University School of Architecture, and worked as an art educator for the Joan Mitchell Foundation.

She is presently completing a series of photographs combining portraits with commercial logos for Branded and on Display, a traveling group exhibition opening at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She lives and works in New York City.

AMY BARKOW – SHORT BIO
Amy Barkow was born in Great Falls, Montana. Her work as an architectural photographer influences her photography and sculpture. She has exhibited her work worldwide, and has received support from the Santa Fe Art Institute, Times Square Business Improvement District/ Times Square Alliance, American Institute of Architects, among other institutions. Her work is visible at www.barkowphoto.com.

Wow! That’s much shorter!
Let’s look at the long bio first.

The first one is about 160 words. It doesn’t seem like a lot but it’s a big mess of words. In that bio she has three paragraphs.

1.) Where’s she’s from, her credentials, and an interesting fact
2.) Her work and the big, awesome things she has accomplished.
3.) What’s she’s working on now and where she lives now.

It’s almost formulaic, yes? That’s because it is! What can vary is the place where she lives. Some artists prefer not to mention they are from a place or a city. It’s not a required piece of information. However, consider what we discussed earlier:

PEOPLE WANT TO CONNECT WITH YOU AND YOUR STORY.
Location is a quick way for people to connect. Thankfully, that can be as general as you’d like.

Let’s consider, now, the short bio. It’s 55 words! Yes, it’s super short but it still gives the same information. Don’t believe me? Watch this!

1.) Where’s she’s from, her credentials, and an interesting fact
2.) Her work and the big, awesome things she has accomplished.
3.) What’s she’s working on now and where she lives now.

Amy Barkow – Short Bio

Amy Barkow was born in Great Falls, Montana. Her work as an architectural photographer influences her photography and sculpture. She has exhibited her work worldwide, and has received support from the Santa Fe Art Institute, Times Square Business Improvement District/Times Square Alliance, American Institute of Architects, among other institutions. Her work is visible at www.barkowphoto.com.

Here’s what she did:

1. Amy condensed information
2. She picked the most information parts and kept them
3. Directed the reader to where they can learn more about her

Here’s some tips to write your bio:

• Write it in the third-person (unless otherwise directed)
• Have different lengths: 25 words, 75-100 words, 150-200 words
• Put your most important and prestigious things.
• Education and background
• Mention what’s next
• Use your full name!

Just like the statement, you want to keep this at the ready so that you can adjust as needed.
LOOKING FOR MORE RESOURCES TO HELP SUPPORT YOUR ART CAREER?

Checkout *Fresh Arts Artist Resource Library*, an online curated selection of dozens of artist business resources, including career-focused articles, templates, and tool kits on topics such as marketing, finances and fundraising, legal issues, health and self-care, and other artist business essentials. New Resource Toolkits will be launched throughout the year so check back often or sign-up for our newsletters.

Support for Fresh Arts Resource Toolkits and Artist Resource Library was provided by a grant from Houston Endowment and the National Endowment for the Arts. Fresh Arts is funded in part by the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, the Texas Commission on the Arts, the Brown Foundation, Inc.

ABOUT FRESH ARTS

Fresh Arts is a 501c3 nonprofit that champions local artists and creative entrepreneurs to succeed in the business of art. Our programs help advance the careers of local artists and creative entrepreneurs through resource sharing, skill building initiatives and through our artist-centered community-building initiatives.

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