



WRITE AN AWESOME ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Welcome to the Write an Awesome Artist's Statement ebook!

In this ebook I will be sharing with you insights, tips and tricks on how to write an awesome artist's statement about your work.

All the tips and strategies are based on things I have used working with makers to enhance their written communication about their work. Many of these ideas form the basis of talks or lectures I give and can offer you a slightly new way of approaching a piece of writing.

I hope you find them useful and inspiring!

*If you are new to writing about your work and would like to build up your confidence, do check out my Getting Started with your Writing Practice ebook. That's where I share tips for establishing a writing routine, give you exercises you can do at any time to help investigate your making practice and to craft words that reflect your work. Thinking about your making practice, and writing about it regularly, will help you to feel more confident about the work you do, including the writing.

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WRITING TOOLS

I like to think of words as another material at your disposal. That the writing you create, about the things you make, is just as much your 'work' as the physical objects. If we think of writing like this, then it makes sense that your writing should look and sound like the things you make- it should reflect your work.

But how does this happen? How do we craft our words so that they feel like they belong with the objects we create? Well, like with all skills it takes practice and a focus of attention. If you have been following my blog you will know that I recommend to all makers to write regularly about their work. This 'little and often' approach will help you find those perfect ways to describe what you do, but it does take trial and error. However, alongside practice and working on your writing skills, there are 3 components of writing that will help you along... tone, style and voice. Learn the difference between them, and how to use them, and you will be closer to finding the right words for your work.

Tone

The tone of your writing should evoke a certain emotion or mood. It lets your reader know how you feel about what you are writing, and it helps them to feel a certain way about your words. The tone of your writing could be serious, irreverent, friendly, sarcastic, cheerful, sad, funny – any emotion you like. Ideally you should try to find a tone that suits you/your work and keep it consistent throughout all the writing you do (eg on your website, on social media, in marketing). This consistency helps your audience get to know you and to build a relationship with you.

Style

The style of your writing might be dictated by what you need to write, whether it's an artist's statement, a blog post, a piece of text for a show or exhibition, a social media post or product descriptions for your online shop. On a basic level, the style of your writing can be formal or informal, but it can also be broken down into 4 types, which all have different motivations:

- *Informative* – this style of writing favours details and facts and is great for product descriptions.
- *Persuasive* – this style of writing aims to move the reader or to present an opinion and is really useful for social media posts or marketing, like newsletters.
- *Descriptive* – this style of writing creates a sense of things and can be helpful for things like social media posts, your website About page, marketing.
- *Narrative* – this style of writing tells a story and is essential for things like press releases, marketing and social media.

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Voice

A writer's voice is an elusive thing to pin down. You know it when you see it, but it's hard to quantify. Your voice in your writing can come from the tone and style you use – some writers have a distinctly ironic voice, or a jolly one. Some tend to favour very descriptive and elaborate ways of describing things, when others like a simple, pared-back aesthetic. As well as tone and style, the words you choose to use and how you construct your sentences can have a big effect – just as the way you speak is very distinctive, the way you write is also a fingerprint of sorts.

All these elements, combined in you and brought out through practice and experimentation, lead to the creation of a voice that seems natural and appropriate to your work and which reflects the quality and craftsmanship of your making practice.

How to sound authentic: avoid the obvious

When we are asked to write about our work we often fall into clichés or obvious phrases, using generic language that could describe any maker's work. Try not to begin sentences with 'My work is inspired by...' or 'I am exploring...' and avoid general statements like 'Taking nature as my starting point...'

You want to highlight the differences, draw attention to the aspects of your work that set you apart. Make a list of keywords that are relevant to your practice. Then build on that list with descriptive words that are as sensory, emotive and dynamic as the work itself. By being as specific as possible, by using language that reflects the work you do as accurately as possible, you will create a distinct piece of writing.

AUDIENCE

The most important thing to consider before you even begin, before you ask yourself 'what do I write about' or 'what is this for', is: who am I writing this for? Who is my audience?

Knowing who you are writing for will help you determine all aspects of the writing – the tone and style you use, the language you employ, the length of the piece etc. Writing with the right audience in mind keeps the writing relevant and appropriate. It will help you to connect to your readers, to engage and inspire them.

Questions to ask yourself about your audience:



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Who are they?

- Be specific: are you writing for the general public, visitors at an exhibition or trade show, potential customers (online or in person) or a selection panel for an application?

Each of these audiences will come with their own prior knowledge or interest levels.

How much do they already know?

- Are they familiar with your work at all?
- Do they know much about making: your material, your processes or techniques?

How much your audience already knows will help you pitch the language, especially the use of technical terms.

What do they need to know and what is important to them?

- Are they reading this piece of writing to get to know you and your practice better or are they reading it to find out your prices, or how you would like the work to develop in the future?

Different audiences will not need to know everything about you and your work: be selective.

How much time will they have to read this?

Visitors to an exhibition or show typically do not spend much time reading text, so keep artist's statements short and snappy, whereas people reading your website may be happier to spend a little longer. Selection panels may have to read hundreds of applications, so make their job easy – keep text concise, dynamic and jam-packed with juicy information.

How and where are they reading this?

Your audience may be reading your words on their phone on the move, they may be standing up reading printed text, or they may be sitting at home on their computer. Different circumstances will affect your audience's ability to engage; if they are comfortable they will give it their attention, if it is a struggle to read they will give up quickly.

Think about these things before you start writing and spend some time putting yourself in your audience's shoes. Sometimes we are quick to jump straight into writing, without considering what our reader most wants to know, or needs to find out. If you ask yourself 'who is my audience?' every time you start to write about your work, you will find that it helps you to focus on what you need to write and allows you to write the words that work best for the situation.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT DILEMMA: 1ST OR 3RD PERSON?

This seems to be a perennial problem for makers. Faced with having to write an artist's statement, it can be hard to know what to do – use the 1st person 'I' or the 3rd person 'she or he'. Lots of us have been given the advice that the 3rd person sounds more professional and that the 1st person sounds a bit 'school project', but I think that's an over-simplification, and one which doesn't help with the whole point of writing your artist's statement: communicating about your work in the best possible way for your work.

The answer to this dilemma doesn't lie in how 'professional' you want your statement to sound (because who doesn't want their work to be professional?), it comes from asking two key questions (ones that come up again and again):

1. Who is your audience?
2. What is your work like?

Answer these questions and the 1st person/3rd person dilemma will be solved.

Who is your audience?

This is the fundamental question you need to ask yourself every time you have to write anything about your work. Who are you writing for? What situation is it?

If your audience has little or no knowledge about your work (or about making/craft/design in general) a 1st person statement can help you to connect to your reader and explain your motivations, your materials and processes in a direct, uncomplicated way. Similarly, if you are writing for an audience who may have an understanding of your work, or the area you work in, a 3rd person statement may help you to address conceptual or technical aspects of your work more successfully. A statement aimed at 'experts' (eg for an application) might work best in the 3rd person, unless the situation calls for a more personal response.

Issues you may want to consider: does your audience want to connect with you and your story, your values, the lifestyle you are creating? In which case, 1st person is great for this. Or, do you want them to connect to your motivations, skills and craftsmanship? In which case 3rd person can work really well.

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What is your work like?

Think about which approach suits your work best. If your practice is light-hearted or fun, experimental or cheeky, sensuous or comforting, you may find a statement in the 1st person will allow all those values to shine out. If your practice is focused or enquiring, conceptual or challenging, minimal or technically-driven, you may find you prefer addressing these aspects in a slightly more detached way, in the 3rd person.

This is me simplifying things quite a bit here. It is possible to write a brilliant statement about humorous work in the 3rd person, or a detailed account of conceptual work in the 1st person – it's all down to how you write it. Writing that is natural, that comes from a genuine, un-guarded place, will always connect with your audience in a way that overly-complicated, stilted words will not. Writing in a way that reflects your audience and the style of your making will create text that feels right to your reader and will show off your work at its best.

So much of my writing advice comes down to this: guidelines not rules. Do whatever works for you and your work. What is your instinct when it comes to this issue? What do you feel happiest writing? If the thought of writing in the 1st person or the 3rd person fills you with horror, don't do it! Write in the way that allows you to sound like you, and to share everything you need with your audience. If that version doesn't sound or feel quite right, try writing it in the other voice to see what happens. In fact, I'd go so far as to suggest that you should probably write two versions anyway, and then you have the option to change your mind at any time, and you end up with two artist's statements that you can use in any situation. Writing about your work is as personal as crafting your work, and it's up to you to choose what works best for you.

4 TRICKS FOR WRITING AN AWESOME ARTIST'S STATEMENT

So, let's assume you've thought about who and what the writing is for, and have decided which point of view works best for your work... and it's the 3rd person. Now what? Here are some tips to help you get started and write that awesome artist's statement.

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1. Pretend you are writing about someone else

Let's imagine you're not writing an artist's statement about your own work, you're writing a short article about another maker. Draw up a list of questions you need the answers to, for example:

- Who is your name here?
- What sort of work does she/he make?
- What materials does she/he use?
- How does she/he make the work?
- What inspires her/him?
- What is her/his current collection/project/piece about?

Now, answer those questions as if you are writing about another person. [In the following examples I'm going to pretend to be fictional textile artist Eliza Beadle so you get the gist.] For example:

Who is Eliza Beadle? *Eliza Beadle is a textile artist.*

What sort of work does she/he make? *She makes woven pieces inspired by weathering and change in natural environments.*

What materials does she/he make? *She uses hand-spun wool from the environments she is inspired by. She incorporates natural materials and man-made ephemera that she finds.*

How does she/he make the work? *She uses a loom.*

What is the current collection about? *It is inspired by a trip to Cornwall where she saw the erosion of cliffs, which is leaving homes and buildings stranded, precariously balanced on the edge.*

Once you've got your answers, put them together to create a statement. You may need to re-order them, expand some of them or link some together so that the text flows and things make sense:

Eliza Beadle is a textile artist whose woven pieces explore ideas of weathering and change in natural environments. She works with hand-spun woollen yarns from the environments she is inspired by. She works on a loom, incorporating found natural materials and man-made ephemera within the weave. Her current collection is inspired by a recent trip to Cornwall and the erosion of cliffs along the coast, which leaves homes and buildings stranded, precariously balanced on the edge.

2. Take an abstract approach

For this method you are going to start by writing an abstract statement about the ideas/concepts/materials/processes that drive your work. It sets the scene.



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Imagine you've been asked to write a paragraph about why this idea/concept/material/process is so important and how it relates to your work.

(Remember to keep it in the 3rd person!) Start off with a general statement about this idea and then show how the work responds to it:

There is a quiet beauty to weathered surfaces. The effects of sun, wind and rain on natural materials produces unexpected textures and colours – often in contrast to the pristine surfaces of new or man-made objects. These contrasts and surprises inspire the work of textile artist Eliza Beadle, who translates these influences into contemporary woven pieces for interiors.

Working on a loom, using hand-spun woollen yarns...

You can see how this initial statement works well as an opening which can then be followed by more detailed information about how and why you make your work.

If you struggle to put your ideas into words on paper, why not try talking about these abstract ideas to someone, or record yourself? Try to start your sentences in an abstract, 3rd person way, with 'There...' or 'It is...' or 'The such-and-such...' By talking out loud you can start to hone in on what it is that's important much quicker than thinking and writing about it.

3. Cheat!

This method isn't fool-proof but it is one way to quickly get some writing down in the 3rd person if you are struggling.

Start by writing your statement, or answering your questions, in the 1st person. For example: 'What inspires this collection?'

Walking on a beach in Cornwall I noticed these houses which had been built on top of the cliff quite a while ago, but the cliff had been weathered away underneath and now the houses are left really close to the edge. I found this really unsettling but there was something about the closeness of the solid buildings to the crumbling cliffs that fascinated me. I wanted to explore this contrast, of the expected stability of home and the unstoppable force of nature, in the new collection.

Then, change all the 'I's to your name or she/he. This won't necessarily sound right and you will probably have to change some words or add bits to have it make sense:

On a trip to Cornwall, Eliza noticed houses which had been built on top of cliffs, a while ago, but the cliffs had been weathered away, leaving the houses close to the edge. She found this unsettling but something about the closeness of the solid buildings to the



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crumbling cliffs fascinated her. She wanted to explore this contrast, of the expected stability of home and the unstoppable force of nature, in her new collection.

4. Don't use the 3rd person at all!

This is a handy trick which can work really well if you are happy articulating the ideas behind your work. You can write a 3rd person statement that is mostly in the 1st person by quoting yourself!

Again, I recommend having a list of questions that you'd like to answer, but this time answer them in the 1st person (either straight on paper or talking out loud and recording). Once you have your answers, it's up to you how much of the original 1st person text you include, but it can often be useful to describe, in your own 'voice' the ideas behind the work:

Eliza Beadle is a textile artist whose woven pieces explore ideas of weathering and change in natural environments. She works with hand-spun woollen yarns from the environments she is inspired by. She works on a loom, incorporating found natural materials and man-made ephemera within the weave. Her current collection is inspired by a recent trip to Cornwall and the erosion of cliffs along the coast, which leaves homes and buildings stranded, precariously balanced on the edge:

"walking on a beach, I noticed these houses which had been built on top of the cliff quite a while ago, but the cliff had been weathered away underneath and now the houses are left really close to the edge. I found this really unsettling but there was something about the closeness of the solid buildings to the crumbling cliffs that fascinated me. I wanted to explore this contrast, of the expected stability of home and the unstoppable force of nature, in the new collection."

As 'Eliza' I could have easily quoted myself in the first paragraph when I talk about the general themes in my work, or in the part where I describe the materials and processes I use. I would caution against using too much quoted text (it will start to sound a bit odd) but one or two sections in your own words can provide a nice balance to the slightly more detached-sounding 3rd person elements.

You may have noticed that by using a combination of these tricks and approaches it's possible to create quite a nice, clear artist's statement in only a few paragraphs. Test them out, save all the writing you create and don't be afraid to use a collage approach to put your statement together. Ultimately it doesn't matter how it was written, just that the writing sounds like your work and shows off your work.

MORE TIPS FOR GETTING STARTED

Still struggling to start? Why not go back to basics and build up from there. Try not to get overwhelmed by all the things you'd like to say, but focus on the essentials. Once you've got a simple outline down on paper it's so much easier to fill bits in and flesh out your statement.

1. Cover the basics: the 3 sentence statement

A great way to start your artist's statement is to try distilling it down to 3 sentences:

1. who are you? What do you do?
2. what materials, processes, techniques do you use in your work?
3. why do you make this work? What influences you?

2. Extend the terrain: questions every maker should answer

Once you've got the basics down you'll want to fill out the statement. Try answering these questions:

- What aspect of your work is your defining feature?
- What is the narrative behind your work?
- What are the values behind your work?
- How does it feel to interact with your work or to use it?
- What lifestyle or experience do you hope your work allows people to create or have?

DON'T STOP NOW

I feel like this next sentence could get me into trouble: the reality of writing about your creative practice is that it will never end – you will probably need more than one artist's statement and you should update all your text regularly.

I spend a lot of time helping makers feel confident about their writing skills, and I'm aware that saying 'you'll have to do more writing' might make you feel uncomfortable. But I'm not here to tell you things you want to hear. The truth is that every application, every show, every new collection has its own audience and needs a relevant piece of writing. It is exactly the same deal as re-drafting a covering letter and tailoring your CV for each job you apply for – completely necessary

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and worth the effort.

Now, it does not have to be a completely new piece of writing. I'm not suggesting you start with a blank page every time. I am suggesting that you re-work, adapt, edit, rejuvenate text you already have with the new situation and audience in mind. However, if you have made new work or developed your practice significantly, then new writing will be needed. If you've managed to establish writing as part of your practice, and maintained a writing routine, then this shouldn't be too onerous.

I know it's easier to send off the artist's statement you already have, or to leave the About section on your website for months without reviewing, but trust me, the investment in keeping up to date, of creating text relevant to each audience you encounter, is going to enhance your practice, strengthen your confidence communicating about your work, and deepen the relationships you are building with those people you work with and who buy from you. It's the reality of working as a creative and sharing that work with the world, embrace it!

FINAL THOUGHTS

The aim of this e-book is to offer some guidance on how to write the best artist's statement you can that is authentic, distinctive and genuinely reflects the amazing work you do.

The tips and guidelines are things that I have discovered through years of my own writing practice, and also through the work I do with contemporary craft makers. There will be some techniques or approaches that work really well for you, and others that just don't click. Don't worry, keep going, find the things that sing for you.

Writing about your work can be challenging, but it can also be wonderful. It can be another creative outlet for your ideas, and can compliment and support your making practice. It is worth doing well, because your making practice deserves good writing. Only you know how and why you make, no one else can fully share that narrative with the world. Embrace the writing as a necessary part of your work and you will soon see how it can shine!

Good Luck!



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This e-book was written by Melody Vaughan (they/them).

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Creative mentoring tending to cultures of care

Melody is committed to working with professional artists, designers & contemporary craft makers who want to build ethical and sustainable creative practices full of care.

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