

ART SCHOOLED

A GUIDE TO ARTS WRITING



FOR ARTISTS, WRITERS,
AND ALL WORD TYPERS.

Art Schooled acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the traditional custodians of the land on which we produced this publication, and on which we learn and share ideas.

Written by the 2018 Writers Coordinator at Arc @ UNSW Art & Design, Audrey Pfister.

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Even if writing isn't your passion, it's something everybody working in the arts will need to do at one time or another.

Writing well in the arts is key in setting you and your practice ahead. It ensures you can clearly express your ideas and present your best self to funding bodies, galleries, the media and arts publications!

Whether you're an artist, designer, arts writer, gallery assistant or curator you'll find useful tips and pointers in this zine.

ARTIST STATEMENT

Your artwork shouldn't be the only thing making a statement!

At some point in your career as an artist you will be asked to provide a written description of your practice in the form of an artist statement. Artist statements can be used in a number of forums – they can accompany exhibition texts or catalogues, become resources for media or be used in grant and award applications. In each of these contexts, your statement should be written to help readers to develop a general understanding of your practice.

1. Think about it!

Think about what shapes your practice. What words come to mind? What are you trying to express?

2. The bigger picture.

Contextualise yourself. Use your artist statement to tell people why it is you're painting memes or making glitch art in 2018. What are you responding to? Where does your practice sit in the wider world. Perhaps, who or what came before you, sits next to you, in the long lineage of thought and practice.

3. The smaller picture.

Maybe you just want to answer the basic questions – what, how, and why. Explain what your work is in terms of medium, scale, process, context, audience. What does your process involve?

4. Complex work ≠ complex statement.

Your work may be complex, varied, and infinitely shifting in meanings. That's great! But... that doesn't mean your artist statement has to be complex as well. Providing insight into your work doesn't take away from an audience's ability to experience your work openly. If you can pack all your complex practice into a couple of punchy sentences, you're writing like a winner!

5. Language.

The statement is a reflection of your work. Use terms and styles that match your work. There is certainly a time and a place for academic writing, but your artist statement is for broader audience. This audience may be put off by overly convoluted terminology. Remember to tread carefully when writing in a way that some people might find inaccessible, especially if you're not quite confident with writing yet.

6. Small but strong!

A statement may be small but it has to be strong! A strong statement will be structured

well. Don't just string sentences together one after the other, stream-of-consciousness style. Take time to think and plan first, and structure your statement in a way that is logical and easy to read. It should flow well from one sentence and paragraph to the next. A common approach is to begin with an overview statement then focus down into a bit more detail about specific ideas in your practice. Follow this with a concluding statement, perhaps summing up these points.

7. Polish (again, and again).

Let's be real. The best artist statements are the result of a bit of workshoping, even though the end result may look like a couple of tiny sentences. Make sure you proofread and edit your work! Get a second or even third opinion. Listen to the criticism you receive. You don't have to take it all on board, but it's a good idea to understand how your artist statement will be received.

I'm ready for world domination!

So, you've laboured away making a whole body of work you're ready to be seen or heard by the world! A great way to generate interest in your work and bring in new audiences is with a press release. A press release can be to the point, factual, concise, intriguing, game-changing, maybe even earth-shattering? There may not be a perfect simple formula, but there are a few things to be aware of when sending your work to media.

P.S Any media coverage that it brings will also serve you well in future applications for funding and support.

Some good places to send your releases:

- Blitz | Arcadia
- FBI Radio 94.5 | Culture Guide and Canvas
- Concrete Playground
- Art What's On
- Art Monthly's Art Notes
- Time Out
- The Brag
- Eastside Radio

PRESS RELEASE

1. Bait that hook!

Yes, the clickbait economy is still going strong. No, you do not have to adopt this approach. What clickbait teaches us is the trick of having a really strong and intriguing headline. Headlines should stay to the point and be concise and clear.

You'll never believe what happens next...

2. Wait, what does happen next?

Next, (while still keeping concise) you should follow by leading with the essentials: what, where, when.

3. Then, the who.

They won't need your life story, but it should contain some basics. If you are emerging or early career, one to two sentences are enough. Summarise a few biographical details for the people who need to vaguely understand the idea your project. Think - where are you from? What is your main practice? What else do you do?

Tip: refer back to the artist statement section of this booklet!

4. Describing your project.

Don't just provide a conceptual justification of the work - describe it! What does it look/sound/feel like? What does it do? Why should the reader be interested in it? Describe how it is experienced. What should people expect to encounter? Communicating how your work is experienced can be key in getting a story written about it.

5. What's your flavour?

Know your angle. What is it about your work that is new or exciting? What's unique about it? Will it appeal to a particular audience? Will it appeal to the platform's audience?

6. More please!

At this point your press release will be so fantastic the reader will be wanting more! Journalists picking up your story will need to know more information. Journos are notoriously time-poor, so make their job easier by having further information readily available. Include details about your website or a Facebook event. Have a link to hi-res images of your work, or have them at the ready for people when they email and ask for them. Be clear the best way to contact you.

7. Send it out there into the press Ether.

You can send your press release out as widely as you like, but often a targeted and well-planned campaign will have just as much effect as a blanket offensive. Know your audience. Try to target exactly who you should be sending the release to in the organisation.

Catalogue essays are written to accompany a show, and are usually published in an exhibition catalogue as a survey or exploration of the artworks, curatorship, or themes. There can be some flexibility in how you approach the catalogue essay. They're usually written in a more professional and polished tone, rather than the more opinionated and critical style of a feature article.

You might find these essays alongside a roomsheet, inside an exhibition's publication, or published on the exhibition's website. Keep an eye out for one next time you visit a show!

CATALOGUE ESSAYS

1. Hit the books.

Research for a catalogue essay is fundamental. The sources you use can be primary and secondary, but you must have sources and be well versed in the artist or thematic concerns of the exhibition.

2. Let's get engaged?

A catalogue essay importantly engages with the show, the artists and the themes of the exhibition. It should be a mix of description, explanation and sophisticated, researched presentation of the exhibition.

3. Nicely said!

Language for a catalogue essay should be formal, professional and can be somewhat technical. The writing should also fittingly reflect the exhibition. Make sure to use surnames to refer to artists, don't abbreviate institution names, and correctly format the titles of works.

4. Strategic Structure.

Knowing a structure that works well with your skills is paramount. If you are adept at constructing a well-informed biographical piece, then lead with that information. If your strength is the thematic concerns, make this the structure of the essay. Whatever your structural strength is, work to it. Catalogue essays are a chance for you to show the full extent of your sophisticated art writing. Like all topics covered in this zine, don't forget to keep an eye on the overall structure.



REVIEWS

A review is published after a writer has seen and experienced an artist's work. A review often focuses on the writer's critical reaction to the works; reflecting their thoughts, feelings, or responses. Artists, writers, curators and all other arts professionals/slashies should know how to write a review, so they can contribute to the ongoing conversations about art practice and the broader arts ecology.

1. Pay attention.

It's difficult to write a good review if you didn't pay attention at the show. By pay

attention we don't mean just looking really intensely at the work, although you should do that too. Read room sheets, artist statements and catalogue essays or talk to the gallery staff. Take a look at the audience, listen to conversations around you. Pay attention to the space, the institution, and

the history of the location. Pay attention to your responses to the works so that you can draw on them when it's time to write your review. Try jotting down a few notes.

2. Help me trust your judgement.

Reviews centre on someone's opinion of a work. This doesn't mean streams of consciousness text dump of someone's reaction to some art. They can be that, but good reviews are thoroughly thought out, well researched and engaged. Early in your career, your review may only be engaged in some small way, be it through a single allusion or a head nod to critical debates. This creates a more relevant, nuanced review, and an environment of trust between writer and reader.

3. Stay stylish.

When writing a review your language should be accessible, professional and descriptive. There is also room for being playful and experimental with reviews. Consistency is important. Pick a style and go with it. Think about what platform your review is being written for. Look to the publication to see

what language they usually use.

4. Keep it short. Keep it sweet.

Most reviews will be around 500 words in length. It's important to remember that a review is not an essay. It should be your value judgement of a show or work that you've seen. It should be concise and informative. Edit and tighten overly long and complicated sentences. Planning your review will ensure that what you have to say will be clear, concise and cohesive.

5. Give us the info.

Providing information at the end of your review is really important. It should include the dates the show is on, the location of the gallery, links to any relevant places including ticket details if applicable.

6. Check it.

Proofread, edit and get others' opinions. All great writing happens in the editing process.

Having other eyes read over your work can be valuable. Readers can tell you if your writing is communicating your ideas well, if you need to be more succinct, or if your grammar needs a polish. Reading your writing out loud is another useful tactic. It can reveal insincerities and inconsistencies in your writing.

PROFILES

Profiles differ from reviews as they are factual and reflective surveys of a show or artist, they're usually not overly critical or negative. When writing an artist profile, focus on their practice rather than writing a standard biography. You should know information on the artist's practice, education, shows, awards, residencies and so on, to be able to write a profile.

1. Get toned!

Use the customary language and tone of the publisher. If it's a zine something more colloquial might be most appropriate. For a publication with wide distribution its best to keep it formal and professional. This will change for every profile.

2. Core strength.

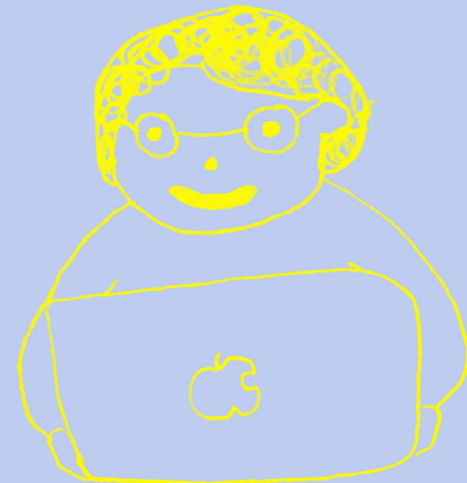
Profiles are short and factual, so it's important to only include information that is central to the practice of the show or artist you are profiling. What is central to the practice? You can normally excavate what's at the core of the artist's practice by deconstructing their artist statement(s).

3. Keep it right and tight.

Profiles should be little nuggets of info: think 200-300 words. This means your writing should be accessible, concise, and focused on the central aspects of the artist's practice or the show you're profiling.

4. Stay connected.

Links to the artist's website, depending on the profile's place of publication, can be a great way to end the text. This can be a jumping off point for the reader to leave your text and learn more.



Feature articles are often an arts writer's favourite form. Why? because they give you the chance to flex your literary and conceptual muscles in a sophisticated, long-form rumination on ideas.

A feature article usually involves a sense of critical commentary rather than a preview, review, or profile emphasising what kind of experience the work provides.

FEATURES

1. Educate yourself before you wreck yourself.

Feature articles require an engagement with critical debates, similar to what is expected of a university essay, so it's important that you know your stuff. Familiarise yourself with current and historical conversations, and be aware of the debates surrounding what ideas you're writing about.

2. Be that opinionated person.

The cornerstone of a good feature is an educated opinion. Be clear on what it is, and back yourself on it. Most feature articles require a strong voice. What you are saying should have a narrative, idea or argument that you explore and conclude (in some form) towards the end.

3. Structure your argument.

When you're writing an essay for class, you know that introducing your key idea at the end of the text won't fly with the marker. Writing a feature is a similar task; you want to write something that continually and legibly mounts a cohesive argument.

4. Life's about balance.

Reference complex ideas but don't make it inaccessible. Try to cut down on the kinds of language you might expect to see in academic literature and write for a wider audience. Also, get a balance between writing for your publisher and writing for you. Features are a place where you have a lot

more freedom to develop your own opinions, so it's a good chance to develop your own voice to express those opinions.

5. Life's about risk taking?

If you're going to write nuanced and interesting features, you need to think critically about everything. That includes this advice. Don't be afraid to throw caution to the wind. Take a risk if you want to!

Writing experimentally is a high risk – high reward game. You can easily end up confusing yourself and the reader by departing from convention, so make sure it's a calculated risk.

6. Support material.

Don't forget your support material. You can reference supporting material by mentioning the relevant authors' names in the piece. Some publishers and publications allow or require footnoting, but this is very much on a case-by-case basis. Don't hesitate to ask the editor what they want.

7. Getting Published.

An easy way to develop your writing is to just write. Practice makes perfect, and every time you write it gets easier and you get better. You don't have to aim super high when you're first starting out. Some good starting points are the student publications on campus, Framework and Arcadia, because their mandate is to publish student writing – you aren't competing with professional writers when you pitch ideas.

GRANT APPLICATIONS

Who is Grant and why are artists always asking him for money!?

Sometimes (okay... a lot of the time!) you will need a few dollars to make what you want to make, what you need to make, and still eat and keep a roof over your head. Luckily for you, funding bodies want to help out. But don't expect to get any of those sweet arts funding dollars without putting some real elbow grease into a grant application. While every award, residency or grant you apply for will be different (and you must cater to those differences if you want to be successful) there are a few general guidelines that you can always follow. Presenting your work in the right way to funding bodies, potential exhibition/residency venues or prizes is essential.

1. Drafting the basics.

The details of what, when, where, and how should be clear and simply described. Include direction to more information about yourself. Think about who the audience for your project is. In reality, many details may be finalised as a project unfolds. Funding bodies understand this.

Be as detailed and accurate as you can, and acknowledge information you are missing. The most important thing, though, is to avoid sounding vague. Funding bodies need to trust that if they support you, you'll deliver.

2. Who are you applying to?

Grants aren't about receiving no-strings attached funding. They're about mutual exchanges between artists and institutions. You'll have a greater chance of success if you understand what the agenda is behind the grant. The organisation giving the grant will be quite clear about what issues they want you to address in your application, but it doesn't hurt to also make yourself familiar with the organisation's goals and policies. Cater to your audience and speak their language – if you're writing for a government body keep it really formal and use words like 'objectives' and 'outcomes'. If it's an ARI like Firstdraft, feel free to let your experimental hair down a bit more. Just be smart and make good choices.

3. Okay, let's break it down. How to-

i. Describe the work simply. It should be very clear from a quick read what your project is, what it looks like, how it is

experienced, and how it will be executed. Your work may be complex, but if it is so complex that it can't be explained, it is likely it won't appeal to funding bodies. They need to fully understand what a work is before committing to it.

ii. Clearly state your expected outcomes. Clearly state what the outcomes, benefits and milestones of your project will be. Will it employ local artists? How many? Will it reactivate a disused space? Where? Will it engage a local community? How? Make these things clear, bearing in mind that (especially for public funds) the more 'measurable' the outcome, the better. How will you demonstrate if your work has achieved its goals? Giving a sense of this will make your application stronger.

iii. Include logistical details. Unlike media, funding bodies have a keen interest in the logistical details of how your project will be executed. Don't be vague – break down exactly how you will spend the time and money at your disposal. Be detailed to assure funders you're capable of executing your plan, while keeping your details succinct as possible.

iv. Provide a budget. Almost all major funding bodies will require a budget with applications. A detailed budget should not list 'materials' at \$1,000. It should list individual materials, their cost per unit, required number, and (where possible) the supplier. Itemise your budget as much as possible, bearing in mind that you may have to acquit to this at a later date.

4. Still unsure?

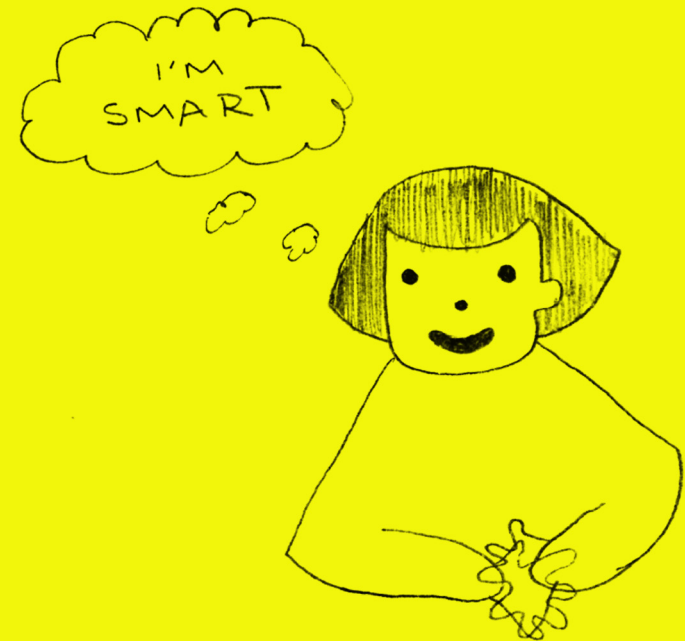
If in doubt, ask! Almost all awards, tenders, and funding rounds will have an information service. Don't submit something if you are uncertain about the details – get online or on the phone and talk to someone. They'll usually be happy to help and it doesn't hurt to show them that you're taking your application seriously.

5. P.S. !!

Luckily for you Arc @ UNSW Art & Design has a whole bunch of grants to give out throughout the year!! Yep, that's right, we want to give you some \$\$\$ to make your extracurricular art and design project wishes come true!! Plus, we have a bunch of Art and Design Grant tool kits to help you write that fantastic grant of yours! Hop online and see; How to Write your Proposal, Support Material and Selection Criteria.

More info here:

www.arc.unsw.edu.au/art-design/grants



GETTING PUBLISHED



FRAMEWORK

Framework is Arc @ UNSW Art & Design's critical arts journal, which aims to facilitate, promote, and celebrate arts writing and critical dialogue on campus.

As an e-pub contributors have the freedom to include interactive media such as videos, audio, gifs and animation in their writing. *Framework* encourages experimental, avant-garde, and ficto-critical approaches to arts writing. *Framework* also publishes conventional reviews, interviews, essays, articles, and more

Contributing to *Framework* is a chance to be published alongside students, to share your work with peers, and to celebrate and promote your work at the launch. Contributors get feedback from the Writers' Coordinator to help develop and polish the piece!

Pitch your ideas to the Writers' Coordinator Audrey Pfister in the Arc @ A&D office or a.pfister@arc.unsw.edu.au

READ IT! www.arc.unsw.edu.au/framework

ARCADIA

Blitz | *Arcadia* is your guide to the Art & Design campus. *Arcadia* shares reviews, events, profiles, study trics, interviews, snapshots, playlists, and more!

Arcadia is great for newbies to any kind of content producing. If you're more interested in doing casual interviews, reviews, or more, *Arcadia* is the place for you! *Arcadia* is a flexible and fun place to flex your creative muscles. Taking contributions all year round *Arcadia* is keen to get student involved!

THARUNKA

If you want to write something a bit less art-related, you can always pitch for *Tharunka* at main campus. *Framework* is sometimes open to publishing political pieces or investigative journalism around our campus, but if you have an idea related to main campus or if it definitely wouldn't fit into *Framework*, head on over to the other side of the world.

RUNWAY

Runway is an iconic publication in Sydney's experimental art scene and a great place to get published. *Runway* publishes on both their quarterly Magazine, and all year round on their Conversations platform.

Runway is a great place to catch some of the most innovative arts writing in Australia. Check out their features, reviews, and interviews for some writing #inspo

FBI RADIO

FBI Radio have a great arts and culture guide that you can write for, if you volunteer at the station. You can also try emailing arts and culture submissions your fantastic press releases or features! Hop online and have a read of their interviews, reviews, art we heart, and event guide.

Some other good place to consider or just read!

- Runningdog
- Concrete Playground
- The Brag
- Art What's On
- FBI Radio: Culture Guide

NOTES

Now that you know how to write for the arts these pages are for you to scribble all of your ramblings, thoughts and ideas!

