

Writing Your Artist Bio

Your artist bio is a third-person narrative that introduces you to audiences, curators, galleries, grant committees, and the press. Think of it as a professional handshake — factual, warm, and memorable. Unlike an artist statement, a bio focuses on who you are rather than what your work means.

What Is an Artist Bio?

An artist bio tells the story of your creative life in clear, accessible language. It typically includes where you trained, how long you've been making work, what media or disciplines you work in, notable exhibitions or accomplishments, and — when relevant — personal context that shapes your creative perspective.

The Three Lengths

Most artists need three versions of their bio ready to go:

- **Short (1–2 sentences, ~50 words):** For social media profiles, app bios, name tags, and quick introductions.
- **Medium (1 paragraph, ~100–150 words):** The most commonly requested length — used for exhibition catalogs, grant applications, press releases, and websites.
- **Long (2–3 paragraphs, ~250–350 words):** For residency applications, detailed gallery submissions, and feature articles.

What to Include

Work through these building blocks and choose what fits your career stage:

- Your name (in third person: “Jane works...” not “I work...”)
- Primary medium or discipline (painting, sculpture, fiber arts, photography, etc.)
- Where you're based and/or where you're from, if relevant
- Training, education, or self-taught background
- Years of practice or career milestones
- Notable exhibitions, collections, awards, or publications
- Influences, themes, or a brief window into your creative focus
- Current projects or upcoming shows (for time-sensitive versions)

What to Avoid

- Clichés: “passionate artist,” “lifelong love of art,” “art chose me”
- Overly humble disclaimers: “I’m just a hobbyist” or “I never went to art school, so...”
- Jargon-heavy language that only insiders understand
- A laundry list of every show you've ever been in — curate your highlights
- First-person voice (a bio is always written in third person)

Example: Short Bio

“Maria Contreras is a Lynchburg-based painter whose work explores the intersection of memory and landscape through layers of oil and encaustic. Her paintings have been exhibited throughout Central Virginia and are held in private collections across the Southeast.”

Example: Medium Bio

“Maria Contreras is a painter based in Lynchburg, Virginia, whose work examines the relationship between memory, place, and material. Working in oil and encaustic, she builds canvases in layers — burying and revealing — to create surfaces that feel simultaneously ancient and immediate. Contreras studied fine arts at Longwood University and has exhibited regionally for over fifteen years, including solo exhibitions at the Academy of Fine Arts in Lynchburg and group shows in Richmond and Charlottesville. Her work is held in private collections across the Southeast. She currently teaches painting workshops through the Lynchburg Art Club.”

Tips for Writing Your Bio

TIP 1 — Start with what you make, not how you feel about it. “Sarah photographs abandoned industrial spaces” is stronger than “Sarah has always been moved by the passage of time.”

TIP 2 — Write it, then read it aloud. If it sounds stiff or overly formal, simplify. Your bio should feel like you wrote it, not like a legal document.

TIP 3 — Update it regularly. Keep a master doc and review your bio at least once a year or after any significant show, award, or shift in your practice.

TIP 4 — Ask a fellow artist or trusted reader to review it. It’s hard to see yourself clearly from the inside.

Writing Your Artist Statement

An artist statement is a first-person reflection on your work — why you make it, what it explores, and how it connects to the world. Where your bio tells people about you, your statement invites them into your thinking. It’s one of the most challenging things an artist is asked to write, and one of the most important.

What Is an Artist Statement?

An artist statement is a short, personal essay written in the first person. It gives viewers, jurors, and collectors a way into your work — context that helps them understand what they’re looking at and why it matters to you. A good statement deepens the experience of the work without explaining it away.

General vs. Project-Specific

You will likely need two types of statements over the course of your career:

- **General Statement:** A 100–300 word overview of your broader practice, themes, and process. Used for grant applications, website bios, open calls, and portfolio submissions.
- **Project Statement:** A focused statement about a specific body of work or exhibition. Typically 150–400 words. Used for solo exhibitions, residency applications, and curated submissions.

The Core Questions

Before you write, work through these questions. Your answers are the raw material of your statement:

- What do you make? (Medium, form, process)
- Why do you make it? What compels you or keeps you returning?
- What ideas, questions, or themes does your work explore?
- What is the relationship between your process and your meaning?
- Who or what influences you — artists, places, experiences, ideas?
- What do you hope the viewer takes away, feels, or questions?
- How has your work evolved, and where is it going?

Structure: A Starting Point

There's no single correct structure for an artist statement, but if you're starting from scratch, this three-part framework can help:

- **Opening:** Introduce your work and its central focus or question. Avoid starting with “I have always...” — jump into your practice with specificity.
- **Middle:** Explore the themes, influences, or ideas your work engages. Talk about process where it connects to meaning — not as a how-to, but as insight into why you work the way you do.
- **Close:** Reflect on what you hope the work does in the world, or where your practice is headed. This doesn't have to be grand — a genuine, grounded observation is more powerful than a sweeping claim.

Example Artist Statement

“I make paintings about disappearance — not loss, exactly, but the particular quality of things on their way out. I’m drawn to corners of Central Virginia that don’t quite register: gas stations at dusk, overgrown lots behind strip malls, the backs of buildings no one photographs. Working in oil on linen, I build these images slowly, in layers, letting earlier marks show through. The surface keeps a record of decisions made and reversed.

I’m interested in what we notice and what we’ve agreed not to. The landscapes I paint aren’t dramatic or scenic. They’re easy to drive past. Part of my intention is to slow that down — to spend time with what usually gets skipped. I want viewers to leave with a slightly uncomfortable familiarity, the sense that they’ve seen these places but never really looked.”

Common Mistakes — and How to Fix Them

Mistake: Being too vague. “My work explores the human condition and the nature of beauty.” **Fix:** Get specific. What aspect of the human condition? Which beauty — and in what form?

Mistake: Over-explaining. A statement that tells viewers exactly what to think removes the experience of discovery. **Fix:** Share your intention and process, then trust the viewer.

Mistake: Academic jargon. “My practice interrogates the hegemonic structures of representational space.” **Fix:** Say it plainly. If you can’t explain it in conversational language, you may not fully know what you mean yet — and that’s worth exploring.

Mistake: Starting too broadly. “Throughout human history, art has served as...” **Fix:** Start with your work. The first sentence should anchor the reader in your practice.

Mistake: Apologizing. “I know this is hard to explain, but...” **Fix:** Cut it. Lean into the difficulty with curiosity, not apology.

Getting Started: A Simple Writing Exercise

If you’re staring at a blank page, try this freewriting warm-up before you write anything “official.”

Set a timer for 10 minutes and write without stopping:

- Describe a piece you made recently — what you did, step by step.
- Why did you make that particular piece? What were you trying to figure out?
- What does the finished work do that surprises you?
- If a curious stranger asked, “Why do you make this kind of thing?” — what would you say?

Don’t edit while you write. When the timer goes off, read back through what you wrote and underline any sentences that feel true, specific, or alive. Those sentences are the seeds of your statement.

Bio vs. Statement: Quick Reference

	Artist Bio	Artist Statement
Voice	Third person (“She makes...”)	First person (“I make...”)
Focus	Who you are, your credentials	Why you make work, what it means
Tone	Professional, factual, warm	Reflective, personal, exploratory
Length	50–350 words depending on use	100–400 words depending on use
Updates	Revise annually or after milestones	Revise per project or annually
Uses	Exhibitions, press, websites, grants	Grant apps, exhibitions, open calls

A Few Final Thoughts

Both your bio and your statement are living documents. They should grow and shift as your practice does. Don’t aim for perfect on the first draft — aim for honest. Honest writing almost always becomes good writing with a little revision.

Share early drafts with artists you trust, not just people who love you. Ask them: Does this sound like me? Does this make you want to see the work? Where do you lose the thread?

Finally: you have more to say than you think. The fact that you make work is evidence that you have a relationship to the world worth writing about.