

You are a senior and have chosen to pursue your art-making for all four years of your high school career. Your dedication to creating meaningful and personal art has been a source of frustration at times, but more often has brought you fulfillment. It is now time to step up the seriousness of your efforts and truly investigate why you make the art that you make. This semester exam consists of writing a meaningful and honest statement about your process as an art maker.

Your artist's statement can be a moving testament to your creativity and integrity. The expression of this commitment will vary, but the effectiveness of your artist's statement stems from the **authority** with which you write it. Our words "author" and "authority" come from the Latin root "augere," which means **"to increase, to create, to promote."** This implies that the notions of creation and promotion are compatible! The purpose of an artist's statement is to help others understand why you create what you create. The beautiful thing about writing the statement is that it will also help you to understand exactly what you are creating and why.

Think of your artist's statement as a nourishing stew. The rich flavors and inviting aroma will feed your spirit and summon wonderful people to your table. You'll want to make sure your stew is made from the freshest, finest ingredients and that it has been simmered and seasoned with care. Do this, and you will be proud to share your creative vision – your **authority** – with others.

The following steps should be taken over the course of the next hour and a half. To make this more fun, I will continue to use the analogy of creating a nourishing stew. Your finished product will not be the stew that others will be tasting, as you will need to let it simmer, taste it first yourself, and add seasonings that will make it as delicious as possible.

STEP ONE: Assemble the Ingredients

1. Take five minutes and think about why you do what you do. How did you get into this work? How do you feel when work is going well? What are your favorite things about your work? Jot down short phrases that capture your thoughts. Don't worry about making sense or connections. The more you stir up at this point, the richer the stew. (jot down notes as necessary)

2. Make a list of words and phrases that communicate your feelings about your work and your values. Include words you like, words that make you feel good, words that communicate your values or fascinations. Be loose. Be happy. Be real. Think of these as potential seasonings for your stew. You don't have to choose which ones to use just yet, so get them all out of the cupboard.

3. Answer these questions as simply as you can. Your answers are the meat and potatoes of your stew. Let them be raw and uncut for now.

1. What is your favorite tool? Why?
2. What is your favorite material? Why?
3. What do you like best about what you do?
4. What do you mean when you say that a piece has turned out really well?
5. What patterns emerge in your work? Is there a pattern in the way you select materials?
In the way you use color, texture or light?
6. What do you do differently from the way you were taught? Why?
7. What is your favorite color? List three qualities of the color.
Consider that these qualities apply to your work.

4. Look at your word list. Add new words suggested by your answers to the questions above.

5. Choose two key words from your word list. They can be related or entirely different. Look them up in a dictionary. Read all the definitions listed for your words. Copy the definitions, thinking about what notions they have in common. Look your words up in a Thesaurus. Read the entries related to your words. Are there any new words that should be added to your word list?

6. Write five sentences that tell the truth about your connection to your work. If you are stuck, start by filling in the blanks below.

When I work with _____ I am reminded that _____.

I begin a piece by _____.

I know a piece is done when _____.

When my work is going well, I am filled with a sense of _____.

When people see my work, I'd like them to _____.

STEP TWO: Filling the Pot

Write a three-paragraph artist's statement. Keep your sentences authentic and direct. Use the present tense ("I am," not "I was," "I do," not "I did.") Be brave: say nice things about yourself. As a rule, your artist's statement should be written in the first person. Refer to yourself with the pronouns "I, me, my." Use the suggestions below to structure your statement. Write three to five sentences per paragraph.

First paragraph. Begin with a simple statement of why you do the work you do. Support that statement, telling the reader more about your goals and aspirations.

Second paragraph. Tell the reader how you make decisions in the course of your work. How and why do you select materials, techniques, themes? Keep it simple and tell the truth.

Third paragraph. Tell the reader a little more about your current work. How it is grew out of prior work or life experiences. What are you exploring, attempting, challenging by doing this work.

STEP THREE: Taste and Correct the Seasonings.

Read your statement out loud. Listen to the way the sounds and rhythms seem to invite pauses. Notice places where you'd like the sound or rhythm to be different. Experiment with sounding out the beats of words that seem to be missing until they come to mind. Do this several times until you have a sense of the musical potential of your statement. As you read your statement, some phrases will ring true and others false. Think about the ones that aren't on the mark and find the true statement lurking behind the false one. You may find that the truth is a simpler statement than the one you made. Or your internal censors may have kept you from making a wholehearted statement of your truth lest it sound self-important. Risk puffing yourself up as long as your claims are in line with your goals and values.

Keep reading and revising your statement until you hear a musical, simple, authentic voice that is making clear and honest statements about your work. Refer to your word list and other Step One exercises as needed. By now your taste buds are saturated. You need a second opinion. Choose a trusted friend or professional to read your statement. Make it clear that you are satisfied with the ingredients on the whole, but you'd like an opinion as to seasoning. In other words, you alone are the authority for what is true about your work, but you'd like feedback on clarity, tone, and such technical matters as spelling and punctuation. Once you've incorporated such suggestions as make sense to you, make a crisp, clear original of your artist's statement. Sign and date it. Make lots of copies, you will have lots of people to serve it to!

STEP FOUR: File Your Recipe!

Save all the notes and drafts that you've made. You'll want to revise and update your artist's statement from time to time to reflect changes in your work.

Please turn in all of your work, including your notes. I will help with step THREE, as I will be grading this. When I grade this statement, I will be looking for spelling errors, grammatical mistakes, clarity of thought, and completion of all steps in this activity. If you follow all of these directions and stay honest with yourself and your purpose for creating your art, a certain "A" will be earned on this exam. Please be sure to finish in the allotted time. A follow up activity to this exam will include your revision of the exam (your rough draft). Once a complete and final copy has been conjured, I will help you "design" your statement using Adobe Illustrator. You can't just serve your stew in a crusty old dish. Presentation is everything, and I will help you make this stew look too good to pass up. I wish you luck.

-Guyer