WRITER'S CRAFT FOR ARTISTS

Hamilton Artists Inc
2 October 2019

Presented by Stephanie Vegh
Visual Artist + Arts Writer

OVERVIEW

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➤ Common Writing Formats for Artists

➤ Writing Techniques

➤ Editing Techniques

➤ Writing Exercise

➤ Questions

COMMON WRITING FORMATS

And how to tell the difference between them

COMMON WRITING FORMATS

➤ Most artist applications will request some form of the following three written pieces:

➤ Artist Biography

➤ Artist Statement

➤ Project Proposal

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

- Typically written in the third person (he/she/they)

- Provides a summary of your creative career

  - Education / training

  - Exhibition history

  - Professional experience

  - Awards and grants

- May also include *relevant* personal context for art-making - are there parts of your personal history that intersect with your artistic practice?

ARTIST STATEMENT

➤ Typically written in the first person (I, my, me)

➤ Provides insight and context for your practice

   ➤ Medium and materials

   ➤ Subject matter

   ➤ Influences / inspiration

➤ At their best, develop a clear connection between your art and its ideas

PROJECT PROPOSAL

- ➤ Typically written in the first person (I, my, me)

- ➤ Answers a specific set of questions:

  - ➤ What is your idea?

  - ➤ What will it look like?

  - ➤ What technical supports do you require to present the work? Are you able to provide any of these? What will the gallery need to source?

- ➤ Strikes a balance between conceptual and practical concerns

WRITING TECHNIQUES

How to put words on paper

WRITING TIPS: PREPARATION

➤ Maintain reliable records of artworks, exhibition history, grant history

➤ Keep a studio notebook for jotting down ideas relating to your work

➤ Read and collect other artists' statements from sources such as exhibition brochures, websites, etc.

➤ Assemble your most relevant artworks in one space (real or virtual) - what do they have in common?
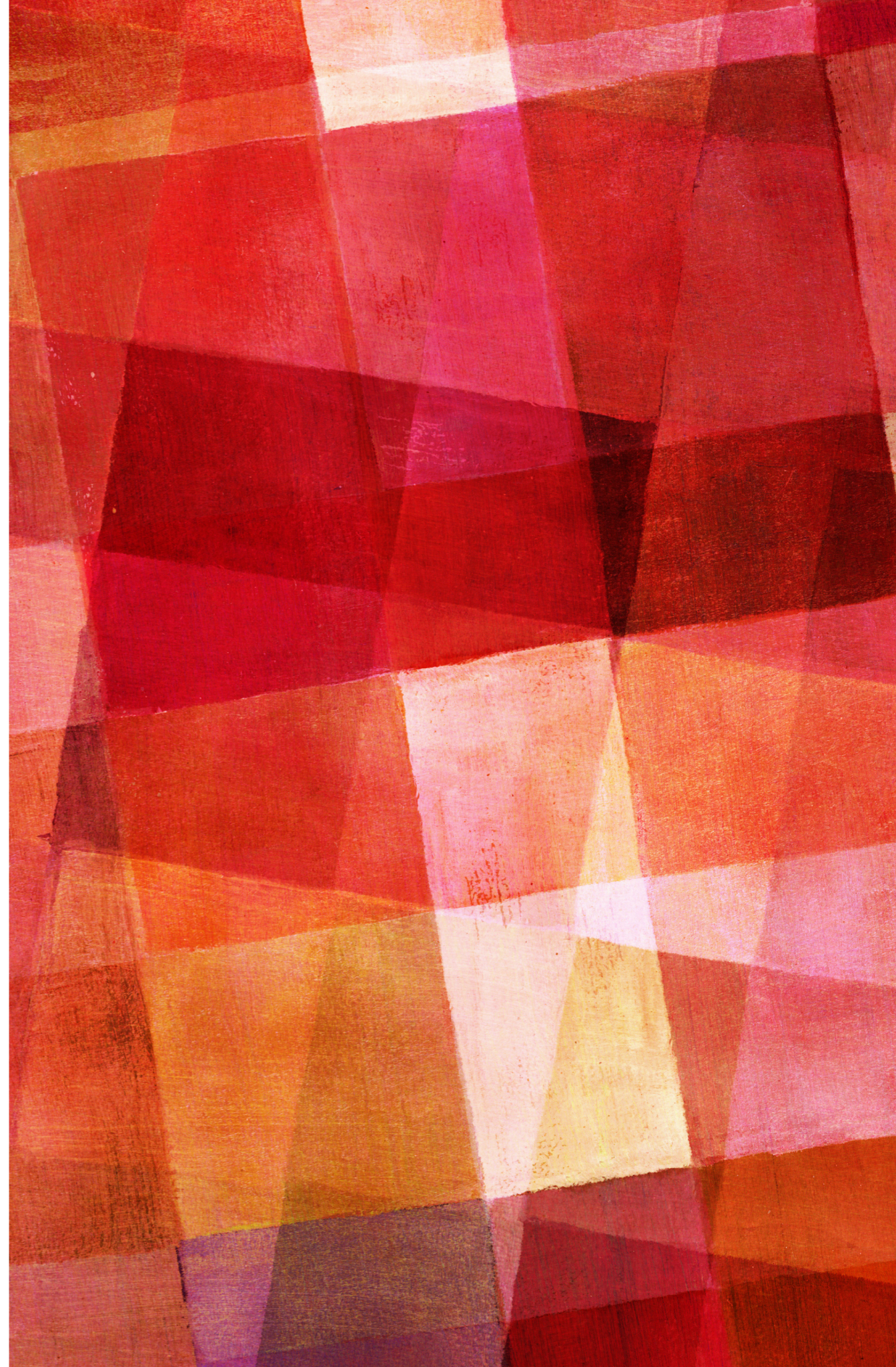
WRITING TIPS: FIRST DRAFT

➤ Observe your own work while writing down first impressions, physical descriptions of what your work looks like, ideas that come to mind while looking

➤ Keep writing until you run out of things to say - don't self-edit, re-read or second-guess anything at this stage

➤ Don't rush - feel free to walk away and come back to this process over several days, a week, or longer if needed

➤ Once done, review what you've written and highlight the ideas that are most relevant, honest, interesting

➤ Select out those ideas and pull them together into a first draft, adding any further connecting thoughts that may be needed

WRITING TIPS: PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

➤ Which sentence is the strongest, most important statement about your work? This should appear near the beginning of your first paragraph, or may be your first sentence

➤ Aim to use language that is accessible and easy to understand

    ➤ Avoid art theory, jargon, excessively poetic language

➤ Is this writing specific to your work or could it just as easily be used to describe work by other artists?

    ➤ Go beyond broad themes and generalizations (e.g. "My work is about the body/the land/capitalism") - what is your work contributing to those themes that is different, unique, and specific to your practice?

CHECKLIST FOR ART APPLICATIONS

➤ Provide direct answers to the specific questions being asked in the application

➤ Convey a compelling idea in clear, accessible language

➤ Establish a clear link between the project you are proposing and the artistic work samples you provide

➤ Reference past projects that provide context for a new project and prove your ability to complete and deliver on an idea

➤ Anticipate and answer any questions the reader may have about your work or process

WHAT QUESTIONS?

➤ Listen to people in your studio, at your public presentations and online - what questions do they most frequently ask about your work?

➤ Is there anything unusual about your process that needs explaining?

➤ Do you use materials or processes that are difficult to see in digital images?

➤ Are there images or themes that recur in your work? Why are they important to you?

EDITING TECHNIQUES

How to make words sound better

WRITING TIPS: EDITING FOR TONE

➤ Are you writing in the first person or third person? Is this the right voice for the format? Are you being consistent in your usage of pronouns?

➤ Do you sound arrogant?

> ➤ Avoid claims of being "unique" (all art is unique), or the "first" and "only" artist doing what you do (unlikely, and hard to prove)

➤ Do you sound too passive?

> ➤ Avoid aspirational language like "hope" or "attempt"

➤ Are you telling the viewer what their response will be?

> ➤ Don't tell the viewer how **they** will feel, react, be moved or challenged - you can't predict this response

➤ Do you sound defensive?

> ➤ Don't anticipate and deflect a viewer's response; state what the art **is** about, not what it's **not** about

WRITING TIPS: THE FINISHED PRODUCT

➤ Use your computer's spelling and grammar check functions, or applications like Grammarly to check your work

➤ Read your statement out loud to yourself - do the words sound natural coming out of your mouth?

➤ Ask **at least two people** to read your writing and give feedback:

  ➤ A fellow artist or arts professional who is familiar with your work can confirm that your writing accurately represents your practice and communicates well in a professional arts context

  ➤ A non-artist friend or family member can confirm that your writing is free of jargon and other difficult, inaccessible language choices

➤ Make any final revisions based on feedback from friends and peers

➤ Ensure your proposal fits within any word or character limits that may apply to your application

COMMON PROBLEMS

➤ Excessive use of art theory, specialized jargon or intensely personal and poetic writing that may be unfamiliar to your reader

➤ Omitting essential facts, such as medium or scale of work

➤ Personal vs. professional context

➤ Neglecting to customize writing to meet application requirements