

Writing your artist bio

What goes in a bio?

It may help to compare an artist bio to a CV and an artist statement.

- A **CV** or resume generally is historical – it establishes your credentials by listing your relevant training, work experience including teaching others, shows, contests, awards, other achievements, and so on, in chronological order. It is as long as it needs to be.
- A **bio** can include the most relevant or important of the CV information along with major inspirations and influences (include why), and you may also include your aspirations if you can do so believably. Write a bio in paragraph form so it is narrative more than it is reference. Narrative style contains more words than lists do, so of necessity you will have to choose carefully what you include in it. A short bio for a website would max at 150-175 words. This won't hold your life story, so choose carefully.
- An **artist statement** is your opportunity to talk about things like your philosophy and approach to art, what motivates you, what inspires and moves you to create, and such more personal things that describe your sensibilities. Your statement should help people understand you as an artist from the 'why' perspective while the other two documents address the 'what, when, and where'.

First person or third person?

There is some tradition that a bio is third person because it talks about you and could have been written by somebody else, and a statement is first person because it is you talking – you are making the statement. Do what makes you comfortable, but understand where your bio is likely to be used, and that may help you decide which way to go. If the bio is only for your own website or other personal promotion, first person is fine. If it is going to appear elsewhere, go with third person.

Do I write for a given audience?

Yes. Try to appreciate who will see your bio, and tune the bio so it has the most possible impact with them. You might want to re-tune your bio any time you have a significant change to the expected audience. Avoid humour even if you feel you thoroughly know the audience – it is a minefield.

Do I brag myself up, or be modest?

Be truthful, because cheaters get caught and lose their credibility. It is better to write a short, unpretentious, honest bio than to try to inflate it. In art, it's the art that counts most, while your bio is a way to let people know you better and be interested in you. That said, people make connections, and you may one day enjoy the experience of having your story resonate with someone else to the point that they become a fan, a champion, and maybe even a collector. Let your personality come through and let your story talk for you. If you have a major accomplishment, starting with that can be a hook to the reader's interest.

Does a bio have to sound like it was written by a pro?

It doesn't have to sound like a slick marketing piece. It does need to be free from spelling and grammatical errors and it should be written to a reading level that your expected audience can access without having to work at it. Write to communicate, not to impress with your rhetorical sophistication. Avoid obscure terminology and jargon in favour of more recognizable language. Use a quote if the quote is meaningful to you and not just name dropping. Get another person who is articulate and careful to read your bio before you release it.

How do I know if I'm in the ballpark with my bio?

You can get reliable opinions, and you can look at the bios of several artists to see what they have done.