

# Artist's Biography Guidelines

Updated 2016 – Dinah Satterwhite

These tips are helpful when writing a bio or “Artist’s Statement” for print or web purposes. The public, your customers, the media, and others will look at your photos and bio, to contact you, to commission work, to use for marketing purposes, press releases, etc. It will inspire and enrich their experience, and often times create lifelong friendships and customers.

Also, it is nice to update your information from time to time, even if no major changes have taken place with regard to your art medium or style – to keep your look “fresh.” I would recommend every other year.

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## TIPS FOR CREATING or UPDATING AN ARTIST’S BIO:

1. **Prepare:** Set up a page in Word or a word processing document, so you can edit and save various versions. Then you can cut and paste from them and use them for a variety of purposes. Over the years I have developed full page half page and one paragraph versions, along with special ones that feature a single “process” for special events. This way, I have something to work with when I demonstrate or am asked to speak or judge somewhere, or when the media or others ask for information.
2. **Research:** Search the web for articles about writing an artist’s bio, and check out samples from other artist’s to get some great ideas for format, content, and style. When in doubt, or for your first biography, you may wish to hire a copywriter or Public Relations firm that is experienced with writing visual artist’s biographies. I can also help you with this.
3. **Cool Book:** Check out one of my favorite books on the subject: “Art-Write” by Vicki Krohn Amorose. It has a lot of wonderful information, including some good marketing tips. You will walk away with a finished Artist’s Statement that you are really proud of, and you will know how to use it. It has lists of words to use, and great exercises. And it’s not a huge book – just the right size. I will share a few of my notes below (on the second page) from a workshop I attended several years ago.
4. **Get Personal:** Choose whether to write in the first person (makes it more personal), or third person (this can give a professional edge, and appears to be a third party who “admires” you and your work and is writing about you). It is totally up to you. Third person example: “Mr. Smith is known for incorporating dramatic and intensely layered colors...” (instead of first person: “I like to work with a lot of dramatic colors.”) And use plenty of *colorful* and appropriate adjectives. Another resource: art guides, art magazines, & catalogs. Grab words and phrases from them – no need to reinvent the wheel.
5. **Layout:** Start with a clear heading: your name and medium and/or “Artist’s Biography” at the top. For a written bio, put contact information preferably at the bottom, like a footer that doesn’t overpower the body of the text – city & state, phone number, e-mail, and your website are sufficient. For a website, like the Studio Tour, contact details would be near the top by your name and medium.
6. **Content:** Include the following, but keep personal information out or to a bare minimum. Work this information into 3 to 6 paragraphs of text, chronologically -- don’t jump around. Keep a logical progression of thought.

Type of art medium or craft

A small introduction and background to your involvement in your art or craft, perhaps how you got started and what inspires you to do it

Mention how you developed your style, what is special about it, different? Any special tools or equipment?

Define your medium briefly. If it's an un-common medium, describe it in more detail so no one has to guess or fill in the blanks

Include your inspirations, what drives you, where you get ideas if appropriate

Add some character or inspiration that makes you/your art interesting \*<sup>A</sup>

Brief information about any special training, degrees, awards, or special recognition you've received

Near the end you can briefly mention one or more of your products, careful not to make a list \*<sup>B</sup>

Include dates (year only) if it shows longevity or recent achievements

And wrap everything up with some positive comments about your love for your work, and maybe some plans you have for the near future.

- \* Ideally, tie the end back to the beginning somehow. And mention your medium in the last sentence. This ties it up and allows people to process everything, and remember you better.

[For a printed bio, choose one to three photos of your work – choose images that work well together (like including a common color thread), and consider a good quality headshot of you, or of you working on your art, but don't over-do the photos]

OTHER TIPS: Be generous with COLORFUL and CREATIVE words

Break up long paragraphs so subjects are grouped accordingly; don't be wordy or repeat

Try to avoid over-used words like "one-of-a-kind" and "unique"

Use a sweet short sentence now and then

Use good grammar and spelling – have two trusted friends or peers look it over

Examples:

\*<sup>A</sup> "I often travel to Italy in the summer to select the glass beads with gold..."

"The raku process continues to fascinate me because of the unpredictable nature of..."

\*<sup>B</sup> "The large format oils on canvas are sometimes offered as two pieces that are meant to be hung together, called a diptych, or three, called a triptych."

7. Format: Fonts and fancy paper or graphics are not necessary, and can take away from your bio. But sometimes they can add a little dimension and style to your "look." Just keep it simple so the attention is on the words and you, not the paper or format. A little creativity is fine, but keep it professional and polished.

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Brief notes from Dinah, after attending Vicki Krohn Amorose's 2013 artist writing workshop:

1. Language shapes perception.
2. A bio helps others to see you, then to look again.
3. It's a bridge to connect to your audience.
4. Tell the truth! Get to the point! Find an editor if possible!
5. Respect the viewer. Don't TELL THEM what to see.
6. Claim authority in your writing, own it, be confident.
7. Try a story style sometimes.
8. You can't go wrong if you tell
  - a. The how
  - b. The what
  - c. The why