

# What is a Design Statement?

Like Artist's Statements, Design Statements serve to present your intent, process, and the context of your work. They vary from addressing a specific piece to looking at your overall approach to design. Here are some examples of when you'd use a Design Statement:

- ***Class Assignment***  
Design statements are sometimes written for the purpose of presenting a project to class. In this capacity, it is a tool for critique and should contain relevant detail, describing the piece's intent and execution.
- ***Graduate School Application***  
Graduate schools often request design statements, asking prospective students to describe their work and their understanding of their 'place' in contemporary design.

## CONTENT

Design statements can include a variety of information. Here are some potential subjects for your statement:

- ***Process/Technique***  
What kind of techniques are significant to your work? How do you make decisions about the progress of a design?
- ***Goals/Intent***  
What are your goals for an individual design or series? How do you want the viewer to "read" the design?
- ***Subject/Content***  
Are there consistent themes or subjects that you address in your design work?
- ***Social Impact of Design***  
Some designers are interested in the political or cultural effects of design in contemporary society. How can design change or improve society? What is the relationship between a designer and the public?
- ***Ethical Responsibility of the Designer***  
What is the ultimate objective for a designer? How is this goal limited by ethical concerns? What kinds of rules should a designer apply to their work?
- ***Function vs. Aesthetics***  
How do you balance self-expression and client needs? How can these two (sometimes conflicting) factors be synthesized?
- ***Accessibility and Legibility***  
Many contemporary designers push the limits of legibility for the sake of content or self-expression. What is your approach to accessibility?
- ***Branding***  
What design elements are significant in creating a 'brand,' and how do these elements interact?
- ***Type vs. Image***  
In an increasingly image-heavy culture the relationship between text and image is a large concern for designers. How does this issue and its complexities affect your work?

**FORMAT**

Depending on purpose or function, Design statements can address a single piece or a lifetime of design. Below are some examples of different formats.

- **Philosophy/Manifesto**  
A statement can serve as a manifesto for your work. What defines successful design?
- **Proposal**  
A statement can be written before the execution of a project, highlighting your goals and methodology.
- **Project Narrative**  
A design statement can be a narrative account of your concept development.

**NOTES ON WRITING THE DESIGN STATEMENT**

- Graphic Designers are artists and they need artist’s statements too. But the details of design as industry make a statement on design as art a little tricky sometimes. The art of your design is not how well you use a computer or handle a marker. It is not even your thorough comprehension of design principles expertly applied. Design as art is the choices you make in distinguishing yourself from others, and your statement is an expression of those choices.
- What kind of client you work with is a choice. Rebelling against a medium’s restrictions or making them your best friend is another choice. In your designs does readability dominate concept, or is the idea and a novel expression of it more important? What’s the value of “edginess?” Everyone knows and uses (or defies) the principles and everyone combines text and image—that’s what design is. Your own principles and your own positions on contemporary design issues (know them) are where good artist statements come from.
- Design has its own exclusionary language. If you misuse it, designers and professional readers of artist statements will know, and it will exclude you. Precision, brevity, and clarity are always preferable to big words and bloated language. The number one problem with student artist statements is a lack of clarity, usually due to abuse of the language. If you have trouble expressing something important, try the simplest possible way you know. Write it the way you say it.
- The artist statement is as personal as a piece of writing gets. For design it’s about setting yourself apart and accounting for your behavior within a commercial art form. If a sentence doesn’t address one of these, if it doesn’t express a genuine personal truth, or if you don’t know exactly what you meant by it, it doesn’t belong in your statement.

**Useful Verbs:**

Articulate  
Communicate  
Illustrate  
Transcend  
Convey  
Layer  
Add  
Enhance  
Impact

**Useful Adjectives:**

Complex  
Dense  
Layered  
Superficial  
Iconoclastic  
Experimental  
Low-tech  
Critical  
Nostalgic

**SOURCES FOR CRITICAL DESIGN WRITING:**

Periodicals:

ID Magazine  
Print  
HOW Design Magazine  
Graphis  
Communication Arts  
AIGA Journal of Graphic Design

&

*Looking Closer : Critical Writings on Graphic Design* (volumes 1 – 4) edited by Steven Heller