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## Teaching the Art of Writing as an Artist

Yarrow Mead

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Teaching the Art of Writing as an Artist

By

Yarrow Mead

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of

Master of Arts in Teaching.

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Saint Paul, Minnesota

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To my grandpa, Jack Pichotta. A man who has shared the importance of education with thousands, myself included.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### Overview

In high schools across the country, there are innumerable students who have real artistic talent and the capability to succeed in the art world, yet they are not being encouraged or equipped to even try, and because art is not seen as a “safe” career path, students coming from lower income families are more affected than those coming from wealth and privilege. It’s this rather niche problem that I would like to begin to address, not in the art classroom, but rather in the Communication Arts and Literature realm. We as English teachers can encourage young creatives’ confidence and technical skills through teaching high-level academic writing specifically targeted towards the skills needed in the art world. The question becomes: *how specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant writing, and artist biography and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?*

By extension, some might argue that we should then teach future engineers, nurses, or machinists the writing skills they need for their careers, but this arguably already occurs. Training for more “realistic” jobs is much more common. In many ways, careers in art do not get the same respect or thought, especially in high school settings. This is, of course, the whole problem

In order to keep this project as accessible as possible during a time when many are not attending school in person, I will be creating a website for use by

both students and teachers, and the first thing it will focus on is academic writing. This type of writing is usually the hardest to motivate students to engage with fully because it's considered dry and inflexible, but it's also arguably the most useful writing skill in college and professional life. The goal here is to frame this learning as the acquisition of real-life skills that will help students interested in art careers succeed in the professional world of art, thus tapping into both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The second thing this project does by teaching actual tangible skills such as grant writing and artist statement writing is encourage students to actively work towards careers and education in the arts.

In this chapter, I will share my personal experience with art, writing, and education. I will focus on how messages about careers in art affected my decision making in college, as well as my experiences with writing in the art world. I will then discuss broader stakeholders in this conversation and touch on some research regarding who pursues careers in the art world and who doesn't, as well as why this needs to be addressed.

### **Personal Context and Rationale**

My journey in the world of education and art has not been a straight one, and I would not consider myself to be at the end of it. In high school, I was very interested in all things creative. I did a lot of illustration, and for a while thought I would go to school to be a scientific illustrator. I worked one summer as an intern for a volunteer group dedicated to determining the ranges and distribution of my state's dragonflies and damselflies (odonates). I spent the summer running



around bogs and fens with a giant net during the day, and the nights were spent sketching my various finds in cheap hotels in the company of mostly middle-aged entomologists - side note, getting bed bugs is never an awesome experience, but getting bed bugs with entomologists isn't so bad because they're usually pretty thrilled by any bug, even the biting kind.

Additionally, I dabbled in community theater, first on stage. I was Pepper in "Annie" and then Rizzo in "Grease" before realizing that my true passion was backstage. I did a number of shows as stage crew before falling in with the scene painting and prop making side of things. I was lucky enough to grow up in a small town with an amazing community theater program, and I was able to learn from professional directors and scenic designers from an early age.

I also spent a year studying in Sweden where I attended an arts magnet school and studied music, illustration, pottery, sewing, and writing. Although I enjoyed every class, it became clear at this point that my real passion was for the visual arts. This was an experience only made possible by my Swedish relatives, and it's one that I am forever grateful for. When I returned home, I joined an arts board as one of two student members. We sponsored a variety of residencies in our school district including K-12 ballet and hip hop troops, spoken word artists, painters, jewelers, etc. During this time, I generally felt I was making it up as I went along - there was no training or support for what we were doing.

At the same time I also developed a strong interest in literature and writing. I had a variety of English teachers in high school, some good, some not so good.

My parents both work in education, and I developed an interest in education that was encouraged by my teachers and college recruiters. English was always my best subject, and academic writing was something I seemed to enjoy much more than most of my classmates. Despite getting some training in academic writing, it was never tied to art for me, and I did not realize being a strong academic writer could be a powerful skill as an artist.

Despite all this encouragement, as I came closer to graduating and taking the next step, the message I received from my teachers and other adults was that pursuing a career in art wasn't very realistic. My childhood was in many ways idyllic - I grew up in rural Northern Minnesota where the cost of living is low, and my parents worked hard to shield me from some economic realities - but the truth is that for most of my childhood we lived well below what's considered the poverty line. This is something I wasn't completely aware of until I was in my upper teens, but once it became clear it also became obvious that all those messages of "follow your dreams" were tempered by the reality of needing to meet basic needs and the fact that my parents were not going to be able to help me monetarily.

I want to be clear that I was and am incredibly privileged, my parents are beyond supportive, and it's only looking back that I see signs of just how poor we were. I am white, cis-gendered, and able bodied. I was given so many opportunities to explore the art world - and yet I still graduated from high school with the clear message that I needed to go to college and get a career that society deemed respectable and stable. If I, with all my privilege and encouragement,

was dissuaded from pursuing art in college, imagine how strong that message is for students who have received far fewer opportunities and encouragement to pursue their interests in the creative world.

In college, I decided to pursue education, specifically a degree and licensure in communication arts and literature. I graduated *summa cum laude* and completed my student teaching at a high school in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Despite this, I stayed connected to the art world. I worked in the Hamline University theater department all four undergraduate years, three of those years managing the properties department, or the "Prop Shop." Using the experience from managing the Prop Shop, as well as a January-term class I took on jewelry making, I was able to get an internship with a Minnesota jeweler, which I completed between graduating college and beginning my student teaching. After student teaching, I made the somewhat radical choice to pursue a career in jewelry - and four years later I am a full-time jeweler with a strong interest in the overlap between being a professional artist and education. I do not regret the path I took to get here, and I don't believe that I have reached my end destination - or that I ever will - but I do believe that if I had received more realistic encouragement, I may have gotten to this point a bit less circuitously.

One of the major factors of starting a jewelry business and actually keeping it afloat for the first few years has been my ability to write and receive grants. I have received five major grants since starting my business, and I would not have been able to complete the projects or purchase the necessary tools I have been

able to without these grants, which is why I believe that grant writing is an important tool we as English teachers can give to young creatives to encourage both their confidence and their technical skills. I have also found myself writing many artist bios and artist statements, and the ability to put into words one's own thought processes and motivations has been challenging and illuminative. Most gallery, residency, and sales opportunities also require this type of writing and self reflection, which is why I believe it is also an important skill we should be helping our secondary students to develop.

### **Stakeholders in Art**

I have now written a lot of words about myself and my reasons for being interested in this topic, but who is this project really for? I won't pretend that this one unit is going to magically encourage every high school student with an interest in art to pursue a career in it. There are real, persistent, and systemic problems in every corner of the art world, and a single paper or idea can barely scratch the surface of the many ways racial injustice and income inequality affect who "makes it" and who doesn't. Despite these massive hurdles, I do think that equipping students with tools that will be genuinely useful to them will both up their chances of making it, and encourage them to try at all. Although I hope this unit will be helpful for all students, ideally it will be especially helpful for students who for a variety of reasons don't have the same safety nets their peers are working with.

These reasons include but are not limited to race, family income, and physical or learning disabilities - they make students less likely than their peers to feel comfortable making the leap to pursuing a career in a creative field. In her article "The Origins of Creativity: The Case of the Arts in the United States since 1850," Borowiecki (2019) looks at 170 years of American census information and lays this issue out quite plainly: for every additional \$10,000 in family income, an American citizen is about 2% more likely to go into a creative occupation. Put another way, upper-middle-class or rich people are able to become creatives because they have the means, and there doesn't seem to be cap on the correlation. Consider the many ways in which racial inequality has actively stifled the accumulation of generational wealth by people of color, especially Black people, and racial disparities also become clear.

Greater diversity in the art world is an important aspiration for a number of reasons - art in many ways represents culture, and the art that gets purchased, viewed, and disseminated becomes the art that defines us. McCarthy et al. (2001) highlight three ways the arts benefit society and individuals. The first is the personal, that art provides succor to individuals in times of stress or need. The second is that this effect can have a "spillover effect" into a larger society, meaning simply that citizens with the ability to cope in difficult times are able to contribute in more positive ways during those times of crisis. The third reason is that arts can have a broader more direct impact on society as well, for example "such as increasing economic growth and social capital" (p. 69). The economic

forces keeping low income students and students of color out of the art world skew those positive effects unjustly. Despite movement towards more diversity in the art world, it is still dominated by the rich and white.

### **Stakeholders in Education**

This website I create will include unit plans written with secondary communication art and literature teachers in mind, but I have also written it with parents in mind. Schools are currently in limbo as our country and world grapple with COVID-19, and given best practice for keeping our communities safe during a pandemic, it seems likely that the trend towards distance learning will continue.

Beyond the stated goal of encouraging and equipping students towards pursuing careers in the arts, I am also writing this because academic writing is one of the more difficult subjects to motivate students to learn in the English classroom. Many students, and frankly many teachers, view it as one of the driest aspects of English class. During the many hours I have spent sitting in teacher's lounges, eating lunch, grading papers, and doing lesson prep, I have heard many Communication Art teachers talking about how excited they are to start a unit on creative writing, or Shakespeare, or Greek Mythology. I have yet to hear anyone express that amount of enthusiasm for non-creative writing. This is wrong! Academic writing can be empowering and fun! It is a skill that is applicable in college and professional life, and being proficient in it can open so many doors that lead in many different directions.

## Conclusion

Despite movement towards a more equitable art world, the realities of economic injustice still keep many high school students from considering a career in art. Using the teaching of writing such as grant and artist statement writing, I hope to create a unit plan that encourages all students, but particularly low-income students and students of color, to consider these careers and equip them with some of the tools they may need to succeed. My own experiences as a low-income student who eventually found a career in art has shaped this interest, as have the often upsetting realities about who succeeds in art, and who doesn't. This has also been shaped by an interest in finding ways to motivate students to learn useful writing skills. In Chapter Two, I will be reviewing the literature around who succeeds in the art world teaching and standards, as well as student motivation, teaching practices, and genre-specific writing resources. In Chapter Three, I will be discussing the participants as well as the details of the website I have created and why I chose to use a website for this project. In Chapter Four, I will be discussing implications and uses of the project, as well as its limitations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

There is admittedly not much literature on how to teach important writing skills to high school students interested in the arts or why it would be beneficial. This question is niche, and while there is very little written about it specifically, there is a large body of literature surrounding it more broadly. This chapter's goal is to examine this body of literature in three sections, each relating to a different aspect of the question: *How specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant, artist biography, and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?* Each section will be broken into several subsections in order to maintain clear organization.

#### Chapter Overview

Firstly, the literature on the lack of diversity in the art world will be discussed. This topic is placed first because it addresses the “why” this question is worth pursuing at all. The first part of this section will focus on why encouraging young creative people to genuinely consider going into the art world is important right now - namely because there is a severe lack of diversity found in professional artistic circles. This lack seems to stem from the reality that students with strong family safety nets (high levels of generational wealth) are much more likely to attempt to enter this world (Borowiecki, 2019).



The second part of this section will acknowledge the intersection of race and class. Due to generations of racist economic policies, people of color are much less likely to enter the creative workforce at all, a message students undoubtedly receive in school. The paper will acknowledge that while it cannot hope to address the larger systemic problems, and that it will not explicitly focus on a specific student group, it is necessary to touch on these issues in order to make sure the project outcome is racially responsive. It will then touch on what racially responsive teaching looks like.

This next section discusses the literature - what exists of it surrounding the teaching of grant, artist biography, and artist statement writing. This section will review literature surrounding the teaching of personal and academic writing, it will touch on the "how" of teaching this kind of writing to high school students, and because there is not much written on teaching these specific writing styles to adolescents, much of it will be about similar styles, such as essays, that can be modified to fit the question. Grant writing will be discussed first, followed by biography and statement writing.

The final section addresses student motivation. The first part of this section will discuss intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation and why this project should connect to a student's intrinsic motivations (namely their passion for whichever art form(s) they have chosen), as well as the external factors that motivate this work, such as grant awards and gallery or residency opportunities. Teaching technical writing

can be dry, so it is important for this project that student interest and student creativity stay at the forefront.

## **Lack of Diversity in Art World**

### ***Introduction***

In this section, the realities of the lack of diversity in the art world will be discussed; this topic is placed first because it addresses the “why” the question of *how specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant, artist biography, and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills.*

### ***Economic Issues***

The United States has a huge diversity in the arts problem, so it is no wonder that young people who do not fit the mold of a “successful artist” are not encouraged to pursue careers in art. Borowiecki (2019), digs into American census data kept on “creative occupations (i.e., artists, musicians, authors, actors)” (p. 1) and the economic trends surrounding who becomes a creative and who is successful. The paper is in depth, and well worth a read, but the overarching message is this: racial inequality, class inequality, and only to a slightly lesser degree gender inequality, are rampant in the art world.

### ***Racism and Economics in the Art World***

The worst of this inequality stems from the reality that students with strong family safety nets (high levels of generational wealth) are more likely to attempt to enter the art world. Take into account the all the ways in which economic racism

has stopped non-white Americans from accumulating generational wealth, and it is no wonder that the vast majority of occupational artists are white.

An economic problem of this size cannot be changed overnight, and as teachers we can only hope to provide our students with tools that can disrupt the pattern on an individual level. Generational wealth contributes to the black-white achievement gap within the school setting as well (Yeung & Conley, 2008), so there is literature on best practice for educators who want to take steps to address what they can. Grant writing, as well as artist statement and biography writing, can provide both economic and other career opportunities that may not be available to students because of their status as minorities in the art world. Although this curriculum will not be explicitly about race, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the role it plays and remiss if we did not make an effort to make the curriculum culturally and racially responsive.

### ***Racially Responsive Teaching***

Delpit (2006) provides an important attitude adjustment to educators, especially white ones. Delpit argues against the message that good teaching always looks the same or that there is a one size that fits all best practice. In a series of essays, they argue instead that the huge cultural differences and power imbalances between Black and non-white students and their often white teachers make for ineffective education, and if teachers want to truly teach fairly, they must get to know their students well enough to understand and communicate in the way that will best engage them.

For example, Delpit (2006) cites a number of studies that show that while white learners often expect teachers to maintain a certain level of dispassion while teaching, other groups actually value displays of emotions, even negative ones, because they show the teacher cares. Creating a curriculum that can be used with a variety of students from different cultural backgrounds requires built-in opportunities for making emotional connections, as well as a great deal of flexibility.

Lee (2017) makes a similar point - ultimately all students are going to need teaching that is responsive. One size will never fit all. Lee argues for teaching that takes into account student lives outside of school and suggests several ways to do so: students need to be able to see the point of what they are learning, they need to feel they belong, they need to be encouraged to share prior knowledge, problem solving needs to be made “public and explicit” (pp. 269-270), and different views need to be openly discussed and interrogated.

Another important point Delpit makes is that as educators we should never assume that students understand unstated norms. All expectations need to be explicitly stated, preferably multiple times. Educators should also, they say, create opportunities for students to use the vernacular, accents, etc. that they use outside of the classroom, as well as opportunities to use Standard English. Students can be made to feel that their voice is less than and that if they learn standard English they are abandoning their identities. In order to avoid putting students in this position, the reasons for learning Standard English need to be explained, and

they need to be given the opportunity to use other languages as well (p. 164). In the case of artist biography, statement, and grant writing, this will look like using Standard English where it is appropriate, but it does not dissuade students from using other languages when it will work with the project and not against it. The skill of developing a strong sense of audience is a crucial component of communication, in academic writing as well as all other forms of communication.

White (2011) discusses the importance of teaching Standard English not as the rule one must always follow to be successful, but rather to treat language as “socially mediated” and use it to meet “our social and cultural needs” (p. 45). In short, students should see Standardized English as a useful tool, but not imperative to successful communication.

Language is constantly changing, and that should be respected and encouraged. Grant writing is generally expected to be written in Standard English, but a well-written grant is one that represents the individual writing it, and there may be sections where writers could use non-standard language to successfully highlight their individuality. When code switching is not respected in a classroom setting, this opportunity would be lost.

Ultimately, any project that hopes to empower students needs to make space for cultural and racial difference. While in many ways it may seem like a tangent to look so closely at race and culture when on the surface this project has very little to do with either, the truth is that it would be a serious omission to not

address these aspects. Racially responsive teaching needs to be discussed anytime education is being closely considered, and this paper is no different.

## **Teaching Writing**

### ***Introduction***

In this section, the details of teaching this style of writing to secondary students will be discussed. Theory and techniques will be discussed, as well as the reasoning behind using a website to disseminate this information that answers the question of *how specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant, artist biography, and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?*

### ***Creating Units***

We now come to the bulk of the research - the how of teaching high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant, artist biography, and statement writing. Although there is almost no literature on teaching grant writing to high school students, there is a fair amount of guidance on how to teach a variety of compositional techniques that can be applied to our question, as well as some literature on teaching college students grant writing.

Before we get to the specifics, however, we will touch on the bones of creating curriculum. Backwards design, or UbD, is a way of thinking about curriculum design in which the curriculum planner begins with their ultimate goal in mind and works backwards from there. The framework for this will be based on and supported by the work of Wiggins & McTighe. (2011). In this text, the authors

outline a way of designing curriculum starting with the end goal in mind, and building the assessment, evaluation, and lesson plans “backwards” from there.

### ***Grant Writing***

Grant writing can be daunting for adults, so teaching it to high school students may seem intimidating, but there is, in fact, a straightforward set of guidelines that can help us tackle the world of grant writing without too much fear. Braukmann and Pedras (1989), outline a few main rules for grant writing - maintain organization, allow several rewrites, follow the guidelines laid out by the organization offering the grant, and ask for help.

They also strongly encourage writers to develop a proposal outline first, rather than trying to write the whole thing without an outline. The proposal should start with an introduction, present their needs, their project design, and their budget. When teaching grant writing, therefore, organization and a step-by-step approach should be utilized, both because this approach creates successful grants, but also because by tackling one section at a time, the task becomes much less onerous. For high school students, this progression of steps presents a bonus: it improves organization and thinking. This focus on proposal writing follows specific steps in the article (Braukmann & Pedras, 1989)

One of the most in depth and helpful guides to grant writing discusses a modality approach to grant writing (Stokes, 2012). In the article, the author argues that grants are most often successful when they are written with modality, or learning styles, in mind. They encourage prospective grant writers to create

grants that will appeal to kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learners. From a teaching perspective, this is helpful as it allows for and encourages teaching that can be tailored to students with unique learning styles.

Stokes (2012) then lays out three major steps for grant writing, including several figures for the visual learners, as well as some written examples. The first step is to “be clear on the grant proposal message”: figure out what the function of your project is, and why it matters. This includes your “needs, goals, objectives, and evaluation plan” (pp. 225- 227).

The second step is to “develop a good story and present the facts” - Writers need to present facts while keeping the audience engaged through storytelling. Stokes suggests a number of techniques to do this for different modalities, for example the use of storyboards (pp. 227- 229). Creative writing teaching techniques can be utilized to help students do this well.

Early et al. (2010) provides a good teaching framework for instructing students in personal writing in “high-stakes” genres (p. 209). Although this article focuses on college admission essays, their techniques for encouraging and honing students’ skills in upper-level personal writing translate well to grant writing. The article outlines a six-week course that focuses on helping students understand what is expected, choose topics that are both important to them and appropriate to the task, and introduces a number of writing skills and then provides opportunities to practice.



The final step Stokes (2012) suggests is to “select an effective rhetorical approach” - or to figure out how to say what needs to be said in a way that the audience will most easily understand and relate to. (p. 229) From a teaching perspective this means students need to engage in research about the organization they are applying to for a grant, and teaching techniques on research can and should be implemented. This requires students apply some of the skills they have learned through writing research papers. A more in-depth summary of this, which will be found on the website, is in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1:

*Successful Grant Writing*

<b>Step</b>	<b>Specifics</b>
"Be clear on the grant proposal message"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify what the grant manager wants from you (note, not what you want from them)</li> <li>- Focus on the need you will meet before discussing solutions</li> <li>- Identify the cause and effect of the problem you are solving</li> <li>- Identify your goals and objectives</li> <li>- Explain how you will evaluate the success of your project</li> <li>- Discuss money explicitly</li> </ul>
"Develop a good story and present the facts"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don't drag it out; present facts without being too long-winded</li> <li>- "Brevity and clarity" are important</li> <li>- Tell a story; this includes giving your reader characters to become attached to and an arc of some kind</li> <li>- Using a three-act organization for your story can be helpful</li> </ul>
"Select an effective rhetorical approach"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research the group you are applying with</li> <li>- Make your approach one that will appeal to them</li> <li>- Use language that matches the groups norms; match their communication style</li> </ul>

(Stokes, 2012)

Pfaffinger (2006) provides a helpful framework for helping students develop the skills to find appropriate sources and take useful notes on them, as well as how to form that information into their own work without plagiarizing. The author suggests focusing on three skills when first tackling a big research paper with students: “identifying sources, taking notes, and synthesizing information” (p. 75). These steps can be utilized in the research process regarding grant writing, artist statement, and artist biography writing as well. The author also suggests splitting writing into small, manageable steps.

### ***Artist Biographies***

Writing artist biographies is a better documented endeavour. The power of modeling comes into play here, as there are many collections of artist biographies students can read to get an idea of what is included and the many options available to writing them.

Modeling is an important part of learning to write artist biographies, especially given that biographies can be written in many different styles, and showing students they have options is the easiest way to encourage them to take advantage of them. Phillips describes the purpose of a biography: “The Artist’s Biography serves to provide the reader with a story about you as an artist and learn about your career credentials” (Phillips, 2019, para. 1). It is importantly not a resume, as it is written in a much more personal style, and it is also not an artist statement (which we will get to next).

According to Phillips (2019), artist biographies are necessary for a large number of professional opportunities and should cover many of the things a resume would cover, but be specific to the art. The web article provided by Artwork Archive (2016) provides a helpful list of steps, which have been summarized and somewhat edited for brevity in Figure 2, below. This table will be used in the website that will be outlined in the next chapter.

Figure 2.

*Successful Artist Biographies*

"Understand your audience"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don't waste time writing a draft of anything before you have made sure you know who you are writing for</li> </ul>
"Choose the right information"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Write in the third person</li> <li>- Introduce yourself with whatever information seems most important to you</li> <li>- Talk about what you have accomplished, whatever that may be to you</li> <li>- Don't get too long winded</li> </ul>
"Write multiple drafts"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draft at least two or three times</li> <li>- Don't talk about your "purpose and the inspiration"; that is best left for an artist statement</li> </ul>
"Edit and edit some more"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoid overly fancy or arty language</li> <li>- Keep it short</li> <li>- Check grammar and spelling carefully; have someone else proofread</li> </ul>
"Show it to another artist"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Show it to peers and ask for feedback</li> </ul>
"Bonus step"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Keep adding to it as you grow!</li> </ul>

*(How to write an appealing artist biography, 2016)*

Ultimately, the writing of an artist statement requires similar skills required to create a resume and allows the student to practice presenting themselves as

an artist in the light they prefer. It also requires good editing skills, which is always an important thing to practice.

### ***Artist Statements***

Both artist biographies and artist statements allow for a great deal of flexibility in writing style, and students can be encouraged to write in a way that best represents their sense of self and their art - not all adolescents have a strong sense of these, so we will be including exercises to help students narrow down their interests. Wargo (2020) provides a number of writing assignments that allow students to find and practice styles that feel authentic to their lives.

There is a fair bit of literature regarding the teaching of writing artist statements, Papanicolaou (2017) says :

...[since] each artwork represents an individual creative process, the best practice is to include artist statements by the children themselves.

Collecting a few sentences from each participant in an inclusive exhibition is a huge job, but worth the authenticity of artist voice this brings (p. 1).

While this project does not necessarily include the creation of an exhibition (although it could easily be used in a program that includes that since it's goal is to be flexible enough to fit other's needs), the point remains that artist statements are a powerful tool to bring the artist's voice to the forefront.

Before going into the details of prompts and questions best asked to help students create strong artist statements, we should first perhaps define what an artist statement is. Hotchkiss (2020) defines an artist statement as

a not-too-long series of sentences that describe what you make and why you make it. It's a stand-in for you, the artist, talking to someone about your work in a way that adds to their experience of viewing that work.

(Hotchkiss, 2018)

Hotchkiss notes that artists are asked to submit artist statements with work in a number of professional settings, including grants and other opportunities. The author also notes that there are a few things that artist statements are *not*. There is a long list of these no-nos, but what it mostly comes down to is that it is not long, and it is not self-aggrandizing.

This web article provides a helpful list of steps, tricks, and red flags, which have been summarized and edited for brevity in Figure 3 below. This figure will be used in the website that will be outlined in the next chapter.

Figure 3

*Successful Artist Statements*

“The brainstorming phase”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Look at a lot of your work all together</li> <li>- Make a list of words that describe your work</li> <li>- Tell someone about your work, or write to someone about it</li> <li>- Consider what you want people to think or feel about your work</li> <li>- Think about what questions you want to answer with your work</li> </ul>
“Artist statement basics”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “What” is your work made out of?</li> <li>- “Why” are you doing what you’re doing?</li> <li>- “How” are you creating your work?</li> </ul>
“Red flags, bad practices, and other traps to avoid”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Avoid cliches</li> <li>- Don’t use unnecessarily fancy or arty language</li> </ul>
“You have a draft, now what?”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Read it aloud</li> <li>- Look back at the work you are writing about</li> <li>- Don’t be afraid to edit a lot</li> <li>- Keep it short</li> </ul>
“Consider your audience”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different opportunities require different language</li> </ul>

(Hotchkiss, 2018)

Papanicolaou (2017) has some suggestions for teachers working with students who may need a little help scaffolding into writing an artist statement. Papanicolaou suggests asking students questions about specific aspects of the



creative process, including use of color and issues or problems that the student faced, stressing the importance of detail and specifics in these answers. The author also suggests that students should be reminded that they cannot answer these questions incorrectly, as long as they are answered. When done correctly, they say, writing can vastly improve the art itself by creating space to slow down and consider.

### **Student Motivation**

In this section, the theory behind student motivation will be discussed as it relates to the question of *how specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant, artist biography, and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?*

#### ***Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation***

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are a commonly discussed topic in the teaching profession. Intrinsic motivation is defined as “An incentive to do something that arises from factors within the individual, such as a need to feel useful or to seek self-actualization” by Oxford Reference (n.d). Extrinsic motivation is defined as “An incentive to do something that arises from factors outside the individual, such as rewards or penalties” (Oxford Reference, n.d). These two topics are often painted as antithetical, and the presence of extrinsic motivation is often considered to be harmful to intrinsic motivation. Covington and Müeller (2001) argue that rather than painting these two motivators as a dichotomy, they need to be acknowledged as beneficial in different ways, and in

the right conditions they can coexist in a way that is extremely beneficial to learning.

In a study carried out at Berkeley, these researchers pinpointed three main points teachers can use to create conditions in which students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, and in which one motivator does not negatively affect the other. The first is to create learning opportunities that are “task oriented,” and neither based in fear of failure (avoidance) nor in the need to overly promote oneself. The second condition needed is to make it reasonably possible for students to achieve goals. The third is that the topic is of “personal interest” (p. 173).

It's easy to see that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are present in this list and that negative motivators like fear or pride are avoided. All three conditions will be utilized to teach grant, artist biography, and statement writing. Condition one is applicable in that the unit will be focused on creating pieces of writing that meet certain criteria, and the task in question will have real world uses. Condition two is applicable in that the unit will be designed to be challenging but achievable. Condition three is perhaps the most important, in that grant, artist biography, and statement writing are inherently intrinsic because they tie into the students' personal interests and creativity, while also being extrinsic because they offer real world motivators like artistic opportunities, and in the case of grant writing, money.

The interconnectedness of creativity and intrinsic motivation should also play a role in a unit like this. Sanacore (1997) discusses the need for personal expression in the cultivation of interests in reading and writing. They recommend creating an environment centered on student interests and creativity, as well as creating opportunities for both oral and written communication, collaboration, and problem solving. Their advice focuses heavily on encouraging student interaction, for example co authorship and verbal discussion, as a means of encouraging love of learning and increasing student confidence.

### **Reflection**

Ultimately the goal is to provide racially and culturally responsive instruction that helps students engage in writing that meets necessary standards, while helping students find meaning and purpose in the writing. In a two-year study Eodice, M., Geller, A. E., & Lerner, N. (2016), found that meaningful writing occurs when students are given choice and agency in the topic, are engaged with what they are learning, and feel that the writing in some way “connects to previous experiences and passions and to future aspirations and identities.” (p. 22)

Teaching grant, artist biography, and artist statement writing is uniquely situated to meet all of these prerequisites, especially the final one, as it can actively create opportunities for artistic and occupational successes.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter the literature on the lack of diversity in the art world, or the “why” was first discussed, followed by an acknowledgment of the intersection of race and class leading into a discussion of what racially responsive teaching looks like. The following section reviewed literature surrounding the teaching of personal and academic writing, specifically grant writing, artist biography writing, and artist statement writing. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are then discussed.

In the next chapter, I will outline the website I will be creating to provide teachers or parents (or very driven students!) the tools to teach and learn how to write successful grants, artist biographies, and artist statements. It will utilize best practice as discussed in the literature for teaching and motivating students to successfully use a variety of writing and research techniques. It will also discuss the participants of the project, and the theories used to create the units and projects found on the website, as well as organization.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Creating the Project

#### Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will be outlining why and how I chose to create a website to answer the question: *How specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant, artist biography, and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?* I will be discussing the participants of this project, namely secondary classroom teachers or parents, and the theories I will be utilizing to create the units and projects found on the website. I will also be discussing why I chose a website and outlining the organization and content of the two units I will be creating.

This section will also discuss the use of websites as an educational tool. This project is utilizing the internet as an educational tool, in hopes that in this time when many people are turning towards distance learning and homeschooling this important but niche concept will be accessible to a variety of teachers and parents. There is literature regarding the best way to use online resources, and it will be discussed here.

#### The Project

My project is the creation of a website with projects, smaller unit plans, and guidance developed for use with secondary English students, particularly those interested in art. It contains three micro-units: One on grant writing, one on artist

statement writing, and one on artist biography writing. It has been designed to be easily accessible, so it may not contain the language of assessment and standards some teachers may be used to. Instead, it should provide guidelines that can be easily adaptable to pre-existing units or used by parents attempting home schooling in a post COVID-19 world. It contains the framework for needs assessments, evaluation, and assessment, but remains non-specific enough to be easily adapted.

### **Setting and Participants**

This project will be designed for flexibility and adaptability, so I will not limit it by getting too specific about an ideal setting or participant. That being said, the goal is to create a website with projects and ideas classroom teachers or parents can adapt to their individual needs and utilize in the way that best benefits students. It contains three micro-units: one on grant writing, one on artist statement writing, and one on biography writing. Rather than specific or rigid in organization, they provide a number of options for teachers or parents so that they can be easily adapted to diverse classroom settings, or into pre-existing units. The goal is to make the website as easy to utilize as possible by anyone who may find it useful.

### **Basic Theory**

I have utilized backwards design or Understanding by Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011) to create the units on the website, with a focus on engaging students both intrinsically and extrinsically. In order to achieve this the projects

are largely self-researched and self-chosen, with a focus on collaboration and the option of a graded project at the end of each unit. Backwards design asks that we identify what our goal is (step 1), decide how we will determine if that goal has been met (step 2), and finally plan the lesson or learning experience (step 3). Each of the sections first asks students or individuals to identify their goals (step 1), create their own rubrics (step 2), and then move forward with the writing and learning (step 3).

Intrinsic and extrinsic learning is utilized using Covington & Müeller (2001), who pinpoint three main ways teachers can create conditions in which students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated and in which one motivator does not negatively affect the other. The first is to create learning opportunities that are “task oriented” and neither based in fear of failure (avoidance), nor in the need to overly promote oneself. The second condition needed is to make it reasonably possible for students to achieve goals. The third is that the topic is of “personal interest” (p. 173).

The first condition, that learning opportunities are “task oriented” and neither based in fear of failure nor self promotion, has been met by constructing each unit around an end goal project that students will be able to use, but it also includes clear guidelines to be met if the website is being used by a classroom teacher or parent who is homeschooling. The second condition, that it be reasonably possible for students to achieve goals, is also met. If the website is being used in a classroom setting, there are options for grading, but ultimately the

goal is to create written products that can be used outside of the classroom. The nature of both grant writing and artist biographies and statement writing lends itself to clearly stated expectations, so this is easily transferable to clearly stated expectations for letter grades. The third, that the topic is of “personal interest” (p.173) is met by building each unit around the completion of a final writing project of the student’s choosing. Artist biography and statement writing is unique to each student’s chosen artistic medium, and the final project of writing a grant proposal (whether the student actually applies will be left to the discretion of their legal guardian) is completely student chosen. They choose the grant they want to apply to and then work collaboratively to make sure they have met all the criteria.

### **Unit Organization**

Each of the three units follow the same outline. The first unit focuses on creating a project on artist statement writing, the second on biography writing, and the third on grant writing. Each unit is broken into six sections, which are as follows:

- Artistic goals formation
- Writing type research (artist bio and artist statement, grant specific to chosen inquiry)
- Collaborative proposal writing
- Creation of project
- Presentation of a project
- Collaborative reflection.



The final project of each unit is the completion of an artist biography, artist statement, and grant specific to the student's choosing (the grant can be completed as if the student was applying, but actual application should be left to the discretion of the student and the student's legal guardians).

In the first section, students are asked to work on artistic goal formation. In this stage, students can identify what artistic medium they will be focusing on, as well as what they hope to gain from the unit. The next section is writing type research; in the first and second unit students can read artist biographies and artist statements in a number of different styles and choose a type that they feel fits well with their style and medium. In the third unit, students can work to find real grants specific to their chosen inquiry. During this step, students can create (based on a provided skeleton rubric) specialized rubrics for themselves based on their research. In unit one and two, students can create these rubrics based on the mediums and style of writing they have chosen, and in unit three the rubrics can be taken directly from the grant expectations. These rubrics cover the guidelines they will be working with or expectations they have been asked to meet.

In the third section, students work collaboratively, if that is an option, on proposal writing, or in the case of artist biography and statement writing, drafting. Students can be paired with peers working in a different medium, for example pairing a visual artist with a musician. Students can present proposals together orally. The next step is the creation of their chosen project; each project will look a

little bit different, but all students can be asked to create a non-written section, and the medium is up to them. Students can then present their project, including presentation of their research rubric.

Finally, students can work collaboratively to reflect on how well they and their peers have met those guidelines. Grading will be based on how well students met their expectations as stated in the rubrics they made in step two.

### **Use of Website**

This content has been shared through a website, but why a website? In the online article from Miller (2004) the author covers the basics of publishing teaching tools online and discusses the ways in which sharing tools is incredibly helpful as a teacher. They write:

Over the last year, I have realized the tremendous value and impact of creating and maintaining my own professional website, thus creating a new way to share my work, writing and other media with other educators through the World Wide Web. Educators in all roles, whether they are teachers, administrators or researchers, can benefit from sharing their work and experience with others and taking advantage of those fellow educators already publishing on the World Wide Web (Miller, 2004).

As is shown in this quote, using technology to share expertise with fellow teachers is not a new idea, and as technology advances and becomes more and more ubiquitous, the reasons for using websites to share information increase

In order to create a useful website, Goldsborough (2000) pinpoints a few areas, including making sure the content is unique, providing background information, and making sure there are no grammatical errors or broken links. Speaking more specifically on creating sites for educational purposes, Baker (2007) speaks most specifically about classroom websites, but does offer some broader guidance on what a useful website might look like.

### **Other Resources**

The website includes other resources as well, including a number of short interviews with people with grant writing experience. These interviews consist of a short Q and A with the following questions:

- How long have you been writing grants?
- How many grant applications have you submitted?
- How many have you received?
- How long does the average grant take you to write?
- Do you have writing steps you follow when you start the application process?
- What would you like new grant writers to know about grant writing?

It also includes an interview with people who manage grant applications. These interviews consist of a short Q and A including the following questions:

- How long have you been managing grants?
- How many grants have you seen?
- What do you look for in a grant application?

- What are some reasons you would automatically discard a grant application?
- What would you like new grant writers to know about grant writing?

## **Conclusion**

I have created a curriculum and how to website to answer the question: *How specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant, artist biography, and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills, using understanding by design and student motivation theories.* The curriculum contains three units addressing artist biography writing, artist statement writing, and grant writing. Each unit follows six steps:

- Artistic goals formation
- Writing type research (artist bio and artist statement, grant specific to chosen inquiry)
- Collaborative proposal writing
- Creation of project
- Presentation of a project
- Collaborative reflection

The curriculum has been designed as a flexible and adaptable tool secondary classroom teachers can utilize in the way that best benefits their students and their schools. The next and final chapter will chronicle the ways in

which this project has changed, and may continue to change, in order to better answer its question.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Conclusion

#### Introduction

When I began this project, I set out to answer the question: *How specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant writing, and artist biography and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?* I initially wanted to find a way to empower teachers to encourage young creatives' confidence and technical skills through teaching high-level academic writing targeted towards skills needed in the art world. While this goal did not change, I did drastically change the way in which I approached it.

#### Overview

In Chapter One, I shared my personal experience with art, writing, and education. I looked at messages about careers in art and how they affected my decision early in my career, as well as my experiences with writing in the art world. Chapter One also touched on stakeholders in the conversation and research regarding who, statistically speaking, ends up working in the art world.

In Chapter Two, I looked at the literature on the lack of diversity in the art world, with the first section focusing on why encouraging young creative people to consider going into the art world is important. The second section focused on the intersection of race and class, as well as racially responsive teaching. The third

and fourth sections honed in on teaching practices, student motivation, and use of websites as a teaching tool.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the participants in the project, namely secondary classroom teachers or parents, and the theories I would be utilizing to create the units and projects found on the website. This chapter also discussed the organization and content of the three units I planned on creating.

In this final chapter, Chapter Four, I will be looking at the goals and objectives from previous chapters and considering how they changed and how they were implemented. I will first discuss the major changes and lessons learned, including the presentation and stakeholders. Next I will discuss the implications of this project, as well as the limitations of both the project as a whole as well as the way in which I have chosen to present and share it. Finally, I will look at the benefits to stakeholders, specifically instructors and students, and end with a look at where I can take this project next.

### **Major Lessons**

Perhaps the biggest thing I learned during this process was to be flexible with my presentation. I initially planned on creating a series of lesson plans for secondary instructors who want to teach writing related to the arts in their classrooms. I had my first three chapters drafted before I started to wonder if that wasn't the best way to create a truly accessible resource. After receiving similar feedback from my content expert and peer reviewer, I made the decision to tweak the project into a website for secondary instructors.

That wasn't the end of the change, though, because after creating the lesson plans I planned on sharing on the website, I began to think about individuals searching for grants, artist statements, and artist biography writing online. I realized that to create the kind of accessible website I was envisioning, I needed to create resources for individuals as well, since many people are certainly stakeholders in this project but do not have committed instructors to help them, and not many people want to slog through lesson plans.

After this realization, I took the lesson plans I had created for instructors and re-worked them into something that didn't include lesson plan language and was significantly shorter, while still retaining all the key information. These are also available on the website and labeled for individuals to use. Adding first the need to create and design a website and then three more instructional resources did create more work for me than I initially had planned, but my entire goal with this project was to make it as accessible and easy to use as possible, so I believe it was worthwhile.

I also learned quite a lot about website design. This is the second website I have designed, but the first is my personal art website, and it has very little text as I am a visual artist. Initially, I had planned on designing this practical writing website using text block, but I found I had too much information and that putting it all on the page created blocks of texts and a website that was difficult to navigate.

Website design is complicated when there is a lot of information to share, and I quickly realized there is a line to walk between making it aesthetically



pleasing, easy to navigate, and not so full of text and figures that it takes forever to load and crashes devices. In the end, I chose to keep it as simple as possible by only having two pages: a Home page and an About page. The instructional materials are presented as blog posts, with the introductions in the posts and the bulk of the material available in a series of links to the actual documents. In this way the website is easy to navigate and the materials are all accessible, without walls of text and long loading times.

### **Literature Review**

My literature review was instrumental in the creation of this project; in fact the first section of my literature review, which focused on why encouraging young creative people to genuinely consider going into the art world is important, was written and researched before I had a fully formed question I wanted to answer. Perhaps the most influential article for me was the one laying out census data regarding the lack of diversity in the art world. This lack, according to the article, stems from the reality that students with strong family safety nets (high levels of generational wealth) are much more likely to attempt to enter the art world (Borowiecki, 2019). This article began me thinking about my personal experience as a poor kid who was interested in art and helped to shape my question: *How specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant writing, and artist biography and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?*

In terms of literature that was most helpful to the formation of my project, I found the articles regarding certain teaching practices and topics to be instrumental. White (2011) discusses the importance of teaching Standard English not as the rule one must always follow to be successful, but rather a choice to be made depending on the information at hand. Code-switching is a huge part of my project, as it is an important consideration for all three genres of writing covered.

Other sources that focused on the genres in a helpful way include Braukmann & Pedras (1989) and Stokes (2012), both of whom were extremely helpful for grant writing. Phillips (2019) was important for artist biographies, and Hotchkiss (2018) was integral for the artist statement section. These highly specific articles were important for the actual creation of my project.

### **Implications and Limitations**

This project was created with the hope that it will facilitate change: namely, that it will encourage instructors to help students develop art writing skills and that it will encourage students to hone these skills and try for opportunities with their art. Having created the resource, I will share it with instructors and young artists, and I hope that they will share it with their peers. I would love to see this resource used as a tool to refine writing skills and open doors for young people interested in the arts.

There is also the matter of encouraging students who may not receive much support to pursue art seriously. I won't pretend that a single website is going

to magically encourage everyone who stumbles upon it to take their art seriously. There are persistent, systemic problems in every corner of the art world, and this website cannot hope to address the many ways racial injustice and income inequality affect students' lives. There is also the reality that many classroom teachers do not have the time to add writing that isn't directly tied to state standards into their already busy class schedules. Despite these hurdles, I do think that equipping students with tools that will be useful to them will both increase their chances of making it and encourage them to try at all.

My personal limitation is that I do not currently teach in a school setting and cannot use it in my own classroom, and the limitation of the website in general is that if it doesn't get shared it won't be used. I do plan on continuing to maintain the website, which I am sure will include adding and editing as I receive feedback. It is also currently a free website, in that I have not paid to make it easier to find on Google, which is certainly a limitation in terms of people stumbling on it by themselves. I would love to be able to spend the money to make it more discoverable, but at the moment that is not possible.

### **Benefits to Instructors**

The goal of this website is to make it easy and accessible for instructors to teach art-related writing skills to their students, and I believe I have created a resource that will facilitate that. The lesson plans are all fairly straightforward, but they have strong framework in UbD, or backwards design, and they focus on peer interaction and student choice. I have made it very clear as well that instructors

may feel free to change and adapt these materials, which I hope will also encourage use. I believe that this resource has the ability to not only make it easy for instructors to teach these skills, but also make them more likely to even try to teach these because it is easy.

I also believe that this project can be useful to instructors by providing them another tool for teaching academic writing skills. Academic writing can be difficult to teach because it's viewed as dry and overly strict, but by providing a scaffolded resource that motivates students to learn these skills, I feel that this may help.

### **Benefits to Students**

I hope that students interested in the professional world of art are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to acquire real-life skills such as grant writing and artist statement writing and are encouraged by this to actively work towards careers and education in the arts. This applies both to students who have instructors who will use this resource, as well as those who use the individual guides.

Beyond the goal of encouraging and equipping students towards pursuing careers in the arts, I also believe by utilizing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation this will be helpful in learning academic writing in general because it is one of the more difficult subjects to motivate students to learn in the English classroom. Academic writing can be an empowering skill to have, and being proficient in it can open many doors that lead in many directions.

I also believe that by encouraging these skills it is possible that more low-income students may feel encouraged to pursue art seriously. My personal experiences as a low-income student who found a very circuitous way to a career in art has shaped this interest, and because of my personal connection to this, I will also be continuing to change and better this website based on feedback from these stakeholders.

### **Where from Here?**

I plan on keeping this website current, as well as sharing it with as many interested parties as possible. There is space on the website for comments, and I am sure with more feedback there will be materials I will want to edit or add to as time passes. As previously mentioned, I also hope to make it more discoverable on search engines at some point, which will require a monetary commitment.

### **Summary**

I set out to answer the question: *How specifically can we teach high school students interested in the arts important skills such as grant writing, and artist biography and statement writing, and why should we be teaching those skills?* I wanted to empower teachers and encourage young creatives' confidence and technical skills through teaching high-level academic writing specifically targeted towards skills needed in the art world. That goal did not change, but as I have outlined, it did shift in terms of presentation and specific stakeholders. As I have worked on this project, I have become more convinced that it is a worthwhile endeavour, despite the ways it has shifted, and I am excited at the prospect of

helping instructors, whether they are parents or teachers, as well as individuals gain the confidence and technical skills they need to embark on exploring the art world.

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