



# The Artist Statement as a Genre: Move Analysis with Pedagogical Aims

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## Abstract

Despite the vital role the artist statement plays within the art community, very little research has been done on its rhetorical organization and many artists face challenges when they are required to write one. The present study involves move analysis of a corpus of 69 artist statements written in English by professional visual artists with the aim to determine the move structures, dominant moves, move patterns and communicative purposes. The findings reveal five recurrent moves which were developed by the researcher. They include *providing a self-definition, revealing the basis for creating art, explaining work process and techniques, explaining about one's work, and making a connection with viewers*. The findings are presented in detail and genre-based teaching implications are largely discussed in this article.

**Keywords:** artist statement, move analysis, genre analysis, rhetorical patterns, genre-based instruction

## 1. Introduction

To most people, what comes to mind when thinking of art and artists are not words, phrases and sentences but rather images, drawings, paintings and sculptures. In reality, however, many genres of written documents exist in the art community such as the artist biography, the art review, and the artist CV. One of the most important genres in this discourse community is the artist statement. Artist statements are texts written by artists to describe what they do as artists (Siber, 2009). It can be said that artist statements are important for artists professionally because they are used to communicate their ideas and promote their works to people in their community, the general public (Siber, 2009) and the buying public (Goodwin, 1999). A well-written artist statement will show that the writer is a “thoughtful and deliberate artist” (Siber, 2009). Moreover, for career advancement, artists rely on artist statements for most applications for opportunities, and to add to press releases and websites (“Artist Statement,” n.d.).

Despite its importance, many artists and art students find the task of writing the artist statement a daunting experience since artists generally “dedicate their lives to visual, not verbal, creativity” (Adamson, 2012). This challenge is worse for art students whose first language is not English. Apart from artists and art students themselves, teachers of English for Specific Purposes who teach professional writing for art students, also encounter difficulties in classroom contexts. Although guidelines, suggestions and advice regarding how to write an artist statement are available on websites, the body of genre-based research into this genre is limited which may result in teachers not being able to teach in a well-informed manner.

Genre analysis has been widely used for the teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and a number of research studies on genre analysis and move analysis have been conducted to study rhetorical organization of a variety of texts in many disciplines such as sociology (Brett, 1994), social sciences (Holmes, 1997), computer

science (Posteguillo, 1999), linguistics (Lorés, 2004; Pasavoravate, 2011), medicine (Jirapanakorn, 2013; Nwogu, 1997), biochemistry (Kanoksilapatham, 2005), accountancy (Flowerdew & Wan, 2010), business (Bhatia, 1993; Hiranburana, 1996), journalism (Bonyadi, 2012), legislation (Bhatia & Han, 2012), tourism (Ahmed, 2015), engineering (Maswana, Kanamaru, & Tajino, 2015), and even suicidology (Samraj & Gawron, 2015). However, little research has been done in the art field (Crețiu, 2013a), particularly in regards to the artist statement.

The main objectives of the present study are, therefore, to explore the rhetorical organization of the artist statement genre using move analysis proposed by Swales (1990) as a framework, identify its recurrent moves and move patterns, and investigate its communicative purposes.

The move structures and rhetorical patterns emerging from the analysis reveal the conventions observed by professional artists, and contribute a new body of knowledge to the field of genre analysis. In addition, the results provide writing instructors with a research-based theoretical background so that they can develop research-informed materials, prepare effective lessons, give practical guidance to students and assist them in producing good artist statements. Artists and art students may gain a better understanding of the genre's rhetorical organization and write their artist statements using well-structured templates as a model. Relying on the findings of the study, they can know how to conform to the genre conventions and effectively be part of the art community through both their art and language.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Genre analysis**

Martin (1985) stated that genre “represents at an abstract level the verbal strategies used to accomplish social purposes of many kinds. These strategies can be thought of in terms of stages through which one moves in order to realize a genre” (p. 251). Swales (1990) defined genre as a class of communicative events with some shared set of communicative purposes which belong to a discourse community and the rationale behind a genre in turn informs of its structure, content and style (pp. 10, 45-58). According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), a genre is “a type of discourse that occurs in a particular setting, that has distinctive and recognizable patterns and norms of organization and structure, and that has particular and distinctive communicative functions” (p. 245). From the definitions above, it can be said that the key element of a genre is its communicative purposes that are recognized by people in the discourse community in which the genre is used. Therefore, it can be said that genre analysis is the study of how language is used and structured in a particular way for a certain context to achieve certain communicative purposes.

A “move” in genre analysis is defined as “a discursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse” (Swales 2004, p. 228) or a “stretch of text” that serves a particular communicative function (Upton & Cohen, 2009, p. 588). A move can consist of several “steps” which are a move's sub-units selected by a writer to support the move's communicative function (Jirapanakorn, 2013). According to Upton and Cohen (2009), move analysis is an analysis of the discourse structure of texts from a certain genre and as a top-down approach, it involves developing an analytical framework, identifying and describing move types, segmenting texts into moves and classifying them into specific move types. The texts' discourse structures can then be described in terms of move sequences. Another approach to move analysis is called a bottom-up approach, which



begins with the segmentation, followed by a linguistic analysis and description of communicative functions (Jirapanakorn, 2013).

## 2.2 Genre-based instruction

Genre-based instruction is now widely used (Basturkmen & Wette, 2016) as the approach offers a number of benefits. The genre-based approach allows instructors to “direct students to the specific language features necessary to achieve the communicative purpose of the genre in a given situation” (Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010 p. 109). Hyland (2007) praises genre-based pedagogies because they “offer a valuable resource for assisting both pre- and in- service writing instructors to assist their students to produce effective and relevant texts.” He further explains that genre approaches are effective as they provide “a coherent framework for studying both language and contexts” making it clear to students what is to be learned and making them understand how target texts are structured and why they were written in certain ways. Hyland (2004, 2007) also stresses that with the knowledge of genres, teachers can give more informed feedback, give advice and teach more confidently and better assist students in producing relevant texts. Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998) reported on teachers’ views concerning genre-based teaching, stating that some teachers see this approach as empowering students, especially those at beginner or intermediate proficiency levels, as it gives them confidence and offer writing models. Payaprom (2012) claims that the genre-based approach helps students develop a better understanding of texts and gain control of the target genre. Other research studies also reveal that genre-based instruction has a significant positive impact on university students’ writing performance (Chen & Su, 2012; Henry & Roseberry, 1998; Kongpetch, 2003; Tuan, 2011). Crețiu (2013b) states that genre analysis is a very reliable approach in teaching English for Art Purposes.

Despite its usefulness, there have been concerns that this approach might limit student expression (Paltridge, 2006). According to teachers interviewed by Kay and Dudley-Evans (1998), the approach can be prescriptive and restrictive rather than descriptive, especially when used by unimaginative teachers leading to students lacking creativity; therefore, generic structures of genres should be presented as possible models not rigid patterns.

## 2.3 The artist statement genre

### 2.3.1 Definition of the artist statement

Artist statements are short written pieces produced by artists in order to communicate their concepts and ideas and describe what they do as artists (Siber, 2009). Artist statements allow artists to convey the deeper meaning of and the purpose behind certain works, and provide their audience with a general introduction by explaining the what, how and why of their works from their very own perspectives (“What is an artist statement?” n.d.). Goodwin (2002) defined the artist statement as an act of self-definition, a personal revelation and a reflection about artists’ relationship to their art and its process. “It is a statement deeply related to the essence of the artist in relationship to the essence and process of the artwork” (Goodwin, 2002, p. 7). She further explained that from the artist’s viewpoint, it is “the artists’ summation of how and why they work and what they do” or how they “want their work to be viewed by the public” (Goodwin, 2002, p. 35). For the purposes of this study, artist statements are defined as written texts produced by artists to communicate about their rationale, works, and working process.

In describing the artist's work in general or specific pieces of their work, the content in an artist statement may include the artist's "basic philosophy of creation, personal aesthetics, own technique, sources of inspiration, process of creation, interpretation of own work(s)" and personal or professional experience (Crețiu, 2006).

### **2.3.2 Discourse community and communicative purposes of the artist statement**

Swales (1990) defined discourse communities as "sociorhetorical networks that form in order to work towards sets of common goals" (p. 9). The discourse community that uses the genre of artist statement consists of artists, curators, gallery owners, art patrons, art dealers, grant committees, writers of articles, art critics, the buying public, and the general public. It may appear in artists' portfolios, galleries, museums, articles, exhibition programs, press releases and websites. It can be said that the genre has such diverse audiences that it results in different kinds of writer-audience relationships thus assuming different roles and communicative purposes.

Considering that the artist statement is produced for diverse audiences, it is not surprising that the genre is embedded with various communicative purposes. For the artists themselves, the ultimate purpose is to "tell people who they are and what they are about" (Crețiu, 2006). That is artist statements serve to define the artists, clarify their ideas, reveal their rationale and describe their work.

For curators, art dealers, art patrons, and gallery owners, artist statements may serve a promotional purpose where artists have to promote themselves and their work and convince people that their works are worth being exhibited or purchased (Crețiu, 2006). For this purpose, artist statements have to capture readers' attention, show that the writers are serious and professional and demonstrate that they follow the conventions existing in the discourse community. As for the media, artist statements provide a source of information reflecting the artist's viewpoint. For the general public, artist statements serve to advertise and create a connection or an "emotional bridge" between the artist and the viewer (Goodwin, 2002). Through their artist statements, artists offer viewers some insights into their works and increase the viewers' appreciation of the works. An artist statement can also provide information for art critics regarding work interpretation and evaluation (Crețiu, 2006). Art critics may refer to artist statements when they evaluate certain works. Based on the statement, the art critics will critique whether through their works, the artists have successfully achieved what they have set out to do as declared in the statements.

The artist statement is clearly used as an important means of communication within the professional community and outside. With such diverse audiences and serving many possible communicative purposes, the task of crafting the artist statement can therefore be very challenging for artists, particularly as language is not the main channel through which they express themselves.

### **2.4 Related studies**

In reviewing the existing literature, it is clear that very little research has been done on the artist statement as a genre. Only one academic article about the artist statement by Crețiu (2006) has been found by the researcher. Crețiu contends that the artist statement genre "does not reveal a prototypical structure" and "the instances of the texts it manifests itself in are so largely diverse, both in subject-matter and in discursive strategy, that it makes any typical classification impossible." She argues, however, that the texts have some common features which are the subjective character (reinforced by the use of the pronoun "I"), specialized vocabulary, and short length.



According to her, the genre reflects artists' desire to communicate to a specialized audience or the general public. Despite Crețiu's claim that there is no prototypical structure for artist statements, the researcher found a suggested move pattern on her weblog (Crețiu, 2016) where she does offer definitions of moves and steps as shown in Table 1. No information was given as to whether these moves and steps were based on research findings and no references were provided. Further information could not be found about this model.

**Table 1**

***Crețiu's (2016) moves of artist statements***

<b>Move 1 Personal philosophy/ies and aesthetics</b>
Step 1 Art philosophies and/or aesthetics the artist relies on; general ideas guiding the creation; perspective on art
Step 2 General themes, sources
<b>Move 2 Personal style and techniques</b>
Step 1 Defining personal style
Step 2 Describing the favored techniques
Step 3 Suggesting originality
<b>Move 3 Commenting on current exhibition/work</b>
Step 1 Stating the general idea (or the specific one), sources of inspiration
Step 2 Describing the process of creation
Step 3 Suggesting the meanings of the exhibition and/or the work (details, explaining metaphors, signs, symbols)

As one can gain insights from making comparisons, it is logical to compare the artist statement with other comparable genres. One genre that can be compared with the artist statement is the personal statement which is required for application to most university study programs. A move analysis study conducted by Ding (2007) of application essays to medical and dental schools revealed five moves, which are M1) explaining the reason to pursue the proposed study, M2) establishing credentials related to the fields of medicine/dentistry, M3) discussing relevant life experience, M4) stating future career goals, and M5) describing personality. The two genres contain some common promotional communicative purposes as they are both written to promote and explain about the writers. The personal statement is composed so that the writer can gain admission to and/or receive financial support from target programs (Ding, 2007) while the artist statement can assist the writer in the art curation process and with grant applications. Further comparison of these two genres appears in the discussion section of the current study.

### **3. Research methods**

#### **3.1 Data collection**

The corpus created for this study comprises 69 artist statements totaling 17,138 words with an average statement length of approximately 248 words. The length of the artist statements varies considerably with the longest one containing 785 words (three pages) and the shortest one 24 words (two sentences). These artist statements were written by a range of professional visual artists such as painters, photographers, installation artists, and sculptors. Most of them are American artists who work and live in the United States. The texts were collected from the official

website of Artadia, which is a non-profit organization in the United States that supports visual artists financially and professionally. At the time of the collection process, the statements were available on the website as they are typically included in each artist's information package together with other documents such as a biography, resumé and pictures of works. The researcher collected all the artist statements available on the website at the time of the study for the representativeness of the corpus.

This website was chosen because as an organization that grants financial awards to artists, Artadia deals with a large number of art professionals and therefore is a large discourse community. Over 20,000 artists have applied for the Artadia Awards and the process involves a panel of internationally prominent curators and established artists. It can be said that the organization is well-established with significant involvement of highly credentialed and credible professionals. Moreover, the website has an extensive archive of awardee artists where their artist statements could be easily accessed and retrieved, thus providing a high level of availability and accessibility.

### 3.2 Data analysis

This study employs the top-down process of move analysis. Although some academics question this approach, it tends to be the main approach used in move analysis and moves found by the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach are similar (Lieungnapar & Watson Todd, 2011). Moreover, the top-down approach allows researchers to investigate texts as context (Lieungnapar & Watson Todd, 2011). Since the researcher aims to analyze the moves of the artist statement genre within the context it is used, this approach is deemed appropriate.

#### 3.2.1 The artist statement

The term 'artist statement' in this study refers to a written text produced by artists to communicate about their rationale, works, and working process. One example of an artist statement is shown below.

(S1) Tasting salty teardrops is to me as seeing a diamond-embedded frog resting on a dried tree branch. (S2) Viewing a tense expression in a mirror is to me as seeing countless silkworms contorting their bodies. (S3) A touch of happiness or sorrow is to me like strong liquor throwing off its scent. (S4) The power of love and death is to me like red ivy climbing off a plaster vase decorated with roses.

(S5) Images of imagination are not remote from that of actual vision. (S6) What is remote is our expression in language from precision and perfection, an ideal which I do not possess. (S7) So I have chosen simple tools to record my immediate sensations. (S8) Doing so I try to discover what lies within that might be more real and true.

#### 3.2.2 Move and step analysis and classification

Before moves and steps were identified, the texts were segmented into coding units. Sentences were used as the unit as a sentence "usually conveys one proposition and has exact boundaries" (Jirapanakorn, 2013). As suggested by Swales (1990), moves and steps were analyzed based on their communicative functions using



linguistic features as evidence. For instance, the words “am interested in” in example (8) in section 4.1 help identify that in this sentence, the writer is discussing his interest. The words “my intent is to” in example (10) suggest that the writer is stating his goal. Although the two sentences explain different content, they both explain the artist’s basis for creating their art. Therefore, they are classified as different steps but within the same move category. In this study, an iterative analysis was conducted on the entire corpus before distinct move and step types and their definitions that match all the emerging categories were finally developed by the researcher.

To achieve inter-coder reliability, 10% of the corpus was randomly selected and coded by an inter-coder, who is a PhD candidate in Applied Linguistics and an English language teacher who has experience in teaching artist statement writing. The percentage of agreement stood at 94.83%.

### 3.2.3 Communicative purposes

The communicative purposes of moves and steps in this corpus were identified based on linguistic evidence (e.g. keywords) and categorized based on their meanings.

### 3.2.4 Move frequency, proportion and patterns

This study employs Kanoksilapatham’s (2015) criteria in order to determine the status of moves and steps. In this study a move or step is considered obligatory, conventional, or optional if it is found in 100%, between 60-99%, or in less than 60% of the corpus, respectively. In addition, this study looks at the proportion of each move and step to find out how much space is devoted to certain moves and steps per statement on average. Move patterns were also studied to find how moves and steps are structured in the artist statement genre.

### 3.2.5 Interviews with specialist informants

Bhatia (1991) stated that specialist informants can provide crucial information regarding the “socio-linguistic background,” “cognitive structuring associated with the genre” and feedback on many aspects of the analysis (p.159). In order to gain this information so as to have a better understanding of the genre from the insider perspective, two art professionals familiar with the genre were contacted and interviewed through phone calls. One was an internationally-recognized professional Thai visual artist, curator and gallery owner who has created multiple series of artworks, curated numerous art collections and has been involved with writing many artist statements. The other was a young professionally-trained Thai artist who has exhibited art collections abroad and has experience of writing artist statements.

The experts were asked about the genre’s definitions, characteristics, communicative purposes and use. Further interviews with the artists were conducted to resolve problems involving unclear communicative purposes of certain coding units.

## 4. Findings

In this section, the findings from the move analysis are presented. The move analysis of the corpus revealed that there are five recurrent moves: **(M1)** providing a self-definition, **(M2)** revealing the basis for creating art, **(M3)** explaining work process and techniques, **(M4)** explaining about one’s work, and **(M5)** making a connection with viewers. All of the statements were written in an essay format using the first person pronouns “I” when written by an individual artist and “we” when written by a group of artists who created works together. The artist statements may

have been written for a specific work or series of works or composed as a general artist statement.

#### 4.1 Move classification

Before specific moves and steps are examined, an overall picture is presented below.

**Table 2**  
***Move and step overview***

<b>Moves and steps</b>	<b>Communicative purposes</b>
Move 1: Providing a self-definition*	To define who they are.
Move 2: Revealing the basis for creating art	To reveal their motivation for creating art.
Step 1: Explaining thoughts and feelings	To explain their ideas and feelings.
Step 2: Mentioning specific influence*	To identify sources of influence.
Step 3: Stating the intention*	To state what they want to achieve.
Step 4: Referring to certain events*	To refer to relevant events.
Step 5: Using quotes*	To explain thoughts using words of wisdom.
Move 3: Explaining work process and techniques	To explain their work process and techniques.
Move 4: Explaining about one's work	To give an explanation about their works.
Step 1: Referring to the work's title*	To refer to titles of certain works.
Step 2: Identifying types of works*	To identify which types their works are in.
Step 3: Describing art elements*	To describe art elements in their works.
Step 4: Explaining what the work is about*	To discuss the subject matter and themes present in their works.
Step 5: Explaining how artists view their own works	To define their works and offer their own interpretations of the works.
Move 5: Making a connection with viewers*	To address the viewer's role in their work.

\* optional moves and steps

Next, the definitions and communicative purposes of moves and steps are illustrated with examples.

**# Move 1 (M1\*): Providing a self-definition** In this move, artists offer a self-definition explaining who they are to announce how they see themselves. This move is usually marked by the pronoun “*I*” followed by keywords such as *am*, *consider myself* and the use of the present tense and the active voice.

- (1) **I am** a visual artist, video-maker, writer, educator, occasional curator, and political activist.

**# Move 2 (M2): Revealing the basis for creating art** Consisting of five steps, this move deals with artists' motivations for art creation and is considered very important. In this move, artists make use of at least one of the steps to explain why they create art. They might have been driven by certain ideas, influences, wishes, personal experience, or words of wisdom from a particular person.



• **Step 1 (M2S1): Explaining thoughts and feelings** This step reveals artists' thoughts, standpoint, concepts, ideas, world views, personal beliefs, and feelings, which usually are a point of departure for their creation. Therefore, in this move, artists may explain their reasons for creating their works and/or working the way they do, and what they want to express or present. They may explain their philosophy of life and art and its significance in order to reveal themselves to their readers. Because thoughts and feelings are usually abstract, this step is usually marked by abstract nouns and sometimes the use of figurative language such as simile as shown in example (3) below. Therefore, reading and understanding this step often requires some interpretation. The present tense and the active voice are dominant in this step. Sometimes, this step can also be characterized by keywords such as *concept*, *idea* and the use of the pronoun "*I*" followed by verbs like *think*, *believe*, *question*, *imagine*. This step can be realized in many different ways as shown in the examples below.

- (2) Occurring both inside and outside of ourselves, movement is a ubiquitous **presence**, from one's hands punctuating a conversation, to internal reflexes accompanying a **thought**.
- (3) Tasting salty teardrops **is to me as** seeing a diamond-embedded frog resting on a dried tree branch. Viewing a tense expression in a mirror **is to me as** seeing countless silkworms contorting their bodies. A touch of happiness or sorrow **is to me like** strong liquor throwing off its scent.
- (4) Colors provoke **olfactory sensations** for me. Abstract painting is a sort of mash-up of the decorative and **the sublime, the ordinary and the numinous**. Perfume is another kind of abstraction.
- (5) In one way, **I think** of my work being like a physical painting or drawing.
- (6) **I question** the symbolic nature of objects from cultural and personal perspectives, resourcing both found and fabricated objects and painting them from direct observation.
- (7) We're all active and/or passive participants in **Capitalism**. However, it's not helpful to approach the existing system from **a place of polarity** - either you live completely off the grid or you're a Capitalist.

• **Step 2 (M2S2\*): Mentioning specific influence** To identify their sources, some artists directly mention specific influences, inspiration and interest on which they base their works. Words, phrases and sentences that frequently occur in this step include *interest*, *influence*, *inspiration*, *my interest is rooted in*, *I take inspiration from*. This step usually makes use of the present tense.

- (8) **I am interested in** the study of human behavior, its psychological and emotional impact on society and how society affects the collective and individual consciousness in general and black people in particular.

- (9) Information gathered from travel and study of various world cultures **has greatly influenced** my work.
- **Step 3 (M2S3\*): Stating the intention** This step is to state the writer's goal. Some artists directly state what they want to achieve in creating their art and as an artist. They explicitly discuss their purpose, hope and dream which drive them to create their work. The step is often characterized by the pronoun "**I**", the active voice, the present tense and the to-infinitive. Keywords such as **want to, hope to, try to, strive to, seek to, goal, intent, aim, intention, my hope** are predominant in this step.
- (10) **My intent is to** explore the human psyche and relish the idea that we are all beautifully flawed.
- (11) **My hope is that** each series offers glimpses of possible fantasies that could and sometimes do emerge in real life.
- (12) Ultimately, **I try to** understand the complexities, contradictions and injustices of today's world through my creative process.
- **Step 4 (M2S4\*): Referring to certain events** This step describes certain personal and/or professional experience, life events, or events in history, which are deemed relevant by the artists. By employing this step, some artists may want to explain how certain experiences and events affect their views and art creation. This step is usually written in the past tense, makes reference to time and includes time markers such as **while, after, in 1994**.
- (13) **While** traveling in India, I became familiar with the concept of the bindu.
- (14) I lost my vision **in 1994** due to an optic nerve disorder. **After** intense medical treatment and care, I returned to art making with renewed energy and commitment.
- **Step 5 (M2S5\*): Using quotes** In this step, artists refer to quotes from famous people to explain and probably give weight to their thoughts. The use of quotation marks followed by the name of the speaker is the main characteristic here. This step was rarely used in the corpus and according to Siber (2009), quotations should be used cautiously as misinterpreting well-known people may affect the artists' credibility and may cause an embarrassing situation.
- (15) "Man is a curious body whose center of gravity is outside himself."-- **Francis Ponge**
- (16) "Whatever it is I'm against it." (**Groucho Marx**)

# **Move 3 (M3): Explaining work process and techniques** Move 3 demonstrates how artists create their works, what techniques they employ, and what materials they use. It also includes artists' comments on why certain processes, techniques and



materials were selected. Intending to discuss the creation process, this move can usually be identified by the use of verbs that explicitly explain the working process such as *use, employ, select, make, begin, collect, photograph* and sequence markers such as *first, then, finally*. Keywords like *process, technique, material* were also frequently found. In this step, both the present tense and past tense have been found. The active voice and passive voice can both be used.

- (17) **My process begins** with private performances in front of the camera.
- (18) I **use** human hair in my work because it is a rich material thick with history, beauty politics, racial identity, genetics and societal taboos.
- (19) My installations **employ** sound, video, texts, photographs, found objects, drawing in temporary settings to address my concerns with historical reference and cultural memory.
- (20) My art brings an illustrator's **technique** of realism and surrealism to the fine arts arena.
- (21) To make my pictures, I **first collect or generate** a variety of photographic images. **Then, I print** the images as acetate negatives. The acetate negatives **are then collaged** together to create figurative images, usually either at the size of a single acetate sheet (8.5 by 11 inches) or at the actual size of the body represented. **Finally**, the negatives **are contact printed using** the antique photographic technology of cyanotype printing (literally, blueprinting). In individual pictures, the effect of this **process** is a photographic surface that materially and visually integrates disparate sources while opening into a non-perspectival pictorial space that is unified but, stylistically, neither fantastic nor realist.

# **Move 4 (M4): Explaining about one's work** This move provides descriptions of works given by the art creators themselves. It is very important because as it offers descriptions and explanations about works of art, it helps convey the hidden message and increases art appreciation among viewers. Move 4 in this corpus is realized by five different steps.

- **Step 1 (M4S1\*): Referring to the work's title** Artists specifically refer to the name of a particular work. This step is rarely used because most of the artist statements in this corpus were written as a general statement of an artist rather than a specific one devoted to a particular work.

(22) I refer to my ongoing project as **Automythography**.

- **Step 2 (M4S2\*): Identifying types of works** This step identifies the type into which a work is categorized. Artists identify types of works to classify their works. It usually makes use of the present tense and the active voice. Words commonly found in this step are nouns that describe types such as *drawing, painting, photography, and installation*.

- (23) My work crosses and combines **many media – video installation, digital media, drawing, photography, artists’ books, graphic arts, and public, collaborative projects.**
- (24) Over the years my work has **taken various forms ranging from photography, to graphic design, to clothing, to sculpture, installation and video.**
- **Step 3 (M4S3\*): Describing art elements** Some artists comment and/or discuss art elements which are visual components in a work such as lines, colors, and forms to describe certain features of their works. This step is marked by the use of the present tense. Both the active voice and passive voice can be used.
- (25) My **lines** continue to remain simple.
- **Step 4 (M4S4\*): Explaining what the work is about** In this step, in order to explain what their works are about, artists may discuss the works’ content, subject matter and themes both clearly visible in the work and hidden. The step usually makes use of the present tense and the active voice. Some keywords that help identify this step are *my work, project, is about, deal with, address, focus on, depict, issue, explore, and theme.*
- (26) Sweaty figures against the summer foliage capture the heat and humidity of a sweltering day. The withering branches **depict** the bone chilling winter landscape. Abstraction, modularity and pattern **are the central themes** that define this series.
- (27) This project **is about** the intersection of the political and photographic histories of Ethiopia.
- (28) The work **looked at** a transitory period in people’s lives during a ominous post 911 landscape, and **dealt with** migration, memory, loss, community, and sense of longing and belonging.
- (29) Oppression, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, racism in America, the housing crises, are all **issues** that have been subjects of exploration in my work.
- **Step 5 (M4S5): Explaining how artists view their own works** In this step, artists explain how they view their own works and what they mean to them in order to offer explanations and comments about the works from their own perspectives. Therefore, they may define their works, offer their own interpretations of the works, discuss their works’ functions and purposes, and explain their relationship with their works. It can be said that this step deals with the abstract notion of the works and usually offer insights into them. The step is usually realized through the use of the present tense and active voice. It is often marked by the words *my work, my project, the image* followed by the verb to be or other verbs like *propose, function, seek to.*
- (30) **My work is** a visual dialogue between abstraction and representation in paintings, drawings, and prints.



(31) **My work seeks to** question, explore, and expose experiences, causes, effects, and the subtle transitory elements along with those that shape them in everyday life and imaginary life.

(32) **My works propose** art and imagination as primary tools of transformation and self-empowerment. Using myself as the subject, **my works are** a deployment of those tools, a demonstration of self-invention and self-representation.

# **Move 5 (M5\*): Making a connection with viewers** This move addresses the viewer's role and the impact the works have on the viewers. Some artists may want to involve the viewers and address their role in their works. The keyword *viewer* helps identify this move.

(33) **Viewers** are left to fill in the fuller story with their own experiences and bodily memories of gesture and reflex.

(34) To come to any conclusion, **viewers must consider** their own relationship to hair, gender, race, incarceration, the environment, and global capitalism.

#### 4.2 Move frequency

The frequency and percentage of the analyzed moves and steps are presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**  
*Frequency and percentage*

Move / Step	No. of statements (N=69)	Percentage
Move 1 (M1): Providing a self-definition*	5	7.25
Move 2 (M2): Revealing the basis for creating art	67	97.10
Step 1 (M2S1): Explaining thoughts and feelings	60	86.96
Step 2 (M2S2): Mentioning specific influence*	28	40.58
Step 3 (M2S3): Stating the intention*	26	37.68
Step 4 (M2S4): Referring to certain events*	15	21.74
Step 5 (M2S5): Using quotes*	4	5.80
Move 3 (M3): Explaining work process and techniques	44	63.77
Move 4 (M4): Explaining about one's work	60	86.96
Step 1 (M4S1): Referring to the work's title*	2	2.90
Step 2 (M4S2): Identifying types of works*	22	31.88
Step 3 (M4S3): Describing art elements*	14	20.29

Move / Step	No. of statements (N=69)	Percentage
Step 4 (M4S4): Explaining what the work is about*	29	42.03
Step 5 (M4S5): Explaining how artists view their own works	44	63.77
Move 5 (M5): Making a connection with viewers*	6	8.70

\* optional moves and steps

Although the results show that there was no obligatory move based on the cut-off rate at 100%, M2 seemed to be a quasi-obligatory one with the percentage of occurrence at 97.10. M2, M3 and M4 can be considered conventional as they were used in 97.10%, 63.77% and 86.96% of the statements respectively. M1 and M5 are optional as they were used only in 7.25% and 8.70% of the statements respectively. The findings suggest that M2, M3 and M4 should be used if artists want to conform to the genre conventions, realize communicative purposes and meet the audience's expectations. As for the steps, only M2S1 (86.96%) and M4S5 (63.77%) were conventional while the other steps were optional.

### 4.3 Move proportion

Move proportion was calculated in order to find out how much space is generally used to discuss certain moves and steps per statement on average, which can suggest their significance. The average number of each of the moves and steps is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Total and average number of moves/steps in the corpus*

Moves and steps	Total	Average	Percentage
<b>M1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.07</b>	<b>0.66</b>
<b>M2</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>5.42</b>	<b>49.34</b>
M2S1	221	3.20	29.16
M2S2	55	0.80	7.26
M2S3	46	0.67	6.07
M2S4	44	0.64	5.80
M2S5	8	0.12	1.06
<b>M3</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>20.84</b>
<b>M4</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>3.10</b>	<b>28.23</b>
M4S1	2	0.03	0.26
M4S2	27	0.39	3.56
M4S3	19	0.28	2.51
M4S4	63	0.91	8.31
M4S5	103	1.49	13.59
<b>M5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.10</b>	<b>0.92</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>10.98</b>	<b>100</b>



On average, a single artist statement contains 10.98 moves and/or steps. The average numbers of moves and steps show that artist statements generally devote more attention to the discussion of artists' motivation for creating art as Move 2 accounts for 49.34% (5.42 times per statement) of an artist statement on average. Importance is also placed on explaining about art and its creation process as Move 4 and Move 3 make up 28.23% and 20.84% (3.10 times and 2.29 times per statement) of a statement on average respectively. Move 5 and Move 1 occur less than once per statement (0.1 times and 0.07 times respectively) on average.

#### 4.4 Move patterns

In this section, the move patterns found in the corpus are presented. The results reveal that the order in which moves and steps are structured and how they are repeated vary considerably in different artist statements. In this corpus, there are as many as 56 move patterns out of the 69 artist statements. The most common patterns were M2 and M2-M4-M2. This suggests that M2 is the most important move among the five moves. With such a wide range of possibilities of move patterns and move cycling, it is apparent that there is no clearly preferred pattern in the corpus as shown in Table 5 below. Table 6, which shows the number of move reiterations, seems to confirm the fact that M2 is given the most emphasis by the writers in this corpus. M2 is repeated the most often (76 times, 41.30%) followed by M4 (74 times, 40.22%) and M3 (34 times, 18.48%). M1 and M5 never reoccur in a statement.

**Table 5**  
*Move patterns*

Move patterns	Frequency	Percentage	Move patterns	Frequency	Percentage
2	4	5.8	4-2-4-2-4	1	1.45
2-4-2	4	5.8	4-3-2-3-4	1	1.45
4-2	3	4.35	1-4-2-4-3-2	1	1.45
2-4	2	2.9	2-3-2-4-3-4	1	1.45
1-2-4	2	2.9	2-4-2-4-2-4	1	1.45
2-3-2	2	2.9	2-4-3-2-4-3	1	1.45
4-2-4-2	2	2.9	4-2-3-4-2-4	1	1.45
2-3-2-4-2	2	2.9	4-2-4-3-4-2	1	1.45
4	1	1.45	4-3-4-2-4-2	1	1.45
3-2	1	1.45	2-3-5-3-2-3-2	1	1.45
2-3-4	1	1.45	4-2-3-4-2-4-2	1	1.45
2-4-5	1	1.45	4-2-4-2-3-2-4	1	1.45
4-2-4	1	1.45	4-2-4-2-4-3-2	1	1.45
4-5-2	1	1.45	4-3-2-3-4-3-2	1	1.45
4-3-4	1	1.45	2-4-2-4-2-5-2-4	1	1.45
4-3-2	1	1.45	2-4-3-4-2-4-3-4	1	1.45
1-4-2-4	1	1.45	3-2-3-4-3-4-3-2	1	1.45
2-3-4-2	1	1.45	4-2-3-4-2-3-4-3-2	1	1.45
2-4-2-3	1	1.45	4-2-4-2-4-2-4-2-3	1	1.45
2-4-3-4	1	1.45	3-4-2-3-2-3-4-3-4-2	1	1.45
3-2-5-2	1	1.45	4-2-3-4-3-4-3-4-3-4	1	1.45
4-2-3-2	1	1.45	3-4-3-2-3-2-4-2-4-3-2	1	1.45
4-2-3-4	1	1.45	4-2-3-4-2-3-2-4-2-4-2	1	1.45
1-4-3-2-3	1	1.45	3-4-2-4-2-4-3-4-2-4-2-4	1	1.45
2-4-2-3-2	1	1.45	4-2-3-2-4-2-4-2-3-4-2-4	1	1.45
3-2-4-3-2	1	1.45	2-4-2-3-4-2-4-2-4-2-4-3-2	1	1.45
3-2-4-3-4	1	1.45	2-4-2-3-4-3-2-4-3-2-4-3-4-2	1	1.45
4-2-3-5-4	1	1.45	2-4-3-4-2-4-3-4-2-4-3-2-4-2	1	1.45

**Table 6**  
*Number of move reiterations*

Moves	No. of reiteration	Percentage
Move 1	0	0%
Move 2	76	41.30%
Move 3	34	18.48%
Move 4	74	40.22%
Move 5	0	0%

#### **4.5 Perspectives from experts**

According to the specialist informants interviewed, artists should state their intention of art creation, the key message they want to convey to their audience, their feelings and thoughts, as well as a rationale behind their work. It is also possible that artists explain their agenda in their artist statements. The experts explained that some visual artists claim that they have already communicated through their art and that it is not necessary for them to do it again in writing; however, this is not always true. They emphasized that artist statements are very important because without them, artists may fail to communicate their message to their audience as their art alone may be too obscure to understand or the audience may draw a conclusion which is different from the one intended by the artists themselves. Artist statements, therefore, play a crucial role in helping clarify the messages that are hidden in a work. Artist statements provide the clues or sometimes the key for the audience to correctly understand those messages and appreciate the work more deeply. They also mentioned that although writing an artist statement is not always mandatory, it is a tradition that most artists follow.

#### **5. Discussion**

Based on the results, the moves and steps found in the corpus of the artist statements mostly correspond with the guidelines in the existing literature and comments from the specialist informants. The three conventional moves (M2, M3, and M4) match the “why, how, what” framework usually suggested by websites offering artist statement writing instructions whereas the other two moves (M1 and M5) are entirely optional. Artists tend to explain their motivation and thoughts, their works and their work process in their artist statements. Rarely do they mention their viewers or directly define themselves as can be seen from the low levels of occurrence of M5 and M1. This suggests that it is not usual for artists to direct their viewers and state what they want them to feel, do or think, which is likely because they want to restrict their influence on their audience. This reflects that some artists value the thought-provoking nature of art and they may want to encourage people to think for themselves, make their own interpretations and appreciate art in their own way.

This study’s findings regarding conventional moves (M2, M3, and M4) suggest three main communicative purposes of the artist statement genre. As M2, M3, and M4 deal with the basis for creating art, work process, and art description, respectively, it can be said that the main communicative purposes of this genre are 1)



to clarify artists' motivation and ideas; 2) to explain working process, techniques and materials used and; 3) offer artists' descriptions and explanations of their own works. Artist statements appear to generally be written to provide information and at the same time create an impression among readers that the writers are serious professional artists.

As for the proportion of the moves and steps, the findings reveal that almost half of the space in the artist statements in this study, on average, was devoted to M2 (49.34%). This, somewhat surprisingly, suggests that artists generally feel compelled to explain their rationale and motivation for creating art. While many people associate artists with being driven by emotions and feelings, the findings demonstrate that they tend to be methodical in their thinking process and rely on lengthy, reasoned explanations when discussing their motivation.

Looking at the steps mostly employed by the artists within M2 and M4, M2S1 and M4S5 are used most frequently. These two steps are likely to deal with abstraction. M2S1 discusses the philosophy of creation where artists explain their ideas, beliefs, reasons and feelings, while in-depth explanations about how artists view their own works offered in M4S5 are usually abstract in nature. With these two steps being most prevalent, to a certain extent, artist statements can be seen as being abstract and requiring interpretation. This may imply that artists place importance on feelings and abstract notions, resulting in artist statements containing poetic language. Therefore, this genre can possibly be obscure for some readers who will find it difficult to understand.

When analyzing the discourse structure of texts, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the socially situated nature of the texts and the role they play in their setting (Paltridge, 2006). The fact that the move patterns vary considerably in the corpus (56 patterns out of the 69 texts) and the moves are frequently and variably repeated may be interpreted in various ways. First of all, the findings seem to show that within the conventions of the artist statement genre, a number of variations are possible. This means that artists have considerable freedom in writing as far as the move patterns are concerned. Moreover, although the findings suggest that artists do conform to certain genre conventions, at the same time, they are probably striving to be different or unique through the way they organize and structure their statements as can be seen from a lack of preferred move patterns. Highly varied move patterns may reflect the fact that artists and the discourse community greatly value creativity, originality and individuality, as well as welcome uniqueness and invite creative diversity. The subjective character of the genre is also illustrated by the use of the first person pronouns "I" and "we."

Another interesting aspect of the artist statement genre is its diverse audiences. As mentioned earlier, the artist statement is read by other art professionals, the media and the public. With such diverse audiences come different communicative purposes. To other art professionals, artists have to demonstrate their professionalism by being serious, thoughtful and perhaps sophisticated and by revealing their drive and values in order to gain acceptance into the art community. This is shown through the considerable use of M2S1. At the same time, they are expected to explain their works and offer their own interpretation so that their viewers can have a glimpse into the artists' psyche and appreciate their art. The artist statement has to reveal, clarify, demystify, explain, convince, and promote. Writing a well-crafted artist statement is, therefore, much more challenging when compared to other genres in the artistic

community such as the artist biography, which usually comprises life events chronologically listed.

The findings of this study have contributed some new understanding of the artist statement genre in relation to a previous study by Crețiu (2006). In her study, Crețiu argues that the genre “does not reveal a prototypical structure” and “the instances of the texts it manifests itself in are so largely diverse, both in subject-matter and in discursal strategy, that it makes any typical classification impossible.” However, although the findings of this research study show that there is no preferred rhetorical structure for the artist statement genre, there are recurrent moves and steps. In relation to the information provided on Crețiu’s (2016) blog regarding the moves and steps of the artist statement, the findings of this study show different moves and steps from those suggested by her. This study reveals five recurrent moves while Crețiu’s model contains only three. Crețiu’s model does not have a *Providing a self-definition* move and *Making a connection with viewers* move. The steps *Stating the intention*, *Referring to certain events*, *Using quotes*, *Referring to the work’s title*, *Identifying types of works*, and *Describing art elements* are also absent in her model. However, there is some overlapping. Crețiu’s move 1, move 2 and move 3 bear some similarities to this study’s move 2, move 3 and move 4 respectively.

In order to create a richer understanding of the genre, it is useful to compare the artist statement with other comparable genres, commencing with the personal statement (Ding, 2007). The artist statement and the personal statement share some similarities. Both are written to promote the writers, establish their competence, and discuss their motivation, goals and interest. These two genres are subjective in nature, allow for creativity and individuality and can discuss narratives and stories of the writers. The personal statement may help the writer gain admission to a target program of study or receive financial support whereas the artist statement can help the writer in the curation process and with grant applications. While credentials and experience are very important in the personal statement, based on the findings of this study, credentials are not mentioned and experience is not a necessary component in the artist statement. This is probably because stories about artists are usually presented in the artist biography and their credentials in the artist résumé. While the use of narratives and relevant experience is the norm in the personal statement, it is rare in the artist statement. This may suggest its insignificance as artists may not need to use their stories to create their value. Instead of narratives, artists create value and gain acceptance into the art community by explaining their conceptualization process as well as allowing their art to manifest their competence. Describing one’s personality is sometimes used as a way to promote oneself in the personal statement. However, it is never mentioned in the artist statements in this corpus. This seems to suggest that personality is a possibly irrelevant issue in the art community where the philosophy of creation and the value of one’s work are paramount.

Other genres in the art community can also enhance understanding of the artist statement. The artist biography is a genre widely used in the community. It usually provides background information of the artist regarding areas such as childhood, education, art career, goals and other relevant life events. It is mostly written using the third person pronoun as if it was written by someone else while the artist statement is always written with the first person pronoun. This reflects the different natures of the two genres. While the biography is more objective, neutral and fact-oriented, the artist statement is more subjective and abstract. The communicative purpose of the biography is mainly to inform the reader of facts while that of the artist statement is to



reveal one's inner self and voice. Another genre that should be compared with the artist statement is the art review. Art reviews usually describe works of art and offer reviewers' personal evaluation of certain works or exhibitions. It is useful to compare the two genres because, with similar communicative purposes as the writers from both genres describe works of art and offer their interpretations, texts are written from different perspectives. Artist statements are written from the perspective of art creators while art reviews are composed from the perspective of art perceivers. The nature of the two genres are, therefore, quite different. The art review tends to be more critical while the artist statement is likely to be more reflective.

## **6. Implications**

Apart from the contribution this study makes to genre knowledge, it also offers pedagogical implications for writing instruction. Contextual concepts of the genre including the discourse community in which it is used, its communicative purposes, and its audience should be explained to students. Teachers should also explain the expectations of people in the art community. The moves and steps found in this study can be explicitly presented to students to familiarize them with the genre, raise their awareness and increase their understanding of the target genre in terms of its conventions and audience expectations. The move structure with example artist statements can be taught to students as templates to assist them in developing writing outlines. The concept of move cycling should be discussed so that students know that high levels of move cycling is one of the characteristics of artist statements. As artists value uniqueness, move cycling can be used as a tool to make their writing original in terms of both content and organizational pattern since different move cycling patterns help create uniqueness in writing style. Certain keywords, phrases, sentences, the use of certain tenses and active and passive voice can also be introduced to students for them to draw on. This is especially useful for low proficiency students as they can have difficulty in choosing the right words to express their ideas. Teachers should keep in mind, however, that rhetorical patterns as well as lexical items taught to students are only some of the possibilities and they should also explain to students that variations are possible. Teachers can also critique their students' writing based on insights provided by the findings of this research. For instance, based on the findings of move frequency and proportion, they can evaluate whether the students' writing adheres to the genre conventions and achieves its communicative purposes. Critical advice as well as constructive feedback can be offered with suggestions regarding specific points for improvement. The research findings can also be used in developing teaching materials for use in ESP classrooms. As for professional use, the study helps demystify the genre and enhance understanding of the genre among art professionals. Moreover, knowledge of the rhetorical structure and the genre content can assist less experienced artists in producing their artist statements for career advancement and professional opportunities.

## **7. Limitations and recommendations for further studies**

This research conducted an analysis of artist statements written by only visual artists. Further research can study artist statements written by artists from different fields, for instance, musicians or performers. A comparative study can be done to compare the similarities and differences of the rhetorical organization of artist statements written by visual artists and musicians or between artists who speak English as their first language and those who do not.

## 8. Conclusion

In order to demystify the artist statement genre, the researcher conducted this study to investigate the genre's rhetorical structure, moves and steps, and communicative purposes. Fives moves have been identified based on their communicative functions and linguistic evidence namely *providing a self-definition, revealing the basis for creating art, explaining work process and techniques, explaining about one's work, making a connection with viewers*. Conventional moves and steps and their communicative functions have been identified. The study's findings appear to reflect the nature of the art discourse community where members highly value originality, creativity and individuality. The knowledge contributed by this study can be applied in classroom contexts to enhance the teaching and learning of the artist statement genre and to assist artists in their professional career.

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