

Elements of the Genre

In their Authors’/Artists’ Statements, writers do the following:

- *Discuss a specific composition and make an argument.* In an Author’s/Artist’s Statement, writers discuss a particular composition — such as an essay, painting, photo, documentary, ad, or other work. They refer directly to that work and provide specific details as they explain the “what, why, and how” of their creation. For example, in the Author’s Statement example from *Cook’s Illustrated*, Andrew Janjigian explains that he set out to create a dressing that would successfully blend “the four Thai flavor elements: hot, sour, salty, and sweet.” He then explains how he did that.

Writers also make a case for their compositions in order to persuade readers to see their work in a particular way. For example, Andrew Janjigian wants us to see that his beef salad recipe succeeds in blending desired flavors.

- *Discuss their specific rhetorical situation and related choices.* The Author’s/Artist’s Statement gives you, as a composer, an opportunity to explain to audiences:
 - » **Your purpose:** why you composed the work on that specific topic, in that specific way
 - » **Your audience and use of rhetorical appeals:** what you understand about your readers and how you connected with them through choices regarding ethos, pathos, and logos
 - » **Your mode and medium:** why you chose them and how they benefit your work overall

For example, if you created a collage — perhaps on the topic of body art and identity — in your Artist’s Statement, you could explain to viewers:

- » Your purpose or main point in creating a collage on the relationship between body art and identity — and what the relationship is
 - » Why you chose specific central images, how they contribute to your message, and how you hope your viewers will read them and relate to the overall collage
 - » How you wanted to connect with your viewers through pathos, logos, and ethos (for example, your arrangement of images might appeal to their logic or emotions)
 - » Why you decided to create the collage, say, in a digital format
- *Answer the question “why.”* Readers of Author’s or Artist’s Statements want to understand all the thinking that went into the creation of the final product. While that thinking is obvious to you, it is invisible to readers. The point of the Author’s or Artist’s Statements is to make it visible, and that can only be done by providing many specific details about the “why” of decisions that were made. If you write “I decided to create an advertisement,” you should follow it up with an explanation of why you decided to create an advertisement.
 - *Address readers directly.* Writers use the “I” construction, which allows them to speak plainly to readers about their choices. They also refer to the works they’re discussing in the Statement as “my essay” (or “my painting,” “my photograph,” etc.), indicating their ownership of the composition and the choices they made.
 - *Explain their choice of genre and how they worked with its conventions.* The Author’s/Artist’s Statement is a place for a composer to explain why he or she chose to work in a particular genre. For example, let’s say that for your composition course you chose to write an opinion piece on gun control. In a separate statement, submitted with your opinion piece, you might explain to your instructor and classmates why you chose this genre. Pointing out your specific choices builds your ethos and persuasiveness. You might note, for example, that the opinion piece was the best choice of genre because it allowed you to:
 - » Clearly present your opinion on the topic of gun control (and write in the first person)
 - » Be brief (just a few paragraphs) and lively
 - » Deal with potential objections and offer potential solutions
 - » Invite readers to respond
 - Alternatively, maybe you created a photo essay for your class or a wider audience. An accompanying statement — in which you explain why you found the photo essay to be the best way to communicate your ideas about gun control — would go a long way toward helping your viewers get the most out of your work.