

How to write your biography

As an artist, there are three documents which are always required for any submission, either to a gallery, educational institution or competition. These are your biography, CV and artist's statement. It is advisable that you keep your biography and CV updated regularly, adding to the information as events occur. It is important to differentiate between the types of documents, and their function. This fact sheet focusses on the biography.

What is a biography?

This is a short summary of your life, career and artistic practice. This information is mostly used to introduce the reader to the 'artist as person', so keep that in mind when writing your biography. You want your reader to have some insight into what makes you 'tick' and what your practice is about.

A good approach is to use the 5W's and H rule as a guideline:

- WHO you are as an artist,
- WHEN and WHERE you acquired your knowledge, skills etc.,
- HOW you create your work or WHAT processes you use,
- WHAT media you normally work in,
- WHAT influences you and the main concerns in your work,
- WHY you focus on your specific concerns.

What to include:

- Date of birth (year) and country of origin, and where you are currently residing if different.
- Your artistic journey (e.g. education, residencies, life changing experiences).
- Specific media, techniques and style unique to your practice.
- Describe main themes your work deals with on a recurring base (e.g. gender, environmental issues, technology, etc.)
- Landmark exhibitions, notable competition wins, commissions or collections which own your work. Only the most significant ones deserve a mention here, keep the list short!

What to exclude:

- Details that might compromise your safety or privacy, such as your residential address, telephone numbers etc.
- Any information that is not directly relevant to your artistic career or practice, such as hobbies, references to people or pets who share your life, etc.

Tips:

- Keep it short and concise. Between 150 and 250 words is a good length.
- Write in essay format using full sentences, avoid using bullet points.
- Ensure that there are no spelling or grammatical errors. If need be, ask someone to help edit your text. Pay attention to the layout as well.

- Write in the third person, in other words, do not refer to yourself as “I”, but rather “he”, “she” or “they”. Remember this information will be used by third parties to contextualise you who are as an artist for the viewer.
- Use the handy Sasol New Signatures Biography template if you don’t know where to start!