

## WHY MUST WE BE ABLE TO WRITE ABOUT WHAT WE DO AND WHO WE ARE AS ARTISTS?

To clearly and often passionately **communicate** the following:

1. Our *historical activities* (**Curriculum Vitae (CV) and Biography**)
2. The *facts regarding our current activities or projects* (**Press releases, Press kits, Website, Facebook, Youtube and other Web places**)
3. Our *requests for financial support* (**Grants, Private and Corporate Fundraising**)
4. Our *requests for employment opportunities* (**Engagers (companies, independents, schools, community centres etc.), Presenters, Festivals**)
5. Our *cumulative experiences* (**Archives**)
6. Our unique *creative point of view*, whether as a choreographer, a performer, a teacher or in some other dance-related activity and *where* our point of view exists within the larger dance ecology (**Artistic Statement**)

### THE ESSENTIAL DOCUMENTS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

**1. Curriculum Vitae (CV) and the Biography:** these describe your historical activities and share the same goal: to provide the reader with a snapshot of who you are today. They differ in that the **CV** is a chronological statement of fact and the **Bio** is a narrative (prose) retelling of your own unique story. Both forms usually contain the following, which are listed or written about in reverse chronological order. Variations of form are infinite:

- i. Education (dance and non-dance)
- ii. Professional Development (you may not have much of this at the beginning of your career)
- iii. Professional Experience: group your experiences under choreography, performance, teaching, film and television, artistic direction, rehearsal directing, mentoring, technical work, dance writing and other dance related activities. 'Professional' means that you have been paid for your work and don't forget to list apprenticeships
- iv. Grants and scholarships (include those received for training)
- v. Awards and prizes
- vi. Community work
- vii. Other interests and skills (this is optional, but often useful)

### 2. Press Kits:

- i. These are used to provide publicists and presenters with factual information. Although paper versions are still common, electronic links to websites or PDF versions on a Data disk are becoming the norm.
- ii. There are generally speaking two kinds of press kits, and each of them is added to and subtracted from over time (as are all of the written materials you will generate in your career). The first kind is directed at the press and gives the facts regarding a specific project/show/festival/event including:
  - a. A copy of the press release (see below)
  - b. The main collaborators' bios
  - c. Your company/collective description and mandate (if applicable) and your artistic statement
  - d. A description of the work(s) to be presented
  - e. A contact sheet for the major players (including phone numbers and e-mail addresses)
  - f. A creative team breakdown (this looks like a print programme and lists all of the contributors in an easy to read format)

- g. A press quotes page and perhaps some articles written about you in the past; these and complete reviews (only include if they are glowing) should not be older than three years
  - h. Photos/images: it is common practice now to provide digital versions of these, usually both electronically and on disk. Your publicist or the media will advise you on which format they prefer
- iii. The second kind of press kit is directed at presenters and gives them a more complete visual picture of who you are. Include the above **except** a, e and f. **In addition**, include:
- a. Cover letter either introducing yourself if this is a 'cold call' or reminding the presenter of your recent phone/e-mail conversation
  - b. A detailed list of your current and recent repertoire
  - c. A preliminary technical sheet for the works you are trying to sell
  - d. A list of recent donors and funders
  - e. A copy of a poster and/or a print programme from your last show
  - f. Video materials, either VHS and/or DVD

### 3. Press Release:

- i. "The facts, sir, nothing but the facts": title of the event, nature of the event, dates, venue, collaborators/performers, ticket prices and box office info
- ii. This tool also acts as a way of selling your event (which is really one among thousands occurring at the same time) to weary writers who have heard and seen it all. Your goal is not only to have your event included in listings (which should happen as a matter of course) but also to secure pre-event press coverage: a print article, a picture, a radio or TV interview etc. The media are interested in discovering your 'hook', something about what you are doing that makes it stand out above the rest. Obviously, inventing a hook that is not reflective of what you are doing or is a gross exaggeration is not appropriate but this is where your superlative writing skills come into play
- iii. A press release traditionally finishes with "-30-" following the body of the text. This tells the reader that all subsequent information is not for publication. The "-30-" is usually followed by your media contact info, including name, phone number and e-mail address
- iv. Check, re-check and triple check your info: sending someone to the wrong venue on the wrong date at the wrong time is disastrous...and unforgivable
- v. Media lists for Toronto and the GTA are available for sale through DUO ([www.danceumbrella.net](http://www.danceumbrella.net)). Contact your local Dance Service Organization for lists in your area.

### 4. Grant Applications:

- i. First time applicants **must** contact the funding agency directly to determine eligibility before applying
- ii. Each organization offers support to artists at different stages of their careers. Their priorities, rules, guidelines and applications **are updated regularly** so be sure you have the most current information
- iii. Although the applications are often quite similar in terms of what they require, each has its own focus and must be studied carefully: **it is your responsibility to ensure that you comply with every detail that each organization asks for...never assume, trust the written word and if confused, PHONE AND ASK FOR HELP**
- iv. Grants usually take at least two months to prepare completely
- v. First time applicants often need letters of support from professionals who know them and their work. As a matter of courtesy, you must ask for these letters **no later than two weeks** in advance of the deadline. You will need to provide these busy artists with a copy of your written project proposal (so that they can carefully assess your project), the forms the funding agency has supplied you with (each has specific questions that they ask the assessors) and a stamped and addressed envelope is always a nice touch
- vi. Pay attention to the number of copies required (each is different), how to collate your requests (these are actually a big deal: single or double-sided? If they say no staples, they mean it) and deadline dates.
- vii. Support materials will be discussed in another workshop.

## 5. Engagers and presenters:

- i. The first line of attack here is personal contact (see v. below) but when this is not possible, the cold call or letter is the usual route
- ii. Whatever you know about writing formal letters applies here, including the recipient's correct title and spelling of his or her name
- iii. If going to an audition, bring what they ask for (usually CV and/or bio, headshot and sometimes a video) and prepare as directed; there are no set rules about audition protocols so be attentive to each case. Following the audition, a brief letter or quick e-mail thanking them for their time is not inappropriate
- iv. If applying to a festival, follow the application instructions 'to the letter' (see 2.2 iii above)
- v. If approaching a presenter for the first time (through the Candance Network, for example, [www.candance.ca](http://www.candance.ca)) your mailed package will include a letter of introduction, your bio/CV, some form of a press kit and video/DVD material of your work. Follow-up with a phone call to ensure that the presenter has received the package and to initiate dialogue. This process takes time and is about building relationships. Ultimately, your success will depend upon how well your work matches the presenter's needs (audience profile and programming philosophies) but none of this matters if you haven't built a professional relationship based on who you are as a person

## 6. Artistic Statement:

**The Ontario Arts Council** grant application says, "Describe your artistic vision for your project, the dance genre(s) and aesthetic, cultural and/or professional context that informs your work."

- i. The artistic statement is the most personal yet essential document that you will write in your career. It defines who you are now. It gives the reader an understanding of what engages you as a viewer, a performer, a choreographer, a teacher, as an artist. It outlines your creative process, it gives context to your current activities/project, and it allows the reader to enter your unique world.
- ii. The artistic statement is always evolving. You will add to and subtract from it throughout your career in tandem with your growth as an artist.
- iii. Writing an artistic statement requires you to ask yourself some very straightforward yet profound questions such as:
  - a. How do you define yourself as a dance artist?
  - b. What is your take on the cultural, social and political world in which you live?
  - c. What excites you as a person, what are your passions, what drives you?
  - d. What do you question about the world around you?
  - e. What excites you as a viewer of dance and/or draws you to this form of artistic expression?
  - f. As a choreographer, what generally are you trying to say with your work? (What kinds of experiences do you want your audience to have?)
  - g. As a choreographer, what process do you use to say it? (Detail your process, outline the relationship you envision with your collaborators, discuss both form and content)
  - h. As a choreographer, who is your targeted audience?
  - i. As a choreographer, with which dance form do you most clearly align yourself creatively and where do you 'fit in' in the current dance ecology?
  - j. The list of questions goes on...find more
- iv. The artistic statement is an expression of your refined artistic viewpoint that is developed through your experiences over time. Emerging artists, like you, who are just beginning to understand their choices may find the writing of an artistic statement a daunting proposition, as your accumulated experiences so far are quite limited. This is no reason to put the process off until tomorrow. Start by asking yourselves the above questions and write the answers in a journal in point form. Refer to them often. Keep a running tab of your thoughts. Over time, patterns will begin to emerge and your unique point of view will surface. Enjoy: this is a creative endeavour and as a creative artist, it should be a natural extension of what you already do and who you already are

- v. Finally, I wish to grossly paraphrase Toronto fashion writer Cobi Ladner who writes about inspiration, taking risks and growing up:

“Our transition into the field is the next expression of our growing up. We leave our schools, where we did as we were told, were unable to create much from our own experience (since we had very little to work with) and sought safety in our sameness. Now, we must move on to experimenting and experiencing to finally become fuller versions of ourselves. While we accept and appreciate all different approaches to life, we must now begin to settle into the one that feels best to us. And we shouldn’t waste time – we’re not about to sit around waiting to come of age before doing what we want to do and trying what we want to try. Nothing is certain about the future, so we might as well throw caution to the wind and live the way we want to live it.”

**Your artistic statement is the result, in words, of you living your life.**

**7. Miscellaneous notes about writing:**

- i. Proofread all your material again and again and again. Read it out loud to a friend and/or have them read it. Ask them to respond to the logic of your arguments, the grammar you use and your spelling.
- ii. Keep materials current. It is amazing how quickly we accumulate experiences and sometimes we forget what we did last week. Write them down as they occur.
- iii. Use the active voice, not the passive. Build towards short, concise sentences.
- iv. Research.
- v. Keep records of all phone and live conversations with prospective funders and engagers. Date them. Print out important e-mails so that you don’t lose the paper trail.