



Guidelines for a A Detailed Project-Oriented Approach to Photography (Full Version) Portfolio Project 2025-2026

Please Note: This document has been created to provide some guidelines on to how to select a good photographic project topic, how to write an artist statement, and how to make your project look like a coherent piece of work. This is not a set of rigid rules that must be followed to be successful. Use them as guidelines and tips on how to proceed in this endeavor. Above all, enjoy the process, embrace the results, and have fun.

Selecting a Project Topic

In selecting a topic for your photographic project, consider the following categories as a good place to start: 1) a concept project, 2) a storytelling project, or 3) a project that focuses on form, lines, textures and color. There may be other categories, but these would be considered the major categories for project topics. In some cases your chosen topic may blur across a couple of the above topics.

- **A concept project**

A concept photographic project uses a collection of images to visually develop an idea. Some concept projects allow the photographer to create interpretations of the world and how they see things. It is not unusual for a project based on a concept to visually convey the opinions of the photographer. A concept project may also serve as a means for the photographer to reflect on a subject.

- **A storytelling project**

Photographic storytelling is usually sequential and sometimes is about suspense. There is generally a beginning, middle, and an end to the story in your photographic project. Photographic storytelling will involve characters, stages, goals and plots. Generally photographic storytelling is about addressing the mind and the heart of your viewer. The common characteristics of storytelling would include mood, idea, emotion, narration, and a message.

- **A project about forms, lines, and textures and color**

This type of photographic project will generally include abstract type images. The project will be focused on conveying a message to the viewer that is based on images that are created using one or more of the

elements of forms, lines, and textures or color. Your visual language becomes the designs in your images. You will want to explore the relationships between elements in the image. This type of photography has a degree of independence from visual references in the world.

What to avoid in choosing a project topic

Projects that focus on “things” or “nouns” should be avoided. A good example of this would be a project that just focuses on photographs of churches, or blue doors, or cranes. Instead, you might want to ask yourself what it is about the “thing” that intrigues you. The emotion or your response to that “thing” becomes the basis for your project. Once you write down that response you will most likely find that it falls in one of the above categories of project topics.

If you choose a topic that is based on a photographic technique, (a good example would be IR photography), you will want to make sure it still involves a “concept”, “storytelling”, or a project built around forms, lines, textures, and color. While some techniques are very interesting, a project needs to go beyond the technique used to capture the images in the collection.

Important considerations in selecting a project topic

- Can you easily return to the location of your photographs so that you can add more images or try different images from that location?
- Why is the theme relevant to you?
- How will the project define you as a photographer?
- Can you trace the roots of your theme or concept?
- What do you want the viewer to understand about you and your work when viewing the project?

Creating Visual Consistency in your Photographic Project

Visual Consistency can take several forms, and generally the strongest projects use multiple forms of consistency. This is what ties the images together as a project.

- Toning -- one of the most important, you should have a consistent color balance and quality throughout the set of work.
- Perspective -- try to photograph all your images using a similar perspective in the shots to create consistency.
- Size of the subject in the frame -- keep the subject approximately the same size in the frame throughout the project images.
- Subject matter – usually the easiest to achieve.

Creating an Artist Statement for your project

The act of writing about your work will often help you understand your process, clarify ideas, and reveal new insights.

What an artist statement IS

An artist statement is a concise arrangement of words that acts as a bridge to connect your audience to your art. You want to explain what you do, how you do it, and why you do it.

What an artist statement IS NOT

An artist statement is not art. It is not a full translation of a visual statement into a verbal statement. The writing does not need to encapsulate all of your creative striving and complexities. It does not need to be entirely original or brilliant and say everything you want to say to the world. It is not a resume or Curriculum Vita; it does not need to include where you went to school or what workshops you have attended or what awards you have won.

Prompts that will help with constructing your artist statement.

You're the artist and most of the time you are performing the action, so "I" will occur several times in your artist statement. If the repetition of "I," "me," and "my" is nagging at you, here's an easy fix: start some sentences with a clause before the "I." This breaks up the rhythm and disguises the repetition.

Prompts of clauses you can put at the beginnings of your sentences.

- Because of this belief, my work became
- Due to the accident, I knew....
- In time, my work expanded
- Without knowing how, I thought ...
- In all my work, I approach
- After experimenting, I found
- In the final stage, I added

Stick to the how, the what, and the why of your work.

Prompts: The How

- How did you physically engage in the creation?
- How are you uniquely presenting the subject?
- How did accidents or discoveries lead you to the finished work?
- How did you choose this subject?
- How did you decide on this direction?
- How has exploration brought you to this work?
- How would you like the viewer to approach the work?
- How would you describe the contrast or continuity in the individual images?

Prompts: The What

- What is the viewer looking at?
- What does it represent?
- What are you investigating?

- What was the initial inspiration and where did that lead?
- What could you say that might encourage a closer look?
- What are you communicating?
- What story does it tell?
- What did you learn while creating the image?
- What keeps you curious/dedicated/obsessed with this project?
- What was involved? Collaboration? Skills? Tools? Travel? Research? Technology? More than one attempt?

Prompts: The Why

Expressing what you understand about your photography.

Why did you make this?

To answer, you need to write about the beliefs, emotions, and ideas supporting your work. **This is the heart of the matter. Art viewers search for the Why in an artist statement.**

Your viewers and readers are curious about your intention. Intention is the same thing as what you understand about your photography. Your understanding leads to the audience's understanding, just as your confusion leads to their confusion. Why did you make this?

- What do you believe?
- What belief are you investigating?
- How does personal belief/viewpoint/conviction come through your photography?
- What emotion was primary while you made these images? How does emotion come through the work?
- What were you thinking about during the process?
- What inspired this direction?
- If the inspiration had no concrete logic, write about that.

Prompt: Fill-in-the-blanks

The following section of fill-in-the-blanks is designed to help you turn your thoughts into sentences. Use these fill-in exercises to start building cohesive ideas and sentences. Let this help to create your success in conquering the blank page, the blank screen, the big blank.

You can take the fill-in-the-blanks directly from this exercise and use them in your artist statement. That is, after you fill them in! No two photographers will complete these sentences in exactly the same way. Choose any or all. Try out different ideas. Keep your notes and examine all this process; it will help you arrive at what you truly want to say.

- **Fill-in-the-blank #1**

I do photography because it allows me to (action/expression).

Examples of #1

I do landscape photography because it allows me to experiment with style and composition.
I create photographic collages because it allows me to highlight contradictions.

- **Fill-in-the-blank #2**

I (verb) the viewer in order to (state your intention).

Examples of #2

I engage the viewer in order to tell them a story about the mystery in the familiar.

I agitate the viewer in order to break down walls between them and my subject matter, the homeless in America.

- **Fill-in-the blank #3**

I created (the work) to express my (belief/emotion/idea) concerning (the situation/inspiration).

Examples of #3

I created these images to express my frustration and anger concerning our city's disregard for homeless animals.

I created this series to express my fascination with abstracts and how forms evoke emotions.

- **More fill-in-the blanks**

I am drawn to the subject of _____ because _____

In the process of creating this work, _____

I want my viewer to _____

I discovered that my approach needed to be _____

I find inspiration _____

_____ is at the center of my photography.

I don't _____ Instead, I _____

My work is a combination of _____ and _____

To me, the most important thing is _____

I make connections between _____ and _____

To me, this represents _____

I was thinking about _____ and I created _____

Prompt: Useful phrases and words for an artist statement

An integral part of

The foundation of

I value

My process

In the spirit of

I am intrigued by

Provide clues

Ask questions about
 My technique developed
 My observation of
 What interests me about
 My vision
 Making connections between
 Reference my experience of
 Bring focus to
 The question I ask myself
 Rooted in
 I attempted to make things look as if

When writing your artist statement don't let these things happen to you.

- Poor writing quality. (Get help)
- Writing way too much.
- Using overblown phrases.
- Using incomprehensible language.
- Using grandiose generalities that say nothing.
- Making evaluative comments about the work.
- Focusing on the photographer's psyche, to the exclusion of the photographs.
- Focusing on technical aspects, to the exclusion of anything personal.
- Telling the viewer how you, the photographer, want your work to be viewed.
- Stating the obvious about the work, with no additional illumination.
- Trying to convince the viewer of something which is not evident in the work.

Prompt: Words for an artist statement

Articulate	Allows	Absolute	Amplify
Absurd	Animates	Accelerate	Appears
Activate	Arrange	Adapt	Articulate
Adaptation	Assemble	Adhere	Atmosphere
Advance	Balance	Aesthetic	Belong
Affords	Bewildering	Aggressive	Blend
Alerts	Capture	Catalyze	Challenge
Circular	Common	Crystallize	Complementary
Composition	Conception	Coincide	Consciousness
Consider	Constrict	Construct	Contains
Contemplate	Contorted	Contradict	Contrary
Delicate	Demands	Demarcation	Depth
Devise	Dimension	Direction	Directs
Discover	Discovery	Disparate	Dissolves
Distinct	Dramatic	Dynamic	Edges
Embrace	Emerges	Exaggerate	Endeavor

Converge	Crude	Cultivate	Declare
Define	Defies	Degree	Energy
Engage	Enlarge	Evoke	Examine
Execute	Experiment	Externalizing	Extravagant
Exude	Flinging	Force	Formal
Formidable	Formula	Fracture	Fragmented
Freedom	Fundamental	Gestural	Grasp
Happenstance	Harmonious	Hue	Identity
Illusion	Image	Intentional	Interface
Introspective	Invent	Investigate	Juxtapose
Kinesthetic	Knowable	Layer	Level
Line	Linear	Literal	Loose
Magnify	Markers	Materialize	Mechanism
Merges	Message	Minimize	Important
Improbable	Improvisational	In-depth	Insight
Instinct	Modified	Movement	Multi-directional
Mythology	Non-objective	Objective	Notably
Novel	Nuance	Objective	Oblique
Odd	Organic	Outright	Overlap
Paced	Painterly	Pairing	Palette
Particular	Pattern	Perpetuate	Perspective
Pervasive	Pictorial	Prevalent	Problem
Question	Random	Redefine	Reduce
Render	Regarded	Reinforce	Relationship
Requires	Research	Resolve	Resonate
Rest	Reveal	Reverses	Rewarding
Rich	Schematic	Sensation	Senses
Shades	Shadows	Shapes	Shift
Shock	Significance	Signifies	Similar
Simplify	Singular	Spins	Stabilizes
Strength	Strike	Strikingly	Subliminal
Subsequent	Substance	Subtle	Supple
Surprising	Synthetic	Tension	Tight
Traces	Traditional	Transcends	Transform
Transmit	Transpose	Underlying	Uniformly
Unintentional	Unsettle	Velocity	Veracity
Vulnerable	Wielding	Yielding	

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