

PROJECT PROPOSALS

Digital Imaging
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WHAT IS A PROPOSAL?

Your project proposal is intended to get you thinking about your semester projects right away and to help you clarify your ideas as you begin working. The proposal needs to be two typed and concisely worded paragraphs. Efficiency of language is important because it will help you more narrowly define what your project is about. Keep in mind that you are not bound by this proposal. I fully expect your ideas to evolve as the course moves along but try to be as specific as you can with your ideas.

The difference between a project PROPOSAL and a project STATEMENT can be subtle but it is important to be aware of. Your proposal tells me what you are GOING to do and how. Your artist's statement is intended to accompany work that is already completed or in progress.

WHY IS WRITING A PROPOSAL IMPORTANT?

For this class it is important because it gives you a starting point and a projected plan for your project. It also gives me an idea of what you are interested in doing this semester.

Beyond that, writing proposals is an integral part of an artist's professional life. In order to get funding for projects or win major awards, it is important that artists are able to write clear and coherent proposals to the boards of these organizations. It is certainly required for major grants like the Creative Capital Grant (up to \$40,000) and the Guggenheim Award. As students, you can take advantage of your proposal writing skills by applying for a Weisman Award (up to \$4,000). I encourage everyone to apply for this at least once before you graduate.

PROPOSAL CONTENTS

PARAGRAPH ONE

This is the conceptual part of the proposal. There should be a brief project statement indicating what idea or ideas you are planning to explore with your project. Explain why you think these ideas are important and any influences or inspiration you can cite for your concept. Don't forget to state how you plan to express your idea. What subject matter will you choose? How will your approach to photographing this subject matter get your idea across? How will post-production techniques or effects (if any) help express your idea?

PARAGRAPH TWO

This is the logistical part of the proposal. Describe how you will approach the project. Will you go out and photograph on the street or will you be in the studio? Will you appropriate imagery from other sources or will you use your own images exclusively? Will you be using a specific camera like a view camera, etc.? Will there be models or other people involved in your project? What is your strategy for getting this project done and making it successful? Will you be able to make significant progress on this project in one semester? Are there potential pitfalls that could get you in trouble later in the semester? For instance, if you've been given special access somewhere, is it possible that it will get taken away before you complete your project? Try to think ahead to avoid difficult situations at the end of the semester.

HOW DO I ADDRESS THE CONCEPTUAL ASPECT OF MY PROJECT?

This question is the source of a great deal of confusion and contention among art students. The word “conceptual” often intimidates people, especially students who are interested in commercial, fashion, or journalistic work. Many of these students have also run into instructors who don’t know how to address these genres of photography and have made them feel less important than the “fine art” students. All photographs are conceptual, but the motivations change slightly depending on the intended venue. Always ask yourself where this work will be viewed and what role it serves.

FINE ART

The contemporary discourse of fine art assumes that your artwork has a message, a meaning, or is a critical investigation of an issue or idea. The venue for this type of work is usually galleries, museums or books. In this case, the idea is the personal choice of the artist. What ideas or issues are you interested in, not just as an artist, but as a person? What would you like to learn more about through your artistic investigation of a subject? It is assumed that the artwork presented in this genre is the personal expression of the artist and no one else.

JOURNALISM/DOCUMENTARY

These really are different terms but they often get lumped together. Since the 1970s, documentary photography has been included in fine art venues like galleries, museums and books. Journalism is usually found in media outlets in print and online. The notion that a photographer or a photograph can be objective has been largely dispelled by thirty years of Postmodernism. We now accept that there is always a bias or an angle. Start by identifying your subject, who/what they are, why they are important, and the broader issues represented by them. How will your photographic strategies present your subject in the way you want them to be seen? Why is it important for the viewer to be aware of your subject?

COMMERCIAL/FASHION

This genre of photography is associated with the promotion of a product or brand. Marketing and advertising agencies have become extremely sophisticated in their strategies. What is being promoted is an idea about a brand more than a product or service itself. In this case, the ideas being expressed are not those of the artist but of the client. For this class, create an assignment for yourself where you are playing the role of photographer, marketer and art director. Your series of images can be considered a full advertising campaign or an extended spread in a fashion magazine. Think about where each image can/will appear in the campaign. What image does this brand (or designer) want to project to the public? Who is the target audience? How does the client want the public to feel about their brand?

These aren’t the only genres in the photographic arts, but they are the ones that are best suited for extended projects appropriate for a semester’s worth of work.