



Widening Participation

*Writing your
Portfolio Statement*

What is the Portfolio Statement?

- *The Portfolio Statement is your opportunity to explain in more depth how you are suited to the specific course you are applying to, and to give context to the work you have submitted.
- *It is uploaded along with your Digital Portfolio to the GSA Upload Site.
- *Admissions staff assess your UCAS Statement, Digital Portfolio, and Portfolio Statement together. For this reason, your Portfolio Statement should not be the same as your UCAS Personal Statement.
- *The Portfolio Statement must be no more than 500 words otherwise it will not upload.

Top Tip



Write your Portfolio Statement using a word document so that you can easily copy and paste it onto the GSA Upload Site when submitting your application.



Fine Art applications



* Each course has its own set of guidelines for making an application [HERE](#).

Painting & Printmaking, Fine Art Photography and Sculpture & Environmental Art are looking for the following in the Portfolio Statement:

- *“Your Portfolio Statement should be a clear and coherent reflection on why you have chosen to apply for a particular programme.”*
- *“It should demonstrate that you have researched and understand the specifics of the programme you are applying to and why you think you would be a suitable candidate for it.”*
- *“It could also include particular areas of interest within your practice and key influences e.g. artists/writers etc. who have informed your thinking and ideas.”*

Architecture applications

* Architecture at GSA has its own set of guidelines for making an application [HERE](#).

Architecture are looking for the following in the Portfolio Statement:

- *“We are interested to know about you and your interests in Architecture and why you would like to study with us and as such will assess your application and in particular your statement of intent on the following criteria:*
- **“Your motivation:** *We are interested to know why you want to study architecture We also want to know what or who has motivated or inspired you to apply the study architecture at university.”*
- **“Your knowledge of the discipline:** *We don’t expect you to have carried out any architectural design but we would like you to expand on your interest in the subject and for you to demonstrate your creative thinking and spatial awareness.”*
- **“Evidence of extra-curricular activity:** *We want to know if you have managed to do any work experience with an architect or if you have done any evening or weekend classes relating to architecture or been to visit any particular buildings, exhibitions or read any books that have inspired you.”*

Design applications

* Each course has its own set of guidelines for making an application [HERE](#).

Design Courses* are looking for the following in the Portfolio Statement:

- *“The ability to demonstrate an interest in Design & the Specialist area applied for.”*
- *“We are very interested in finding out more about your interest in Design; historical or contemporary artists/designers that you are looking at or are inspired by or exhibitions you have visited.”*
- *“We want to know what or who has motivated or inspired you to apply for the specialist programme”*
- *“You should include your reasons for applying to Glasgow School of Art and information on what you hope to gain by studying the programme.”*
- *“Ability to communicate about your work & to put it into context.”*
- *“Please do not use this statement to list the materials used; charcoal, paint, oil pastel etc or the size of the work.”*

* Communication Design, Fashion Design, Interior Design, Interaction Design, Textile Design, Silversmithing & Jewellery Design.

Writing prompts for all applications



Your statement can only be 500 words so choose which points you most want to talk about. We recommend that you definitely address the ones with an * within your statement. These points are relevant to all course applications.

- 1. Your enthusiasm for the subject area (e.g. Painting, Fashion, Jewellery etc.)**
- * 2. Your awareness of what the specific programme applied for entails.**
- 3. Why you want to study this programme.**
- * 4. What makes you a good fit for the programme.**
- 5. Evidence of your commitment through participation in relevant extra-curricular learning.**
- 6. The ideas behind your work and what/who inspired you.**
- * 7. The story of a specific project you included in your digital portfolio. What your starting point was, how it developed, which elements you consider to be most successful and how you would develop it further if you had more time.**
- * 8. Which historical and contemporary artists/designers/architects have informed your work and in what way. This can include exhibitions you have visited that have inspired you.**
- 9. If you have undertaken any relevant work experience.**
- 10. What you hope to gain from studying the programme.**

Demonstrating enthusiasm

1

→ *Your enthusiasm for the subject area (e.g. Painting, Fashion, Jewellery etc.)*

*You want to **demonstrate** your enthusiasm. Rather than saying *'I love to paint'*, you should do your best to **show evidence** of this. There are a lot of ways you can show your enthusiasm for the subject area, for example:

- Detailing how often you practice a relevant skill. Try working out how much of the week you dedicate to your chosen subject, e.g. *"6 periods of art a week at school, a 3 hour portfolio class and 1 hour of drawing 4 nights a week..."* this adds up to 12 hours a week.
- Showing an engagement with what is happening in the subject area now, for example an opinion about the most recent Turner Prize winner or feelings on a recent fashion line by your favourite designer.
- If the history of art or any particular time period is something that you genuinely find interesting and relevant to your work then mention it but don't spend too much time talking about it. Remember you only have 500 words and you are applying to a degree in contemporary art/design/architecture!
- Think about how you personally engage in the subject area, maybe discuss the relevance of the subject area in your everyday life:

“*I've been reading about the Vertical Forest project by Boeri Architects in Milan and think that Glasgow should really look into this approach of utilising highrises in such a great way, instead of just knocking them all down.*”

Awareness of programme

*2

→ Your awareness of what the specific programme applied for entails.

- * This is where you really need to show that you have read about the course and have a clear understanding of what is involved.
- * Applicants should be able to demonstrate that they know the course structure and if relevant, the specialisms within it. Each course has a Programme Specification that you can look at [HERE](#) for an in-depth outline of the whole degree.



- * You need to be able to describe what it is about this course at GSA that appeals to you. Address this point by answering what specifically it is about the course offered by GSA that makes you want to study it. For example:

“Product Design at GSA appeals to me the most due to the opportunity to take part in live projects and the integral part Social Sciences have in the course.”

“I like the idea of exploring illustration, graphic design and photography in first and second year before getting to choose a specialism in the third year of Communication Design at GSA.”

Why you want to study this

3

→ Why you want to study this programme.

* It might be helpful for you to write a list of reasons why you want to study your course. Some might include:

- You've seen work by graduates and want to produce work of that quality.
- The pathway to practicing professionally that this course provides.
- The facilities and technical workshops, and skills you will learn.
- Recommendation from someone already studying the course. (Explain how you know them, a family member? A student from the open day?)
- To experience the studio learning environment.
- The fact that courses encourage independent learning and gives you freedom.

* These are just a few examples, we would encourage you to think hard about your own *personal* reasons for wanting to apply.

Why you'd be a good fit

*4

→ What makes you a good fit for the programme.

*Talk about your skills and aptitudes that are relevant to the course.

For example:

Product Design → *“I am an ideas person, I really enjoy problem solving and I am always thinking about ways I could improve the experience of...”*

Sculpture & Environmental Art → *“I want to bring contemporary art to a wider audience by taking it out of the gallery and into community spaces.”*

*Try to articulate other key skills you have that are relevant and show good studentship, for example:

- Capable of working independently/being self motivated.
- Enjoying discussing art/design with others.
- Good attendance and time keeping, especially with deadlines.
- Having a commitment to your practice and developing your skills.
- Willingness to learn and take feedback.

Evidence of commitment

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→ Evidence of your commitment through participation in relevant extra-curricular learning.

* If this applies to you, say where this took place, how long you participated for, what you learned. For example:

“I attended a 3 hour portfolio class every Sunday for 10 weeks with GSA WP. I learned how to use new materials and took part in a class crit. This experience taught me how to work on a self-directed brief and how to give and receive critical feedback in a studio environment.”

* What do you do in your own time, outside of all prescribed course work which proves what you are committed to improving your creative skills?

- Do you carry a sketchbook with you at all times?
- Are you part of a local photography club?
- Do you spend time drawing every evening?
- Have you taught yourself any creative skills?

Ideas and concepts behind your work

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→ The ideas/concepts behind your work and what/who inspired you.

* Explain the theme or brief of a particular project, and which artists or designers you researched. Try to avoid saying things like, 'My teacher told me to...' or 'I had to design a garment for school...' instead, start with what your theme is and why you chose it,

"I chose to explore garden plants as a theme for my garment as I am a really interested in horticulture and wanted to observe my own plants directly, to draw and document them as they grow and change. I thought the leaf shapes could inspire the form of the garment."

* Maybe you have been looking at the work of a particular artist,

"I've been looking a lot at the work of Jean-Michel Basquiat and have been inspired by the expressive, gestural nature of his work. He made work about topics that were important and personal to him and I have been trying to do the same."

* Another way to address this point, is to talk about your personal inspirations for making work, and applying to art school. For example, if you were inspired by a friend or family member then say this.

Telling the story of a project



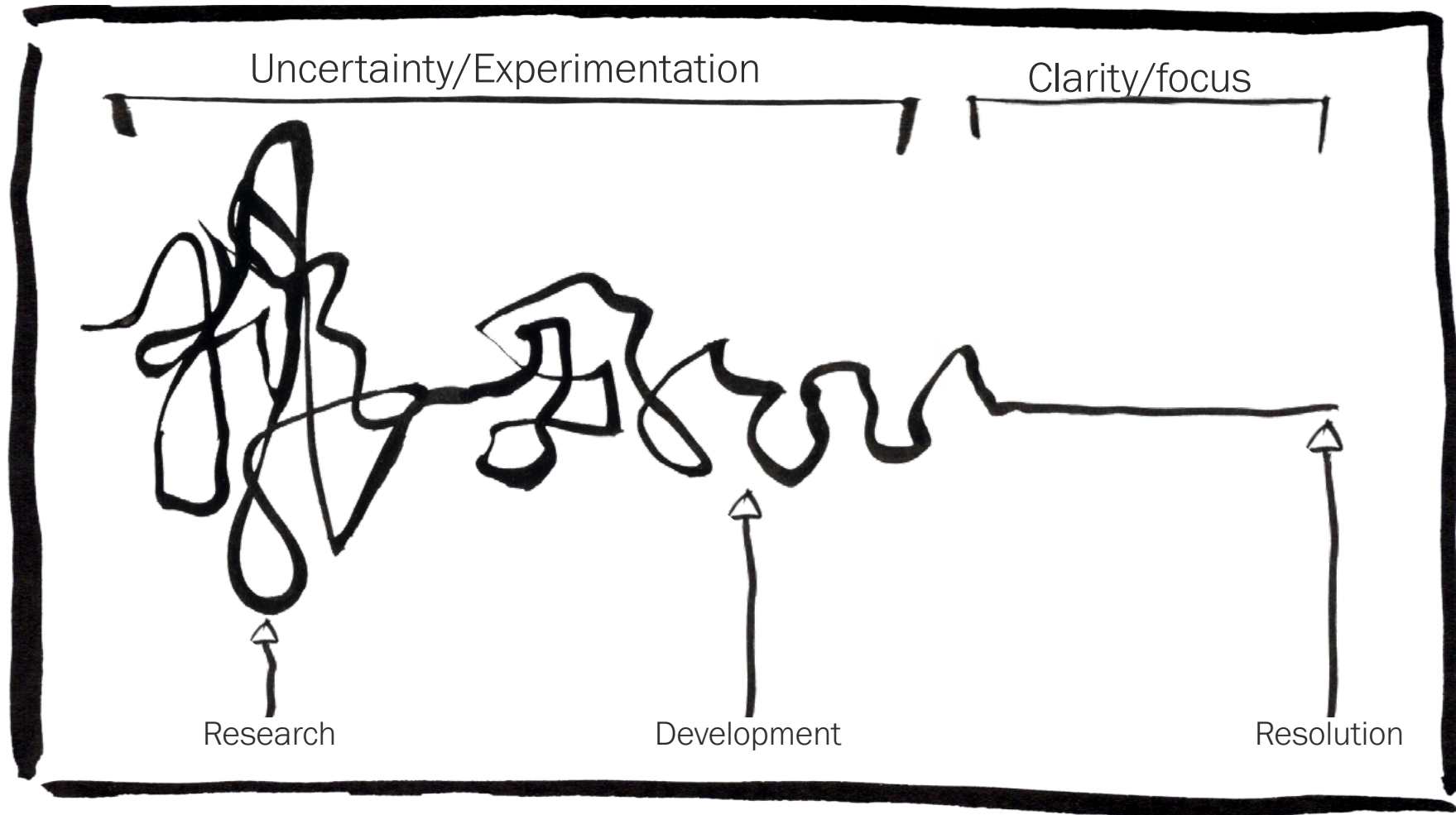
→ The story of a specific project. What your starting point was, how it developed, which elements you consider to be most successful and how you would develop it further if you had more time.

*You want to explain the steps you took during a specific project, and walk someone else through them. For example,



“The first five slides show my ‘Home Project’, I started by doing observational sketches and taking photos of where I live. I developed this by combining the photos and drawings into collages. I focussed on elements of the collages that I thought were most successful to inform my colour palette and create a repeat pattern. I would like to develop this by creating printed textiles and see how they fit into the original environment.”

~> *The Creative Process*



* When telling the story of your work you are really describing the 'Creative Process'. This is the journey you go through when making work, and is the part that admissions staff want to hear about.

Your Creative Process



*Everyone has a different creative process and it is important for you to reflect on your own and see the value in all the ‘mistakes’ you might have made along the way to making a final piece. Often, it is these ‘mistakes’ that are vital parts of the creative process and lead you in the right direction.
For example,

“I started to develop my drawings into pieces of embroidery, but then realised that this was not the right medium as I wanted to be more gestural so I switched to charcoal and this worked a lot better. I’m glad I tried the embroidery though, as the painstakingly slow progress gave me time to think about what I wanted to achieve.”

Relevant Work Experience



→ If you have undertaken any relevant work experience.

* This is especially relevant for architecture students, as it is specifically stated in the GSA Architecture guidelines that:

“We want to know if you have managed to do any work experience with an architect or if you have done any evening or weekend classes relating to architecture or been to visit any particular buildings, exhibitions or read any books that have inspired you.”

* If you have, use part of your portfolio statement to explain where, how long for, and what you gained from this experience.

* Other relevant experiences such as helping at a fashion show or volunteering at an art gallery may be worth mentioning if you feel this was influential.

What has informed your work



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→ Which historical and contemporary artists/designers/architects have informed your work and in what way. This can include exhibitions you have visited that have inspired you.

* It is important that as an applicant to Art School you are spending time learning about artists/designers in your own time. You want to find artists and designers who really inspire you or who you feel an affinity with. Read about the artists life as well as about their work. Research can take a wide number of forms:

- Looking at online magazines, galleries, articles and websites.*
- Watching documentaries.
- Listening to podcasts.
- Reading books.

* Try to create yourself a bank of artists/designers that you know about, including specific pieces of work they have made. You might want to collect this research in a sketchbook so you can refer back to it.

* If it is possible for you to go and see a gallery show then this is a good thing to do, but if you can't then don't worry, maybe try and research online instead.

*See page 20 for a list of websites you can use to do some research.

What you hope to gain

→ What you hope to gain from studying the programme?

* It goes without saying that you hope to gain a degree, this prompt is really asking about what other parts of studying the course you want to benefit from. For example some of these might include:

- The skills to be industry ready.
- To meet other creative people and collaborate/learn from them.
- The chance to work on live projects.
- The opportunity to study for a term at another university via the exchange/study abroad programme.
- Feedback from tutors, technicians and other students.

* These are just some examples, you will have your own reasons and the more personal your statement is the better.

↪ Be mindful that you could be asked about anything written in your statement during an interview, so only write what you are happy to talk about in person.



Mirroring language



Mirroring the language used on the course guidelines or descriptions can be a good way to show you have researched about the course: ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

*From the GSA Fashion Design webpage:

“The programme promotes a culture that recognizes teamwork and interdisciplinary peer learning as well as independence as essential elements in the effective practice of Fashion Design.”

How this could be responded to:

“One of the reasons I am so keen to study Fashion Design is because I know it will give me the chance to develop my collaborative and independent working and making skills, with other Fashion Design students and also students from other discipline areas.”

*From the GSA Sculpture and Environmental Art webpage:

“The core objectives of the Programme are to develop the practical and philosophical understanding of the subject of sculpture; to develop practical skills and the ability to mediate ideas through materials and process; and to develop the ability and confidence to critique and communicate about sculpture, both historical and contemporary.”

How this could be responded to:

“Studying Sculpture & Environmental Art will give me the opportunity to strengthen my practical abilities through using different materials and processes but also the chance to develop how I communicate my ideas and opinions on both historical and contemporary sculpture.”



Online Research Resources



Fine Art Resources

[Frieze](#)

[WhiteHot Magazine](#)

[Tate](#)

[Juxtapose](#)

[It's Nice That](#)

[Elephant](#)

[Wallpaper](#)

[Architectural Digest](#)

[Arch Daily](#)

[Architectural Review](#)

Design Resources

[Eye Magazine](#)

[AnOther Magazine](#)


[Creative Review](#)

[Design Week](#)

[Dezeen](#)

[Living Etc](#)

Architecture Resources



Good Luck!