

Cultural Enterprise Factsheet

Basic Tips on Documenting Your Work

Introduction

It is essential for all practitioners to have high-quality images that provide an insight into their work and practice for marketing activities, exhibitions, proposals, funding and grant applications. It can be expensive to produce good images, but it is worth the cost, as it could mean the difference between being accepted or rejected for a commission.

Reasons for documenting work

Documentation is important for your personal records as well as informing others about your practice. For example, regular documentation is useful for creating an archive or website, or for researching a retrospective exhibition or your work.

For marketing purposes, material can be selected to target different audiences / markets and prepare customised portfolios. If you are applying for a commission to make new work, examples of past work will help support an application by establishing a track-record and enabling commissioners to envision the end product.

Finally, by lodging details of publications, music, or images with collecting organisations such as PRS (www.prs.co.uk) or DACS (www.dacs.org.uk), royalties and copyright fees will be collected on your behalf. If you do not lodge that information, you stand to lose income.

Methods of recording your work

There are no definitive rules on how to document and store work, so it is easy to develop a personalised system that reflects how the documentation will be used. There are, however, some general rules that will help to develop an effective system:

- It is always easier to document work as it is created
- Develop a system that makes records easy to locate
- Label all records correctly (details below)
- Keep a record of any work sent to a gallery, studio, competition, etc, the date it was sent, and who it was addressed to
- Keep all correspondences from music labels, publishers, galleries, etc
- Collect quotes about you and your work and gain permission to use them for marketing purposes. Also keep copies of any articles, reviews, and interviews.

Images

A range of images that reflect your entire practice can be used to produce a portfolio and for other marketing / funding opportunities. For example, an industry magazine might want a detailed picture of the product whereas a local newspaper will usually prefer an image of people interacting with a product.

Many creative practitioners choose to hire a professional photographer to document their work, to guarantee it is captured in the best light. Always ask to see samples of a photographer's work and ensure they have a clear idea about how your work should be represented, particularly if the work involves a live event or intervention. Make sure you are given a detailed estimate that includes all costs.

Be specific about which film formats to use. Until recently 35mm transparencies were the most useful, although they are now being superseded by high-resolution digital images. Think about the presentation of images - will you need prints and/or a CD? Do you need images to be in black and white, colour, or both? What kind of files do you need?

Finally, make sure that you and the photographer are in agreement over how images will be used and clarify any copyright issues at the outset - photographic copyright remains with the photographer unless otherwise agreed (preferably in writing).

Image Format

It is useful to have images available on a variety of formats as exhibition organisers, grant-making bodies, curators, galleries and the press often request specific types of images. Common formats are digital images (TIFFs or high-resolution JPEGs), CDs/DVDs, prints and 35mm slides.

- Digital images are now commonplace and provide a much cheaper way of presenting work (although it is still advisable to hire a professional photographer). Common file types are JPEGs or TIFFs. It is also useful to have the facilities to burn images onto CDs or DVDs, which may require buying a separate drive for your computer.

For print purposes, images need to be high resolution (usually about 300dpi and using the CMYK colour format); it is useful to remember that when printed, images are roughly a quarter of the size they appear to be on a computer screen.

Emailing images can be frustrating, especially if either party is using a dial-up or slow connection, so it is also useful to have a lower-quality image (at 72dpi – screen resolution) that will enable someone to see your work quickly.

- Prints are useful for including in portfolios (although these can also be presented on CDs / DVDs) and are still preferred by some galleries and funders. They are also useful to keep in case a recipient has problems opening electronic files, and as a back-up to electronic files. Black and white images may still be useful for some printed magazines, journals, etc.

- Colour postcards can be used as promotional material in galleries, art and craft fairs and also to give to prospective clients, sponsors or promoters.

- Slides are now the most expensive way of documenting work and tend to be used less than in previous years. They are, however, still accepted by most galleries and can be useful if planning a presentation with a slide projector (although many are now done using Power Point or a similar presentation programme). If sending slides, it is useful to type a checklist - send one copy and keep another as slides can easily go astray. Send slides and other material by post in a padded or stiffened envelope.

- Film and video can be useful to document performances, participatory projects and installations. The documentation of a live event can be shown as a piece of work in its own right at exhibitions or other events. Again, the cost of video documentation is becoming cheaper, but it is advisable to hire a professional to record the event.

Musicians

Keep copies of CDs, DVDs, videos, and a record of composition dates, performances, recordings, and gigs. Information about the duration of recordings, songwriters, performers, studio, producers, CD label designers etc, must also be kept. This information is required when registering with organisations such as PRS (www.prs.co.uk) & MCPS (www.mcps-prs-alliance.co.uk) so they can collect license fees and copyright fees on your behalf.

Writers

Keep copies of both published and unpublished work that you may be able to place it with a publisher at a later date.

With published work, keep records of the ISBN number (the unique number which can identify every book) ISSN number (periodicals), other contributors, (e.g. co-author, illustrator, editor, translator), publisher, date of publication, date of reprint. This information can be lodged with ALCS (www.alcs.co.uk) and other similar bodies in order to collect royalties & funds on your behalf.

Labelling

It is advisable to label all images, CDs, and other material correctly as it will enable you to keep good records and find documentation quickly at a later date. Note the title, description / event, material, technique, dimensions and photo

credit. It is also a good idea to assert your copyright on all images in the following format: © Your Name Year (e.g. © John Smith 2006).

Writing a CV

This is usually requested if you are applying for work of any kind. A CV should be around two sides of A4 and must be kept up-to-date. CVs should also be adapted to suit the organisation to which you are applying. They are usually organised under various headings such as:

- Your name and contact details
- Relevant educational qualifications
- Work experience in chronological order (starting with the most recent)
- Solo shows, group shows, collaborations, performances, recordings, published work, etc
- TV, Radio and media coverage
- Collections in which your work is held
- Residencies
- Teaching experience
- Awards
- Bibliography (articles & books referring to you and your work)
- Additional skills
- Organisations of which you are a member

Writing a statement

It is usual to be asked for a statement about your work that can be used in press releases, on websites, in exhibition catalogues, etc. It is worth preparing a few basic statements in advance which can be adapted to suit different uses. Useful paragraphs to prepare could include:

- Information about your background and a description of your work.
- The subject matter and inspiration for your work.
- Information about commissions, residencies, clients, major awards, exhibitions, etc.
- For a Press Release, it is useful to have quotes from clients, galleries etc. These should be written in the third person and put in quotation marks.

Documenting Events - Data Protection

If you are running a workshop or event and wish to photograph or film participants, you must ensure that you conform to the 1998 Data Protection Act. This requires that permission is granted from all people who will appear in the photograph before the images are taken, (this does not apply to crowd or audience shots). For children below the age of 12 and venerable people, you will need parental/guardian consent and be able to specify how long images will be retained for.

Some venues may request that signs are displayed informing attendees that they may appear in photographs. It is good practice to avoid using personal details or

the full names of anyone in the photograph. Consent forms should be held together with copies of photographs.

If the photograph is being taken in a public place (e.g. car park) and you can answer positively to the following questions, it should be reasonable to take photographs:

- Will people attending the event expect photographs to be taken?
- Will the people in the photographs probably consider themselves to be in a public place, with no expectation of privacy?
- Do you think that anyone will object to their photograph being taken?

Final Tips

- Use a filing system that is easy to operate and will allow you to locate records quickly
- Document work as it is created rather than having to remember information at a later date
- Document work in a variety of ways
- Keep a list of buyers/clients/people who have shown interest in your work, as well as a record of reviews, interviews and quotes for marketing purposes
- Keep CVs and Statements up-to-date

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