

University of New Mexico
Department of Art & Art History

Letter of Intent and Portfolio Guidelines for Application to the MFA in Studio Art

The letter of intent and the portfolio are complementary; each completes the other. Both need to be strong for an application to be successful. We want to see coherence and excellence in both the art and the letter, and a solid connection between the two.

The letter can also complement the portfolio by filling in information. For instance, if your portfolio is all recent painting, but you also sculpt, you can discuss your sculpture and its relation to your painting, or how one grew out of the other, in the letter.

We highly recommend having a faculty mentor at your current school review your letter and portfolio, and acting on their informed feedback.

Letter of Intent

Your letter of intent should not be less than one page, and not more than three pages. Your name, address, phone number, and email address *must* be at the top of the first page. In the first paragraph or the title, indicate what area you are applying to (Painting & Drawing, Photography, Printmaking, Electronic Arts, Sculpture, Art & Ecology, or Ceramics).

The letter should demonstrate focus and direction. You should demonstrate a sense of what you want from the MFA program, and what you're prepared to put into it. It should be both articulate and conceptual, and discuss the conceptual framework of your art, the ideas that tie the body of work represented in the portfolio together. Also focus on where you are going, what drives you. Our faculty are interested in students who are interested in learning, hungry to know as much as possible, who work hard at what they've done in undergraduate and on their own, who are deeply involved in what they're doing in their art. What ideas motivate and drive your artwork; what concepts are you working with?

Express what you know about your discipline—and be aware that you are talking to intelligent and articulate people who are engaged in the field. Speak to your own strengths without an arrogant or condescending attitude. Write as you do to the professors you most respect—because that's who's going to review your letter. It's a very good idea to have a current or former faculty mentor review your letter of intent before you submit it.

Avoid name-dropping unless you are discussing why you want to study with a particular professor, or discussing a particular influence on your work. The sentence that follows the name and provides context for it is of more interest than the name being dropped.

The relationship between what you write and what you show in your portfolio will show how you place yourself in the art world. We expect our students to have a strong background both in studio techniques, and what is going on and has gone on in the art world; hence the admissions requirement for 18 hours of art history coursework.

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What are we looking for in a portfolio?

Technical considerations: The portfolio consists of 15-20 images of your best recent work.

Images should be submitted as a single, high-resolution (compressed) PDF document, uploaded during the application process. If you are including video, please upload each of your videos to vimeo, and include the links in your application. Links to websites may be included but please include a PDF portfolio if at all possible.

Artistic considerations: We are looking for a high level technical expertise, suitable for graduate work, combined with focus and direction. Additionally, the quality of your images themselves should be high: good lighting, color balance, neutral background.

You should present a body of work that goes beyond undergraduate assignments—work that comes from yourself, and that stands out from the crowd. It is most important in the portfolio to show your *best* work. Not necessarily one sample from each medium worked in or body of work you've completed, but the very strongest pieces of all that you've done. We're looking for a consistently high level of excellence. The work that is accepted is likely to be a relatively consistent body of work that sustains itself over 15 images, and is consistently excellent in skill and content, especially in self-motivated work. You should choose work that shows how you distinguish yourself from your peers.