

How to stage a student exhibition



Educator Guide

Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design

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Topics in this guide

- **Finding an exhibition space**
- **Developing a narrative**
- **Hosting an opening event**
- **Selling work**

How to use this guide

This guide will assist educators in providing their students with experiences of professional visual art practice by staging an exhibition of aspiring artists' work.

The recommendations provided in this guide come from the Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design.

Further information is provided via a link when text is **in bold**.

While this guide has been designed for secondary school educators, students, curriculum and syllabus, the information can be applied to all levels of school education.

Use it while preparing a unit of learning and refer to it for specific ideas when lesson planning.

About the Code of Practice

NAVA's Code of Practice for Visual Arts, Craft and Design (**the Code**) sets out equitable, ethical and self-reflective standards for the professional Australian contemporary arts sector.

The Code covers good practice guidelines for the interactions between artists, arts workers and organisations that work with them (like galleries, arts centres and schools).

Learning with the Code

Learning about the Code means students can be artists with future careers that are successful and sustainable, and arts workers that ensure artists are treated equitably, acknowledged correctly and paid fairly.

The Code can be used as a starting point to explore all aspects of what it means to be a contemporary visual artist, craftsperson, designer or arts worker in Australia.

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What is an exhibition?

Exhibitions are opportunities for artists to test or challenge ideas, tell stories about their experiences, histories and cultures, and reach new audiences. Many successful exhibitions show work that has required the artists to revise ideas and approaches, problem solve, and think critically and creatively.

The Code says...

'Art, craft and design works are exhibited through different arrangements in a variety of not-for-profit, non-commercial spaces, known as public galleries. There are currently over 400 public galleries across urban, regional and remote Australia...

Artwork may be shown as part of solo or group exhibitions, collaborations, festivals/events and more. It may aim to engage in creative and critical discourse, to award a prize or to engage the public, including local communities and visitors. The spaces that host exhibitions are not always physical, with online exhibitions becoming increasingly popular for presenting works to the public...

Exhibiting is an important aspect of the relationship between artists, the visual arts, craft and design sector, and the broader public.'

'Exhibiting' in Code of Practice, 2022

Why exhibit student artist's work?

Visual arts sector professionals contribute to shaping Australia's culture and economy. With real-world experiences of professional practice, students are able to more readily excel in curriculum or syllabus activities and assessments. Knowing their work will be publicly displayed with an audience can motivate student artists to extend their practice, depth of exploration and quality of work.

Exhibitions also bring the school community together, foster school-pride and show students, school leaders and families that 'artist' and 'arts worker' are attainable and practical career choices.

Remember, an exhibition doesn't have to wait until the end of year. Showcase student's works of art all year round.

Tip | Take inspiration from exhibitions at ARIs.

Functioning on a small budget, ARIs are usually volunteer-run by professional artists and arts workers testing new ideas.

Find your local ARIs

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Finding an exhibition space

There are three options to consider when choosing a space to hold a student exhibition.

1. Use a space in school

Think creatively about spaces that can host student artwork.

An exhibition staged at school doesn't need to be student work displayed on a pin up board. It could take place on a lawn or in a garden, in the school library, on the back of doors, hanging from the ceiling or projected onto walls or buildings.

Exhibiting on school grounds reduces the physical transportation of works of art, eliminates the need for travel and permission slips with students and supporting adults already on site, and allows the school's community to more easily engage with the work. However, it is important to consider when and how the exhibition will be open to the public, and if the space allows for public programs to be offered.

Tip | 'Hire' your students.

'Arts worker' is a legitimate job. Appoint a project manager, curator, public programmer, designer, writer, install team and marketer. You will be giving your students experience with industry skills by having them stage the exhibition.

2. Find a space elsewhere

Free options for exhibition space exist, and require negotiation for the waiving of fees and commission (if selling work). A great place to start are local government galleries, libraries, visitor information centres, council chambers and outdoor spaces. You could also approach your local cafe, shopping centre or another type of business from the parent/guardian community. When exhibiting in an external venue you will also need to consider opening events, insurance, installation and agreements.

3. Create an online exhibition

An online exhibition is a great way to reach wider audiences – it can be open all hours and can reduce costs and the physical workload of transportation, installation and pack up. An online exhibition can be hosted on your school's website or on a free website made using a free builder like WordPress. Alternatively, a virtual exhibition can be created using **Google Slides** or by using a platform like KUNSTMATRIX, ArtPlacer or Artsteps. You will need good quality images of each artwork and can find tips in SALA's guide, **How to photograph your work.**

Find out more about **hiring an exhibition space** or **selling online** in the Code of Practice.

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Developing an exhibition narrative

Both artists and curators contribute to storytelling in an exhibition. Artists make works of art in response to their experiences, histories and culture. Curators interpret an artist's work and make decisions about how their stories are told to audiences. Artists can also curate their own work. Developing a strong narrative places the works of art within the context of a theme, idea, style or historical period, and helps the audience make observations and connections.

Storytelling and interpretation is often supported by words. Developing texts will support students' discussion about the exhibition, their works of art, and their practice as artist or curator.

Consider including:

- Wall labels
- Extended wall texts
- Accessible descriptions (audio, Auslan and plain english)
- Self-guided audio tours
- Exhibition catalogue (images, essays, artist statements)

Find more ideas and resources listed at the end of this guide.

Selling student artwork

Exhibiting and selling work is part of an artist's job. When an artist's work sells, the artist earns income and the gallery takes a commission (typically around 10-30%). Works of art are not usually for sale in a student exhibition, but this doesn't mean they can't be. Guide your students through pricing their work, invoicing the school and completing a **Statement by a supplier** form. Use the school's commission towards paying artist-in-school fees, a Student Exhibition Fund or finally buying that kiln for the art room!

Find out more about **selling work** in the Code of Practice.

Tip | Your students have rights as artists.

Creators have legal copyright and moral rights that are protected by law. If an artist is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights will also apply. First Nations artists have the right to self-determination. Incorporating Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) in artwork is guided by cultural protocols. Ensuring your students' rights are upheld is not only ethical, but sets the expectation of ethical behaviour when they enter the industry after school. Refer to **the Code** and NAVA's **Educator Guide: How to protect student artist rights** on our website for more information.

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Tip | You already have an installation team on staff.

Even if your students are taking on the job of installers, they will likely need assistance. Ask the handy-people employed by the school to help, including tech teachers and grounds crew.

Planning an opening event

Opening events are an excellent way to celebrate the hard work that your students have contributed to staging the exhibition.

Some things to consider for your event are:

- Arrange to have the exhibition opened with a Welcome to Country by a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community member. If this is not possible, open with a meaningful Acknowledgement of Country and follow cultural protocols for the First Nations Country you are on.
- Drinks and nibbles are a must! This could be provided by the school or a local business could be approached to sponsor the event.
- Opening events will often include artist talks, curator talks, and guided tours, and can also be scheduled throughout the duration of the exhibition. Large galleries, like **MCA**, **AGSA** and **QAGOMA**, are a great source of ideas for different types of public programs to offer.
- Invite people from the wider school community, as well as influential people that will help promote the exhibition (i.e. local paper journalist) and support future exhibitions and artist-in-school programs with resources and funding (i.e. school leadership, your local Mayor or MP).
- Engage a photographer to document the audience and any public programs. Whether a student, educator or professional photographer, high quality photographs are essential for showing school leaders the value art education has for art students and the wider school community.
- Find out more information about **opening events** in the Code of Practice.

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Helpful resources from NAVA

- NAVA Factsheet
Planning and presenting an exhibition
- NAVA Checklist **Is it worth it?**
- NAVA Factsheet
Selling from exhibitions
- NAVA Guide
How to promote your exhibition
- NAVA Factsheet
Exhibition contracts checklist
- NAVA Guide
How do I price my artwork?

Further reading and ideas

- **Risk Management for Exhibition Content** Museum & Galleries of NSW and NETS Victoria
- **Fact Sheet: How to Put on an Accessible Exhibition** Shape Arts (UK)
- **School exhibitions – tips for teachers from the Smithsonian** Teacher magazine, Australian Council for Educational Research
- **School exhibitions – tips to involve all your students** Teacher magazine, Australian Council for Educational Research

Student exhibition examples

- **The West Australian Pulse**
Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA)
- **Top Arts**
National Gallery Victoria (NGV)
- **ARTEXPRESS**
NSW Department of Education and the NSW Education Standards Authority
- **White Chapel Art Gallery**
St John's Grammar School, SA

Tip | Create an accessible experience.

As educators we must differentiate for different learning styles and abilities. Apply this skill to exhibition design and ensure accessibility is a priority for the artists, audience and school staff attending.

Some things to consider are engaging an Auslan interpreter for the opening, using captions for film and audio work, placing artwork labels at 1.1 metres, plus other changes that can remove barriers. Find more guidance with the **Summary of Good Practice Recommendations**.