

# Planning your degree show: A practical guide



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Donkey ears project, 2006

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The degree show represents an important point in your artistic career and acts as a valuable promotional tool for your work and course.

This practical guide will ensure your show reaches its full potential. Some of the points in this guide may seem obvious, but research shows that in the rush to finish your work and organise the show, many students forget the basics.

## Plan ahead

As soon as possible you should liaise with your course leader and identify the exact dates for your final show. It is important to plan ahead in order to effectively market and create interest for your show.

You could elect a 'Degree Show Co-ordinator' to make sure that communications run smoothly between you all, the university and the visiting public. Find out what budget you are working with and consider looking for sponsors to help your money go further.

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## Marketing

To get the most out of your show you should consider the visitors. Many influential artists, curators, collectors and gallerists visit degree shows as talent spotters. Make it as easy as possible for them to find out when and where your show is and make their visit pleasant and easy to navigate.

Make sure your show is listed on [axisweb.org](http://axisweb.org), [degreeart.com](http://degreeart.com) and [a-n.co.uk](http://a-n.co.uk).

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## Website

It is important that you have a website to promote your show. Create one as soon as you know the date and venue. It could be part of your department's website or you can set up your own website using one of the many free website design and hosting applications (don't worry – you won't need knowledge of HTML or web design to use these – have a look at [sites.google.com](http://sites.google.com)). Remember, it needn't be flashy or expensive but the minimum is one simple page that contains:

- The names of all the students exhibiting
- Details of the all courses showing their work
- Visiting information including venue, dates and opening times
- A map with directions to the venue and details about parking, rail travel etc
- The contact details of one student who is happy to provide more information (this could be the 'Degree Show Co-ordinator')
- Include a clear heading such as 'University of Leeds MA degree show' to ensure that search engines (e.g. Google) list your site and visitors find it easily

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## Promotion

The easiest and cheapest way to invite people to your exhibition is to use email groups (e.g. Arts Council's Art News [artsjobs.org.uk](http://artsjobs.org.uk)) and social networking sites. Consider setting up a group on facebook that you can use as a communications tool to discuss degree show plans as well as to promote the event – set up an event page for your show and circulate it to your friends as well as on arts organisations 'groups' and 'pages'

Produce posters and flyers which you can send to galleries, arts organisations, local press and ask your course leader for a mailing list. Use the website address on all promotional material and make sure you ask other websites to link to it.

*Be aware, data protection legislation prevents you from sending information to people who have not given their consent or whose details are not in the public domain.*

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## The degree show

### Venue

Whether going for the 'white cube' approach or installing work in a more imposing architectural setting, nothing should detract from the work being displayed (unless it's site-specific). When considering display, make sure you think about the type of work on display and how different types of work affect each other.

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### Signage

Many visitors will be in the building for the first time so make sure you have clear directions and information on where to go. A floor plan is a useful tool to aid a visitor's navigation of the show.

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### **The human factor**

You should always have someone to meet and greet visitors on arrival. This person should have basic knowledge about each artist and the work on display. Many students invigilate their own shows on a 'shift' basis.

You should all attend the private view so visitors can engage with the artists face-to-face and discuss the work. Consider wearing name badges so visitors can identify who they want to talk to.

A comments or visitors book is useful way of collecting feedback and contact details can be used for post-show mail outs (providing consent has been given).

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### **Exhibition labels**

You should have clear and consistent labelling of all artwork across the entire show. Each label should give the artist's name, title of the work, year produced and dimensions in cm (or duration in minutes if a multimedia work). To present a professional show, ensure consistency and make sure the labels use the same fonts, layouts, card stock and are displayed in the same place next to each work on display.

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### **Artist statements and business cards**

Make sure you work on your artist statement to provide contextual information and give visitors a better understanding of your work. You should all have at least a basic business card with your name, email address and phone number. Ideally this will have an image of your work on it to remind the visitor what they saw after the show. You should all agree on the format and again, keep it consistent.

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### **Catalogues**

A catalogue, although a more expensive way of providing information to visitors, is a lasting document which visitors will hold onto long after the show has come down. Remember, you can always charge a small fee to cover some of your design and print costs.

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### **Post-show**

The website you created to advertise the show can be just as useful after the show has taken place. Acting as a 'legacy document' you can include installation shots, images of the private view and comments from visitors. Maintaining this could build into a comprehensive archive, documenting past shows.

It is important you continue to promote your work after your degree show, engage with contemporary practice and apply for opportunities. To work on your online presence join Axis – the online directory of artists and curators, this is an effective and inexpensive platform for your work.

Axis is the leading online resource for contemporary art in the UK and offers a host of benefits for artists including a fully searchable profile, an opportunities noticeboard and the chance to network online with other artists and curators. To find out more and apply online, go to [axisweb.org/apply](http://axisweb.org/apply)

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### **MAstars: selected MA Graduates**

MAstars is an annual online selection of the most promising artists from a selection of UK MA courses presented on Axis.

Each year a team of influential curators, artists, academics and arts professionals visit MA degree shows across the UK. They select artists who are then promoted and featured in the 'Selected' section of the Axis website alongside text written by the nominator. Watch out for the MAstars selector at your show.

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Content adapted from *Maximising the MA Show* research by Paul Glinkowski, University of the Arts London. Read the full report at: [arts.ac.uk/docs/Maximising\\_MA\\_Full\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://arts.ac.uk/docs/Maximising_MA_Full_Report_Final.pdf)

### **Further information**

[artsjobs.org.uk](http://artsjobs.org.uk)  
[degreeart.com](http://degreeart.com)  
[a-n.co.uk](http://a-n.co.uk)  
[sites.google.com](http://sites.google.com)  
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The logo for Axis, featuring the word 'axis' in a stylized, lowercase, handwritten-style font.