

# ENGAGEMENT

## THE ARCHIVING PROJECT

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING DOWN EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND ABUSE OF POWER IN THE ARTS

*“We need structure to give evidence to structure. To catalogue instances of violence is to create a feminist catalog. I think one of the reasons why I find the project [Everyday Sexism](#) so important and compelling is that it shows how the cataloging of instances of sexism is necessarily a collective project. The project involves the creation of a virtual space in which we can insert our own individual experiences of sexism, sexual violence, or sexual harassment so that we show what we know: that this or that instance is not isolated, but part of a series of events: a series as a structure.”—Living A Feminist Life (2017), Sara Ahmed*

ENGAGEMENT is an artist-led movement tackling sexual harassment, sexism and power abuse in the Belgian arts field. The movement was shaped when women all over the world on social media platforms used #metoo to recount personal experiences of sexism and sexual harassment. The massive, global response highlighted just how deeply sexist and misogynist attitudes are woven into the fabric of society. Creating an archive of individual experiences across cultures would illustrate the collective and structural nature inherent in discrimination. Therefore Engagement believes that the continuation of #metoo-informed writing processes are crucial if we are to break through our collective history of inequality.

### **Getting started: how to write a testimony**

The process of writing down observations and experiences is referred to as writing a *testimony*; an attestation or statement made with utmost veracity.

The goal and main direction when giving or writing a testimony is to explain the experience as clearly and precisely as possible.

You can write down your experience yourself or share the experience with another person who helps you write the testimony. You can use a recording device and/or take notes, and write the testimony later. Or you can write out experiences collectively, if what you write about concerns a group.

## **Content of a testimony: description, chronology, perspective**

Start with what you know. You can **describe** a single event, a series of events that relate to one another, or a list of seemingly unrelated experiences taking place over time. (e.g.: “Before the incident happened, there had been subtle comments about my looks and questions about my private life” or “These have all been moments where I was aware of my gender/race/ability/... and how it influences who I am in my career”).

**Chronology** helps to give a clear overview of the events as they unfolded for you. It can be useful to date the situation by adding the year or, if possible, by dating the order of events as precisely as you can.

Speak from your own **perspective** and include any details, observations and nuances that seem relevant to you. (e.g.: “I am not sure when it happened precisely, but I remember it was during a Summer.”, “I remember addressing the issue, but I cannot recall an explicit apology.”)

## **How do we write in collaboration?**

### **When you are the person sharing the experience**

Make sure that the person(s) you choose to document your experience is trustworthy and reliable. Ask if they can help you write down your testimony according to the above guidelines.

The process of recording should always be collaborative. However, you remain the author of the testimony. That is to say, you can disagree with how things are written down and change it's content by deleting or adding information in order to reflect the experience as accurately as possible. You are allowed to stop the process of recording at any time or withdraw a testimony if you no longer want it archived.

### **When you are the person documenting someone else's experience**

#### ***How do we practice listening?***

When you are the person recording, make sure that the exchange happens in an atmosphere of trust. Keep in mind that some experiences are sensitive and perhaps also traumatic. Acknowledge your role as a listener and check in with yourself to see

if you have the capacity to receive the testimony without bias or additional commentary.

- Create a sense of trust and safety. Establish a calm atmosphere. Allow silences to take place.
- Do not interrupt the person sharing their experience unless something seems unclear. Do this in a gentle manner such as: “Sorry to interrupt you, but can we go over this part again?”
- It is your job to listen and record accurately.

### ***How do we practice recording?***

Your role is to help report the experience as objectively as possible. Do not judge the situation or the people involved. You are not an investigator.

- Detail in your record as much as possible how it is situated in time, how it develops, how things relate to one another in the testimony.
- If you need clarification on any part of the narrative, or you lose the thread of the story: repeat or summarize these segments and ask if you heard and notated them accurately.
- It is acceptable to ask for a pause in order to catch up on your notation.
- You are not an interrogator. It is not your job to determine whether someone is telling the truth or not, or who is at fault.

### ***How do we conclude?***

- Thank the person for sharing their experience with you.
- Inform sharer of the process of archive safety and privacy policy.
- Type-up the testimony within 1 week, at which point send an email of the document to the sharer, upon which changes still can be made until its' completion.

### **Why is anonymity key?**

When writing a testimony in the context of Engagement, we do not mention names. Anonymity provides protection. One may, however, abandon the policy of anonymity outside the Engagement Archiving Project only when using their **own testimony** to pursue an action or outcome of their choosing.

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## **Questions to use, should they prove helpful to you**

### ***Time***

*When did it happen?*

*If in the distant past: in what year(s)?*

*Did what you experience happen while you were working or not? If not, please elaborate.*

*How old were you?*

*Where were you in the course of your career?*

### ***Situation or place***

*Where did it happen?*

*What was the context?*

*Did it happen during an audition, during education, during an internship, in a bar after rehearsals, in a workshop, during a studio visit, in a gallery, while you were rehearsing, while you were teaching, in a theatre, in a residency,...?*

### ***Use of power & roles***

*Why was this behaviour unacceptable to you?*

*Who was involved?*

*Did it occur among colleagues or with an employer?*

*Did it concern a student-teacher relation?*

*Did it involve a person who is a gatekeeper of some kind (i.e. a person who has power and could potentially help your career by giving you access to financial support, opportunities, networks, etc.)?*

*Did it involve a person(s) who has a clear status (of any variety) in the field?*

*Is there a difference in terms of social, economic, or professional status amongst those involved?*

*Are there any persons involved indirectly, implicated by association, or persons who were bystanders?*

*How much power or agency did you actually have in the situation regardless of how it was supposed to be?*

*Did you feel comfortable with this person or these people?*

### ***Your response***

Below are some examples of ways a person could respond, but the list is not exhaustive.

*Was it possible for you to respond? Either immediately or later in time?*

*Do you remember what you did right after the event occurred?*

*Did you tell a friend, partner, and/or colleague? How did these people respond? Did you feel supported?*

*Did you confront the person who was the source of your conflict or harm? If not, please explain why not.*

*If you did confront the person, then how did you do it, and what was the conclusion of this confrontation?*

***Reflections***

*How did the experience make you feel?*

*How did this feeling affect you?*

*Did the event have an influence on how you think about art and your profession?*

*Did this experience impact your life after the event(s)? Please describe if so.*

*Please include any other thoughts, details or observations you would like.*