

Portfolios

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The portfolio is a career communication tool that creates a narrative about your work and artistic philosophy. It is a showcase of what you have to offer as an employment, exhibition, or academic candidate and is a compilation of your best and most recent work. Your portfolio is a piece that is always in progress and always evolving as you in turn evolve as a creative professional. There are five steps to creating a successful portfolio:

1. Self-assessment – Decide who you are as an artist and where you want this portfolio to take you
2. Organization – Decide what you will include
3. Design – Arrange your work based on size, portability, cost, durability, maintenance, and additions
4. Review – Collect and consider feedback
5. Production– Select a format and finalize the presentation of your work

Self-Assessment:

- Articulate your vision. Your portfolio should not only highlight your technical competence, but also reflect your artistic philosophy.
- Learn about the gallery, employer, or institution that will review your work. Ask yourself if that organization's vision is consistent with your own, and tailor your portfolio reflect your compatibility.

Organizing a Portfolio

- Remember that the quality of your work is more important than the quantity.
- Group your pieces by type, rather than placing them in chronological order. This will allow your interview to flow better (put pieces in chronological order by section if appropriate).
- Show your process. Employers, judges, and faculty love to see sketches, drafts, and works in progress.
- Include a publications section. You may include work published in a student publication.
- Provide your contact information in your portfolio— it could become separated from your cover letter and resume. If you have any loose pages, be sure that they are clearly labeled as well.

Designing a Portfolio

- Develop a coherent image. Use similar design elements for your resume, cover letter and portfolio.
- Present all of your samples in the same manner. Inconsistency is perceived as lack of taste or lack of focus.
- Strive for simplicity and clarity. Use line, alignment, font, and font size to organize your information.
- Consider the angle from which you shoot 3-D work. Try to capture the project in a single image as too many images of a single project will clutter your portfolio and dilute its potency.
- Be ethical. Remember to take credit for only what you did in a group, ensemble or firm project.
- Be prepared to USE your portfolio in an interview. Do not include any pages that you would not feel comfortable explaining. Use your pages as visual references to your verbal ideas.

Production of a Portfolio

- Invest in quality reproductions. Your portfolio is only as strong as your weakest image or lowest resolution.

- Laminate your pages. Plastic laminating saturates the color of your images and protects samples.
- Be sure that your first page is particularly sturdy; it will be subject to the most wear and tear.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread, and then have someone else proofread. Then proofread one more time!!!
- Consider many possible viewers or readers—a portfolio should wow any reviewer, whether she thumbs through it in thirty seconds or pours over it for a half-hour.

Review

- Solicit feedback before showing your portfolio to an employer, gallery owner, or admissions committee.
- Register for the annual Make Your Living, Living Your Dream conference on campus. This event provides many opportunities for portfolio reviews by professionals in your field.
- Approach your faculty advisor, or contact the Career & Professional Development Center to schedule a portfolio review with your school's consultant.

Special tips for online portfolios

Online portfolios are a great way to showcase your creative talent in any medium while at the same time highlighting your technical skills. However, you must plan your website carefully to maximize usability. Your website should be easy to navigate, quick to load, and aesthetically pleasing.

Programming:

- Coding your web page yourself allows you to maintain total control over the page. It also allows you to easily edit the code later. However, web-authoring software is becoming more and more powerful and easier to use. Before beginning, investigate your possibilities: Adobe Photoshop, Imageready, GoLive, and Dreamweaver are some popular choices.

Navigation:

- Create a main menu page with links to different areas/categories.
- Create sub-menus within each category or area.
- Provide links. Each project page should at least include a link back to the main menu and to the next page.
- Provide a link to your resume. Store it in .pdf format so that your viewer can open it and print it in Adobe Acrobat.
- Use links to showcase your education and experience. Provide links to your school's web page, your previous employer's web page, or your references' web pages. Be SURE to ask permission first.
- Consider each possible user pathway. Your site should be organized enough to allow visitors to follow a logical sequence of samples, but flexible enough to allow viewers to tailor their visit to their own needs by focusing in on specific points of interest.

Speed:

- Make it snappy. Viewers will not wait for a slow page to load.
- Be sure images load quickly. The maximum resolution of anything on the web should be 72 dpi.
- Save images as .gifs except where color and clarity is important. In that case, save images as .jpegs.
- Place several small images on a page and give viewers the option of clicking on the image to see an enlarged version. This allows viewers to get more detail if they want, but don't have to wait for a large image to load.
- Save your .gifs as "interlaced." Interlaced images, rather than loading from top to bottom, appear fuzzy and then grow clearer as the images loads. Viewers are more patient with these interlaced images.

Size:

- Consider that many viewers may work on monitors smaller than your own.
- Avoid any images which will require the viewer to scroll horizontally.
- Limit the number of times a viewer has to scroll vertically. Consider how this will affect the overall look of the page.

- Figure out what the narrowest monitor is that you want to target, and make sure your web page is narrower than that. Don't forget to leave room for scroll bars and menus.

Animation:

- Make animation eye-catching, but don't let it distract the viewer.
- Again, consider speed. Don't let animation slow down your load time.

~from Holly Wasilowski, CMU School of Architecture Alumnae

Visual Arts and Architecture Portfolios

Animation Portfolios

For students pursuing a career in animation, an excellent portfolio is absolutely essential. Most studios or companies only grant an interview after they have seen your work. To expedite your job search, make multiple copies of all your portfolio materials so that you can circulate your work.

- Never include work on canvas. Use photographs or slides.
- Limit your portfolio to twenty-five pages. Organize your samples according to size and subject matter.
- Include copies of your work from your sketchbook as well as finished drawings. Show that you can draw fast, that you draw often, and that you draw well.
- Think about your potential employer. Large studios or projects look for candidates with specific expertise, smaller operations look for one candidate who can wear many hats. Use what you know about the studio to determine if you should emphasize the breadth or the depth of your experience. Always highlight the area you are most interested in working in.

Here are some tips for specific areas of interest:

- **Background Layout Design:** Include drawings in various styles and of various locations.
- **Character and Prop Design:** Showcase life drawings. Be sure to include costumed figures. Showcase your own creations rather than interpretations of classic cartoon characters. Vary the props you include in your portfolio. Include everything from mundane items like tables and chairs to large vehicles like planes trains and boats.
- **Background painting:** Include quality copies of original material that show your ability to work with color. Because background painters use fast-drying mediums, show work done with acrylics. You may include work done on a computer, but you must also demonstrate traditional skills.

Most studios want to see your work in action along with your portfolio. When putting together videotape, remember:

- Quality is more important than quantity. Choose 2-3 minutes of your best work. Even 1 minute of excellent footage is better than 5 minutes of spotty footage.
- Orient your viewer. Add a verbal introduction to the beginning of the tape in which you explain the nature of the project, your role in the project, and the type of software used to produce the piece.
- Add sound. Even if dialogue or music is not an essential part of the work, adding a blanket of sound beneath the video will add dimension to the work.
- Share the credit. Make it clear what role you took in a collaborative project. Your honesty will pay off—employers want to see that you are able to work in a team.

-From Jim Deusing, Professor of Animation, and Larry Huber's "The Television Animation Portfolio: A Model"

Architecture Portfolios

- Explore formatting options. Three effective options are:
 - A container with plates (for mixed uses)
 - A book or several books (to be mailed/carried)

- A master version (to be carried and self presented)
- Choose a flexible format. Your choice should be able to accommodate the following:
 - Different image types and sizes
 - Interchangeability for client/target
 - Future expansion
- Think of the portfolio as a coherent book format: cover, contents, chapters, pages. A portfolio shouldn't have fewer than 10 to 12 samples of projects, and probably no more than 15 to 18.
- Design the table of contents for your portfolio so that it will expose the content, structure and organization of all that will follow. Consider using some of these categories:

built work	construction drawings	graphic design	research
competitions	design projects	industrial design	sculpture
computer drafting	drawings	installations	sketches
computer modeling	exhibitions	paintings	writing
furniture design	photography		
- Pay attention to the groupings and sequence of the contents. Consider the overall structure/composition and the type of representation, then seek to transfer/overlay this strategy within each page or plate.
- Develop your text. Titles should include when, where, why. Project descriptions include what, why and how.

~from Laura Lee, Associate Professor of Architecture

Art Portfolios

There are three types of art portfolios that students can develop:

- School/program entrance
- Exhibition
- Creative field – Visual Arts

School/Program Entrance and Creative Field – Visual Arts Portfolios

- Compose a story or narrative out of your slide sheet—this will enable you to order your images effectively.
- Edit your portfolio to include only the most important works and sketches. Include no less than 10-12 pieces, and no more than 15-18.
- Select a series of works within your concentration. If you represent too many media, you won't provide an in-depth view into your specialty.
- Mat your work.
- Keep your presentation neat and professional.
- Include your sketchbooks. Schools like to see what kind of work you're doing outside of class and to see how you translate an idea through to processed work.

Exhibition – Visual Arts

- Edit your slides for both focus and appropriate light levels.
- Include multiple examples of similar work.

~from Simone Jones, Visiting Professor of Art

Design Portfolios

Format:

- Cover your bases. Creating a web site or CD portfolio can effectively showcase your knowledge and competency with various technologies, but be prepared with a back-up paper copy in case something in the technology fails during your interview.
- Choose your paper carefully. Think about the value of the interaction of an employer opening a brochure, thumbing through a pamphlet, etc.
- Produce your final product in color if color is an important element of your work.
- Think about logistics. Choose a format that you can travel with or mail safely and inexpensively.
- Plan to update your portfolio often. Choose a format that can easily accommodate additions and deletions. An idea is to present a series of boards in a hand-constructed box/carrier.

Content:

- Be concise. For a portfolio, limit yourself to 20 pieces.

- Tailor the content of your portfolio to the position you are seeking. For example, if you are interviewing for a position that focuses on the design of the structure of interactions you would choose a different set of materials than if you intended to work on content strategy.
- Present your process work– if you can present it neatly. Show a series of thumbnails used in developing an idea along with the final product.

Text:

- Pay special attention to the cleanliness of the typography. Use a consistent style for each element of your complete employment package (your resume, cover letter and portfolio).
- Know your text. When presenting the portfolio in a personal interview, don't expect the employer to read the text on the spot – explain by talking.

Special Tips for Teasers:

- Choose 3-5 pieces of your best work.
- Include a brief paragraph emphasizing the overall concept for each piece.
- Tailor your teaser to each company.

~from Margot Bloomstein, CMU School of Design Alumnae

Performing Arts Portfolios

Drama Portfolios

Like all artists, dramatic artists of all kinds need a portfolio that showcases their talents in a neat, professional and visually compelling manner. For drama students, a portfolio must meet the additional challenge of bringing performances to life in a two-dimensional medium. Therefore, students should consider the following content guidelines in addition to the general tips outlined at the beginning of this handout.

Performance Portfolios should include:

- Resume and cover letter
- Photography
- Programs of performances (for titles for photo pages)
- Favorable reviews or excerpts of reviews
- Newspaper and magazine articles and photographs describing your work

Technical Directors Portfolios should include:

- Resume and cover letter
- Photographs of completed projects
- In process photos from the shop and pictures from the rear showing assembly
- Copies of production paperwork (budgets, schedules, estimates)
- Developmental Drawings (sketches or schematics to show process)
- Shop drawings, drafting (hand drafting and CAD)
- Awards or certificates
- Published articles
- Programs of performances you have worked on (as titles for pages of photos- do not include the entire program unless you designed it or else it will be seen as filler)
- Favorable reviews or excerpts of reviews
- Newspaper and magazine articles and photographs describing your work
- It is best to include a complete set of the items above for a project. Presenting an estimate, schedules, drafts, and photographs of the finished set are better than including bits and pieces of several different projects.

Production Managers and Stage Managers should include:

- Resume and cover letter
- Copies of production paperwork (contact sheets, calendars, memos, daily schedules)
- Any awards or certificates
- Any published articles
- Photographs are not as useful, but they fill out your presentation and present the framework for discussion of your other documents

In addition, a Stage Manager might include:

- Copies of portions of a prompt script
- Examples of rehearsal notes
- Examples of blocking notation
- Examples of performance reports
- References (what directors you have worked for, stage managers you've assisted)

In addition, a Production Manager should include:

- Copies of production budgets (projections, adjustments, and actuals)
- Copies of seasonal/annual production budgets
- Production meeting summaries/minutes
- Writing samples
- Production schedules/calendars
- Seasonal/annual calendars

Scenic Designer Portfolios should include:

- Models or renderings of design
- Photographs of completed work
- Sketches of process work in design phase
- Floor plans for each set
- Construction documents for one or more productions
- Working drawings, cross sections and details
- Property drawings or renderings

Costume Design Portfolios should include:

- A series of sketches indicating familiarity with historical periods and the principle types of costume for those periods
- A series of color renderings, swatches showing costumes for entire small cast play or one scene of a large cast play. Indicate details such as cut, trim, fastenings, accessories, etc.
- Detail drawings of wigs, hats, jewelry, etc. and indicate construction technique
- Scale drawings of patterns
- Process drawings for a costume plot
- Photographs of above completed work

Lighting Design Portfolios should include:

- Scaled light plots with lighting instruments placed in proper location and the lighting areas outlined and identified
- Instrument schedules for the above plots
- Sample cue sheets for at least the major cues of one production
- Color photographs illustrating the effect of the light at selected moments in the play (include actors in the photographs)

~from David Boevers and Anne Mundell, CMU School of Drama, and the USITT's Portfolio guidelines

Music Portfolios

Music portfolios should create a narrative about your work as a teacher, performer, or composer. Musicians should follow the general guidelines outlined on the first page to create a portfolio that is neat, professional, and accessible. However, the content of a musician's portfolio is unique. The following guidelines are designed to help you decide what belongs in your portfolio.

Teaching Portfolios should include:

- Letters of recommendation
- A video yourself teaching and conducting during your student teaching experience (both elementary and secondary education if possible)
- Copies of programs in which you played or conducted at the student and professional level
- Curriculum unit if you have had to write and/or teach one
- Lesson plans from student teaching
- Written notes from students, parents or supervising teachers and course evaluation comments from your student teaching
- Work from workshops given or taken
- Published articles

- An excerpt of a course paper (not necessarily music), so the readers get a sense of your ability to write
- Samples of student work (e.g. selected projects from band/choral arranging)
- Excerpt of your senior recital with the program
- Copies of any music composed or arranged
- Your philosophy of music education (as written and modified in elementary methods)

Performance Portfolios should include:

- Traditional Resume
- Recommendation letters
- Professional photograph (especially for voice majors)
- Music scores, usually computer generated (especially for composition majors)
- Excerpt of your senior recital with the program
- Concert programs
- Audition and/or concert performance videotapes and/or audiotapes

~from Sharon Johnston, CMU School of Music, and Joyce Zsembery, Prince William County, VA Public Schools

Writing Portfolios

Content:

- Begin collecting work as soon as possible. Consider freelancing as a way to boost your portfolio.
- Include at least one sample of a classroom assignment, but do not include any work that shows a grade or instructor's comments.
- Tailor your portfolio to highlight your compatibility with your employer's needs and interests.
- Omit samples that contain typos, as well as those which contain confidential information or that may be considered offensive.
- Organize your portfolio. You may want to present your work in chronological order. On the other hand, you may want to organize your pieces by genre or by type of experience. Choose an order that will allow your interview to flow smoothly.

Format:

- Choose a flexible carrier that will allow you to add, remove or rearrange your writing samples easily.
- Select a carrier that is easy to manage. You should be able to turn and remove the pages easily during an interview.
- Use acetate pages to protect your work. To reduce static-cling, wipe your pages with a drying sheet before presenting your portfolio.
- Place only one sample on each page.
- Do not mount your samples. Employers may want to remove and copy your work during an interview.

Presentation:

- Create brief, typed explanations for each piece in your portfolio. Creating these summaries will help you to prepare your talking points for the interview. If the employer retains your portfolio after the interview, these summaries will guide the employer as she reviews your work.
- Let the employer know you have a portfolio when you apply for the job. You may add a line to your resume which states "portfolio available" or suggest showing your work in your cover letter.
- Be accommodating. If the employer asks about a piece of writing that isn't in your portfolio, follow up by sending the piece with your thank-you letter.

~from *The Perfect Portfolio* by Marilyn Seguin, available in the Career & Professional Development Center library.

Portfolio Resources

Library (CMU, Pitt, Carnegie Libraries)

- Barry, Anne Marie. *The Advertising Portfolio: Creating an Effective Presentation of Your Work*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business Books, 1990. Carnegie Library, Journ/Comm HF5828.4 .B37 1990

- Berryman, Gregg. **Designing Creative Portfolios**. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publications, 1994
CMU, Hunt Library, 700.68 B53D, FA-REF-4
- **Building a Good Portfolio**. Upper Fairmount, MD: Barbara L. Dougherty, Inc., 1997.
Carnegie Library, Music&Art Oversize, qN8351.B85 1997x
- Craig, James. **Graphic Design Career Guide**. 2nd revised Ed. New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1992.
CMU, Hunt Library, 741.6 G88G2 1, FA-REF-4
- Goldfarb, Roz. **Careers by Design: A Headhunter's Secrets for Success and Survival in Graphic Design**. New York: Allworth Press, 1993.
CMU, Hunt Library, 741.6023 G61C 1, Stacks-4
Rev. Ed. CMU, Hunt Library, 741.6023 G61CA, FA-REF-4
- Hart, Russell. **Photographing Your Artwork**. Cincinnati, OH: North Light books, 1992.
CMU, Hunt Library, 778.997 H32P, FA-REF-4
- Linton, Harold. **Portfolio Design**. New York: W. W. Norton, 1996.
CMU, Hunt Library, 720.22 L76P, FA-REF-4
- Marquand, Ed. **How to Prepare Your Portfolio: A Guide for Students and Professionals**. 3rd Ed., Rev. New York: Art Direction Book Co., 1994.
CMU, Hunt Library, 700.68 M35H2A, FA-REF-4
- Metzdorf, Martha. **The Ultimate Portfolio**. Cincinnati: North Light Books, 1991.
Carnegie Library, Music & Art Oversize qNC1001.6 .M48 1991x
- Poggenpohl, Sharon Helmer. **Graphic Design: A Career Guide and Education Directory**. New York: Alga press, 1993.
CMU, Hunt Library, 741.6023 G766, FA-REF-4
- Scher, Paula. **The Graphic Design Portfolio: How to Make a Good One**. New York: Watson-guptill, 1992.
Carnegie Library, Music & Art Oversize qNC1001.534 1992
- Seguin, Marilyn. **The Perfect Portfolio for Artists and Writers: How to Put Together a Creative "Book" That Sells**. Hawthorne, NJ: CareerPress, 1991.
CMU Career & Professional Development Center Library– 2 day sign-out
Carnegie Library, Job/Career Open Stacks, N8350.546 1991x
- Supon design Group. **The Right Portfolio for the Right Job**. New York, NY: Madison Square Press, 1994.CMU, Hunt Library, 700.68 R571, stacks-4

Web Resources

- World Wide Arts Resources for Artists, Museums, and Galleries – post a free artist portfolio for public viewing online.
<http://wwar.com>
- Online Communications for the Arts
<http://www.artswire.org>
- College Art Association
<http://www.collegeart.org>
- National Endowment for the Arts
<http://arts.endow.gov>
- American Institute of Architecture Students – free web posting site for online portfolios for members of AIAS
<http://www.aias.org/>
- Art-Support.com: Artist Portfolio Guidelines
<http://www.art-support.com/portfolio.htm>

Career & Professional Development Center

- Sonjala Allen
Architecture/Design/BHA/BSA/BCSA Career Consultant
412/268-2064
- Elaine Stolick
Art/Drama/Music/BHA/BSA/BCSA Career Consultant
412/268-2064

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