

## The Importance of a Portfolio

A **portfolio** is a living and changing collection of records that reflect your accomplishments, skills, experiences, and attributes. It highlights and showcases samples of some of your best work, along with life experiences, values and achievements. The personal information that you incorporate into your portfolio can greatly reflect on your abilities as an individual as well as become a useful tool in marketing yourself to employers, corporations, colleges and universities. A portfolio does *not* take the place of a resume, but it can accentuate your abilities and what you can offer in the chosen field.

### Why do I need a portfolio?

A portfolio can set you apart from other applicants, whether in a professional or academic setting.

- It allows you to be more personal and creative in order to expand on and exhibit your skills, knowledge, projects and experiences.
  - A portfolio is a method of self-discovery and confidence-building.
  - It is a multi-faceted way to organize your accomplishments, goals, aspirations, and personal thought. It showcases your personality to potential employers and organizations.
  - It is a useful tool to include in an interview. It provides tangible proof of your skills and abilities and demonstrates to the employer that you are qualified for that specific job.
- It can be helpful in applying for bonuses, scholarships, grants and negotiating promotions and raises.
  - A portfolio demonstrates prior work or learning experiences that can be useful for educational credit.



### How do I create a portfolio?

First, you need to determine what type of portfolio is best suited for your needs:

1. **Student Portfolio**—Useful in an academic setting; demonstrates knowledge attained in a given class or throughout your school career. This portfolio can be very helpful if you plan on continuing your education beyond the undergraduate level.
2. **Project Portfolio**—Useful in an academic and professional setting; shows the efforts or steps taken to complete a specific project or independent study. *For example*, if you have the experience of producing a school play, you would create a portfolio that incorporated the materials and research that was involved. If you wanted to apply for a grant in order to do another play then you could use your portfolio as a form of proof that you did a good job and would be a prime candidate to receive the requested grant.
3. **Professional Portfolio**—Useful in a professional setting; demonstrates your skills, background, accomplishments and experiences. This portfolio is versatile and can be arranged for a specific position. *For example*, a teaching portfolio

would be a type of professional portfolio that would highlight experiences, achievements, goals and ambitions for a position as a teacher within an educational institution.

4. Online Portfolio—Useful in an academic and professional setting; enables your credentials to be more easily accessible via the internet. This should not take the place of a hard copy portfolio, but be created in addition to one. This portfolio can be very helpful for those planning on applying for a job in the field of technology and/or graphic design. Also, an online portfolio can be useful to anyone in *any* given field. As the Information Age progresses, prospective employers are beginning to request online portfolios. Bear in mind that several employers may be located afar and with one click of a mouse, they can access your information more readily.
5. Personal Portfolio—Simply for your personal use. This portfolio is a collection or a scrapbook of things that interest you. This portfolio could be used as a stepping block towards understanding who you are and where you would like to be in the future.

### **What should I include in my portfolio?**

As you begin to create your portfolio, there are several different categories that you should consider: Personal Information, Values, Personal Goals and

History, Accomplishments and Job History, Skills and Attributes, Education and Training as well as Testimonials and Recommendations.

To Do:

**IMPORTANT:** Always be as specific as possible. Your portfolio can become quite a large collection of materials. For interview purposes, it would be a wise strategy to select items from your portfolio to be included in a smaller interview portfolio. The smaller portfolio can be presented during the interview and would be less overwhelming to the interviewer.

Here is a list of possible information to include.

- Letters of reference
- Resume or Vitae
- Lists of accomplishments
- Samples of work (e.g., items produced on internship or co-op experiences, class projects, items produced from previous job)
- Memos and/or reports (optional)
- Designs and Photographs (optional)
- Transcripts
- Licenses or Certifications
- Evidence of specific skills (e.g., writing, graphic design, public speaking, leadership, event management)

Depending upon your profession, certain items can be added to provide a more detailed representation of your knowledge and skills. As with any interview portfolio, you should include the best examples of your skills and abilities that are relevant to the position you are seeking. (*see below*)

## Example of Portfolio additions

### **Education/Teaching**

- Video of your teaching
- Statement of teaching philosophy (1-2 pages)
- Evaluations (e.g., supervisor, student)
- Sample lesson plans
- Classroom Innovations (e.g., new technology, new methods)
- Relevant photographs
- Teaching honors and/or awards
- Evidence of student learning (e.g., graded exams, assignments [1 good/1 bad])
- Continuing Education/Workshops completed

### **The Arts: Performance or Design**

- Work samples or photo images of them
- Video/audio recording of work
- List of competencies mastered
- Course descriptions for classes/workshops completed



Second, it is *vital* to adopt a specific presentation format for the material within your portfolio. For example:

1. Introductory Title Page
2. Table of Contents
  - a. Can be organized two ways—chronologically or functionally
3. Work Samples
  - a. Provide a reflection statement for each sample
  - b. Reflection statement can be in either paragraph or bulleted format
  - c. The reflection statements should contain a brief description of the sample item and its background and a detailed list of the competencies developed by the sample



When creating a smaller portfolio for an interview please consider the following:

- ✓ Place items in a loose-leaf binder
- ✓ Use sheet protectors
- ✓ Use copies of your work and keep a master copy available
- ✓ Organize your pages by index tabs and/or dividers
- ✓ Try to keep this portfolio between 5-10 pages in length
- ✓ Avoid page numbers as this allows you to add and move things around more easily
- ✓ Be consistent with headings and placement of items
- ✓ Keep the sections job specific

## **Making a Portfolio**



First and foremost, it is very important that your portfolio:

- Looks professional and accurately reflects your skills
- Is specific and occupationally focused
- Is easy to update and view
- Is self-explanatory if need be
- Supports information presented in your resume



## Helpful Links

When using internet search engines, try to use phrases like “professional portfolio,” “how to create a portfolio,” “interview portfolio,” and “career portfolio.” The sites listed below may provide you with ideas for creating or building upon your own portfolio.

<http://www.georgebrown.ca/saffairs/stusucc/portfolio.aspx>

<http://www.uwrf.edu/ccs/portfolio-steps.htm>

[http://www.digital-web.com/articles/the\\_perfect\\_portfolio/](http://www.digital-web.com/articles/the_perfect_portfolio/)

<http://electronicportfolios.com/portfolios/howto/index.html>

[http://careers.d.umn.edu/cs\\_handbook/cshandbook\\_portfolio.html](http://careers.d.umn.edu/cs_handbook/cshandbook_portfolio.html)



## Additional Resources

The books referenced below can be found in College of Charleston Career Center if you would like to further research this topic.

JIST. (2003) *Your career and life plan portfolio* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Indianapolis, IN: JIST Publishing, Inc.

Kimeldorf, M. (1997). *Portfolio power: The new way to showcase all your job skills and experiences*. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's.

Kimeldorf, M. (1994). *Creating portfolios for success in school, work and life*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, Inc.

You may also want to check out available resources at the Addlestone Library <http://library.cofc.edu/> or the Charleston Public Library <http://www.ccpl.org/>.