Creating A Professional Portfolio

CEAT Career Services

Portfolios aren't just for artists anymore. Long regarded as an essential job-search tool by creative professionals like visual artists and architects, these collections of work-related artifacts are gaining popularity in general job searches. You might want to start thinking about creating your own.

What is a Portfolio?

A basic portfolio includes a résumé, transcripts, and letters of recommendation secured in a binder or notebook. You might also incorporate items that illustrate writing or computer skills such as press releases or newsletters. In other words, anything that demonstrates the credibility of claims made in the résumé can be included in the portfolio. It is generally shown during the interview process. Bear in mind we're not talking about toting the complete works of "Me, Inc." to an unsuspecting employer. A central or archival file of relevant artifacts, for example, can be created so that your portfolio can be modified, much like your résumé, for each job vacancy.

Steps Involved in Making a Portfolio

Like a résumé, a portfolio requires an investment of time. The following steps are suggested when putting your portfolio together:

- Research the employer or job desired
- Review your collection
- Assemble artifacts or work samples
- Develop a sequence for the artifacts
- Develop captions and titles
- Create an introduction & a table of contents
- Develop the first draft
- Evaluate your product, get feedback
- Revise and develop finished draft
- Rehearse using your portfolio

Once you assemble your first portfolio, you simply add to it or customize it to an employer by revising captions and text. If your portfolio is done on a computer, the revising and updating will take little effort and time.

Low and High Tech Alternatives

You may design a high tech or low tech portfolio. The high tech alternative is to utilize multimedia software and design a computer portfolio that you can save on a disk or compact disk. This alternative is easier to manage once it is finished but may take more time initially to design and complete. Another design option is the low tech alternative which is creating a printed hard copy portfolio. The presentation of the portfolio might look like:

Exterior: Depending on your personality, skills, and employment goal, your portfolio can vary widely, from a sleek black, professional zippered binder, to a hand-made book bound in tarnished, painted aluminum. You can use a box, instead of a portfolio, to hold a couple of binders or loose samples.

Dimensions: Your portfolio should be easy to handle. Sometimes you will be asked to leave it for a day or two for review. You want the prospective client or employer to feel comfortable when opening the portfolio, turning the pages, or removing samples. If it is awkward to handle, the employer may not look at your portfolio.

Number of pages: Use only as many pages as necessary to show your best work. Remember, quality is much more important than quantity. A binder or portfolio that contains removable pages is much more flexible that one with fixed plastic sleeves.

Organization: If you lay out your portfolio pieces according to chronology, it is a good idea to put the most recent work first. If all your work is of one type, however, it will probably make more sense to organize by category with the most recent work first in each section

Layout of Pages & Backgrounds: Don't use distracting colors or patterns behind your portfolio pieces. Many portfolios come supplied with black or grey inserts. You can usually change these, or slip other paper into the sleeve, but don't draw attention away from your work. The following is a list of areas you may want to include in your portfolio.

- Contact Information
- Table of Contents
- List of contents included in the portfolio
- Accomplishments Include any awards, certificates, newspaper articles, photos, or examples of things you have done or are good at.
- Sample Work from Your Classes
- Community Service Experience
- Senior Project

- Work Experience
- Letters of Recommendation
- Letter of Application
- Résumé
- Specialized workshops attended
- Participation in conferences and workshops
- Awards
- Leadership activities

Summary: Creating a portfolio can be an effective tool in your current and future job search. By compiling updated information and maintaining it as you move to different jobs, the portfolio can be a great tool to sell your skills to interested employers.

Websites and Apps

Websites and apps can help you create, design and tailor your portfolio.
For creating a websites portolfio:
- wix.com
- squarespace.com

For creating traditional or paper portfolios:
- Adobe Indesign
- Microsoft Word
- Canva.com

Please use caution when using templates. A template will look less put together, and organized.