

Portfolio Planning

A portfolio is a collection of materials that documents your educational preparation, achievements, skills, and experiences, and demonstrates your work potential. From the candidate's perspective, the portfolio is a marketing tool that is used to provide visual evidence of your qualifications. From the employer's perspective, a portfolio serves as an evaluation tool for identifying the best candidate for a given position. If it is well prepared and organized, a professional portfolio could be just the thing that sets you apart from other candidates.

Advantages of a Portfolio

During your interview, your biggest challenge is to provide proof that you have the skills to do an effective job. Presenting physical evidence of your competencies to the interviewer is far better than just talking about them. In addition to discussing your qualifications, you may want to use a portfolio to *illustrate* your points.

Employers are concerned about competencies and outcomes. They want to assure themselves that the candidates to whom they offer employment will be strong contributors to the organization. Interviewers like portfolios because a good portfolio can help them to distinguish a highly effective candidate from one who is less effective.

Tips for Developing a Portfolio

- **Determine the intended audience for your portfolio.** Who will review it? What kind of position is available? What qualifications are required? What does the interviewer need or want to know?
- **Be very critical when selecting samples to include.** Sort through the materials you have saved throughout your college experience, and determine the information that best highlights or demonstrates your professional skills and abilities. Employers often review materials from hundreds of applicants each year, and they are impressed by well organized, concise presentations. Your very best work can get watered down if it is sandwiched between mediocre pieces.
- **Plan how you will convey the portfolio's contents to your audience and how they can best review it.** Use a caption or a label to identify and explain the significance of an item.
- **Update your portfolio on an on-going basis.** Review your activities each semester, and choose the materials that best indicate your highest level of skills and achievements.
- **Check (and re-check!) your portfolio for organization, accuracy, and neatness.** A typo or a sloppy error can create a bad impression about your capabilities, such as attention to detail. Your portfolio should create an impression that you are a competent, skilled professional ready to put your talents to work.
- **Have your portfolio critiqued.** Ask your academic advisor, a faculty member, or a Career Services professional to review your portfolio for content, organization, and presentation. Then have it reviewed by a professional in your career interest area. The key is to ensure that your information is on target for the position and career field.

How Much to Include

The amount of attention that the interviewer or hiring committee can give to a review of your portfolio is limited. Don't present the total collection of materials that you have accumulated during your college years.

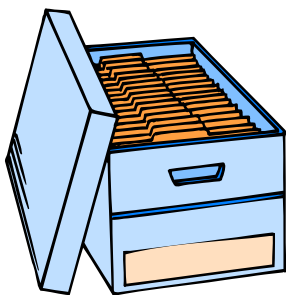
Begin with an assessment of items from your courses, activities, and field experiences that you have saved. Which pieces should be included in your portfolio? Keep in mind the educational preparation, skills, and experiences required by your targeted position. Determine the items that best represent your highest level of achievement. How can you tie these items to the competencies required by the position?

Organizing Your Materials

After you have determined the materials to include, you can determine the best way to arrange them. Your portfolio should be organized so you can quickly and easily refer to it in an interview.

A portfolio also needs to be portable, so for most individuals, a three-ring binder is appropriate. Place your materials in plastic sleeves to protect them through the portfolio's use, and use pockets for containing loose materials.

Arrange your portfolio in an order that showcases your most important information first. Organize your materials into sections, with similar materials grouped together in one section. Use tabbed dividers to separate each section, and label the index tabs so you can turn to each section easily when showing your portfolio to an interviewer.



Items to Include

There is no specific list of items that should be included or is appropriate for every occasion. The materials that you include depend on the position and the audience.

While most portfolio items will be written materials, other items such as a DVD, a CD, a computer diskette, or photographs also can be included. The following list contains some suggestions. Design your portfolio to best present your knowledge, skills, interests, capabilities, and experiences.

All Students:

- Table of contents, tabbed for easy reference
- Application documents: resume, transcript, list of references, and recommendation letters
- Performance assessment materials: internship or student teaching performance evaluations, former employers' evaluations
- Letters of nomination for honors, academic organizations, and awards; certificates representing academic honors and awards
- Certificates for special training or professional development workshops
- A list of the software programs you have learned, including a word processing program, a spreadsheet program, a database program, and programs used in your field
- Newspaper clippings documenting your special achievements
- Evidence of your involvement in planning or participating in special events or activities (e.g., photographs, flyers, brochures)
- Test results (e.g., Praxis)
- Professional certificates, licenses, or clearances (e.g., professional teaching certificate)

- Significant projects showing skills that are applicable to your targeted job (e.g., research, creative projects, writing samples, presentations, business/marketing plans, technical drawings, artistic works, etc.)
- Evidence of written and verbal communication skills (e.g., class papers, newsletters, articles, brochures, flyers, poems, outlines of PowerPoint presentations)

Education Majors:

- Teaching philosophy statement
- Letters of appreciation/commendation from students, parents, fellow teachers, and administrators
- Planning strategies: a unit plan; monthly, weekly, and daily lesson plans; samples of homework, assessments, manipulatives, cooperative learning strategies
- Publications: learning activity packet, sample letters or newsletters to parents, letters to students, creative handouts, teaching tools, or educational resources
- Photographs: bulletin boards, learning centers, groups of children involved in classroom activities, special school activities or events that you coordinated or planned (e.g., field trips), you working with students. Don't include pictures of children if your portfolio will be made publicly available (e.g., online)
- Samples of students' work: completed tests, worksheets, and projects. Be cautious about issues of confidentiality when using photos or documents. Don't include students' or parents' names.

Presenting Your Portfolio

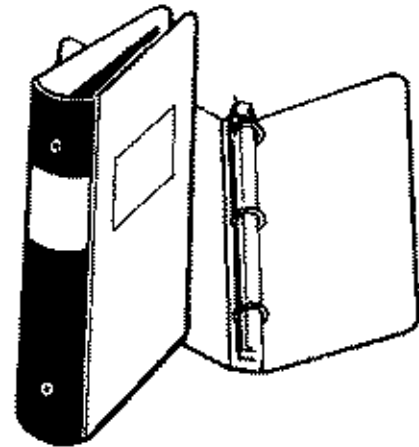
The best time to present your portfolio is during an interview. Keep in mind the following:

- The interviewer may use a standard interview procedure and have a limited

amount of time to divert from his or her format.

- Offer the portfolio to an employer instead of forcing it on him or her.
- Be highly selective about the information that you present.

Look for opportunities in the interview to share items from your portfolio. Use it to support your responses to interview questions, particularly if the employer asks for examples.



For example, an interviewer might say to a communication major, "I see that you have worked at your college newspaper. What were your favorite writing assignments?" The candidate might reply, "My favorite assignments include this article [turns portfolio toward the interviewer and shows the article in the portfolio] which required a lot of research and this creative writing piece [shows item] that I contributed to a special university publication."

If time permits you can ask the interviewer if he or she would like to further examine your portfolio. As you flip through each section, explain the contents, highlight your best examples, and discuss how they are relevant to your candidacy for the position. Be willing to remove pieces for closer examination by your interviewer.

A Few Words about Electronic Portfolios

The number of colleges and universities that are teaching students how to develop electronic portfolios is increasing. Computers can make your works accessible, portable, and easily distributed. Electronic portfolios take up little physical space, but can hold a great deal of information. Pictures, artwork, and writing samples can be scanned or photographed, and saved.

Electronic portfolios and web site development can communicate your ability to use technology. By incorporating sounds, animation, graphics, colors, and video, you can showcase your technical skills.



Portfolio development is being introduced in the curriculum as one method for assessing student performance and outcomes. For students, portfolio development allows you to reflect on your college experience; assess your personal and professional growth; document education preparation, skills, achievements, and experiences; and provide evidence of your capabilities and potential to employers.

In Conclusion

Even if you do not have the opportunity to show your portfolio during interviews, the process of portfolio development will be valuable. A well-prepared portfolio can be a big help in demonstrating your abilities to an employer, but in the end, it is you (not the portfolio) that has to prove your qualifications and potential. Candidates who have gone through the process of reflecting on their educational preparation, skills, achievements, and experiences and evaluating how their qualifications are relevant to a career field tend to present themselves more effectively.

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