

quick tips Portfolios

Step 1. Portfolios - Keys to Consider

A portfolio is a collection of your work that showcases your abilities, creativity, interests, and development. It communicates what you have to offer as a professional, an employee, artist, exhibitor, or academic candidate. Your portfolio should include your best work, and, much like a resume, is always in progress and evolving as you in turn evolve as a creative professional.

Do you need a portfolio

There are certain majors, jobs, and industries which require you to have a portfolio. There are other times where it can be advantageous to have a well-crafted portfolio of work, even if it is not required. If you are unsure if you should spend time developing one, it is best to come in and discuss your academic and career goals with your career consultant to see if a portfolio is something that make sense for you. Faculty are also a great resource when it comes to discussing the need for a portfolio.

Know yourself and your audience

Are you a designer or an engineer? A visual artist or an architect? Maybe you are more than one. Portfolios will look different based on who you are as an individual and the career path you wish to pursue. Make sure you spend time thinking about your artistic identity, background, and focus as you decide on the content and format of your portfolio.

Similarly, your audience is important. Consider the industries, types of companies, colleges and universities, or clients to whom you will be submitting your portfolio. Find out if people in a particular setting expect a certain type of portfolio. It is important to be able to convey your unique talent and identity while also demonstrating that you understand and can meet the needs of those reviewing your portfolio.

Format of your portfolio

Much of the format will be determined by the factors mentioned above. Your portfolio may be developed in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, a PDF, a website, a bound book, or one of many other potential formats. Once you have an idea of what you wish to convey and to whom, determine the appropriate format in which to do so. You may very well end up having multiple versions.

quick tips Portfolios (cont.)

Step 2. Developing and Organizing Content

Quality over Quantity

The length of your portfolio will depend on several factors: the industry, your experience, and the job description to name a few. However, regardless of length, the quality of the work you choose to include should be your focus. If you have a lot of projects to choose from, pick the best ones. Do not feel like you need to include something that doesn't accurately represent your skills and capabilities. Along the same lines, spend more time describing the important and relevant details of a few strong pieces rather than not giving all the pertinent information just so you can include more.

Organization

When it comes to choosing how to organize the content you have selected for your portfolio, there are several things to consider. Your portfolio does not need to be chronological, put pieces in an order that enables you to communicate everything you wish in the order you want. Always begin with or highlight a piece that strongly demonstrates your abilities. Sort your work appropriately. If you have multiple areas of expertise, group your projects. An organized and thoughtful portfolio communicates that you are an organized and thoughtful candidate.

Write and Show

While the number of actual words you use to discuss and describe your work will vary depending on your major, industry, etc. be sure to use both written language and visuals to showcase your work. Tell your audience what you need to tell them, and use images and graphics that clearly communicate your process and work. An image of a hundred post-it notes does not communicate your process in the same way that a concise description accompanied by high-resolution images of key stages of this project's development does.

Process is key

Finished products are obviously important, but as important is how you arrived at that product. For many industries and majors, framing the problem or challenge, showing the work (collaborations, various iterations, how and why you landed on the solution you did) and then showing a quality solution is key. Employers use portfolios not only to see your skills and projects, but to try to get an idea of how you think and work.

quick tips Portfolios (cont.)

Step 2. Developing and Organizing Content (cont.)

Include Side Projects

While this will not apply to all types of portfolios, for creative positions it is often a good idea to have a section of an online portfolio dedicated to side or passion projects. Part of your artistic or creative identity will lie in the things you choose to do outside of work or class, and employers want to see that too. While it should not be the main focus of your portfolio, a few extra pieces can show personality and dedication to your craft.

Organization

Portfolios are rarely, if ever, submitted by themselves. They are usually accompanied by a resume, cover letter, personal statement, or other professional documentation. Be consistent in the way you market yourself as a professional. Fonts, headers, color schemes and other various formatting pieces should be a part of the way you brand yourself and your work. Within the portfolio itself, be sure to follow a consistent layout and format as well. Each page or project should have a similar flow. This not only communicates your brand, but also that you are an intentional, thoughtful, and organized professional.



Additional Help

Since portfolios can vary so much between industry, major, purpose, skillset, and your individual personality, it is best to come in and meet with your Career Consultant, or find a faculty member who can provide feedback and assistance as you continue to work on developing your portfolio.