Crafting a Strong Portfolio

A Portfolio is an online collection of materials that represent your education, experience, training, skills/strengths, individuality and own creative style. A good one will advance your chances of being hired. Your career portfolio – online or not – is a representation of you! Make sure what you are posting and including is what you're confident in and what you want the first impression of yourself to be to employers, clients or other folks viewing it.

Portfolios take the extra step of providing a detailed overview of who you are and what you've achieved. Digital documents, multimedia examples of your work, personal, freelance and coursework projects as well as awards. Portfolios can be an effective tool to market "You" and your brand.

Getting Started

- Think about your brand
    - What colors speak to you?
    - Is there a common word, shape, design you resonate with?
    - What is unique about you?
    - Who are you?
    - What do you want clients/employers to know?

- For ideas & inspiration check out professionals in your industry already
    - What does their portfolio look like?
    - Is there a common brand, color, theme throughout their site?
    - Is it simplistic? Colorful? Neutral?
    - What tabs do they include, if any?

- Play around with templates or design your own (see section titled "Choosing a Website")

- Save everything you've created and decide later what you want to include in your portfolio

- Portfolios may include:
    - Introduction or About the Artist
    - Photography/Art/Videos/Audio/Designs/Publications/Awards & more
    - Descriptions & Titles under each sample of work
    - Contact info
    - Pricing/packages

Choose work that shows off your many skills as a designer, photographer, programmer, etc.

Ask yourself the following for each sample:
- What will this work demonstrate?
- Is this my best work?
- What skill level does it show?
- Am I proud of this sample?
- Is there a common theme or creative style?
- Is it easy to navigate?
- What skills do I need for a career in this industry? Have I showcased those?
- Which samples show the most skills and competencies?
- Which work samples are the most interesting?

Choosing a Website

How do you pick a website to house your portfolio? You need to explore a number of sites and determine the pros and cons for displaying your work. Pick a website that can best represent your work and is easy to share with prospective employers. Some sites are free and some will cost money, think of it as an investment.

Sites to check out:
- Wix
- Weebly
- Web.com
- Krop
- Dribbble
- Carbonmade
- Coroflot
- Dunked
- Viewbook
- IMCreator
- Wordpress
- Behance

Do some research, check with faculty, ask friends and ask yourself the following:
- Is it easy to navigate?
- Is it able to accept your files?
- Is it visually pleasing?
- Do you need to know how to code or will the site manage coding for you behind the scenes?

Once you have had one for a few years and you feel confident in your career path and portfolio consider getting your own personalized domain/URL ($12/year through domains.google.com) with a free site.

Sample portfolios:
- https://sydneyvk.com/projects
- https://www.wilfford.com/work
- https://www.dimitrichristogd.com/
- https://madelinekew.myportfolio.com/packagecover-redesigns

Showcasing Your Work

Put your top project's front and center. If you have completed or published work, list those first. Include only your best work! You do not need to show everything you've ever done and you should not try to fluff it up with "more".

It's okay to put some additional work outside of your focus area in your portfolio to show you know how to work in other areas but make these clearly subsidiary to your focus. If you want to show multiple kinds of work, clearly separate these on your portfolio. Most industry people will be looking at you for one type of position. It's best to make separate portfolios entirely, one per discipline (and each has to have sufficient high-quality content), but at minimum separate these so that anyone coming to your site can quickly and easily find what they're looking for.

When writing about your projects:

- Describe what the project was, why did you create it? What inspired it?
- Use short bold headlines to help guide the reader through your portfolio
- List your top projects clearly, ideally with a text headline (title), sample, and brief caption mentioning the highlights, team size, and length of project-time
- Remember to use the same format across your portfolio for consistency
- Don't just talk about what you did, but why and what you learned from it
- Discuss your thought while creating your piece & talk about what you specifically did
- Show what you produced, what you were trying to do
- Briefly discuss how it succeeded or failed, and what you learned from the experience
- Show what you did, including the process: How the piece evolved along the way
- Never take credit for someone else's work, clearly state what work is yours and what isn't

Use explanatory text along with any images/videos, but keep it brief – 1-2 sentences. Give it a title, date & was it a personal project? A project for class? Answering these will make it easier for the viewer to understand the thought behind the art. Remember, you want your work to do the talking as well and if someone wants to know more, they can always ask you!

Feel free to also show current projects or work that's in-progress or that was experimental and never finished, so long as it is some of your best work. However, keep in mind it is typically a red flag to employers if you have a lot of almost-completed work on your site and none that are actually completed.

If you're listing tools or languages used, measure how well you know them by the number of years you have used them. Keep in mind that sometimes even with multiple years of using a program in school it may not be given the same weight as doing so in the industry.

Make sure every sample is of high quality and large enough to be clear. Have one primary sample for each item on the main page, and then a few others on a detailed page. Animated GIFs can become tiresome quickly, multiple beside each other create a visual nightmare, avoid this.

Showing your portfolio in person:
Online portfolios can also save time, if you show your portfolio to potential employers before a face-to-face interview, or at an event, it could give you a leg-up above other potential candidates…

- Make sure your device (laptop or tablet etc.) is fully charged
- Clean your screen!
- Never assume there will be good WIFI
- Have a backup on your hard drive, on a separate USB, and for extra back up maybe even print it
- Check your desktop and background for anything that might be offensive or embarrassing

Network & promote yourself so that people know your portfolio exists! You may send this to connections after you've exchanged a business card at a conference or networking function.

Your online portfolio is the next logical thing a potential employer will look at once they've "met" you via a cover letter and resume to determine if they want to interview or hire you. A resume can list all sorts of accomplishments but a portfolio shows what you can do based on what you have done. This is your opportunity to tailor how someone sees your work, so build your portfolio for the position you want. This is your moment to impress and excite a potential employer in all the ways a resume simply can't.

Overall Design

In addition to being easy to access and navigate, your portfolio must also look professional. A potential employer will absolutely be judging you by the overall quality of your portfolio. Everything, including layout, font choice, color, etc., says something about you. If you're not confident in your aesthetic choices then keep it simple. You can use an existing template - and there are tons of these available online - but go with something that communicates who you are while still looking inviting and professional.

Make sure your name and contact info such as your email and LinkedIn or additional professional info are at the top of each page, and that you use the same format for each project you talk about. Include a title or a short statement of the kind of work you're looking for along with the other general information. Put a little more detail regarding what you're looking for on an "About" page.

Ease & Navigation

Make your portfolio easy to access, don't expect an employer or client to dig through your portfolio, similar to a resume they will only spend a few seconds clicking and scrolling. The URL should be simple and should be included on your resume and business card.

Your name, title and your top projects should be what greet someone when they see your portfolio. Keep personal details, resume, etc., on separate pages of their own within the portfolio. Anyone coming to your portfolio for the first time is usually more interested in what you can do.

Best Practices:
- Include links that open a new tab or window or as an embedded scrollable window so the reader doesn't lose their place on your main site
- If you're using a third-party hosting site make sure the visitor experience is welcoming and without unwanted popups, etc.
- Include links to get back to the main page, and header links if you want for each page/tab
- Do not use a splash page or anything that gets in the way of a quick visitor quickly learning about your top projects and skills
- Keep the site as well-organized and as flat as possible
- Don't make anyone click through layers just to get to your content

Make absolutely sure every link on your site works for someone else. It may work fine for you, but if a google doc or file shows up as unavailable for someone else on their machine, they'll move on and you've lost your opportunity. Use Chrome's Incognito Mode (or your preferred browser's equivalent) and test it on someone else's computer.

General Tips
- Document formats to use: DOCX, PDF, XLS, GIF, JPEG, MPG, MOV, SWF (make file sizes small)
- Similar to the resume it should be easily readable, make things easy to navigate
- Use spell-check & have someone read it over for spelling and grammar as well
- Test your portfolio in all major browsers & on mobile to make sure it works
- Be aware of copyright infringements
- Update often, similar to a resume, set calendar reminders every few months to check it
- Have friends/family/professors/mentors/advisors test it out & look at it to provide feedback
- Make sure your portfolio looks clean
  - Adding tabs/an index is a great way to keep your work organized
- Make sure your email address is professional, if necessary, get a new one
- Write text that's "future-proof"
  - Read what you write and ask if it will still be true in five years
  - Future proof: "I have been making games since 2018"
  - Not future proof: "I have been making games for the past three years."
- Do not let your portfolio go stale, always be adding work to it
  - If you show something as "in progress," make sure you show progress regularly
- Don't require any plugins or other technology to view your portfolio
- Be prepared to talk in-depth about anything you list as a project, process, tool, or skill
- Dedicate the time to create the right content that makes up the heart of your portfolio

Additional Resources:
- A presentation regarding portfolios: LINK
- A video about portfolio creation: LINK