Portfolio Handbook

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What You Should Know Before You Begin Your Portfolio:
The Real Purpose of a Portfolio

In the past, professionals needed two marketing tools for an effective job search: a cover letter and a resume. As jobs become more demanding and employers more savvy, a portfolio is an additional self-marketing piece that can provide a more detailed illustration of who you are and what you are capable of. Portfolios display evidence of accomplishments and demonstrated knowledge. They allow self-expression and do a great job of answering the "tell me about yourself" question. Portfolios are:

Highly effective as self-promotion tool, they can answer the questions:

- Why should I be hired?
- Why should I be promoted?
- Why should I be given this opportunity?

Valuable process piece for self discovery, self evaluation and/or reflection

- What skills have I gained/honed?
- What are my strengths/weaknesses?
- What goals have I met?

Documentation of experiences (formal and informal)

- What have I accomplished this year?

Common questions about portfolios
1. What is a portfolio?

"*Port*" means to move and "*folio*" means papers or artifacts. A portfolio is a collection of papers or artifacts that can be transported. It is a collection of samples of your work that documents what you have accomplished and learned over a course of time or within a particular work or academic experience. When done properly, a portfolio should capture how you have developed in addition to showing the results of your effort and performance. This set of materials documents your personal experience but can be used both for personal or professional purposes. This handbook focuses on how to use a portfolio effectively as a job search tool.

Specifically, a job skills portfolio is a collection of visual examples (artifacts) that illustrate your experience, your education, your accomplishments, and your skill sets. The job skills portfolio can be used in job interviews to showcase a point, to illustrate the depth of your skills and experience, or to use as a tool to get a second interview. Using your portfolio in an interview creates a strong impression.

- It communicates a high level of preparation, implying a genuine interest in the interviewer and the company.
- It allows you to demonstrate some critical competencies as well as creativity, motivation, and a strong work ethic.
- It allows you some control over the content of the interview.
- It adds a critical visual dimension, helping separate you from other candidates.

2. Why do I need a portfolio and how do I use it?

Even if you never get a chance to introduce your portfolio in an interview, the process of developing one will help you synthesize and categorize what you've learned, assess the competencies needed in your field, and will give you a better idea of how you qualify for a certain position. Developing a portfolio is an excellent way to prepare for an interview.

Portfolios come in many forms but a job skills portfolio is essentially a collection of artifacts for the purpose of illustrating skills and achievements to be marketed in pursuit of an opportunity. These opportunities include interviewing, career promotion, promotion of new idea/assignment, and employee evaluation.

3. How do portfolios differ from resumes?

A resume is a marketing tool that promotes your abilities, accomplishments, and future capabilities. The single most important function of your resume is to "sell" yourself to an employer. Resumes are an excellent and mandatory tool for the job search process. Portfolios, however, expand on the resume. While the resume lists and gives brief explanations of your skills and experiences, contents of a portfolio allow for physical or virtual examples which serve as evidence of your marketable qualifications and experience. Resumes *highlight* knowledge, skills and experience; portfolios *illustrate* knowledge, skills and experience.

4. What goes in a portfolio?

Portfolios can include the following:

- Table of contents
- Work philosophy
- Career/professional development goals
- Resume (or work history)
- Transcripts
- Certificates, diplomas, degrees, awards, etc.
- Licenses or certifications
- Professional development activities
- Evidence of professional affiliations
- Record of service/volunteer work (i.e. brochures, letters of recognition, etc.)
- Evaluations, performance/assessment records or work reports
- Letters of reference/recommendation (and appreciation)
- Evidence of skills (i.e. writing, speaking, event planning, marketing, leadership, etc.)
- Work and/or learning samples
- Other promotional media (i.e. newspaper story featuring you), photos, etc.

Portfolios do not and should not include:

- Any product, service or experience in which your role was minute
- Work with errors and/or is mediocre in quality
- Materials that are copyright protected
- Anything that you wish to remain confidential
- Poorly cared-for materials
- Work that does not exhibit current level of skill or experience

5. How should a portfolio be organized?

The typical job skills portfolio is contained in a binder or zippered case. Every portfolio should include:

- A title page or an introduction explaining the purpose of the portfolio.
- A table of contents.
- An organizational system of tabs or dividers to separate the various sections.
- Descriptive labels or captions to identify each artifact.
- Unifying elements such as color scheme, type of paper, consistent font type, etc.

Steps

1. **Collecting.** Select a variety of materials that represent your range of skills, achievements, and experiences. The best approach is to start collecting potential artifacts early in your college career and make a habit of saving samples of all your accomplishments. These can be collected and kept in a specified box, drawer, or file so that they will all be available when you start assembling your portfolio.

2. **Sorting and filtering.** As you sort through your artifacts, make sure you focus on quality rather than quantity, because not all materials will be suitable for your portfolio. When you are ready to start building your portfolio, decide what the organizational structure of the portfolio will be. You may want to assemble artifacts for a general portfolio that is organized by categories similar to the headings of your resume or you can build a targeted portfolio that focuses on skill sets that are desirable for a particular job you are seeking. Other organizational methods are possible; don't be afraid to be creative. If in doubt about including a particular artifact, it is usually best not to use it.

3. **Final touches for presentation.** The method by which artifacts are displayed in the portfolio can be just as important as the contents themselves. The portfolio binder should have a plastic or leather cover. Contents should be placed in plastic sheet protectors. For organization purposes, separate portfolio sections with dividers. Pages should have titles and descriptive explanations. Include quotes, captions, and/or narratives to give the reader background information for work samples. Pay close attention to the use of images, graphics, and color as well as printing and paper quality.

Developing a Portfolio

The following list details certain contents of a typical portfolio, but the organization of this material can take many forms. The most effective portfolios are customized to the requirements of a particular position or career field, so there can be many different approaches to selecting appropriate content.

An introduction page summarizing your career goals.

A description of your work ethic, organizational interests, personal mission, etc. and where you see yourself in two to five years.

Resume.

Samples of a traditional resume and/or a scannable, text-only resume.

Awards and honors.

Certificates of honors, scholarships, or leadership awards or any other type of certification of mastery or completion.
Letters of recommendation and testimonials
Traditional letters of recommendation; notes of appreciation or commendation; favorable employer evaluations and reviews.

Educational accomplishments.

Brochures describing training events, workshops, clinics, etc.
Evidence of participation in vocational competitions.
Charts or lists showing hours completed in various areas of study.
A list of courses required by your major with selected course descriptions.
Descriptions of extracurricular organizations to which you belong.
Professional test results (GRE, Praxis, GMAT, etc.)

Items that demonstrate your skills and competencies.

Employers look for a variety of skills in potential employees. In addition to job-specific skills, the transferable skills listed below are the most commonly valued. Refer to this list as you build your portfolio. Choose artifacts that illustrate four or five of these skills that are most relevant to your job objective. Here are some examples of skills to highlight:

- Knowledge of your field
- Analysis
- Creativity
- Written communication skills
- Teamwork and group work
- Attention to detail
- Problem solving skills
- Time management
- Organization
- Computer literacy

- Ability to run meetings
- Diversity sensitivity
- Effective writing skills
- Flexibility
- Goal setting
- International travel
- Personal initiative
- Professional image
- Presentation skills

Significant projects that are applicable to the job.

Class assignments, research papers, case analyses.
A proposed budget request prepared as an officer of a student organization.
A description and analysis of a campus service project.
Photographs of a trade show exhibit created during an internship.
Photographs of you in a work setting, especially at a special work-related event.

One or more items reflecting work style.

Teamwork and group projects, presented with grade or evaluations.
Details of a program that you coordinated for your fraternity or sorority.
A project or assignment that shows great attention to detail.
Mission statements, meeting agendas, schedules created in a leadership position.

Examples of computer expertise.

A computer file on diskette of a spreadsheet template created for a class.
Any example of software skill such as graphics, charting, text formatting or
template development, or knowledge of data base or presentation software.
Technical directions, manuals, procedure sheets that you have used including
sample pages or copies of manual covers.

An item drawn from work experience.

Reports, lists, written materials, spreadsheets, etc. developed while on the job.
Training packets, interview sheets, motivational activity descriptions.
Evidence of research skills (publications, paper, awards, slides).

Elements reflecting oral communication skills.

A demonstration video prepared for a class.
Notes for a class presentation with visual aids, printouts of electronic
presentation and slides, etc. included.
Evidence of public speaking (photo, speech outline, review of performance).

Published work you have produced: newsletters, brochures, posters, etc.

For each item, consider adding a caption stating a brief description and the context in which
it was created (e.g. "A spreadsheet template for case-flow analysis created for Accounting
370") and a bulleted list of the competencies developed.

Portfolio Presentation
Four ways to present the perfect portfolio (adapted from Connie Wallace)

1. *Quality, not quantity.* Pick out the greatest achievements in the portfolio and be prepared to show those items specifically rather than flipping through each page.
2. *Highlight what you want to do most.* Instead of selecting pieces which showcase work you're uninterested in doing, pick pieces that give the employer an idea of what skills and experience you're interested in further developing.
3. *Test-market your portfolio.* Before the big interview, show your portfolio to others in your area of interest to get constructive feedback on its composition.
4. *Don't use portfolio as a crutch.* The portfolio should be an added element in the interview. It should not rule discussion or be needlessly referenced.

Using the portfolio in an interview
Alerting the Employer
Make sure you let the employer know you have a portfolio. You may indicate on your resume or in your cover letter that your "professional portfolio is available upon request." You can mention your portfolio when you phone in your confirmation for the interview. These pointers set the stage for showcasing your portfolio during the interview. You can also place the portfolio on a table or desk to signal interest in sharing.

The Typical Approach
Most people prefer to wait to introduce their portfolio until a question comes up about a particular competency that is demonstrated by the portfolio. If you have assembled the items in your portfolio based on thorough research of the needs of the industry, the appropriate competencies should be represented in your portfolio. Once you have introduced your portfolio, the interviewer can then choose to look through it or ask you to guide him/her. It is usually best to limit yourself at first to those samples that apply to a specific question. Never attempt to narrate your portfolio page by page unless asked to do so. Some questions that could lead naturally to introducing your portfolio:

- What are your five-year goals/future plans?
- What certificates do you hold?
- What was your most difficult class?
- Have you ever worked as part of a team?
- Have you ever been in charge of a project?
- How confident are you of your computer skills?
- What do you do in your leisure time?

Leaving Your Portfolio with the Employer
Make sure that everything in your portfolio is a copy, not an original, so you will feel free to leave it on site if they ask. Don't leave it for more than 24 to 48 hours. This is a good way to create an opportunity to go back and have another contact with the person or company. Before you leave the interview, set a firm time to pick it up, but be sure to call ahead of time.

Basic Portfolio Tips

- Portfolio should not replace resume.
- Pick relevant key areas in portfolio to highlight in an interview.
- Accept that view of portfolio (like cover letter) may be declined.
- Portfolio (like resume) is a living document. As long as skills are being acquired, portfolio will require updates.
- Portfolios do not have to include everything you've ever done but rather the best examples of your skills and abilities and/or those relevant to the position for which you are applying.
- Portfolio does not sell your skills; you sell your skills. The portfolio helps support your claims.
- Practice presentation of portfolio just as you should practice interviewing skills to make sure items in portfolio are being shown and explained efficiently and effectively.
- Keep master copy of all items included in portfolio.
- Keep size of portfolio manageable; not too big.
- Do not include page numbers to make it easier to add or delete content and to change order of sections.
- Make sure your portfolio shows a wide range of your abilities to show flexibility if you have not constructed it for a specific opportunity.
- If including specific written work from employer, make sure you have permission to include it as it may actually be intellectual property of the employer even if it was personally written by you.

Portfolio Inventory Checklist

Artifact collecting for portfolios can be a very thoughtful and time-consuming process. While in the midst of work experience and/or coursework, it is easy to forget about salvaging materials to include for evidence and reflection. Below is a portfolio inventory checklist to keep as a reminder of items to save and document as you create and update your portfolio.

Status	Item	Notes
Personal Reflections		
	Philosophy/mission statement	
	Goals and objectives	
	Personal values	
	Personal characteristics	
	Reflection journals	
Work Reflections, Core Employability Skills, and Career Planning		
	Work preferences, standards, reflections on work history	
	Professional aptitudes	
	Skills inventory	
	Accomplishment statements	
	Career development plans	
Academic Accomplishments		
	Academic transcripts	
	Degree(s)	
	Certification(s), Training Certificate(s)	
	Employer evaluations	
	Letters of reference or recommendation	
	Letters of appreciation	
	Scholarships, awards	
Academic Work		
	Projects	
	Presentations	
	Research papers	
	Publications	
	Team projects	
	Syllabi or course descriptions	
	Research grants/proposals	
Work Documents (Current and Archives)		
	Resume (master)	
	Cover letter (master)	
	References (master)	
	Job descriptions/advertisements	
	Applications	

	Tailored resume(s), cover letter(s), and reference(s)	
	Interview debriefing notes	
	Interview journal	
	Interview follow-up notes	
	Career interest inventories/career planning materials	
	Contact management materials and notes	
Volunteer Experiences		
	Volunteer job description/company brochures/volunteer contract	
	Summary of volunteer experiences/volunteer journal	
	Samples of work/contributions	
	References/contacts for future networking	
	Letter(s) of recommendation	
	Certificate(s) of participation	
	Volunteer awards or recognition certificate(s)	
	Pictures of volunteer experience	
	Reflections of experiences, skills, achievements and challenges	
Work Experiences		
	Job descriptions, company brochures, and marketing information	
	Contracts, non-disclosure, or confidentiality agreements	
	Summary of work experiences	
	Samples of work (presentations, projects, reports, updates, event plans, newsletter articles, posters and brochures, news releases, creative writing samples, web pages, etc.)	
	Testimonials	
	References/contacts for future networking	
	Letter(s) of recommendation	
	Performance feedback	
	Performance evaluations	
	Employment records	
	Award(s), recognition	
	Pictures with diverse clients, customers, organizations	
	Reflections of experiences, skills, achievements and challenges	

Community Involvement (Clubs, Associations, and Activities)		
	Membership information and certification	
	Student societies/organizations	
	Athletics	
	Community service projects	
Certifications and Awards		
	Certifications (past and present)	
	Awards/recognitions of achievement	
Professional Development		
	Conferences	
	Courses	
	Workshops	
	Seminars	
	Events	
Creative Achievements		
	Works in progress	
	Favorite projects	
	Cultural and artistic pursuits	
	Artwork	
	Slides	
	CDs	
	Photography	
	Performances	
	Personal website	
Personal Accomplishments		
	Independent reading and study	
	Travel	
Additional Artifacts		

References, Resources and Links

Books in the Career Center Library:

- <u>Creating Your Career Portfolio: At-a-Glance Guide</u>, by Anna Williams and Karen J. Hall (Prentice Hall, 1997).
- <u>Portfolio Power: The New Way to Showcase All Your Job Skills and Experiences</u>, by Martin Kimeldorf (Peterson's, 1997).
- <u>Proof of Performance: How to Build a Career Portfolio and Land a Great New Job</u>, by Rick Nelles (Impact Publications, 2001).

Other Books:

- <u>Creating Your Skills Portfolio: Show Your Accomplishments</u>, by Carrie Straub (Crisp Publications, 1997).
- <u>Designing Creative Portfolios</u>, by Gregg Berryman (Books Nippan, 1994).
- <u>Electronic Resumes and Online Networking</u>, by Rebecca Smith (Career Press, 2000).
- <u>Digital Professional Portfolios</u>, by Elizabeth Hartnell-Young and Maureen Morris (Skylight Professional Development, 1999).
- <u>Portfolio Power</u> and <u>Career Portfolio Sampler</u>, by Martin Kimeldorf (Publishingonline.com, 2000).
- Various titles by Joyce Lain Kennedy such as <u>Hook Up, Get Hired!: The Internet Job Search Revolution</u> (Wiley, 1995) and <u>Electronic Job Search Revolution: How to Win With the New Technology That's Reshaping Today's Job Market</u> (Wiley, 1995).
- Kimeldorf, M. (1997). Portfolio Power: The new way to showcase all your job skills and experiences. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's.
- Pack, D. (1998). "Wings: The Winona State University Electronic Portfolio Project." About Campus, May-June, pp. 24-26.
- Steigerwald, F. (November, 1997). "Portfolio development: Documenting the adventure." Counseling Today, Vol. 4, no. 5, p. 30.

Websites:

- http://www.amby.com/kimeldorf/p_mk-toc.html
  Highly recommended site offering a variety of articles by Martin Kimeldorf on career portfolio development. Also provides an excellent on-line example of a portfolio; click on "Kimeldorf's Career Portfolio Sampler."
- Creating an Impressive Portfolio:
  http://www2.biz.colostate.edu/career/portfolio.htm
  From Colorado State Business College, this on-line guide has some good advice for anyone wanting to build an effective career portfolio.
- Professional Employment Portfolios:
  http://www.bsu.edu/careers/foliotip.html
  From Ball State University (Indiana), this comprehensive resource offers tips on developing career portfolios, resources for self-assessment, resume writing and interviewing skills. Check out the URL for self-assessing your goals (http://www.bsu.edu/careers/selfases.html) and your skills (http://www.bsu.edu/careers/skills.html).

- Portfolio Basics:
  http://www.aag.org/Careers/UW/Profportfolios.html
  From the American Geographer's Association, check out this summary of portfolios. Also click on "Starting Your Portfolio Collection."
- A Teacher's Portfolio:
  http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed385608.html
  Description of how teachers can use the portfolio process for performance assessment and professional development.
- Professional Portfolios
- http://www.sage.edu/sca/resources/advisement/career/ProfessionalPortfolio.php
  From Sage College of Albany (New York), resource gives FAQs and responses regarding portfolios as well as steps and instructions.
- Creating a Portfolio:
- http://www.uwrf.edu/ccs/portfolio-steps.htm#How
- From University of Wisconsin – River Falls, site gives step-by-step description of how to put together a portfolio with detailed ideas of what to include.
- www.amby.com/kimeldorf/portfolios
- www.northwestern.edu/careers/STUDENTS/job-skills/portfolio.htm
- www.yorku.ca/careers/students_jobs_portfolio.htm