Design Portfolios

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Portfolio Basics

A portfolio is a collection of designs, drawings, sketches and photographs of your work intended to showcase your skill set to potential employers. For the job search you may need both a traditional print portfolio as well as a digital portfolio that can be viewed prior to an interview.

What to Include

Each field has slightly different requirements of what to include in a portfolio. You will also need to tailor what you include depending upon your career goals. Keep in mind you will likely need to scan and/or reduce the size of hand-drawings, paintings and illustrations. Computer drawings will need to be saved as image files and imported into your portfolio.

Apparel Design: Mood boards, sketches, flats, technical drawings, photographs of completed garments, fabric swatches.

Architecture: Sketches, drawings, renderings, models, photography, painting, graphics, construction documents and computer aided design work. Process!

Graphic Design: Web design, posters, logos, typography work, package design and illustrations or photography if relevant to the position.

Interior Design: Sketches, drawings, renderings, models, storyboards, computer aided design work and sample material boards.

Landscape Design & Planning: Sketches, drawings, renderings, models, digital expertise, website work, video, photography and computer aided design work.

Product Design: Sketches, drawings, renderings, models, storyboards, mobile apps, and computer aided design work

Photographing Your Work

One of the most important parts of a quality portfolio is having quality pictures of your work. Make sure that boards, apparel, models and/or graphic design work are brought to the imaging center for photos. Ensure the background and lighting are done in a manner to enhance not detract from your work. Photographs are the most professional way to show your work, but another option is Photoshop Mockups. These are a good way to showcase work if you don't have access to physical pictures, especially for graphic design majors. Mockups can come in either free or paid options. You can also scan your work in the computer labs noted below.

College of Design Imaging Lab
125 Rapson Hall/244 McNeal Hall
https://design.umn.edu/students/facilities/ilab/
Get high quality images of all of your design work. Staff are available to help and photography equipment is available to borrow per session.

Photoshop Mockup Resources
https://graphicburger.com/
https://creativemarket.com/templates/mockups
https://creativemarket.com/search?q=interior+design
https://www.behance.net/search?search=Mockups

Designing New Projects

Remember that you will often be competing with classmates for jobs and internships. Many professionals are looking for a portfolio with more than school projects. This will help you develop your skills as a designer, and show you are passionate about design by doing extra work outside of class. These might be designs for competitions, charrettes, fashion shows, or client work. Another option is to make personal projects where you set the guidelines. This can be a way to show problem solving skills as well as your personality through your work. If you include class work in your portfolio, a good approach is to revisit the project and see what you can add to it. For example, if you created a garment, consider creating an entire line inspired by that one piece.

Layout/Portfolio Design

When creating your portfolio consider the following guidelines related to layout and design:

- Most students design their portfolios using the Adobe Creative Suite, specifically InDesign. If you are not yet comfortable with this software, creating a basic portfolio in PowerPoint is a simple short-term alternative.
- Your portfolio design should reflect your brand and coordinate with your resume and cover letter.
- Printed pages should have a consistent layout orientation: landscape or portrait, but not both.
- Develop a consistent format for headers, text boxes and any design on the pages.
- Keep any design on the portfolio pages simple so as not to distract from your work.
- Start and end with strong projects. Organize individual projects in a logical manner that highlights your diverse skills and is easy to present.
- The number of projects will vary greatly depending on your experience level, and quality is more important than quantity. It is common to have at least 4 of your strongest projects by graduation.
- The flow of the book is important. Don't just show one photo of a project – think about how you can show the process that got you to the finished project, and expand on projects. You're selling your problem solving skills to employers and should show how much work went into your projects.
- One option to show your process is to have a separate "Process Book" that shows ideation, mood boards, and sketches of concepts, employers want to see how you think and the process you went through.
- Employers are interested in seeing your design skills. Try to keep fine art and personal photography out of your portfolio unless you incorporate them into a design.
- Use the concept of the "invisible grid" to layout your portfolio in a logical easy to follow manner: www.ideabook.com/tutorials/page_layout/the_grid_an_invisible_framewor.html

Text and Labels

For the text within your portfolio, you should always consider how it is being viewed. A portfolio shown during an interview does not need as much text as a website because you will be there to explain your projects. Text should always be brief – employers don't have time to read large paragraphs – but you should take a few sentences to explain the project goal, inspiration and your solution. Tools used are not needed; employers are familiar with design programs and tools. They are more interested in your thought process and problem solving, so speak about those instead. Select font styles and sizes that are easy to read. Be sure they match the font selections used on your resume, cover letter and other application materials.

Print and PDF/PowerPoint Portfolios

Consider what positions you are applying for when creating your portfolio. If you are strictly working within web design, a screen based presentation may work better than a printed portfolio. Many employers will require you to provide a 2-6 page PDF sample of your work, along with your resume and cover letter. This allows them to see a sampling of your design work and creative process.

Many employers may prefer to see a printed portfolio during a job interview. They appreciate being able to see the physical copy and are aware of the extra effort put into portfolio books.

Common Print Portfolio Sizes
When creating your portfolio, ensure the size is large enough to showcase your work. If it is too small, an employer will not be able to see your design abilities. You will find portfolios of all types of sizes in every field, but common portfolio sizes for each major are listed below:

Architecture: 8.5 x 11	Interior Design: 11 x 17 or 8.5 x 11
Apparel Design: 11 x 14 or 11 X 17	Landscape Design & Planning: 8.5 x 11
Graphic Design: 11 x 17	Product Design: 8.5 X 11

Printing/Binding
When you print your portfolio for interviews, be sure to invest in high quality printing to ensure excellent color and resolution that best showcases your work. Quality printing costs more than inkjet, but remember that you are investing in yourself and employers will see that. If you plan to bind the portfolio, consider selecting a binding type that lays flat on a table for convenience during interviews. Most printers offer binding services and Coffman Printing Services offers affordable metal coil binding. Many professionals bind their own books, and there are multiple options available for that including: Perfect, Coptic, Screw-post, and Japanese Binding. This is a good way to add refinement and personality to your portfolio.

Online Portfolio Websites

Many students create an online portfolio that employers can preview prior to inviting the candidate in for an interview. For graphic and product design students, this is considered essential. For other majors, it is optional, but highly recommended because it can make a strong positive impression when done well. When creating an online portfolio, don't put 100% of your work on the site. Hold back a few quality items so that you can show some new work the employer hasn't yet seen during the interview.

Ease of Use
It is critical that your digital portfolio be easy to view and navigate. Keep the following in mind:
- Make sure it is intuitive to navigate and that the files load quickly on most computers. This can be done by "Saving for Web" when saving files in Photoshop or Illustrator.
- Remember you are in a visual field - your landing page should be visually interesting and not include too much text. When sending a link of your online portfolio to an employer consider sending the link that goes directly to your "Work Page." You want to make sure employers don't have to make unnecessary effort to search for your projects.

Online Portfolio Websites
There are many available online portfolio websites to choose from:

Adobe Portfolio – www.myportfolio.com

Behance - www.behance.net

Squarespace – www.squarespace.com

WordPress – www.wordpress.org

Wix – www.wix.com

Cargo Collective - www.cargocollective.com

Weebly - www.weebly.com

Portfolio Box – www.portfoliobox.net

Coroflot - www.coroflot.com

Krop – www.krop.com

Consider purchasing a tailored domain name for your web site. Some of the above sites may also allow you to buy a domain name.

Leave-Behind Items

Leave-Behind items are also important to consider. At the end of an interview, you should plan to leave something with the employer that is a short reminder of your work. They range from a nice glossy print out of your work sample pages, to brochures and even creative items like playing cards or coasters showcasing your designs.

Tips for Interviewing with Portfolios

Using the portfolio effectively in an interview takes practice and preparation. This is a very important part of the interview because employers will compare how you present your work in an interview to how you will present information to future clients. When setting up an interview with an employer, ask the employer the type of portfolio they would like you to bring to an interview (electronic, print, originals etc.) and if there is any specific type of work they want to see. Look up their work, and tailor your projects to the firm you are applying (ex. web design agencies should have more web design than print work).

Introducing Portfolio Items
Many job candidates flip through their portfolios so quickly that an employer cannot absorb any information. When introducing a project in your portfolio, speak at a moderate pace and cover the following:
- Explain the project guidelines including any constraints you were given.
- Walk the employer through your design process including why you made the decisions you did and any research you incorporated into your decisions.
- If it was a team project, clearly articulate what portion of the design was your responsibility.
- Never apologize or make excuses for your work. Be confident in your skills as a designer.

Additional Suggestions
- Be sure to make eye-contact with the employer, even when you are explaining your portfolio.
- Smile and be enthusiastic about your work – passion is the number one thing employers look for. Remember that your portfolio got you the interview – your personality will get you hired.
- After reviewing a project in your portfolio, pause and ask the employer if they have questions before moving on to the next section.
- Ask how much time you have for the portfolio review so you can pace yourself appropriately.
- Practice talking through your portfolio with friends and family (non-designers too!) so you are comfortable with the process. Ask them for feedback on the order and presentation. You can also practice with a counselor at Career & Internship Services by calling 612-624-2710 for an appointment.
- AIGA Minnesota Portfolio 1-on-1 is a great place for graphic designers to practice showing their portfolio, get feedback on projects, and even earn a scholarship for their work. The event is in early April: http://aigaminnesota.org/committee/portfolio-one-on-one/
- Another great place to get feedback on work is through informational interviews with professionals in the area. Many are happy to help students and give advice.

Portfolio Related Resources

4 Easy Steps to Create a Beautiful Design Portfolio – AIGA

http://www.aiga.org/4-easy-steps-to-create-a-beautiful-design-portfolio/

Presenting Your Portfolio – AIGA

http://www.aiga.org/portfolio-presenting/

Portfolio Tips for Architecture Students – First in Architecture

http://www.firstinarchitecture.co.uk/portfolio-tips-for-architecture-students/

10 Tips to a Great Fashion Portfolio – Searching for Style

http://searchingforstyle.com/2012/11/10-tips-to-a-great-fashion-portfolio/

8 Essential Tips for Landscape Portfolios – Land Archs

http://landarchs.com/8-essential-tips-to-make-a-knockout-landscape-portfolio/