PORTFOLIOS

A portfolio is an evolving collection of tangible evidence of your ability, contributions, scope of competence and experience. They are widely used by new professionals, people changing careers and those in creative fields.

Whether you are a student with little professional work experience, a soon-to-be graduate or someone with 20+ years experience, portfolios are developed in a similar way.

The Comprehensive Portfolio

A master portfolio is your library of samples that show your full range of abilities developed through school, paid and volunteer work, hobbies and home or life experiences. It is an effective way to organize, track and reflect on documents and experiences. From this portfolio you will pick and choose samples to create targeted portfolios for purposes such as:

- Career mapping
- Professional practices/learning/skill development
- Creative ability
- Interview (employment-related) proof of competence

The Interview Portfolio

A professional interview portfolio is your competitive advantage, differentiating you from other candidates. Seeing is believing. It shows your competence to do job-related tasks using projects done and activities to which you have contributed. Selecting relevant samples moves an interview from *just words* to an impressive *things you've done* summary. It demonstrates you can see what's important from an employer or client perspective.

Why use an interview portfolio?

A well-planned portfolio says you:

- Take initiative, are prepared and organized
- Are able to use written, visual, and verbal communication to explain key information
- Are able to prioritize and critically assess what is relevant from the other side of the table

Developing a portfolio can help you:

- Successfully compete in interviews, showing why you are qualified for this job, project or opportunity
- Match specific examples such as class assignments and activities outside of school to position needs
- Evaluate opportunities for a first post-graduation job, career move or a career change
- Document landmark accomplishments for performance reviews or compensation negotiations

All you need for a basic portfolio is:

- A file drawer/box and memory stick to store collected materials for a comprehensive portfolio
- A small folder or zippered 3-ring binder with section dividers, sheet protectors and quality paper for a basic hard copy interview portfolio, and a memory stick for a basic digital one

Hard copy or online?

A master portfolio in more than one format allows you to collect materials in whatever format is most convenient at the collection stage and decide later how to present your work for different audiences or circumstances. **Note:** Many employers will not review materials (hard copy or online) prior to interviews.

- A hard copy portfolio in a presentation binder is most effective for interactive situations – such as interviews – as a visual aid to demonstrate (show) abilities while answering (tell) interview questions. For multimedia or online work, use screen shots or process charts to generate interest in viewing an online version after the interview. This keeps the focus on you instead of on a screen.

- Online portfolios give employers/clients the opportunity to control what and how much they look at, and can include program or curriculum links. Because of this, layout and design are more complex and may take significantly more time. While online portfolios allow more creativity, there are challenges and concerns uniquely associated with online platforms.

    » Online portfolios are useful when interviews are done remotely, whether by telephone, Skype or video-conference where the show and tell format is challenging.

    » Online predators look for personal or business information to mine or spoof. Privacy is an issue for others shown in your documents or with whom you collaborated on projects. Take precautions to protect confidential and proprietorial information. Ensure you have written permission from all individuals and organizations which could be identifiable.

Portfolio samples

Do not try to include everything you have ever done or worked on. Update samples as your work improves. Samples to collect in your comprehensive portfolio useful in developing an interview portfolio include:

- Up-to-date resume, commendations, testimonials, thank yous from happy customers

- Degree, training certificates, awards, class outlines, transcripts

- Class projects, term papers, reports, case studies, research simulations, evaluations of presentations, hand-outs developed or other presentation materials

- Professional memberships, committee positions held, conference brochures

- Pictures of design projects, screen shots of websites, user manuals, help systems

- Business plans, sales strategies, funding proposals, publicity/media/ad campaign designs

- Event plans/programs, flowcharts, surveys, project budgets, feasibility studies

- Computer-generated charts, tables, spreadsheets, financial summaries/analysis

- Sample letters, sales scripts, problem summaries

- Logs, lists, volumes, results, case loads, transactions, procedure sheets, schedules, records of improvement/efficiency, reviews

- Plans/photos of displays designed for student competitions, volunteering or on the job

- Community service or materials demonstrating contributions to projects or committees

- Samples of projects, surveys, products, programs developed or facilitated, speeches workshops or presentations delivered

- World map (indicating cultural awareness through travel/work/experience)

- Reviews of industry-acclaimed books, information interview summaries

- Articles written, newsletters edited, blogs, sample creative designs, logos created

- Evidence of competencies or deliverables met

How to Develop a Portfolio

Collect and store

Make a habit of assessing all that you do, asking "Does this have portfolio potential?" If yes, outline the **Situation, Task, Action, Result** (**STAR** story) to better remember details later when creating interview sample captions (below).

Create and develop samples using assignments and activities. If other people collaborated on samples or tasks, note your contribution rather than just the group activities and outcomes.

Review this **master portfolio** regularly to reflect your increasing competence. If you do not have items that show your ability in a certain area, develop them. Expand on a class project to target an industry/company or mock up something done but not kept. Create new samples.

Reflect and select interview portfolio pieces

Selecting samples relevant to the work you seek shows you are a serious candidate with a clear idea of what is required to be successful. Knowing what the interviewer needs and how you want to use samples will ensure you choose the right ones.

To identify the best samples ask yourself, *"which items show I can do **this** job's tasks"* rather than just *"what are my best samples."* Ten to 20 relevant samples are much more effective than a larger, unfocused collection.

Remember: What is left out is just as important as what is put in.

Build, write, design

Arrange samples by skill set based on job needs. Under each section include samples showing ability, scope of competence and commendations.

- Best samples indicate potential. Poor or unrelated samples can compromise your chance for a job. If you are not proud of something, or it no longer represents your best work, replace it.

- Keep samples short and focused. Group similar samples by theme, such as Research, Presenting, Sales, etc.

- Use basic design rules of simplicity in font, space, balance and layout. Keep originals safe.

Use captions to explain what a sample demonstrates. What was your role? The intended audience? How did you accomplish the task? What were challenges/constraints, how did you meet them? How have you measured or assessed success?

Present and evaluate

Creating a portfolio is only the start. Make a habit of talking about your work and portfolio. Use it regularly to explain what you have done. This is an extremely important skill. Over time you will be presenting your work to potential employers and future clients, many who may be non-industry people.

Ask and answer, *"How will I support my interview answers with portfolio pieces? Why is each important to the interviewer's business?"* Expect to show only select samples rather than the entire portfolio.

- Have your portfolio critiqued by Career Services and industry professionals.

Targeted Interview Portfolio

Master Portfolio

Job or position tasks

Industry knowledge
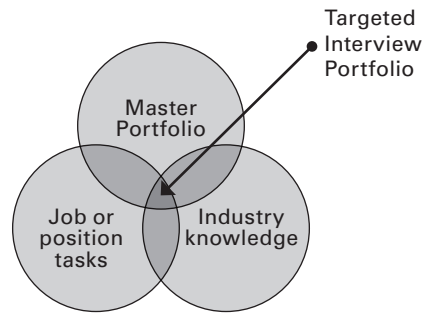
SELF-EVALUATE?

Now that you have your interview portfolio together, rate its effectiveness on the scale below.

Is it relevant? Does it show you understand the job tasks/work and does it include relevant samples? Does it show that you clearly understand what the viewer needs? Does it convey the ability expected for this position?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

EXCELLENT... **POOR**

Is it skim-able? Have you chosen excerpts rather than entire reports? Is it a clean copy? Do your choices demonstrate your ability to think, prioritize and plan strategically? Is it professional and appealing using clear, non-technical language?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

EXCELLENT... **POOR**

Is it your best work? Does it convey the level of professionalism and ability you want it to? Have you chosen your best examples to show related competence and excellence that qualifies you for the work?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

EXCELLENT... **POOR**

Is it recent? Have you replaced outdated materials and updated samples to reflect your skill level today?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

EXCELLENT... **POOR**

Would YOU hire you for this job based on the evidence you have included? Does it compel the reader to want you over other candidates because you have shown your capability to do the work at the level they seek?

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

EXCELLENT .... **POOR**

Make sure interviewers know that you have a portfolio.
Indicate on your resume that a portfolio is available.

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