

CAREER PORTFOLIO BASICS

Why are professionals using portfolios now?

For decades, artists, photographers, architects, designers and writers in search of work have used portfolios to showcase their abilities and their qualities. Finally, others are now discovering how portfolios can help them in their careers.

- Students are discovering that portfolios offer a better way to demonstrate their learning experience that adds value to their potential for specific kinds of work.
- Portfolios can help people in business and industry move more freely in the current work environment, in which more individuals are acting as if they were independent contractors, selling their skills and capabilities whenever they can fill an employer's needs.
- Portfolios can help the already-employed with career transitions, because few can expect to work for one employer or another for an entire career.
- College professors and career advisors are realizing that the process of developing a portfolio can be an important learning tool for students to help them assess their learning and to compare it to the employer's need for skilled, capable employees.

It helps you:

- Prepare for interviews
- Convince others of your skills, abilities and qualities
- Communicate clearly (focusing the interview conversation).
- Showcase your skills
- Demonstrate the results of your work
- Establish the habit of documenting your accomplishments and results
- Create a personal data base
- Assess your own progress in your career development
- See and evaluate the patterns in your own work preferences and values

A portfolio is not a resume

- A portfolio may contain a resume
- A portfolio may be large or small, a few pages to 20 or more. (Fewer is better)
- Most people use their portfolios in interviews. They do not send them out as if they were resumes.

What is a portfolio?

Physically, it's a collection of things-artifacts-tangible materials-that represent work related events in your life. The portfolio provides "evidence" of your potential by demonstrating what you accomplished in the past.

Artifacts

An artifact is any tangible object/item that can represent your accomplishments and qualities.

In the same way that archaeology reconstructs a civilization from artifacts, a portfolio reconstructs your work life from artifacts. In both cases, the artifacts are fragments that represent pieces of the whole.

Artifacts include:

1. Work products you've made on the job. You could include reports, computer print outs, graphics, handouts, published articles, invitations, programs, brochures, fliers, newsletters, "before and after" editing.
2. Something you've created to summarize or "represent" things you have done. It could include:
 - A summary of evaluations from a workshop, a bar graph that shows rising sales figures, or a chart showing your contribution to the team.
 - A statement of your philosophy, or you could symbolize your philosophy by using an image or developing a collage of images.
 - A photo of you accepting an award or making a presentation.
 - Thank you notes.
 - Letters of recommendation.
 - Photos of you on the job.
 - Articles about you.

One size does not fit all

Because those skills, qualities and knowledge can come from so many different places, even the portfolios of twins could be drastically different from each other.

A “learning” portfolio is not a “job” portfolio

The learning portfolio, as instructors and educational institutions use it, tends to focus on documenting the process of all learning that has occurred in a limited context.

However, a “job” portfolio (ideally developed for interviews for a specific category of jobs) focuses on one’s potential for accomplishing specific work. Also called a professional career portfolio, it assumes that learning has happened. Employers are not interested in the learning process, but on those skills, abilities, experience, or personal qualities that relate to the specific work they need to have done.

How do you make a portfolio?

You start by developing a portfolio “collection” that contains all of your artifacts, but, much like a resume, you want to focus the temporary portfolio you’ll use for a specific event, so that all the items are relevant to your audience and support your purpose.

If your audience is an interviewer (for a job), you’ll want to focus the “job” portfolio so that evidence of your ability to do that job is crystal clear. Your “purpose” is to demonstrate that you have successfully accomplished the tasks represented in the portfolio (which should parallel the job description), to support your assertion that you can do the job.

Whenever you make a portfolio (for any specific, temporary event), your choice of artifacts from your collection will depend on your specific audience and your purpose.

- Use professional binder or notebook that takes clear page protectors
- Use clean copies, rather than originals.
- Create a table of contents.
- Organize by categories relevant to the job.
- Use dividers to separate categories.
- Insert a summary caption that explains the significance of each artifact.
- Use graphics, visuals and color, if possible.
- Should be no longer than 20 pages.
- *Bring duplicates of some artifacts so they can be left with employer, if requested.