

Professional Portfolios

A professional portfolio is a collection of your best work samples that can be presented to employers either electronically or in a hard copy form. Portfolios are a tool that individuals can use during their job search and interviews to ensure that employers have a thorough understanding of their skills and abilities. Portfolios are not just for design and art fields—all job seekers can benefit from having a portfolio!

Hard Copy Portfolios

A hard copy portfolio includes samples that are placed in a professional binder or case. These work samples are then brought to job interviews and integrated them into the conversation. Showing examples of your work assures employers that you have the skills they seek. The benefit of a hard copy portfolio is the employer is able to actually see the work and you can elaborate on the items if needed.

- Place items in a professional binder or case.
 - Label each item that briefly explain what the item is and what skills it shows.
 - Group items into logical categories by project or skill area to make them easy to find.
 - Include a table of contents, divider tabs/pages for a clean organized look.
 - Make your items visually appealing – include color when possible or print out items on different colored paper.
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Electronic Portfolios

Electronic portfolios can either be created on a web site or CD which employers view before or after an interview. The challenge of e-portfolios is that employers tell us they often do not take the time to review them. As a result, we highly recommend that an electronic portfolio be used in conjunction with hard copy materials that can more readily be taken to job interviews.

- Organize your portfolio items into logical sub-categories using menu tabs.
- Attach items so that employers can open documents with original formatting – be sure to include brief introductions for each item.
- Don't include a photo or personal information on an electronic portfolio.

Online Portfolio Tools

- Efolio MN <http://efoliomn.com>

What to Include

The most difficult part of creating a portfolio is deciding what to include. Once you have decided to create a portfolio, save all of your work from academics, jobs and volunteer activities. Some examples of what to include: resume, transcript, letters of recommendation, awards, performance evaluations, thank you notes, emails acknowledging your work, writing samples (business letters, research reports, press release, creative writing samples), computer documents (Excel, Word, PowerPoint, HTML), academic projects and/or work projects.

What your portfolio includes may vary widely depending upon your line of work. The below examples show portfolio items from two very different lines of work:

Teacher

Performance evaluation from principal
Lesson plans
Sample assignments
Sample test
Letter written to parents
Thank you notes from students/parents
Photo working with diverse student group
Volunteer certificate – Big Brothers/Big Sisters
Training certificate – English Language Learning professional development
Calendar printout – showing long range planning/organization

Researcher

List of laboratory equipment used
Research publications
Protocol write up
Lab write up
Photo of poster presentation
PowerPoint presentation to colleagues
Graphs/charts showing data analysis skills
Email from colleague noting hard work
Conference program outlining specialized training
Award for innovation
Collaborative project showing team work

Utilizing Your Portfolio in an Interview

Once you have a portfolio, it is critical to spend time thinking about how to use it most effectively in an interview. A few suggestions:

- Only bring relevant items to your interview (10-20 key items) not everything you have saved.
- Integrate the portfolio item throughout the interview (don't simply share it at the end).
- Explain the item and what skills are illustrated by the document.
- Once you have explained the item remain silent as the interviewers review the item. After you have their attention again, ask if they have any questions.
- If the employer asks to keep your portfolio consider referring them to your electronic portfolio or giving them a photo copy. Originals are valuable and can be lost if left behind!

Questions?

Individual portfolio assistance is available at Career and Internship Services. This includes but is not limited to help with what to include or practice utilizing your portfolio in an interview. To schedule an appointment call the Career and Internship Services front desk at 612-624-2710.
