

McDaniel College Career Services
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Guide to Creating a Portfolio

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What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is a portable compilation of personal documents used to present and highlight an individual's skills, achievements, accomplishments, development and performance. Portfolios are used in a multitude of settings.

There are two types of portfolios: *personal and professional*.

A personal portfolio normally focuses on the various aspects of our lives and is found in multiple formats including journals, scrapbooks and photo albums.

A professional portfolio focuses primarily on career related development including training, experience, education, etc. and is often produced in a 3-ringed binder or electronically.

The focus of this guide will be professional portfolios.

Why create a portfolio?

Individuals choose to create and use portfolios for a variety of reasons. A recent graduate may use a portfolio to highlight his or her academic accomplishments as well as demonstrate the application of knowledge to a particular work setting. On the other hand, a mid-level professional may use a portfolio when asking for a raise or promotion. The reasons cited for using portfolios is varied. However, it is imperative that a portfolio be appropriate to the situation.

Common reasons for using a portfolio:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job Search	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tracking Certifications
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promotion/Advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internship Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graduate School Admissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resume Enhancement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job Shifting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scholarship/Grant Applications
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Job Re-entry	

What are the benefits associated with using a portfolio?

Constructing a portfolio provides you with time to self reflect and critically evaluate your skills, abilities and experiences. Portfolios also help you to prepare for interviews and, if constructed correctly, allow you to demonstrate your knowledge and understanding about organizational characteristics and needs. Customizing your portfolio to the specifics of the position and the company inform potential employers that you are a great fit for the position as well as their organization.

What type of format should be used when creating a portfolio?

When it comes to creating a portfolio, individuals have two options—*hardcopy (paper) or electronic*. While each format has pros and cons associated with it, the professional trend is to use electronic portfolios. Below you will find a list of pros, cons and guidelines for both formats.

Electronic Portfolios

Pros

- The ability to utilize video, animation, sound, graphics, etc.
- Compact and easy to carry
- Relatively inexpensive to mail
- Easy to duplicate
- Does not show wear and tear
- Non-linear; allows reader to freely move around

Cons

- Some employers still prefer hardcopy formats
- Possible software conflicts
- Overuse of animation, sound, graphics, etc.
- May require the purchase of additional software

Guidelines for creating an electronic portfolio:

- Don't over do it
- Make sure portfolio can be accessed by different computers and software
- Make sure portfolio can be sent via email (i.e. attachment is not too large)

Hardcopy Portfolios

Pros

- Easy to include and remove items
- Can be displayed during an interview without the use of a computer

Cons

- Easily shows wear and tear
- Fragile document
- Can be too cumbersome to carry around
- The portfolio can look amateurish, if professional looking supplies are not used.
- Linear; reader is confined to the organization of the portfolio

Guidelines for creating hardcopy portfolios:

- Put items in a loose-leaf binder
- Use sheet protectors
- If possible, keep a master copy of all work and use copies in the portfolio
- Keep your interview portfolio to a manageable size—5-15 pages
- Omit page numbers—this provides you the freedom to rearrange as necessary
- Use consistent headings
- Use index tabs and/or title pages to separate sections
- Include a table of contents
- Use a computer to create all text
- Use quality paper

What should be included in a professional portfolio?

Deciding what to include in a portfolio requires thought and consideration. After all, it could be your portfolio that lands you a particular job or a promotion. When deciding what to include in your portfolio, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who is my audience?
2. What specific duties and responsibilities fall under the job description?
3. What documents do I have that appropriately demonstrate proficiency and skill within identified duties and responsibilities?
4. Are the documents that I plan to include in my portfolio appropriate to this particular profession/career industry?

By honestly answering the above questions and by using the list of portfolio items (below) as a guideline, you should be able to identify documents appropriate to your particular situation.

Suggested portfolio documents

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resume	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Philosophy Statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Employment History	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research Papers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Awards/Honors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Appropriate Personal Information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Certifications/Licenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• GPA
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Degrees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extra-Curricular Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skills/Abilities• Projects• Professional Development Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional Memberships• Performance Evaluations• References/Letters of Recommendation

Career Specific Artifacts:

Consider the field in which you want to work. You may want to include additional items not listed above. For example, educators may want to include a videotape of them in the classroom, evidence of student learning or sample lesson plans. An artist may want to include photographs of work samples, course descriptions and a list of mastered competencies.

Time is of the Essence:

Finally, because the individual reviewing your portfolio does not have an endless amount of time to spend assessing all entries, it is in your interest to create a separate interview or showcase portfolio. An interview portfolio is a mini compilation of your best documents that you show potential employers and reviewers during interviews. Remember to replace selected documents back into your master portfolio if using the hardcopy format.

How should the portfolio be organized?

Portfolios should not be organized hap hazardously. As a guide, it is helpful to consider your audience and the field in which you are working or want to work. There are three main ways to organize a portfolio—*chronologically, functionally and thematically*.

Chronologically—Items are arranged in order.

This method allows individuals to highlight an increase in job responsibility and career progression. It is typically arranged into categories first. Subsequent entries are then organized chronologically. Common categories include work history, education, awards, accomplishments, etc.

Functionally—Items arranged by description, task, etc.

This method allows individuals to highlight a variety of skills obtained from different experiences. The creator first picks the functions to highlight. He or she then includes documents that support or demonstrate competency within the identified functions. Examples of categories used in functional portfolios include experience in supervision, leadership, management, project development, customer service, etc.

Thematically—Items arranged by major themes. This method allows the creator to create his or her own themes and use appropriate documentation to illustrate achievements within the themes. Common themes include work and volunteer history.

For more details check out “*Portfolio Power: The New Way to Showcase All Your Job Skills and Experiences*,” located in the Career Resource Library.

Important things to consider

Creating a portfolio requires a fair amount of work. You may think you have created the ideal portfolio when, in actuality, it still is not complete. Below are some things to consider when working on your portfolio. Remember, your portfolio is a representation of you and your professionalism and should, therefore, be one of your best works.

- Does my portfolio look professional?
- Does my portfolio accurately reflect my skills?
- Is my portfolio occupationally focused?
- Can my portfolio stand alone without explanation?
- Does my portfolio support my resume?
- Is my portfolio easy to review?
- Is my portfolio free of typos and other errors?
- Is my portfolio current and up-to-date?
- Is my contact information easy to locate and read?
- Have I avoided using too many different fonts?

References

Located in the Career Resource Library

Amirian, S. & Flanigan, E. (2006). *Create your digital portfolio: The fast track to career success*. Indianapolis: JIST Works.

**Excellent step-by-step information and instructions on creating digital portfolios.*

Kimeldorf, M. (1997). *Portfolio power: The new way to showcase all your job skills and experiences*. Princeton: Peterson's.

Mullen, L., Britten, J., & McFadden, J. (2005). *Digital portfolios in teacher education*. Indianapolis: JIST Works.

Williams, A. G. & Hall, K. J. (2005). *Creating your career portfolio: At-a-glance guide for students* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson.

Additional Paper Resources

Bullock, A. A. & Hawk, P. P. (2005). *Developing a teaching portfolio: A guide for preservice and practicing teachers*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson.

Campbell, D. M., Cignetti P. B., Melenzyer, B. J., Nettlers, D. H. & Wyman, R. M. (2001). *How to develop a professional portfolio: A manual for teachers*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Kilbane, C. R. & Milman, N. B. (2003). *The digital teaching portfolio handbook: A how-to guide for educators*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Constantino, P. M. & De Lorenzo, M. N. (2002). *Developing a professional teaching portfolio: A guide for success*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Web Resources

<http://www.mcdaniel.edu/5732.htm>

<http://www.georgebrown.ca/saffairs/stusucc/portfolio.aspx>

<http://www.smu.edu/career/portfolio.htm>

http://www.quintcareers.com/job_search_portfolio.html