

Portfolio Preparation

“The portfolio is a career communication tool that creates a narrative about your work and artistic philosophy. It is a showcase of what you have to offer as an employment, exhibition, or academic candidate and is a compilation of your best and most recent work. Your portfolio is a piece that is always in progress and always evolving as you in turn evolve as a creative professional.”

Harriet Schwartz, Carnegie Mellon Career Center

What do I need in my portfolio?

In the 21st Century it is crucial that creative people have web sites. Whether you use your web site as a portfolio, business, or what have you, the digital age is here and prospective employers will expect that your work is easily accessible. If you do not feel as if you have the skills to design your own web site, here are some sites that may be helpful:

- [Big Black Bag](#)
- [CarbonMade](#)
- [Coroflot](#)
- [Other People's Pixels](#)
- [PortfolioOpen](#)
- [Web Design Library](#)
- [Weebly](#)

Over time you will have at least two portfolios. The first is your “master portfolio” and the second is your “interview portfolio.” The master portfolio is a compilation of all of your work and you will add and subtract to it over time. The interview portfolio is comprised of pieces from your master portfolio that are applicable to the job, exhibition space, or other criteria.

If you are keeping a master portfolio on the web, CLEARLY delineate what kind of work is in each section so that potential employers, galleries, etc. will not have to hunt through meaningless images. Too much of a good thing really can become too much of a good thing.

Make sure your portfolio contents are appropriate to the position for which you are applying. In other words, if you are applying for a graphic design internship, you may not want to include images of your oil paintings. Include only examples of your best graphic work. If you have 20 projects completed but think only 10 are of good enough quality to be shown, only include those 10 in your interview portfolio. You want to make sure that only your best work is presented, and you don't want to waste the viewer's time. Always start and end with a strong image and make sure the work in between is coherent and connected.

When applying for design positions, do your homework about the business to which you are applying and make sure the work you include is applicable. The same holds true when submitting your portfolio for art shows, galleries, art fairs, etc. Doing your research will ensure you submit appropriate work. While it is true that your portfolio should include

evidence of breadth and depth, when in doubt about what to include, contact the employer, gallery owner, etc.

Before the advent of digital communication, portfolios were sometimes referred to as “artist packets.” There are some venues in which portfolios are accepted via regular mail. When mailing a portfolio, enclose the following, in this order (unless the prospectus dictates otherwise):

- A cover letter
- An artist’s bio or resume
- An artist’s statement
- Reviews (if any)
- Images of your work (CD/DVD, slides, digital prints, etc.)
- Self addressed stamped envelope for return of portfolio
- A piece of cardboard to prevent damage in transit
- A big enough envelope to contain everything

For an internship, you can adapt the materials above to the needs of the application.

When sending information via email, the email itself becomes the cover letter and everything else is an attachment. If the above information is on your web site, then link to your URL in the email. ALWAYS follow the directions presented by the employer/organization in terms of submission of materials.

If you schedule an appointment with the prospective employer/art dealer/gallery owner in person you should take along examples of your work in a well-organized portfolio, binder, or catalogue. Adapt the items listed above:

- Artist statement
- Images of your work
- Resume
- Credit information sheet, if appropriate

What format is best?

This depends upon the situation. Ask the employer what she or he prefers. Usually you can send digital images via email with attachments, but never exceed 1MB and ALWAYS send images in PDF format (do not ever send images in PhotoShop, Illustrator, etc.). You may also be able to send a CD, a DVD, or the URL for your web site.

When presenting the work in person, employers wish to see work in the venue in which it is best seen. So, if the work should be seen printed, bring a book. If the work should be seen on a screen, bring a laptop. If the work is mixed bring both. Some employers will want to see all work printed or all work on the screen. When in doubt, ASK how the interviewer would like to see the work.

However, don’t assume everyone has the same access to technology or that work created in a Mac environment will always work in a PC environment. Always ask for the employer’s preference. To reiterate, when sending images, always send as PDF. DO NOT SEND ILLUSTRATOR FILES, PHOTOSHOP FILES, INDESIGN FILES, ETC.

If you are using a binder or catalogue you can also include a front and back cover. If you are using pictures or digital prints, mat them and cover them with clear protection. You

should include evidence of your process such as sketches, drafts, and works in progress.

For your web site, keep the following in mind:

- Make your site quick loading
- Make your site easy to navigate
- Be sure your links work
- Cross link pages if possible
- Include your resume, statement and bio as separate linked pages
- Make sure your site is coherent and set up so that you can make changes easily

Unlabeled icons are usually not helpful for the viewer so please avoid them. In addition, your web site most likely will be very public so please bear this in mind when including information and images.

How do I get my work photographed?

There is nothing worse than good artwork that is badly photographed. All artists need to learn to take good photographs of their work. However, if you do not take good photographs of your work, find an experienced photographer who can. Don't be tempted to save money when it comes to photographing your work. Your viewer will not see the strength of your portfolio. If you work in 3-D, photograph your work from several angles.

Separate shots of details are good for both 2-D and 3-D work when applicable. A&D provides training/workshops with Patrick Young so that students can learn to photograph their work. These workshops are announced via email so please look for these announcements every semester.

Once students have successfully completed a workshop, they can reserve Room 2006 to photograph work. Reservations for Room 2006 are done through the front desk in the Academic Programs Center.

For more information about portfolio preparation as well as advice on being a professional artist or designer see:

<http://art-design.umich.edu/career>

For designers: http://www.core77.com/design.edu/portfolio_tips.asp
Samples of design portfolios: <http://www.coroflot.com/>

Presentation Checklist

The following checklist is a useful tool whether you are preparing for a formal interview or have a chance meeting in which you can network. Some categories (i.e., resume, portfolio, etc.) may be more applicable to formal interviewing. Always have business cards or leave behinds with you, be able to discuss your interest in your chosen field, and follow up with contacts.

_____ Resume

_____ Portfolio

- Relevance to organization
- Examples of process
- Ability to speak about each piece
- Leave behind

_____ Business Card or other means of contact

_____ 30 second self-promotion

- Background
- Interests/Activities
- Leadership/Campus Involvement
- Major/Academic Interests
- Volunteer Work
- Special Abilities/Skills
- Interesting Life Experiences

_____ Ability to explain interest in your field

_____ Ability to explain interest in employer's organization (do your research!)

_____ Interview "outfit"

_____ STAR (able to describe Situation, Task, Action/Activity, Result)

_____ Ask for contact information

_____ Follow up as agreed and/or appropriate

_____ Send thank you letters/notes promptly

For more information about portfolios, or to discuss other issues related to career development, contact John Luther, Career Development Coordinator, by stopping at the front desk of the Smucker Wagstaff Academic Programs Center or calling to make an appointment (734) 764-0397.