

Creating a Professional Portfolio

What exactly is a portfolio?

A portfolio is a showcase for your achievements and talents, which can be used to show samples of your learning, experiences, work certificates, diplomas, awards, letters of recommendation, and so on. It is most often presented in a good quality three-ring binder, and many of the items it contains are inserted in plastic sheet protectors. Think of it as a sophisticated scrapbook. But more valuable, it is a tool to help you take away more from your experiences so that, even without the portfolio in hand, you are a wiser, more interesting person.

There are master portfolios and sample portfolios. Your master portfolio is a complete collection of all of your documents, while a sample portfolio is a scaled down version, prepared for a specific purpose, such as a job interview.

Why do you need a portfolio? What are the advantages to using it?

A Professional Portfolio can serve you in several important ways.

- ✓ Reflective Practice – Students value clarity in their coursework. Professional growth occurs when students are challenged to articulate their beliefs and values.
- ✓ Career Advancement – Research has shown that a significant percentage of school executives believe that a professional portfolio is a useful tool in the hiring and selection process.
- ✓ The Interview – The process of portfolio development prepares the candidate for the interview by requiring the candidate to summarize and articulate beliefs, skills, and strengths.
- ✓ Matching the Position and Candidate – The Professional Portfolio helps the candidate to stand out from others. It also gives insights into the candidate's personality, skills and beliefs that allow the interview team and candidate to better evaluate the “fit” for the position.

What goes into a portfolio?

The Leadership Certificate Portfolio is meant to demonstrate the learning you experienced as part of the certificate process. Your finished product should reflect each one of the certificate components, in whatever medium you deem appropriate.

Here are some other ideas for portfolio content related to job searching:

- Your career goals or career mission statement.
- A copy of your résumé.
- A list of your skill sets or competencies.
- Letters of reference or recommendation from previous employers, volunteer work, work-study programs, internships, co-op programs, summer jobs, peer tutoring, and so on.
- Transcripts.
- A summary of community service or volunteer work you have done.
- Academic awards.
- Copies of educational certificates, diplomas, or degrees.
- Copies of positive performance appraisals.

- E-mails, thank you letters, and handwritten notes complimenting you on a job well done.
- Company announcements of promotions, awards or achievements.
- Documents you may have designed-brochures, flyers, pamphlets, report covers, reports.
- Flyers, conference brochures, videos or other materials describing presentations, workshops or seminars you have presented.
- Photographs representing projects you have been involved in.
- Samples of articles you have published.
- A report on research you have conducted.
- Articles written about you or projects you have been involved in (newspapers, company newsletters, etc.)
- Copies of evaluations from a workshop you presented or a speech you made.
- Reflection questions.

Many people set up their portfolio in a fancy binder with labeled sections separated by tab dividers. Others use a file box or something similar.

Some Tips for Getting Started on Your Portfolio

The best time to start assembling your portfolio is...NOW! Assembling a portfolio takes time, and you want to do a good job on it to ensure that it is a positive reflection of you and your skills.

1. Collect all the materials together that you would like to put in your portfolio. You may need to get certain items enlarged, color-copied, re-typed or scanned if the originals are dog-eared, stained or on poor quality paper.
2. Supplies:
 - A good quality three-ring binder – it may be zippered or not – or a nice file box for your master portfolio.
 - One or two smaller binders or good quality folders (for sample portfolios).
 - Dull-finished sheet protectors
 - Labels or cards on which you can type descriptions of items displayed in your portfolio.
 - Dividers with labels you can have printed off (not hand labeled)
 - Professional-looking paper for printing and copying documents.
3. DO NOT punch holes in any of your documents or materials.
4. Put your name on all of your materials / documents.
5. Group related items for your portfolio together.
6. Prepare and insert tab dividers for each group of items. Do not handwrite the labels.
7. Ask a friend, teacher, or someone else whose opinion you trust to look at your portfolio and give you feedback on anything that could be improved. If they notice something that doesn't look right, chances are good that potential employers will notice it too.

Sources: George Brown Student Affairs Career Counseling:
<http://www.gbrownc.on.ca/saffairs/stusucc/portfolio.html>
University of Wyoming Department of Educational Leadership
<http://www.uwyo.edu/edleadership/pep/portfoliopep.asp>