

*SKILLS FOR SUCCESS™*

# ***STRENGTHENING PORTFOLIO- BUILDING SKILLS***



**DON RAUF**

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DON RAUF



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# INTRODUCTION

When it comes to searching for a job, employment seekers need to have a winning résumé, a persuasive cover letter, and potential references at the ready. In today's marketplace, a portfolio is a must to gain a competitive edge. And portfolios aren't just for job hunters. Students also use them as a way to present their academic achievements, experience, and skills to gain admission into their top-choice colleges. In addition, the portfolio can be a convincing tool when seeking a bonus, a promotion, or scholarship.

Many people may think that they don't need a portfolio. They may already document their lives fairly thoroughly on Facebook and LinkedIn, but that's often not comprehensive enough to advance as a student or employee. Although the portfolio has been traditionally associated with art students and art-related careers, this collection of work samples and achievements is becoming the norm for almost every occupation.

Increasingly, professionals are finding that a portfolio can be the factor that tips the scales in their favor and clinches getting a job. The portfolio supplements the résumé, bringing to life the real work that you've developed and completed.



A portfolio highlighting work, academic, and other achievements can be key to helping a job candidate land the perfect position.

The portfolio can include photos, slides, brochures, lists of statistics, newspaper clippings, annual reports, images of products you've developed, or outlines of projects you've completed. Portfolios may be binders of notes and documents, large carrying cases of artwork, or in the form of a website. A portfolio gives proof that you've got what it takes to get the job done.

Liz Danzico, National Public Radio creative director, turns to portfolios when she is searching for a job can-

didate. “A portfolio of work is a curated experience,” she said in an interview in *Core 77/Industrial* magazine. “It’s an applicant’s chance to shape the way that I’m viewing his or her approach, methods, process, and best thinking; but oftentimes, a portfolio only contains final pieces, as applicants are overly concerned about presenting perfection. Polish doesn’t communicate process though, and therefore I’m left with only part of the story. Messy problems—and how applicants work through them—can show a great deal more in a portfolio than one finished, airtight solution. It’s then the applicant’s job to curate those into an experience for the portfolio viewer.”

As Danzico points out, a portfolio showcases a person’s approach, or how he or she will go about tackling a job. Establishing your professional identity is called career branding, and it’s what sets you apart from others in the work world. Collecting your best work also gives a person a chance to recognize his or her own achievements and take pride in their accomplishments. It demonstrates progress made and skills that have been developed. It also helps give a structure and story to a person’s professional life.

The portfolio should be treated as a living document, a body of evidence that is continually growing. It needs to be continually updated and edited to remain current and relevant. Even if you are just starting on your education or career path, you can bring together materials to form a powerful portfolio that will set you on a course to reach your goals.

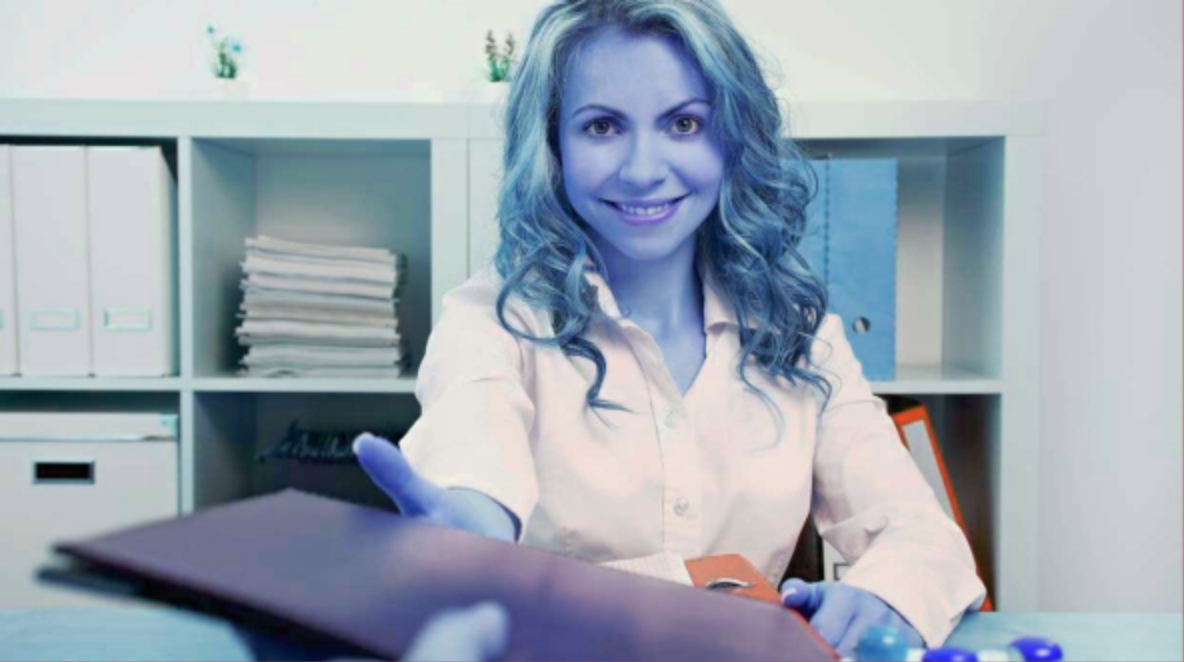
# Portfolios for All

To get into the college of your dreams or to land that ideal job, you need to stand out. The résumé may *tell* potential employers about your skills and achievements, but the portfolio *shows* them what you really have done. Visuals can speak louder than words, and people really respond to images. The portfolio can be one of your biggest selling points. The collection of work showcases your accomplishments in visual terms, and in effect, brings the résumé to life.

The portfolio of today can be a physical presentation, but many are also displayed on websites, which is a convenient way to promote past successes. Simply building the portfolio helps individuals understand their own “story” and who they are as professionals.

Putting together a collection of work can be solid preparation for a job interview. It makes it easier to discuss skills and talents and explain your professional growth and ability to handle diverse challenges. You can assess your own strengths and weaknesses and see where you might need to focus future endeavors. You may also recognize





Materials and information included in a portfolio can spur an interesting conversation during a job interview that may win over a potential employer.

patterns in creativity, style, or projects that reveal your own personal preferences.

In an interview, the portfolio can also provide material for conversation. An applicant may find it easier to talk about their achievements when they can point to images of their work. It can be more convincing to describe how you developed and executed a plan when you have visuals that tell the story. Conveying pride in your accomplishments can impress employers, especially when they actually see what you have done.

As you go along in life you may actually develop two portfolios—a large one with all your major accomplishments and a shorter edited version to reach your current goals—whether you are applying to college or a job or something else entirely.

# JOB-HUNT ESSENTIALS

While the portfolio can certainly clinch a position, a fully equipped job-hunter's kit should include some standards tools—the résumé, cover letter, recommendations, and interview skills:

- **An error-free résumé.** The résumé gives a concise one- or two-page snapshot of who you are as a

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The résumé remains the top tool for any successful job hunter. This is one sample of a template that can be used to show work experience, skills, education, and other qualifications.



**NAME SURNAME**  
— PROFESSION —

**PROFILE**

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potential employee. It includes your work experience, skills, accomplishments, and education. Employers usually refer to this vital document first when making hiring decisions, so it needs to have no mistakes and be well-written.

- **A compelling cover letter.** This letter introduces you to a potential employer and lets you give a short pitch to explain why your talents and background would be a good match for a specific job.
- **Positive references.** If you're in the running for a position, a potential employer may want to do a background check and call a few people who can vouch for the quality of your work. These references need to be able to champion all your positive traits as a potential employee—punctuality, strong work ethic, creativity, teamwork, strong communication skills, and more.
- **Good interview skills.** This face-to-face meeting with a potential employer can be the final deciding factor that tips the scales in your favor. Employers want to get a sense of how you interact on a human level and how you communicate one-on-one. Job hunters typically practice for the interview, reviewing the points they wish to stress, so when they meet they have an impressive delivery.

## WHAT ARE THE BASIC INGREDIENTS?

While a portfolio is considered a tool to supplement the résumé, the résumé is usually included in any portfolio. When a potential employer is reviewing a job candidate's materials, it's possible that the résumé might get separated from the portfolio—so including a copy helps the potential employer immediately connect the candidate with the portfolio.

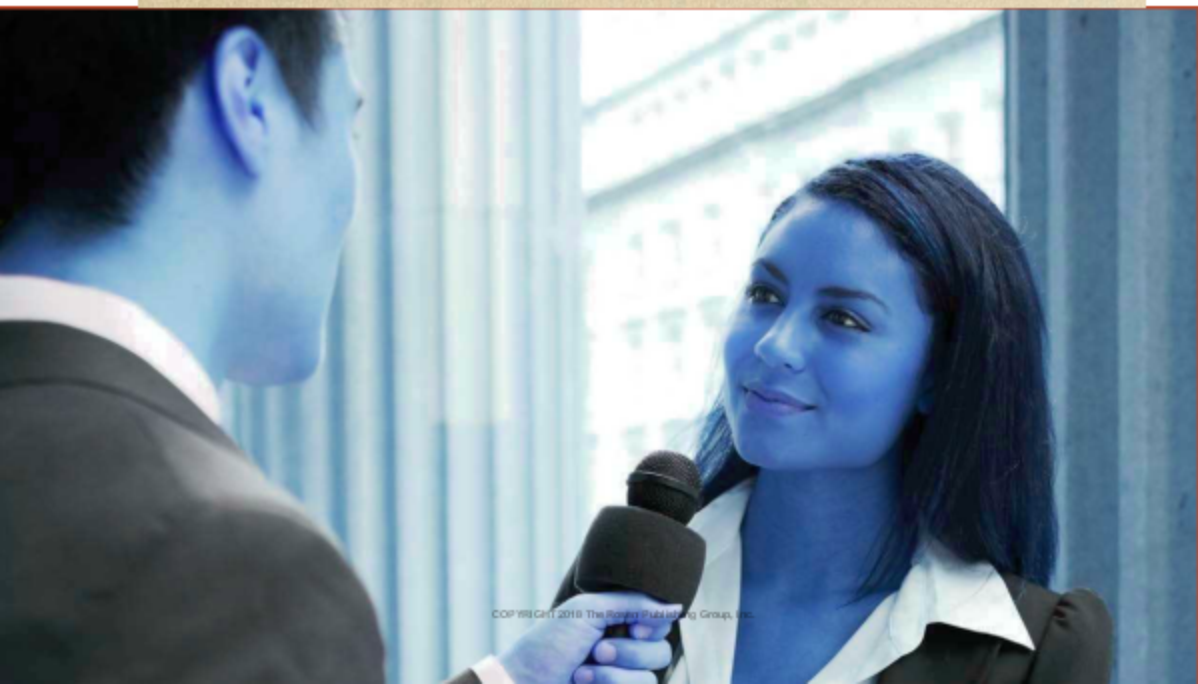
The work samples collected have to be of the highest quality and demonstrate versatility and the ability to get the job done. They should be the best script, ad copy, brochure, report, design, etc. The samples usually need accompanying text so that the viewer understands what he or she is looking at and why it is relevant. When was the sample made? What was its intent? How long did it take to create? Did the project achieve its goals? Where was the project completed? Who was involved? Who was the client? Who was the target audience?

Ask yourself if the materials in the portfolio indicate the ability to meet deadlines, work on budget, get along with others, produce under pressure, get results, and make the customer happy. Beyond samples of work, some people present any media coverage they may have received in relation to their achievement—articles or interviews from TV, radio, or online. Sometimes, photos can be effective. A

snapshot of you accepting an award may have more impact than simply stating that you've won a prize. These media reinforce the successes you've had.

A portfolio may also feature letters of recommendation from colleagues and bosses, performance reviews, certificates, awards, and any of forms of recognition of achievement. A concise list of accomplishments may be included as well. This may spotlight a plan you undertook to save money and bring things in on budget or under budget, actions you took to solve a problem, collaborative efforts, times you went the extra mile (toiling on the weekends or late at night), or examples of how you sweated the details and that led to a big payoff. Portfolios can give you a chance to simply explain complex concepts and demon-

Samples of press coverage can often boost a job seeker's presentation. Be sure to include any TV and radio interviews or print articles about yourself.



strate your ability to think strategically and solve real-world problems.

## THE WIDE WORLD OF PORTFOLIOS

Portfolios today extend beyond the world of art-related careers. Here are a few of the many careers that can be furthered by a winning portfolio.

Event planners organize weddings, corporate events, fund-raisers, and other festive gatherings where many people come together. To find new event work, they want to show photos that tell a story about their previous successes, and provide text that describes what the productions were all about and how they proceeded from beginning to end. Portfolio samples show a range of events. For example, clients may view images of a wedding or a corporate party that takes them from the set-up and introductions to the finish and farewells.

PR and marketing specialists present a variety of writing pieces that spotlight their best work. Often, success in these fields is measured by media attention. Were you successful getting exposure on TV, radio, or print? Show samples of that.

Chefs today may find that their portfolio is one the most effective tools in their culinary kit. Knockout portfolios need clear photos of the most mouth-watering dishes—the ones that look most aesthetically appealing, along with



Almost every type of career can be given a lift with a professional-looking portfolio. A chef, for example, can include photos of mouthwatering dishes, preparation techniques, and recipes.

recipes, menus, action shots from the kitchen, any newspaper clippings, impressive reviews, or TV appearances. Videos of food prep may help as well.

Doctors must maintain a portfolio not only for job applications but for licensing and relicensing. The materials demonstrate that a medical professional has maintained good medical practice, proper teaching and training, and professional relationships with patients and colleagues. These may include records of meetings with educational and clinical supervisors, workplace assessments, reports and documents about interesting cases, and courses attended.

Engineers of all types (mechanical, electrical, chemical, civil, etc.) may include sketches, graphics, diagrams, and audio-visual clips in their portfolio, all visuals that will give a sample of the projects that they have worked on.

Construction workers and contractors may find that a collection showcasing their best work is a great way to gain new business. Range and quality are key. Builders may display decks, kitchens, bathrooms, bedrooms, roofs, garages, entire homes, and office spaces. Close-up photos can reveal detail in the work. Photos may show the progression of a project as well as dates to highlight their timeliness. Any documentation indicating the proper following of safety procedures and codes can be helpful.

Computer programmers also can benefit from a visual presentation of their work. Employers who know their applications and programs can appreciate solid coding when they see it. Yet, on the website Grokcode, com-



puter programmer, developer, and coder Jess Johnson estimates that less than 5 percent of programmers have a portfolio of their work. Be sure to describe each project and provide the project name, client name, your role, codes used, code flow diagrams, how the program works, and all the programming languages, skills, and technology that went into its creation.

Bookkeepers and accountants can present pages of accounting reports or a list of relevant software programs. Offering different types of accounting reports and stats on the volume of data you routinely process can show your range of abilities.

Finally, detectives present notes on case histories, samples of the investigative process, and photos showing evidence that is pivotal to proving a case.

## PORTFOLIOS FOR “PORTFOLIO CAREERS”

A growing number of people today construct their work life around a variety of part-time work, such as temporary jobs, freelancing, and self-employment. A work life built in this manner is called a portfolio career. This type of employment path seems to be increasingly more common. But even the portfolio career needs a portfolio. Portfolio career workers especially need samples of their best work as they progress from one gig to the next.

# Filling Your Portfolio

Some say that the best portfolios tell a story. They show the viewer exactly what you're all about—your talents, interests, and goals. To show your capabilities, these materials can often speak for themselves. All portfolios will have some basic ingredients: a full and complete résumé, real examples of work, testimonials, performance reviews, and copies of training awards and certificates.

## GETTING STARTED

The first step for anyone starting a portfolio is to review all the work he or she has done and then assess it with a critical eye. For some, this means getting their professional materials together in one location so they are easy to review.

Consider pastimes. To gain work that you will absolutely enjoy doing, you may want to think about hobbies and interests as well. What are the activities that bring you satisfaction? Creating a list of these can help you see where your true passions lie. Choose samples that will set you on



Sometimes highlighting the hobbies and pastimes that interest you—such as playing music—can open the door to work opportunities that you will find most rewarding.

a course toward these real professional desires. As you sift through materials, narrow down your portfolio choices to ten of your strongest pieces of work. You may want more and that's fine, but remember not to overload the viewer. Keep in mind that you may want to swap out samples depending on the job you're applying for. In an electronic format, it may be easier to include more pieces that can be seen if the viewer wants to dig a little deeper.

Review your education. Think about the possible educational materials you're putting forth, such as awards, certificates, transcripts, lab work, research, letters of recommendation, PowerPoint presentations, and any other

accomplishments or projects that pertain to the work you seek. Think back about your entire educational experience. Which classes and extracurricular activities did you enjoy most and why? These experiences can help shape the collection of work you gather.

Assess your work experiences. As with your education, think about the types of work that have made you happiest. What did you enjoy doing and what did you dislike? Also, did you perform volunteer or temp work that might further your career? Your self-analysis can help form a portfolio that is aligned with your true passions.

## PHYSICAL AND ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS

Depending on the type of work you pursue, you might have a physical portfolio, an electronic version, or both. Even if you don't decide to present employers with a physical portfolio, it can still help you maintain your works, organize them, and store them together in one place.

Still, there is power seeing the physical display. In some situations it may be beneficial to show actual materials. Physical items can make more of an impact, especially in a world where people spend huge stretches of time staring at a computer screen. Websites can actually wind up being less impactful compared to viewing the real deal.

Physical portfolios can range in size and be made from different materials, although most are plastic, vinyl, leather, or faux leather. In an interview, Fox Business online's executive recruiter Tim Tolan says that a portfolio's look should match the level of the position. You can't have a \$5 binder if you're seeking a six-figure job.

Most portfolios are a simple black case with a zipper. Many have plain, clear pages inside to display high quality reproductions, originals, and text. More artistically inclined people may construct their own portfolio cases, sometimes out of nontraditional materials, such as rubber or wood. Artworks often have to be mounted on black or white boards, but some contents may just be loose in the portfolio.

When it comes to hiring, an employer may actually judge a book by its cover. A good-looking portfolio case can make a good impression.



Bulky artworks will most likely need to be photographed to be presented. Oversized original works can be awkward to handle. It's not uncommon to develop a portfolio of quality reproductions that can be left with a potential employer. It's typical for an artist, for example, to leave a portfolio of high quality prints.

As a reminder to potential employers, job candidates may include a few business cards or promotional postcards along with their presentation. You can also provide an electronic form of the portfolio on an accompanying thumb drive, although offering a link to a website may be sufficient.

## SERVICES THAT HELP YOU BUILD YOUR PORTFOLIO

There's no lack of digital portfolio-building services that specialize in organizing and presenting accomplishments. Here are a few options worth exploring. Note that while many are free, each offers paid plans as well—generally the higher the cost, the more tools and features offered.

**Weebly:** This is a great free site for beginners. Features include a slideshow, search box, video player, and audio player.

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**Wix:** This free site creator allows for easy customization with no coding knowledge needed. Users can develop a variety of styles and atmospheres.

**Wordpress:** This is a versatile content management system used by top companies such as eBay, GM, and Reuters. It is known for offering more complex functions, so it can be harder to use than some other sites. Wordpress is an “open source” community project. Tens of thousands of individuals have developed it to make it into a great site. Users pay for hosting.

**Behance:** This multimedia site showcases online portfolios by creative professionals across industries. Colleagues can provide feedback. Clients can subscribe to Behance portfolios and comment on them. It is free to use with an optional paid service.

**Squarespace:** Squarespace provides simple templates for attractive portfolios. The platform emphasizes design. It has tiers of pricing based on the number of pages and extras.

Other sites include Carbonmade, Krop, Portfoliopen, Cargo, Big Black Bag, 22Slides, Moonfruit, Flavors.me, and IMCreator.

## HOW TO MAKE AN ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO

An online portfolio is a website displaying your work. Those who are ambitious and have the technical skills may make their own website from scratch, by coding a unique format to display their work. The internet, however, offers many platforms that make it relatively easy to put together an online portfolio without an in-depth knowledge of coding or programming. All that is needed is a computer and a connection to the internet, and you're ready to go. In most cases, these online portfolio tools are free or available at a low cost.

To translate physical images into a digital format to present online, you may need to scan your work. Most printers today have a scanning option. However, if the work is too large or the scanner does not offer high enough quality, you may want to take materials to a commercial copy center and purchase high-resolution scans. Resolution, or the quality of an electronic image, is measured in dots per inch (DPI), and a standard scan is usually three hundred dpi. At three hundred dpi, the image is clear and the file isn't too big.

Note that sometimes your work may already be posted on another site, and for your portfolio purposes, you may be able to simply provide a link to that URL. This can be especially meaningful if the material has been published





Many online services offer tools to create easy-to-navigate electronic portfolios that let users present work history, achievements, and a snapshot of who they are personally.

and the link takes the viewer directly to that source.

Web platforms such as Weebly, Wix, and Wordpress offer different style options for designing portfolios, but a general rule of thumb is keep things simple and be consistent. Maintaining a clear and uniform design will put your work center stage. In general, the online portfolio includes a short bio where you tell your story, giving a brief synopsis of your work experience. You may share your point of view and set a tone that reveals your personality. If you happen to maintain a blog, include it.

Along the way as you develop your portfolio, ask yourself: Does it highlight my strengths? Does it explain how I solve problems? Does it show how I achieve goals or

improve business? Does it demonstrate my knowledge of the latest technology? Does it show my versatility?

## WHERE TO POST

When it comes to networking to find employment, LinkedIn is probably the most prominent online service today. It's a social network dedicated to advancing the professional lives of its users. Hiring managers use LinkedIn to find candidates with the specific skill sets and necessary experience.

LinkedIn offers a Professional Portfolio feature that lets individuals spotlight samples of their work (presentations, videos, etc.) as part of their LinkedIn profile. But in addition to LinkedIn, there are several other sites dedicated to producing e-portfolios. Most have easy interfaces that allow you to drag and drop or upload items you want featured.

No matter where you host, your electronic portfolio is an advertisement for yourself. You may want to provide links to it on other social media such as Facebook, Google+, and Twitter. The more you spread your good work, the more opportunities may come your way.

## Making a Great Student Portfolio

When it comes to students building their portfolios, they generally fall into two camps—they are either putting together a portfolio to get into college or they are collecting their best work in order to impress a potential employer and land a job. No matter where you are in your life, it's important to gather all your creations and achievements in one place and protect them.

Students are advised to put their work in a physical portfolio that is water and stain resistant. Papers and documents may be protected in plastic sleeves. The key is to keep setting aside your best work. Don't shove it under the bed, lose track of it, or let it get crumpled or damaged.

Students following a path in an artistic field should gather their work as they go along in their pre-college years. For the college-bound, not every student needs a portfolio, but those pursuing any of the following programs most likely do need a collection of work: apparel design, architecture, art education, art history, ceramics, film, fine arts, graphic design, interior design, modeling,



For the college-bound, an academic portfolio can be helpful. It may include samples of their most impressive work, including in-class presentations.

painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, and writing (usually for programs focused on poetry, fiction writing, or screenwriting).

## DRAWING ON SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Many students who are in college and heading out into the workforce face a common problem—they need experience to land a job, but they need a job to get experience. Getting these early breaks can be tough. Developing a portfolio can pose the same problem. A student who may not have much

work experience may have to draw on samples of schoolwork, volunteer experiences, and activities on campus to create a portfolio.

Students need to thoroughly review all their activities and accomplishments to decide what to present. Sometimes, a hobby or extracurricular activity will provide impressive material. For example, a recurring blog or podcast can show creativity, dedication, and mastery of a medium.

Consider all projects and assignments you've completed. You might even include an especially strong performance on a test. Also, check with counselors and career centers at your school. They often offer assistance for developing portfolios.

A story in *USA Today* titled "What Should a Geology Student Put in His or Her Digital Portfolio?" described how one student started her college career as a marketing and graphic design double major. Then in her sophomore year she decided to switch directions and pursue geology. She had begun to develop a digital portfolio of posters and logos, but she had to begin replacing those with charts, maps, and items related to her geology major. The geology department at her school, Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, required its students to establish a digital portfolio using Google Sites.

Google Sites is a free service from Google, which lets you create, edit, and share websites. Bit by bit, this student created works related to her new area of interest. In went



Through services such as Google Sites, job seekers and students can simply upload materials demonstrating their achievements and then share the presentation via the internet.

maps from her cartography course, projections of the globe, and thematic charts that zeroed in on specifics such as crop acreage in Michigan and peanut production throughout the United States.

Her background in graphic art helped her. She used her knowledge of software such as Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop to compose diagrams, maps, and illustrations. She also kept detailed records of her research projects. She maintained logs of her field trips as well, describing the purpose of and activities from her various treks into areas such as Death Valley and the Kilauea Volcano in Hawaii.

## PORTFOLIO DAYS

Art students often present their portfolios to be judged on specific portfolio days. Colleges will have their own portfolio days and then during National Portfolio Days, representatives from many colleges gather together in a campus hall or meeting space to offer their review and critiques.

The National Portfolio Day Association is a nonprofit organization of more than one hundred degree-granting institutions. It holds about thirty-five one-day events at locations around the country from September through January. About fifteen to fifty institutions may participate at any given event. Because hordes of students usually attend, lines are typically long and reviews last no longer than fifteen minutes.

Portfolio day can be an eye-opener for many students because it can be the first time they've had any real critique of their work. Some students may have a narrow view, having received nothing but praise so far from family and friends. While the experience can be ego-busting, it can also serve as a wake-up call that will help a student get on the right track. Colleges may evaluate students' work on specific points such as line, scale, color, and composition. They may advise students to do more observational drawing, add more color, include more variety, or try different media or subject matter.

Some students may seek out professional portfolio prep advice, but sessions like that can be costly. Students who are very serious may seek out adult or college classes that offer more advanced training beyond their high school.

On National Portfolio Days, students have a chance to present their work before college representatives and get a critique about what to include and what to take out.





She kept journals and summarized each day for her portfolio. She wrote an in-depth paper on diamond deposits in Sierra Leone, in Africa, which provided another boost to her portfolio. When she earned credentials to be a water tester in Iowa, the certification went into her portfolio. She included documents that showed her ability to carry out scientific tasks, such as monitoring for nitrates and phosphates in water. The variety of materials she put together proved to be attractive to job recruiters.

## THE IDEAL ART PORTFOLIO

For students who may have their hearts set on attending an art school or college with an art or design program, the portfolio must be carefully put together. Cooper Union is one of the most prestigious art and design programs in the country—about 12 percent of applicants are admitted to its art program each year.

As with most art programs, Cooper Union requires that students submit a portfolio. The school recommends that portfolios feature ten to twenty pieces that demonstrate the student's "degree of interest" and it should represent a cross-section of their best work. So a variety of themes, styles, and mediums might be worth putting forward if those creations are high quality.

Variety of subject matter is important. In general, a school will be more impressed by diverse views. Twenty self-portraits might not be that interesting. The diversity in

media may show color, black and white, pastels, oils, watercolors, charcoal, etc. This demonstrates diverse skill sets. For the artist, it is important to keep experimenting, learning, pushing, and creating.

The pieces you include in a portfolio should show technical mastery. They should demonstrate a command of the materials. They should look like professional works that are not marred by mistakes or sloppiness. Every work should be 100 percent finished—works that are just half complete don't cut it.

In the article “Portfolio Prep” in the *New York Times*, Natalie Lanese, a representative from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, said, “First and foremost, we want to see how well they can draw.” Drawing is often valued above other artistic talents because drawing applies to so many artistic endeavors, from commercial design to fashion to architecture. In so many fields, the design comes first, and design requires confident drawing skills.

Drawing from real life is an especially valuable skill and student artists are advised to keep a sketchpad and devote time to real-life drawing. Because art schools want to see this type of talent, college applicants are encouraged to include sketchbooks. These can reveal more about the interests and creative vision of the artist. Sketchbooks often demonstrate a person's ability to conceptualize and solve problems.

Many art schools place value on a work of “direct observation.” They want to see how you envision the real

world. The website Art Prof, a free online educational platform for visual arts, says that drawing from direct observation is now the rare exception among high school art students. “Just doing this one directive will distinguish your work from the crowd, and put you lightyears ahead of other students,” according to the site. So make sure you have observational drawings in your arsenal.

Typically, students applying to college have the opportunity to get feedback on their portfolios at a portfolio day at the school or at a national portfolio event. At these events, school representatives review work and give feedback so students can adjust their submissions.

The art world wants original voices, and the portfolio

When it comes to getting into an art school, a dazzling portfolio is a must. To get into the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, applicants need to put forth 10 to 15 of their best creations.



should show off a person's unique vision and personality. Think outside the box. When the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) reviews portfolios, usually consisting of ten to fifteen works, it looks for a sense of who you are, your interests, and your willingness to explore, experiment, and think beyond technical art and design skills. Most schools want a young artist who is different from the others, because plenty of people can copy other styles. An original vision is hard to find.

Most pieces should have been created within the last few years. Some art, such as a sculpture, would be hard to submit. Therefore photos are needed that fully reveal the project. Make sure that the photos are excellent quality. Also, art may be in the form of a video or film. Schools may require that these samples be submitted on a thumb drive or by supplying an online link. Sometimes schools want the actual pieces submitted and mailed in, while in other cases colleges will accept electronic files with images.

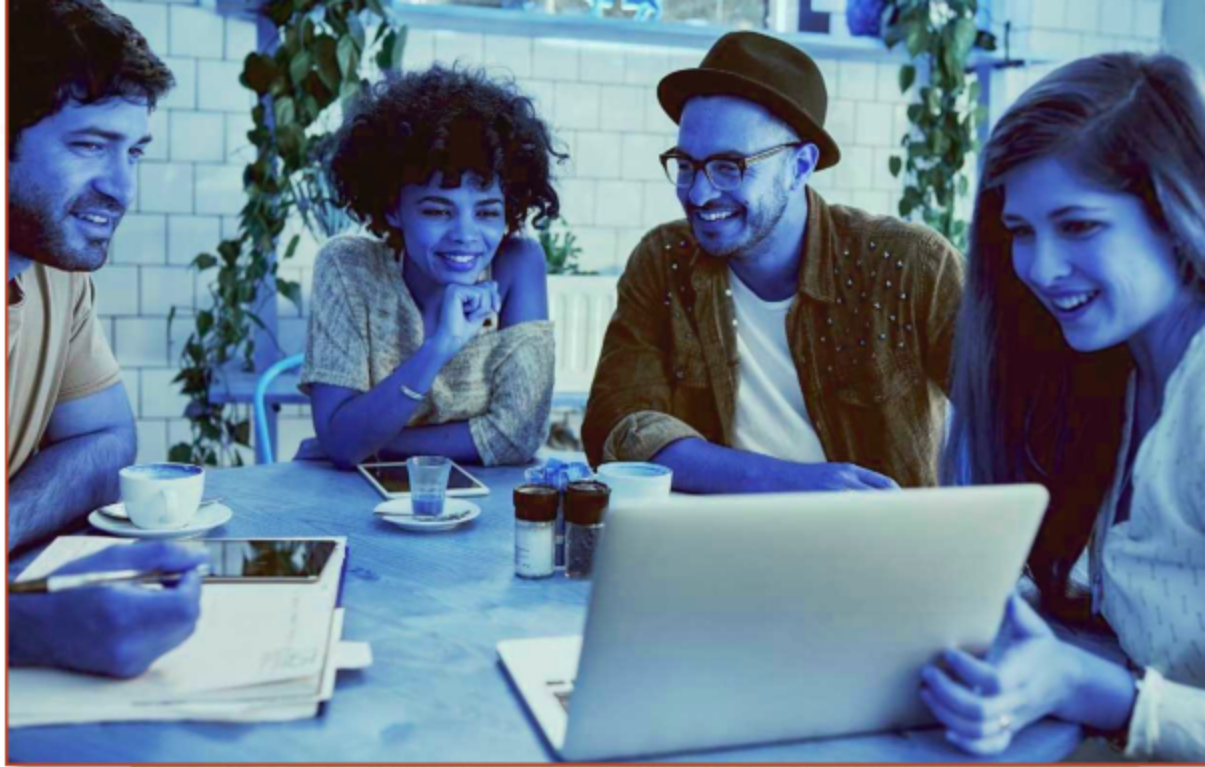
## Portfolio Pitfalls and How to Avoid Them

Sacha Greif, curator of Folyo, a social e-commerce platform for original student artwork that helps companies find great designers, says on the website Letsworkshop that the biggest mistake of all is to not have any portfolio whatsoever. “Even in this age of blogs, tumblelogs, and social networks, there’s no excuse for not having a portfolio.”

Finely tuned portfolios can make all the difference in this competitive world. Employers can be flooded with materials, so they normally do not have much time to review portfolios. Keeping your portfolio short and to the point is vital, although a presentation should not be a skimpy one-page offering. Also, people may tailor their portfolio according to the job they are applying for. So be flexible about adjusting the contents according to each situation.

### IMPROVE YOUR PORTFOLIO

This is your chance to sell yourself, so make sure you avoid mistakes. Keep in mind along the way, however, that certain work is more subjective than others. If someone responds



To land a job, the portfolio should be adjusted to match the particular position. Getting critiques from friends and colleagues can help fine-tune a presentation.

negatively to your art, for example, it's possible that it simply doesn't suit his or her personal taste. Here is some advice on what may improve your presentation:

- **Don't be messy.** Jennifer Pastore, associate photo editor for *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, said in the book *How to Create a Portfolio and Get Hired*, "Any kind of sloppiness in the craft of the portfolio is unacceptable."
- **Double-check spelling and get an extra set of eyes to review things.** Others may spot errors that you missed. Proofread and run spellcheck. But don't let autocorrect do all the work. A computer can make mistakes. Bad

grammar can sink your chances of getting a job. Make sure all your language usage is correct. Don't leave out essential details.

- **Organization can help.** Separate work you want to present into categories. A freelance writer, for example, may have books, articles, and advertising or marketing work. Keeping samples arranged according to genres could help with presentation.
- **Formatting counts.** For example, if your portfolio is in an extensive binder, a table of contents may help, listing pages to turn to. Check that your presentation is easy to navigate. Make sure everything makes sense and is self-explanatory. In an interview online in *Format* magazine, the CEO and cofounder of *Format*, Lukas Dryja, says that you might want to view your online portfolio like a storefront. Ask yourself, would you stop and look around, and is it easy to tell exactly what you are selling?
- **Present images that can be seen.** Don't include thumbnail images that are too small. Viewers shouldn't have to strain their eyes to see your images. If you're struggling to see your own images, then make them bigger.
- **Don't be boring.** Check that your text is interesting to read. If it's not, it suggests that you are not interesting either. The visuals should be stimulating as well—if you are not in an art-related field, this can be difficult but

you can use aids like charts and graphs to illustrate your work.

- **Make sure you present high-quality work.** Don't include items that are not of sufficient quality. Sometimes play the role of the potential employer and ask yourself: "Could I count on this person to do great work for me?" If you present six killer examples of your work, that may make a better impression than putting forth six dynamite pieces and six so-so items.
- **Quality usually wins out over quantity.** Be a tough editor of yourself. Will your work make a person stop and say, "Wow?" In fact, as a person progresses in a career, he or she usually clears out the student project work and only presents examples from their working lives.

## BE ABLE TO SAY "NO"

A person who is successful at building a specialty or talent usually knows how to say "no" to doing work that will not progress his or her career. Saying "no" can be a difficult thing to master. As Steve Jobs, the cofounder of Apple, once said in *Forbes* magazine, "People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I'm actually as proud of the things we haven't done as the things I have done.



## WHERE TO SHOW OFF YOUR WORK

To get your portfolio in front of the right audience to help advance your career and connect you to more opportunities, explore websites that are tailored precisely to your professional path. Most of these take the hard work of computer coding out of the process. Here are a few worth investigating, but an online search will reveal many more options.

### **For Authors**

- Clippings.me is designed for the freelance journalist and lets writers display as many clips (published writing samples) as they want.
- Journo Portfolio is geared toward all types of writers (copy writers, content managers, bloggers, and beyond). Users can upload all types of multimedia, including PDFs, videos, and photos.

### **For Architects**

- ArchDaily features a section of projects in many categories including health care, hospitality, industrial, commercial, and residential. The photos and plans can serve as inspiration for any architect constructing a portfolio.

### **For Artists**

- Behance showcases creative works by artists working in many different media. The service is free and

reaches an international community.

- Coroflot not only offers a tool to create an online portfolio for a range of designers, this free platform also features job listings and a free monthly newsletter.

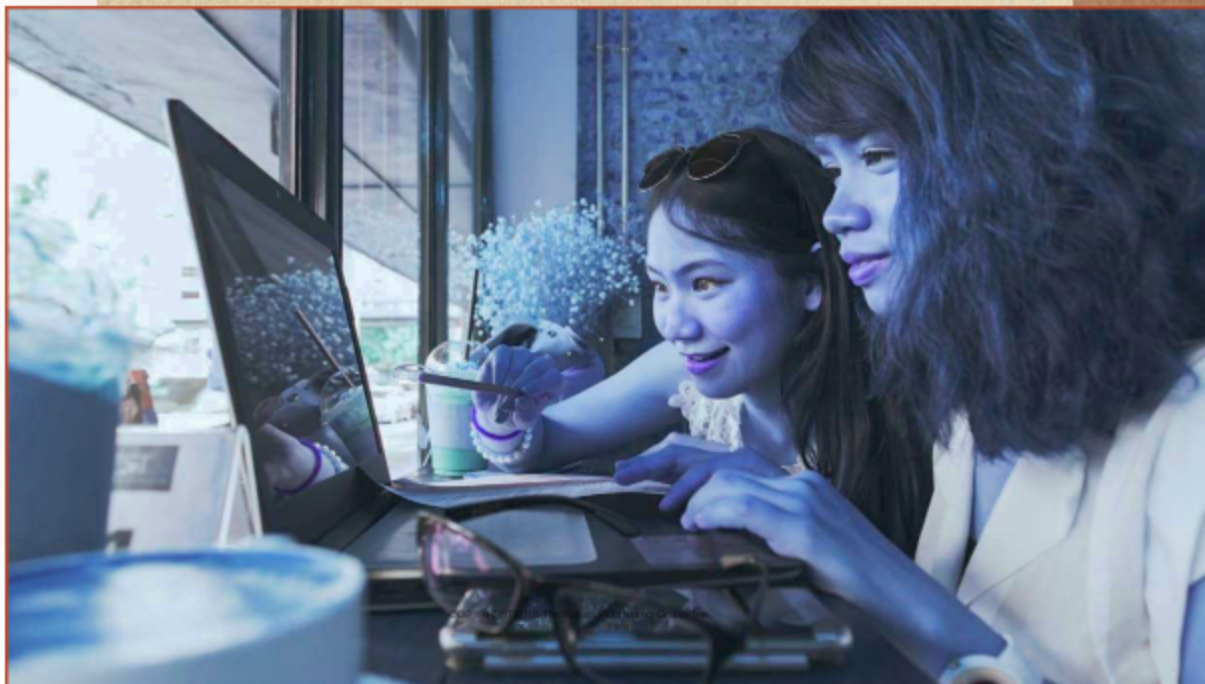
### **For Scientists**

- ScienceSites was founded by a group of science writers to help researchers present their work online in a dynamic and personalized way.

### **For Teachers**

- PortfolioGen features a tool that targets educators so they can effectively present lesson plans, certifications, presentations, publications, professional development activities, and more.

Teachers, scientists, artists, architects, authors, accountants, and other professionals will find web sites especially tailored to present their materials and résumés.



### For Real Estate Agents

- Style Agent gathers together real estate agent websites from around the United States—each site serves as a work portfolio for the agent. Many samples here can provide inspiration for those who are starting their own online portfolio.

### For Finance

- Financial Job Bank offers the tools to create an online career portfolio, as well as leads for thousands of accounting and finance jobs.

Innovation is saying no to 1,000 things.” Say “yes” to things that help you reach your goals and “no” to things that don’t. If you do say “yes” to too many things, you can dilute your work and dilute your focus.

## STRIKE A BALANCE

Check your tone when putting your works forward. You don’t want to be overly humble or overly bragging. Some people make the mistake of using self-deprecating humor, but those who are hiring might not get the joke. Ultimately, you need to underscore how you have the confidence to do the job. Don’t point out weaknesses. And in fact, if any piece

tempts you to make excuses, then it's not up to par and it should not be included. Also, think twice about including super-experimental pieces that may be hard to replicate.

## GIVE SPECIFICS

A lack of details can leave people guessing. You need to provide the viewer with some background information on your work—typically, explaining what the project was for, when it was created, what your role was precisely, and what the effect of your work was. If the work helped a potential employer or client, that has to be stated. A reader wants to know how your work contributed to reaching or surpassing goals, whether it be for a boss or school project.

Not including enough of “you” can be a negative. From an online or a physical portfolio, the viewer will want to know a bit of personal information. A bio should not be formulaic. Instead, it should be personal and trigger a reader to want to know more. Client testimonials can help you sell yourself. Possibly toss in a few juicy pull quotes from past employers who have given you high praise.

## KEEP IT UP TO DATE

Employers will want to see examples of your most recent work. Some people also try to maintain a blog that pertains to their professional lives, and blogs can be a terrific complement to these presentations.

## What Employers See

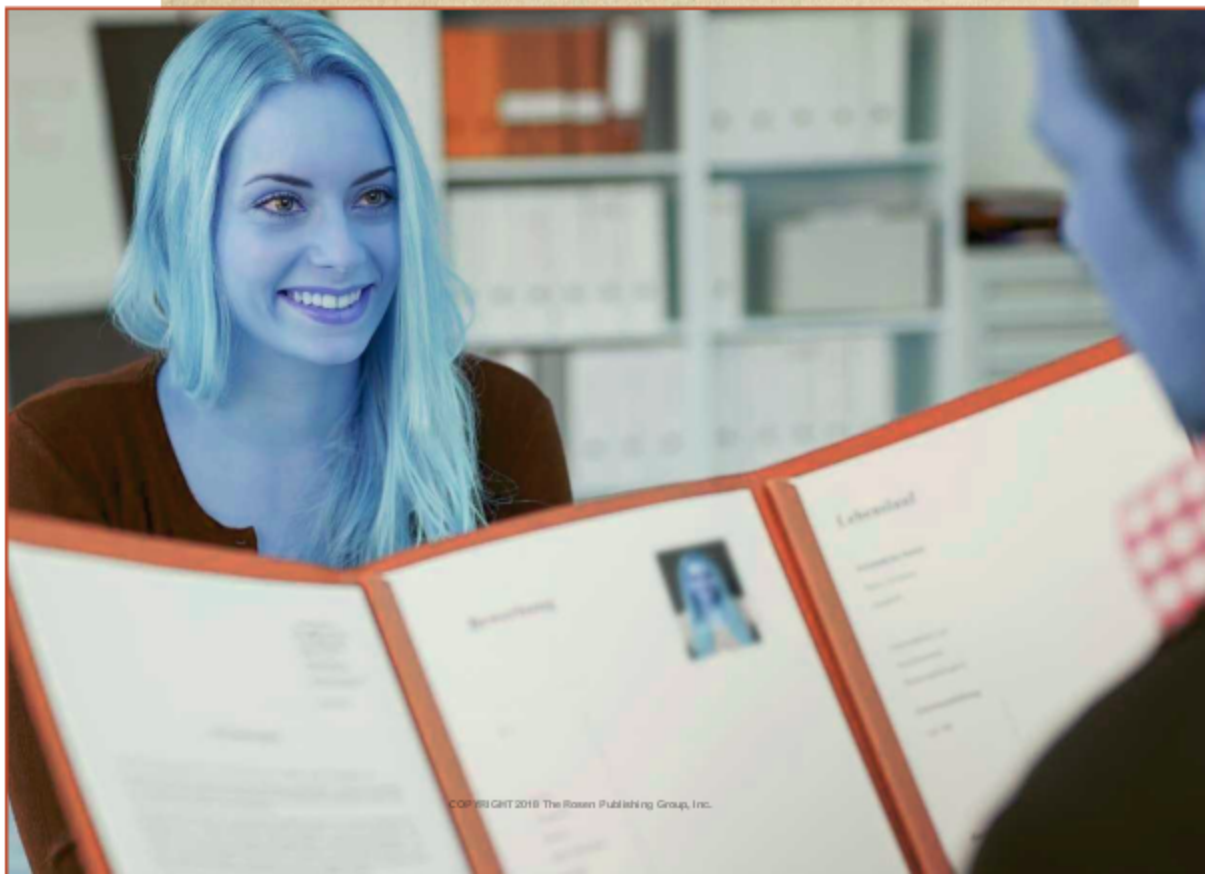
**W**hen weighing the value of a portfolio as a hiring tool, some job candidates may ask, “Do employers really care?” In today’s competitive market, the answer is yes. As bosses and human resources managers narrow down their top candidates, they will turn to portfolios to help make their final decisions. The contents of a physical or digital portfolio will show in concrete terms if a potential employee can deliver the goods.

In a recent survey by CareerBuilder of more than two thousand hiring directors and human resources managers, six in ten employers who currently use social networking sites to research job candidates said that they look for information that supports a candidate’s qualifications for the job—this may include a professional portfolio. The Association of American Colleges and Universities recently conducted a poll of four hundred employers; they found that 80 percent believe an electronic portfolio of student work would be very or fairly useful.

Hanyi Lee, the chief creative officer of the Secret

Little Agency, which develops advertising campaigns, firmly believes in the power of the portfolio. She recommends that young people keep an eye out for industry events where they can share their portfolios. On the website CreativeBloq, Lee explains what she wants to see in a young person's portfolio: "Creative clarity. Imagine you are looking at your portfolio for the first time. In two seconds, do you get what the work is about? The explanation of the work is as important as the work itself."

Increasingly, human resource managers and hiring directors are turning to portfolios to evaluate an applicant's range of skills, creativity, attention to detail, and productivity.



She added that her agency values diversity in the media presented—she doesn't want to just see printed works but digital and video formats as well. It may be wise to view the portfolio as flexible and changeable. It can be directed to show what you can bring to certain employers and stress why you want to work for them.

## SET YOURSELF APART

In an article titled “Where’s Your Executive Portfolio?” on TheLadders, an online job search service, Don Straits, an authority on contemporary job search strategies and technologies, says that a portfolio gives job hunters a chance to break out of the box and set themselves apart. Straits focuses on executive portfolios but the messages that apply here apply across the board—the portfolio gives the opportunity to stress your expertise and ability and to make a bottom-line contribution. Beyond the résumé and summary of accomplishments, Straits also advises the possible inclusion of a project list. He also says to consider mentioning any field research, independent study, patents, and copyrighted or authored material.

Employers say that portfolios not only help to secure a position, but can also be practical when seeking more compensation or a promotion. When it's time for a performance review, the compilation of achievements proves an employee's worth. Just the fact that you're organized enough to track your work history can be impressive.

Hiring managers may just look at the first few pages of a portfolio, so be sure to put the best work up front. In the article “Top Tips for Building a Standout Portfolio” in Creative Review, one of the largest online communities dedicated to visual culture, Jack Smallman, a design director in Australia, said that it’s crucial to have a sense of your strongest work and to remove any works that are mediocre. If you leave in the bad, it indicates that you might not know what bad is.

## ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

In the same article, Pip Jamieson, founder of creative community The Dots, shared her tips from extensive research with creative directors and agency recruiters. She said that HR managers love seeing recommendations and work that has won awards. This praise is a convincing endorsement of the type of quality work you can produce. Consider including self-initiated projects as well. Endeavors that you sought out on your own show extra drive. These may be contests, contributions to volunteer groups, or simply a hobby project that illustrates your passion.

Consider emphasizing any skills that employers are desperate to encounter. In a recent survey from CareerBuilder, businesses said that they’re looking for graduates with more technical know-how. Just over one in ten employers said that students lack computer and technical skills. The portfolio can show motivation and focus that recruiters say new grads are often lacking.





Volunteer work can set a job candidate apart. Volunteering time to good causes shows initiative, motivation, and focus and that some employers say new grads are lacking.

## WHAT DO EMPLOYERS WANT?

The portfolio can be a chance to highlight some skills these companies are eagerly seeking. A few are:

- **Interpersonal skills.** A portfolio can demonstrate an individual's experience in conversing and effectively communicating in groups. Showing a portfolio can provide the opportunity to speak logically and passionately about a subject, make eye contact, and listen as well. Listening attentively can be just as important as speaking. Some employers believe that the latest generation spends too much time on texting and online communication, and that has detracted from their ability to communicate verbally. Young job candidates may have to learn how to speak in front of a group and make a convincing presentation. Any experience like this can be presented in the portfolio. A student might have had such an opportunity giving the morning announcements on the school public address system, presenting live coverage of a sporting event, DJing at the school radio station, or speaking in the auditorium for a performance.
- **Writing talent.** Just about every workplace needs staff who can write. Communication in this form can show professionalism and it is vital to getting most jobs done. Ideas must be clearly conveyed to make progress. Proper grammar, spelling, and language

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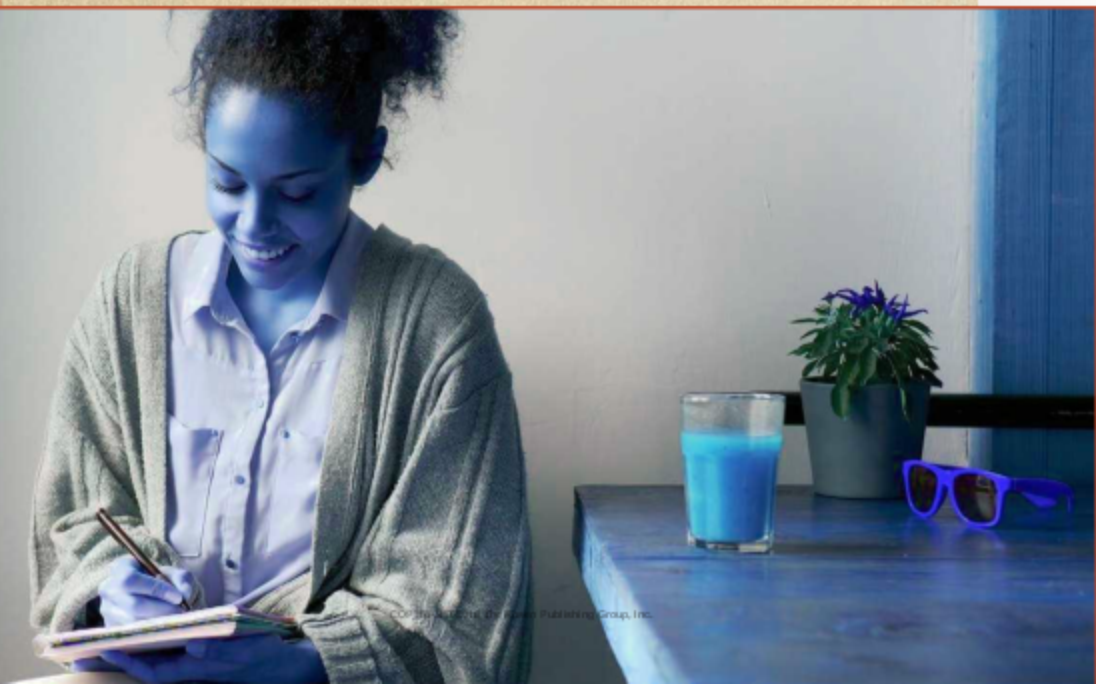
## STRENGTHENING PORTFOLIO-BUILDING SKILLS

*(Sidebar continued from the previous page)*

usage is critical. Again, the portfolio can be a chance to show off your best writing. Students might include a published story from the school newspaper, a portion of a speech, a brief description of a scientific project, a proposal letter, or any samples of advertising or public relations material they may have written for a project or class.

- **Problem-solving ability.** Students may not have had many chances to solve real problems. Projects in a portfolio can illustrate a problem that they faced and what they did to solve it. For example, one student working on a film project had to find the exact lead for his student film. He posted auditions online

Employers value certain skills over others. At the top of their list: interpersonal skills, writing talent, leadership, and problem-solving ability.



at websites that reach the local acting community. Scores of people responded and showed up at a community space in the city library. Still, the high school student director did not find the person who best suited the role. He was frustrated. He looked out the window of the audition space and contemplated his options. Two stories below, he spotted a young man with dark hair pacing about. The guy exactly matched his vision. He knew it was a long shot but he rushed down to the street and approached the man. The student explained his situation to the fellow. The man said he happened to be an actor and he would gladly audition. He gave a perfect reading, and the stranger wound up giving a memorable performance in the film.

- **Leadership skills.** According to a recent Millennial Leadership Survey from The Hartford, 77 percent of people consider themselves to be leaders today and aspire to be leaders in the future. About four in ten employers polled, however, said that young people need work in this area. Again, the portfolio can spotlight efforts in leadership and demonstrate how that leadership succeeded. Students may consider including summaries of events in which they served as the director. Some possible activities may be a fund-raising campaign for a school sport team or club, a volunteer food drive, or serving as president of an afterschool organization or student government.

## KEEP YOUR PORTFOLIO UP TO DATE

People aren't as concerned about what you were able to do five years ago as what you are able to do right now. Maintaining a fresh portfolio is vital, not only for landing the first job but for advancing throughout your professional career. An occasional review may tip you off on where you need to beef things up as well. For example, you may be an expert at designing in a version of Adobe Illustrator from several years ago, but have no clue about the latest incarnation. That can be a signal to do some homework and get some training, whether it be on your own or through a class.

When reviewing the portfolio, ask yourself, "Am I challenging myself? Does this work show how I am advancing?" Check all the links in your portfolio as well and make sure they are all still "live" connections. People who have a steady job can often get comfortable and let their portfolios gather dust. But job market volatility can strike suddenly. You'll be well-equipped and ready to land that next gig if your portfolio is current. At the very least, continue to tuck away copies of projects as you complete them and try to gather a few lines of positive comments from clients with whom you work. You may not need these materials now, but they can pay off in the future.

# GLOSSARY

**ASSESS** To evaluate or review.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** An investigation to verify a job candidate's past history.

**BLOG** Short for web log, a regularly updated online site, usually written in a conversational tone by an individual or small group.

**CAREER BRANDING** Defining who you are and the unique abilities you bring to a job.

**CARTOGRAPHY** The science or process of making maps.

**CODING** Computer instructions written in a programming language.

**COMPENSATION** Monetary and nonmonetary pay provided to an employee by an employer in return for work performed, such as salary, vacation, and health insurance.

**CUSTOMIZATION** To modify or construct according to personal specifications and needs.

**FAUX** Not genuine; fake.

**HOSTING** A computer service that lets people and organizations make their website accessible via the internet.

- NETWORKING** A skill for establishing relationships with people who can help you advance a career.
- OBSERVATIONAL DRAWING** Drawing by simply looking at the real-life subject.
- RECRUITER** A person who works with employers to fill job openings. They often search for job candidates for a range of positions.
- TEMP WORK** A working arrangement that is limited in time.
- THUMB DRIVE** A small portable data storage device, also called a flash memory drive or USB drive

# FOR MORE INFORMATION

Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

130 Slater St #410

Ottawa, ON K1P 6E2

Canada

Website: <http://www.casa-acae.com>

(613) 236-3457

This is a national voice for Canada's post-secondary students, composed of student associations from across Canada.

DECA

1908 Association Drive

Reston, VA 20191

(703) 860-5000

Website: <http://www.deca.org>

This international organization provides community service projects, competitive events, educational conferences, leadership positions, and networking opportunities to high school students in grades nine through twelve who are preparing for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, management, and entrepreneurship.

National Art Education Association

901 Prince Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

(800) 299-8321



Website: <http://www.arteducators.org>

Among other services, this group gives support to more than fifty-four thousand students who are members of the National Art Honor Society. The society's mission is to inspire and recognize students who have shown an outstanding ability and interest in art.

National Portfolio Day Association

44744 Helm Street

Plymouth, MI 48170

email: [lmorabito@fidm.edu](mailto:lmorabito@fidm.edu)

Created in 1978, this organization plans and arranges National Portfolio Days throughout the United States for student visual artists and designers who wish to meet with representatives from colleges accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design and Canadian colleges and universities that are members of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC).

## WEBSITES

Because of the changing nature of internet links, Rosen Publishing has developed an online list of websites related to the subject of this book. This site is updated regularly. Please use this link to access the list:

<http://www.rosenlinks.com/SFS/portfolio>

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Don Rauf is the author of numerous nonfiction books for young people including *Kickstarter*, *Killer Lipstick and Other Spy Gadgets*, *Virtual Reality*, *Getting the Most Out of Makerspaces to Explore Arduino & Electronics*, *Getting the Most Out of Makerspaces to Build Unmanned Aerial Vehicles*, and *Powering Up a Career in Internet Security*.

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## Book Index



Strengthening Portfolio-Building Skills

**Strengthening Portfolio-Building Skills** *Don Rauf. Skills for Success New York, NY: Rosen Young Adult, 2018. 64 pp.*

This book teaches readers how to build a powerful portfolio no matter what career path they are on. Tips are included on how to avoid mistakes, make a stellar presentation, and highlight student accomplishments.

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