



Placement Centre

# Career Portfolio

# Guide



Laurentian University  
Université Laurentienne



Human Resources  
Development Canada

Développement des  
ressources humaines Canada

Canada

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**Placement Centre**  
**Centre de placement**



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## Introduction



Renowned Northern Renaissance artist Titian was known for his innovative use of basic colours to produce realistic yet flattering portrayals of his subjects. When Titian visited Pope Paul III in the hopes of gaining the privilege of painting his portrait, Titian brought with him a collection of his works hoping to impress upon the Pontiff that he was Italy's most prominent portrait painter. Among the collection was the rich and lavish portrayal of Emperor Charles V. The richness of that portrait impressed the Pope, who felt that he could not bear to have secular personages shown in grander fashion than himself, thereby commissioning Titian to paint his portrait. Titian became the official papal artist through the successful demonstration of his arts portfolio. (Bostaph and Vendeland.

*The Employment Portfolio 2000)*

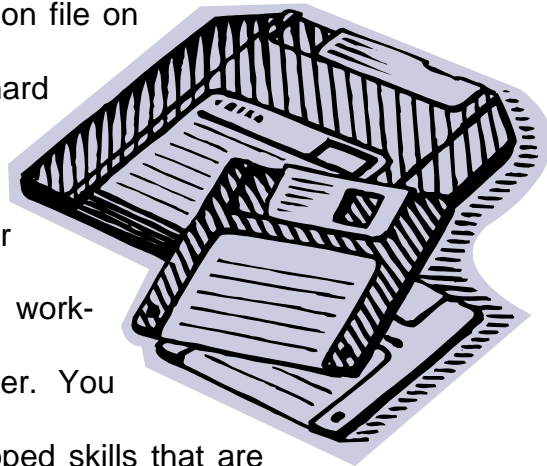
For many years since, portfolios have been utilised by architects, photographers, artists and others as a platform to illustrate their abilities through examples of their work. A portfolio is a visual representation of one's knowledge, abilities, skills and



qualities; essentially it is a representation of one's potential. More recently professionals have begun to enjoy the benefits of using career portfolios as a way to showcase their skills and attributes to potential employers. (University of Washington. *Career Portfolio Basics* 2000)

While résumés and cover letters give a brief history of an individual's professional development, a portfolio shows concrete examples of one's work, and/or accomplishments. A portfolio can also be packaged creatively in a polished and professional manner so that one's choice of medium can serve as an example of one's capabilities. Portfolios can present students with an alternative avenue to exhibit their educational experience which can, in turn, add value to their potential for specific types of employment.

The items that you will need to collect on file on both your personal computer and in a hard copy format are a compilation of résumés, awards, and letters of recommendations or other tangible qualities that represent the work-related events of your professional career. You should keep in mind that you have developed skills that are



now work-related while you were playing team sports, pursuing hobbies or volunteer activities, or simply exploring your interests. (University of Washington. *Career Portfolio Basics* 2000)

Your portfolio demonstrates your potential by exhibiting what you have accomplished as a student and as a professional. Your portfolio should be a visual representation of your strengths. This means that you can present both

what you can do and how you do it. Therefore, you need to know what you do well and what you want to do. Ongoing self reflection and assessment is needed in the creation of your portfolio. (University of Washington. *Career Portfolio Basics* 2000)

You will want to collect and keep on file evidence of all your activities, whether they are from work, past assignments, internships, accomplishments and special training and workshops. If some items are missing, you can try to reconstruct some of these. You may have to retype some documents from memory or from a rough draft.

### **Five Types of Career Portfolios** \*



**1. Studio Arts/Design Portfolio:** Artists, designers, architects, photographers, and others utilise the studio arts/design portfolio to showcase samples of their work to potential employers/clients. This method offers a history of their best work and commissions.

**2. Professional Development Portfolio:** Also known as a Teaching Dossier, professionals in the teaching field use this style to measure up and improve their own instruction. Teachers can develop portfolios of materials and techniques in which they can examine and improve the effectiveness of their instruction.

**3. Instructional/Assessment Portfolio:** This is a tool used to select, evaluate, document and prescribe student work. This serves as an exhibit

of a student's development and performance. Under the teacher's guidance, students can create, choose and justify their selections for their portfolio inclusions. The teacher then can evaluate the students based on what they have collected for their portfolio, and then revise their instruction to meet these individual student needs.

4. **Career Guidance Portfolio:** These types of portfolios provide students with an opportunity to gain insights into work related skills and long range career goals. A variety of career development educational programs are now using career guidance portfolios for career demonstration skills, career awareness, workplace readiness skills, interview skills, and exploration of career possibilities.
5. **Employment Portfolio:** Simply put, this type of portfolio is used to assist the job seeker in securing employment. The components of this portfolio will serve as assessments to ensure comprehensiveness, which will likely impress prospective employers.

(\* Bostaph and Vendeland. *The Employment Portfolio* 2000)

### **Constructing Your Portfolio \*\***



Defining parameters for key elements is vital in producing an effective portfolio. Focus is often overlooked in the haste to prepare a portfolio for use in an interview. A portfolio can appear to be disorganized

and inconsistent in its layout if proper definition is ignored. It is therefore essential to:

1. Show clarity in your message
2. Choose a medium
3. Set your budget
4. Decide on a static or dynamic portfolio

### **Clarity is the Key**

What is it that your portfolio will establish? That you are the best in producing ad hoc reports? That you simplified tracking forms or flow charts? Stating your message with clarity and then producing a portfolio that will get that message across will show in the end product. In the process of producing your portfolio you will collect many samples, awards, and other work-related articles, but are they examples of experiences you want in the future? You may have developed a great management plan from the ground up, but if you have no plans to do that in the future, do not disclose this to an employer as an accomplishment. Before you get started, you need to ask yourself: What is my message?

Message: My portfolio shows that I use software programs to produce business graphics, forms and documents. This proves that I am efficient, accurate, creative and versatile and that I produce more than I cost.

Your Mission Statement:

Message or Mission Statement for my Portfolio

(Straub. *Creating Your Skills Portfolio* 1997)

## Choose a Medium

What materials will best support your message?

- A newspaper clipping?
- Drill core samples that you have analysed?
- A diskette with examples of the programs you have written?
- Drafts of designs you have produced?

Use what you can but avoid using what you shouldn't. Protect proprietary information by changing names, dates, project titles or other sensitive data. Make sure you get written permission to use printed materials or copyrighted text.

## Set a Budget

It is possible to compose a quality portfolio on a tight budget. Most portfolios cost in the range of \$25 to \$50 when completed, however the higher costs would allow a portfolio to contain colour copies, photographs, a leather binder and articles printed on quality bonded paper. The key is to be creative.

- Check office supply catalogues to see your options
- Price-check colour copies
- Use desk-top publishing with creativity and consistency
- Use a binder that is no longer being used

## Dynamic or Static Portfolio

Portfolios most commonly used are dynamic documents with frequent additions and/or revisions. If a diskette is part of your portfolio, find out how to lock the contents so they can't be accidentally altered, and keep an index of the contents to make the review process more efficient.

You can choose the option of laminating the portfolio pages if this is a specific, single-use product. Make sure that you avoid folding, stapling or

otherwise damaging your original documents. Make colour copies of them instead and keep the originals for safe keeping.

(\*\*Straub. *Creating Your Skills Portfolio* 1997)

### **Portfolio Bingo**

Below are examples of work related products that could be in your portfolio. You have met your goal when you have added three items to at least five of the areas. You can add other products in addition to those shown below.

<b>B</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>O</b>
Brochures	Information Reports	Newsletters	Graphs	Operation Examples
Books	Improvements	News Releases	Letters of Gratitude	Outlines
Background Research	Ideas	<b>FREE</b>	Graphics	* _____
* _____	Innovations And Inventions	Negotiations	Gifts	Official Transcripts
Biographies	Implementations	New Systems (filing, work flow, data distribution)	Good evaluations	Organizational examples

\* *Insert your own ideas*

(Straub. *Creating Your Skills Portfolio* 1997)

Now that you have listed all of the possibilities, take the time to find them, start a file and obtain copies.

### **Portfolio Log**



Items that are included in your draft portfolio should be catalogued in order to reference them for future use. This will help you to remember why you decided to use them. Be aware of any information that would be deemed confidential or are copyrighted.

Item			
Date			
What I did			
Team/co-producers			
What I learned			
Challenge in doing this			
Why it's included			
Other information			

(Straub. *Creating Your Skills Portfolio* 1997)

To start, you will begin to develop a portfolio that includes all of your career related articles. Much like your résumé, you will want to concentrate the temporary portfolio for a specific purpose, so that all the items are pertinent to your audience and will support your purpose. If your portfolio is intended for a

specific job application, then it should provide evidence of your ability to fill that position.



### **Portfolio Contents**

In trying to decide what to have in your portfolio, a good place to start is with items that say who you are right now. Accumulate all the important information about yourself.

Keeping a list of all your personal information is a good collection to keep safe and available because it can save you time if and when you need to validate any of these documents for employment or other reasons.

- **Personal Information**

- Driver's licence
- Birth Certificate
- A copy of your social insurance card
- Your passport and/or citizenship papers

- **Education**

- Schools you have attended (from elementary to post secondary)
- Transcripts as well as diplomas or certificates received while attending school
- Examples of assignments with complimentary comments from instructor
- Items or picture of items created for a class project
- Report on a topic of special interest

- Summary of a research project you participated in
  - Positive evaluation received from instructors
  - Any awards, or honours while attending school
  - Apprenticeships, internships or special projects where you took part
  - Seminars and workshops
  - Letter or certificate which recognizes you as a scholarship recipient
  - Letter or certificate which designates you as a Deans List member
  - Graduation program highlighting designation as Valedictorian or special honours
  - Newspaper article noting recognition of special honours
- **Community/Club/Association Activities**
    - Certificate of participation in a program
    - Any positions you may have had where you held a leadership role
    - Outline of a plan you developed to lead a program or presentation
    - Pictures of members participating in an event you helped to organize
    - Posters, programs or invitations that you designed for an event
    - Special note or feedback for your assistance on a project
    - Agendas that describe items discussed in a committee you were involved in
    - Record of your sales achieved for fund-raising
    - Description of any public speaking you may have performed



- **Employment History**

- Job title, description of duties, name of supervisor, contact information
- Major projects that you may have participated in
- Evaluation written by a supervisor or other individual
- Letters of recommendation from present or former employers
- Special recognition from supervisor or customer for work performed
- Internships or co-ops that you have participated in
- Clippings from company newsletter relating to you

- **Awards & Accomplishments**

- List all of your accomplishments or awards received while on a particular job
- Include letters of appreciation, performance reports and appraisals
- Employee of the Month Award



- **Publications**

- Copies of published articles or reports that you composed
- Organization charts produced
- Examples of any brochures or flyers that you contributed to

- **Professional Licences**

- Any licences and/or certificates that you have received

- **Computer Skills**

- List all of the software programs that you have mastered or can navigate

- **Special Skills**

- Examples of letters, memos, reports, charts, graphs, brochures, etc. using computer software or programming languages
- Evidence of a hobby, craft, or topic of special interest, certification of skill level such as, First Aid or CPR.



### **Organizing Your Portfolio**

Although there are many methods of organizing your portfolio, selecting a format will depend on individual's needs. A portfolio can be organized either chronologically, or by subject. When organizing chronologically, you can sort your portfolio by the years or levels of education (i.e. first, second, third year University Undergraduate, or first, second year Masters Program, or employment history chronologically). Sorting your portfolio by subject can be categorized by school subject, or by job or project you have worked on. There is considerable flexibility when sorting by subject, as you could also categorize the portfolio by fields of employment or education (i.e. communications, engineering, consulting etc.) (University of Wisconsin. *Creating a Portfolio* 2004)

### **Size of Your Portfolio**

When presenting your portfolio to a prospective employer or school personnel, only items that are pertinent to your cause should be included. An acceptable size for a portfolio to be presented in an interview would be in the range of 25 pages, any more than that would run the risk of overwhelming the interviewer. The best way to shorten a portfolio that is too long is to analyse the job description on the job posting that you are applying for. Make sure that every quality that the employer is asking for is addressed in the portfolio. If the

description mentions interpersonal skills, public speaking, computer literacy and customer relation skills, make sure that you include items that can prove that you possess these skills. (University of Wisconsin. *Creating a Portfolio* 2004)

### It's in the details

The way you package and present your portfolio is just as important as the contents inside of it. There are a few items that should be added for interviewing presentation, such as binders, divider tabs and captions as well as a table of contents to allow quick and easy reference for the interviewer. The actual portfolio can be contained in an artist's style portfolio case, a three ring binder or zipper case.

Clear plastic sheet covers can be used to protect your materials, and also give a nice polished look to them. Captions should be present on every article and item in the portfolio, as they will inform the reader of the relevance of the



pieces. Make sure the captions are to the point, specific, and strategically placed to catch the reader's eye. Bright colours could be used to help them stand out, with a brief headline to highlight the subject or point of interest. (University of Wisconsin. *Creating a Portfolio* 2004)

### Presenting the Portfolio

Presenting your portfolio at an interview permits you to give examples of the work that you have performed and illustrates your accomplishments. Your portfolio should be used in a supporting role, in that it is a tool to use in an

interview to back up your statements regarding why you are the most suitable candidate for the job. Your portfolio should be utilised by you in an interview situation to illustrate points made to the employer about your experience and skills that are relevant to that specific job.

When it comes to presenting the portfolio, there are two trains of thought; the upfront approach and the wait approach. When applying the upfront approach, the presenter would make a deliberate attempt at making the portfolio visible to the interviewer when entering the room. This can be accomplished by either placing it on the interview table when shaking the interviewer's hand, or by showing the portfolio and asking if they would prefer to view it now or later. Using

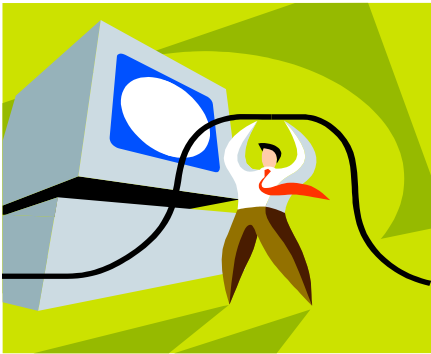
this approach, you take control of the situation at the outset. If you choose to be less assertive, the wait approach allows the presenter to wait to be prompted by a question from the interviewer about your skills. This would then cue the presenter to refer to the portfolio to illustrate proof of the skills that you possess. (University of Wisconsin. *Creating a Portfolio 2004*)



### When to Use Your Portfolio

- Job Interviews
- Career development interviews with mentors, managers or human resources personnel
- Displays at job fairs
- Presentations to head hunters
- Interviews with career consultants to focus on transferable skills and experience
- Performance evaluations
- Interviews with educational counsellors when returning to school
- Online postings or your own Internet home page
- Networking sessions at professional organizations  
(Straub. *Creating Your Skills Portfolio* 1997)

### Electronic Portfolios



Usually designed as web pages, electronic portfolios can be typically posted on an internet site or even sometimes burned onto a CD-ROM, and then used as a tool to enhance the hard-copy version of your portfolio. Using this platform

to showcase your abilities illustrates to potential employers that you have strong technical skills in the on-line world, and also allows employers to obtain further information about you at their leisure. For those who possess degrees that are in the computer field, constructing an electronic portfolio is a chance for you to show off examples of relevant technical work that you have accomplished. If your technical skills are especially strong, you might consider utilising video



and/or audio clips and animations. Make sure that your electronic portfolio is packaged in a polished and professional manner and that it is formatted so it is easy for the viewer to navigate. Remember, your electronic portfolio is a reflection of your capabilities. (University of Wisconsin. *Creating a Portfolio*. 2004)

### **Portfolio Checklist**

#### Content

- Does your portfolio have the best examples of your accomplishments?
- Have you limited it to two to three examples in any category?
- Are the examples brief? Have you edited for clarity?
- Is every item in your portfolio public information? If not have you permission to use it?
- Are your skills clearly demonstrated?
- Have you grammar and spell checked everything you wrote?

#### Organization

- Is the sequence of the examples logical?
- Are similar items and accomplishments grouped to eliminate unnecessary page turning?
- Have you used tabs and colour coding to ensure that you can find each items easily?

#### Graphic Elements

- Are there brief labels, highlights or arrows pointing out key phrases or focal points?
- Does the portfolio project a professional, organized image?

#### Security

- Do you have extra copies of your résumé, work samples and references to leave behind?
- Have you created back-up diskettes of anything you will leave behind?
- Are all the pages inside laminated or have sheet protectors to protect them?

(Straub. *Creating Your Skills Portfolio* 1997)

## Other Sources for Career Portfolios

- **The Career Advancement Portfolio (2000)**  
Beverly Irby ISBN: 076197542X
- **The Career Portfolio Workbook (2003)**  
Frank Satterthwaite and Gary D'orsi ISBN: 007140855X
- **Creating Your Portfolio: At a Glance Guide for Students (1997)**  
Anna G. Williams ISBN: 0130908517
- **Hired! The Job-Hunting/Career-Planning Guide with Portfolio Disk (2001)**  
Connie Harris, Mike Henle & Mike Stebleton  
ISBN: 0139193170
- **Portfolio Development for Career Planning (1997)**  
Michael J. Pierson & Oscar L. Dorsey ISBN: 0912855711
- **Your Career and Life Plan Portfolio (2003)**  
Jist Publishing ISBN: 1563704242
- **Proof of Performance: How to Build a Career Portfolio to Land a Great New Job (2001)**  
Rick Nelles ISBN: 1570231486



## **Bibliography**

- Bostaph Charles, and Vendeland Roland. *The Employment Portfolio*. Upper Saddle River, NJ USA. Prentice Hall Inc. 2000
- Straub, Carrie. *Creating Your Skills Portfolio*. Menlo Park, CA. USA Crisp Publications, Inc. 1997
- University of Washington (Seattle, WA) *Career Portfolio Basics*. Seattle, WA. USA. Online: <http://depts.washington.edu/geogjobs/Careers/pfolbasics.html>
- University of Wisconsin - River Falls. *Creating a Portfolio*. River Falls, WI. USA. Online: <http://www.uwrf.edu/ccs/portfolio-steps.htm#How>



## **Notes**