PORTFOLIO PREPARATION

In today's competitive job market, effectively showcasing relevant knowledge and skills to an employer is critical in seeking and sustaining employment. Along with a tailored resume, a portfolio can help provide further evidence of professional qualifications and abilities. The purpose of this guide is to assist you in organizing your own professional portfolio and using it as a tool in your career development.

1. What is a Portfolio?
A portfolio is a personalized collection of materials. There are two main types of portfolios: personal and professional. In a personal portfolio, the focus is generally on a specific life event, e.g., one's birth, graduation, or wedding. This type of portfolio highlights memories that are more personal in nature. Although the creation of a personal portfolio is good practice for the creation of a professional one, this guide focuses on the creation of a professional portfolio and the interview portfolio.

A Professional Portfolio is…

- a reflection of you as a professional person
- a confirmation of your professional development
- a verification of how you perform/excel on the job or in the classroom
- a reflection of what you have accomplished (i.e., tangible artifacts/evidence)
- a record of your efforts at developing new skills

2. Why create a Professional Portfolio?

- to market your capabilities in job interviews
- to negotiate promotions and raises
- to apply for scholarships, grants or bonuses
- to document the quality and quantity of your professional development
- to demonstrate prior work or learning experiences for educational credit

3. What can be included in a Professional Portfolio?

- Resume
- Transcripts
- Evidence of professional affiliations
• Licenses or Certifications
• Letters of reference
• Evidence of specific skills (e.g., public speaking, leadership, writing)
• Work samples (e.g., class projects, items produced during internship experiences)

Depending upon your professional field, specific items can be added to the list above to provide an accurate representation of your knowledge and abilities. Examples from the fields of Education and the Arts are presented below.

Education

• Statement of teaching philosophy (one – two pages)
• Teaching honors/awards
• Evaluations (e.g., supervisor, student)
• Videotape of your teaching
• Evidence of student learning (e.g., graded exams, assignments [one good/one bad])
• Innovations in the classroom (e.g., use of new technology)
• Sample lesson plans
• Relevant photographs

The Arts – Performance or Design

• Actual work samples or photos of them
• Video/audio tape of work
• Course descriptions for specific classes or workshops
• List of competencies mastered

As you can imagine, your professional portfolio can be quite a collection of things. During an interview, it would be impossible and unwise to go through every item with an employer. A better strategy is to select items from your professional portfolio to be included in a smaller interview portfolio. This portfolio can be presented during an interview to add evidence of important knowledge or skills you possess that are relevant to the position or promotion at hand. Take your cues from the interviewer in regards to an appropriate time to share items from your portfolio (see Section VIII).

4. Benefits of Developing and Using an Interview Portfolio

Interview portfolios should include the best examples of your skills and abilities from your professional portfolio that are particularly relevant to the position you are seeking. When you customize your interview portfolio to the requirements of the specific job, it demonstrates that you have done your homework and understand the characteristics the employer is seeking.

Developing the interview portfolio allows you to think carefully about what experiences and
accomplishments might be important in the interview. This helps you strategically organize your accomplishments. In addition, it helps to refresh your memory about activities and experiences, which will prepare you to relate anecdotes during the interview. Finally, it will give you a good idea of your qualifications for the position and how well you match up with the requirements.

Having your portfolio in the interview offers many benefits. It communicates a high level of preparation to the employer, and demonstrates your experience, skills, and abilities in a visual way. In addition it helps the interviewer remember your application among many others.

5. Tips on Compiling an Interview Portfolio

- put items in loose-leaf binder
- use sheet protectors
- use copies (keep a master copy of all items)
- use index tabs and/or title pages to divide each section
- keep it to a manageable size, ideally 5–10 pages
- omit page numbers to make it easier to add and move items around
- use consistent headings and placement of work samples
- put sections together according to what the employer is looking for (job description)
- make sure it looks professional and error free

6. Presentation Format
Table of contents can be organized in one of two ways:

- **Chronologically** – sections are packaged according to job description and dates the portfolio samples represent, e.g., General Work Performance 20xx–20xx. This organizational scheme helps an individual who has been in a particular field over time demonstrate increasing improvement and accomplishment.
- **Functionally** – sections are packaged according to job description only, e.g., Computer Skills. This organization scheme works when an individual has varied experiences that need to be pulled together to demonstrate ability in specified areas.

Work/Evidence Samples

For each sample, provide a reflection statement in either paragraph or bulleted format that contains the following information:

A brief description of the sample item and the context in which the item was created (e.g., “A marketing plan for a nonprofit agency for Marketing 425”);

A detailed list of the competencies developed or revealed by the sample. (It is this second part
of the reflection statement that makes the portfolio element especially useful in the interview process.

**Interview Portfolios should:**

- look professional
- reflect an individual's actual skills
- be occupationally focused
- be easy to update
- be easy for the employer to quickly review
- be able to stand alone without explanation
- support information presented in the resume

7. **Using an Interview Portfolio**
Before attending an interview, it may be beneficial for you to schedule a mock interview or role-play with a friend using your interview portfolio. Once in the interview, "relax" and look for opportune moments to use your portfolio to address employer questions. Remember, when your interview portfolio includes reflection statements as discussed earlier in Section V, it will be easier for you to feel confident in showcasing your abilities to an employer. Additionally, your interview portfolio can help remind you of information you wish to share with an employer just in case your nervousness tries to get the best of you.

8. **Electronic Portfolios**
Electronic portfolios use interactive multimedia to increase the range and type of materials that can be included as evidence of learning. They take full advantage of the advanced capacity of desktop computers to include text, graphics, animation, sound and video. There may come a day when the majority of employers will require applicants to submit electronic portfolios.

9. **Internet Resources** By using any Internet search engine, and typing in phrases like "professional portfolio," "interview portfolio," and "career portfolio," you will find several sites to review.

10. **Additional Resources**
The Career Resource Library has books that will be helpful.