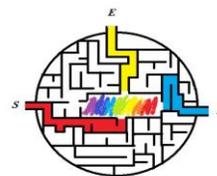




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I.P.S.S.E.M

Integrative pathways for students with social, educational and motivational needs



# CREATING YOUR CAREER PORTFOLIO



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## **The Portfolio Process**

Five or ten years ago, if you were carrying a portfolio to an interview, you were probably an artist. These people carried around samples of their work in big, bulky folios. To the artist, his or her work and the skill behind it, the style and talents, were on display in the contents of the portfolio.

To know the contents of his or her portfolio was to know the artist, the person behind the art.

## **Employers Want Proof**

Today, in the extremely competitive job market of the new millenium, with many highly qualified people competing for the same jobs, employers are looking for new ways to distinguish the excellent people from the average. Having a degree is no longer considered proof of your knowledge, skills, abilities. Employers are beginning to ask to see results: they want to see physical evidence that shows you possess the abilities you claim.

The career portfolio is designed to do just that: to provide proof of your abilities and produce a tool that is distinctly you. The portfolio you create through this process will show the best of your work, your accomplishments, your skills to eager employers.

As the artist's portfolio showed the person behind the art, so will your portfolio show the person behind the work samples.

The portfolio also includes other support material including the lists of documented skills you possess, awards and achievements you have earned, letters of recommendation, you have received, your goals for your future, your vasion and beliefs for the future of your industry.



## Why Do I Need a Portfolio?

**It's Proof.** In an interview or review setting, a career portfolio provides proof of your skills and abilities. Instead of just talking about what you can do during an interview or job review, you can show the person your portfolio – filled with work samples you have created, lists of skills you possess, letters of recommendation, your professional goals.

**An Edge.** Recruiters and managers are still not used to seeing portfolios every day. While your portfolio contains samples of your work, studies or other activities. It also contains important information about you as a person. You can start interesting conversations that wouldn't be possible without a portfolio in hand. In some cases, having a portfolio can make it easier to stress your strengths in different areas.

**It's a Process.** The most important thing to remember about portfolio development is that it's a **process**. Of course, the physical portfolio is important, but **the time and effort you put into its development is the true investment in your career.**

Assembling and organizing samples of your work or studies and activities, developing your management philosophy and career goals, and determining the skills and competencies you want to emphasize or obtain in a job situation are key to the production of the portfolio. You can use the portfolio to track the skills you have and the ones you want to possess. As you work through these areas, you begin to examine your experiences and education from different viewpoints. You learn to recognize your strengths and find ways to emphasize these through the portfolio. You also are faced with your weaknesses and in the process you find ways to compensate them.

This process of examining yourself while developing the portfolio can build your confidence, so that there is little or nothing an interviewer or recruiter can ask you that you haven't already thought about.



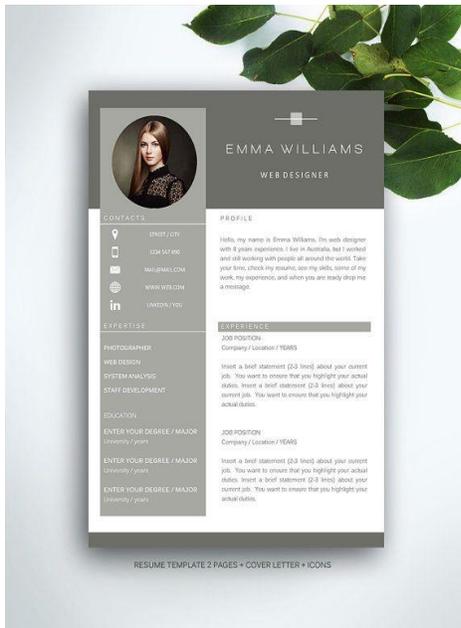
# What is a Portfolio?

By the time, you may be telling yourself that it sounds like there's a lot of work involved in this portfolio process. Analyzing yourself, collecting samples, writing goals...can't I just hire someone to do all this work for me?

## The Average Job Search Tools

First, stop and think about the materials the „average“ person creates to get ready for the job search process:

- **Resume**
- **List of references**
- **Cover letters**



All too often, there are the only materials people prepare and take with them to an interview. We are taught to believe our resume is the key component of the interview process. While a good cover letter that explains why you are perfect for this organization, include a nicely formatted resume that shows education and work experience, include some activities and achievements to trigger their curiosity and you are done with the process.

Make sure you bring a list of people who will say nice things about you to serve as references and you are ready. Keep in mind, the cover letter, resume, references are important tools in the job search process. **The resume and cover letter are the tools you use to get your foot in the door for an interview.**

They summarize your abilities and explain why you are well suited to the position. They aren't as helpful during the actual interview, except as a reference for the interview.

## **The Career Portfolio**

Now, the person with a Career Portfolio brings a zippered 3-ring binder to the interview containing a combination of the following sections:

<b>Statement of Originality</b>	A paragraph stating this is your work and asking them to keep it confidential.
<b>Work Philosophy</b>	A brief description of your beliefs about yourself and the industry.
<b>Career Goals</b>	Your professional goals for the next two to five years.
<b>Resume</b>	A brief summary of your education and experiences.
<b>Skill Areas</b>	Tabbed sections containing information on the different types of skills you want to promote such as Management, Marketing, Training, Technology, Communications, etc.
Each skill area may contain :	<b>Work Samples</b> Physical examples of your work. Projects, reports, documents, pictures, etc. Work samples show your skills in this area.

**Letters of Recommendation**

Letters of support or reference from people who can verify your abilities in this skill area.

**Skill Sets**

Checklists of critical skills related to this area. As you attain different levels of competency with each skill, an instructor or employer can sign off on your ability to perform the skill. These are usually preexisting checklists of skills standardized by an organization.

**Works in Progress**

A brief list of work, activities, projects, efforts you are in the process of completing.

**Certifications,  
Diplomas,  
Degrees and  
Awards**

Copies of certifications, diplomas, degrees earned. Copies of special awards and recognitions you have received. Include documentation used to track skills attained for certification.

**Community  
Service**

Work samples, letters of recognition, photos of projects completed, programs and brochures relating to community service projects.

**Professional  
Memberships,  
Certifications**

Membership cards, citations and letters related to professional organizations.

**Academic Plan  
of Study**

A copy of your plan of study that lists courses you have taken to fulfill your degree.

<b>Faculty , Employer Biographies</b>	Brief description of the people whose names appear throughout the portfolio – who they are and what they do.
<b>References</b>	A list of people who can verify your character, academic record, employment history.

Which person do you think looks more prepared for the interview- the one with average tools or with a career portfolio?



### **What Supplies Do I Need to Get Started?**

The materials you use to create the portfolio serve two purposes:

1. To help organize your materials and documents so you can easily customize your portfolio for a given interview or review period.
2. To make your portfolio look professional.

## Purchase These Supplies

Here is a list of supplies that will help you begin the process of collecting and assembling your portfolio:

- **Plastic file tote box** ( 1 or 2 boxes). Used to store work samples, materials, etc. Should be able to hold hanging life folders.
- **Hanging file folders** – 20 to 30 folders.
- **Zippered 3-ring notebook** – cloth, leather or vinyl with 1-1/2” to 2 “ rings.
- **Sheet protectors**- Clear, plastic, 3-hole punched pockets that hold documents and work samples. They protect your portfolio and give it a professional look. Avoid the non-glare variety because they are harder to read.
- **Connected sheet protectors**- Three to five sets of sheet protectors, bound together in sets of 5 or 10 sheets. These are great for keeping projects and work samples nearly together in your file box. This makes it easier to swap work samples in and out of the portfolio.
- **Extra-wide 3-ring tabs with labels** – Page protectors are wider than ordinary 3-ring tabs. You need to find extra-wide tabs made for use with page protectors.
- **Paper** – Use a high quality paper.
- **Business cards** – Blank sheets of cards are used to create overview cards for work samples. You don't have to use plain white cards –select something that shows your style.
- **Photo sheet holders** – Plastic sheets that can hold vertical and/or horizontal pictures.
- **Nameplate or vinyl card holder** – Used on the cover of the portfolio to identify it as your property.
- **Zippered pouch**- (optional) Holds video.

## Have Access to This Equipment

A professional portfolio looks good and feels good. To make this portfolio something you can be proud of, you should plan on using the following equipment when you create documents and work samples to enhance the quality of your career portfolio:

- **Computer** – You should have access to current versions of word processor, graphic presentation, spreadsheet packages.
- **Printer** – Laser or high quality ink jet.
- **Color flatbed scanner** – Used to scan certificates, work samples , etc.
- **Color copier or color printer** – Used to reproduce work samples, certificates, awards, etc.
- **Film camera or digital camera** – Used for photographing work samples and documenting other activities.
- **Video camera** – Videotape yourself in action when necessary.

## Creating and using portfolio

### A Little Planning Goes a Long Way

Getting the supplies together to produce your portfolio is the easy part. Deciding what to put into your portfolio requires planning and organization. Begin by analyzing your strengths and weaknesses. What are you best at? Which skills and abilities do you want to emphasize? Are there things you'd rather not have people ask about, or skills you know are lacking but would like to have? Taking the time to examine your experiences and abilities will help you focus on your key skill areas you will use in your portfolio. You will also use the planning time to write your work philosophy and career goals. A **work philosophy** gives an employer a unique perspective on you as a person through your personal beliefs about work and your industry. **Career goals** show the employer you have a plan for your life.

## Collect and Organize Work Samples

Once you have decided on your key skill areas, you need to find things that demonstrate your abilities in each area. You can use projects, reports, letters of recommendation, certificates, newspaper articles, awards and many materials you have created on the job, in school, university or through community service, volunteering.

## Putting The Portfolio Together

When you are ready to assemble your portfolio, you will gather your supplies, along with a good friend ( this is very important!!!) and choose the samples to use.

- Decide what key skills areas you want to focus on and create a **tab page** for each. Then pick three or four of your best samples for each area and put them into sheet protectors or photo holders.
- Create **work sample overview cards** for each sample to help a viewer quickly identify the type of sample and what it represents. The card is slid into the sheet protector and floats over the top of the sample.
- Create a **statement of originality and confidentiality** to indicate this is your work.
- Print out your **work philosophy** and **career goals**, your **resume** and **references**.
- Create a list of **works in progress** to indicate projects you are working on now for which you have no work samples.
- Create a list of your professional **memberships** and create a **Faculty and Employer Bio Sheet** listing information about the people mentioned in your portfolio.
- Put copies of your **certificaties** and **awards** in sheet protectors, along with an **academic plan of study** if you want to stree your course work.
- Set up and print out the **tabs** and insert them in the dividers.

## Using the Portfolio in the Job Search Process

So, how do you put the portfolio to work? Remember, it's your resume that helps get you the interview. Once you have an interview scheduled, you 'll want to make sure the samples in your portfolio show you to the best advantage. Each employer is looking for different things, and you may need to use different work samples to prove different skills. Customize your portfolio for the interview.

During the interview you can use your portfolio to answer questions or show examples of your work. Just by having a portfolio along, you can show the interviewer you have organization skills and are focused on your career. Your portfolio can make a lasting impression. Some people have also sent copies of their portfolio along with the thank-you letter after an interview to reinforce their skills, especially when they didn't have a chance to fully use their portfolio during the interview itself.

### How Will I Use a Portfolio in a Job Review?

If you already have a job and you want to shine in a performance review or want to have an edge in the promotion process, you can use your portfolio to keep track of what you have accomplished and present it in an organized manner.



#### **James's Story**

James was feeling a little down after his interview. The interviewer hadn't seemed too interested in his portfolio and he had really wanted to show him some of the things he had created on the job. James went to the copy shop and made a spiral-bound color copy of his portfolio. He sent the copy to the interviewer with his thank-you letter. In the letter he asked the interviewer to take a few minutes and glance at the portfolio, being sure to point out some of the highlights.

James's extra effort made the difference. The interviewer did take time to look through his

portfolio and was impressed by what he saw. James was called back for a second interview and got the job and a larger starting salary based on the contents of his career portfolio.

## **Steps for Growing Your Career**

You can use your portfolio on the job to keep track of what you have done and what you plan to do in the next quarter. Here are some ideas of things to record:

- Keep a listing of projects and documents you have completed during the last review period.
- Keep track of the committees and projects you have worked with.
- Set goals for each review period and track your achievements. Show how your goals help meet the goals of company.
- Include any community service activities in which you have been involved.
- If necessary, update your work philosophy and your career goals, both outside and within the company.
- Keep copies of thank-you letters and memos that document teamwork or cooperation.
- If your supervisor is new, you should include highlights of your career since you were hired by the company.
- Let your supervisor know well in advance of your review that you are using a career portfolio.

## Before Your Review

Talk with your boss and explain the contents of your portfolio. Drop off the portfolio a few days before your review so he or she has time to review it. Then discuss it at your annual review.

### **Kathy's Job Review**

Kathy's boss was a little intimidated by her portfolio. When she saw the updated resume and references, she was sure she was ready to look for a job. Kathy assured her that her portfolio was a "career" portfolio, tracking her performance and abilities on the job. Keeping it up to date showed her organization skills and helped her track her goals and achievements.



### **How will I Use a Portfolio in an Internal Job Shift?**

The portfolio can be a great help if you are looking to advance or to shift laterally within a company. People job shift inside a company in order to change their responsibilities, find new growth opportunities or obtain salary increases. An up-to-date portfolio can help you position yourself where you want to be.

Your portfolio needs to contain samples of your accomplishments in your department. You should also include samples that show your management skills of people or projects. Make sure you note any committees or special projects you have been involved in, and highlight your product knowledge and transferable skills.

### **Transferable Skills and Job Shifting**

George was a technical writer in the company, writing documentation and manuals for a software program. When a position opened up in the Training Development area of the company to create training for the same programs, he applied. In his portfolio, he highlighted his current experience with the company, his extensive product knowledge and writing ability. He used his portfolio to document his training experience and educational background in training and emphasized skills he could use in both positions.



**Technical Writer**

### **Using the Portfolio to Keep Track of Certifications and Professional Development**

A portfolio is a great tool for managing information. More organizations are beginning to use portfolios to keep track of member progress toward industry certification. Many people use a portfolio only for tracking things they have accomplished, others use it as a means of assessment, where the contents of the portfolio indicate the success of the program.

The portfolio can be a tool for tracking your progress toward specific certification in your field. Whether you are working to become a certified coach, registered dietician or Novell administrator, you can use the career portfolio as a place to track your progress toward your goal.

Depending on your certification process, you may have a structured set of materials that you can put into the portfolio where you can list or mark down what you have accomplished to date. If no formal plan fits, you can create your own forms and lists to track your progress.

Remember, the portfolio isn't just for getting a new job. It's a tool for tracking your skills and abilities. As you obtain new skills, you should add them to the portfolio. Keep this document up to date, and you will be ready for anything.

## **Sounds Great – But it Won't Work for Me**

“Sounds great but it won't work for me”. If there is something in your gut that makes you uneasy with the prospect of developing a portfolio, there are two possible explanations. First, you may be a master procrastinator and this is your normal response to work efforts. The second, and more likely, possibility is that you can't see yourself with enough work samples to make the portfolio process work.

### **Common Stumbling Blocks**

- Lack of physical work samples
- Unclear personal goals
- Not sure how to use the portfolio in your particular industry or profession.

Throughout the development of this portfolio process, several people kept telling us – “this sounds great but...” We kept trying to figure out the reasons for their resistance to the process. Was it too much work? Were they unsure about how to actually use it in an interview? Finally, after observing one person's struggle during a full-time job search, we discovered the problem.

## The Portfolio in Action

Our friend George wanted a different job and had background and experience to do many different kinds of work. George had a solid, formal education and lots of community service background, but he kept blocking when we offered to help him put together the portfolio. This went on for months. Then all of a sudden, one employer said, "Could you do a presentation for us and bring us some of your work to the interview tomorrow?" We followed the guidelines for the "Emergency Portfolio" and helped him create a portfolio for the next day. He admitted that "A portfolio was the best way to organize my work".

George found that the process wasn't so bad, and the portfolio worked well in the interview. When we quizzed him about what kept him from doing it earlier, he said: "Most of the resumes I sent out were for jobs where I didn't have an exact match to the company". He felt the portfolio worked best when he could match his work samples to the skills needed by the company.

The story continues. In subsequent interviews he used his portfolio each time. George said: "Most people conducting the interview don't know how to get information out of you. This portfolio stuff works because you can prompt the interviewer to ask better questions.

We are happy to say George found a job where his talents and experiences could be well used. "I might have still gotten this job without it," he said, "but the portfolio made the interview go more smoothly. The interviewers were impressed by the portfolio, and it made me more visible candidate. At my 90-day review I learned I had started about 85,000 higher than average because I had the portfolio and could show them my skills". The moral of the story is....If you are feeling overwhelmed and uneasy about the portfolio, be sure you are seeking out positions that are really you.



## **I don't Need a Portfolio : I Have Lots of Job Offers**

“The job market is real good right now and I have lots of offers”. If this sounds like you – congratulations! It would be easy to take the path of least resistance here. Consider, however, that using the portfolio may help to “up the offer”. Remember that getting the job is the first hurdle, keeping it is the next, followed by the goal of getting promoted and rewarded for the job.

### **Upping The Offer**

When you have a portfolio, you have your professional goals spelled out. You can use the section, along with your work samples, to get more money or better benefits. Pam developed her portfolio, after receiving three offers, to help justify her negotiations for benefits and perks. The money being offered may be preset, but the benefits package can often be expanded for secondary benefits. Secondary benefits are the non-insurance and retirement benefits. She used her portfolio to demonstrate her abilities and her need for professional development. Each of these companies agreed to pay for her professional memberships and one three-day professional meeting. This would save her an advantage of 1,200\$ out of pocket expenses per year. She was also able to convince her eventual employer to purchase an additional copy of the software they used in the office for home use. This made her job easier by having the same software at home to do her work.

There is something about the portfolio process which causes you to reflect on who you are, what you want to do, and to search out what you are good at doing. Let's focus on getting you rewarded for your work. Using the portfolio process for upping the offer in the interview sets you up to use it on the job during your performance appraisals or year-end review.

**Use a portfolio as a bargaining tool when you have lots of job offers!**



