“The portfolio is a career communication tool that creates a narrative about your work and artistic philosophy. It is a showcase of what you have to offer as an employment, exhibition, or academic candidate and is a compilation of your best and most recent work. Your portfolio is a piece that is always in progress and always evolving as you in turn evolve as a creative professional.”

Harriet Schwartz, Carnegie Mellon Career Center

What do I need in my portfolio?

Over time you will have at least two portfolios. The first is your “master portfolio” and the second is your “interview portfolio.”

The master portfolio is a compilation of all of your work and you will add and subtract to it over time. The interview portfolio is comprised of pieces from your master portfolio that are applicable to the job, exhibition space, or other criteria.

Make sure your portfolio contents are appropriate to the position for which you are applying. In other words, if you are applying for a graphic design internship, you may not want to include slides of your oil paintings. Include only examples of your best graphic work. If you have 10 projects completed but think only five are of good enough quality to be shown, only include those five in your interview portfolio. You want to make sure that only your best work is presented, and you don’t want to waste the viewer’s time.

When applying for design positions, do your homework about the business to which you are applying and make sure the work you include is applicable. The same holds true when submitting your portfolio for art shows, galleries, art fairs, etc., Doing your research will ensure you submit appropriate work.

Portfolios are sometimes referred to as “artist packets” when the information is being mailed to galleries, juried shows, etc.

When mailing a portfolio, enclose the following, in this order:

- A cover letter
- An artist’s bio or resume
- An artist’s statement
- Reviews (if any)
- Slides, pictures, transparencies or CD/DVD
- Self addressed stamped envelope for return of portfolio
- A piece of cardboard to prevent damage in transit
- A big enough envelope to contain everything

For an internship, you can adapt the materials above to the needs of the application.

If you schedule an appointment with the prospective employer/art dealer/gallery owner in person you should take along examples of your work in a well-organized portfolio, binder, or catalogue. Adapt the items listed above:

- Artist statement
- Images of your work
- Resume
- Credit information sheet, if appropriate

What format is best?

This depends upon the situation. Ask the employer what she or he prefers. Usually you can send slides, but as the world becomes more computerized you may also be able to send an email with attachments, a CD, a DVD, or the URL for your web site. However, don’t assume everyone has the same access to technology or that work created in a Mac environment will always work in a PC environment. Always ask for the employer’s preference.

If you are using a binder or catalogue you can also include a front and back cover. If you are using pictures or digital prints, mat them and cover them with clear protection. If you are sending slides, use an 8.5 X 11 slide sheet. Label each page and each
slide. If you are using slides, be sure to indicate the direction the slide should be viewed (i.e., front, back, top, bottom). You may also include evidence of your process such as sketches, drafts, and works in progress.

If you decide to use a web site, keep the following in mind:

- Make your site quick loading
- Make your site easy to navigate
- Be sure your links work
- Cross link pages if possible
- Include your resume, statement and bio as separate linked pages
- Make sure your site is coherent and set up so that you can make changes easily

**How do I get my work photographed?**

There is nothing worse than good artwork that is badly photographed. All artists need to learn to take good photographs of their work. However, if you do not take good photographs of your work, find an experienced photographer who can. Don’t be tempted to save money when it comes to photographing your work. Your viewer will not see the strength of your portfolio. If you work in 3-D, photograph your work from several angles. Separate shots of details are good for both 2-D and 3-D work.

Workshops are available each semester on how to photograph your work. Look for announcements or get in touch with Academic Services Office.

For more information about portfolio preparation as well as advice on being a professional artist or designer see:


