PORTFOLIO PREPARATION

What do I need in my portfolio?
In the 21st Century it is crucial that creative people have web sites. Whether you use your web site as a portfolio, business, or what have you, prospective employers will expect that your work is easily accessible. If you do not feel as if you have the skills to design your own web site, here are some sites that may be helpful:

- Big Black Bag
- CarbonMade
- Other People's Pixels
- PortfolioOpen
- Web Design Library
- Weebly
- Wix

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 (Do not share this as a web site!). The interview portfolio is comprised of pieces from your master portfolio that are applicable to the job, exhibition space, or other criteria. REMEMBER, PURPOSE EQUALS RELEVANCE AND IN TURN CREATES EFFECTIVENESS and the purpose for the portfolio dictates what goes into it and how you show it. Categorize the work and CLEARLY delineate what kind of work is in each section so that potential employers, galleries, etc. will not have to hunt through meaningless images. Too much of a good thing really can become too much of a good thing.

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 images of your oil paintings. Include only examples of your best graphic work. If you have 20 projects completed but think only 10 are of good enough quality to be shown, only include those 10 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. Always start and end with a strong image and make sure the work in between is coherent and connected.

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. While it is true that your portfolio should include evidence of breadth and depth, when in doubt about what to include, contact the employer, gallery owner, etc.

—Harriet Schwartz
Carnegie Mellon Career Center
For an internship, you can adapt the information above to the needs of the application.

When sending information via email, the email itself can become the cover letter and everything else is an attachment. If the above information is on your web site, then link to your URL in the email. ALWAYS follow the directions presented by the employer/organization in terms of submission of materials.

As an artist, you may wish to have a hard portfolio as well as an online portfolio. 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.

What format is best?
This depends upon the situation. Ask the employer what she or he prefers. Most people will be fine with a link to your site while others may request samples of your work. You can send digital images via email with attachments, but never exceed 1MB and ALWAYS send images in PDF format (do not ever send images in PhotoShop, Illustrator, etc.).

When presenting the work in person, employers wish to see work in the venue in which it is best seen. So, if the work should be seen printed, bring a book. If the work should be seen on a screen, bring a laptop. If the work is mixed, bring both. Some employers will want to see all work printed or all work on the screen. When in doubt, ASK how the interviewer would like to see the work.

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. To reiterate, when sending images, always send as PDF. Do not send Illustrator files, Photoshop files, Indesign files, etc.

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. You should include evidence of your process such as sketches, drafts, and works in progress.

For your 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

Unlabeled icons are usually not helpful for the viewer so please avoid them. In addition, your web site most likely will be very public so please bear this in mind when including information and images.

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 when applicable.

YOU MUST BE ABLE TO TALK ABOUT YOUR WORK!

The ability to place your work in context, to understand your process and to coherently explain to others what your work is about is ESSENTIAL when presenting your portfolio. All those in class critiques, reviews, the Sophomore Review, etc., give you the opportunity to learn and practice how to effectively present and talk about your work.

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

www.stamps.umich.edu/career

For designers:
www.coroflot.com
http://www.core77.com/design.edu/portfolio_tips.asp
www.behance.net
PREPARING FOR PORTFOLIO EXPO AND CAREER EVENTS

Annual Events at U of M:
- The Stamps Portfolio Expo
- The Career Center Career Expo
- The Engineering Career Fair
- MPowered Career Fair

Watch your email for announcements for other career events on and off campus.

Do I need to do anything before the event?

Recruiters say research is the key to a successful job search. So... stand out from the crowd by taking their advice... research organizations before hand. Not a lot of spare time? Pick your top 5 organizations; do the research and for the Stamps Portfolio Expo submit early!!!!

What do I wear?

Organizations say first impressions count so give some thought to what you wear. While you may not want to go all out and wear a suit, don't dress like a slob either.

There’s so many organizations here... where do I start?

Here are a couple of tips to make it more manageable:

- Before the Expo or Fair, develop your “two-minute commercial”: a brief overview of you—your background and career interests (see example below).
- Although the Stamps Portfolio Expo is easier to navigate, at Career Center events get familiar with the layout: take a minute to review the Fair booklet and room maps.
- When you’re ready, head for your first organization, introduce yourself with a smile and a handshake and begin your “commercial.”
- If you’re feeling nervous or need a break, stop by the info table at the Expo, or The Career Center table at their fairs... we can help you practice and share a little encouragement.

The Portfolio Expo differs from other events because:

You are there primarily to present your work and get expert feedback on what you are creating, how you are presenting, etc. Jobs and internships are a bonus!

Start your two-minute commercial with:
Hi, my name is ____________ and I am happy you are here since I am interested in ______________.

I only have 30 minutes between classes... should I still come?

Yes! but maximize your time. At the Stamps Portfolio Expo this will mean having your portfolio reviewed by only one organization/person so submit your resume or sign up early!

For other events, head straight to your top choice organization (at Career Center events you must register first). If there's a long line move on to the next one on your list. Thirty minutes is plenty of time to connect with 2-3 organizations at a Career Center event.
You should never skip a class for a career event but many professors are sympathetic to the fact you need a job or internship and may be able to work with you to make up what you miss if you choose to get permission to miss a class. Alternatively, the Stamps Portfolio Expo has a variety of creative possibilities from nonprofit art organizations to international design firms so plan ahead! Also, don’t forget the MPowered Career Fair and the Engineering Career Fair.

It’s all business at Career Center events... isn’t there anything else?

You’re right... job fairs tend to be pretty corporate. While you’ll see some not-for-profit and government organizations at fairs they tend to use different recruiting resources. On the other hand... corporate organizations can offer a variety of opportunities--some that may fit your interests! So take a tip from recruiters: “Explore options you may not have considered... you never know what you might find.”

What do I bring to the Fair?

Bring copies of your resume, your portfolio (in appropriate format), a leave behind, reference sheet, pen/pencil and notebook. You’ll want your resume and portfolio as you’re chatting with organizations and the other items may come in handy. If you’re asked for them, you’ll present yourself as a prepared job seeker!

A note on leave beinds:
These come in many different forms. They can be a business card, a small book, a pamphlet, etc.

Got more questions?

For the Stamps Portfolio Expo, please contact John Luther jonel@umich.edu or to make an appointment call 734-764-0397

For Career Center events, contact them at 734-764-7460.
www.careercenter.umich.edu

This document is based in part on the University of Michigan Career Center’s web site Frequently Asked Questions on preparing for Job Fairs.
The following checklist is a useful tool whether you are preparing for a formal interview or have a chance meeting in which you can network. Some categories (i.e., resume, portfolio, etc.) may be more applicable to formal interviewing. Always have business cards or leave behinds with you, be able to discuss your interest in your chosen field, and follow up with contacts.

_____ Resume

_____ Portfolio
  • Relevance to organization
  • Examples of process
  • Ability to speak about each piece
  • Leave behind

_____ Business Card or other means of contact

_____ 30 second self-promotion
  • Background
  • Interests/Activities
  • Leadership/Campus Involvement
  • Major/Academic Interests
  • Volunteer Work
  • Special Abilities/Skills
  • Interesting Life Experiences

_____ Ability to explain interest in your field

_____ Ability to explain interest in employer’s organization (do your research!)

_____ Interview “outfit”

_____ STAR (able to describe Situation, Task, Action/Activity, Result)

_____ Ask for contact information

_____ Follow up as agreed and/or appropriate

_____ Send thank you letters/notes promptly

For more information about portfolios, or to discuss other issues related to career development, contact John Luther, Career Development Coordinator, by stopping at the front desk of the Smucker Wagstaff Academic Programs Center or calling to make an appointment (734) 764-0397.