

Culling Advice from the Experts: A Checklist for Building a Professional Portfolio

Have a portfolio; keep it current—that’s the bottom line! Being able to *prove* rather than just *tell* what you can do gives you a distinct edge when interviewing prospective employers and clients. A sequence of considerations for building a portfolio in any medium appears in the checklist below.

Sources for the checklist include: *The Web Portfolio Guide: Creating Electronic Portfolios for the Web* by Miles Kimball (2003, ISBN 0-321-09345-3), and three articles that have appeared in the *Intercom* magazine of the Society for Technical Communication (STC):

- “Portfolios for Technical Communicators: Worth the Work” by Julie S. Scott (*Intercom*, Feb. 2000)
- “The Ten Commandments of Effective Portfolios” by Kirk R. St. Amant (*Intercom*, June 2002)
- “Developing a Web-Based Portfolio” by Steven M. Kendus (*Intercom*, Nov. 2002)

Checklist for Building a Professional Portfolio		✓
①	Maintain a Portfolio Plan	
a.	Keep digital copies of all paid and unpaid work you complete.	
b.	Maintain a running inventory (e.g., a list) of your work samples for ready reference.	
c.	Document your answers to the steps below as part of your plan.	
②	Analyze Your Audiences	
a.	What groups will be looking at your portfolio?	
b.	What are their expectations?	
c.	What artifacts, qualities, ideas, and tone will they be looking for?	
d.	What would each audience NOT want to see?	
e.	Which audiences would you most like to impress?	
f.	What impressions would you like your audiences to have?	
③	Assess Your Portfolio Goals, Purposes, Requirements, and Standards	
a.	Are you documenting a single project or entire body of work?	
b.	What purposes will the collection serve? Which purposes have the highest priority?	
c.	What content and preparation requirements exist, if any?	
d.	What quality standards exist (or are implied) for each type of sample?	
④	Rate Your Work to Identify Your Best Samples	
a.	Select what appear to be your best samples from your inventory in 1.b, above.	
b.	Focus on the samples with which you are most familiar.	
c.	Organize candidate samples by type or category (see 5.f for ideas).	
d.	Develop evaluation criteria for each type of sample; you may list several standards for each category of work.	
e.	Rate each sample by how well it stacks up to your criteria, for example: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give each item a score of 1, 2, or 3 for each criterion (e.g., 1 is low; 3 is high). 2. For each sample, add up the scores for all criteria. 3. Rank the scored samples to determine your best work within each category. 	

Continued on the next page...

Checklist for Building a Professional Portfolio, Continued		√
5	Identify What Will Go into Your Portfolio, Including:	
a.	An overview, outline, or plan describing the entire collection and its sections.	
b.	Résumés, references, and any other elements of your curriculum vitae.	
c.	Transcripts (if a current or a recent student, or if required for the position).	
d.	Lists of capabilities and selected accomplishments, if not part of your résumé.	
e.	Introductions to each section of samples explaining how each was created (e.g., state the methods and applications used, and be sure to give credit to other contributors).	
f.	Work samples showing different genres, writing styles, media, examples of layout and design, authoring tools, disciplines or industries, subject matter, and so forth.	
g.	Before-and-after samples (e.g., from editing or transforming the work of others).	
h.	Any business benefits resulting from your work (e.g., reductions in support calls).	
i.	Testimonials, awards, complimentary reviews, and letters of recommendation.	
j.	Professional group affiliations.	
k.	Carefully selected pieces that can be given away if samples are requested.	
6	Identify Tasks and Priorities for Finalizing Your Portfolio	
a.	Create a list of samples that need revision, as well as a list of missing items.	
b.	Develop new samples to fill any voids in each category.	
c.	Bring any less-than-optimal samples up to the desired standard.	
d.	Obtain permissions from organizations (written or e-mail) to include work samples.	
e.	Further sanitize work samples if proprietary material requires it.	
7	Build Your Portfolio	
a.	Design the layout and table of contents, or the site map for a digital portfolio.	
b.	Design the aesthetic look and feel, select typography, create cover art, and so forth.	
c.	Create section dividers as needed, or a navigation scheme for a digital portfolio.	
d.	Assemble components in the order outlined in the section overviews or site map.	
8	Test, Revise, and Publish Your Portfolio	
a.	Develop a survey of assessment questions (see parts 2–4 of this checklist for ideas).	
b.	Ask friends and associates to review your portfolio and complete the survey.	
c.	Compile the feedback from the survey forms.	
d.	Group and prioritize the comments into a revision plan.	
e.	Revise the samples or overall layout according to the revision plan.	
f.	Create a final version of your portfolio. (Use sheet protectors for the paper version.)	
g.	Make copies of your portfolio, or a subset, for distribution or emergency backup.	

More tips: For an expanded portfolio, consider including the following:

1. Benefits statements for each section (see <http://www.site-scribe.com>)
2. Frequently Asked Questions (see <http://www.mlujan.com/faq.htm>)
3. Details on your mission and goals (see <http://www.customercreation.com>)

I welcome your experiences from using this list! Please send them to adelesommers@earthlink.net.