



Building, Maintaining, and Presenting An Effective Portfolio

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Often times a candidate does well verbally at an interview, but then falters when it comes time to present a portfolio of sample projects.

The portfolio portion of the interview (paper and/or laptop) can be viewed as a two-step process: building/maintaining a portfolio, then presenting it at the interview. Here are some pointers for building and maintaining a professional portfolio, and also pointers on how to effectively present your portfolio so that your skills and experiences are represented effectively:

Building and maintaining....

- Purchase a professional looking portfolio case, with clear plastic sleeves for 8 x 10 inserts. Black with zipper is very common. For digital samples, you may want consider also including a laptop.
- Select samples of your work that best represent your skills and experiences.
- If the sample is an entire manual, then only include several representative sample pages (including a table of contents page).
- If the sample is a brochure or newsletter, insert the entire sample in the sleeve (you can always remove it during the interview for examination by the interviewer).
- If, for example, you have different categories of samples (some technical writing, some marketing), then consider sorting them by group. Then sort samples from newest, to oldest (front to back).
- Do not include samples that are: worn out in appearance (discolored, “dog-eared” edges), appear to be old or produced with outdated technology (i.e., pre-desktop program era), samples which don’t have much impact overall (i.e., a parts list may not add much value).
- If you are a new graduate: If you had an internship, you may have some goof corporate samples. If no internship, then review your college courses and pull together samples of projects completed for such classes as Technical Communications, English, Journalism, or Marketing Communications. Also consider excerpts from thesis papers, research project, reports, class projects, etc.
- If you have web-based projects, hyper-linked files, or on-line help files, it is ok to print out a few representative pages. However, it is much more effective to bring them on a CD or laptop (or, bring an extra CD to leave with the interviewer).
- Periodically review your portfolio and determine if you need to add newly-completed samples, or if you need to either remove outdated or non-relevant samples, or remove worn out-looking samples.
- When obtaining samples (printed or digital), always try to obtain a printed sample or two of a project you have completed. Before doing so, consult with the company or client for which you did the project to get their permission (as some samples may contain proprietary information).

Presenting at the interview...

- Check your portfolio before the interview in case you need to add, subtract, or change the order of the samples to better match the interview.
- At the interview, usually wait until the interviewer either requests to see the portfolio, or offer to show it after you and the interviewer have discussed your background and experiences.
- When you start showing the portfolio (printed or on a laptop), be selective in what you show (as the interviewer may not wish to see the entire portfolio; you will have to make a judgment call, based on time remaining, and what the interviewer is most interested in seeing).
- As you show the samples, make sure you describe: 1) the name of the project or deliverable, 2) who the audience is, 3) your involvement with the project, 4) any particular obstacles you overcame or problems you solved during the project.
- Generally do not remove samples and leave them with the interviewer.