



JPG & Associates, Inc



Creating a Portfolio for the Technical Communicator

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Objective Of A Portfolio



- The portfolio is the “certification”, the “legitimization”, the “validation” of your professional credentials and career.
- It serves as the “gallery” by which hiring managers, potential clients, and peers can get a “snap-shot” of your career and validate your skills, experiences, and strengths.
- Becomes the visual component of the interview process, and provides the basis for verbal descriptions of your involvement in a project. Where words fall short, the visual will compliment.
- Provides a quick inventory from which hiring managers can view samples of your work in order to determine if you are a viable candidate for a more in-depth interview by phone or in-person.



Types Of Portfolios



Hard-copy--printed or hand-carried in a portfolio case or binder (also reference the handouts Building, Presenting, and Maintaining An Effective Portfolio)



Online, personal website--showing samples and resume (also reference the handout: Showcasing Your Work In An Online Portfolio, and 15 Free Portfolio Hosting Sites)

Other ways of delivering your samples:

- Digital media (CD, DVD, flash drive)
- Down-loadable files (PDFs, HMTL, JPEG, MP4, etc.)



- Laptop, I-Pad, auxiliary screen
- Leave-behind hard-copy samples
- Combination of hard-copy, digital, and/or on-line (website)





Matching Experience And Objectives

- Depending upon your career status, you will want to select samples of your work that best reflects your skills, experiences, and strengths.
- Also, you will want to include samples that represent your career objectives for the next new stage of your career.
- As a candidate, you may fall into one of these three categories: 1) New graduate and post-graduate, 2) Experienced career candidate, 3) Transitioning professional from another career.



Number And Types To Include

- Regardless of hard-copy or on-line, it is recommended that you highlight the most current samples and then work your way backwards—from newest to oldest samples (see the handout *Deliverables That Technical Communicators Develop*). Here are suggestions for your particular career status:
- If you are a new grad or post-grad, you will want to highlight specific course papers, research and/or thesis papers, and/or specific projects completed by you during your internship.
- (cont'd)



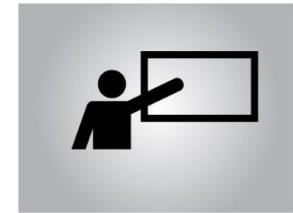
Number And Types To Include (Cont'd)...

- If you are an experienced communication professional, you may want to include samples that reflect your next career objective or focus. If you have “worn many hats”, you may want to group samples by type (for example: 1) end-user doc., 2) training).
- If you are transitioning from another career, you will want to highlight those communication projects and experiences from your previous career that validate your skills and demonstrate those “tools” that are transferable into and applicable for a new communication career.



Verbal Support Is Important

- During the interview, augment each sample of your work with a verbal summary. Suggestions include describing:
 - Purpose or objective of the project.
 - Audience for which the project (or deliverable) was initiated.
 - Level of involvement may include any combination of these-- from scratch, or the revision of an existing deliverable: conceptualization, planning, time-lining, writing, editing, production coordination, page layout, file preparation for print and/or on-line, etc.
- Was it a "solo" project, or was it part of a team?
- Note: Include any specific letters, e-mails, and/or awards of recognition for extraordinary performance or effort.





Ideally A Portfolio Should Reflect...



- Written and verbal communication skills
- Authoring tool (software) experience
- Project management skills
- Ability to assess, plan, and time-line a project
- Problem-solving abilities
- Relevant strengths
- Familiarity with both print and on-line delivery of publications
- Team participation and negotiation skills
- Cross-team/cross-departmental negotiating skills



Reviewing, Updating, Retrieving

- Regardless if you have a hard-copy or on-line portfolio, review it periodically and determine if you need to update it, and/or if you need to remove outdated or irrelevant samples.
- Do not include samples that are of poor display quality (printed or on-line); avoid photocopies and low-res and/or third-generation scans.
- When retaining or obtaining samples from present or previous employers, be aware of the issues of confidentiality and ownership. When in doubt, ask for permission.



Before And During The Interview...

- Check your portfolio before the interview and see if you need to customize add to it or subtract from it to fit the job or company.
- At the interview, wait until the interviewer requests to see it, or offer to show it after you and the interviewer have reviewed and discussed your background.
- When you start showing samples, be aware of the time remaining; you may want to be selective since you may not have time to show the entire portfolio.
- As a general rule or practice, do not leave hard-copy and/or digital media samples with the interviewer (you most likely will not get them back). Note: For reference, you may point the interviewer to your website, offer to e-mail attachments, or upload large files to a secured file-sharing site.





In Summary

- Keep your portfolio updated and fresh looking.
- Make your portfolio available in several different deliverable types, since what is required may vary from hiring manager to HR person (hard-copy, web, up-loadable files, portable media—CD, DVD, flash drive).
- Depending upon the type of project(s) you are sampling (on-line portfolio or displayed via a company web portal) and the preference of the interviewer, you may need to bring a laptop, I-pad, or other personal device to the interview. (An auxiliary screen may be available.)
- For additional reference material, refer to the handouts provided.





Addendums

- A: Getting Your “Foot In The Door”
- B: What Catches The Hiring Manager’s Attention?
- C: Use The Tools Of Effective Job Search
- D: Communication Is Important
- E: Organizations And Memberships



A: Getting Your “Foot In The Door”

- If in last year of college: Try to get an internship that involves any type of writing (technical, marketing, training development).
- If you are currently in any “cross-over professions,” you may be able to get into technical writing easier if you:
 - Apply for a contract or consulting position.
 - Re-organize your resume so as to focus on “strengths” versus “chronology”.
 - Take a course in technical writing, or in specific tools areas (i.e., InDesign, FrameMaker, Articulate, etc.).
 - Network: Go to meetings of organizations that promote technical communication.





B: What Catches The Hiring Manager's Attention?

- 4-year degree in Tech Comm., English, Journalism; some requests call for an advanced degree
- Internships, projects, or related job experience while in school are very helpful
- Solid writing ability
- Good verbal skills
- Quick study (learning about client products)
- A creative problem solver (can adjust to changing landscape)
- Basic software tools familiarity
- Works well with people, departments, and stakeholders





C: Use The Tools Of Effective Job Search

- Resume (or curriculum vitae)
- Create a portfolio of samples (may also include samples on-line)
- Join LinkedIn and create a profile page
- Watch the on-line job posting sites
- Post resume on reputable sites
- Person-to-person networks still important
- Work with agencies that specialize





D: Communication Is Important

- Have all vital contact information on resume
- Check e-mail and voice mail on a regular basis
- Return e-mail inquiries and missed phone calls promptly—sometimes a day or even hours can make the difference
- Be proactive and check in with your agencies or contacts periodically—shows interest, energy, and professionalism





E: Organizations And Memberships

- Society for Technical Communication (STC)
 - www.stc.org
- American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)
 - www.amwa.org
- LinkedIn specialty groups
- Networking groups, training, seminars, expositions, etc.