



visual resource center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO • COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING

GENERAL TIPS ON CREATING A PORTFOLIO

by

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1. **Utilize the resources and staff members that are provided to you by the Visual Resource Center**, as one of the VRC's main objectives is to help you document your work for portfolio purposes. The VRC is located in Room 305 of the Environmental Design building and is open an average of 65 hours per week during the fall and spring semesters, including evening and Sunday hours. Check the door of the VRC for specific times or call us at 303-492-2808. Our facility houses a portfolio studio to photograph your models and drawings using digital 'point and shoot' and SLR cameras as well as 35mm and medium format film cameras. There are also two computers equipped with 35mm film scanners and flatbed scanners for use in creating your digital portfolio. To reserve a time in the portfolio studio you need to visit the VRC and sign up on the reservation sheet or call the VRC office. The digital cameras and all of the equipment in the portfolio studio are provided by the VRC but if you wish to use your own digital camera please see the attached sheet titled, "Tips on Using a Point and Shoot Digital Camera in the VRC Portfolio Studio."
2. In putting together a portfolio, **consider what you want the final product to be**. Most portfolios are generally digital images, text, and graphics displayed on pages that you have created in graphic design software and then printed out and bound together. Your **first step should be to document the work** by photographing or scanning it and then adjusting the images in a digital imaging software program such as Adobe Photoshop. The next step is to choose a graphic design software program such as Adobe InDesign or Illustrator in which you will **design the page layouts** including images, text, and graphics. The third step will be to **decide where you will print your files** and on what type of paper. Lastly, you will either buy a pre-made binder to insert your pages into or you can design your own cover and have the pages bound professionally at a printing shop. Keep in mind that **you may have to make multiple copies** of your portfolio to send off to several different grad schools or employers all at the same time.

Most universities still require a printed out version of your portfolio that has been bound, rather than just sending a CD/DVD of your digital files or a web site link. Remember that the person viewing your digital files on a disc must have the same software that you used to create the portfolio or they will not be able to open those files. **It is important to check first with the graduate school regarding their particular requirements.**

3. **Don't procrastinate** documenting your work. Establish a habit of photographing or scanning your projects once each semester, or at least once each year. You'll be amazed at how quickly your work can become damaged or lost. Also, many

colleges/faculty members may "temporarily" hold student work for their archives, shows, or teaching portfolios, so **be prepared that you may not always have immediate access to your work**. If this happens, making a photographic copy or scan of the artwork is a must, since it may be the only record you will have of the work for a period of time.

4. While some discretion in selecting artwork is inevitable, **don't be stingy in what you choose to document**. While you may think your first models or those simple sketches will not be worthy of your final portfolio, they nevertheless are a valuable record of the skills you acquired in college. They also show how your skills have progressed. Some graduate schools or employers are interested in seeing projects from each year of school, and you can never second guess what samples of work they might like to see. Some ask to see preliminary sketches, as well as the final drawing, so that they can see your "design process." Also, **consider including work you produced in classes outside of your degree curriculum**. Many graduate schools ask to see samples of other "fine art" work such as paintings, photography, or sculpture. Maybe you wrote an interesting computer program or have Computer Aided Designs. You should document this work and consider including it.
5. **It is possible that your final portfolio may not include more than 5 to 10 different projects**. It is far better to include your 5 very best projects than 20 mediocre works. Graduate schools or employers will look for quality in your work, not quantity. But remember, it's important to have a large variety of work documented from which you will choose those 5 to 10 projects.
6. **Most portfolios should be 10 to 15 double page spreads** but some graduate schools may specify less. Again, check with the school to see what their particular requirements are. The following is a list of what should typically be included within the portfolio:
 - Title page
 - Opening statement and/or Resume
 - Contents page and/or Index
 - Design studio coursework (drawings/models)
 - Computer Aided Design & Drawings
 - Volunteer and/or Employment projects
 - Elective coursework (painting, sculpture, photography, etc)
 - Samples of papers you have written (only 1 to 2 pages)
7. **YOU DON'T JUST MAKE ONE FIXED, UNCHANGING PORTFOLIO. A portfolio is an ever changing process/product**. As mentioned, different colleges or employers want to see different types of work, and that's why you photograph a large variety of your work. Your intent should be to **create a library of images** from which you can choose a smaller subset of images. The projects you put in a portfolio for a graduate school may be entirely different than the projects you include for an employer, or a different grad school.
8. While you want to begin photographing your work in your first or second year, you might not use these images for some time after taking them. **Make sure that you are storing your digital images properly and are backing them up regularly**. It is best to save your images on 2 different media at the same time. If you are using CDs, burn 2 CDs or

back up those images to a flash drive or hard drive in case the first CD becomes unreadable. Most CDs and DVDs are not created for long term storage which means they are not considered “archival”. This is why it is a good idea to back up your images every 2 years at least by burning a new disc or transferring that disc to another backup storage device. Also, remember that hard drives can crash and flash drives can be easily lost or erased, so having a CD or DVD backup of images stored on this type of media is a good idea. **Avoid using (erasable) CD-RWs and DVD-RWs for storing your digital images** as they can be easily erased and are considered even less reliable than regular CDs and DVDs for long term storage of digital files.

9. Most digital cameras record an image as a JPEG file. JPEGs are compressed files which store as a small file but lose resolution because of the compression. **Every time you open, edit, save, and recompress a JPEG you lose more image resolution.** To alleviate this loss of information, **save the JPEG file as a TIFF** the first time you open it. TIFFs are uncompressed files and take more storage space but will not lose resolution when edited. Some digital cameras will give you the option of recording the image as a TIFF, or if you are using a scanner to record your work you can save that file as a TIFF from the beginning.
10. When you are ready to start thinking about the page layout and design of your portfolio, stop by the Visual Resource Center to look at an array of sample student portfolios and books on creating a portfolio. **Ask a faculty member for their input on which projects and how much text to include.** You may also want to purchase a copy of the book by Harold Linton called *Portfolio Design* which is geared specifically toward creating an architectural portfolio. His book is available to order through most local or online bookstores. This author also has a **very useful website** at portfoliodesign.com.
11. When you have finished creating your portfolio pages in a graphic design software program and are ready to print your portfolio, there are several factors to consider. Where you have your portfolio printed might depend on what kind of paper you would like to use and what kind of binding the print company offers. Once you have decided where to have it printed you should **find out what the print requirements are** for the specific printer being used. Many print companies will tell you what format your files need to be in, the optimal resolution and file size, and whether they require CMYK versus RGB color mode to achieve accurate color when printing.
12. **If letters of recommendation are needed from faculty members** to accompany the portfolio, **they will need several months advance notice** from you. Faculty members will be flooded with requests for recommendations from dozens of students, and the earlier you ask for the letter, the more likely you will receive one by your deadline.
13. Remember, **your portfolio is the vehicle through which your work is seen by those making important decisions about your future.** It is not a place to cut corners or accept mediocre quality. The more proficient you are in using the digital imaging and graphic design software programs, the better able you will be convey what you want in your portfolio. **This is a time consuming project which often takes several months to complete** and it will be the most important project of your school career.

Please stay in touch, and good luck in creating your portfolio!

Recommended reading for creating a successful portfolio:

- Portfolio Design, Third Edition (January 2004); Author: Harold Linton; Publisher: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. NY, NY; ISBN: 0-393-73095-6
- Website: <http://www.portfoliodesign.com/>