



Portfolio Writing Guide

A professional portfolio is a tangible collection of items (artifacts) that charts your professional growth and illustrates the best examples of your most relevant skills and experiences. While a resume states what you can do, a portfolio enables you to demonstrate examples of your qualifications. The process of putting together your portfolio helps you to determine who you are, what you like to do, what you do best, and how you want to present yourself to your targeted audience. It is a valuable tool that you can use throughout your career to assess your professional development, interview effectively, negotiate job offers, prepare for performance appraisals, navigate career transitions, and track professional growth. Employers value proof of your qualifications. Job seekers who use portfolios often receive more job offers at higher starting salaries!

Creating a Portfolio

Step 1: Collect items that showcase your skills and abilities in various skill areas. At the end of each college semester or during each year of employment, collect and file evidence of activities, work, assignments, internships, accomplishments, special training and workshops.

Here are some examples of where you can draw these artifacts from:

- Community/Club Activities
- Classroom/College Experiences
- Academic/Extracurricular Recognition
- Special Interests/Life Experiences
- Professional Memberships/Development
- Special Skills/Certifications/Licensure
- Work/Internship Related Skills
- Service/Volunteer Work

Step 2: Select artifacts that best demonstrate your accomplishments, but be concise and don't include everything you've ever done. Select materials that you are most proud of and that demonstrate achievement towards your goals.

Step 3: Connect materials to achievements with summaries or reflection papers that highlight your learning. For example: If you participate in a leadership workshop, connect the pamphlet with a written summary of what you learned or how you grew.

Step 4: Sort your portfolio materials by learning outcomes into 8 areas of skill development. The following skills are based on the top 10 qualities that employers seek and each one links to examples of artifacts to consider including in each skill category:

Professional Growth and Career Planning
Communication
Creativity (Humanities, Arts, Culture)
Critical Thinking and Research
Leadership and Teamwork
Social Responsibility (Volunteer/Community Service)
Technical and Scientific
Other

Step 5: Assemble a "working portfolio" by purchasing a professional looking binder, divider tabs, clear sheet protectors, and creative paper and card stock for photos and captions. Use high quality paper for layout pages and strive for consistency and a professionalism throughout.

Remember: Your portfolio should not resemble a scrapbook project. Some documents are "stand alone" artifacts, meaning they do not need any explanation to someone reviewing the item – such as a resume. For those that need an explanation, you will need to develop captions or reflective statements to communicate their relevancy. Brief captions should clearly state what you did or learned, highlighting results and accomplishments. Begin your captions with action verbs to avoid overusing the word "I".

Here is an example of how you might organize your binder:

- Table of Contents
- [Career Goals and Philosophy Statement](#)
- Resume, Letters of Reference, Credentials
- Skill Categories (*See Step 4*)

Step 6: Filter your comprehensive “working portfolio” into a targeted “presentation portfolio” when showcasing it to potential employers or graduate schools. A “presentation portfolio” is more streamlined and tailored to the requirements of your career or educational interest. For example, a presentation portfolio for a scholarship application might include items related to leadership, service learning or academic achievements. In this instance, you would only include artifacts that are necessary for that objective.

Step 7: Interview effectively by using your portfolio to enhance your answers during the interview. This way, you are not just telling the employer that you are qualified for the job; you are showing proof! Construct 10-15 specific examples that target the employer’s needs for the position. Use the STAR Approach – Highlight accomplishments that illustrate your expertise, strengths, and contributions, which are most relevant to your objective. [Refer to Accomplishment Guide](#).

You and your competition may have similar work and/or educational backgrounds. Emphasizing your unique successes and strengths will allow your resume to stand out above the rest.

Show a connection to the job requirements and the employer’s needs: “I understand that this job requires someone who has good communication skills, can manage others, work in teams, coordinate events, and increase company revenue. I believe my education and experience have prepared me well, as I have developed these skills in my courses, jobs, and volunteer experiences.” (Hint: Open your portfolio and pull out the appropriate example to show the interviewer).

Sample Artifacts for Portfolio Sections

Professional Growth and Career Planning

- Outstanding work in your major
- Internship experience
- Professional memberships
- Job shadowing/Informational interviews
- Job descriptions/performance appraisals/work projects
- Professor evaluations
- College transcript
- Academic or professional awards

Communication

- Speeches/Oral Presentations
- Papers/written work
- Debates
- Articles written/published
- Business letters/correspondence
- Marketing materials
- Sales/customer service experience

Creativity

- Creative Writing Samples
- Art Work – drawing, painting, images
- Photography
- Theatre experience
- Personal experience in another culture
- Study of another culture
- Foreign Languages
- Innovative, imaginative or creative ideas
- Designing materials or projects

Critical Thinking and Research

- Numeric work from coursework or professional experience
- Research papers/projects
- Case studies
- Care plans
- Critical analysis papers
- Critiques of research articles

Leadership and Teamwork

- Clubs/Campus activities
- Athletics
- Academic group projects
- Leadership roles
- Community projects
- Volunteer activities
- Work or internship roles
- Active committee member or officer

Social Responsibility

- Community outreach programs
- Fundraising events
- Community service events
- Multi-cultural awareness projects
- Campus ministry work
- Community building
- Care giving
- Service Learning

Technical and Scientific

- Power Point presentations
- Excel spreadsheets
- Access databases
- Publisher (brochures, flyers)
- Computer hardware/software experience
- Web page design/programming
- Internet research
- Laboratory work
- Scientific reports
- Clinical skills

Other

- Extensive/Unique Travel
- Special Hobby
- Participation in a unique group
- Organizational memberships
- Licenses/Certifications
- Study Abroad
- Life Management Skills – time management, record keeping, managing, budgets or finances, etc.

Resume, Letters, Credentials

- Resume
- Letters of recommendation
- List of references
- Dean's List letter
- Nomination letters
- Performance evaluation
- Letter of acceptance into graduate school
- Letter commending your skills

Career Goals and Philosophy Statement

- Introduce yourself
- Characteristics that make you a good employee
- Your guiding values
- Why choice of academic major and Rivier University?
- How knowledge and experiences gained will help with future goals
- Practical experiences you bring to the employer
- Relevant achievements
- What are your professional/career goals?