

A professional employment portfolio could be just the thing that sets you apart from other job candidates.

A well-prepared portfolio

- shows your achievements,
- documents the scope and quality of your experience and training, and
- shows your skills and abilities.

### **Organizing Your Portfolio**

- Determine the skills necessary for the job you will be interviewing for.
- Choose items that will document how you have used those skills for the employer.
- Use a looseleaf portfolio notebook.
- Use plastic page covers to protect your materials and to make rearranging your portfolio easy.
- Arrange your portfolio to show how your abilities relate to the employer's needs.
- Label the different sections for ease of finding information in the portfolio.

### **What to Include**

- A copy of your résumé
- An official copy of your transcript
- A fact sheet, in list form, that displays your skills and what you like to do
- A list of experiences that do not fit into your résumé
- Certificates of awards and honors; special certifications for special training
- A program from an event you planned or in which you participated as part of a class project or campus organization
- A list of conferences and workshops you have attended and a description of each
- Samples of your writing
- Documentation of technical or computer skills
- Letters of commendation or thanks
- Letters of nomination to honors and academic organizations
- Newspaper articles that address some achievement
- Internship or co-op summary report

If you are seeking a teaching position you may want to add

- Student teaching evaluation materials
- Sample lesson plans
- A videotape of your teaching
- Sample syllabi
- Pictures of bulletin boards you designed
- Teaching tools you have created
- Information about a field trip or other event you organized
- Pictures of yourself working with students

## Electronic Portfolios

In addition to your traditional portfolio, you may want to create an electronic portfolio. You can make the electronic portfolio available to employers as a supplement to your résumé. It can be on the World Wide Web or on a CD-ROM, floppy disk, or zip disk. You can set it up as a PowerPoint presentation or include a PowerPoint slideshow as part of your electronic portfolio.

Electronic portfolios are easy for employers to access and use, especially if they're on the web. By including a "mailto" link in your portfolio, employers can contact you easily simply by clicking on the link and typing in a message for you. Another benefit of having an electronic portfolio is that it shows employers that you are familiar with various types of computer technology and programs.

Before creating your electronic portfolio, create your traditional version. Include electronic versions of items from your traditional portfolio. For example, include the word processing files for your writing samples and your résumé, scans of appropriate photos and certificates, and Adobe Acrobat (pdf) files of graphics such as brochures that you have designed. In University Computing Services graphics labs you can scan photos, digitize images, and prepare other items for inclusion.

In addition to the kinds of materials in your traditional portfolio, you might include an expanded version of your résumé, audio and video clips, an e-mail link, a link to Ball State's web site as well as one to your major department's pages, a link to the curriculum for your major, and other appropriate links. Avoid personal information and inappropriate links--anywhere on your web site. Remember that anyone with much web experience can explore more of your web pages quite easily beyond your portfolio if it's online. You might want to put your online portfolio on a different server to prevent this kind of browsing by employers.

### Using Your Portfolio

You may want to mention in your résumé as well as in your cover letter that your portfolio is available upon request.

Always bring your portfolio to interviews. When the employer begins to ask questions about your résumé, you can use your portfolio to support your responses.

For example, the employer might say, "I see that you have worked at your school newspaper. What were your favorite writing assignments?" You might reply, "My favorite assignments included this health article (show article in portfolio) that required a lot of research and this creative writing piece (show article) that I wrote for a special edition."

Never leave your original materials with an employer. Offer to let the employer make copies before you leave or offer to send copies of the materials as a follow-up to the interview.

You need to continue to update and add information to your portfolio. Every day (or at least once a week), make notes in an achievement diary about projects or ideas you have worked on since the last diary entry. Save copies of materials you have written as well as notes about decisions you have made that had positive results. Include anything that you think might help you in a future job search.

# **PREPARING AN EMPLOYMENT PORTFOLIO**

**A professional employment portfolio could be just the thing that sets you apart from other job candidates.**

The material you include should show what makes you different from the other applicants for a particular position. A well-prepared portfolio provides "evidence" to the reviewer of your accomplishments, skills, abilities and it documents the scope and quality of your experience and training. It is an organized collection of documentation that presents both your personal and professional achievements in a concrete way.

Portfolios can range in scope from being something as simple as a companion page to your resume, to a notebook or folder full of original materials. It can include a videotape or audiotape of your work or of you at work.

A portfolio is designed to do one thing - to support you as you market yourself! It is limited only by your imagination. It is possible for someone from any program to successfully develop and utilize this tool!

## **WHERE TO START**

Begin developing a portfolio by starting with self-assessment. Evaluate what you have to offer and what is the best way to market your assets. If you have trouble getting started, talk with a faculty member or the SERC Coordinator for ideas.

Decide what skills and experiences you have that relate to the needs of your reviewer or that you would most like for the reviewer to see. Then, take time to think about the examples of your work that will exhibit those skills in the best possible light.

Keep in mind that your portfolio displays you to a reviewer, therefore it must present you in a professional manner. Don't skimp on your portfolio display system because "the book will be judged by its cover!" Buy the best quality cover that you can afford; you will use this tool for a very long time, not just entry into your first professional employment.

Acetate or plastic sleeves are a good way to display and protect materials. You want to make the best presentation possible. Use a portfolio large enough to handle most of your work but not so large that it is awkward to carry, display, or review.

Arrange your portfolio in much the same way you would organize your resume. Show in order or priority, your information that relates to the needs of your reviewer. A well-organized portfolio indicates that you are a serious candidate. Plan to label and index materials, placing like materials together under a labelled tab, so that you can turn to each section easily in the course of conversation with your reviewer.

Remember, your portfolio will not speak for itself; you must explain it. Explain the purpose of each section as you refer to it. If a section does not elicit a good response during the interview, you can easily skip over other material in that section. Be honest about the role you played in each piece you include, indicating that you were part of a team that completed some activity or piece shows your ability to work with others.

### **INFORMATION TO INCLUDE:**

- Table of Contents, tabbed for easy reference
- Your resume
- An official transcript
- A fact sheet - This can also be an expansion of your skills/ experiences section from your resume that relate specifically to the reviewer's expectations of skills, experience or qualifications
- Certification or licensure documents
- A list of conferences and workshops attended, plus a short description
- Professional testing results
- Certificates of awards and honours or special training
- Letters of nomination for honours and/or academic awards
- Professional experience evaluations
- Work experience evaluations
- Letters of commendation or thank you's
- Newspaper clippings that address your achievements
- Evidence of senior projects
- Documentation of technical and/or computer skills, including samples created from various software
- Evidence of creative experience, such as marketing brochures or presentations, technical drawings, or photos of artistic pieces

In addition to providing something physical to remind the reviewer that you were there, the portfolio also provides you an occasion for an additional contact in a week or so to arrange for its pickup. A word of caution: never include original materials of which you only have one copy. If you have a series of on-site interviews scheduled throughout the day with several representatives of the same employer, offer to leave your portfolio with the key person while, for instance, you go for lunch with several others who might become your peers.

### **KEEP YOUR PORTFOLIO CURRENT**

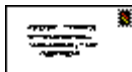
You need to continue to update and add information to your portfolio. To help remember to put things in your portfolio, you should review and evaluate your activities regularly. Choose the best and most appropriate that speak to your highest level and achievement. Include anything that you think might help you in your job/graduate school search.

### **HAVE YOUR PORTFOLIO CRITIQUED**

Have a faculty member and the SERC Coordinator review and critique your portfolio for presentation and content. Then have it reviewed by a professional working in your career area. This is very important. These professionals know from first-hand and current experience of the expectations of professionals in your career field! Possibly, an alumni might be willing to assist or you may wish to contact an employer with whom you would like to develop and foster a relationship for future reference. The key is to ensure that your information and evidence is on-target and that the presentation is impressive.



Student Employment Resource Centre (SERC)  
Lethbridge Community College  
3000 College Drive South  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
T1K 1L6  
Phone:403-320-3298 Fax:403-317-3503  
Toll Free:1-800-572-0103 ext.3298



[serc@lethbridgrec.ab.ca](mailto:serc@lethbridgrec.ab.ca)

# Your Job Skills Portfolio: Giving You an Edge in the Marketplace

by *Randall S. Hansen, Ph.D.*

An old job-hunting tool is making a big comeback. For years, graphic artists, journalists, teachers, and other creative types have used career portfolios while job-hunting, but it is only recently that the idea has caught on for all types of job-seekers.

What is a job skills, job-search, or career portfolio? It is a job-hunting tool that you develop that gives employers a complete picture of who you are — your experience, your education, your accomplishments, your skill sets — and what you have the potential to become — much more than just a cover letter and resume can provide. You can use your career portfolio in job interviews to showcase a point, to illustrate the depth of your skills and experience, or to use as a tool to get a second interview.

This article will show you how to develop your job-search portfolio, key elements to consider in developing your job-search portfolio, and the best resources to explore job-search portfolios in more depth.

Your biggest time commitment will be the initial development of your portfolio, but once you've developed it, keeping it current and up-to-date should be fairly easy. Your two biggest decisions in developing your portfolio are determining the format of the portfolio and the organization of the portfolio.

Most experts agree that the portfolio should be kept in a professional three-ring binder (zipper closure optional). You should include a table of contents and use some kind of system — such as tabs or dividers — to separate the various parts of the portfolio.

Besides the traditional portfolio, if you have access to space on a Web site, you should also consider developing an online Web-based portfolio.

Once the development is complete, you then have to gather, write, copy, and assemble the material that goes in the portfolio. This process will not only result in a professional portfolio, but should help you be better prepared for your job search.

So, what types of things go in a portfolio? Here are the basic categories. Don't feel you need to use these exact ones for your portfolio. The key to remember as you contemplate these items is that you want to give reasons for the employer to hire you -- you want to showcase your education and work experience by showing examples and evidence of your work, skills, and accomplishments.

1. **Career Summary and Goals:** A description of what you stand for (such as work ethic, organizational interests, management philosophy, etc.) and where you see yourself in two to five years.
2. **Professional Philosophy/Mission Statement:** A short description of the guiding principles that drive you and give you purpose. Read more in our article, [Using a Personal Mission Statement to Chart Your Career Course](#).
3. **Traditional Resume:** A summary of your education, achievements, and work experience, using a chronological or functional format. If you need help developing a resume, visit [Quintessential Careers: Fundamentals of a Good Resume](#).

4. **Scannable/Text-Based Resume:** A text-only version of your resume should also be included. More information about this type of resume can be found at: [Quintessential Careers: Scannable Resume Fundamentals](#).
5. **Skills, Abilities and Marketable Qualities:** A detailed examination of your skills and experience. This section should include the name of the skill area; the performance or behavior, knowledge, or personal traits that contribute to your success in that skill area; your background and specific experiences that demonstrate your application of the skill.
6. **List of Accomplishments:** A detailed listing that highlights the major accomplishments in your career to date. Accomplishments are one of the most important elements of any good job-search. Read more in our article, [For Job-Hunting Success: Track and Leverage Your Accomplishments](#).
7. **Samples of Your Work:** A sampling of your best work, including reports, papers, studies, brochures, projects, presentations, etc. Besides print samples, you can also include CD-ROMs, videos, and other multimedia formats.
8. **Research, Publications, Reports:** A way to showcase multiple skills, including your written communications abilities. Include any published papers and conference proceedings.
9. **Testimonials and Letters of Recommendations:** A collection of any kudos you have received — from customers, clients, colleagues, past employers, professors, etc. Some experts even suggest including copies of favorable employer evaluations and reviews.
10. **Awards and Honors:** A collection of any certificates of awards, honors, and scholarships.
11. **Conference and Workshops:** A list of conferences, seminars, and workshops you've participated in and/or attended.
12. **Transcripts, Degrees, Licenses, and Certifications:** A description of relevant courses, degrees, licenses, and certifications.
13. **Professional Development Activities:** A listing of professional associations and conferences attended -- and any other professional development activities.
14. **Military records, awards, and badges:** A listing of your military service, if applicable.
15. **Volunteering/Community Service:** A description of any community service activities, volunteer or pro bono work you have completed, especially as it relates to your career.
16. **References List:** A list of three to five people (including full names, titles, addresses, and phone/email) who are willing to speak about your strengths, abilities, and experience. At least one reference should be a former manager. Read more in our article: [The Keys to Choosing and Using the Best Job References in Your Job Search](#).

And remember . . . once you've created your job search portfolio, be sure to take it with you to all interviews and use it as a tool to getting job offers.

If you still have some questions, here are additional resources that can help you build your portfolio:

Books:

- Go to our [Books about Career and Job Portfolios](#).

Websites:

- [Career Portfolios](#), from the Department of Student Services at Dalhousie University.
- [Kimeldorf Portfolio Library](#). Selected articles, excerpts, and other works by portfolio guru Martin Kimeldorf.

