

Preparing a Visual Portfolio

Dougherty Arts Center

Artist Resource Center Professional Development Workshop Series



Why do I need a portfolio?

A portfolio helps you to represent yourself professionally

When do I need my portfolio?

- Applying to galleries
- Applying to jobs
- Applying to grad school
- Requesting a grant
- Many other times.....so just have it

What should be included in my portfolio?

- Cover Letter
- Artist Statement
- Biography
- Resume/CV
- Images of your work
- Image list
- Project proposal and budget (if needed)
- Any reviews or press
- Hand out materials (business cards, postcards, extra copies of CV and Artist Statement)

Cover Letter

A cover letter will help to introduce you to your portfolio viewers. Be sure to tailor it to those that will be reading it. Do not send a generic cover letter.

Let them know why you are contacting them and what is included in the portfolio. Keep your cover letter short and to the point. It should not be more than one page.

Artist Statement

Your artist statement will act as a stand in for when you are not there to discuss your work. It will be an ever-changing document that should be re-written with any new change in your work.

Your statement should outline your:

- Ideas
- Intent
- Materials
- Methods

Biography

A brief background on yourself to let the viewer know how you got to where you are. Don't get too personal and keep it to a few sentences unless otherwise requested.

Resume/CV

An Artists Resume or CV (curriculum vitae) is a listing of all of your professional accomplishments including:

- Education
- Professional/Teaching Experience
- Exhibitions
- Publications
- Awards/Grants/Fellowships
- Collections
- Representation

You may be asked to limit your resume/CV to a certain number of pages. If you need to cut information, list items as “selected”.

Images of your Work

Documenting your work is an important part of your portfolio. Accurate images are essential to representing your work.

- Your work should be well-lit, either using a light kit or natural light.
- Pay attention when positioning. Make sure the camera is level with the artwork to avoid keystoneing.
- Fill the frame as much as possible with the artwork. Background can be edited out later.
- 3D work should be on a plain/simple background.
- Avoid shadows.

For more information, see our presentation on
“Photographing Your Work”

Image List

An image list can be a separate document or the information can be listed with each image. If it is a separate document, it should be easily accessible while viewing the images.

An image list should include:

- Title
- Date
- Size
- Medium/materials
- Short process description

Project Proposal and Budget

If applying for a specific project, you may be asked to include a proposal and budget. Often these calls will include details for how they would like the proposal and budget formatted. If not, it does not hurt to contact and ask if a certain format is preferred.

Reviews or Press

If you have had any reviews or press written about you or your work, or have been featured in publications, be sure to include a list of publications, or copies if available.

Hand-out Materials

It's always great to include hand-out materials if available. This can include business cards, exhibition postcards, or copies of your artist statement or resume. It's good to give the person reviewing your portfolio something to remind them of you.

Types of Portfolios

The presentation of your portfolio may be determined by what it is being used for and who is requesting it. Be sure to read any prospectus to determine how you need to submit your portfolio.

- Physical – binder, box, etc.
- Digital – CD, DVD, USB
- Website – your own or an online host

Physical Portfolios

Although it has become less common to submit physical portfolios, some organizations may still require it.

Your physical portfolio can be traditional or inventive, but should be easy to handle. A binder or folder with plastic sleeves allows you to insert and rearrange contents easily.

Photographs of your work should be printed on matte photo paper, not copy paper. Do not send originals of your work.

You may not always receive a portfolio back, so make sure to make copies of all of your contents so that you can easily duplicate your portfolio.

Digital Portfolios

Your digital portfolio should be arranged and include the same items as a physical portfolio.

You may be asked to email your portfolio, or deliver or mail it on a CD, DVD, or USB drive.

Be sure to label your files consistently and with your name on each file. Files should also be universal types that can be read on all operating systems, such as jpegs and pdfs.

If emailing your portfolio, be sure that your mail server and your recipient's mail server will accept the file sizes.

Websites

Another great option for sharing your portfolio is through a website.

You may have your own website and include all of the items we have been discussing, but be sure they are easily found.

There are also portfolio host websites, where you upload all of your contents and are able to provide a link or use your portfolio to apply to calls for entry. There are many available online. Search for them and determine which suits you best.