Instructions for creating your portfolio

The portfolio is a fun and creative project where you will explore what matters most to you – your hopes, your dreams, and your power to make a difference.

In the past, many students have created beautiful and artistic projects – works that are full of photographs, paintings, and drawings, in addition to stories, poetry, and inspirational quotes. Some people have recorded music CDs to accompany their portfolio, or have made movies.

Many people even choose to publish this portfolio and produce their own books. There are websites like blurb.com or lulu.com, where you can submit your manuscript for publication as a hardcover or paperback. The result that comes back is a gorgeous, colorful, professional book – a record of your hopes and dreams.

Hopefully it will be a project that you will cherish for decades – as valuable as a scrapbook or family album. After all, you will be the author of your own life story: your autobiography of personal and social transformation. For some people, this will be a combination of artwork, scrapbook, family history, and dream board.

Indeed, some people have said that these books would be the one material possession that they would rescue if their house ever caught on fire. It is a record of their favorite memories, photographs, ideals, dreams, and goals. It is a testament of their finest self.

How to create your own professional portfolio

It’s simple to create your own portfolio. In the following pages, there will be a series of questions that will spur you to think about your past, present, and future. Just take out a journal and start writing the answers by hand, if you want. Or you can create a manuscript on a computer, one that will eventually be sent to a printer for publication. It’s meant to be fun and exhilarating.

A portfolio can include the answers to such questions as:

- Your ancestry – your family traditions and history
- Your creative inspirations
- Your finest moments and peak experiences of life
- The things that make you happiest – your passions, joys, and moments of flow
- Your strengths and talents
- 100 goals that you would want to achieve in your life
- Your dreams for the future
- What you would do if you won $100 million tax-free in the lottery

All in all, there are 20 questions in the portfolio. It’s important to do all of them. Each question explores a different aspect of your life.

Why we recommend writing this portfolio

Numerous studies have documented the power of writing. When people have problems and challenges in life, one of the most effective ways of solving them is to write. Writing helps us make sense of our lives. It helps us find meaning when things appear to be chaotic and crazy. Creating a portfolio of our hopes and dreams can also be inspirational. It can give us direction for the path we want to take into the future.
Frequently asked questions about the portfolio

I’m a very private person. In my portfolio, I want to write very honestly about difficult things that have happened in my life. I’m going to make myself vulnerable. What if I don’t want other people – like my professor or my fellow students -- to read my private thoughts?

We respect each person’s privacy. Ultimately you are writing this portfolio for yourself, not for anyone else. If there are any answers that you do not want other people to read, just place a yellow post-it note on that page, and we will honor your wishes to keep those private.

How does this get graded? What are the standards?

We recommend very high standards to people who are doing the portfolio. The best portfolios have all of the following qualities:

• They are personal, thoughtful, and truthful. The portfolio reveals a lot about the character of the author. There are many specific, detailed examples, including personal stories and honest, deep reflections. The writing has the ring of truth and life. As writing teacher Natalie Goldberg tells her students, “Lose control. Don’t think. Don’t get logical. Go for the jugular. If something comes up in your writing that is scary or naked, dive right into it. It probably has lots of energy.”

Here’s a thought experiment: Imagine that your grandchildren discover this portfolio in 50 years. They want to read your portfolio and understand everything about their ancestor. Do you feel like this is the best possible portrait of you that will help people to know who you really are? Does it tell great stories about your life? Is it rich in sights and sounds and smells and memories?

Another variation on this theme is to imagine that you will contract amnesia and lose your memory in a year from now. The only things that you will be able to remember are those things that you record in your portfolio. Does this adequately capture your passions, dreams, and greatest experiences? Is this a full record of the moments and ideals in your life that you would like to remember? Is this the best possible picture of you – the moments that changed your life; the people who influenced you; the times when you were at your happiest and most ideal?

• The presentation is consummately professional; it is visually attractive and compelling.

• The portfolio is original, creative, innovative, and unique; it stands out from the rest. You would be proud to have this on your shelf and to show it to your children and grandchildren some day. In other words, it is not just another book that you will put on a dusty shelf when you finish it, but something that you will cherish for years. This can be a powerful, inspirational record of your hopes and dreams and visions for the future.

• It represents the best you have to offer. You can truly say that this pushed you beyond what you thought you were capable of achieving; you are excited about the end result; it’s clear that you put your full effort into it. You can even say that this was a transformative and meaningful experience for you.

Remember: Ultimately you should be doing this portfolio for yourself, not for anyone else; if you do it correctly, you should have a sense of intrinsic motivation - doing great work because you are passionate and enthusiastic about the results. You far exceeded your own expectations.

We realize that these are extremely high standards, and may seem quite challenging. But ultimately, as John F. Kennedy said, when someone complained that it was too hard to meet his ambitious goals of going to the moon, we don't strive for great things because they are easy. We strive for them precisely because they are hard. As we will learn in this course, research on people's peak experiences -- the moments when they are happiest, most fulfilled, and in the state of "flow" -- shows that these optimal times come when people challenge themselves to push just beyond their previous limits.

Ultimately, this portfolio is like an experiment. Feel free to play around with it. Have fun. There is no such thing as failure here, as long as you are true to yourself.