The Graphic Designer's Guide to Portfolio Design

Debbie Rose Myers
THE GRAPHIC DESIGNER’S GUIDE TO PORTFOLIO DESIGN
THE

GRAPHIC DESIGNER’S GUIDE

to PORTFOLIO DESIGN

THIRD EDITION

Debbie Rose Myers
CONTENTS

PREFACE . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . x

1 THE PORTFOLIO PROCESS—START TO FINISH . . . . . 1
2 PLANNING YOUR PORTFOLIO . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 15
3 THE TRADITIONAL PORTFOLIO: . . . . . . . . . . . . . 31
   The Résumé, Cover Letter, and Business Card
4 THE TRADITIONAL PORTFOLIO: . . . . . . . . . . . . . 55
   Design and Art Projects
5 THE DIGITAL PORTFOLIO: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 83
   CD-ROMs, DVDs, and Web Sites
6 THE DIGITAL PORTFOLIO: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 111
   Technical Elements
7 THE DESIGN PHASE . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 129
8 WORKING WITH TYPE . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 151
9 MANEUVERING AROUND YOUR SITE: . . . . . . . . . . 171
   Navigation
10 THE WEB-BASED PORTFOLIO: . . . . . . . . . . . . . 187
    Web Page Design
11 THE WEB-BASED PORTFOLIO: . . . . . . . . . . . . . 211
    Technical Elements
12 MULTIMEDIA AND YOUR INTERFACE . . . . . . . . . 229
13 DESIGNER CHECKLISTS . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 253
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO LAND A GREAT JOB.</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>TAKING INTERVIEWS AND PRESENTING YOUR PORTFOLIO</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GLOSSARY</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX</td>
<td>321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Computers? In art? I remember telling my boyfriend (later to become my husband) Glenn that computers would never be used in art. As I watched him carry those long boxes of computer punch cards to class each week, I chuckled, secure in the knowledge that artists had no need for computers. How wrong I was!

Back when I studied graphic design and art in college, you learned how to prepare art for printing with materials such as Rubylith and stat cameras. Rubylith was a thin, semitransparent acetate material that was used to block out areas of color. I remember spending hours cutting CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, and key) color separations with an X-ACTO knife. Type involved an even crazier process. You would go to a gigantic drawer filled with type of various sizes and styles and pick the sheets of type that were closest to the sizes you needed, because, unlike today, type came in only a few sizes. Then you would use Popsicle sticks to laboriously rub (or set) the type in place on the page. Stat cameras gave you the ability to “resize” your type through the photographic reproduction method. You would first photograph the type, then enlarge it and paste it down on the final boards. My tools of choice in those days were the T square, the triangle, and my trusty non-photo blue pencil, which I used to draw lines and grids for the type. Naturally, it took forever to build a layout. Who knew that only ten years later, I would be teaching computerized page layout to a whole new generation of art and design majors!

Why a book on digital portfolios? Once upon a time, it was enough to have a great set of boards to demonstrate your design ability. You went to an interview, talked about your credentials, opened your portfolio, discussed your work, and if all went well, you were offered a job. Today, though, things are a little different.

- You go to job-specific Web sites, enter your credentials, and begin searching for a job that matches your requirements.
- You design a Web site, post it at a place established specifically for your profession, send out announcements, and wait for job offers.
- You are asked to submit a DVD of your work before you are even invited in for an interview.

I teach at a college that is always on the cutting edge of design trends. Students are instructed in industry-specific software. But I have learned one thing in my 32 years of teaching: design majors are true right-brained thinkers. You say, “programming language,” and they say, “bye-bye!”

Here’s how this book on digital portfolios came about. Over the years, I have spent much time trying to find ways to introduce complex computer programs to creative majors in order to enable them to embrace the newest technologies. This book, then, is for all my students—past, present, and future—and is designed to allay their fears, answer
their questions, and ultimately empower them to succeed.

I know it takes time, energy, and patience to create a digital portfolio that will get you the job of your dreams. If you're just starting out, you have many multimedia programs to evaluate. You want one that meets your needs but doesn’t take a lifetime to master. You want proven interface design techniques that are easy to understand and utilize. You want to know what problems you may encounter and how to solve them. Or maybe you’re already at the next level—you know all about the popular programs but want to learn more about interface metaphors. Whatever your level—novice, intermediate, or professional—this book will help you learn how to create a successful digital portfolio.

What’s New in This Edition?

Nothing has changed . . . everything has changed!

As with the last edition of this book, there is still a need for a book that helps students gather their art and design pieces to create a market-ready portfolio. Every creative can use a bit of help with designing effective résumés and business cards and learning the best techniques to take interviews and ultimately secure employment. But a lot has changed, as well! Today’s design students have many new tools at their disposal to help create their own online “brand.” Social media marketing is now a viable way to reach out to the design industry and find a job. LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and Google + all offer new ways to reach a possible employer. The choices are vast and sometimes confusing for the young designer. This new edition of *The Graphic Designer’s Guide to Portfolio Design* will help the graduating student to understand the practical side of social media marketing, as well as the potential problems.

This third edition presents new interviews with leaders in the graphic design and advertising industries at the end of every chapter. They will offer you their many years of wisdom and practical experience regarding the interview process. Their answers are funny and real, and they offer sound advice on successful interviewing. I know you will enjoy their insights.

Also new in this edition are up-to-date “designer’s challenges”—one or more projects that appear at the end of every chapter. They’ll help kick-start your creative portfolio by offering you some “assignments” that will aid in the development of your portfolio.

The first edition of the book offered detailed information to help design students create both traditional and digital versions of their portfolio work. The second edition of the book examined updated methods for the online portfolio. Since the publication of the second edition in December 2008, many new techniques are being utilized by graduates to locate potential jobs. Likewise, the methods available to a graduate to reach a potential employer have moved substantially to an online environment. This new edition of *The Graphic Designer’s Guide to Portfolio Design* will offer a chapter that focuses on the newest techniques in online marketing.

Likewise, the design software is not the same. There have been some substantial changes in the software industry since the publication of the last edition. Once upon a time, QuarkXPress ruled the publication market. That is no longer true. InDesign is now the industry standard, and QuarkXPress is concentrating on its new market in interactive book design. Adobe purchased Macromedia Director, and some years later discontinued it. Adobe Acrobat has morphed into a robust program that delivers print and Web-based documents. HTML 5 is gaining ground as the new standard in animation and sound for Web design, and Adobe is beta testing a new Flash-style interface program, called Creative Edge. Edge will create robust Flash-style animations that convert directly to HTML 5. All of these changes...
have occurred in the past three years. Blogging platforms such as WordPress offer new ways to showcase design.

These are some of the changes you will learn about inside this new edition of *The Graphic Designer’s Guide to Portfolio Design*.

**If You Are a First-Time Reader**

Chapters 1 through 5 of this book will give you some perspective on the digital portfolio. Think of it as the whys and wherefores of interface design. You’ll learn what should be included in a good portfolio and see a discussion of what stays and what goes. If you need to generate new pieces for your “port,” you’ll find ways to jump-start your creativity.

Once you have some projects, chapters 5 through 8 will help you organize them into a cohesive system. There are chapters that discuss CD-ROM design versus Web design. You will learn about all of the most popular multimedia programs, and you’ll find many tips and tricks to make your time on the computer more productive.

If you are already a design professional, familiar with the software, chapters 5, 6, and 9 will show you new ways to utilize your knowledge, including various techniques for designing efficient yet creative maneuverability features for your multimedia port.

If you’re struggling with type and color, head directly to chapter 8, which presents a detailed discussion of type issues, not just in design but also on the computer. Confused about what typefaces work best on the Internet? You’ll find answers on that topic in chapter 7, as well.

If you’re worried about technical problems, don’t miss chapter 13, which examines what can go wrong in every phase of your portfolio development.

Do you know how to write a résumé, an artist’s statement, or a cover letter? Have you taken a job interview lately? Do you know what questions an interviewer is prohibited by law from asking? Chapter 3 offers examples of résumés and techniques for taking a successful interview.

And, as a new feature to this edition, chapter 14 will teach you how to use social media to unearth jobs and then to land one!

This book focuses both on the ever-changing world of technology and on the enduring principles and techniques of interface design, which do not change over time. It is my hope that you will find this book both supportive and enlightening—and that it will be the key to your success.

*Debbie Rose Myers*
This book would not have been possible without the support and inspiration of many people, and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge these wonderful friends and colleagues.

Throughout this book, you will see art by many of my most talented students. I thank them all! I especially want to express gratitude to Julie Ruiz, Ryan Skinner, Sigrun Eggertsdottir, and Etni Estrella for their insights and art.

In particular, special thanks go to the many fine folks who agreed to be interviewed for this book: Christine David, Stephan Donche, Steph Doyle, Tom Kane, Nancy Karamarkos, Jamie Kluetz, Andrea Lubell, Blaise Nauyokas, Dani Nordin, Barry Rosenberg, Rick Tuckerman, Andrea Knibbs, Shannon Beck, and Roberto de Vicq de Cumptich.

Kyle Fisk, associate professor, Sinclair Community College, and Donna Teel, assistant professor, computer graphics design, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, also deserve special thanks. They helped me to track down some of the best student design projects in recent years. Thanks, too, to Kim Metzger, from Pina Zangaro, who provided the images of today’s best-looking designer portfolios.

Many of my colleagues, who are industry professionals as well, graciously allowed me to feature their artwork in this book: M. Kathleen Colussy, Christine David, Andy Bing, Randy Gossman, Gary Ramey, Paul Kane, Sue vanHamersveld, Michael Crary, Kelly Bennett, and Linda Weeks. Howard T. Katz, Catherine Ramey, Gary Ramey, and Mark LaRiviere also provided the wonderful artist’s statements you will read in chapter 4. The compelling and dazzling art contributed by these fabulous friends has truly enriched the book.

I am most grateful for the encouragement I received from Margaret Cummins, executive editor, Lauren Poplowski, assistant editor, Michael New, editorial assistant and David Sassian, senior production editor at John Wiley & Sons. They knew when to support me and when to just let me do my thing.

To my Mom and my Dad. They taught me that I can do anything I put my mind to and to do it all with a smile and some laughter.

And deepest, heartfelt thanks to my beloved (and long-suffering) husband, Glenn, who always knew when to hug me, when to leave me alone with my computer, and when to bring me lots of chocolates!
“Can you start on Wednesday?” The words floated across the table. I paused for a moment before answering. “I believe I can free up the remainder of the week.” (Not that I had had anything lined up.) The dean of education handed me a completed teaching schedule, shook my hand, and said, “The meetings are all day Wednesday. You start teaching on the following Monday. I’ll need all of your syllabi by next week.” I nodded and mumbled, “No problem.” As I stood up, the dean spoke once more. “We’re taking a chance on you, so don’t let us down.” Taking a slow breath so as not to hyperventilate, I said, “I’ll do my best.” I picked up my portfolio, walked out of the office, and headed back to my car.

This certainly wasn’t my first job interview. I had completed the interviewing process many times before. What made this interview so nerve-racking was that I wanted the job so desperately. The expression “Never let them see you sweat” came to my mind as the adrenaline finally gave out. Then it hit me: “I’m teaching college!” I hurried to the nearest phone to call home. I couldn’t wait to break the news about my new position.

So why was I offered that job? Was it my interview skills? My attire? My positive attitude? Nope! It was my portfolio—plain and simple. I had brought to the interview a portfolio of design projects that I had completed in college, plus a number of projects that I had created in my freelance business. Those pieces, together with my ability to discuss the portfolio projects and what they represented, were what got me the job.

Building a portfolio and interviewing for jobs is possibly the most intense process you will ever undertake as you begin or advance your career. Your portfolio must reflect the very best of what you can contribute to a potential employer as an artist/designer. And the pivotal moment in your interview process begins as the employer slowly opens your portfolio, allowing it to reveal the best of what you have to offer (figs. 1–1 and 1–2).

You Need a Portfolio

As you arrive for your job interview, you notice that another applicant is leaving. And when your
interview concludes and you are departing, you see that yet another applicant is waiting. Assume that each of these three candidates has equal qualifications for this job, a similar college degree, and an excellent interview. How does the company make a decision?

No doubt about it, the competition is tough in today’s job market. So you cannot just say that you are an extraordinary designer. You must provide proof of your qualifications. That’s the purpose of your portfolio: it demonstrates your skills and abilities. Instead of just talking during a job interview about what you have done or can do, you can show samples of your work. Your professional portfolio showcases your talents. In this way, a well-designed portfolio can help you stand out from the other candidates. It gives you the edge.

It was once thought that only fine artists, graphic designers, architects, and fashion designers needed a portfolio to get a job. Not anymore. Today, portfolios are used to secure jobs in many different areas. Teachers, interior designers, multimedia and Web designers, engineers, and journalists can all make use of a professional portfolio to advance their careers. A portfolio for each of these professionals will be unique to his or her field of specialization. The overall purpose, however, is to present a unified body of work that represents what the candidate can offer. Thus, regardless of your design background, you can develop a portfolio that highlights your accomplishments and shows off your talent. Portfolios are especially necessary for people seeking a new job, changing career fields, or negotiating for a promotion or raise.

It’s one thing to say, “I have great organizational skills.” But when you can back up that statement with examples, you’re demonstrating that you can do the job. It’s the difference between saying, “I can do it... really!” and showing that you can—the difference between talk and action.

Obviously, you need to feel comfortable in the job environment, and the company must have confidence in you as well. A job almost always requires a match of personalities—yours and the potential employer’s. I once took an interview at a community

![Fig. 1–1](image1) Preparation is the key to a successful portfolio.

![Fig. 1–2](image2) Be prepared to discuss your art. You will be asked to explain why you created a piece in a certain way. Your ability to articulate an answer can influence how you are perceived as an artist and Web designer.
college. I had made the initial cut from 175 applicants to the final 5 who would be interviewed. The unusual thing about this particular interview was that about 20 minutes into the session, I began to notice a pattern to the questioning: certain individuals on the interviewing committee would ask certain questions. It really surprised them when I turned to the next person, smiled, and said, “I believe the next question is yours.” They were slightly taken aback, then started laughing. That interview, scheduled for 45 minutes, was really good and ended up lasting almost two hours! Only a few days later, I was offered the job.

If you look up *portfolio* in a dictionary, you’ll probably read something like “a portable collection of paper and artifacts that demonstrates one’s experience and skills.” That’s pretty vague, considering that these materials can be made up of almost anything—artwork, writing samples, award certificates, even performance reviews. Other samples might include customer-satisfaction surveys or graphs that chart improvements in products or services based on your contributions (fig. 1–3). The point is, the artifacts that you include in your portfolio should always be chosen carefully to highlight your most relevant skills and achievements.

### A Portfolio Must Stand Alone

Suppose for a moment that you are not allowed to remain in the room while a potential employer is viewing your portfolio. Will he or she be able to understand the pieces it contains or your participation in those projects? Think of what it’s like to watch a silent movie—no sound. You have to interpret what you see using only the images. Looking at your “port” is like watching that silent movie. The body of work has to stand alone. The point is, once you have selected what to include in your portfolio, organize the pieces in a logical manner. You may decide to arrange your work by strengths or chronologically. Whichever way you choose, document your involvement with each project. For instance, if you include a brochure from a training program, make sure that the interviewer can tell

![Michel Khalil’s design skills are clearly apparent; hence, this piece would be an excellent way to showcase his ability to design logos.](image1)

![This project, which I created to promote a study-related trip, demonstrates that portfolio opportunities are always available. Don’t hesitate to volunteer your services as a designer.](image2)