

# CAREER PORTFOLIO GUIDE

## WHAT IS A CAREER PORTFOLIO?

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A **Career Portfolio** is a collection of documents and other easily portable artifacts that people can use to validate claims they make about themselves.

A **Career Portfolio** is not a resume, which simply lists your experiences and accomplishments; nor is it a cover letter in which you write about yourself and your qualifications for a particular job. Instead, it is a collection of actual documents that support and make tangible the things you want to say about yourself in a cover letter, a resume, or a face-to-face interview.

A **Career Portfolio** is about **YOU**. It is...

- A life-long tool to help you discover and express who you are;
- A dynamic collection of materials or artifacts which summarize, document, and highlight the best of who you are, what you have done, and what you hope to do;
- 'Evidence' of your potential.

A **Career Portfolio** is seen in the light of your past, your present, and your future. The portfolio may be used to assess strengths and weaknesses with a view to making some educational or career decisions.

## WHY DO I NEED A CAREER PORTFOLIO?

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Traditionally, portfolios have been used by artists, architects and designers to get hired and promoted, but more and more people are using them in other fields to assist them in getting jobs and developing as a professional. It is becoming more common for business professionals, particularly business students who are starting their careers to bring portfolios into interviews to illustrate their qualifications. Portfolios can also be used once on the job to substantiate accomplishments. They can be particularly useful when entering a performance review and to support a request for a raise!

A well-targeted portfolio that is properly presented can be a great self-marketing tool for five main reasons:

1. It draws *attention* to the key information you want to convey about yourself.
2. It provides *links* that connect you with an opportunity.
3. It makes the key *intangibles tangible*.
4. It adds to your *credibility*.
5. It builds *confidence*.

*PORTFOLIOS GET ATTENTION.* We’ve all know ever since kindergarten that ‘show and tell’ is more powerful than just tell. The simple act of handing a potential employer a document from your portfolio not only gets that person’s undivided attention, it also piques her curiosity.

*PORTFOLIOS PROVIDE LINKS.* Once you have a potential employer’s attention, each item that you present in a well-targeted portfolio helps to make the link between what you can do and what the other person is looking for.

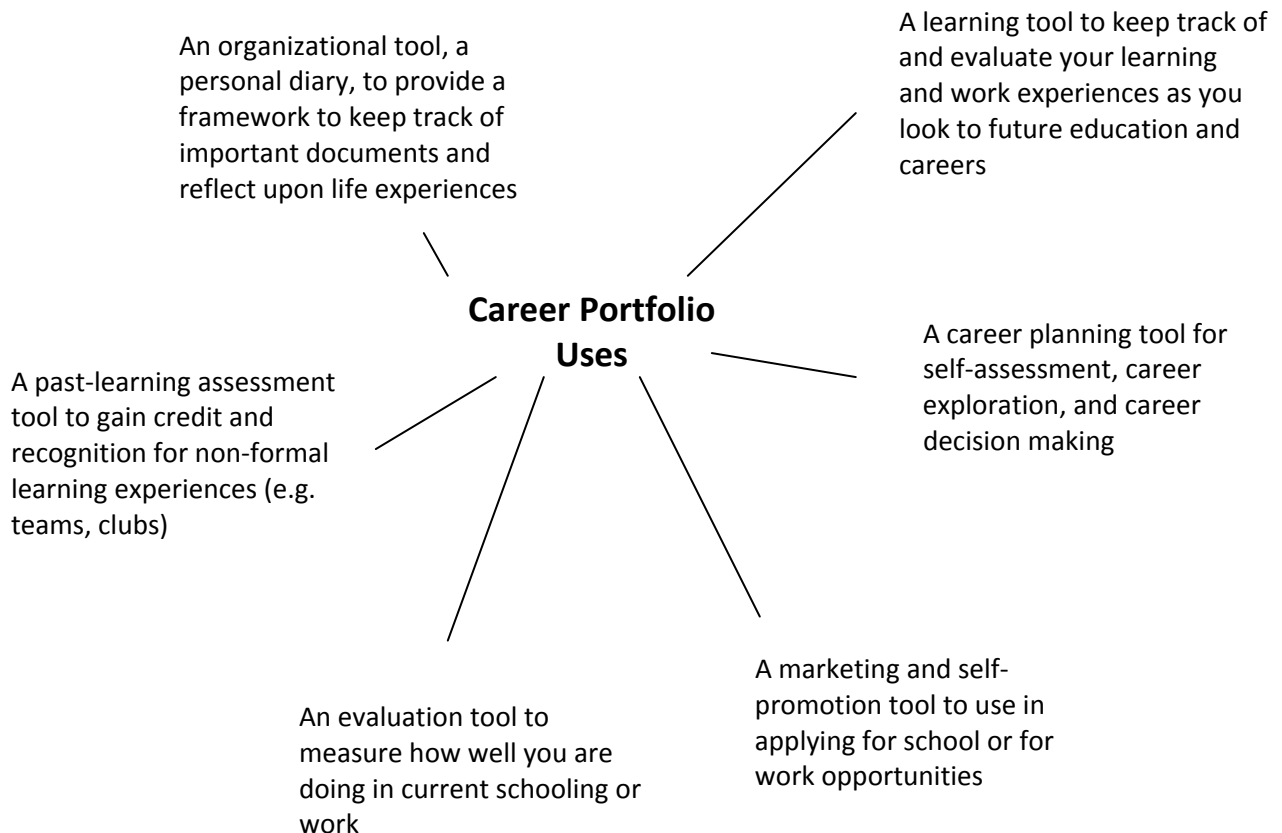
*PORTFOLIOS MAKE INTANGIBLES TANGIBLE.* Research indicates that employers and bosses are looking for certain key intangibles that can be brought to life in a portfolio.

*PORTFOLIOS ADD TO YOUR CREDIBILITY.* When you present an item from your portfolio, you are not just saying you are something, you are showing that your claims about yourself have real substance. In this way a portfolio that contains the right items adds to your credibility. Selectively shown items help to answer the question that always lurks when people are meeting for the first time: “Is this person for real?” There is something to that old adage, “seeing is believing”.

*PORTFOLIOS BUILD CONFIDENCE.* Even if you show up for a job interview and discover that you have forgotten to bring your portfolio, all is not lost. If you’ve done your homework and created a great portfolio, you will know exactly what you bring to this opportunity and will be able to articulate why you are the right person for the job with great confidence. You will know that what you say about yourself is true, and the sense that you truly believe what you are saying will come across, with or without your portfolio. But, of course, you will be more effective if you do remember to bring your portfolio with you!

**CAREER PORTFOLIO USES**

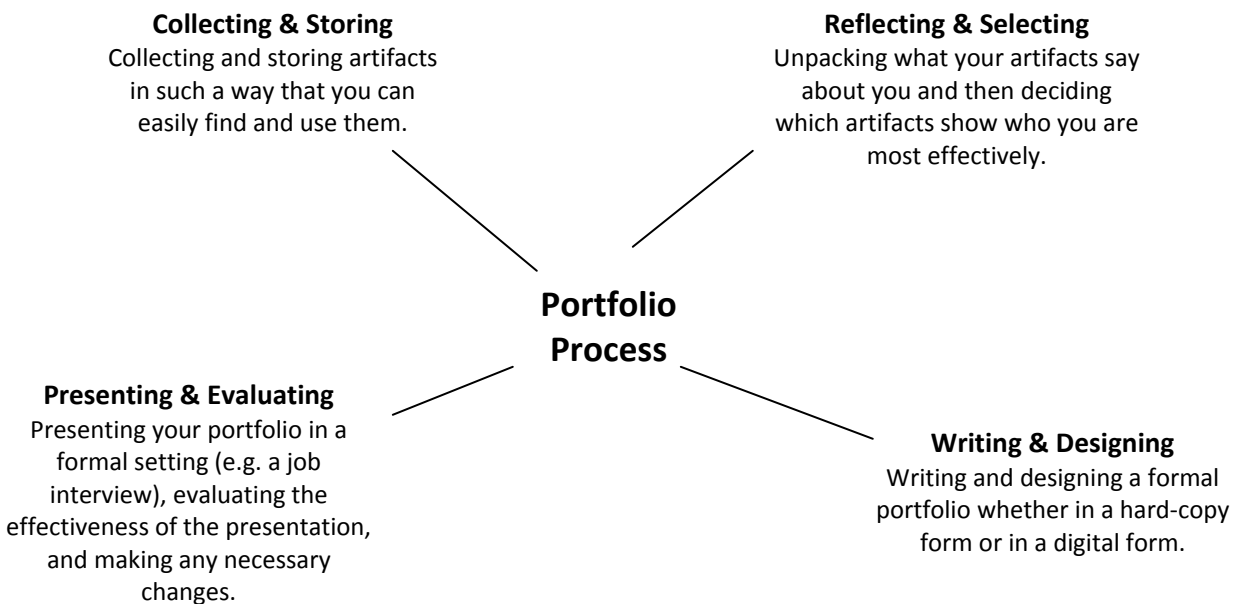
The Career Portfolio has many uses which may apply to you in different ways at different times.



## DEVELOPING A CAREER PORTFOLIO

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*The portfolio process involves several stages. These stages tend to overlap each other but are instructive for thinking through what needs to be done to develop and use a portfolio effectively.*



## SELF-ASSESSMENT

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*What are you good at? Before you can build a unique Career Portfolio and make effective education and career plans, you must know what you are able to do or capable of learning to do.*

A 'skill' is a learned ability to do something well. Don't underestimate the number of skills you actually have. This activity will help you to identify items for your portfolio and to gain an accurate picture of all your skills. First, learn to distinguish between a **job title** (the name of the specific job), **job duties** (tasks done to carry out the requirements of a specific job) and **transferable skills** (skills or abilities which develop over time and which can be used in a variety of school, work, social or other situations).

Knowledge of your transferable skills will help you find career options which match your skills. For example, a person, hired as a counter person at a fast food restaurant (job title), may perform specific duties (take orders, serve food and drinks, receive orders from co-workers, clean up, maintain inventory, handle cash, customer relations, etc). In order to fulfill these duties well, that person would need certain transferable skills (communication skills, skill in handling and preparing food and drinks, janitorial skills, money skills). These skills could potentially be used in other jobs, such as retail sales, other restaurant and hotel work.

You can discover your transferable skills by exploring past successes or accomplishments.

**MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

What are some of your accomplishments? Accomplishment may be any past experiences in which you have done well. If necessary, talk with others who know you and who can help you identify some. List accomplishments from different areas of you life – leisure, educational, volunteer or employment activities.

Accomplishments:

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On separate sheets of paper, write complete descriptions of at least two accomplishments. This is an exercise to help you discover your transferable skills. While writing, think about these questions:

- What did you actually do?
- What lead up to the accomplishment?
- What happened after? How does the accomplishment relate to other aspects of your life?
- Underline any transferable skills directly mentioned in your descriptions.
- Write down in the margin any other skills which come to mind.
- You may discover even more about yourself by talking with someone else. Share your descriptions and findings with a Career Advisor. Ask him/her to suggest additional or related skills which you may have overlooked.

Review your accomplishments and then place a check mark beside all the transferable skills you have. While developing your Career Portfolio remember to keep in mind and highlight these important transferable skills!

**Administrative Skills**

- |                                    |                                   |                                   |                                   |                                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Approve   | <input type="checkbox"/> Compile  | <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor  | <input type="checkbox"/> Record   | <input type="checkbox"/> Tabulate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange   | <input type="checkbox"/> File     | <input type="checkbox"/> Organize | <input type="checkbox"/> Retrieve | <input type="checkbox"/> Type     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catalogue | <input type="checkbox"/> Generate | <input type="checkbox"/> Process  | <input type="checkbox"/> Send     | <input type="checkbox"/> Classify |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inspect   | <input type="checkbox"/> Purchase | <input type="checkbox"/> Sort     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    |

**Financial Skills**

- |                                     |                                   |                                  |                                   |                                    |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Administer | <input type="checkbox"/> Audit    | <input type="checkbox"/> Compute | <input type="checkbox"/> Forecast | <input type="checkbox"/> Project   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allocate   | <input type="checkbox"/> Balance  | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop | <input type="checkbox"/> Manage   | <input type="checkbox"/> Analyze   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Budget     | <input type="checkbox"/> Estimate | <input type="checkbox"/> Market  | <input type="checkbox"/> Appraise | <input type="checkbox"/> Calculate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate   | <input type="checkbox"/> Plan     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____   | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     |

**Communication Skills**

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Address   | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop    | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivate  | <input type="checkbox"/> Publicize |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Write     | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange    | <input type="checkbox"/> Draft     | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpret | <input type="checkbox"/> Negotiate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recruit   | <input type="checkbox"/> Correspond | <input type="checkbox"/> Edit      | <input type="checkbox"/> Lecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuade  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speak     | <input type="checkbox"/> Debate     | <input type="checkbox"/> Formulate | <input type="checkbox"/> Moderate  | <input type="checkbox"/> Promote   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Translate | <input type="checkbox"/> _____      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     |

**Leadership/Management Skills**

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|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Administer | <input type="checkbox"/> Conduct    | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate | <input type="checkbox"/> Prioritize | <input type="checkbox"/> Risk          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Analyze    | <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase | <input type="checkbox"/> Plan       | <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assign     | <input type="checkbox"/> Delegate   | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate | <input type="checkbox"/> Recommend  | <input type="checkbox"/> Supervise     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Close      | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lead     | <input type="checkbox"/> Recruit    | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategize    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commit     | <input type="checkbox"/> Direct     | <input type="checkbox"/> Organize | <input type="checkbox"/> Review     | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-Solve |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> _____      | <input type="checkbox"/> _____         |

**Research Skills**

- |                                   |                                   |                                    |                                      |                                    |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assess   | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate | <input type="checkbox"/> Identify  | <input type="checkbox"/> Investigate | <input type="checkbox"/> Simplify  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clarify  | <input type="checkbox"/> Examine  | <input type="checkbox"/> Inspect   | <input type="checkbox"/> Model       | <input type="checkbox"/> Summarize |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collect  | <input type="checkbox"/> Extract  | <input type="checkbox"/> Interpret | <input type="checkbox"/> Organize    | <input type="checkbox"/> Survey    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diagnose | <input type="checkbox"/> Focus    | <input type="checkbox"/> Interview | <input type="checkbox"/> Review      | <input type="checkbox"/> Theorize  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____       | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     |

**Service Skills**

- |                                 |                                  |                                  |                                  |                                  |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advise | <input type="checkbox"/> Assist  | <input type="checkbox"/> Collect | <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare | <input type="checkbox"/> Sell    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wash   | <input type="checkbox"/> Answer  | <input type="checkbox"/> Change  | <input type="checkbox"/> Deliver | <input type="checkbox"/> Receive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Serve  | <input type="checkbox"/> Arrange | <input type="checkbox"/> Clean   | <input type="checkbox"/> Explain | <input type="checkbox"/> Remove  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Show   | <input type="checkbox"/> _____   | <input type="checkbox"/> _____   | <input type="checkbox"/> _____   | <input type="checkbox"/> _____   |

**Teaching Skills**

- |                                  |                                      |                                     |                                   |                                    |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adapt   | <input type="checkbox"/> Communicate | <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage  | <input type="checkbox"/> Guide    | <input type="checkbox"/> Plan      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advise  | <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinate  | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate   | <input type="checkbox"/> Inform   | <input type="checkbox"/> Stimulate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clarify | <input type="checkbox"/> Develop     | <input type="checkbox"/> Explain    | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate | <input type="checkbox"/> Train     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coach   | <input type="checkbox"/> Enable      | <input type="checkbox"/> Facilitate | <input type="checkbox"/> Instruct | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     |

**Physical Skills**

- |                                   |                                   |                                    |                                    |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Apply    | <input type="checkbox"/> Connect  | <input type="checkbox"/> Drive     | <input type="checkbox"/> Measure   | <input type="checkbox"/> Regulate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spray    | <input type="checkbox"/> Assemble | <input type="checkbox"/> Construct | <input type="checkbox"/> Fit       | <input type="checkbox"/> Mix      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renovate | <input type="checkbox"/> Unload   | <input type="checkbox"/> Build     | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultivate | <input type="checkbox"/> Install  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Operate  | <input type="checkbox"/> Repair   | <input type="checkbox"/> Check     | <input type="checkbox"/> Drill     | <input type="checkbox"/> Locate   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rebuild  | <input type="checkbox"/> Sort     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____    |

**TypeFocus Careers**

**A great resource to help you identify your natural strengths and talents!  
Take the Personality Questionnaire today!**

www.careers.typefocus.com  
Site Password: asp44

**Personality Questionnaire** – By understanding yourself better, you'll find work that will be satisfying in the long run - where it counts. As you understand yourself better, you'll clarify your values, skills and interests and become more focused. This report will help you discover satisfying careers that work with your strengths.

**ARTIFACTS**

The technical term for an item in a portfolio is an ‘artifact.’ An ‘**artifact**’ is any actual item that can provide ‘**evidence**’ to demonstrate who you are (e.g. personal qualities) or what you have accomplished.

Artifacts can come in almost a limitless variety of forms including written text, pictures, documents, electronic presentations, web pages; artifacts may even include movies or sound files.

Artifacts may include things you actually made (e.g. reports, graphics, etc.) or things which represent what you’ve done (e.g. reflections, resumes, summaries, photos, etc.). Use your creativity to select and craft your artifacts in a manner which best represents what you wish to show others.

**GATHERING ARTIFACTS**

*The place to start when developing your portfolio is to collect and store artifacts, things that in some way demonstrate who you are and what you can do.*

The following list of artifacts is far from complete. Use these suggestions to help you generate ideas that will work for your portfolio. Add any other ideas you may have in the blanks provided. Think about each idea and ask yourself if you have anything similar which you can develop into an artifact.

**PERSONAL INFORMATION**

- licenses (drivers, business, professional & technical)
- certificates (first aid, lifesaving, food safe, WHMIS, etc.)
- security clearances
- languages
- resume
- personal mission statement, personal and career goals
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

- schools attended (names, addresses, teachers, photographs)
- course descriptions
- assessments, test results, appraisals, grade reports, school transcripts (GPA)
- writing samples
- co-op projects
- awards, honours

- workshops, seminars, conferences, special training attended (brochures, handouts, photographs, ...)
- degrees, diplomas, and certificates
- independent learning (notes, products, ...)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**LEISURE/NON-WORK ACTIVITIES**

- organizations or student societies joined (brochures, letters, posters, ...)
- leadership positions held
- volunteer activities
- community service
- public speaking or performances
- products or pictures from hobbies or interests
- sports (pictures of teams, schedules, newspaper clippings, ...)
- travel (tickets, pictures, itinerary, brochures, memorabilia, ...)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**PERSONAL REFLECTIONS**

- statement of mission
- work philosophy
- results from self-assessment tests or exercises
- career exploration results
- notes from career research or informational interviews
- personal and professional goals
- action plans
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**WORK-RELATED EXPERIENCES**

- resumes and cover letters
- networking info (lists of contacts, chart of relationships, photographs, ...)
- work search records
- jobs/contracts held (title, duties, supervisor, phone, address)
- companies/organizations worked for (brochures, annual reports, newsletters, ...)
- committee work (agenda, products, photos, ...)
- evidence of competencies met

- documentation of accomplishments
- attendance records
- performance charts
- performance evaluations and reports
- creative products, designs or logos you created
- customer satisfaction reports, employee surveys you created
- evidence of new products or services you created
- photographs of you in newspapers, magazines, or in-house publications because of an accomplishment
- samples of projects, products, program, or materials completed or in progress
- samples of programs developed or facilitated
- record of client accomplishments
- client surveys
- thank you notes or emails
- honours, awards, other recognition
- letters of references (supervisors, colleagues, clients)
- mentoring (photos, learning notes, schedule, ...)
- computer-related capabilities (including list of equipment and programs)
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**REFLECTING ON AN ARTIFACT**

*Reflecting may be the most important step in the portfolio process. It is what distinguishes portfolios from mere collections of pictures and things.*

Reflecting upon an artifact enables you ...

- to discover what it says about you
- to make connections between what you have done and your world
- to see patterns in your life
- to evaluate your growth over time
- to measure your achievement of goals
- to identify areas for further development
- to set meaningful learning goals
- to appreciate what you have done

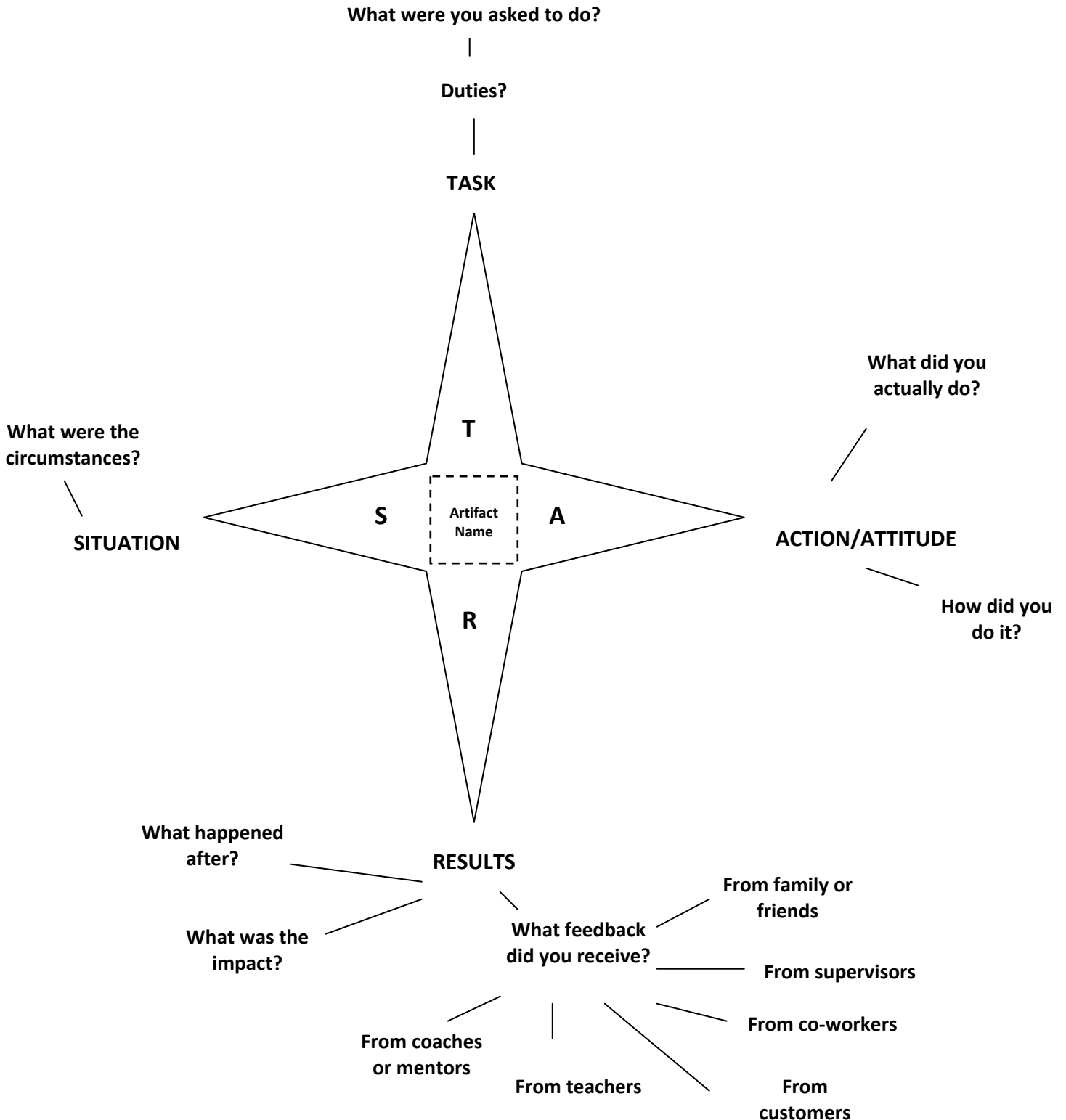
Tips for reflecting on an artifact:

- keep focused
- write your thoughts down
- talk with another person
- relax and follow your hunches
- be concrete don't jump to conclusions

The debriefing of artifacts is far from a rigid checklist-type activity. It is a dynamic time of discovery. You will need to sharpen all your questing and thinking skills to make the most of this opportunity. You will be amazed at what you will learn about yourself.

**S.T.A.R.**

The S.T.A.R. format comes from an area of behavioral interviewing in which there is an emphasis on giving concrete answers which are life-oriented, specific, and credible. In the future, you will want to be prepared for these types of questions when you go for an interview. Besides using this format when using a portfolio in an interview, you can use the STAR format to help you unpack the story behind an artifact in an effective way. Write the name of the artifact in the centre of the STAR. Answer each of the S.T.A.R. questions in order.





Pick an artifact, write the name of it in the centre of the STAR, and write your observations for each of the 4 areas of the STAR:

**Task**

*Provide recommendation on how to improve student orientation session.*

*Work towards creating a 'student friendly' environment.*

*Present recommendations to management.*

**Situation**

*Each department handled student orientation differently, information presented was not consistent, and students felt overwhelmed.*

**Action**

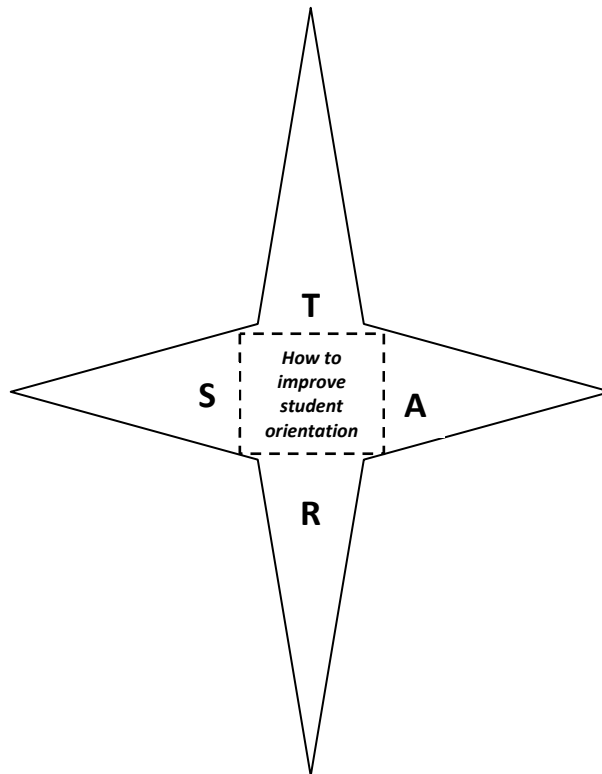
*Develop/distribute student/manager survey; Collect/analyze data; Research existing orientation programs; Create PP presentation incorporating graphs, quotes, and recommendations.*

*Receptive to feedback, detail-oriented, positive attitude, attention to detail.*

**Attitude**

**Results**

*New processes implemented consistency of distributed information, increased productivity of new students, students quickly adjust to corporate culture employer promoted as a 'student friendly' employer, increased moral.*



Pick an artifact, write the name of it in the centre of the STAR, and write your observations for each of the 4 areas of the STAR:

**Task**

*Complete Asper Co-op work term 2 as an accounting technician.*

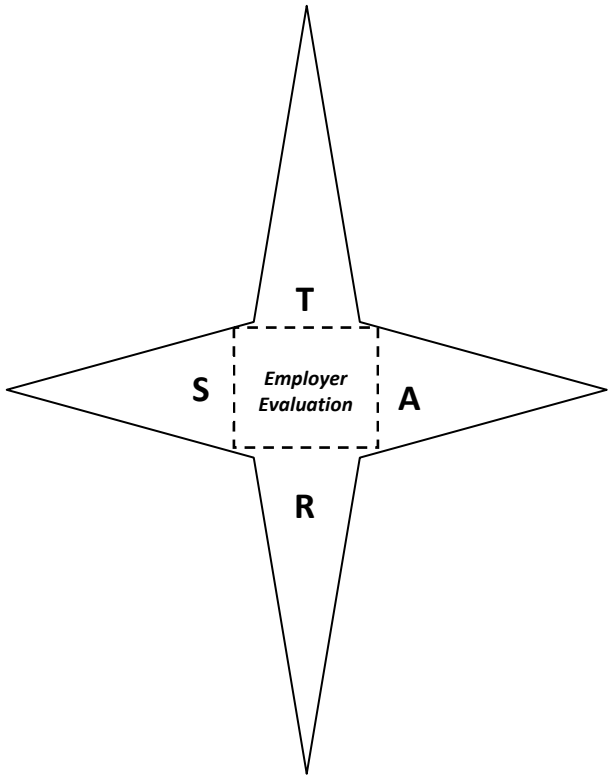
*Reconcile financial statements, settle and update invoices, generate budget reports for management, update database...*

**Situation**

*Starting a second work term with a new employer in a new discipline.*

*Only a short time to learn, adapt to corporate culture and make a significant contribution. (4 months)*

*It was an extremely busy time of the year for the employer.*



**Action**

*Accurately input into company database, if data does not match – speak with department managers and seek additional info from suppliers.*

*‘Learn something new everyday’, network, ask questions, punctual, and complete tasks quickly and efficiently.*

**Attitude**

**Results**

*Learned about the internal operations of an accounting department; gained an understanding of general accounting principles; developed the ability to effectively communicate and work within a team.*

*Supervisor recognized hard-work, error free work, ownership of assigned tasks, and ease of working within team.*

## **ADDING ANNOTATION**

*Annotations provide context, and convey the relevance of an artifact to the viewer(s) since it may not be immediately apparent.*

There are many details that you could include in your annotation. Use the following [Artifact Annotation Guide](#) as a checklist to confirm details are already included within the artifact or as a summary of additional details. Note as many details as possible when you store your artifact so that you can highlight the most important ones in your targeted portfolio.

### **Artifact Annotation Guide**

Annotations could include any of the following:

#### **Context**

- parameters: goal, purpose, timeline and accomplishments
- type: academic assignment, professional consulting project, co-op work term project or a self-initiated project
- where, when and for whom: organization, individual and, if appropriate, intended audience
- role: position, responsibilities, major contributions, role changes
- collaboration: completed independently or part of a team
- scope: length of time to complete, size of project
- artifact history: new, revised, inherited, adapted, assigned or self initiated

#### **Development Details**

- available resources: budget, equipment, schedule
- constraints: limited time frame, dependencies, budget, transitions, change in resources
- development history: process, transitions, changes and evolution
- skills used: problem solving, critical thinking, written communication, oral communication, numerical/statistical, teamwork, planning and organizing, research methods and skills, laboratory and fieldwork, social and cultural awareness, information and technology/computer literacy

#### **Outcome**

- status: completed, in progress, or rejected
- reception: positive and negative, positively accepted, used

#### **Reflection**

- What did you learn when completing the artifact?
- What skills did you gain or enhance?
- What would you do now to improve the artifact?
- If you were to do the project today, what would you do differently?

**SELECTING THE BEST ARTIFACTS**

*You will initially collect many artifacts. You must choose the best artifacts for the situation at hand.*

Before you can answer the question, “What is the best artifact to demonstrate who I am and what I can do?”, you must first ask important questions such as “How am I going to use the portfolio?”, “Who is going to see it?” (audience - family, friends, potential employers, graduation showcase, etc.), “What will they be looking for when they look at it?”, and “What is it that I want to show about myself?” Ideas such as the employable skills as described by the Conference Board of Canada can help you select and organize your artifacts. ([http://www.conferenceboard.ca/Libraries/EDUC\\_PUBLIC/esp2000.sflb](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/Libraries/EDUC_PUBLIC/esp2000.sflb))

Remember the question is not “What are the best artifacts?” but “What are the best artifacts to show who I am in this particular situation?” From one situation to another you may choose to show different artifacts. Sometimes the same artifact may be used to demonstrate different characteristics. For example, showing a picture of yourself with the sports team that you were captain of. In one situation you may use it to demonstrate that you are a team player. In another, your leadership ability. In another, your competitive spirit. And so on.

Use this template for each situation in which you will use your portfolio. Review all of your artifacts and select the best ones for each situation by completing the chart below.

**Purpose**

How am I going to use the portfolio?  
A school presentation? A job interview?, etc.

**Audience**

Who is going to be looking at the portfolio?

WHAT DO THEY WANT TO SEE?	WHAT ARTIFACTS COULD I USE?	WHICH ARE THE BEST FOR THIS SITUATION?	WHY?

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## ASSEMBLING YOUR CAREER PORTFOLIO

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Your task is to take what you've decided to go with and put it into a presentable format. You will need an appropriate carrying case for the documents you have selected, and you will want to have an attractive way of presenting each of these documents. Consider the following ideas for putting the final touches on your portfolio.

### *Carrying Case*

Consider using some form of standard-size, three-ring binder for your portfolio.

### *Tabs*

The items you bring with you need to be easily retrievable under pressure. We suggest that you use dividers with tabs. If a document could be filed under more than one heading, make extra copies of this document and file it under as many headings as you like, if that makes it easier for you to retrieve it when you are distracted and under pressure.

Tabs may include:

- Personal Characteristics
- Skills
- Resume
- Experience
- Education & Training
- Technical Skills
- Accomplishments
- Leadership Skills
- Letters of Reference
- Knowledge
- Communication Skills
- Creative Materials

### *Documents*

Do not include original documents in your portfolio. Since portfolios can get lost or even stolen, we suggest that you make high-quality photocopies of your original documents and then store your originals in a safe place.

Photocopying documents will enable you to reduce or enlarge the originals so that they can fit comfortably into your carrying case. It will also allow you to create 'collages' of documents, when appropriate. For example, you can create a collage of several favorable customer service comments or employer evaluation comments on one page. Although it does cost more, photocopying your documents in their original colors is probably worth the extra expense, since when the photocopying is done well, the copies look like the real thing.

Be very careful to delete any information that should not be shared from the documents you place in your portfolio. And if you are taking any documents/materials from a past employer, be sure to first ask for permission!

Rather than punch holes in the documents you present, place these documents in standard-sized sheet protectors that are clear on both sides and are equipped with holes. Typically when you are showing documents from your portfolio, you will take them out of the binder and hand them to your interviewer. Having your documents in sheet protectors keeps them from becoming damaged and worn. You can also store extra copies behind displayed documents.

*Have someone in the industry take a look at your portfolio.*

Once you have put together what you think is a good portfolio, it is very helpful if you can have someone who is knowledgeable about the position for which you are interviewing give you a critique of your portfolio.

*Do the best you can and then go with it.*

Don't be discouraged if you feel that despite your best efforts your portfolio doesn't include everything you think it should. Maybe there's an elusive document that you can't seem to put your hand on. Or it could be there's an important skill that you haven't yet developed. No matter what you do, the fact is there will always be something you wish you had in your portfolio but don't. Missing some items is not the problem you may think it is. The best way to use your portfolio in an interview is not to show the whole thing, but instead to present a few items at the right moment. You may be aware that you are missing an item or two that you would like to have, but the person to whom you are presenting your portfolio will not know this.

*Let the skill sets demonstrated in your portfolio give you confidence.*

The process of targeting your portfolio should make you very aware of the particular skill sets you have that are right for the job under consideration. Focus on these strengths and you will start looking forward to going to interviews that will give you opportunities to discuss these skill sets. You will know that whatever claims you make about yourself, you can back them up. You will know this because you have a Career Portfolio!

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## **HOW DO YOU ACTUALLY USE A CAREER PORTFOLIO & WHEN?**

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### **#1: TO ACE AN INTERVIEW**

Here are some of the advantages that having a well-targeted portfolio can give you during a job interview, if it is used properly:

- The simple fact that you bring a portfolio to the interview distinguishes you from candidates who did not bring a portfolio; this shows initiative on your part.
- Having a nice-looking portfolio suggests that you are the kind of person who is well prepared and well organized.
- Having a portfolio that contains documents that verify your experiences, skills, abilities and personal characteristics that are relevant to the job under consideration suggests that you have a very serious interest in this job, and that you have a clear idea as to what is required to be successful in the job.
- The items in your portfolio allow you to provide tangible evidence that you, indeed, have important qualifications for this job.
- Your portfolio enables you to give examples that showcase the key personal characteristics being sought in the candidate.
- You can discuss your qualifications for the job with confidence, with or without showing items from your portfolio. Even when you do not show documents from your portfolio, just

**Never leave  
your portfolio  
behind!**

knowing that you can verify the claims you make about yourself allows you to talk in a very confident and convincing manner about your qualifications.

- You come across as a can-do candidate. You give the overall impression that you are very much a candidate who is ready, willing, and able to get the job done.

Typically, a career portfolio is not shown in its entirety during an evaluation or an interview. Instead, at appropriate moments during the interview, you *selectively* show particular documents that both validate and bring to life the claims you are making. You must find the right moment to show a particular document, such as responding to an important question during a job interview, as in the following example:

**Interviewer:**

*“This position requires a person who has a strong work ethic and the organizational skills necessary to work on multiple projects at the same time. Can you describe a situation where you had to work on several projects at the same time and what you did to achieve success?”*

**Job Candidate:**

*“Yes, last fall I was charged with creating a business plan for my division. This was a very comprehensive plan that detailed the potential of my division as well as set baseline goals to help the company make large profits. At the same time, I chaired a steering committee set up to recommend changes in the organizational structure of my division. Even though both projects were demanding and time-consuming, I was able to get both tasks completed successfully. In fact, I would like to show you some letters of commendation I received from my company that describe my work ethic and creativity on these projects.”*

**Key Do’s and Don’ts for using your Career Portfolio in a Job Interview:**

1. *Do not let go of your portfolio.* It leaves your hands, the whole direction of the interview will change. Instead, hand individual items to your interviewer.
2. *Keep the focus on **you**, not on your portfolio.* Your portfolio should be viewed as something that enhances the presentation of your qualifications for the job, not as the central feature of the interview.
3. *Do not keep your portfolio continuously open.* To do so would put too much focus on your portfolio.
4. *Use the peek-a-boo technique when showing your portfolio.* Take your portfolio out to make a point, then close it and put it aside.
5. *Do not use your portfolio as a crutch.* Do not use it to fill awkward silences or to remind you what to say next.
6. *Look for opportunities to use your portfolio in response to key questions.* Your portfolio can really come alive when you use it to substantiate a point you want to make about yourself in response to a question that is obviously very important to the interviewer.
7. *Always explain the relevance of the documents you present.* When you show an item from your portfolio, tell the interviewer quite explicitly the relevant skill sets that this document illustrates or verifies, “I included this document to illustrate my ability to ... It also, I believe, shows that I ... “

8. *Use portfolio items to demonstrate desirable personal characteristics.* Personal characteristics that are desirable in candidates but are hard to prove can be nicely illustrated with your portfolio.
9. *Use most of your portfolio items as confidence builders that you don't actually show.* Remember, you do not need to show items to speak confidently about the things you have done that generated these items. Just knowing that you can verify claims you make about yourself will enable you to talk in a very confident and convincing manner about your qualifications.
10. *Bring extra copies of items that your interviewer is likely to find particularly impressive.* And make doubly sure all proprietary information has been carefully deleted from anything you intend to leave behind.
11. *Do not leave behind items that have not been explained during the interview.* And do not send things from your portfolio that were not discussed during the interview.
12. *Be careful not to show your portfolio too much.* Less is truly more when presenting your portfolio. Follow the old show biz maxim, and "leave 'em hungering for more."

## **# 2: TO GET A FAVORABLE PERFORMANCE REVIEW**

*Get started early.* In order to create a portfolio that gives you an edge in your next performance review, it is important for you and your boss to have an explicit understanding of the criteria on which your performance will be judged.

*Assemble a portfolio that shows you have met or exceeded your boss's expectations.* Here are some things to think about when you are assembling your portfolio:

1. *Identify the key performance criteria in your boss's mind.* List the performance criteria on which you will be judged. If you are having difficulty determining this, talk to a person you trust who has had successful performance reviews from your boss in the past.
2. *List the particular skill sets and traits your boss considers most important.*
3. *Collect documents that demonstrate that you have met or exceeded expectations.* Performance figures, letters of appreciation, awards, citations, certificates – any document that gives evidence of one or more of the high priority skill sets you have demonstrated since your last performance review should be collected.
4. *Organize your portfolio according to your identified important skill sets.*
5. *Select the best documents to show.* Choose the documents that give the strongest evidence that you have met or exceeded important expectations.
6. *Assemble two copies of your entire portfolio.* Since you may be leaving a copy of your entire portfolio with your boss, you should create a second copy.

## **#3: TO GET A RAISE**

Using a portfolio to get a raise is quite similar to using a portfolio to get a good performance review. In both cases, you will want to show everything in your portfolio that gives evidence of your having met your boss's expectations. Review the suggestions made above for using a portfolio to get a good performance review.



Here are some further things to think about.

*Know the reasons why you might qualify for a raise.* You will want to include documents in your portfolio that help you make your case. But first you need to know what your case is. Why might you qualify for a raise? Were you promised a raise if you met certain expectations? Does your organization offer merit increases if certain criteria are met? Do industry salary figures reveal that other people are being paid more than you are for essentially the same job? Have you taken on new responsibilities in your job that should qualify you for a raise? Are you offering to take on new responsibilities?

*Talk with someone who has been successful at getting a raise.*

*In addition to the documents which support your important skill sets, gather other key evidence that supports your case.* If you believe you are underpaid, get a document that quotes industry salary levels for your kind of job. This data can usually be found using an Internet search engine. If you have taken on additional responsibilities not originally assigned to you that you believe qualify you for a raise, include a copy of your original job description along with your write-up of your present responsibilities.

#### **#4: TO GET A PROMOTION**

Using your portfolio to get a promotion is quite similar to creating and using a targeted portfolio to get a job with a new employer, particularly if the promotion is not controlled by your present boss.

Being inside an organization means you are well placed to find out about the precise skill sets that the people who will be interviewing you consider most important. And you are in a good position to demonstrate your ability to meet expectations in ways that are very meaningful to the people who interview you.

*Demonstrate that you are a reliable performer who is ready for a new challenge.* Your goal is to show that you can be relied upon to do what you are asked to do *and* you are ready for a new challenge. You should include documents that demonstrate you have consistently met past expectations during your tenure in this organization. Including these items is particularly important if someone who does not know you very well is evaluating you for this position. But, unlike a portfolio that you use to get a good performance evaluation, you do not want to have in this portfolio mostly documents that demonstrate your ability to handle your present job. If you do so, you might come across as being indispensable in that job! The focus of your portfolio should instead be on the skills sets you have developed that make you ready to take on the new job.

*Use your access to insiders to learn as much as you can about the new job and boss.* Talk to people in your organization (or to friends of friends in the organization) who can tell you about the expectations associated with the job. What are the specific responsibilities, activities, and goals associated with the job? What are the particular skills sets that the person to whom you would report is seeking in a candidate? Are there people from human resources who will also be interviewing you? If so, what are their biases? If there was a problem in the past with how this job was done, what was it, and how can you present yourself as someone who can make significant improvements?

*Get documents that verify relevant skill sets you have developed in your current position or elsewhere.* When collecting documents for your portfolio, you should not limit yourself to items associated with your present job. You are trying to demonstrate that you have what it takes to succeed in a new job, which means that the desired skills sets are likely to be somewhat different from those required for your present job.

*Show more portfolio items than if you were going for a job outside your organization.* When you are applying for a promotion, the people who interview you are typically still thinking of you as someone in your present job. The burden is on you to demonstrate that you have important dimensions that your interviewers may have overlooked. To counter current biases, you may wish to show more items from your portfolio than you normally would if you were interviewing for a job at a different organization. You will also want to keep focusing on the future, or the interviewer might think you are too good to lose in your present position.

## **#5: TO CHANGE CAREERS**

Changing careers means making a radical shift in the work you do. Examples of a career change include taking on a totally different kind of job in the same field, like transitioning from being a stage actor to becoming a marketing person for a theatrical company. Or, even more challenging, changing careers could involve changing both the kind of job you have *and* the field in which you will be doing the new job. An example is switching from being a schoolteacher to being a computer salesperson.

If you want to get a job that is completely different from what you are doing now, a properly targeted Career Portfolio can help you to convince a potential employer to take a chance on you.

*Try to include evidence in your portfolio that you are a quick and dedicated learner.* You want to be able to make the statement “I can learn new things quickly” and be able to back it up – particularly if the new job is perceived as a real stretch for you. Documents that refer to successful projects you have done in the past that required a lot of on-the-spot learning demonstrate that you are a ‘quick study’. Evidence that you have continually engaged in professional development activities, like attending workshops, could demonstrate that you are oriented toward continually learning new things.

*Feature skills sets from your present job that would be useful in the new job.* Rarely are two jobs entirely different. Any of the skill sets that are important in your present job that would be considered very useful in the new job should be demonstrated in your portfolio – especially if these skill sets are particular strengths of yours.

*Explain your ‘translatable skills’ that will be useful in the new job.* Skills that you have developed in one context that can be used in a new arena are often referred to as *transferable skills*. You probably have already developed and demonstrated a number of skills that could ultimately be used in the new career you are trying to enter. The problem is you may need to do some ‘translating’ so that your potential employer understands that you, in fact, do have relevant transferable skills.

If for example, you are a nurse who is applying for a position in an advertising agency, you can't expect your interviewers to immediately understand the relevance of your nursing background for being a successful account executive or office manager. But, you can show your interviewers a picture of disgruntled and anxious faces in an overcrowded physician's waiting room and explain how you have to use your people skills to calm these patients down and establish rapport with them. And you can show your interviewers letters you have received from grateful patients and say; "You know, people are people. Given the way I've been able to handle patients with very distressing medical problems, I think I could be quite effective working with some of your most demanding clients."

*Use a skills based functional resume.* A resume that has skill set headings and uses a 'function' approach to organizing its items can highlight useful transferable skills and other important 'translatable' skill sets that a prospective employer might otherwise miss. If the items in your portfolio verify the skill sets you feature in your resume, handing your interviewer a copy of your resume at the start of the interview will set you up to show these key items from your portfolio.

*Be prepared to show many items from your portfolio.* Since you may have to overcome initial skepticism about your ability to add value in your new career, be prepared to show more of your portfolio than you would if you were not trying to make a radial shift.

## **#6: TO GET INTO COLLEGE OR GRADUATE SCHOOL**

A properly targeted portfolio can give you a significant advantage if you are competing for admission to a school that interviews its applicants. The items in your portfolio can bring to life and make credible the things you say about yourself in your written application. And the fact that you have gone to the effort of assembling a portfolio to bring to an interview conveys the impression that you are strongly motivated, well organized, and 'have your act together,' – provided, of course, that the items you show from your portfolio do not undermine or contradict statements you have made in your written application! Here are some further things to consider.

*Learn about the skill sets the school particularly favours and like to develop.* Talk to someone closely associated with the school about the skill sets that are most valued in candidates for admission and the particular skill sets that the school prides itself on being able to develop. Ideally, you should talk to someone in the admission department prior to your interview. But you can also learn a lot about valued skill sets by talking to successful students, professors, and recent graduates. This step really should be done prior to sending in your application, as it will help you decide if this school would be a good fit for you.

*Use your portfolio to establish your distinct identity.* There should also be a focus to your portfolio that establishes a clear identity for you. You want to be remembered in a positive way after the interview is over, and this is most likely to happen if you can present a set of items that establishes you as a certain kind of person who can make a certain kind of contribution.

*Try to 'stay on message' when presenting your portfolio.* Since your goal is to have the interviewer be able to sum you up in a very positive way in a few sentences, you should try to show as many items as you can that support the distinct identity that you are trying to establish.

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## MAINTAINING YOUR CAREER PORTFOLIO

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A Career Portfolio will be useful only if you maintain it! It is your responsibility to manage yourself and your development, however, when you become busy with work, school and extra-curricular activities, it is easy to overlook this commitment. Establish a process that works for you, that you can rely on, and you will be better prepared for your future when you graduate.

Maintenance Tips:

- Ensure each record and artifact is up to date.
- Clean up and organize your portfolio by archiving older items, and adding new artifacts.
- Each artifact should be annotated where required.
- Back up your electronic files regularly.

### The Co-op Advantage

Co-op provided you with many opportunities to develop a management process for yourself.

These include:

- Providing opportunities to observe and develop management strategies during your work term.
- Introducing processes which encourage effective portfolio management skills as soon as you join co-op.
- Encouraging documentation at the beginning, middle, and end of the work term, including a summary of work experiences, learning objectives and reflections, evaluations, and projects.
- Providing opportunities to build expertise with each consecutive co-op work term.
- Providing personalized coaching on your portfolio development.

### **Hot Tip: Keep it Current!**

Keeping your portfolio current is an important step in responding to the trend towards frequent work transitions. Current statistics indicate that most individuals entering the workplace will make significant changes in their careers at least five to ten times. Maintaining a current portfolio is a critical part of this process.

#### **Resources Used:**

Careerscope: looking in, looking out, looking around by: Norman Amundson, Gray Peohnell, Mark Pattern

The Career Portfolio Workbook by: Frank Satterthwaite and Gary D'Orsi, McGraw-Hill, Copyright 2003

Simon Fraser University Module Guide: The Master Portfolio