HOW TO:

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
西交利物浦大学

PRESENT A PORTFOLIO

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RIBA
Royal Institute of British Architects

This guidance note forms part of a series of continually developing collection of resources available to graduating students seeking placement within practice as part of their professional development.

Other sections within the series are:

1. Write The Letter of Introduction
2. Write an Effective Resume
3. Preparing the Portfolio
4. The Interview

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INTRODUCTION

The transition from University as a student, into the professional environment of the Practice studio, can be daunting and exciting.

The most challenging part of this process is how to 'stand out' from the volume of applications received by practices, often for those few precious available positions. What is important to understand, is that there is no magic formula, however there are generally accepted protocols or approaches, which can increase the chances of catching the notice of employers and open an opportunity of moving forward in the selection process.

This paper seeks to provide some useful guidance and advice, collected from various sources for the preparation and presentation of your portfolio which would normally accompany any application along with the Letter of Introduction and Resume.

1.
GETTING STARTED

What is the Portfolio?

The answer to this question, very much depends upon the situation it is being used and the intended audience and will vary as your experience and volume of projects increases. However, in most cases it will showcase your work at a point in time. The format of the portfolio can also take a few different forms and again depends upon the circumstances. This can vary from a printed version in book size (A4-A3) so that it may be mailed or transportable in A1 or A2, to allow it to be shown in interviews. In addition, there is a growing tendency for these to be in a digital format so it may be emailed along with the resume and application. The file size must be managed carefully, as many employers state a size limit. The digital version may also be used in interviews and displayed on mobile device or laptop, but be confident and familiar with the use of the technology in this situation.

"KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE. KNOW YOURSELF. CHOOSE A VARIETY OF PROJECTS THAT WILL APPEAL TO THE TYPE OF FIRM YOU ARE INTERESTED IN AND WILL DEMONSTRATE YOUR STRENGTHS AND CAPABILITIES. "

It should be remembered, that there is still something intuitive about turning a page, rather than 'clicking' links on a screen.

In this document, we will consider the typical situations where the portfolio may be most likely required as:

- ◆ Obtaining a position / internship in practice
- ◆ Application for a place in post-graduate Diploma / Masters
- ◆ Application for Scholarships
- ◆ Competitions

Whatever format you choose to prepare, there are four fundamental rules that govern the presentation.

- ◆ Document
- ◆ Edit
- ◆ Message
- ◆ Audience

Document
As in your project work, it is vitally important to take care of your work and to record your process, this includes exploratory sketches, models and drawings. These should be recorded with care through good quality photography and scanning and to catalogue these carefully, so they may be retrieved easily. It's always advisable to correctly archive these for future reference.

Editing
The presentation of your portfolio requires that you edit the volumes of work, to include only the best quality, most interesting and challenging work. This can of course vary depending upon the situation where the portfolio is required. Remember the portfolio is **not** about showing absolutely every piece of work you have ever produced, but is a selective sample which is clear, legible and highlights your ideas, experience and strengths.

Message
In compiling the portfolio, you must be ruthless and selective, based upon the intended audience and circumstance. In this way you must ask yourself; "what is the message I'm trying to convey and why?" This can also depend on the position you are pursuing, or if you are intending to pursue advanced education.

Audience

As discussed above, the message has to be defined and likewise understanding who your intended audience might be. This emphasises the need for advance research to help answer this question. It will also allow you to communicate more clearly and meet the expectations of your audience.

Zhang Houzhe - ARC304 XJTLU ARD Year Book (2017-18)

2.
PREPARATION

Selection and Documentation

It's essential that your portfolio demonstrates your strengths and diversity. This means selecting the best work and not only those which achieved the higher grades. It may be that parts of a single project are more successful than the whole, but can show the strength in that particular component.

Portfolios are usually evaluated very quickly in pre-assessment or in interview and as such, the work selected for inclusion should communicate quickly and visually. Text should be kept to a minimum and be simple and concise. Consider that the portfolio will be 'skimmed' rather than reviewed in great depth at first viewing.

"THE PORTFOLIO SHOULD COMMUNICATE QUICKLY, EFFECTIVELY AND VISUALLY"

Work should be collated and recorded regularly and perhaps at the end of a particular module / project or Review, taking care to pay attention to the quality of the scanning etc. Scanning should be carried out in an appropriate format and resolution. For printing purposes these should be at least 250dpi, but normal publishing standards are 300dpi.

The two most common file formats for scans are TIFF (Tagged Image File Format) and JPG (joint Photographers Group) TIFF likes tend to retain more information but JPG's can be smaller in file size. Generally TIFF are preferred for printing, whereas JPG is best for screen viewing.

When scanning drawings, consider the appropriate resolution settings so as to preserve the original line quality and rendering in the drawings. Scanners will provide much better results than images take with the camera on most phones.

Ensure you retain a regular 'back-up' of work in progress and finished work. Try to develop a work-flow that ensures back up is carried out as a routine discipline.

Camilo Espitia - ARC413/410 XJTLU ARD Year Book (2018-19)
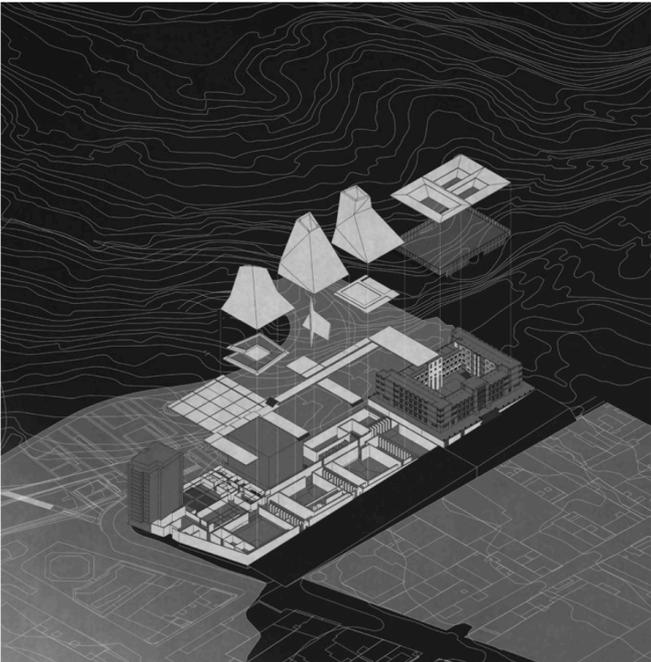
3.
PRESENTATION

Format and Layout

The choice of format in presenting the portfolio, is a consideration following some careful research on the circumstances such as - the practice being targeted, the desired message and the audience.

There are a number of ways the work can be presented, including:

◆ Book
◆ Printed Full Size
◆ Digital
◆ Web Based

Book
   This may be assembled in such a way that it allows potentially mailing to prospective employers or it may be taken to interview. This 'hands on' page turning approach with a professionally printed and bound book, can allow the reviewer a much more tactical and intuitive experience and convey much more of the individuality and personality of the candidates.

Printed Full Size
   This is perhaps the 'conventional' approach, where work is arranged within a portfolio container, often at A1 with the work in its original or reduced form accordingly.

Digital

This is increasingly the most common 'first contact' with employers, where work can be submitted by email, CD or USB in a format that allows the employer to review on screen. This may be followed by interview, where the candidate would normally take a printed version in book or full size portfolio. Care must be taken to observe file size limitations normally set by Practices in receiving such digital portfolios, with a maximum normally set at 10-20mb. This requires careful management of the files and images embedded within the document.

Web Based

There a growing number of platforms that provide a hosting service, allowing the works to be uploaded into existing templates or within your own. Links to some of these are provided in Section 5 of this document.

"THE CHOICE OF PRESENTATION FORMAT FOLLOWS A RESEARCH OF THE AUDIENCE, THE MESSAGE AND THE PRACTICE"
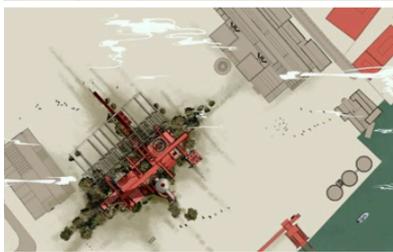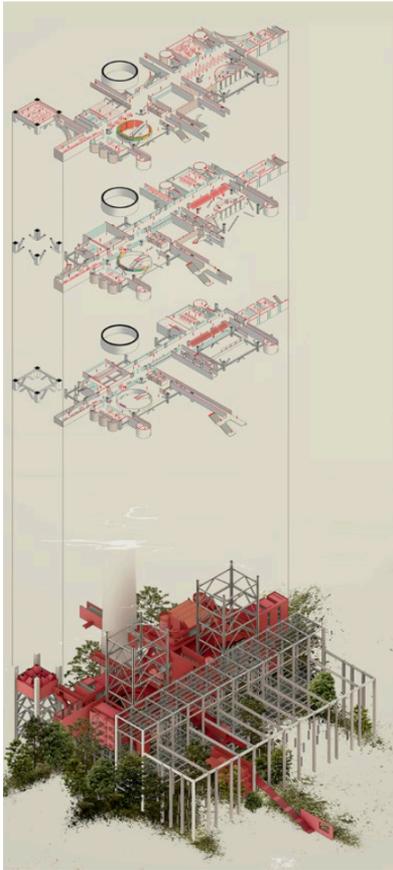
Yao Yuzheng - ARC304 XJTLU ARD Year Book (2018-19)

4.
COMPOSITION

Orientation

Portrait or Landscape?

Either format is acceptable, and depends upon the whether its appropriate to the orientation of the images you use. Landscape can provide emphasis for long, horizontal images. They also usually allow a bit more content on each spread. Portrait however can usually lends itself to a more minimalist layout with more white space or with fewer images per page. The images can generally be in square or vertical format.

If using a book format, consideration should be given at the outset to the binding. This can impact upon the page layouts and if long horizontal images will spread across two sheets, split by the binding.

Arrangement

Chronological or Narrative Style?
The question of how to arrange the projects or your work is an important one, as this will convey the appropriate message or story you want the interviewer or reviewer to understand.

There is a great advantage however, in placing some of your strongest and best work at the start and also at the end as reviewers generally skim or take a short time in looking through the portfolio, tending to linger on the first projects and skim through the work. It's an advantage therefore to leave them with a strong image to finish and a lasting impression of your work.

Giving consideration to the chronological ordering of the work, its recommended that this start with your most recent work. This should be considered carefully, as the latest work may in fact be some of the weakest. However, reviewers will be most interested in seeing your Final Year Project or Masters Design Project, as these will offer the most comprehensive impression. These should therefore be presented in a legible and coherent way to 'tell the story' in a clear way.

Elements

Depending upon the desired arrangement of the work, whether chronological, narrative or otherwise, the document should be arranged in a logical format to facilitate easier navigation.

Cover
◆ including your name, personal contact details, and date.
Contents Page
◆ Include project names and page numbers
Projects
◆ Typically include 5 to 8 of your best project work

Composition

The portfolio is your graphical 'resume' and expresses a lot about your personality, approach to design and professional attitudes. A carefully composed portfolio will therefore show potential employers how much you pay attention to detail and give some impassion of how you would therefore perform in practice. There are a number of general graphical considerations when assembling the work on the page:

Rule of Thirds
  In similar rules to photographic composition, divide your page layout into thirds and put the focus at grid line intersections. Larger images can take up multiple points. The visual balance on the page is essential.

  This composition creates a hierarchy between the elements. The larger the image, the more important it should be. This approach is generally best for landscape layouts.

Symmetry
  Often best in portrait or vertical page formats, this places the objects (text/graphic) at the centre points of the page or balances two images equally on the page.

Alignment
  Care must be taken in ensuring objects on the page are correctly aligned and using grid lines in the formatting software (InDesign) should be fully utilised. This should apply to text as well as graphics.

Hierachy / Fields
  In composing the images on the page, give consideration to the hierarchy, with the largest being the focus or most important, other images are seen as complimentary.
  Alternatively you may wish to give equal importance to each image and create a field of equally sized images in an order arrangement

Use of White Space

Never be afraid of white space on the page, as in the same way as space is important as an architectural quality, white space can give emphasis or balance to the images and objects on the page. A portfolio which is over crowded can become confused or lack coherence. Remember a reviewer will most likely scan the portfolio. "Less is more"

Text / Fonts

The choice of typography is an essential part of the composition in projecting a professional quality. Try to restrict these to no more than two font faces in your presentation. These should be carefully selected, as they project a lot about your personality.

Text should be legible and clear, take care about using coloured fonts and the background colour.

Labelling styles should be consistent throughout the portfolio. (Main titles, sub-tiles, headings, body text etc.)

"THE SUCCESS OF THE PORTFOLIO RELIES ON A HIGH QUALITY OF GRAPHIC COMPOSITION IN PRESENTING THE WORK"

5.
TOP TIPS

1. Be aware of your audience.
2. Consider on-Line Portfolio Platforms.
3. Select your best work at start and end of portfolio.
4. Include Group or Team Work.
5. Pay attention to graphics, fonts and spelling.
6. Utilise your drawing and graphic skills.
7. Don't be afraid of the 'blank space'
8. Less is more
9. Know your message.
10. Be honest

Wang Hongmeng - ARC304 XJTLU ARD Year Book (2018-19)

6.
FURTHER GUIDANCE

The following references provide further helpful advice and guidance on putting together the portfolio, together with some examples:

https://www.arch2o.com/tips-winning-architecture-portfolio/

https://www.archisoup.com/architecture-portfolio-guide

https://blog.buildllc.com/2014/04/a-students-guide-to-the-architectural-portfolio/

https://youngarchitect.com/2016/08/09/the-definitive-guide-to-an-epic-architecture-portfolio-part-i/

https://issuu.com/utsoa/docs/prp_portfolio_guide_online_revised

https://archipreneur.com/5-top-tips-creating-great-architecture-portfolio/

https://www.firstinarchitecture.co.uk/portfolio-tips-for-architecture-students/

https://www.lifeofanarchitect.com/architectural-portfolios/

https://www.ncarb.org/blog/how-to-build-online-architecture-portfolio-4-steps

https://www.archdaily.com/780996/12-tips-on-making-an-architecture-portfolio

https://www.pinterest.co.uk/1starchitecture/architecture-portfolio/

Lokko, Lesley (2003) The Portfolio - An Architecture Student's Handbook Architectural Press (ISBN 0 7506 57642)