

Creating a portfolio for study – Art and Design

A good portfolio is essential for getting you on the course of your choice, so anything you can do to keep it fresh and exciting will improve your chances of being accepted.

If possible it's helpful, but rarely essential, to have two versions—a physical one that you can carry around with you and a website version that can be easily accessed on the internet. Keep aware of the nature of the course you are intending to study - the more technological focus it has, the better to have an online portfolio.

With academic applications, the best thing to do is talk to your current tutors and the admissions tutors that will be looking at your portfolio at interview. Academics will probably want to see originals of your work, rather than copies, but don't try to second guess what they want - phone, email or ask at open days for portfolio guidelines. Some institutions also give guidance on their websites. Ask what size, format, and number of pieces they prefer.

Contents

- Be selective and include your best pieces. Don't overload the portfolio with irrelevant or poor examples but make sure there is enough artwork to show the breadth of your skills, relevant to the course you are targeting. They will want to see completed projects which include your sketch books and development pieces so you can talk through your ideas and show how you arrived at a final piece of work, particularly in design subjects. You should also include related written work.
- You should be comfortable explaining your work, stating your influences, current trends, historical context and an understanding of how these relate to your work.
- Tutors will want to see variation, your individual exploration and experimentation.
- Make your portfolio relevant to the course you are applying. They will not be expecting you to be an expert in your chosen field but will expect you to demonstrate an understanding of the subject, enthusiasm, creativity and potential.

Presentation

- Generally it is a good idea to take time to mount things properly. Presentation can count so invest in some good mounting or displaying materials, and learn how to use them properly if you decide to do this.
- Before mounting anything, play with the layout and arrange things carefully on the page. Get inspiration from art books with interesting layouts.
- Make sure there are no loose sheets that will fall out.
- Put your work in a logical sequence - ideally the tutors should be able to 'read the story' in your portfolio, see how you move from one idea to the next and how you develop your work in themes.
- Always include full information about each piece of art you are including: the title of the piece (make one up if you need to); the project brief or what you were trying to achieve; the medium used; and when the piece was completed.
- Add a table of contents so tutors can easily find different projects.

Contact details

Put your contact details on the front cover and spine of the portfolio and include: name; address including postcode; telephone numbers and times to call; email address and website address if it shows good examples of your work.

Common themes

There are common themes across art based subject areas which should not be neglected:

- Good drawing skills (life drawing, still life illustration and imagination) are particularly important to most subjects.
- Ability to draft something sensitively or with great strength and demonstrate composition skills.
- Include photographs which give tutors an idea of your “eye” for a strong image and ability to frame an image - this is especially important for any 3D work you have completed.
- Examples of collaborative work are useful and you should clearly explain your particular role in the piece and the overall aims of the work.

Subject specific considerations

- **Fine art**
Portfolios should show your basic skills in a range of media and your use of different techniques. You can apply this to the course you want to go on to study - what materials will you be using? As well as your basic skills they will be looking at how you develop ideas. Self-initiation and research are important and you will need to explain your choices in making a piece of work. You should also be able to demonstrate some knowledge of historical and contemporary context.
- **Graphic design**
Any course which lists typography as a subject area will be likely want to see typography samples. Graphics portfolios will possibly also require illustrations, photography, branding projects etc. depending on the course focus. Being able to demonstrate an understanding of colour, evidence of use or understanding of industry-relevant software (photo manipulation etc.) will also help. You should have an awareness of the impact of the medium and its use in the world around you. In addition you should be able to talk coherently about your work and the work of artists / graphic designers you admire.
- **Fashion**
For these portfolios you will probably need to show drawings & illustrations of work. Tutors will be looking for your personality and influences and will expect you to be able to explain how this gives direction to your work. Use work you have initiated - it is important to show you have a passion that goes beyond your current course. You may want to show fabrics to illustrate how you make choices for garment colours, textures and patterns.

- **Other design courses**

Theatre Arts, Model making, Product, 3D, Interior, Architecture or craft base courses will require you to show some understanding of materials and technologies applicable to your course choice, along with proof you have followed a design process in making conscious decisions for the pieces of work you present. You will also need to demonstrate basic modelling skills, drawing and understanding of colour. Have an idea about what you want to achieve and what influences your work. Photography is useful in these areas, not only to show your ability but because you may not be able to take models or big pieces of work - make sure you include good quality images.

- **Animation / Games Design**

Your portfolio will need to show basic skills like life drawing, a use of different drawing media over a variety of techniques and an understanding of colour. More specific skills to demonstrate include evidence of sequencing or pattern (drawing and prints of things in a changing state) and narrative or storytelling, preferably as a storyboard or comic strip. Try and show your confident use of IT and a basic understanding of the software used in the industry (they are not looking for professionals but for understanding and interest). You should be able to talk about your work, influences and other work you admire. Any form of animation or game play you have produced would be very helpful – include an edited show reel if possible.