The portfolio is a culminating exercise that not only demonstrates every single skill a student learns in her program and at the caliber at which she performs but is also useful to the student once the class has ended. — Michel

I was very surprised at the amount of creativity that went into developing the portfolios. They aren't just collections of various projects; they're a reflection of the people who created them. — Brian D.

Nanette

I have learned that a portfolio is a unique expression and a collection of someone's work. — Nanette

INTRODUCTION

Like the students just quoted, you will come to understand your professional identity and how to create a distinctive professional portfolio. Before you create your own portfolio, it is important to place the idea of portfolios in a larger context. To provide this context, Chapter 1 covers the following topics:

- What is a portfolio?
- What do all portfolios have in common?
- Why consider portfolios?
- Portfolios and career professionals
- Portfolios and technical and professional communicators
- Types of portfolios
- Portfolio formats
- Organizational strategies
- Analyzing portfolios

The information in Chapter 1 describes portfolios in terms of what they are and how they can function in your professional life.

WHAT IS A PORTFOLIO?

In recent years the term “portfolio” has been used in many different contexts and situations. Educators have recognized the value of evaluating students in terms of their overall performance and their ability to articulate and demonstrate their skills through portfolios. Professionals use portfolios for purposes such as job searching, performance evaluation, and client presentation. As a job-search tool, a portfolio enables you to go beyond your resume and demonstrate what you can do as well as what you know. Portfolios play an important role in many fields and disciplines, from the arts and architecture to technical and professional writing. Although they have existed for several years in educational settings, portfolios are now entering the mainstream as integral tools within the educational and professional worlds. The role that portfolios play in education is constantly changing as new ideas and uses alter their form and function.
CHAPTER 1 | Understanding Professional Portfolios: An Overview

Before you begin to create your own portfolio, it is important to start with a working definition of the term. A portfolio can be defined as a distinct, representative collection of work for a particular audience and purpose. It is a comprehensive, not comprehensive, collection of your best work, an evolving collection of art and artifacts. A portfolio mirrors your professional growth and development, and that will change as you change. A portfolio presents the skills and talents that best fit the position you are applying for. A well-designed portfolio will address the following points:

- **What you did**
- **Why you did it**
- **How you did it**

Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, well-known advocates for portfolio use, note that portfolios have value because they present different writing samples created under different conditions, thus providing a more trustworthy picture of the individual's writing ability than a single writing sample. Yancey and Weiser (1997, 25-26) make the following statement: "Portfolios provide a window into the writer's thought process, and they present different writing samples created under different conditions, allowing a more exhaustive evaluation of writing ability." Kimball defines a portfolio as a "reflective collection of work" having a specific purpose and used to engage writers/professionals in active reflection and articulation of their development and learning. This reflection might take the form of a process statement, a letter of self-evaluation for a school setting, or an introduction to a professional portfolio. Kimball notes that portfolios are important because they help writers develop new ideas, new approaches, and new strategies. They provide a way to evaluate the writer's growth and development, and they create opportunities for writers to take ownership through representative selection and presentation. Kimball notes that portfolios are very important, particularly for newly minted professional communicators, because they are the only way to prove that you can deliver on the promises made during an interview.

**WHY CONSIDER PORTFOLIOS?**

Here are some of the reasons to consider portfolios:

- Portfolios create a portrait of a professional writer within a particular context such as a class, program, profession, or organization.
- Portfolios encourage professional writers to shape their writing for multiple purposes and audiences.
- Portfolios give professional writers choices in how to present themselves and, in turn, provide a stronger sense of ownership of their work.
- Portfolios help professional writers articulate their learning through reflective practices and statements.

**WHAT DO ALL PORTFOLIOS HAVE IN COMMON?**

Many educational theorists support the use of portfolios throughout education and in the job market. The following statements reflect general assumptions that these theorists and practitioners have in common portfolios. Portfolios have been used for roughly 20 years in some professional fields because they are an important career tool. This section comments briefly on how the following professions use portfolios:

- **Architects**
- **Graphic designers**
- **Teachers**
- **Engineers**

**Architects**

Architects often create design portfolios that focus on architectural renderings, landscape designs, or environmental designs. These design portfolios can be used in a variety of situations, including employment interviews, grant applications, or applications to graduate school. As Linton notes, graduate schools of design often require portfolios as part of their admission packets (Linton 2003, 14).

**Graphic designers**

Graphic designers have used portfolios for many years. A reputable institute in Atlanta, for example, requires that its design major students, video production majors, and digital media production majors create portfolios to show potential employers.

**Teachers**

Teachers are often required to create assessment portfolios for promotion and tenure, and student teachers often create portfolios to use during their job search. Teaching portfolios may include the following documents:

- A statement of the candidate's teaching philosophy and goals
- Lesson plans and handouts
- Graded student work
- Videotapes of classroom teaching
- Reflective narratives on teaching performance

**Engineers**

While the primary audiences for this book are technical and professional communicators or those pursuing a minor or concentration in either of these two areas, you may be an engineering major who understands the important role that effective communication skills will play in your career. Portfolios are now being used as assessment tools in engineering programs throughout the country, and this practice is likely to continue. As Scott and Plumb (2000) note in "Using Portfolios to Evaluate Service Courses as Part of an Engineering Writing Program," the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) 2000 criteria require engineering programs to document that their graduates have the ability to communicate effectively (Scott and Plumb 1999, 337-38). For example, the University of Washington's College of Engineering has established an extensive...
PORTFOLIOS AND TECHNICAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATORS

As noted earlier, portfolios are not new. However, they are relatively new to the technical and professional communication fields. A decade ago, job descriptions for professional communicators emphasized excellent writing and editing skills supplemented by the ability to present technical information. In a format readily understood by non-technical users. To demonstrate these skills, technical and professional communicators brought some writing samples, often collected in a clattered briefcase or tattered manila folder, to the interview. Because such samples cannot present a clear picture of your talents and skill sets, they cannot market your strengths effectively. If you have experience with different types of computer programs, such as RoboHelp, Dreamweaver, PageMaker, Flash, FrameMaker, or Illustrator, include in your portfolio artifacts that show your knowledge of them. Table 1.1 provides examples of documents that might appear in some of the technical and professional communication fields.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of Technical and Professional Communication</th>
<th>Possible Portfolio Documents</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Writer and Technical Editor</td>
<td>A range of documents including marketing pieces, research reports, press releases, proposals, and user documentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Designer</td>
<td>A range of stand-alone graphics (e.g., photos, Web pages, line drawings) created with tools like Photoshop, Illustrator, Flash, and Dreamweaver. Also include documents using spot color and graphic features—fonts, background graphics, and color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia Developer</td>
<td>A CD or URL with sample multimedia projects supporting different project goals (e.g., training, information sharing, marketing). A storyboard or storyboards showing project design. Emphasize sound, text, graphics, and motion working together. Include streaming video clips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video Producer</td>
<td>A variety of print and electronic documents showing how you can design messages for different audiences. Pieces might include press releases, a homepage for a hypothetical company, business letters, brochures, logos, and business cards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Design</td>
<td>For instructional design, you might focus on an interactive training tutorial, a set of instructional objectives, assessment materials, or sample exercises. You may want to include a script for a training manual, a video of a training session you taught, or a PowerPoint presentation used during a training session.</td>
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<th>TYPES OF PORTFOLIOS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Based on their content and use, portfolios can be classified into four types:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working portfolios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic portfolios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment portfolios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional portfolios</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Working Portfolio |
| A working portfolio is exactly that—a portfolio in its roughest form, an informal loose collection of artifacts that you have created for various reasons. It is formed during your writing course, degree program, or career. This portfolio might include working drafts, invention exercises, and process statements. Because a working portfolio is a repository for a wide range of documents, it is often a large collection of work that is not organized according to any set criteria or genre. It may contain, among other things, poems, drawings, stories, reports, multimedia pieces, and graphics. Often these pieces will need significant revision. The primary audience for a working portfolio is you, the author of the documents, and perhaps a teacher or mentor who may help you select and group documents according to some preliminary plan. |
A working portfolio holds the raw material for the other types of portfolios. If you are just beginning your academic studies in technical or professional communication, you should start creating your working portfolio early and add to it something from each course in your major. You may want to create an electronic folder called a "working portfolio" and use it to collect your documents. Try to keep all paper and electronic artifacts you will have an extensive resource to draw from when you create an academic and/or professional portfolio at a later date. Always create several backup copies of electronic artifacts to protect against loss or corrupted files.

**Academic portfolio**

An academic portfolio is a collection of your work for one or more courses and demonstrates your growth and development in relation to a particular subject. It is generally used for response and evaluation purposes in the classroom. If you took a foundations of graphics course where you created several graphics using different software, such as Adobe Photoshop or Adobe Illustrator, you may want to save these artifacts in an academic portfolio labeled "Foundations of Graphics." An academic portfolio may contain suggested revision from your teachers and perhaps even your peers. You may be required to create an academic portfolio for a senior capstone course such as a project portfolio course. A portfolio created for a senior capstone course may be a retrospective collection of work you've created throughout your academic life showing your growth and development as a professional communicator.

Your academic portfolio may also include artifacts that you have created during an internship, co-op job, or other jobs that you may have had while pursuing your degree. If the work, such as a chapter from a software manual or a brochure, is content sensitive or contains proprietary information, you should get permission to include it in your academic portfolio. Intellectual property issues are discussed at length in Chapter 6.

Because more and more academic institutions are now using portfolios as one way of measuring student achievement, there are a number of portfolio sites that can be viewed from university and college Web sites. You may want to search several different websites to view a variety of academic portfolios. Appendix A lists some sample sites.

**Assessment portfolio**

Assessment portfolios are common in academic settings and are used by students and teachers alike. They represent your efforts to shape your work for particular audiences and purposes, allowing you to demonstrate and articulate learning and performance by showcasing your work. This might be a selection of your best, revised works or an overview of your total work in a class or program. These portfolios are generally used for evaluation (both formative and summative) to assess work on a particular project or during a specific time period. A student assessment portfolio is a systematic collection of student work measured against predetermined scoring criteria such as rubrics, checklists, or rating scales (Gomer 2000, 1). Representative work in this type of portfolio might include writing samples, solutions to math problems, showing problem-solving skills, lab reports to demonstrate an understanding of engineering principles, and social science research to demonstrate an awareness of different research methods.

A teacher assessment portfolio, like a student assessment portfolio, contains a wide range of documents demonstrating that the abilities, experiences, and evidence of teaching excellence. These documents might include a statement of teaching goals, lesson plans, handouts, graded student work, and evidence of professional development. Public school or university administrations may use this portfolio to measure the performance of a teacher who is undergoing annual or tenure review or being considered for promotion.

**Professional portfolio**

The statement "You don't get a second chance to make a good first impression" is probably familiar to you. A professional portfolio will help you make a good first impression because it is your best work in finished form. This portfolio represents your work in a professional field. It should include primarily your strongest finished products and reveal your strengths as a professional in your chosen field. It should also reflect your professional identity and goals. This portfolio can be used in the job market, for hiring purposes, performance evaluation, or as a demonstration of your work in a particular program, project, or time frame. Professional portfolios evolve over time as you gain different work experiences. Recent, more professional work often takes the place of earlier student or entry-level work to reflect changes in your professional life.

Commenting on the impact that his professional portfolio had at an interview, Brian D., a recent graduate of a technical and professional communication program, noted: "A good resume and cover letter will get you in the door. A good portfolio can set you apart from other candidates and will get you the job." You will want to include the work that you are proudest of, but remember that your professional portfolio, as noted earlier in this chapter and discussed in detail in Chapter 3, should be a representative selection of your best work rather than a comprehensive collection of all the documents you have ever designed or created. While the number of pieces that you should include in a professional portfolio is not fixed, you will want to document a range of skills. You may decide to include as many as 10 to 15 pieces of your best work, particularly if you have little or no related job experience on your resume and are interviewing for your first job as a professional communicator.

One of the primary functions of a professional portfolio is to validate the information on your resume, since many interviewers today are skeptical about the claims made on resumes. A well-designed professional portfolio can help answer questions that a resume may raise by clearly identifying who you are, what you have done, and what you can do for a particular employer.

Professional portfolios are also widely used for performance reviews, in promotion packages, and, if you have a consulting business, in marketing your business to prospective clients. Table 1.2 summarizes the distinguishing features of each of these portfolios. While commenting on a recent promotion to technical writer, Amy notes that "part of what got me the job was showing them the portfolio I had created at school and had

<table>
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<th>Types of Portfolios</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Working Portfolio</td>
<td>A loose collection of artifacts consisting mainly of unrevised work. It lacks any clear organization and contains the raw material for other types of portfolios. The primary audiences are the writer and perhaps a teacher or mentor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Portfolio</td>
<td>A collection of artifacts often grouped by course content or genre. This portfolio contains selected pieces from a working portfolio designed to show the writer's development as a technical and professional communicator. Selected pieces often include documents with teachers' and peers' comments. The primary audiences are the writer and his or her teachers, parents, and friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Portfolio</td>
<td>A representative collection of pieces used to formally evaluate a student's performance according to specified learning outcomes or a teacher's effectiveness according to predetermined criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Portfolio</td>
<td>A collection of the writer's best work in final form that can be viewed in one or more formats (paper, CD, or Web-related). Work should be representative pieces rather than a comprehensive collection that serve as examples of skills, tools, and experience claimed on the resume. The primary audiences are the interviewee, potential client, or supervisor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
updated with the small amount of technical writing I had completed while working at my old position within the company. In your professional portfolio, you may even want to include a brochure that markets you as a professional communicator.

Your professional portfolio should have a welcome page or introduction that explains the purpose of the portfolio, tips on how to view it (if it is in electronic form), and any unifying design feature such as a metaphor or theme that you have used as a nonprint unifying principle for the artifacts in the portfolio. Various kinds of metaphors and tips on how to use them effectively in portfolios are discussed at length in Chapter 3. In addition, there are thousands of Web sites that you can visit to view different types of professional portfolios or get tips on how to create your own. To view a wide range of portfolios within the field of professional communication, you should develop a list of search terms to use, perhaps through a search engine like KartOO, to view professional portfolios in the fields included under the umbrella term "technical and professional communication." Sample search terms include the following:

- Portfolios and professional communication
- Portfolios and student samples
- Portfolios and multimedia skills
- Digital portfolios and advertising

PORTFOLIO FORMATS

Paper portfolio

While the digital portfolio may be your preferred format, it would be wise to have your portfolio available in both a digital and a paper format. A paper portfolio is very useful when you are interviewing in person, meeting a client, or preparing for a promotion. This portfolio is one that you carry with you. Generally, work is placed in an oversized notebook or leather-bound, zippered case. Figure 1.1 shows Joy's portfolio in its zippered case. Artifacts are usually displayed on large pieces of paper protected by sheet covers. In many cases, they consist of original documents and can provide a visual and tactile presence. It is best to use this type of portfolio during interviews, presentations (for consultants), and performance reviews. Figure 1.2 shows sample pages from a paper portfolio.

A paper portfolio, generally housed in a zipped binder, is easy to tailor for the specific job requirements of the employer. You may want to include multiple copies of your resume so that you can leave a copy behind after the interview. While your paper portfolio should be representative rather than comprehensive, your versatility should be emphasized by showing your full range of skills. For long documents like manuals and formal proposals, include a complete table of contents supported by a few representative pages from the document. If the job calls for a particular document skill, you may want to include a smaller segment of the manual or proposal as an attachment.

Advantages of the paper portfolio. A major advantage of the paper or hard copy portfolio is that it allows you to structure the interview even if the interviewer hasn't asked you to bring a portfolio. Paper portfolios work best in face-to-face settings because they provide talking points and the ability to focus the discussion in ways that are not necessarily linear. For example, they allow you to skip around and emphasize one skill over another as the conversation grows. They also provide more control during interviews as you come to the table ready to talk about and show your work. Chapter 9 discusses in detail how to present the portfolio during the interview. You may want to include a brief summary statement for each piece that notes why that piece was selected for the portfolio, the audience for it, and any skills or tools used to create the piece that clearly match the job requirements. Some candidates also include a compact disc version of their portfolios in a cellophane (acetate) pocket at the front or back of the paper portfolio.

Electronic or digital portfolio (e-portfolios)

More and more professional communicators are presenting their portfolios in a digital format. The electronic or digital portfolio, often posted on the Internet as a Web page or stored on a disk, is essential in our electronic world. Even in the writing-heavy professions, employers are looking for candidates who demonstrate state-of-the-art skills and basic computer literacy. One major advantage of the digital portfolio is that the format itself clearly demonstrates the high-end software tools or skills listed on the resume. In addition, a digital portfolio may be the only vehicle that can effectively display Web design and other electronic communication skills such as online help systems, clips from streaming video projects, Web sites, or even Web-based training packages.

Like the paper portfolio, the electronic version showcases your work. Unlike the paper portfolio, it will generally be viewed when you are not around. This type of portfolio is very useful because it is convenient. It can also act as a reminder or follow-up after a face-to-face meeting. It gives your audience a chance to ruminate, look more closely (and actually read documents—should they desire), and view at their own pace. It is also an inexpensive way to store your work, as it is quite costly to send out actual samples to
CHAPTER 1 | Understanding Professional Portfolios: An Overview

prospective employers or clients. (See Chapter 5 for an in-depth discussion of electronic portfolios.) There are two major formats for electronic portfolios:

- Compact disc (CD) portfolios
- Web-hosted portfolios

CD portfolio

CDs are becoming popular as a format for presenting electronic portfolios. The CD portfolio is inexpensive and easy to maintain. You can leave it behind at an interview, knowing that the cost of making another copy is minimal. CD portfolios are also easier to maintain than paper portfolios, and they allow you to display larger documents, like manuals or proposals, without adding bulk. These portfolios are easy to send and are now available in a business-card size so that you can send them or leave them behind with your business card. CD portfolio, however, must stand alone; you will not be there to present their contents. As a result, your CD portfolio probably should have more of a marketing tone or slant than your paper portfolio. Also, a potential employer may want you to send a CD portfolio in order to review your qualifications before committing to the expense of an in-person interview.

Web-hosted portfolio

Almost all the tips for CD portfolios apply to Web-hosted portfolios. Web-hosted portfolios also have some distinct advantages and disadvantages that other portfolio formats don't have.

Advantages. A Web-hosted portfolio provides the widest possible audience for marketing your qualifications and skills. Daily, millions of people surf the Internet, and some will click on your Web site. One or more of these visitors may be potential employers who, after viewing your online resume and portfolio, may invite you in for an interview. This happened to Brian D., who was contacted for an interview by an employer based exclusively on his online resume and portfolio. Brian was offered a technical writing position because he had his resume and portfolio on his Web site; the power of the Web could work to your advantage as well. Having a Web-hosted portfolio also allows you to place the Web URL on your resume, application letter, and business card. CD portfolios are becoming popular as a format for presenting electronic portfolios. The CD portfolio is free of charge, easy to maintain, and easy to send. You can even send larger documents, like manuals or proposals, without adding bulk. These portfolios are easy to send and now available in a business-card size so that you can send them or leave them behind with your business card.

Disadvantages. Of course, there is a downside. You may not want everyone to have access to your portfolio. If this is the case, you can password protect your portfolio. One of the biggest potential drawbacks to a Web-hosted portfolio may be the technology itself. A potential employer may not be able to access your portfolio when needed. As Steven Kendus notes in "Developing a Web-Based Portfolio," it is a good idea to provide the employer with your phone number or e-mail address should technical problems occur (Kendus 2002, 7). You may also want to check to see if the Web site hosting your portfolio is free from advertisements and cookies that might irritate your viewers. Once your portfolio is hosted on a Web site, test it to make sure that your links work. You may also want to use file types like pdf, doc, and ppt that will be familiar to your user.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

One of the decisions you must make about your portfolio is how to organize it. Once you look at your artifacts (the items in your portfolio) and content, you will have a better idea of how you want to arrange portfolio. Remember that your portfolio is more than just a container. It is a whole body of work linked together—a reflection of you as an individual. It will most likely have sections that demonstrate particular skills or ideas. The following organizational strategies might help you begin to shape your work (see the detailed discussion in Chapter 3):

- Chronological order
- Genre
- Subject area
- Practice to final product
- Individual and team projects
- Theme/metaphor
- Specialty concentrations

You might set up your portfolio chronologically, from oldest to newest. This structure works well if you want to emphasize progression over time.

For this structure, divide your portfolio into sections for different genres or skills—for example, report writing, creative writing, graphics, and video. Sections can stand on their own or can be viewed as a whole collection.

There might be particular subjects that you focused on in your studies or with your clients. Your portfolio sections could represent these different subject emphases. For example, one of our students chose a medical writing section and another decided to emphasize her talents as an investigative reporter. Another dedicated a section to event planning and marketing. Still another wanted to emphasize her fund-raising abilities and dedicated a section to these efforts. This is also a good way to represent a minor or a secondary interest such as management or computer science.

In the fields of writing and design, employers are looking for individuals with a keen eye on revision. Many jobs call for editing and revising skills and the ability to see a project through from beginning to end. Even if your portfolio is not arranged this way, you might consider at least a section that demonstrates these skills. For example, you might include a document before you revised it, complete with editing marks. Another possibility is to show a storyboard for a video or film or even an early version or versions of a logo or Web site design. Narratives of changes and shifts you consciously made as a writer or designer would also be of interest.

You can always arrange your work in rank order. Do not arrange it from worst to best, as you might not have time to review all the selections during an interview. Like the chronological arrangement, this structure is best for demonstrating progress over time.

Depending on your field and areas of concentration, you might choose to organize your work according to individual and team projects.

As you discover more about yourself and your professional identity (see Chapter 2), you might come up with a metaphor or theme that acts as a unifying design feature for your portfolios. This theme can then be used to divide the sections, which can then include multiple genres and organizational styles within each thematic unit (see Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion on theme/metaphor).

Some people have a stand-alone (or insertable) portfolio that covers a specialty area. This structure works best for people with highly specialized skills. Some of our students created two separate portfolios: one that was more general and one focused on a particular skill set or objective. You can always, of course, rearrange the documents in a single portfolio to call attention to a specialty that you want to emphasize.
TABLE 1.3 Summary of Organizational Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description and Benefit(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronological Order</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are arranged from oldest to newest. Benefit: Emphasizes development as a professional communicator over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are grouped by type or category (e.g., report writing, creative writing, graphics, Web documents). Benefit: Stresses a collection of related pieces that can be viewed as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Area</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are grouped by subject area (e.g., medical writing pieces, user support documents, fund-raising pieces, or pieces pertaining to a subject concentration or minor). Benefit: Pieces that have a related application are placed together so that they can be reviewed as a whole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice to Final Product</td>
<td>Various designs, drafts, and storyboards are sequenced to show how a document evolves from concept to final form. Benefit: Emphasizes project development, editing, and revising skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank Order</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are arranged according to quality. Strongest pieces are placed first, including any work that was published or won an award. Benefit: Showcases the best work early in the portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual and Team Projects</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are organized as either team or individual projects. Benefit: Emphasizes the ability to work well on a team and the writer's individual strengths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme/Metaphor</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are linked by theme or metaphor. Benefit: Provides a consistent look and feel to what otherwise might be viewed as a collection of unrelated pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialty Concentrations</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are organized into different portfolios or portfolio sections to emphasize specialized skill sets. Benefit: Allows the writer to develop a general portfolio and a more specialized portfolio or portfolio insert to be used as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertext Links</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are presented as a multidimensional structure with links to documents both within and outside the portfolio. Benefit: Showcases high-end tools or a different set of design elements and permits display of big documents without adding bulk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination</td>
<td>Portfolio pieces are arranged using more than one organizational strategy in order to best display the work. Benefit: Creates freedom to use a variety of organizational approaches to showcase abilities and skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 1: Understanding Professional Portfolios: An Overview

Hypertext links (electronic)

As with all writing and composing processes, there is no one right way to approach the task of creating your portfolios. We present the ideas in this book as guidelines and hope that you will find your own way to structure your portfolios—a reflection of your individual professional identity. As you will see, our students have found many interesting, productive ways to interpret this task; we are happy that they agreed to share their perspectives and experiences. It is through these varied experiences and products that we have formed our own working definition of portfolios. We can introduce you to the theory and methods of design and creation, but it is up to you to apply them to your own work and vision. It always helps to ground theory in reality. We asked our students to familiarize themselves with different kinds of portfolios along with strategies in designing portfolios. They completed this task through an analytical exercise in which they had to find and reflect on online portfolios. We asked them to look for patterns, themes, and approaches, and as well to consider the rhetorical elements of the portfolios and explore issues such as style, editing, organization, audience, and voice. We also asked them to consider the technological and visual dimensions as they analyzed graphics, color, and visual appeal.

We have included some of their responses to this assignment to show you the ways in which they read and compared the samples they chose to analyze. It is important that you conduct this kind of search in order to understand what is happening in the field at the moment because technical and professional communication is a dynamic profession where things are always changing and technology is quickly outdated. Notice the ways in which these students begin to shape their ideas and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the portfolios they reviewed.

We start with a sequence of comments from Miranda to show the ways in which this student built upon her ideas as she searched. We follow this sequence with a more random list of tips and observations from other students as they analyzed the sites. Miranda's initial comments on a technical writer's electronic portfolio that she viewed ranged from design to organization to graphics:

I like the clean look of the portfolio, particularly the thumbnails. I also like that he included references to pieces that he could not show on the Internet, with an explanation that he could show the "classified" piece in person. That intrigued me. I like the bold choice of colors. The blue background isn't too overpowering.

She notices other issues and design elements as she reads several samples and begins to compare them, such as thumbnail explanations and layout:

The picture of him in the banner is a little large and scary. He's a good-looking guy, but the cutoff at the neck looks awkward and his skin tone seems too red. I also think there is too much space on the page between the thumbnails and their explanations.
CHAPTER 1  |  Understanding Professional Portfolios: An Overview

Her analysis brings up small issues like the use of a personal picture on an electronic site. Notice the ways that Miranda creates questions for herself as she begins to identify what she likes and dislikes about each portfolio. This early analysis is very open—she is just absorbing and processing what she sees and thinks.

Through her search she realizes that she likes a "sleek portfolio" with "soothing" colors. She also liked the subtle way one author chose to include a French version of her resume to "showcase the fact that she's bilingu-
gal as well, without being too pretentious." In addition, she noted that this author's e-mail address ap-
peared on every page—a simple but effective strategy she decides to incorporate into her own portfolio.

You can see Miranda responding to design elements, as she records her overall impression of the sites:

Light gray for some fonts is too light on the white background. The text size doesn't change with the browser.

The next four students commented on organizational strategies:

Brian D.
Sarah
Nanette
Tom

Finally, Nanette and Tom also had comments about the portfolio's graphic design features:

The teacher's portfolio was different from the artist's portfolio because she was displaying more text
assignments instead of paintings. Nanette

Unfortunately, the images in each student's portfolio are tiny JPEGs, and it is impossible to read most of each
ad. One can get a fair impression of the quality of a piece by reading the headline and viewing the graphic. Tom
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Assignment 4: Analyzing Types of Portfolios

Based on this chapter's content, what type of portfolio is best described by each of the following four scenarios?

SCENARIO 1

Noreen, majoring in international and technical communication, has created a portfolio in a folder on her desktop that contains all of her creative writings and drawings. Her portfolio also contains a PowerPoint presentation about Mexico that she created for a social science course and a letter written for her business communication class that she has since translated into Spanish. Her portfolio also contains several drafts of an article she is writing for an environmental science class.

SCENARIO 2

Chris is majoring in digital media and will graduate in 2 months. He wants his portfolio to emphasize the high-end tools and skills that he has learned in his courses. In addition to his digital portfolio, he will create a CD to showcase his high-end digital media projects. Chris has decided to include on his CD, among other projects, screen captures of a website he created during an internship and streaming video he shot for a multimedia presentation. His portfolio also includes a finished article he wrote for his journalism class and a revised chapter from a software documentation manual that he coauthored.

SCENARIO 3

Sarah is taking a graphics course and must submit a portfolio as her final exam. Her portfolio includes a photo essay, many different business graphics, a creative resume that combines text and graphics, and several pieces that have different typographical elements such as dropped capital letters and pulled quotations.

SCENARIO 4

As a graduation requirement for his architecture program, Mark must submit a design portfolio that demonstrates what he has learned in his 4-year major courses. The portfolio must include a cover, a table of contents, a design statement, and several design projects. It will be reviewed by two of his architecture professors, two architects from a local architecture firm, and a civil engineer. Mark decides to include an Auto Cad rendering of the new Waterloo Visitors Center where he worked part-time, a two-dimensional drawing in black and white to show high contrast, several high-quality photos, and a three-dimensional model of the Visitors Center, and a four-color marketing brochure promoting the local architectural firms he interned with this past summer.

REFERENCES

Kendis, Steven M. “Developing a Web-Based Portfolio.” Intercom 49, no. 9 (November 2002): 4-7.

APPENDIX A: SELECTED WEBSITES WITH SAMPLE STUDENT PORTFOLIOS

College of Education, University of Florida Student Samples
http://www.coe.ufl.edu/Students/portfolio/examples/examples.htm

East Carolina University College of Education Department of Library Science and Instructional Technology Instructional Technology Student Portfolio
http://lib.coe.ecu.edu/it/Portfolios

Elon University, Elon, NC
Student Portfolios
http://www.elon.edu/students/portfolio/

Humanities and Technical Communication Department

Southern Polytechnic State University
http://www.spsu.edu/htc/homelndergrad prog.htm

ericola Minnesota
http://www.epi.coe.com/index.asp

Kalamazoo College Outstanding Portfolios
http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolios/outstanding.htm

Maricopa Community Colleges: Electronic Portfolio Examples
http://www.mctc.maricopa.edu/ed/reportof/etemos.php

Skidmore College Career Services Online Portfolio Center
http://www.skidmore.edu/administration/career/resume/portfolio.html

The Portfolio Clearinghouse
http://www.aahe.org/teaching/portfolio_db.htm

Texas Tech College of Education Digital Portfolio Pilot Project
http://www.educ.ttu.edu/portfolio