How to plan a portfolio

Once you have considered the goals and objectives of your portfolio, defined an audience for your portfolio, and chosen a portfolio format, you are ready to plan your portfolio content, design, and flow. Use the following best practices to help you in the planning process.

Portfolio content selection and design

When looking through your work for a term or over the entire course, consider the content and design of your portfolios.

Content:

- What is the purpose of the portfolio? How does the purpose affect the type of content you should include?

- Who is the intended audience for the portfolio? How does the audience affect the type of content you should include? Can you identify any gaps in the available content?

- Consider how you expect a portfolio to change over time or how you might create several versions of the portfolio to accommodate different audiences.

- If you have an existing portfolio, is the current content relevant to the purpose and audience? If not, what should you remove and what other projects should you include?

- Does the portfolio have a narrative? What story is this collection of projects, media, and content trying to tell? Should content be presented in a particular order?

- Where will the portfolio live? If the portfolio will be posted to a website that can be accessed publicly by anyone, take into account government regulations, school policies, and best practices with regard to your personal identification and information. It's appropriate to consider what personal information to include or exclude, since a portfolio may be forwarded by e-mail to unknown individuals.

- Is the language level appropriate for your intended audience?

- Does the portfolio written content have any spelling errors, punctuation errors, or grammatical errors?

Design:

- Uniformity and Consistency: Are elements repeated on content pages to help identify the portfolio as complete? What attributes of the portfolio maintain or violate consistency?

- Universal navigation: Where is the main navigation for the portfolio located, and does it appear universally?

- Layout: Is the layout logical, or do elements appear to be placed randomly?

- Links: Are links labeled clearly?

- Usability: Are portfolio visitors able to find information easily? If online, does the portfolio load quickly?

- Readability: Is there formatting that improves or reduces readability?

- Accessibility: Are all images labeled with alternative text (Alt tags)? Are the text and titles clear and easy to read for all viewers (color, size, and so on)? What features can or cannot be read by screen readers?

- Interactive media: How can interactive media be used to enhance the portfolio? Should interactive media be incorporated into the design of the portfolio?

- Because a portfolio constantly evolves, be sure you plan the portfolio structure to allow for easy changes and additions.

Creating a portfolio flowchart

Planning a design project by using information architecture is a common practice for professional designers. Designers create a flowchart that shows all the content and/or pages in a project and how they connect. The flowchart can also describe the purpose and audience for a project and provide organized lists of content. Flowcharts can be especially helpful when creating a portfolio. Once you determine the above content and design details for your portfolio, it is best to create a flowchart that shows the organization and content of the work you want to include in your portfolio. It is recommended when creating your flowchart to include the following:

- Describe the purpose of the portfolio.

- Include a list of assets in the portfolio, and organize files and projects into categories.

- Using your category outline as a guide, draw a flowchart for your portfolio

Types of portfolios and flowchart examples

Student portfolios typically contain examples of work as well as text descriptions and reflections on each piece. Depending on the goals of and the audience for the portfolio, there are three types of portfolios that students typically use: a showcase portfolio, a skill growth portfolio, and a project progress portfolio. Examples of flowcharts for these three types follow.

Showcase portfolio

A showcase portfolio highlights its owner's expertise by showing examples of best work. A student showcase would include a selection of finished images, designs, and projects. It might also provide a reflection in the piece or document of the process you followed to create it. Following is a sample category outline with associated files:
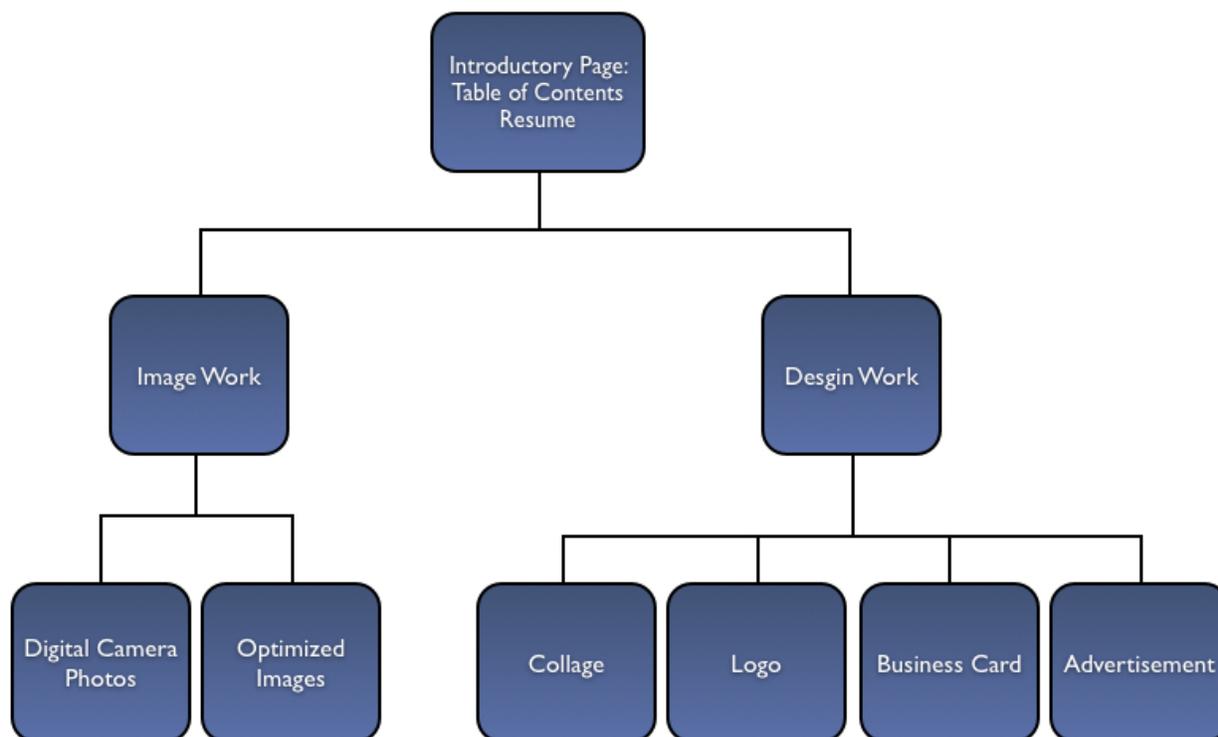
Image work

- Digital camera photographs
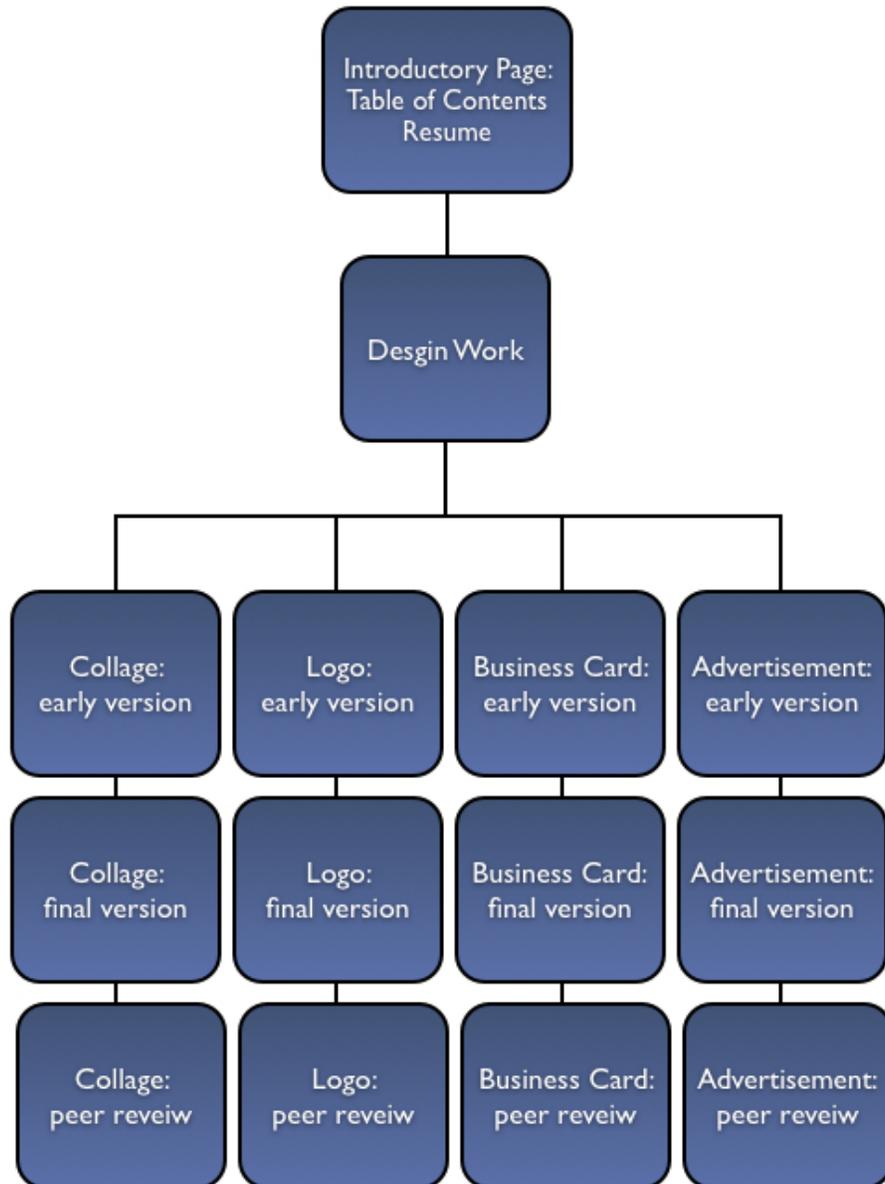- Optimized images

Design work

- Examples of design comps, wireframes, and so on.
- Examples of finished projects

This is a sample flowchart for a showcase portfolio:

Skill growth portfolio

A skill growth portfolio shows multiple samples of work in the same project to demonstrate increasing skill. For example, you could include several versions a project to show how the design evolved. This portfolio can also include reflection and discussion of redesigns. Following is a sample category outline for a print portfolio:

```
                          ┌─────────────────────┐
                          │  Introductory Page: │
                          │  Table of Contents  │
                          │       Resume        │
                          └─────────────────────┘
                                    │
                          ┌─────────────────────┐
                          │    Desgin Work      │
                          └─────────────────────┘
```

Collage: early version	Logo: early version	Business Card: early version	Advertisement: early version
Collage: final version	Logo: final version	Business Card: final version	Advertisement: final version
Collage: peer reveiw	Logo: peer reveiw	Business Card: peer reveiw	Advertisement: peer reveiw

Project progress portfolio

A project progress portfolio contains a more complete selection of work around a particular project. The portfolio reflects the span of work done on a project-showing stages from early ideas to completion. An example would be to show all the work you did while learning about particular product or skills. The portfolio would include design documents, early versions, final versions, peer review, and self-review. For this portfolio type, you will usually need to scan worksheets and other sketches and handwritten documents to create web-ready versions.