

Graduate School of Language and Educational Linguistics

## HOW TO PREPARE A PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO FOR JOB INTERVIEWS

By Sandre Cunha

Believe it or not, employers worry about making a wrong choice when hiring new employees. Using a professional portfolio can work wonders in an interview by providing concrete evidence of the experience and skills you are striving to articulate. Like the program portfolio, the professional portfolio is a collection of materials organized to present your accomplishments and individuality, but in a much more concise and “businesslike” way. A professional portfolio is a tool you can use to enhance your self-marketing efforts, and should creatively reflect your unique talents and teaching philosophy.

Specifically, the interview portfolio:

Helps reduce your anxiety by preparing an interview "script."

- Offers you some control of the interview.
- Demonstrates your professional intention, preparation and serious interest in the job.
- Demonstrates your experience in critical knowledge areas, plus your creativity, individuality and organizational skills.
- Adds a visual dimension to your interview, making it easier for the interviewer to recall you from other candidates.

### CONTENT

The portfolio is not meant to stand-alone; it is a tool to help you illustrate the points you want to make in your job interview. One of the keys to creating a successful professional portfolio is to concentrate on the visual appeal. In this regard, a 20-page curriculum design project would not be the best artifact choice. A chart illustrating the design, plus a sample lesson and photos of the students engaged in an activity would be much more effective for use in an interview. Focus on the areas you want to emphasize, such as testing, teaching of writing, curriculum design, computer assisted instruction, or whatever you consider your specialty to be. Be ruthless and include only your best work. There is no point in illustrating the ordinary.

If You Have a Program Portfolio...

You have a wealth of material already prepared. Now your task will be reviewing and winnowing it down to a reasonable size. Begin by considering the job(s) for which you will be applying. One of the advantageous points about a portfolio is that you can easily change the pages, depending on the impression you want to support. Evaluate what you have to offer related to each particular job and choose the supporting documents accordingly.

If You Don't Have a Program Portfolio...

Your task will be a little harder, as you will have to collect and generate the necessary documentation for the skills and experience you want to showcase. A good way to begin is by reviewing your CV or resume for particular experiences which have documentation or which resulted in a tangible artifact, such as a lesson plan or a certificate.

## **ORGANIZATION**

Although the professional portfolio does not have to follow a proscribed structure in the way the program portfolio does, it is a good idea to spend some time plotting out the best arrangement of your material for each interview. You can be creative in the organization of your portfolio. The particular method you choose for organizing your portfolio is not as important as the fact that it is organized. A few ways to consider are:

- Functionally – according to requirements of the job
- Thematically – showing variety within a specialization
- Chronologically – to show development and breadth of experience

## **PRESENTATION**

No matter how you decide to organize your portfolio, choose a way that will make it easy for you to find what you need, when you need it. Fumbling through the pages in the middle of the interview destroys the professional quality of your presentation. A well-organized portfolio is labeled and indexed, so everything is easy to locate quickly.

You want to make the best presentation possible, so use a portfolio which is slim and high-quality. Some people like the self-contained portfolio, in which the plastic sleeves are permanent pages. Others prefer a style with removable sleeves, to make changing or rearranging material easier. Both styles are available in a variety of widths, but a ½” or less is best. You may want to use dividers to separate sections or categories. Dividers with tabs you can label are the most useful for locating items quickly. Most portfolios have covers that can be customized; however wildly creative the interior of you portfolio, keep the cover professionally conservative.

## **PRESENTING YOUR PORTFOLIO**

Always take your portfolio to interviews and use it to support your responses. For example, the interviewer might say, "I see that you have customized the curriculum for several of your business students. What sort of assignments did you give them?" You might reply, "Yes, here is one of my favorite lesson plans (turn to the appropriate section of your portfolio and show it to the interviewer while you continue talking about it – what the students' special needs were, how you developed it, why it was effective, and so on).

Always customize your portfolio for every interview by changing or rearranging items for the most effective presentation. While doing this, plan ahead for the times when you don't have time to sufficiently display your portfolio or when you are asked to leave it with the interviewer(s). Take extra copies of important items and consider having an inexpensive version your portfolio that you can leave behind. It goes nearly without saying that you should never leave behind original materials, or those of which you only have one copy.

**Remember: Not every candidate comes to the interview with portfolio in hand, so the very fact that you intend to compile a portfolio gives you an edge.**

## **INFORMATION TO CONSIDER INCLUDING**

Table of Contents (optional)

Your CV or resume - Even though you have sent one to the interviewer, you may want to have several copies with you for others who may join in the interview, or just in case...

Transcripts (official or unofficial)

A list of references

Teaching certificates or licenses.

Conferences and workshops in which you participated.

Professional test results, such as CBEST

Certificates of awards, honors or special training.

Letters of commendation or thanks from previous employers, organizations, or leaders of volunteer projects in which you have been involved.

Letters nominating you for honors or awards.

Evaluations or summaries of student teaching, co-op or intern experiences.

Newspaper articles and photos that showcase your achievements.

Evidence of creative experience, such as brochures, presentations, or photos of displays.

Evidence of research: professional papers, presentations or research reports. For lengthy documents, a summary or abstract is sufficient.

Evidence of involvement in professional organizations or community activities: a program from an event or a special activity you planned or in which you participated.

### **Specific items for teaching positions:**

Special projects - i.e. curriculum design or teaching materials you created.

Sample syllabi, lesson plans, teaching units or tests you have prepared.

Sample assignments, along with grading rubrics.

Statement of teaching philosophy.

Pictures of bulletin boards or learning centers you designed.

Learning activity packet (or photos thereof)

Extra-curricular activities: description/photos of class field trips/student groups you advised.

Notes from students, teachers or administrators with positive comments about your work.

Photos of yourself working with students.

A videotape of you teaching a lesson (to leave, not for interview itself)

### **Specific items for administrative positions:**

Sample program budget

Grant proposals

Teacher training curriculum

Documents from the teacher selection process: ads, interview forms, selection recommendation.

Documents illustrating methods of teacher supervision and evaluation

Writing samples: include a variety, such as brochures, newsletters, articles, and memos

### **Specific items for CALL positions**

Documentation of technical or computer skills; include samples created from various software.

Outline of your website and/or sample pages from it

Guide to contents of a CD-ROM product, plus the CD itself

## **KEEP YOUR PORTFOLIO UP-TO-DATE**

Continue to revise and add information to your professional portfolio even after you get a job. Reviewing and evaluating your activities annually or each semester means you will always be prepared to seize opportunities that appear unexpectedly (promotions, as well as new jobs).

## **GET FEEDBACK**

Show your portfolio to classmates, career staff, MIIS faculty, and other teachers. Getting objective impressions is very useful in gauging the portfolio's effectiveness. Feedback from language teachers or hiring administrators is especially helpful. Professionals in the field know from first-hand and current experience, the expectations of other professionals!

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

### **Books in the Career Collection, Fletcher Jones Resource Center**

Portfolio Power, Martin Kimeldorf, Peterson's, Princeton, 1997.

The Perfect Portfolio, Marilyn Seguin, Career Press, 1991.

### **Websites**

Portfolio Library: Selected works of Martin Kimeldorf

<http://amby.com/kimeldorf/portfolio/>

SUNY Postdam - Portfolio Development

<http://www.potsdam.edu/CAREER/01B3Portfolio.html>

Creating the Ultimate Interview/Teaching Portfolio

<http://www.teachnet.com/how-to/employment/portfolios/>

Evergreen State College

<http://www.evergreen.edu/career/portfolio.html>

Florida State University Portfolio Preparation Guide

<http://www.career.fsu.edu/ccis/guides/port.html>