Professional Portfolio for the Job Search

The portfolio concept has become the cornerstone for helping students explore the development aspects of learning and career development. Documenting skills, abilities, and achievements through the use of a professional portfolio will help a person be more competitive when conducting a job search. Portfolios can be collections of materials that help applicants organize their career development plans or samples that can be used to show what they have learned, produced, and accomplished. A portfolio might include samples from:

★ Educational course work taken
- curriculum
- transcripts
- certificates and diplomas
- class papers and projects—what was done and what was learned
- letters of recommendation from teachers and professors

★ Club or organization participation
- vocational education clubs, 4-H, scouts, and other youth groups
- civic, community, and church groups
- memberships in professional associations
- volunteer work done, such as at a hospital
- club projects—what was done and what was learned

★ Leisure time achievements
- participation in sports or other competitive events
- hobbies or arts and crafts projects

★ Actual work done
- papers written
- recording of speeches
- pictures of work, such as decorated cakes or flower arrangements
- videos of a project, such as re-building an engine

★ Credentials held
- certificates of achievement, such as first aid or CPR training
- licenses, such as driver's or occupational licenses
- certificates from national occupational associations

★ Any honors, awards, or special recognition earned
- merit badges
- ribbons and trophies
- scholarships

Have a Disability?

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) is a law that requires both business and public facilities to be handicap accessible. Some of the compliance procedures are physical and cost money, while others involve adopting new attitudes toward people with disabilities.

Some disabilities may require special accommodations. You will need to know what your limitations are and how your talents and skills fit with specific jobs. With a little research and effort, you will be on your way to gainful employment.

Get to know the job trends for the future to help determine what kinds of jobs will be available and how your particular disability fits with the future. Consult directories in your library's reference center or career guidance office for information. Check with your state rehabilitative services department. You can also contact the U.S. Department of Labor's website at www.dol.gov/odep or contact them at 866-633-7365, or TTY: 1-877-889-5627 or write to them at: U.S. Department of Labor, Frances Perkins Building, 200 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20210. Information and assistance is also available on the following websites:

USA Government	www.usa.gov
Government Benefits	www.benefits.gov
Disability Information	www.disabilityinfo.gov
Employer Assistance and Recruiting Network	www.earnworks.com

What About a Criminal Record?

Even though a criminal conviction seriously changes the lives of all involved, it seldom ends our lives unless we let it. The crisis can be turned into a positive opportunity—if it is viewed as a challenge and confronted with a strong heart.

What type of job? A criminal record may limit the type of job a person can look for and companies to which an individual can apply. Success at finding a job will be strongly influenced by the seriousness of the charge(s), how much time has passed, and the relationship of the charges to the job for which the person is applying. An employer may be reluctant to hire an individual for a job where that individual may have the opportunity to commit the same type of offense again. For example, a person would probably not get a job as a childcare worker with a record of sexual abuse, or a bank teller with a bank fraud conviction. There's no sense in applying for unrealistic careers.

Honesty. It's always best to prepare to be honest and direct about a personal history. If a criminal history is disclosed, success will depend on how well a person presents himself and deals with his/her past. Lying on an application is grounds for an employer to fire an employee. Correctional personnel are often required by law to inform a potential employer of criminal backgrounds of applicants. If a person lies in order to get a job and later the boss finds out, the employee can be fired just because (s)he lied. It's not easy or without risk to disclose a criminal history, but it is better to be honest.

Trust. A criminal conviction is a warning sign for employers, and they must decide if an applicant is a good risk. It is up to the applicant to show the employer that (s)he is truly stable and trustworthy. One way to win trust is to develop a network of supporters. Positive activity in the community, such as volunteer work, education growth, and church participation, may also help. An applicant can carry a letter of reference or a list of references but needs to make sure that permission has been given from these individuals to give out their names. References may include a parole officer, former employers, and community contacts.

What About a Substance Abuse Problem?

One positive drug test could ruin career hopes forever. It's estimated that the cost of employee drug and alcohol abuse is as high as $100 billion each year. To fight this alcohol and drug problem, corporate America is taking a strong stand to provide a drug-free workplace. Applicant and employee drug testing, for example, are now standard practices. Many companies have established policies not to hire a person who presents a positive test result indicating the use of drugs.

So what does all this mean to a job applicant? As time goes on, chances become greater and greater that applicants will be asked to take a drug test before being hired. Some employers include information about their drug policy on the application form. Others tell applicants in the first interview that drug testing is required. But no one should count on getting a warning. Some employers make no mention of drug testing in advance.

Drug testing should not be taken lightly. A positive test result, or answering "yes" to a question about drug use, may eliminate an applicant for employment. Different companies have different policies. Some may allow retesting if a test result is positive, or be more lenient towards someone who last used drugs over five years ago. But others will reject an applicant on the basis of one positive test.

Employers conduct drug screening in various ways: by asking applicants about current and past drug use; by giving pencil-and-paper or polygraph (lie detector) tests; or by medical tests of urine, blood, or hair samples. The most commonly used test is a urinalysis, which is laboratory testing of a urine sample. Retention time (the length of time any substance remains in the body and can be detected in the urine) varies with the drug and the individual.

Current military policy is zero tolerance, meaning that all military personnel are subject to immediate discharge if a drug test has been confirmed as a positive result. Further, a Presidential Executive Order has authorized drug testing throughout the Federal Government.

Alcohol and drugs can destroy a person's work life. Substance abuse can lead to job loss and make it difficult to maintain a job. All drugs cause disorientation. The side effects of marijuana are memory loss and inability to concentrate. Cocaine users become anxious and paranoid. Alcohol causes irritability and depression, and reduces the ability to express oneself. Addicts often believe that alcohol and drugs make them feel more confident, but that feeling doesn't last. Addiction can lead to serious health problems or death if left untreated.

What can I do?

- ★ Don't use drugs!
- ★ If you have a substance abuse problem, GET HELP IMMEDIATELY!
- ★ Ask if there is going to be a drug test screening and why.
- ★ Be sure that in having a drug test done, your rights to privacy and dignity are not invaded.
- ★ Report any prescription drugs or medications taken before testing.
- ★ Find out what type of laboratory testing is done to be sure fair and accurate procedures are in place.
- ★ Know the company's policy on retesting.
- ★ Ask for reasons for employment rejection.
- ★ Be aware that not wanting to take a drug test may be interpreted as a fear of a positive result.

Just Laid off?

About to experience a layoff? There's help available . . .

What services may be available to help get me back to work? There are three types of services that are potentially available to you at no cost.

★ All workers have access to core services through a local One-Stop Career Center. You may have received information about services available at these centers through your Rapid Response team if you were part of a larger layoff. Through the One-Stop Career Centers, you can obtain information on topics, such as:

- unemployment insurance
- pension benefits
- job search assistance
- job referral
- local area job openings
- résumé assistance
- job training

★ If the core services do not produce results, you may be eligible for one-on-one assistance, group career workshops, and other services, such as:

- assessment of your skills and abilities
- résumé writing classes
- help in planning how to get back to work
- stress and financial management workshops
- one-on-one job counseling

★ Training services may be available to help you get a good job. Your One-Stop Career Center will have a list of training programs, descriptions, and costs to help guide you in the decision-making process. If you qualify for help, you will have access to a broad range of training services, such as:

- occupational skills training
- on-the-job training
- skills improvement
- GED preparation
- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- math and reading training

Your local One-Stop Career Center can help you identify sources of financial assistance to help pay for training. Some services for dislocated workers have eligibility requirements. Please check with your state Dislocated Worker Unit or One-Stop Career Center for details.

Am I a dislocated worker?

You may be a dislocated worker if you have been permanently laid off or you have received a notice of layoff from employment.

Among those whom the dislocated program might serve are:

- workers with outdated skills.
- those who have lost their jobs due to import competition or shift in productions outside this country.
- farmers who have lost their farms.
- self-employed individuals who are unemployed as a result of economic conditions in their area.
- homemakers whose principal job has been homemaking, who have lost their main source of income.
- workers who have been dislocated by a mass layoff and/or closure.

What is rapid response?

Rapid Response Services provide immediate aid to workers affected by announcements of plant closings and large layoffs. Typically the Rapid Response Services program is designed to respond to layoffs with more than 50 workers. Contact your state Dislocated Worker Unit for more information.

Your State Dislocated Worker Unit can get help to you quickly. For layoffs that meet state criteria, Dislocated Worker offices may send one or more representatives to your work site to coordinate the layoff before it occurs.

Where can I go for help?

The best place to start is with your local One-Stop Career Center.

For information on specific services in your area, you can also contact your state Dislocated Worker Unit directly, or visit the website www.servicelocator.org, or call:

Toll Free: 1-877-US-2JOBS

TTY Number: 1-877-TTY-JOBS

Source: U.S. Department of Labor/Employment and Training Administration

State Dislocated Worker Contact Numbers and Websites

District of Columbia Department of EMPLOYMENT SERVICES "Linking Washington to the Workplace"

DC: 202-698-3495
TTY: 202-698-4817
http://does.ci.washington.dc.us

MD: 410-767-2833
TTY: 1-800-735-2258
www.dllr.state.md.us

MARYLAND Workforce Exchange
Where Business and People Connect

North Carolina JobLink Career Center
Career Planning, Training & Placement Services

NC: 919-329-5248
TTY: 1-800-735-2962
http://www.nccommerce.com/en/WorkforceServices

VA: 804-225-3050
TTY: 1-800-828-1120
www.vawc.virginia.gov

VIRGINIA WORKforce CENTER

WORK FORCE West Virginia

WV: 304-558-8415
TTY: 1-304-558-1237
www.wvbep.org/bep

Tips for Reentering the Workforce

So you're ready to jump back into the job market. What have you been doing since you left the workforce? Perhaps you've been at home raising a family or enjoying the leisure of retirement. Now you're afraid you may no longer be marketable. Here are some useful tips on how to proceed with your job search:

1. **Update your skills.** If it has been a significant time since the last job in your career, it is time to find out about the skills that are in demand in your industry. Network with people in the business and find out what is considered necessary these days. Then train yourself or sign up for a class. Do this before you start to job-hunt so you can include these skills on your résumé.
2. **Call your former boss and colleagues.** By far the easiest way to get back on track is to go back to where you left it (assuming you were happy with your job and the company). If you were well regarded and left on good terms, they might make room for your return. If the opportunity is not available, thank them anyway and ask for leads and contacts for your job hunt.
3. **Write an announcement and send your résumé to your former colleagues, friends, and family.** These are the people who will be interested in your welfare and will want to help you find a job. Your letter should explain that you are ready to get back on track with your career. Let them know that you will appreciate any leads. Thank them sincerely for their help. Include two copies of your résumé so they can pass it along to other people they know. You will be surprised at how successful this form of networking can be.
4. **Consider freelancing or taking temporary assignments.** A number of different agencies place profession-level candidates in many different fields. You can locate these agencies via the Internet or in your local area.
5. **Get ready to rebuild your career.** Don't be surprised or depressed if you have to take a pay-cut when you are trying to rebuild your career. If you were a top-level manager or a director or supervisor before you left, you may have to re-enter as an assistant director. Employers prefer candidates who have had recent experience. Not to worry: Take the job and the opportunity to shine brightly! With a little time to catch up, you will be back where you left off and ready to move up from where you were!

A special note for post-retirement job seekers! With many Americans leaving the workforce earlier and living longer, retirement can stretch over many years. You may discover that your retirement dollars don't go quite as far as you'd anticipated and decide that you need a new job to generate more income. Or you may find that you want to go back to work, but this time on your terms. After all, work has its own rewards—the regular contact with people and the knowledge that you're contributing. You may even be able to work for your previous employer, perhaps as a consultant or part-time employee. You may also decide that retirement is an ideal time to start your own business. Be aware that holding a paying job can affect your Social Security benefits as well as your taxes. You can still collect Social Security benefits if you work, but if your earnings exceed a certain amount, your benefits may be reduced. Before you take a post-retirement job, call or visit your local Social Security office to find out the latest regulations and their implications for your benefits. Also check to determine the tax implications.

Need Job Leads? Start Here

Community Agencies

A growing number of nonprofit organizations throughout the nation provide counseling, career development, and job placement services.

Direct Employer Contacts

Most employers have personnel offices where you can fill out a job application.

Internet

Most individuals have access to a computer. There are thousands of career-related sites on the Internet.

Job Service Offices

Job Service is the largest single source of job openings. Anyone can register, and the service is free at all employment service offices.

Libraries

Most libraries have directories and trade publications useful in locating employers who could use your skills.

Newspaper Ads

Classified ads are listed alphabetically; think of all the job titles related to the work you want to do.

Other People

Most job leads are found through word-of-mouth from friends, relatives, and acquaintances.

Private Employment Agencies

Private employment agencies work for companies with job vacancies. The fee is usually paid by the hiring company.

Professional Associations

Listings of associations for various occupations can be found in a local library, or in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*.

School Placement Offices

Job hunting information and job leads are commonly available at high school, business school, and college placement offices.

Trade Unions

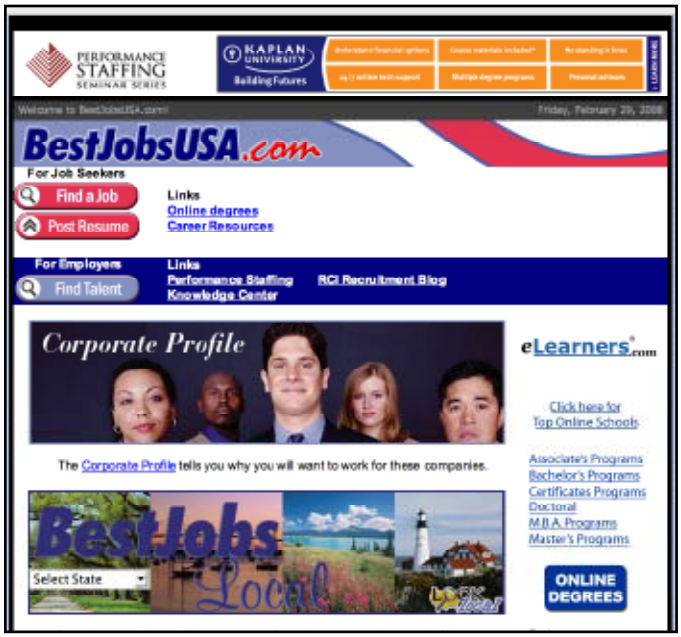
Libraries have listings of local trade unions for carpenters, plumbers, electricians, etc.

Yellow Pages of Telephone Directory

Companies are listed by the products they manufacture or the services they provide.

Websites

Jobs/Career/Labor Market Information



Personal Search/Jobs

Best Jobs in the USAToday
www.bestjobsusa.com

Career Builder
www.careerbuilder.com

Career OneStop
www.jobbankinfo.org

Career Site
www.careersite.com

Federal Jobs Digest
www.jobsfed.com

Human Resource Executive Online
www.hreonline.com

Job Bank USA
www.jobbankusa.com

Job Hunt
www.job-hunt.org

Job Postings
www.jobpostings.net

The Monster Board
www.monster.com

The Riley Guide
www.rileyguide.com

Yahoo! hotjobs
http://hotjobs.yahoo.com

Career Information

America's Career Information Network
www.acinet.org

Career Magazine
www.careermag.com

Career Net
http://careernet.4jobs.com

Career Overview
www.careeroverview.com

Education Information

College Board On-Line
www.collegeboard.com

College View
www.collegeview.com

FastWeb
www.fastweb.com

Mapping Your Future
www.mapping-your-future.org

National Center for Education Statistics
www.nces.ed.gov

Peterson's Education Center
www.petersons.com

U.S. Department of Education
www.ed.gov

Financial Aid Information

Financial Aid
www.ed.gov

Financial Aid Form Information Page
www.finaid.org

Financial Aid Form on the Web
www.fafsa.ed.gov

Free Scholarship Search
www.fastweb.com

Information about Direct Loans
www.ed.gov

Labor Market Information

Bureau of Labor Statistics
www.bls.gov

U.S. Census Bureau
www.census.gov

U.S. Department of Labor
www.dol.gov

Virginia Employment Commission
www.va.employ.com

Virginia Workforce Connection
www.vawc.virginia.gov

E-mail Etiquette

The following guidelines are derived from many locations on the Internet.

In the more established communication media (i.e. mail and telephone) certain widely-observed conventions have emerged. Such courtesies as when to use "yours sincerely" in a letter, or announcing your name and/or number when you answer the telephone, are not just pointless conventions but help promote a sound basis for communication between the relevant parties.

Electronic mail (e-mail), however, is an effective form of communication, and the number of new users is increasing dramatically. As a consequence, few people are aware of appropriate conventions. These are gradually emerging, and the following suggestions are based on advice being provided to e-mail users at many sites around the world.

These conventions (often called "network etiquette" or "netiquette") recognize that it is very easy to dispatch e-mail messages very quickly, and so little thought is often given as to how the message will be received. This leads to the following code of good practice for e-mail.

Good Practice

★ Check your mail regularly. Ignoring a mail message is discourteous and confusing to the sender.

★ Always reply, even if a brief acknowledgement is all you can manage. There is still sufficient unreliability about e-mail transmissions to create doubt in the mind of the sender that you ever received it.

★ Reply promptly. E-mail systems often do not have the conventional "pending" trays of the desktop, nor secretaries to remind you, so it may be easier to forget an e-mail message.

★ Develop an orderly filing system for those e-mail messages you wish to keep; delete unwanted ones to conserve disk space.

★ Try to keep e-mail messages fairly brief. Most people wouldn't choose a computer screen to read text in preference to a printed document, and it can get very tiring for some users. Try to restrict yourself to one or two screen-fulls at most.

★ Make sure that the "subject" field of your e-mail message is meaningful. The recipient can more easily organize and prioritize e-mails when the subject field accurately conveys the content. When you use the "reply" option, ensure the subject field (automatically filled in for you) still accurately reflects the content of your message.

★ Try to restrict yourself to one subject per message, sending multiple messages if you have multiple subjects. This helps recipients to use the "subject" field to manage the messages they have received.

★ Don't reproduce an e-mail message in full when responding to it, especially if you are posting a bulletin board. This is hard on the readers and wasteful of resources. Instead, be selective in the parts that you reproduce in order to respond.

★ Be tolerant of others' mistakes. Some people are new to this medium and may not be good typists, or they may accidentally delete your message and ask you to resend it.

★ Be very careful how you express yourself, especially if you feel heated about the subject (for instance, if you are shooting off a quick response to some issue). E-mail lacks the other cues and clues that convey the sense in which what you say is to be taken, and you can easily convey the wrong impression. If you meant something in jest, use a "smiley" [☺] to convey that.

★ Remember that people other than the person to whom your e-mail is addressed may see it, i.e., recognize that anyone along the chain of distribution could get to see what you have said, and it might even end up in someone else's hands.

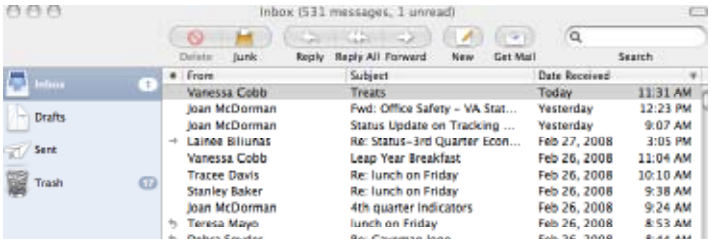
E-mail Abuse

★ Don't extract and use text from someone else's message without acknowledgement. This is plagiarism. You wouldn't do this with conventional mail, so don't let the ease of being able to do it with e-mail lead you into bad habits.

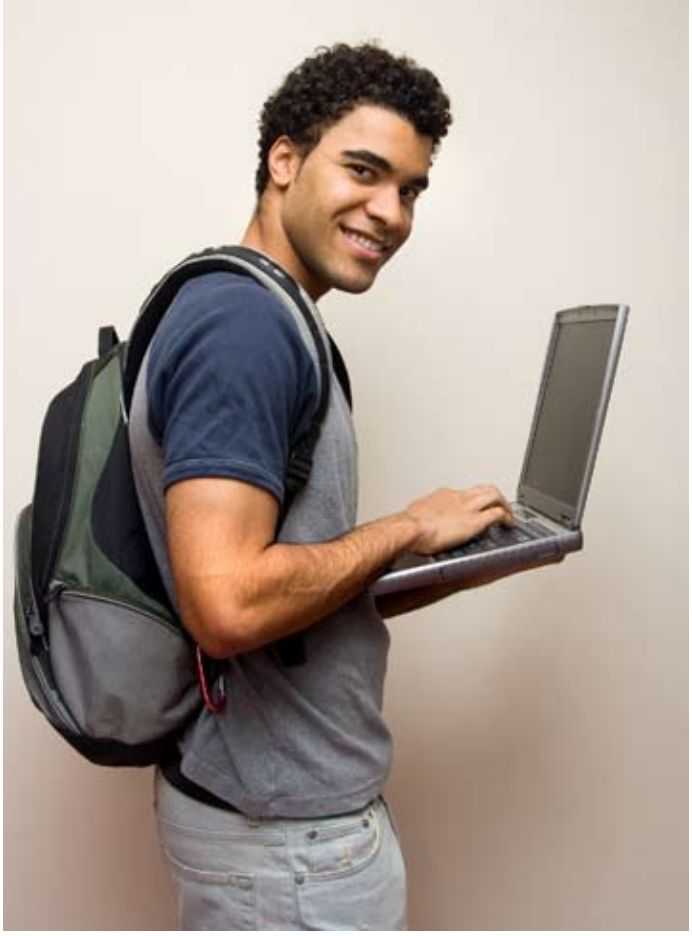
★ Don't make changes to someone else's message and pass it on without making it clear where you have made changes. This would be misrepresentation.

★ Don't pretend you are someone else when sending e-mail, e.g. by using someone else's account to send it. Note that it is not advisable that people lend accounts in the first place.

★ Don't broadcast e-mail messages unnecessarily. It's very easy to send "junk mail," but it can be very annoying to recipients (and wastes resources). Also, do not send or forward chain e-mail—it offends some people and is wasteful of network resources.



★ Don't send frivolous, abusive, or defamatory messages. Apart from being discourteous or offensive, they may break the law.



★ Remember that the various laws of the land relating to written communication apply equally to e-mail messages, including the laws pertaining to defamation, copyright, obscenity, fraudulent misrepresentation, freedom of information, and wrongful discrimination.

And finally . . .

★ Encourage others to communicate with you by e-mail. Make sure you give them your correct e-mail address—include it on your business card and letterhead.

★ Also remember that sending e-mail from your business account is similar to sending a letter on company letterhead, so don't say anything that might bring discredit or embarrassment to the company.

Source: Alex Reid, Director, Oxford University Computer Center.

Looking at Classified Ads

Using classified ads to discover potential job opportunities is much like mining for gold. You have to understand the clues hidden in the ads to find the golden opportunities. Thousands of employers, particularly medium and small organizations, rely on classified ads to recruit most of their entry-level employees. If you learn to decode the classified ads, to read special abbreviations and to identify potential problems, you may find the type of job you are seeking.

Classified ads can be a gold mine of opportunities, but they can also yield "fool's gold." On any given day, only about half of the classified ads represent job openings that are available and will be filled by competitive applicants. These days, many newspapers have put their help wanted ads on their websites. They have also adapted to the new competition from large job sites by outsourcing the "Jobs" portion of their website to those same employment super sites like CareerBuilder, HotJobs, and Monster. Essentially they provide a window into the existing database, quite disconnected from the "real" Help Wanted ads appearing in the printed editions of the paper. While offline activities set the precedent for this type of fraud, the move to the Web allows con artists to reach vast numbers of potential victims. Often their goal is identity theft, and cons can be sneaky. Taking advantage of job seekers' desire to please potential employers, they ask for all sorts of personal information: your name, birth date, credit information—all the things they need to steal your identity and spend your money.

There are many stories behind classified ads. Newspapers and electronic job listing servers are paid to run ads and do not determine whether the person who places the ad actually has a job opening or another reason for placing the ad. So do not feel discouraged if you do not get a response, particularly if you answer a blind ad—one which does not list the employer's name.

Why Do Employers Place Classified Ads?

An employer has a job opening and needs a skilled employee. Most employers would rather hire someone they know, or know of—that way the employer knows something about the potential employee. Often when employers run classified ads, it is because they cannot find qualified candidates for their jobs through their network of contacts.

If you can contact the employers before their job openings are advertised, they have fewer candidates to choose from, and you have a better chance of getting the job.

Employers do not like to run classified ads because such ads do get lots of responses. That means the employer must spend time deciding who to interview, interviewing, and selecting a new employee.

If the potential employer knows you are available for employment before advertising a job opening, you may stand a better chance of being hired, even if you do not have all the qualifications needed.