

PORTFOLIOS IN THE JOB SEARCH: Busy Work or Competitive Edge?

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While a resume and cover letter are non-negotiable documents in the application process, a portfolio is an optional piece. Rarely will an employer request a portfolio, either in the initial screening or at the interview. So, if employers don't request portfolios, why prepare one? Based on feedback from recent graduates and employers, here are some reasons to consider:

- The portfolio demonstrates organization and attention to detail.
- Bringing a portfolio to an interview implies motivation and passion for teaching.
- Creating and formatting a portfolio (either hard copy or electronic) demonstrates expertise with technical applications.
- The portfolio provides a concrete visual image of your strengths and accomplishments.

So, while prospective employers may never request a portfolio, the savvy teacher candidate can use this tool to set herself apart from other applicants as a highly motivated, competent and conscientious candidate.

After developing portfolios to meet course requirements, to document learning outcomes, and/or to satisfy accreditation standards, teacher candidates are often confused about the definition of a "job search portfolio." What are the documents that a teacher candidate should include in a portfolio for prospective employers? While there is not an official list, **here are some items to consider:**

- Your philosophy of education
- Classroom management philosophy
- Resume
- Sample lessons and worksheets
 - Be sure to have samples from a variety of grade levels and subject areas
 - Use lessons that you feel comfortable discussing with interviewers
- Photos showing:
 - Different teaching strategies
 - Diversity in ethnicity and age
 - Special activities you did while teaching that you would like to showcase
 - Sample bulletin boards, posters, or other large manipulatives
 - Variety of subject content
 - Interaction with parents, technology, special speakers, etc.
- Quotes and/or references
 - Be sure to get references from a variety of sources
 - If using quotes, choose quotes from a variety of people (parent, teacher, co-op, principal, students, etc.)
- Evaluations from cooperating teachers and advisors
 - Keeping your final evaluations in a specific spot is especially important
 - Make copies of all evaluations your co-op and advisors give you



- Additional resources (These might be put in a larger portfolio, but maybe not included in a "send portfolio" or a brochure)
 - PRAXIS scores
 - Reference letters and list of contacts (ASK THEM SOONER RATHER THAN LATER!)
 - Certification and clearances
 - Transcripts
 - Letters and certificates (recognition of academic abilities, dean's list, professional development, honorariums, job recognition, participation in education related activities [i.e. Mini-Math Conference], etc.)

Just as the content of a portfolio is open to your experience and job-hunting objectives, the format is open to your creativity and needs. For example, **consider these approaches:**

- **Binder** – The key to using this tool effectively is the organization! Use tabs, so that you can easily refer to a document as needed. Don't expect the employer to have the time to review the full contents of your binder, however. Instead, at the interview, ask if you may reference a sample of your work when it relates to a particular interview question.
- **Streamlined "Packet"** – To supplement the application credentials you submitted, an "abbreviated portfolio" (less than 10 pages) highlights your experience with work samples and photos and may include quotes or other endorsements beyond the letters of recommendation the employer has already received.
- **Brochure** – A tri-fold brochure is a convenient way to highlight your strengths with photos, quotes, and other noteworthy information. The brochure works well as a creative tool at job fairs and networking events; also, some candidates choose to tuck it into follow-up thank-you letters as a creative reminder of their strengths.
- **Electronic Portfolio** – This format allows you to tailor content easily for particular employers. Also, the e-folio demonstrates technical expertise and presentation skills.

While an employer may never request a portfolio, the benefits of a well-organized portfolio include: accessible documents, visual examples of experience, demonstration of creativity and technical skills, and a concrete example of your passion and motivation to teach.