

# ART/VCDMA PORTFOLIO TIPS

## **What is a portfolio?**

A portfolio represents your skills as an artist, including craftsmanship, technique, creativity, and the ability to communicate visual ideas. High school seniors use portfolios to gain admission to art schools and professionals use them to gain employment. It is also a collection of your best and most recent creative work that highlights your art and design experience. A portfolio is a visual archive of your artistic accomplishments that demonstrates your ability and potential as a visual artist, designer, filmmaker, etc.

## **What should be in a portfolio?**

- Drawings from life emphasizing an understanding of light, shadow, composition, perspective, technique, and value.
- Figure/Portrait studies showing an understanding of the human form. May be completed in a variety of media, as illustrations or as fine art pieces.
- Paintings in any media (oil, acrylic, watercolor, tempera) showing the ability to mix color and understand form. Demonstrate a familiarity with a variety of media and concepts, including both a realistic and an abstract approach.
- Designs showing skills in using color, shape, and composition and the ability to think symbolically. May be a poster design, symbol design, logo, abstract exercise, etc.
- Three-dimensional designs demonstrating the ability to work with sculptural concepts.
- Personal choices highlighting your special abilities and skills. May include photography, crafts, jewelry, printmaking, commercial art, interior & environmental design, lettering, ceramics, etc.
- (For undergraduate students: Your portfolio should provide evidence of development and highlighting a specific area of focus in a particular area of art/design: ex. animation/motion graphics, illustration, fashion, film, advertising, branding, painting, etc. All leading towards the goal of the senior thesis and exhibition. The images in your portfolio should relate to one another and your specific future career goals.

## **Keep/Maintain a Sketchbook**

- Personal sketchbooks and preliminary studies can be included to show your thought processes in developing your final pieces. These reflect your motivation, creativity, and genuine interest. A blog that demonstrates these concepts is highly suggested. Basically, SHOW the development your work and ideas visually from concept to completion.

### **Why these items?**

Your portfolio should be a collection of your best efforts, showcasing your individual artistic style. It should include about ten to fifteen pieces of finished work using various media, styles, and ideas. For admission to an art school, your portfolio should show your potential to handle college-level art study. Also, it is required to remain in the program, and specifically to graduate. Your portfolio must be accessible by advisors, mentors, professors, etc. and it must be professionally presented, and maintained throughout your college and even after graduation (your professional career).

**Drawing** is the most basic way an artist communicates and it remains so regardless of major or career choice. Interior designers, sculptors, even photographers rely on drawing to do their jobs efficiently and well. Your ideas and skills as an artist are reflected in your drawings. Hence, your admissions portfolio should include your very best drawings. Your art teacher can help you in selecting your very best work. Whenever possible, include drawings made from observation, like self-portraits, portraits, figure drawings, still lifes, and landscapes. Work from familiar objects and/or surroundings, and always refer to subjects that have meaning to you personally. A strong admission portfolio always exhibits a personal point-of-view. Your portfolio should also demonstrate your use of color. Such color work can be accomplished in many ways, but strong painting (oil, watercolor, acrylic) will inevitably enhance your portfolio. You may also submit pastels and drawings in other color media such as colored pencil or marker.

**Composition/Design** -- the arrangement of shapes and forms on a page or within the boundaries of a three-dimensional artwork -- should be evident throughout your portfolio. By selecting your most interesting and accomplished pieces, your sense of design will clearly be evident. Try to avoid including too many pieces depicting centered objects on a page, as this type of composition is all too common. Avoid drawings and paintings inspired from photographs; it is too easy to simply copy photographs. Rather, concentrate on the familiar in your own environment. This will ensure creative and personal compositions.

### **Elements & Principles of Art/Design or others based in career**

Your portfolio should demonstrate or relate to the exploration of the elements and principles of art/design (line, shape, color, rhythm, etc.). Show that you understand these concepts and experiment with each in your work. It should also demonstrate other concepts such as the principles of animation; cinematic concepts (narratives), composition, editing, production or elements of fashion/design, typography, etc. should be demonstrated based on your area of concentration and career goals.

### **How do I prepare my portfolio for presentation?**

Your work should be presented in a neat and organized way. All artwork should be signed. Your name and address should be on the outside of the portfolio. While slides are not the ideal way to judge your artwork, they are the practical and economic way to transport and judge your portfolio. You may submit actual

work along with your slides if you think it will enhance your chances for admission. Sketchbooks, for example, can be a strong addition to any slide portfolio. When including actual artwork, consider using white or neutral colored mats. Slides should be individually labeled with your name, numbered, and presented in a clear plastic slide sheet(s). An inventory list describing each piece should accompany your slides: name, title, media, size, and date. It is advisable to make at least two slide portfolios of your work.

### **Some advice on taking slides**

Use a good camera, preferably a 35mm with a single-lens reflex. Use the proper slide film and lighting. Consult your art teacher, a professional photographer, or your local camera storeowner for advice. Photograph each piece individually; the piece should completely fill the camera frame. Use a neutral background for 3-D pieces. If in doubt about exposure time, take three slides of each piece: one at the automatic reading, one an f/stop higher and one an f/stop lower. Most importantly, take your time. Re-shoot if necessary. Select the best shots -- those that truly represent your work. Of course the use of a DSLR or digital camera and professional scanner is suggested. Make sure your work is well lit and in all images are in focus, cropped, etc. Avoid shooting works with a glass frame and don't show the frame.

### **Other things to remember**

Familiarize yourself with the various deadlines you're facing, especially scholarship deadlines. Be sure to complete all steps of the application procedures. Do not submit more work than is necessary. Finally, seek advice from knowledgeable professionals when organizing your admissions portfolio, but remember your portfolio represents who you are and what you can do. So you should be the ultimate judge as to which pieces to include. Your portfolio must best represent you as an artist.

### **How to Develop Your Portfolio**

- **Start early.** The more time you allow yourself to create, the more work you will have to choose from when preparing your portfolio. Ultimately, however, quality of work is more important than quantity.
- **Challenge yourself.** Take advantage of resources available at your school, in your community, and on your own time. Supplement your high school art experience with outside opportunities.
- **Maximize your summers.** Summer programs are a great way to build your portfolio.
- Include **observational drawings.** Most art and design colleges prefer that the majority of drawings submitted in the portfolio be derived from direct observation, which means drawing or painting from still life, figure models, or landscape. Universities and colleges prefer observational drawings rather than drawings from photographs or from your imagination (such as fantasy characters or anime).

- **Explore ideas in your work.** Strong portfolios typically include work that demonstrates solid technical skills and reflects thoughts and concepts. Consider including work that speaks to your personal experiences, your culture, and so on.

### **How to Get Feedback on Your Creative work**

- **Get outside opinions of your artwork before the year in which you plan to apply.** It is important to show your work to others and to ask for critiques with enough time to benefit from the feedback. This will help you be aware of your progress, as well as areas that may need further development. Teachers, other artists, designers, mentors, and college representatives can offer this type of informal review.
- **Practice discussing your work.** Don't be afraid to talk about your work and what it means to you. Select a couple of pieces to discuss. Think about when and why you created the work, what the work is about, and what media were used. Share what you like about the pieces and what can be improved.
- **Meet with college representatives.** Admissions counselors meet with students on campus, visit many high schools and community colleges, and host special events for prospective students.

### **Portfolio Suggestions:**

All applicants are required to submit a portfolio along with the required university application materials. The portfolio must consist of ten projects including the five mandatory portfolio exercises listed below, as well as five additional examples of your best and most recent work that show your current interests, an awareness of formal visual organizational principles and experience with a variety of tools, media, styles and approaches.

### **Digital Portfolio Submissions**

- Submit no more than ten projects (not to exceed 15 images)
- Images must be submitted in JPG format
- Label work, dimensions, what your role was if a group project and a brief description of the work
- Place into a PDF or PowerPoint presentation with your name, email, contact number included as a slide towards the beginning/end.
- Highly suggested you upload these to a free online portfolio or blog site if at all possible
- Burn to a CD-R that works on an Apple/Mac computer. Please test and print/label the outside of the CD and case.

### **Portfolio Exercises**

Each exercise should be completed on a separate sheet of white A4 size paper. It is recommended that you use good quality paper.

1. Make a work or a series of works (Up to 5 pieces of work) in response to the ideas of "Evolution" "Exploration" and/or "Journey". Use any medium that you feel appropriate.
2. Select three or more pieces of fruit and vegetables and arrange them in a composition of your choice. Draw or paint the composition using paint, color pencil or color pastel. You are expected to use color in this exercise. We will look at your use of color, light and composition.
3. Draw your own hand using pencil. The pencil should be 2B or softer. Consider how you position your hand so that it creates an interesting composition.
4. Crumple an A4 sheet of plain paper and place it under a strong light. Make a black ink drawing of the crumpled sheet. We will look at your understanding of light, shading and composition.
5. Take a plain piece of fabric (no patterns allowed) and drape it over a solid surface. Light the fabric with strong light. Draw the draped fabric paying close attention to tone, line, form and shape. Use a pencil 2B or softer.
6. Choose the above theme and demonstrate one image as a Black and White photograph.

**Additional:**

- Drawings must be done from looking directly at the object and not from photographs or other published material. Copies of anime, graffiti or tattoos will not be accepted.
- Candidates will be required to take a drawing test should inconsistencies appear in the quality of work submitted

**For more information, tips and useful information visit:**

<http://www.bowiestate.edu/academics/departments/dfpa/program/vcdma/resources/>

Look under Portfolio Tips, Elements/Principles of Design and some of the portfolios of other art/design students and even alumni. Contact us should you have more questions and/or concerns. Thank you.

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