



PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT & LEADERSHIP

# Portfolio Guide for Design Students

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# Overview

**Your creativity, skill set, and previous employment experience will stand out with a well-planned, effective portfolio. It is one of the key factors that can reinforce the value and expertise you bring to employers.**

This guide will provide helpful tips from alumni, employers, and faculty about how to prepare a compelling portfolio you can use as you apply for internships and jobs.

Links to helpful resources are included in this guide!



Daniel Lutze (MArch'24), Online Portfolio  
Weitzman School of Design



# Personal Branding

**Creating a personal brand for your portfolio enhances the professional presentation of your work and skill set.**

- **Consistency is Key**

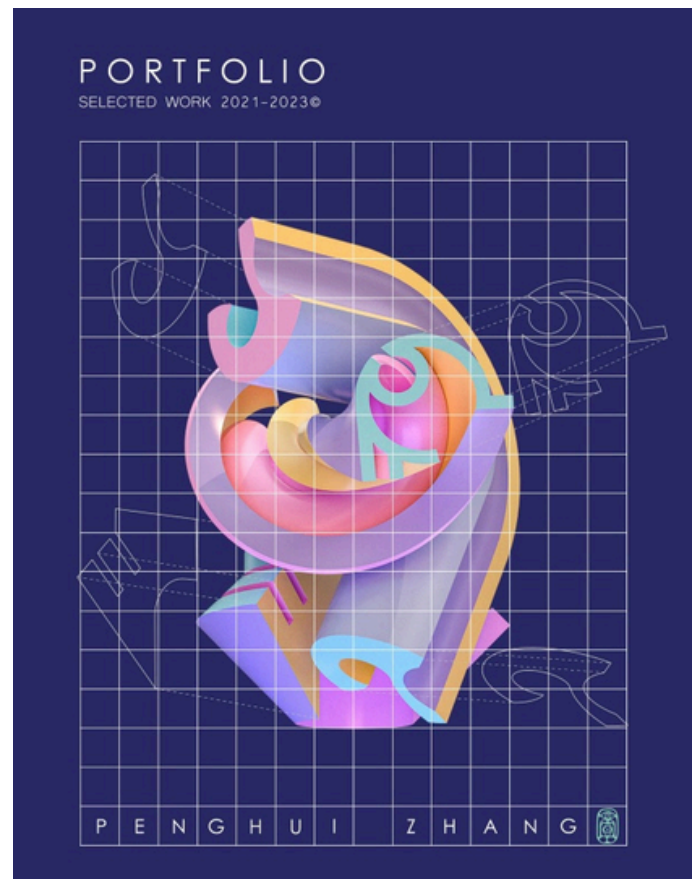
Be mindful when choosing elements such as typography and color scheme; this style should be used throughout your portfolio, resume, website, and professional social media accounts. Do not use an excessive amount of font styles; we recommend no more than three. In general, 10 -12 points is the average font size for readability.

- **Tell Your Story**

Consider including an "About Me" section. This is a chance to differentiate yourself from others by including your design philosophy, journey, and values.

- **Create a Companion Website**

Invest in a professional, user-friendly website host. The browsing experience should be seamless on your computer and mobile device.



Penghui Zhang (MArch'24), Online Portfolio  
Weitzman School of Design

# Portfolio Format + Content

- **Portfolio Versus Work Samples**

A portfolio is a comprehensive collection of your best work. (Consider adding a table of contents for organization.) Work samples (three to five projects, with one project per page) represent a teaser of your portfolio.

- **Clean and Clear Format**

Format your portfolio in a single document, preferably as a PDF. If you are emailing the document, it should be no larger than 10MB. Think about using a full-page bleed (the image extends to each page edge) on the cover of your portfolio with an engaging image and title and/or name of your portfolio. Your portfolio must be legible! Check font sizes and graphic resolution for both print and digital versions. Consider how your work will look on a computer screen versus a mobile phone screen. Have a trusted friend proof your work and provide feedback.

- **Highlight Your Best, Relevant Work**

The content of your portfolio may change depending on the purpose and/or position you are working toward. Those reviewing your portfolio are very busy! Carefully edit your portfolio to represent the requirements of the opportunity you seek (internship, job, fellowship, competition). Your portfolio should be strategic and tell a story! While it is hard to give an estimate, experts say your portfolio should be 20 pages or less.

- **Project Summaries**

Include short projects summaries and outline your role in each project. These project summaries should clearly define the "big idea" of the work. If you decide to include group projects, correctly label them in your portfolio. Never take ownership of another's work.

#### Sources:

FXCollaborative - Resume + Portfolio Tips Virtual Workshop for Weitzman Students  
Penn Weitzman Alumni Association (PWAA) - Professional Review Guidelines  
Nathaniel Rogers, AIA - Lecturer, The Department of Historic Preservation, Stuart  
Weitzman School of Design + Principal at Beyer Blinder Belle

# Portfolio Format + Content

- **Mixed Media**

If your work includes diverse media such as photography, sculpture, drawing, and model making, consider including samples of this work in your portfolio.

- **Combined Experience**

If you are showcasing work from different degrees (such as a bachelor's degree in architecture and a master's degree in historic preservation), be honest about how you've shifted gears. Try and tie these threads together - how do these experiences contribute to your design thinking and career interests?

## How to Avoid Ineffective Portfolios

- Check for misspellings, grammatical errors, low resolution, large file size, varying page sizes, poor organization, inconsistency, and pages that are over-designed that may take away from the effectiveness of your portfolio.
- Have a trusted friend proof and provide feedback.
- Follow any instructions, guidelines, or requirements for your portfolio as stated in the job or internship application.
- Avoid over-explaining your projects. Be clear and concise, focusing on the core concept and design process.

### Sources:

FXCollaborative - Resume + Portfolio Tips Virtual Workshop for Weitzman Students  
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# Ask the experts.



In this section, we reached out to alumni, industry experts, and professors to gather their advice on building a compelling and effective portfolio. Their insights offer a blend of practical tips, creative strategies, and industry expectations that will help you present your best work and make a lasting impression.

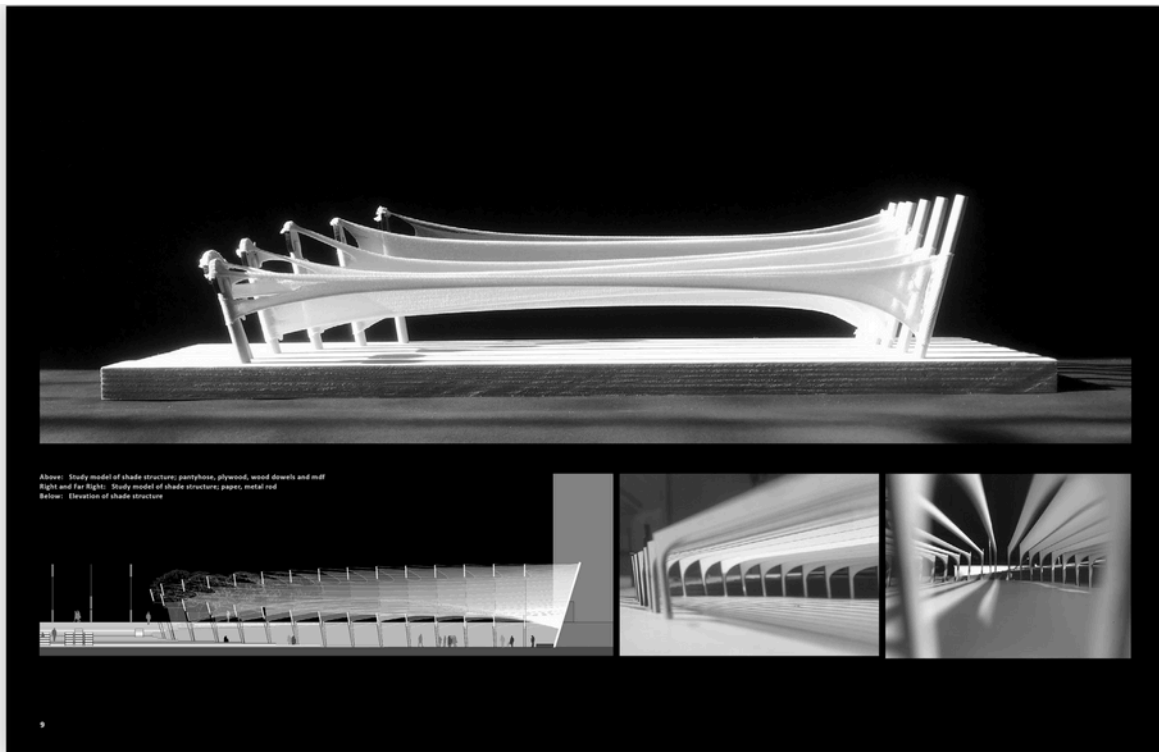


Jared Edgar McKnight (MArch'12)  
Assoc. ASLA, Assoc. AIA  
Senior Associate + Designer, WRT

**"Can I have fun? Yes! Your portfolio can, and should, give a taste of your personality - but as a communication tool, try to focus on consistency and legibility in your graphic layout and presentation."**

- How are you UNIQUE? Every portfolio is a chance to represent your personal voice, designs, and perspectives – how can the design of your portfolio convey something about you as a professional?
- What do you want to SAY? Be intentional with how you introduce someone to your work – the order you showcase your projects should be strategic (I recommend: show your best project first).
- Who did you work WITH? If you show group work in your portfolio, attribution and recognition is a must – be sure to credit your team in your project summary and clearly state the role you played.
- Why is the work IMPORTANT (to you)? You do not need to show every project/graphic you have ever done, curate your selections – and use the work to tell a story about your impact as a designer.





**Krista Reimer shared images from her student portfolio (landscape architecture) and offered advice.**

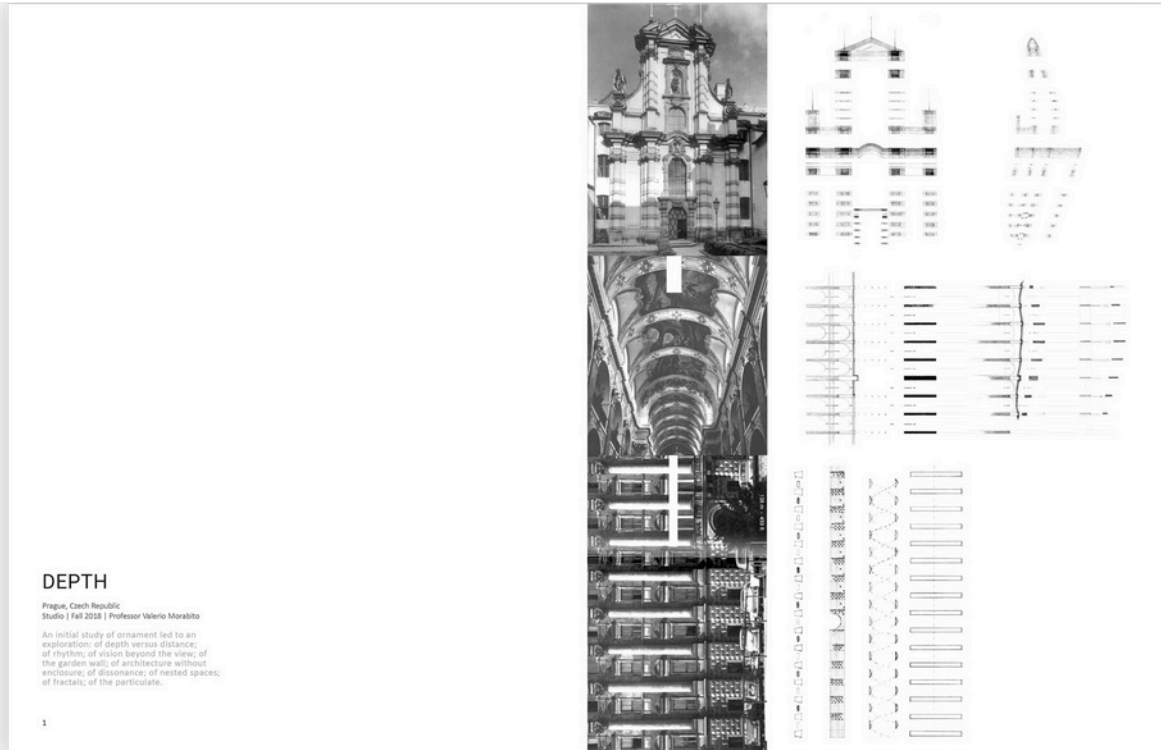
Here a single design element is highlighted through three different studies: two models, and a line drawing. A range of studies on a single element can be useful to demonstrate and walk through your design process.

We use the term “white space” but, depending on page content, a black or gray background can more effectively hold the images. The light tones of the shade structure in these models and linework drawings wouldn’t have stood out as well if the background of this page was white.

Carefully taken model photos can add a tactility and materiality to portfolios which otherwise are typically dominated by digitally produced drawings.



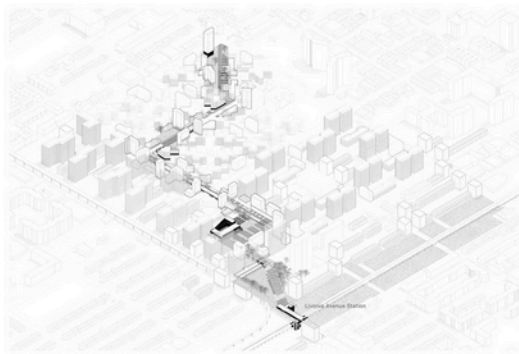
Krista Lynn Reimer (MLA’19)  
 Landscape Designer, WRT



Krista Lynn Reimer (MLA'19)  
 Landscape Designer, WRT

If you are using a book style layout, consider how the two facing pages balance each other. The associated photographs and hand drawn studies on the right page of this spread were best presented together but produced a dense page. To not overwhelm the eyes of anyone looking at the portfolio, the left page was left entirely white except for text introducing the project.

The contrast between the two pages also accentuates the black and white contrast of the photographs and drawings; spreading the same number of photographs and drawings across the two facing pages would have a weaker graphic effect.



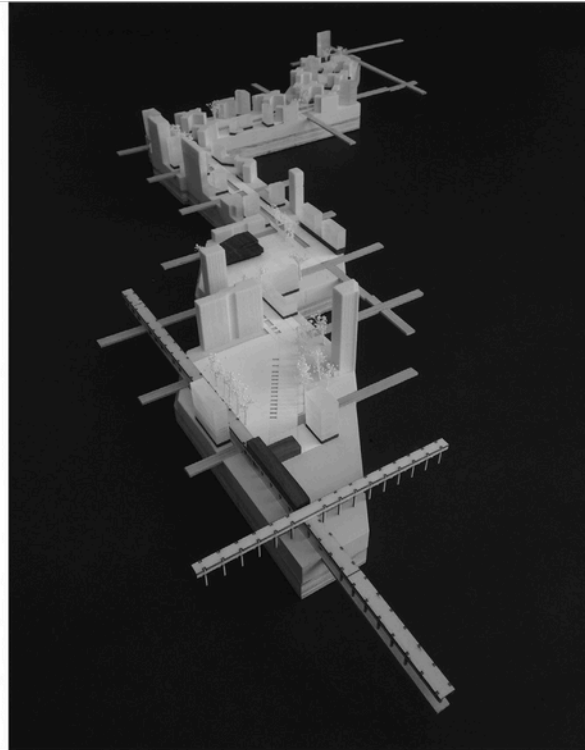
#### A DIAGONAL

Vicinity of Living Avenue Station, Brooklyn, New York  
Studio | Spring 2018 | Instructor Javier Arpa

Jointly developed with Mingchen Cui

The conversion of the Tri-Boro freight line which runs through Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx into a passenger subway line was the starting premise of this urban design studio. Assigned the task of designing the associated urban implications for the neighborhoods surrounding Living Avenue Station, we worked towards a strategy that would reduce the urban isolation of the Brownsville Public Housing blocks.

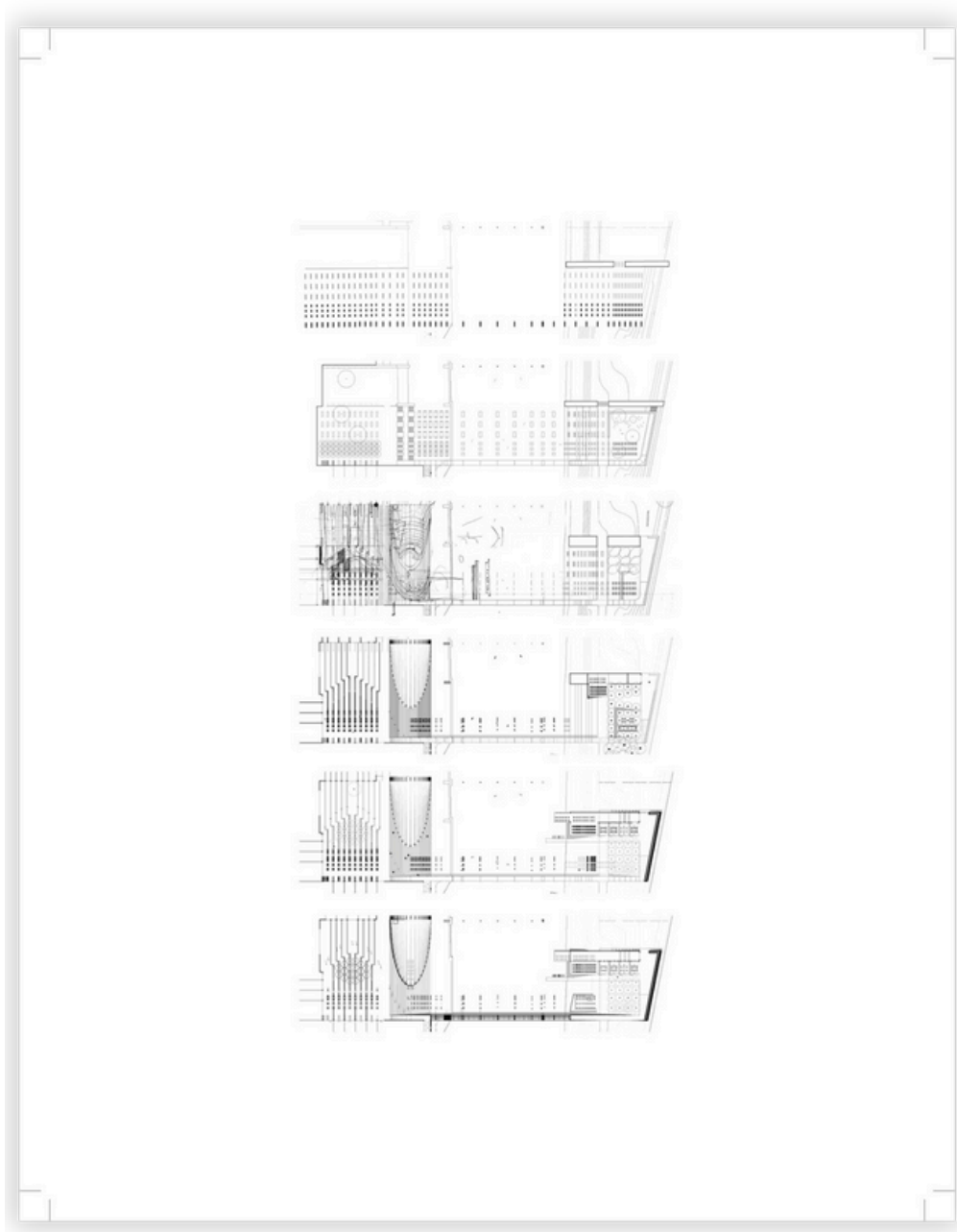
17



Krista Lynn Reimer (MLA'19)  
Landscape Designer, WRT

It is important to give drawings and model photographs with significant detail sufficient space. Make the images large and the pages uncluttered to keep the content digestible to someone flipping through the portfolio quickly. This provides a better scale of image to speak to when walking through your portfolio in an interview.

By presenting this line drawing and model photograph together without other content, it also makes it possible for someone unfamiliar with the work to quickly draw the association between the two.



Krista Lynn Reimer (MLA'19)

Landscape Designer, WRT

Don't forget to show process work in your portfolio. If clearly laid out, showing process communicates your skill in developing an initial idea into a specific design proposal. This series of plans show, from top to bottom, the evolution from a spatial concept to a refined plan. Plans that were printed and drawn over by hand during the design process were scanned for inclusion in the series.





Nate Hume  
Senior Lecturer  
Licensed Architect  
Principal, Hume Coover Studio

**"Editing is a helpful tool, not every project needs to be the same length."**

- Remember to edit! Choose the best items for each project and in some cases that is just one or two items that will make the project appear stronger (rather than including everything).
- Highlight drawings, these are more important to employers than final renderings. They hire someone to render. They are looking for someone to run projects, develop ideas, and execute drawings in most cases.
- Spend some time in the library looking at monographs and journals to see how books of architectural projects are laid out.
- Too often portfolios look like they were designed page by page in InDesign rather than having a template. Don't collect a bunch of images and then try to arrange them on a page. Have a template and use it to edit down the sizes and number of images. This will ultimately result in a cohesive portfolio and stronger presentation of work.

# References + Resources



## Creating Portfolio Content + Format

- "14 Tips for Creating a Winning Architecture Portfolio." [https://www.arch2o.com/tips-winning-architecture-portfolio/#google\\_vignette](https://www.arch2o.com/tips-winning-architecture-portfolio/#google_vignette)
- "Create a design portfolio employers will love." AIA, <https://joinus.aia.org/portfolio-tips/>
- Design Portfolios: A Recruiter's View by Mark W. Smith, ASLA, ISBN-10: 1394150466.
- LinkedIn Learning, <https://www.isc.upenn.edu/linkedinlearning>. Accessible to University faculty, students, and staff.
- Design It Green: Landscape & Urban Design Portfolio Advice - [YouTube](#)
- Search for the "Year End Show" on the Weitzman School of Design website: <https://www.design.upenn.edu>. This annual show highlights work from the graduating class.

# References + Resources



## Building an Online Portfolio

- Behance - visual examples of student portfolios, showcase your work - <https://www.behance.net/>
- ISSUU - digital publishing platform - <https://issuu.com/>
- Cargo - professional site building platform for designers and artists - <https://cargo.site/In-Use>
- MUSE - create customized websites - <https://muse.io/discover>
- SQUARESPACE - create customized websites - <https://www.squarespace.com/>
- WIX - create customized websites - <https://www.wix.com/>
- WordPress - create customized websites - <https://wordpress.com/website-builder/>



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