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THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO BUILDING A WRITING PORTFOLIO

A writing portfolio is a collection of an individual's work that demonstrates the individual's skills to prospective clients and employers. A writing portfolio helps to market yourself as a writer who can write informative, relevant, and creative pieces that showcase your skillset. These portfolios let clients see if your writing style, tone, etc. is in line with what they are looking for.

WHERE TO BEGIN YOUR WRITER'S PORTFOLIO

Before you add anything to your portfolio, you must first consider what pieces you want to showcase. Do you want to showcase journalistic pieces about current events or create fictional short stories or poetry? Perhaps you have a favorite hobby you are knowledgeable about, that you can write informative articles about, or maybe you wish to review places you have traveled or books you have read. All of these, when written in a professional manner that you are proud of, can be included in your portfolio.

According to Jacob Powers, the associate Dean of Liberal Arts at Southern New Hampshire University, "the key is to consider the audience. Who will be reading these materials and for what reason?" Once those two questions are answered, you can begin tailoring your portfolio to fit your target audience.

If you are still unsure of what pieces to share or write, consider reading for inspiration. "The biggest piece of advice that should always be followed is to read," stated Mr. Powers, "to be a strong writer, you have to be a strong reader." He then goes on to say that writers should not

limit themselves to a specific genre and that inspiration can come from anywhere, “consider reading the unfamiliar in addition to the books you love.”

WHERE TO GAIN MATERIAL TO ADD TO YOUR PORTFOLIO

As a college or university student, you may not have a lot or any published pieces to include in your portfolio. Here are a few things you can do to gain written pieces.

1. You can write “on spec” pieces which means writing without the expectation of receiving anything. One major form of “on spec” writing is to write a query letter for publication. This is a form of spec writing because you are creating a document to essentially sell your writing without a guarantee that a publisher will accept your work. Mr. Powers suggests starting out with three pieces in your portfolio that showcase your strength and to remember that pieces that have been turned down by publications can still be used in your portfolio.
2. Pitch story or article ideas to small publications and/or blogs that offer guest posting. These pitches would include a story idea, a headline and why the publication/blog’s audience would be interested in the piece. This is similar to “on spec” writing but you would be doing all the work *after* you know that your writing will be published. Just keep in mind that this strategy may not work unless you have a few public samples that the publication/blog can review.
3. You can find sites that offer writing contents with a wide variety of genres that are free to enter or require a small fee, but the payout is fairly well and upon winning you would have a published piece for your portfolio. Sites such as [SNHU’s Creative Writing Review Club](#) on [SNHUconnect](#), [Reedsy](#), [Freedom with writing](#), [Freelance writing](#), and [Poets &](#)

[Writers](#) are great resources to try. Ideally you can type in “[online writing contests](#)” in google and be presented with a lot of other resources.

4. A few other resources include the [National Centre for Writing](#) which provides free resources for writers. [Poets & Writers](#) lists important deadlines for manuscript submissions, job/internship opportunities, and writer’s retreats. [Association of Writers and Writing Programs \(AWP\)](#) is a professional organization for creative writers, journalists, publishers and freelance writers that also has contests and awards. AWP offers resources on publishing, job opportunities; and students are also offered a membership discount.
5. It is also possible to include academic pieces you have written for your classes, just browse through your written pieces, select about three strong pieces and use those as the beginning of your portfolio.

WHERE TO CREATE YOUR PORTFOLIO

When it comes to showcasing your portfolio, a digital presence is a must regardless of what you’re writing. You can create your portfolio on sites such as [GoDaddy](#), [WordPress](#), [Clippings.me](#), [Squarespace](#) and more. When selecting a domain for your portfolio, usually it is suggested to use your full name, that way it is easy for employers to remember and find you.

Most of these websites will offer free access to creating your own website but they would entail having the website name in your domain, so it is recommended to buy your domain which is usually less than \$30. This will prevent you having to start over later down the line when you decide that you truly need the domain, sometimes when buying it you can get a discount when purchasing for a certain number of years as you would have to renew it yearly.

CREATING YOUR PORTFOLIO

After you have selected your hosting platform and chosen your domain name, it is now time to create your website which will include your writing portfolio. There are usually templates offered on the websites that will help make creating your portfolio easier. After designing your portfolio, you will then include your writing samples, Mr. Powers said, “I took three short stories, thoroughly revised them during my year off from school, and put them in an order where I believed the strongest story was showcased first, followed by the weakest, and ending with the middle-of-the-road sample.”

He suggests doing this because “starting out strong hooks the audience and entices them to read the whole portfolio, while placing the weakest piece in the middle ensures that the collection is not starting or ending on a low note. Closing the portfolio with a middle-of-the-road piece brings the audience back to level ground—stronger than the middle piece, not quite as strong as the first piece, but enough polish to it to show one’s skills and desire to continue to strengthen them. (Note that weak doesn’t mean “bad” here – in my case, the story was simply one that didn’t feel as complete as the others).

TIPS FOR CREATING A PROFESSIONAL WRITING PORTFOLIO

1. Ensure you take the time to make sure your portfolio appears presentable and organized as this will be where you will be sending your prospective clients.
2. Keep your selected pieces up-to-date and do not include too many pieces that they have to scroll forever.
3. Add a brief description of your portfolio at the top and add a title and a short description to each piece.

More helpful writing portfolio tips and examples can be found at [Online Writing Portfolio: 5 Ways to Design yours to dazzle your clients.](#)

STARTING FEE FOR NEW WRITERS

After doing all of this, you can then research how much you are willing to charge for your work/time. Places to do this would be [Fiverr](#) as you can see how much someone with your expertise and background is charging and you can also sign up as a freelance writer. You can also read this article by Elna Cain which talks about [how to figure out your rates as a new freelance writer](#).

In the article, Elna states that “a good intermediate rate is \$125–200 per article. For experts, \$250+ per article is better. For articles that require a lot of research, interviews, and are longer, you need to charge \$500 and up.” She also states that it is better to charge per word instead of hours, that way you don’t have to monitor your hours as you may be able to make more that way.

Two other articles to check out on beginner fees are [How to set your freelance writing rates like an expert \(2022\)](#) by Freelance to Fortune and [How much to charge \(or pay\) for a 500 to 1500 word article](#) by DJ Team.

Ensure you research the price well as setting a low price will show your inexperience and going too high will have you passed over.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

A writer’s portfolio is a living snapshot of your skills so ensure that it represents you well. A bad piece doesn’t necessarily mean it isn’t worth including in your portfolio, it just needs to be reevaluated and revamped. Maintaining your portfolio to your chosen niche(s) is key to reaching your correct target audience. Building a writing portfolio may seem daunting and abstract if you don’t know where to begin, but once you’ve written a few pieces using these strategies, you’ll be able to professionally showcase your ability to clients and editors alike.