



Presenting Your Portfolio

You've worked hard to put together a strong portfolio of your best work, and now you're ready to apply to the art program of your dreams. They want you to submit it on a CD, but that's not a problem. You took photos of the artwork last night, and it only takes a minute to burn a CD. You're all set, right?

Well, no ... not if you want the best chance of being accepted into the program. The truth is how you present your work is as important as the work itself. In this article, I'll describe what it takes to make the best presentation of your portfolio.

Use High-Quality Images

First impressions do matter, and you want to avoid anything that diminishes how the viewer sees your artwork. This means using only high-quality images.

Unfortunately, no one will try to figure out what your work really looks like if your images are less than the best. Poor quality images will make even the best artwork look bad.

If you plan to shoot your art yourself, learn how to use the camera and how best to light the artwork. Special lighting is not required, but the lights should be positioned to evenly illuminate the work. Avoid using an on-camera flash.

Hold flat work upright on an easel or place sculpture or other 3-D items on a table with a neutral background. Mount the camera on a tripod to keep it steady and properly positioned relative to the artwork. Be sure to check the exposure and focus.

Avoid these common mistakes:

- Background distractions
- Artwork crooked, tilted or out of focus
- Uneven lighting, too light or dark
- Wrong white balance, too yellow or blue
- Flash reflection
- Date stamp

Your artwork will still not look its best with images straight from the camera. Use a good image editing program to add polish by cropping, straightening, and making any other adjustments. Then output

your images in the resolution and format specified on the application.

It takes experience and the right equipment to make the highest quality images, especially of sculpture, jewelry, and fiber art. Professional imaging is an affordable alternative, and you may prefer to work with an experienced photographer to produce a CD of your portfolio.

Communicate Your Vision

The best portfolios communicate a consistent artistic vision across 15–20 pieces of artwork or designs. This is your opportunity to express who you are as an artist and what interests you.

You may have many more excellent pieces than can be included, so the decision on which to include and which to leave out can be a difficult one. But quality is more important than quantity.

Try this process to help you choose the work to include:

- Review your artwork from the last two years and select about 30 pieces that are your best
- Lay the pieces out on the floor and look for two or three common subjects or themes, and these may be across different media
- Set aside any work that doesn't seem to fit
- Arrange the remaining pieces by subject or theme and select the strongest five to ten works in each — this is your core portfolio
- Add or subtract works according to the requirements in the application on quantity and type of works

If you pick carefully the pieces to include, your presentation will be stronger and better express your talent, vision, and creative potential.

Organize The Story

In addition to communicating an artistic vision, your portfolio also tells a story. The order in which the work is viewed determines how the narrative unfolds.

Like any story, your presentation has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A good presentation — or a

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good novel — draws the viewer into and through the story by the arrangement and pacing of its elements.

This approach may help you to arrange your work in a way that tells a compelling story:

- Place your best piece first to grab the viewer's interest
- Put the next-best work at the end to give a strong finish
- Your third-best piece should go in the middle to keep the viewer interested
- Place the remaining works based on theme, subject, or medium in an order that relates them to the best pieces you've already placed

Most software used to view your images will arrange the works by filename in alphabetical order. This means you can control the order of the pieces by how you name the files.

If the filenames required by the application don't include a number, add your own at the beginning of the filename (e.g., "01_", "02_"). Be sure to use two-digit numbers so "10" comes after "09". This will force the works to be viewed numerically — in the order in which you want to tell your story.

Be Professional

No one will give the review of your portfolio the time it deserves if you don't take the time to make it look professional. A sloppy-looking presentation says more about you than you may realize, and the consideration of your talent and artistic potential will certainly begin with a negative impression.

Pay attention to these details as you assemble the final application:

- Follow carefully the instructions in the application on the number of images required and the file format, size, and naming
- Include an index of the works (in order) with the title, medium, dimensions, filename, and a thumbnail image for each piece
- Label the CD neatly with your name and contact information
- Type and carefully proofread for typos and grammar any written materials included with your application

In the end, a professional-looking presentation says that you're serious about your artwork and that your application merits full consideration.

Putting together a strong portfolio of your work takes time and a good deal of effort, but is necessary if you want to be accepted into the art or design program of your choice. By following the suggestions in this article, you will ensure that the presentation of your portfolio is as strong as the work in it.

For more information and free lessons on digital imaging and shooting your artwork, visit the Learning Center at ShootMyArt.com.

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