

SOME QUICK TIPS ON HOW TO ASSEMBLE YOUR PORTFOLIO

2001 JEA/NSPA NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM CONVENTION

✎ Putting together a portfolio is one of the most important aspects in growing as a journalist. You will have quick access to some of your earliest works and be able to determine how your skills and interests have progressed.

✎ Don't just take a look at the directions, but consider deadlines as well. Take out a calendar and plan when you believe your submission will be completed. Give yourself some extra time to double check your entry before the final postmark deadline.

✎ Keep everything in your portfolio simple and uniform. Even if you don't choose to use labels, be sure everything is identified in the same way throughout your portfolio.

>>>step one Getting Started

It may sound very elementary but the first thing that you need to do in assembling a portfolio is ask yourself a series of questions, not just limited to the ones below. I'll give you a few starters to get your mind thinking, and under them, note your answer.

What do I want to include in this portfolio?

What's the best method to present my work?

How many aspects of my journalistic work can I highlight (writing, photography, design, etc)

Be sure that you really are content with your ideas and decisions. More recent work is better than older work

>>>step two The Directions

If you are putting together a portfolio for a competition, this portion of the handout is quite important. **FOLLOW DIRECTIONS.** When a committee or contest asks for certain criteria, follow what they have prescribed. Don't give them more. Don't give them less. Many competitions will throw your entry out should you choose to supply more than they have asked. Be sure to keep this in mind...it never hurts to double check.

>>>step three Keep It Clean

One of the most important facets of putting your portfolio together is making sure that you are neat and clear—not only in certain aspects, but all around. Many panels or groups of assessors are very discouraged when they receive a messy portfolio with papers punched in every which way, pictures falling out and directions not followed.

In General: What I suggest is getting a handful of plastic sheet protectors and using those for

all of the items you plan to include. Then, on the bottom left or right hand side of the page, create a label, just like the one on the right to identify the piece of work that appears on the page. Take a look, and if need be, change the categories of the label to better suit your purpose. Make sure that you add a standard, light colored piece of paper to back each and every one of your entries, especially if they are cutout. This again will provide for more consistency throughout your entire portfolio and make it much easier to view.

publication: The Northern Lights

date: winter 1999

description: investigative report on ISTEP testing scores and ensuing ramifications

✎ If your staff doesn't do this already, ask your adviser for some space to store archive issues or volumes of your publications. If you miss holding on to one or two, you'll know where to find them.

✎ Before you set out to select your best work, this is also another time to ask your adviser for his/her opinion on some of your top pieces. They may be able to give you more guidance in the selection process which could help you out in the end.

✎ To show a full-page package you may have done, try opening up the page in either PageMaker or Quark and printing it out on a much smaller scale. This allows you to present the contents of the whole page in a much more presentable fashion.

>>>step four **Recs & Letters**

While some competitions require recommendation letters and/or a self reflective piece on your journalistic career, it may behoove you to have both of these included in your portfolio even if you are not submitting your portfolio to a competition. Both of these pieces are very, very important in the submission process. Your self-reflective piece should be driven by your desire and passion for journalism. Be bold. Reveal things to your audience that you know are important in your desire to be a better journalist and take pride in what you are writing and presenting.

What you should keep in mind when asking for someone to write you a recommendation is that you should ask this of someone who truly knows your work well—in other words it does you no good to have a paragraph-long letter from the Governor attesting to the fact that you write well. A panel of judges will not weight that letter just because of who it is from. In addition, if there are elements of your work that you would like your recommendation letter to take aim at, be sure to convey that to whomever is writing the letter before they do so. Be sure that you give them ample time to write the letter and work out the arrangements to receive it well before the final deadline for your portfolio.

Now that you know how you're going to present your work and what you're going to include, let's start picking things that are easy to read and will enhance the presentation of your work:

>>>step five **What's In, Out?**

For Print: Try to get actual tearsheets of your work, or photocopied articles/columns. In any case, make sure that they are clear and easy to read. If you do photocopy any of your work, you might take a shot at enlarging the original by a tad so that it can be read easily. Select pieces that show strong leads and writing ability and intuitiveness as a journalist. Briefs and such won't cut it. For credibility sake, make sure that your byline is visible.

If you have an article that ran wide across a broadsheet let's say, your best bet will be to cut and paste the article in column form. Try to stay consistent with your page layout—don't toggle between a portrait and landscape oriented page.

For Photo: Many contests will require original photos, so get in the habit of saving them after the production staff of your publication is through with them. Stay away from mug shots and very basic images—try and show a vast majority of your work. This could include a sports picture from a football game, one from an all-school gathering, and perhaps an "on-the-scenes" picture.

When possible, provide some more background information on the picture and where, when, why it was taken. Some are self explanatory but it never hurts to justify and explain your work.

☞ Should you choose to devise your own categories, make sure that your subdivisions cover a diverse range of journalistic abilities that is of interest to those judging your work.

☞ As with all of your other work, be sure to check the items you've chosen to include to make sure that there are no major mistakes that might cause an evaluator to frown.

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>>>step six **Jazz It Up**

This step is easy. There's no question that seeing page after page of newsprint gets monotonous, but the good news is that there's something that you can do about it. Before placing all the materials in your binder, set them aside and categorize your entries by the type of angle/work you are presenting. Just for your reference and as a springboard, you will find below the five categories the JEA uses for its Journalist of the Year competition:

- Self-Analytical Evaluation of Journalism Career
- Letters of Recommendation

-*Section One:* Skilled and creative use of media content writing, production, photography

-*Section Two:* Inquiring mind and investigative presence resulting in in-depth study or studies of issues important to the local high school audience, high school students in general, or society

-*Section Three:* Courageous and responsible handling of sensitive issues-local or societal-despite threat of censorship

-*Section Four:* Variety of journalistic experiences, each handled in a quality manner-newspaper, yearbook, broadcast, etc.

-*Section Five:* Sustained and commendable work with community media

>>>step seven **Some More Info**

Often times the work you include in a portfolio might not do as much speaking for itself as you wish. It maybe in a category that you have established, but there's a muddled reason as to why it's there. You may have published an article that received community praise/attention for one reason or another, or you possibly covered a controversial topic. Don't shy away from adding another label and continuing your description for those viewing your work. Include points that are not apparent by simply looking at your work.

>>>step eight **Another Look**

Before sending in your portfolio, consider showing it to your adviser or someone in the journalism field who knows your talents and capabilities fairly well. The reason this is important is someone close to you should view what you have put together to see how well your portfolio represents you as a journalist. It is in your best interest not to overlook this.

>>>step nine **Not Quite Done**

You aren't quite done yet! One thing to remember is that your portfolio is never complete. To make your portfolio as recent and updated as can be, frequently take a look at your latest work and try to add to what your portfolio already contains. Again, keep in mind it is best to present your most recent work—by updating your portfolio frequently you can always be sure of having your best work ready to submit. Enjoy your final product and every once in a while take a look back at all you've accomplished!