

# Introduction to Portfolios

Welcome to the world of portfolios. The idea of creating a portfolio may be new to you, even though in some ways you have been creating one all your life. We all have dreams, and we all have taken some steps already to fulfill them. A portfolio helps you define those dreams. It also helps you convince others that you have what it takes to pursue them. The information in this chapter will help you answer these questions:

- What is a portfolio?
- How can a portfolio benefit me?
- How do my goals affect my portfolio?
- What kinds of portfolios are there?
- How can I use my portfolio in my job search and beyond?

This book has two purposes. It is designed to help you discover and document everything about yourself that an employer might be interested in. It will also coach you through the process of finding and landing the right job for you. By completing this book, you will have all the information you need to create a portfolio that is representative of your life's work, as well as a plan for building a successful career.

## What Is a Portfolio?

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A portfolio is a logically organized collection of records that reflects your accomplishments and attributes by highlighting your work and life experience. Your portfolio showcases your success and reflects your career goals and values. It also demonstrates the knowledge, skills, and preferences you have that will make you an asset to an employer. In short, a portfolio tells an employer who you are and what you are capable of.

A portfolio can also help you understand your career path and the steps you have taken to improve your work life. In many ways, that is the aim of this book: to help you identify the steps necessary to reach your career goals.

The use of portfolios is not new. In fact, the term *portfolio* comes from the Italian word *portafoglio*, meaning *to carry leaves or sheets*. The term was used by artists during the Renaissance in reference to the samples of work they showed to potential sponsors. Artists, graphic artists, and teachers have long used portfolios to document their education and experience and showcase their talents. Many high schools and colleges now require students to develop portfolios of their work to help them get a job or further their education.

Portfolios have become extremely powerful tools in today's competitive job market. Advances in technology have made it even easier to store, edit, send, and exhibit examples of our work and records of our accomplishments. Today, people in virtually every profession use portfolios as part of their job search. That said, a well-designed portfolio will still give you an advantage over the majority of job seekers who haven't put in the time and effort to create one of their own.

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## Benefits of a Portfolio

Never have our work lives been so uncertain. There was a time when people could expect to get a good job and remain at one company for decades, eventually retiring with a reasonable level of security and a nice watch. In today's global economy, however, the job market is ever-changing. The average worker changes careers 5 times in his or her life and holds an average of 14 jobs. Today's workers must be able to transition into new careers, find new jobs, acquire new skills, and apply existing skills to new uses. In short, workers are more responsible than ever for managing their own careers.

Of course, finding your *first* job, let alone your fourteenth, is hard work. Human resources professionals say that candidates who are prepared, organized, and focused have a definite edge over those who are not. To be successful in your career, you must be *self-directed*. You must take control of your job search, determine your direction, and aggressively advance toward your goal.

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