

Build the Portfolio. Get the Gig. Repeat.

"Congratulations! You have been selected for the role." It's the one sentence everyone hopes to receive about the dream position they have been trying to land. It's the email you refresh your inbox for. The desired notification that will appear on your phone. Whether that role is a marketing coordinator, an editorial assistant, a communications specialist, a grant writer or a staff journalist, the competition is real.

But how do you make it happen?

One of the best ways to do this is to develop a professional writing portfolio. A strong portfolio helps you stand out in a competitive hiring landscape and gives employers and recruiters a clear picture of what you can do before you step into an interview. And while portfolios are often associated with journalists or creative writers, they matter in marketing, communications, education, publishing, nonprofit work and support roles where strong writing is a skill.

A portfolio is a thoughtfully organized presentation that showcases your best work, ensuring you get a "yes" from hiring managers. According to a [University of Wisconsin study](#), 85 percent of recruiters would click a link to an ePortfolio if it were included in a follow-up email. This means your work can speak on your behalf, even when you're not in the room.

The real question is not whether you need a portfolio, but *how to build one that works*.

This is how you build a writing portfolio.

Professional Writing Portfolios: Why They Matter

Hiring managers are busy. They don't want to guess what kind of writer you are.

A professional writing portfolio functions as a credential. It shows that you can communicate clearly, adapt to different audiences and produce polished work. In fields where writing is tied to performance, your portfolio becomes [proof of your readiness](#), and where a resume demonstrates your experience, a portfolio shows your skills in action. What makes the best portfolios special?

They are curated, not cluttered. Each piece has earned a place in the portfolio.

They are goal-oriented. The work you include is the kind that will help you get the roles you are seeking. If you are applying for marketing roles, highlight campaigns, brand messaging or analytics-driven content. If you are pursuing publishing or editorial work, emphasize long-form features, copyediting samples or examples of developmental feedback. Your portfolio can and should change based on opportunity.

They are easy to navigate. Clear organization shows respect for the reader's time and reflects your professionalism.

If your goal is to get hired, published or accepted into a program, your portfolio becomes one of your most valuable tools.

Set the Foundation

Before you upload a document, you need a foundation. That means understanding your niche, organizing your work with intention and thinking about how your portfolio will look to someone seeing it for the first time.

You don't need to do everything. You just need to do some things well.

One of the most common mistakes writers make is trying to appeal to everyone. The result is often a portfolio that lacks focus and looks generic. Instead, ask yourself three 'North Star' questions:

- What kind of writing do I want to be hired to do?
- Who do I want to read my portfolio?
- What problem does my writing solve?

Your niche may change over time, but clarity at the start will help you make better decisions about what to include in your portfolio and what to leave out.

Learn From Experience: Maria V. Snyder

Maria V. Snyder is a New York Times bestselling author of more than twenty-five fantasy and science fiction novels along with short stories, essays and collaborative works. She's known for her interconnected series including *The Chronicles of Ixia & Sitia*, *The Healer Series* and *Sentinels of the Galaxy*. She did not begin her career with a digital portfolio. "I started writing short stories with the mistaken belief they were easier. They were not," she says. "However, I decided I wanted to earn a living writing, so between writing fiction, I wrote nonfiction magazine articles, I helped write a history of a local candy company and I applied to graduate school."

Her early nonfiction work gave her credibility. "I think when I started having my nonfiction articles published and being paid for them, it gave me credibility in the industry and with my family." For emerging writers, that credibility begins with a focused body of work. Organize your work into categories if it makes sense for your goals: journalism, content writing, academic writing or creative nonfiction. The key is *clarity*.

An introduction to each piece can be brief, two or three sentences explaining the context, audience and objective. That framing helps readers understand what you wrote and why.

Design Matters

Your portfolio doesn't have to be fancy, but it *must* be clean.

Marketing expert [Emily Heaslip](#) reminds us that the average attention span is seconds. Readable fonts, consistent formatting and intuitive navigation go a long way. Hiring professionals often skim first and read second. If your layout is confusing, they may never get to your strongest

paragraph.

Consistency signals attention to detail. That means uniform margins, clearly labeled sections and working links. Avoid overcrowding pages with large blocks of text.

Online portfolios are ideal in today's digital economy. According to the [US Chamber of Commerce](#), having an online portfolio increases visibility and grants you control over how your work is presented. And as Snyder emphasizes, "Very important!! You NEED an online presence."

Curating Your Best Work

This is where many writers hold back. What if my work isn't enough yet? All portfolios are works in progress. The trick is that the work you include represents your best effort to date.

You don't need to include dozens of examples. A few good ones will do. Choose examples that show your voice and range. If the assignment requires it, show that you can write for different audiences or purposes.

If you don't have any published work, original or "spec" pieces are a fantastic alternative. Spec pieces are examples that you can write yourself to demonstrate how you would handle a given project. For example, you could write a hypothetical press release, a spec blog post for a company you admire or a feature article about something that's happening in the world.

Snyder notes that expectations differ: "It depends on whether it's nonfiction or fiction. With nonfiction, the more publishing credits you have, the better, but with fiction, the story will speak for itself."

She also emphasizes polish. "Polish, for sure. A manuscript or article filled with bad grammar and typos won't sell."

Quality control is not optional. Not following submission guidelines is one of the most common mistakes writers make. "Do your research," Snyder advises. "Address the editor or agent by name, know what they've published before and find comp titles if you're pitching fiction."

Your portfolio should give the reader a sense of how you think on the page. Let your voice shine through while also showing that you can follow directions and write with purpose.

And while experimentation matters, consistency builds trust. "Very important!! Readers expect a certain type of story or vibe from authors," Snyder explains. Even as she experiments, she maintains thematic throughlines: "When creating new works, I want to show characters solving their problems and overcoming adversity. I want to show strong female characters and couples that are equals."

From Page to Practice

Once you've written your draft, you've got your application. Frameworks for [career readiness](#)

highlight communication as a key competency. A writing portfolio is a representation of that competency. It shows initiative, self-awareness and the ability to reflect on your work.

Snyder separates the creative and professional aspects of her career. "It's very important. It's hard enough to sit down and write, but if you can get into a routine and if your family understands that those hours are for writing, they'll not bother you. I do all my business stuff during the day and write at night."

Sustainability in this field requires a mental wall between the art and the office. As Maria puts it: "I do all my business stuff during the day and write at night... my most productive time to write is 10 PM to 2 AM. I'm definitely a night owl." Whether you're a night owl or a morning person, your portfolio only grows if you protect your creative hours.

That discipline sustains growth. "No doubt that everything I write has improved my writing. My latest novel is much stronger, not only the writing but the depth of the characters, the themes and what I'm hoping to inspire in my readers."

Portfolios grow as you do. Each project becomes an opportunity to reassess your direction, refine your focus and strengthen your professional identity. You won't build it once and forget it. You'll build it, use it and revisit it again and again.

And that's the point: **build the portfolio, get the gig, repeat.**

Sources

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