

Preparing your first architecture portfolio



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Your architecture portfolio gives you the opportunity to illustrate the design skills that you have set out in your CV. It substantiates and proves that you can do what you say you can, while also expressing your own particular creative flair. What you choose to show in your portfolio should reinforce your CV, highlighting what you are capable of, and also supporting how you present yourself in an interview.



Preparation

Starting out, as a student or graduate, your portfolio will most commonly consist of speculative projects that you have completed at architecture school, unless you have gained additional work experience in a practice outside of your course.

Prepare your portfolio in such a way that it can be submitted separately from your CV. Remember you may need to produce both an electronic and a hard copy portfolio – depending on the requirements of the potential employer.





Electronic and hardcopy

For the electronic version, ensure your portfolio is created in a graphics layout program, such as InDesign, with a consistent layout and typeface. This will keep the file size lighter and give more uniformity in the presentation.

Individual JPEG, PNG or PDF images in a mixture of styles can look unprofessional and messy if submitted individually. Try to keep the file under 5MB, otherwise, it may not get through your potential employer's server.

For a hardcopy portfolio – ready to take to an interview – use a size such as A3 so it is easy to print out and sufficiently portable, while still readable.

Design ideas

- Include a timeline of experience that doubles up as a contents page
- Graphically indicate degree of competency for different skills - think dials, bar charts or beginner/intermediate and advanced gradings
- Consider including a drawing of your own of a favourite building by a notable architect. As an immediately recognisable building, this image will spark interest





Curating your portfolio

Use your CV as the starting point for deciding on the skills that you want to emphasise when selecting work to include in your portfolio. You need to show the diversity and range of techniques that you have been able to develop so far. It is not just about exhibiting your mastery of various software programs. It is important to showcase your ability in other media, such as hand-drawing, photography and physical model-making. You also need to include work that encompasses the full range of architectural design conventions from the concept sketch to site plans, complex axonometrics, cross sections, final visualisations and construction details.



Practice type

Pay attention to the type of practice that you are applying to. If, for instance, you are seeking a job with a small practice that specialises in residential projects ensure that your portfolio includes domestic floor plans and elevations. Consider how best you can communicate these skills in a project-related context. Ideally, try to include them in relation to a realised project. Use any relevant work experience that you may have been able to undertake. Or, if this is not possible, then relate the images to a particular university project assignment with the Plan of Work design stages in mind.



Design ideas

- Think of your portfolio as a challenge in graphic legibility and storytelling. Tell a brief story of the essence of each project and support this with compelling imagery, which connects with your passions and the value and design profile of the practice that you are applying to.
- Create a factsheet at the beginning of each new project sheet in your portfolio. This factsheet could include key information on the project, such as: location, client, budget, RIBA stages and your role on the project. This can help to inform your employer of the breadth of your knowledge across stages.





Highlighting skills and connections to your CV

If you have been able to carry out relevant work experience, what skills and experience did you state you had gained in your CV? Are you able to illustrate them visually? For instance, with images that highlight the solving of a design problem, construction detailing or architectural visualisation.

Consider the best type of image to use and ensure that it is of the highest quality. Remember that the skills you demonstrate in your portfolio will be those for which you'll be hired.

Remember to organise your portfolio in chronological order – start with images that illustrate your university work first, and then those from any relevant work experience. Make the connections to your CV clear. For each image, include a focused narrative – a short paragraph or 2-3 bullet points indicating the purpose of that image and what you are intending to illustrate. The images should be easy to read – but also illustrate your creativity and design ability. Think carefully before using anything other than a simple white background.





Portfolio presentation

A practice needs to be able to refer to your portfolio as a standalone document, so include your name, your college or university, your current status and contact details on an introductory first page or front cover. A simple font and a representative image are all you need by way of a cover sheet to give a positive first impression.



Final finessing

If in doubt of whether to include an image or not leave it out. Less is most often more. It is important that you edit your portfolio, so it represents only your best work that is the most relevant work for a specific application.

You are telling the story of your career so far, so ensure that you have led the reviewer through that story with clear signposts. As with your CV, show it to a colleague or peer and get their feedback.



RIBA Jobs Portfolio Tips

- Focus on the particular parts of projects on which you worked yourself. Try to demonstrate your specific skills, e.g. where you solved a design problem, or where you solved a technical issue
- Try not to include images of a project simply because you like them – they need a purpose for being in your portfolio. Offer images in a variety of media and formats, e.g. hand drawings, perspectives, plans, 3D, photographs
- Focus on the most recent projects on which you have worked. Prospective employers will want to know where you are now.
- You may have to email your portfolio, so use a simple format such as PDF and try to keep the file under 5MB, otherwise it may not get through the server of the potential employer.



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