WORK SAMPLES VS. PORTFOLIOS
Understanding the Differences, Uses, and Values of Both

Work Samples

+ Work samples (or design sheets) are intended to provide employers with condensed examples of your best work. They function both independently of each other and as a set, similar to a series of art prints. Design sheets should be included every time you send out a resume and cover letter. They are also great to have on hand during career fairs, networking receptions, and firm presentations.

+ Your name should be included on the work sample sheet you create in the same font and visual style as your resume. Your entire application package should be a reflection of the brand you have created for yourself.

+ Work samples are not intended to function as a comprehensive representation of your work; rather, they are an abridged introduction to the skills and design processes you possess. Design sheets should act as hook with the goal being to stir interest in your background and abilities-- and ultimately, your portfolio.

+ Design sheets range from 2 to 4 pages of images and text. They are typically under 5 MB in size. You may have a different project or skill featured on each page, or focus on one or two projects more thoroughly.

+ Always consider your audience. For example, if you are sending your work samples to a firm that focuses on urban design, including examples of site planning or large-scale projects can showcase your most relevant skills.

+ Showing process work is increasingly valuable to employers. Do not be afraid to include concept models, sketches, or programming studies in your work samples in addition to final models, plans, or renderings. Just don't forget your brand and the value of first impressions. Everything you submit to an employer will be evaluated from a designer's perspective. Treat your entire application as a marketing and promotional device.

+ Creating a few design sheets before facing an application deadline or directly after completing a studio project are great habits to develop. The right design sheet can help you distill the most compelling aspects of your work and inform how you treat the same project in your full portfolio.

Portfolios

+ In contrast to work samples, portfolios are a series of 5 to 7 projects organized in spreads that showcase a greater depth of work. Text is often longer, images are larger and more numerous, and the process from idea to final solution is expressed more thoroughly. In contrast to design sheets, full portfolios should not be included in email attachments when first reaching out to an employer, unless requested. They should, however, always be kept on hand for use during in-person interviews-- and in physical form.

+ Portfolios typically range from 20 to 40 pages (a spread has two pages). The number of pages you decide to devote to a project should be determined by its quality, scope, duration, and execution. Consider the story you wish to tell about a project; the images you select and the way you arrange them should help to reinforce this narrative.

+ Avoid chronological order in a professional portfolio. Opening with your favorite project makes a powerful first impression. Ending with an equally impressive project is also essential: ensure that your final impression is just as strong as your first.

+ Full portfolios should demonstrate your depth of design training with varied project types and scales, software skills, and conceptual approaches.

+ See our **Professional Portfolio Tips** guide for more detailed advice on crafting your best portfolio!