

Portfolios – a Primer
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Fundamentally a portfolio is meant to show a sampling of your best images. When putting together your portfolio there are many things to bear in mind, such as:

Content

- A portfolio should not be too large. Most editors, art buyers or other reviewers agree that 100 images should suffice, although it can certainly be MUCH smaller. If you are showing a book of prints or tear sheets, again less is more.
- It can be in the form of transparencies, prints, tear sheets of published material, a CD containing digital images to be viewed on a computer screen, or a link to digital images residing in a section of your website.
- It should only contain absolutely perfect images, technically and artistically.
Your credit line should appear on all images, and your name should feature prominently on the portfolio.
- The images must speak for themselves, since you may not be around when your portfolio is being reviewed. They must not, therefore, require a spoken explanation of why, what, where to convey their point.
- Many photographers prefer to have more than one portfolio to suit different target clients – for example, leaning towards either advertising or editorial concepts.

Presentation

- If showing transparencies, they should be in plastic sheets --- or even special presentation mounts* (less images on a sheet but more dramatic).
- If showing prints or tear sheets, these should be compiled ideally in a specialty portfolio book* of some sort. At the very least you should use an attractive folder.
- If showing digital images, they can appear on the reviewer's screen individually or as a page of thumbnails. If you are showing thumbnails, it is best if they can be enlarged if needed.
- If you have a website, your portfolio should be featured there. Ultimately this will be a useful tool for a photographer who can direct a potential client to his/her site.
- A hard copy portfolio, as opposed to a digital one, is still preferred since it can more easily be passed around and presented. Some buyers call in portfolios from photographers they want to consider for assignments and show the books to decision makers.

Structure

- The order or sequence of images is important. This is within your control and so you must "lead" your reviewer from one image to the next.
- Put a lot of thought into this sequencing.... It can make or break a portfolio.
- NEVER repeat images within a portfolio, especially if you use a same or similar image on, say, sheet 1 and 4 of a portfolio. Reviewers will often have a photographic memory in this regard and just get annoyed at your sloppy presentation!
- You may, however, use similar images TOGETHER if they are making some artistic point: horizontal v. vertical viewpoint; scene setter v. coming in closer; etc.
- Color spacing is important too. There may be an artistic point to be served by putting similar colors together ... but not too many. Often it is more successful to balance the colors of a particular grouping. If, for example, you have a sheet of slides, or a page of thumbnails, see if the color flows within the grouping. (Hint: if you squint your eyes, it will often be more apparent what is missing, or where there is too much).
- On a sheet of slides or page of thumbnails, remember that the corners of the page are dominant positions.
- THEMES (or keywords) are a useful tool and can help with your grouping. No, you are not trying to show a range of stock subjects per se, but strong mini sequences can be most effective.
- The goal is uninterrupted FLOW. Imagine one color or shape leading into another; or one theme leading to another.
- A portfolio should have strong opening and closing images.

Overall comments

- If you have one area of photography that is your strong suit, don't dilute it with a scattering of other areas that are not "you".
- If you are a landscape photographer but happen to have taken one great portrait, don't bother to put it in your portfolio ... it will just confuse the reviewer.
- Assuming that the purpose of showing your portfolio is to get employment, then it should only feature the area of photography that you are good at; the type of work that you want to be hired to do.
- If the purpose of your portfolio is purely personal, then you can certainly include a broader range of your greatest images.
- Create a "leave-behind" to accompany your portfolio, even if it is only a business card. A promotional card displaying one of your best images is ideal. Print your name and website address on the front on the card.
- Be sure to follow up with your portfolio reviewers by sending them a thank you or email.

*These mounting boards (usually black) and specialty portfolio books are obtained from art supply stores.



ASPP – The American Society of Picture Professionals

"We are a community of image experts committed to sharing our experience and knowledge throughout the industry. We provide professional networking and educational opportunities. If you create, edit, research, license, manage or publish pictures, ASPP is the place for you. Join us." This is the new vision statement that was announced by the Board for 2005, and describes the multi disciplines within this non-profit association.

Since 1966, ASPP has sought to bring together the different groups of image professionals through its educational programs, chapter meetings, quarterly magazine *The Picture Professional*, and regular emailing of announcements, job postings, etc. At www.aspp.com you can find a gallery, the current issue of the magazine with certain archived articles about the business of photography, book reviews, chapter programs, a Find a Pro link to its members, and other helpful resources. Members can also enter into a password-protected area to gain access to an up-to-date membership directory, job postings, and current eNews.

ASPP has approximately 800 members in the U.S. and overseas, whose demographics break down roughly as 50% researchers/editors/buyers, 30% photographers, 20% personnel at stock agencies or collections. In addition to occasional traveling programs, ASPP has a three-day Educational Conference every two years to which other organizations are invited.

For more information contact Executive Director, Cathy D-P Sachs, at 703-299-0219, or email cathy@aspp.com.

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