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THE PORTFOLIO AND JOB SEARCH

A portfolio is a design problem.

—Steff Geissbuhler, geissbuhler:design

THE PURPOSE OF A PORTFOLIO

A portfolio is a body of creative work used to showcase your aptitudes, conceptual and creative thinking, and experience. Every graphic designer and advertising art director needs one. By looking at your portfolio, a prospective employer will be able to evaluate your ideas, typography, visualization, composition, creativity, and tech skills.

Most often, prospective employers will see your portfolio before they interview you. A quick look at your work tells someone whether you are qualified or of interest.

Most student portfolios consist of projects created in response to course assignments, textbook projects, student competitions, as well as self-directed projects. Once you obtain design experience, your portfolio may contain some professional graphic design solutions. Students who have internships or part-time jobs in the profession often include work they have created on the job if the employer or client permit and the work is suitably creative.

ARCHIVE YOUR WORK

- Select your best projects and carefully store them in the cloud or on a storage device. (Dropbox is an example of a storage service that lets you save your files, docs, and videos anywhere and share them easily.)
- Label every file with your last name, project name, and date.
- Write a one- or two-sentence rationale (goal, audience, concept/strategy) for each project and store it with each project.

PORTFOLIO PRESENTATIONS

The quality of your work is paramount. After that, you need an *efficient* and *professional* online presentation.

To post your portfolio on your own website, you need to purchase a domain name from a domain registrar and obtain a web-hosting provider. A domain name is an online web address. Purchase a custom domain of your full name, for example, robinlanda.com or robinlanda.me. You can search available domains and purchase them from a “domain registrar,” such as Hover or GoDaddy.

If you use Adobe Creative Cloud, you can use Adobe Portfolio to build a personalized website to showcase your creative work. Or use Squarespace. Or you can build your own website design.

You also can post your portfolio on various professional design or advertising organizations’ websites. For example, student membership in the AIGA includes an online members portfolio gallery.

TIPS FOR DIGITAL PRESENTATIONS

1. Your portfolio website design should showcase your work, not overpower it.
2. Make sure your work is well organized by kind and is large enough to show your design and typography problem-solving skills.
3. If you have live websites, include links or link the screenshot. (Some talent recruiters prefer not to leave your site, however.)
4. Make contact info easy to find. Include your e-mail and phone number(s).
5. Include links to any relevant social media sites.
6. Post a downloadable current résumé or summary.
7. If you include an About Me section, make it short and to the point (and witty, if possible).
8. Write all your copy clearly and with pith. No rambling! Spell check. Write in a friendly but professional tone, not corporate sounding but not too casual, either. Remember, you’re not writing a text.
9. Your typography should be impeccable.

PRINTED PORTFOLIOS

You can present a printed portfolio in a variety of formats. The physical format should be dictated by the kind of content and how you conceive your *portfolio as a design problem in itself and how it can best document your work and prove your capabilities*. For example, if your work is experimental and completely self-directed—let’s say it’s a visual autobiography—perhaps a bound book would be suitable. If your portfolio contains a variety of solutions including package design, identity design, and book covers, then perhaps a presentation case is in order.

Please keep in mind—*digital and physical portfolios should be easy to navigate*. Make viewing the portfolio almost effortless, certainly not difficult.

PRESENTATION CASES AND BINDERS

Basic types of portfolio presentation cases and binders include binder/book with removable sleeves, attaché-like case, clamshell box, case and book combination, binder with permanent sleeves, and bound book. If you choose an attaché-like case or clamshell box, all the pieces should be mounted on boards of the same size and color (black doesn’t show fingerprints), and they should fit easily and neatly into the case. Optionally, include a binder of the working sketches you made for the design solutions in your portfolio. Some employers like to see these sketches because they demonstrate your ability to work through a concept and generate more than one solution to a problem.

BOUND BOOKS

Fully bound books can be produced in a variety of forms and sizes through vendors or by hand. Some schools offer courses in bookbinding and comping.

- *Types*: Perfect bound, saddle stitch, coil bound, or case wrap
- *Extras*: Dust jacket, foil printing, mounted images, gloved spine
- *Some vendors include*: Lulu.com and Blurb.com

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

A description is an opportunity to showcase your ability to succinctly explain a design concept, strategy, or goal, an insight into the brand, entity or audience, and designate an audience. Some studios or agencies title their projects, for example, in Chapter 14, the Old Spice campaign is titled, “Manliness redefined.” If you visit www.hornallanderson.com, you’ll see that they title their projects.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

- Have you approached your portfolio as a design problem?
- Is your digital presentation user friendly? Did you test it? Is it easy to find and view your work?
- Where will you post your portfolio online?
- Do you have 3D work that needs to be photographed (professionally)?
- Will your portfolio be a one-of-a-kind bound book?
- Will you have more than one presentation?
- Are your labels or descriptions succinct and well written?
- Does your portfolio best showcase all the kinds of work you have?

PORTFOLIO CONTENT

What kind of job would you like to have, and where do you want to work? Would you like to design brand identities? Packages? Websites? Advertising? Would you like to design a variety of projects? Knowing whether you want to present a variety of work or focus on a particular area of specialization is the first step. If you want to specialize in one area of graphic design, such as package design or information design, the work in your portfolio should reflect that area of interest. If all areas of graphic design interest you, your portfolio should include a range of projects that reflect your ability to solve different types of design problems.

PORTFOLIO ORGANIZATION

Conceive your portfolio as an unfolding visual experience. Start with a bang, end with a bang, and keep the reviewer's interest all the way through. Remember: *The last project in your portfolio leaves the viewer with a general impression of the entire body of work.* If the work before it isn't good, however, reviewers won't get to the last project.

Use one of the following sequences to set up your portfolio:

- Next-to-best piece first
- Third strongest in the middle
- Best piece last
- No weak solutions anywhere

Or

- Best piece first
- Third strongest in the middle
- Next-to-best piece last
- No weak solutions anywhere

If a project is not excellent, don't include it. The point is to keep people's attention for the entire presentation. End with a visual high note.

GENERAL GRAPHIC DESIGN PORTFOLIO

For a generalized graphic design portfolio, there are two main ways to think of content.

- *Four integrated media (or 360 or omnichannel) projects, each with several component pieces created for a variety of brands, causes, or entities.* An integrated media project involves conceiving and designing for various media and might include print, desktop web, mobile web and apps, and other screen-based media, out-of-home, installations, branded environments, and innovative or unconventional media. For example, a branding program might start with

the logo and visual identity plus a variety of integrated solutions across media including a website, promotional design, corporate communications (such as brochures or an annual report), and environmental branding. Including well-conceived and well-designed integrated media campaigns or programs demonstrates your ability to conceive strategy and concepts across media, keeping the unique capabilities of each media channel in mind. An integrated media campaign or program could include visual identity, social media, desktop web, mobile web or apps, package design, environmental design or graphics, corporate communication, promotional design across media, motion graphics, digital installations, kiosks, and more.

Or

- *Two or three integrated media programs or campaigns and a few individual projects,* where some projects are a series, such as a poster or book cover series, or a system, such as an icon or wayfinding system.

ADVERTISING PORTFOLIO

A student's advertising portfolio, also called a book, should contain at least four integrated media (or 360) advertising campaigns, with each campaign representing ideas generated for and using some of the following media: interactive, print, mobile, outdoor/out of home, ambient, installations, broadcast, vids/animations, and games. Each ad in a campaign should be able to stand on its own yet belong to the campaign as a group, sharing a common strategy, related ideas, voice, tone, and art/copy characteristics.

A campaign demonstrates your ability to create a flexible strategy with related ideas, sustain your creative and strategic thinking on various media, *while designing for what each medium does best.* For example, an ad idea for mobile web should be different from an ad idea for print because those media channels have different capabilities.

Ideally, the campaigns in your portfolio are for a variety of products, services, and organizations, including nationally known brands, social causes, or nonprofits/charities. (Choose real brands but avoid creating ads for brands that currently have award-winning campaigns. Be aware of the work that agencies are currently doing.)

- Present a fresh perspective on things.
- Don't mimic existing advertising or create pedestrian designs.
- Demonstrate a variety of creative approaches and looks (color palettes, textures, tone, imagery) in your campaigns. Your campaigns should look different because they are for different brands or entities.
- Your ads should have different voices depending on the products or services you're advertising, such as humorous, ironic, bittersweet, or serious.

Remember: One bad ad brings down the entire book. If you have a weak campaign, toss it and start again. Never include something that is weak in a portfolio. Your potential will be gauged by the weak work.

The rule for organizing an advertising portfolio is the same as for graphic design: best ad campaign first and next-to-best ad campaign last or the other way around. Place a strong campaign in the middle. Strive to:

- Illuminate; explain something not already known.
- Make us feel or think differently about the brand or entity by virtue of your idea and execution.
- Offer an insight.
- Positively change the way we think about a brand or entity.
- Arouse an emotional response in the audience.
- Influence someone's opinion of a brand or cause.
- Entertain. Inform. Do good.

BUILDING YOUR OWN BRAND

“Never forget that building your own brand is about determining the things that make you different from every other designer, and shining a white-hot spotlight on them.”

—Drew Davies, Owner,
Oxide Design Co.

Most designers have pretty much the same skill sets—they know how to conceive, design, and prepare their work for screen and print, including producing work for several media channels. Consequently, how do you create your personal brand so you appear to be a singular marvel?

Designer Sean Adams notes, “Being a responsible, skilled and talented designer is the same as a car having reliable wheels. This is the minimum requirement that is expected. What sets great designers apart is the ability to identify the qualities that are unique and personal to their identity, and promoting these relentlessly.”

To begin determining what makes you unique, ask yourself:

- Why do you design? What's your reason for getting out of bed in the morning and wanting to do what you do?
- What do you hope your work as a designer will accomplish?
- What value do you bring to any assignment, studio, agency, or client?
- What value do you promise to deliver?

“Who am I as a designer?” and “How can I communicate who I am?” are not easy questions to answer for most of us. Perhaps related questions can help you articulate answers:

- What are two or three distinctive traits or ways of thinking or creating that make me the designer I am? Do those traits combine in a way that might differentiate me?
- How do I want to present myself professionally?
- How do I want people to perceive me? What would I like them to think?
- How can I visually express those qualities that make me distinctive?
- What’s the takeaway? What is the one key fact, point, or idea I want people to associate with me or remember about me?

Here are two good books about personal branding and portfolio building:

Anderson, Denise. *Stand Out: Design a Personal Brand. Build a Killer Portfolio. Find a Great Design Job.* (Peachpit, 2016); www.standoutportfolio.com/

Landa, Robin. *Build Your Own Brand: Strategies, Prompts and Exercises for Marketing Yourself.* (Simon & Schuster, 2013); www.robinlandabooks.com

COPY AND VISUAL COMPONENTS

IDENTITY IN WORDS

- Name
- Descriptor (career aspiration or category, e.g., junior graphic designer, junior art director, junior UX designer)
- Résumé
- Twitter
- Elevator speech (a thirty-second clear message about you, stating who you are, what you’re seeking, and how you can benefit a studio or agency)

VISUAL IDENTITY

- Typeface(s)
- Logotype (your name in thoughtful typography)
- Résumé
- Icons, symbols, FB
- Color palette
- Portfolio website
- Social media, photo and video sharing sites, blog, Twitter background

VISUAL IDENTITY: RÉSUMÉ

- Typeface(s)
- Type treatment
- Color palette
- Composition, visualization
- Paper and digital résumés

BRAND PERSONALITY

- Your portfolio presentation, your work, résumé, and any other materials you present will define your brand personality.
- Which typeface(s) are you?
- What is your color palette?
- Which symbol are you? Logo? Logotype?

HOW TO WRITE AND PREPARE A RÉSUMÉ AND COVER LETTER

A résumé is a summary of your skills, education, and work experiences for the information of prospective employers. Often, it is the first document that potential employers or creative recruiters see that represents you and your design skills. Initially, the best way to approach your résumé is as an information design project.

- Gather and present information in a clear and interesting way.
- Your résumé is a visual identity design (your distinctive brand) as well as an information design (clear information hierarchy) and promotional design project (differentiates you and promotes your capabilities).
- The most important issues are absolute visual hierarchy, unity, clear communication, visual interest, and impeccable typography.
- A résumé should be neat, legible, and well designed (after all, you are looking for a job as a designer). Design one for print and a downloadable PDF. You may choose to have the résumé reflect your unique design sensibility.

For students, it is important to include both design skills and technical skills. In addition, students can include work experience that is unrelated to the professional field because it demonstrates the ability to land and keep a job. You certainly want to include any design-related experience, such as internships or freelance work. For designers with at least five years of experience, be sure to include responsibilities, skills, and client lists.

SAMPLE RÉSUMÉ CONTENT

This section is only a guide for résumé content, not résumé design. First, make sure to include complete contact information. Your phone, e-mail, and web address should be functional for at least a few months.

- Name, phone number, e-mail address, web address

OBJECTIVE

- If you want to include an objective, keep it succinct.
 - Seeking a position as a (junior graphic designer or junior art director)

EDUCATION

- List college and graduate degrees with most recent listed first. Include degree, date of degree, major, and honors.
 - 2022 BFA: Graphic design, Michael Graves College at Kean University
 - 2018–2022 Dean's list; graduated: magna cum laude

DESIGN SKILLS

- List design and technical competencies.
 - Editorial design, branding and visual identity design, advertising design, promotional design.
 - List software and any tech skills.
 - List any additional skills, such as illustration, video, photography, or copywriting.

EXPERIENCE

Begin with your most recent position and include job titles. *Succinctly* describe your responsibilities (if at all). Include a client list when applicable.

- 2021–present *The Design Studio, Graphic Design Intern*
 - Develop concepts and design with design director based on client creative briefs.
 - Work with clients and vendors.
 - Clients include: Liberty Hall Preservation, The Community Food Bank of New Jersey, and The Enough Project.
- 2018–present *Dunkin' Donuts, Assistant Store Manager*
 - Responsibilities include employee scheduling, customer relations, and quality control.

- 2019–2020 *The United Way, Graphic Design Intern*
 - Collaborated with design director on idea generation and design.
 - Digital prepress and preflight of designer’s print files.

AWARDS AND HONORS

List all professional awards; this will demonstrate that your work has been recognized as outstanding. Simply list the year and award title.

- 2022 The One Club Young Ones competition Gold Pencil
- 2021 AIGA student award

PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS

List advanced coursework, specialized training, workshops, and any academic awards.

- 2020 Philadelphia Art Directors Workshops: Motion Graphics
- 2019 Thinking Creatively Conference Workshop: Handmade Typography

RÉSUMÉ TIPS

- Check spelling.
- Proofread several times.
- Make it readable and legible.
- Use margins well.
- Keep the résumé to one page.
- Use a professional e-mail address with your name in it, such as betty.landa@gmail.com, not the one you use for your friends, such as chill@gmail.com, or a generic design one, such as greatdesigner4all@gmail.com.

COVER LETTER

A *cover letter* is an introductory business letter that accompanies your résumé. Brevity, clarity, and proper form are vital.

- A formal way to address the recipient is by “Mr. or Ms. Last Name:” Spell the recipient’s name correctly. Use the person’s title and last name followed by a colon. An informal salutation is: “Hello, Sally” for example, or “Hi, Sam.” (I am not a fan of using “Hey,” though some potential employers may not mind.) “To Whom It May Concern” is a last resort if you don’t know the specific recipient’s name. You should make an effort to find out the name. Call the firm or check the name online. Some firms prefer communication sent to the human resources officer or talent recruiter; others prefer letters sent to the creative director. Find out or send the letter to both to play it safe.
- Do not repeat many facts contained in your accompanying résumé; rather, include something not in your résumé, for example, *explain what you specifically contributed to a project or on an internship.*
- Keep the cover letter brief and to the point. Check your spelling and usage.
- Create a master cover letter that you can customize for specific career opportunities.
- Use action verbs such as enhanced, demonstrated, delivered, attained, created, completed, and so on.
- Conclude with a formal business letter closure such as “Sincerely yours” or “Yours truly.”
- Follow the instructions if you are uploading a cover letter.

TIPS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS FOR A PORTFOLIO BY PROF. MARTIN HOLLOWAY

Consider the presentation a project in itself.

Pay particular attention to type. Think of type as the visual equivalent of the sound of a voice. Some messages should shout, some whisper, some be expressed with passion, some as a footnote. Sounds of the voice can add great richness and express layers of meaning about the same subject; type should do the same.

Make your résumé a design problem. Make it excellent typographically! Make it clear and easy to read, with good visual hierarchy.

Have more good pieces than you may use in one presentation so you can tailor the presentation to a particular interview. For example, have an extra ad campaign, package design, or visual identity to accommodate a potential employer's business specialization.

If you have 3D work, such as package design, the work should be professionally photographed.

Make the presentation beautiful, but do not let it overwhelm the work.

For conversation with prospective employers, be knowledgeable about the field, production, and designers. Be able to speak with interest and enthusiasm about your profession.

Never apologize for your work. Never include work you have to apologize for.

Always leave a résumé behind after an interview.

Learn to explain what you did and did not do for each piece. For a complex piece, graphic elements within a project may in themselves be impressive solutions to problems, such as icons, maps, spot illustrations, or graphic devices. Do not assume a reviewer will know what you did (some people may use stock images, some may create the elements themselves). Learn to be concise in these explanations.

Know how much salary you want (or will settle for) instead of appearing befuddled by the question. For information about salaries, see the *Graphic Artists Guild Handbook: Pricing and Ethical Guidelines*, <https://graphicartistsguild.org/handbook/> and <http://www.aiga.org/salary-survey/>.

Keep designing. Best wishes for success!

JOB SEARCH

Many graphic design studios, branding firms, advertising agencies, organizations, groups, and corporations list employment and internship opportunities on their websites. You can use a search engine to find company websites by name, or if you don't know the names of the studios or agencies in your metropolitan area, you can also use a search engine to find lists. For example, type in "graphic design firms in Cincinnati" or "advertising agencies in Miami" to find the names and links to potential employers.

Keep a running list of work you admire from various design studios, agencies, and designers. Then go to their websites to view internship and job postings. You can see professional work in design magazines and design annuals, as well as on design magazine and professional organization websites.

Many studio and agency websites allow you to apply for positions online. You will need to upload your résumé. If you know the name of the studio contact, e-mail that person with a follow-up letter of interest. "May I see you for an information conversation or interview?" "Is there anyone you can refer me to?" "May I shadow someone at your studio for the day?" Get back to them to see if any positions have opened up.

Know about the studio or agency before the interview. Put something in the cover letter that makes you sound appealing or valuable.

If you decide to pursue a career in an organization or corporation, make calls to the human resources offices to see if they have in-house creative/design departments; for example, Coach and Target have in-house design departments. Follow the previous advice for making contact and sending résumés.

Not all graphic design careers are in design studios, advertising agencies, branding firms, or interactive agencies or studios.

Many corporations, government agencies, publishing houses, and public institutions require the skills of a graphic designer or art director. Working for a company or organization with an in-house design or advertising department offers a different type of work environment than a design studio or advertising agency.

You will find in-house design departments within the following entities:

- Corporations
- Retailers
- Public institutions
- Governmental agencies
- Nonprofit organizations and charities
- Pharmaceutical companies
- Publishers (magazines, books, newspapers)
- Public relations firms
- Brand strategy firms
- Marketing firms
- Game design firms
- Mobile media firms
- Media companies

There are many additional resources for finding information about jobs and contacts. Check the credits listings in design or advertising magazines for designers, art directors, and creative directors. Check job listings in print and online under graphic designer, designer, graphics, interactive designer, web designer, publishing, editorial, advertising, and art director. Read the business section of any newspaper and note companies that are expanding, hiring, changing management, and so on—these are the studios and agencies that might be hiring. Also look in an issue of *Adweek* or *Advertising Age* to see which

agencies have new clients and therefore might need to hire employees or freelancers. Check advertising and marketing columns in *Business Week*, *Fast Company*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New York Times*. Search job listings on general employment websites, such as www.indeed.com and on design career websites such as www.creativehotlist.com or www.coroflot.com/, and on www.Linkedin.com. Network at design conferences.

Be prepared to put in many hours, weeks, even months searching for a job. Diligence will pay off.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Determine which studios or agencies specialize in the areas that interest you. Make a comprehensive hierarchical list. Compile your list of design studios or ad agencies from a variety of sources:

- Magazine award annuals (featuring the best work of the year)
- Award books
- Graphic design magazine websites
- Design conference rosters
- Design studio websites
- Design blogs
- LinkedIn
- Twitter, Facebook
- *Adweek's* agency directory
- Art Directors Club job postings
- American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) job postings
- Professional design and advertising organizations job postings
- Trade journals and magazines, such as *Communication Arts*, *Print*, *HOW*, *Archive*, *Graphic Design USA*, *Adweek*, *Creativity*, and *Ad Age*

CREATIVE RECRUITERS

Creative recruiters are an extremely important resource. They place a large range of entry-level and experienced creative

professionals in graphic design, advertising, UX, interactive, production, and trainee positions. Some have fees; others don't. Do not pay any recruiter up front! Ideally, the job applicant should not be charged a fee. The potential employer pays the fee.

Most creative recruiters have websites where you can obtain more information about job listings and descriptions, salary guides, and contact information. There are also recruiters that specialize in securing temporary employment for creative professionals with or without experience.

Call the recruiting agency and ask for an appointment to review your portfolio. Check with your college or university professor or career placement center for employment agency names, or find listings by using Internet search engines.

INTERNSHIPS

One of the best ways to gain experience and entry into an agency or studio is through an internship. Some studios and agencies have internship programs. Ask your professor if your school offers an internship program.

Search the top studios and agencies in your area and ask if they have internship programs. Many will list them online. If they do not have such programs, ask if they would consider taking you on as an intern.

- Treat applying for an internship like applying for a job.
- Have a résumé prepared. Most likely, you will need a portfolio, or at minimum, a few finished projects to show.
- Many studios and agencies pay interns. (I do not advise taking an unpaid internship.) Some require that you take the internship for college credit.
- Search for an internship many months before you wish to begin.
- Network. Ask everyone you know and meet if they know of an internship.
- Make sure you will be learning on the internship and not doing menial tasks, such as getting coffee or filing all day.

NETWORKING

Ask the design faculty at your college or university about internships or job leads. Adjunct instructors who are design practitioners are a good resource. Tell everyone you know that you are an aspiring designer. You never know when someone will say, "Oh, my sister-in-law is an art director; maybe she can help." Pursue part-time, temporary, or freelance work.

Maintain or forge new networking relationships. Stay in touch with your peers—one placement leads to others. Join professional organizations. Most professional design and advertising organizations have student memberships at reduced rates. Attend portfolio reviews, conferences, lectures, workshops, job fairs, and webinars sponsored by your state's professional clubs/organizations, as well as by national and international organizations:

- AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Artists) www.aiga.org
- Society of Illustrators www.societyillustrators.org
- The One Club www.oneclub.org
- Type Directors Club www.tdc.org
- Icograda www.icograda.org
- Graphic Artists Guild www.graphicartistsguild.org
- Advertising Week www.advertisingweek.com
- Creative Week www.oneclub.org/creativeweek
- Portfolio Night www.portfolionight.com

THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Now that many graphic design studios and advertising agencies can see a candidate's work online before an interview, the interview truly serves the purpose of meeting the job candidate—the person—rather than evaluating the work. Or a group of people at a studio or agency may want to view work when you arrive for the interview.

Don't take an interview lightly. Be prepared. Know something about the company, especially the kind of work they do and who some of their clients are. Utilizing Internet search engines makes finding information about the company easier than ever before. If possible, try to get information about the person who will be conducting the interview. Be able to state the rationale for all your design projects. Prepare a list of intelligent questions about their company, their process, and the job position.

Read the industry news. Know what's going on in the visual communication industry. Don't be afraid to have an opinion, but don't insult anyone's work.

Be ready to honestly discuss your professional experience. Know what salary you are willing to take. But you can always and safely say, "May I sleep on your offer, please?"

Clearly state your unique capabilities and qualities, such as professional experience, internships, credentials, academic standing, and attractive personal qualities, such as eagerness, being a self-starter, or being a quick learner.

Before the interview:

- Review the content of your portfolio to make sure everything is in order and neat. Tailor your portfolio to the company; for example, include more editorial pieces for an interview with a publishing company.
- Bring a copy of your résumé.
- Optional: Prepare a leave-behind.
- If you bring a printed portfolio, hang a name tag with your phone number on your portfolio case, should you have to leave it behind.

TIPS FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Find one point you want people to remember about you.
- Respect people's time.
- Be curious.

→ Be courteous.

→ Know how to read between the lines at an interview. "Are you available for a second interview?" for example, means they are interested. "Good luck" usually means they are not.

During an interview, it's important to clarify what part of a design project you did—whether you created the illustrations, took the photographs, or created the hand lettering.

The interview meeting is your first (and perhaps last) chance to make a good impression. With that in mind, be sure to be prepared: get enough sleep the night before, dress appropriately, exhibit good hygiene (including hair and nails), and give yourself enough time to be prompt.

Be enthusiastic and energetic. The right attitude is extremely important. Listen carefully to the person conducting the interview. Be attentive. Make yourself seem indispensable.

And always remember, a career in visual communication, whether it's advertising or graphic design, requires communication skills and that you work well with people.

Warning: Your portfolio is likely to be criticized by each interviewer. (It happens.) Don't start pulling your portfolio apart each time. If you rearrange or toss work after every criticism, you'll go crazy and destroy your portfolio. If *more than one or two* people don't like the *same piece*, however, toss it. Keep in mind: A portfolio is an ongoing project. It should always be modified and improved.

During the interview:

- Arrive early.
- If you're bilingual, say so.
- Maintain a good energy level.
- Listen.
- Get people's names right.
- Know about the studio or agency.

Questions that might be asked of you:

- Are you willing to work as many hours as needed?
- What salary do you require?
- What do you think you can contribute to this agency or studio?
- Why do you want to work for *us* (not any old design firm, but us)?
- Where else would you love to work and why? (Be prepared to name more than the hottest studio or agency of the year.)
- Which software applications do you know?
- Are you interested in learning new software and technology? How quickly can you learn it?
- Do you have any hobbies?
- What value do you bring to the table?

After the interview:

- Send a personalized thank-you letter (this can be as creative as you like) via e-mail or snail mail.
- Ask the human resources officer for any positive or negative feedback.
- Assess your interview performance and portfolio.

ON THE JOB

If the first job offer is terrific, grab it. If it's not, then determine how long you can hold out to look for a job that will allow you to learn and grow. Work with people you admire. Change agencies or jobs only for the creative opportunity to learn, not for the money. Doing creative work is far more important, especially at the beginning of your career.

- Find a mentor.
- Stay if you're learning, even if the money isn't good.
- If you're not learning, find a place where you'll grow.

- Demonstrate leadership capabilities.
- Be a self-starter.
- Make yourself indispensable.
- Volunteer.
- Listen carefully.
- Join the agency softball team or band.
- Take advantage of a built-in serendipitous situation; for example, one of my former students got onto the elevator with the ad agency president. She offered him a piece of candy, and they started talking!
- Get to know the lead creatives.
- *Always make sure that you're more valuable than your salary.*
- Treat people respectfully.
- Learn to take criticism well and put it into perspective; most employers are going to be less patient with you than your teachers were.
- Be positive.

More advice:

- Read books written by advertising and design professionals.
- Know what's current; know what's happening.
- Don't check your cell phone messages or text while someone is speaking to you or during meetings (even if others do).
- Don't overuse the phone or text on company time.
- Stay off social media sites at work.
- Don't visit inappropriate websites on the job (including shopping or gaming).
- Don't do personal work on company time.
- Read any employment contract carefully and don't violate it.
- Take great care with company e-mail.
- Be an asset to any studio.