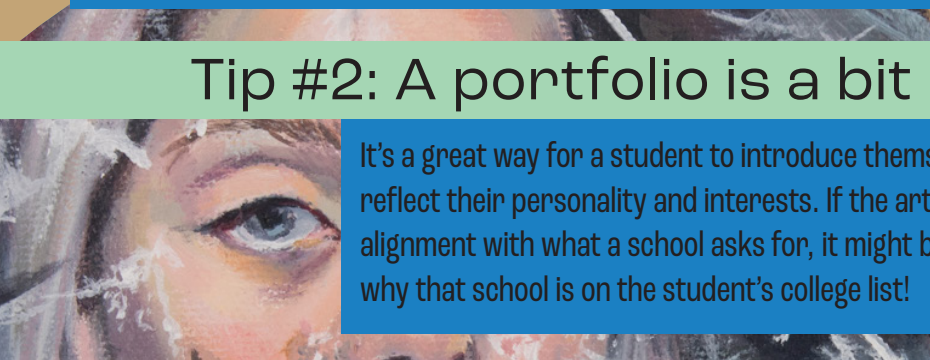


PORTFOLIO HELP

There's a lot of information out there about what goes into a successful portfolio. Although there isn't one right way to make a portfolio, below are a few things to keep in mind to make the process easier.

Tip #1: Do your research



Schools are going to have different portfolio requirements. Make sure your student is compiling a list of the requirements for each of their top schools. How many images do they require? How do you submit them? Is the portfolio deadline the same as the application deadline? Does the school require special assignments, home tests, or challenges for which a student has to make artwork just for that portfolio?

Tip #2: A portfolio is a bit like a personal essay

It's a great way for a student to introduce themselves to the Admissions team. It should genuinely reflect their personality and interests. If the artworks they'd like to include are far out of alignment with what a school asks for, it might be a good opportunity to look a little deeper into why that school is on the student's college list!

Tip #3: Different schools with different types of art programs will value different things in a portfolio

Let's run through different types of art programs and what they might like to see emphasized in a portfolio (and if you're interested in learning more about what these different programs offer, check out our guide to Types of Art Programs).

Foundation Year Programs

Students spend their first year building a common foundation of skills before focusing on their major. It's helpful to show off technical drawing skills alongside artwork that illustrates creativity and personal voice.

Emphasize: Core competencies like composition, line, light/shadow; Openness to trying new mediums or styles; Personal voice or mediums of interest like ceramics, design, or architecture

Direct Entry Programs

Students jump right into a focused major, so portfolios need to address their readiness for that specific pathway.

Emphasize: Technical skills that support chosen major; Development of voice / creative solutions in area of interest

Interdisciplinary Studies Programs

Students can explore any medium or combination of mediums they choose and may not be required to complete a common foundation year. Since these programs emphasize freedom and self-motivation alongside skill building, they'll want to see pieces that showcase a student's voice and personal projects.

Emphasize: More pieces that combine technique and voice; Personal pieces that highlight ideas and interests

Tip #4: Document! Share! Produce!

Encourage students to pick up a few good habits that will serve them for life:

Document your work! Artwork gets lost, damaged, traded, and gifted. Portfolios are digitally submitted, so all you need is a clear image of the artwork to include it. Practice taking evenly lit, head-on images with no distracting backgrounds.

Share your work! Feedback is crucial, so share with friends, art teachers, college counselors, the public, etc. It's important to understand what other people see in your artwork to refine what your pieces communicate.

Make a lot and edit down! It's so much easier to edit down a portfolio than to make new pieces on a deadline. Schools want to see that students are dedicated and hard-working. You don't have to show every piece to prove it – we can tell!

Tip #5: Don't compare yourself to others

Every student has a different background and different access to resources and art instruction. Our job in Admissions is to see potential. Students should show us their commitment and excitement with whatever tools they have – we're investing in their future development!

Tip #6: There's help out there!

Take advantage of opportunities to learn new skills, try new mediums, and get feedback:

Summer pre-college programs. These offer great opportunities to expand horizons, immerse in an arts community, and make a lot of work. Many programs offer financial support to make themselves accessible to any student.

Local art classes. There are afterschool programs and courses offered through community centers and museums in many areas. These are another great way to get exposed to resources and critique.

National Portfolio Day events. These are designed to let students talk to lots of different art programs from across the US. Visit nationalportfolioday.org for a full schedule.

AICAD reviews. Submit examples of work to multiple art schools that are part of the Association of Independent Colleges of Art & Design for feedback. Go to aicad.slideroom.com to start.

Contact schools directly to ask for a portfolio review. At SMFA, we want to help students understand how to best show their skills and ideas in the portfolio. Register at smfa.tufts.edu.

