The Beginner's Guide

WHAT TO PUT IN YOUR TECH PORTFOLIO

skillcrush

WHY DO I EVEN *need* A PORTFOLIO?

If you're ready to start earning money in tech, there's one thing you'll need regardless of the exact job you're looking for: an impressive portfolio. Doesn't matter if you aspire to be a designer, developer, marketer, or something else entirely, you need a showcase of the work you've done and what you're capable of.

It's easy to worry about your resume and cover letter, and fret that you don't have the right computer science credentials from a fancy school. But in reality, your portfolio is much more likely to help you find work in tech, whether you're freelancing or looking for a full-time gig. That's because the actual work you can do is far more important than what you can do *on paper*.

Knowing that can be paralyzing. But the good news is that your portfolio doesn't have to be perfect or even feel complete! What it does need to be is a reflection of you and your work. And that's exactly what you'll learn in this guide!

IN THIS GUIDE, YOU'LL LEARN:

☐ **Why a portfolio is the most important part of your job application**

☐ **What to include in your portfolio to land your dream job**

☐ **Real projects to add to your portfolio when you're brand new to tech**

☐ **The Dos and Don'ts of an amazing portfolio that will get you hired**

4 THINGS *every* PORTFOLIO NEEDS

When you're just getting started on your portfolio, don't worry about creating something super impressive right out of the gate. Instead, focus on getting the basics right. The rest can come later! Here are a few things that absolutely every portfolio needs, regardless of what kind of tech career you want. Start here:

WHO YOU ARE

Make sure your portfolio includes a bio. Give some background around how you came to love web design, or your first experience with a computer at a young age. Make it relatable and personable. And let your personality shine through! Helping people relate to you is a huge step in getting them to hire you instead of someone else.

WHAT YOU DO

State the obvious. There is nothing worse than having a prospective employer or client land on your site and come away with no clue what it is you do. Let future clients know what it will be like to work with you.

WORK YOU'VE DONE

This one is obvious, but don't forget that your portfolio needs to include samples of the work you've done, with visuals and links to the real projects, if possible. This can include work you've completed for others, personal projects, and even fake projects (more on those later!).

A CLEAR CALL TO ACTION

A Call to Action (CTA) is just a spot on your website where you tell your visitors the next step you'd like them to take…and make it easy for them to do so. In the case of a portfolio, it's probably getting in touch with you to discuss a job or project. There's nothing wrong with a simple and clear "Hire Me" or "Get in Touch."

You can make it easy for visitors to find you by incorporating a contact form on your site or even asking for visitors to get in touch with you via your social media accounts. You can also include your email address. (Pro tip: including spaces and spelling out special characters in the address like this: hello (at) skillcrush (dot) com, can cut down on the spam you get, though it's not foolproof.)

Enter email address

GET IN TOUCH

ALL THE BEST PORTFOLIOS ARE MASTERS OF THE FOLLOWING:

They reinforce your personal brand and allow your personality to shine through

The content is focused and displays the kind of work you want to pursue

They're easy to navigate and position your work in the spotlight

They contain a clear call to action that inspires viewers to follow up

PROJECTS FOR *your* PORTFOLIO

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'RE NEW TO *tech*

If you haven't done many "real life" projects, it can feel like your portfolio has nothing in it. Sure, a beautiful, eye-catching, client-snagging portfolio will include work samples, but if you're short on projects, there's still a LOT you can do to create a dynamic portfolio that showcases your best qualities.

1. DESIGN PROJECTS

☐ Your Twist on an Icon Set

☐ Redesigned Newsletter Template

☐ Improved Mobile Product UX

☐ A Mobile App Concept

☐ A Complete Branding Package

☐ A 365 Design Project

2. DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

☐ Customize a Site Theme or Template

☐ The Non-Profit or Mom 'n' Pop Website

☐ The Dream Client Website

☐ A Stock Theme for a Popular CMS

☐ Your Portfolio Itself

DESIGN PROJECTS

YOUR TWIST ON AN ICON SET

This is a pretty standard project, but it's a great way for you to offer something to potential employers and clients while including a project of a completely different scale in your portfolio. An icon set might seem ubiquitous but if you do it well and use it as an opportunity to define your aesthetic, you could really wow in an interview.

REDESIGNED NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE

Entry-level design (and some coding) jobs might include redesigning and sending out newsletters about events, interviews, breaking news, and other timely items, so spending some time redesigning an organization's newsletter, creating samples, and including it all in your portfolio is a great way to impress a hiring manager.
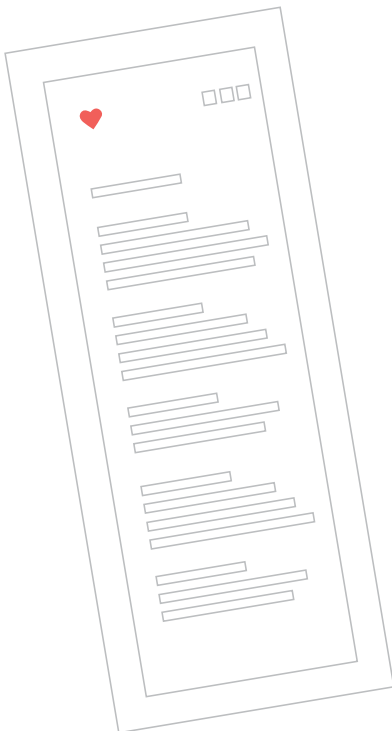
IMPROVED MOBILE PRODUCT UX

Focus on mobile UX to show how you would improve the experience for an existing client or brand in the mobile landscape. This is a project that allows you to be creative inside some very specific constraints.

Do your research here. Perhaps you love a website but think the mobile experience needs an overhaul. Work towards its reinvention and create UX deliverables for every step of the way. Feature all the assets as a "spec" on your site, and make sure to explain your reasoning.

A MOBILE APP CONCEPT

Creating a new design concept for an existing app can be impressive, but creating a new app concept design 100% from scratch is even more so. Decide what kind of app you want to create, find some examples already on the market, and then set about creating a concept for something unique. Be sure you follow established mobile best practices and restrictions so that your design does not come across as unprofessional.

A COMPLETE BRANDING PACKAGE

Create a complete brand update with a logo, mood board, color palette, website design, packaging design, business cards, and style guide (along with any other designs you think are necessary). You can download stock images for things like packages, printed materials, and more that you can overlay your designs on for an even more impressive presentation. If you're not sure where to start, check out all the branding packages uploaded to sites like Behance.

A 365 DESIGN PROJECT

If you're playing the long game (which you should be when it comes to your career), then starting a 365 design project can be a fantastic thing to add to your portfolio. 365 design projects consist of creating a simple design, usually along a theme or for a particular type of design (icons, logos, typography, etc.), and posting them every day for a full year.

▶ *Spec:*

In tech, creating a "spec" is a great way to share your idea for a product and get feedback before you have invested any time or money in creating it. It includes all the assets and designs of a product or experience, plus notes for why features are included.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

CUSTOMIZE A SITE THEME OR TEMPLATE

Even if you know how to code a site from scratch, using a CMS (Content Management System) makes more sense in a lot of cases. And customizing a theme or template using a CMS can make just as much of an impression on a client as a site you coded 100% from the ground up. Make sure to explain any roadblocks you overcame while working with the CMS!

THE NONPROFIT OR MOM 'N' POP WEBSITE

A great project to include in your portfolio is the design or redesign of a small local nonprofit or your favorite neighborhood take-out restaurant. You can add it to your portfolio as a sample project and maybe even book it as a real paying gig. These businesses often have limited resources for creating an awesome website, so designing a mockup to present to them might just land you the job.

THE DREAM CLIENT WEBSITE

Creating a website (or other product) for an imaginary dream client allows you to showcase how you think in terms of scale. For the biggest impact, think through every detail—how the site will look on tablets and mobile phones, what the app experience is like, how comments and threading work, etc. A well-presented project like this can be enough to land you the job even if it's the only thing in your portfolio.

A STOCK THEME FOR A POPULAR CMS

Look at the themes that are on the market—and what sets them apart—and then design one of your own! ThemeForest is a great place to check out tons of successful theme designs. Look at the most popular designs on the site, even if you don't plan to sell your theme.

YOUR PORTFOLIO ITSELF

If you've been using a stock theme, even one that's customized, to host your portfolio, it's time to upgrade! Take time to plan out and create a site that is 100% you. Think about the kinds of projects you'll be showcasing, then figure out the best way to display those projects. Show off who you are, what your design style is, and how you can do more for your clients than your competitors do.

```
1    <!doctype html>
2    <html class="no-js" lang="en">
3
4    <head>
5        <meta charset="utf-8"/>
6        <title>My Awesome Site</title>
7    <link rel="stylesheet" href="css/style.css">
8
9    <script src="js/modernizr.js"></script>
10   </head>
```

MAKE *your* PORTFOLIO STAND OUT

HOW TO *stand out* FROM THE CROWD AS A BEGINNER

If you haven't done many "real life" projects, it can feel like your portfolio has nothing in it. Sure, a beautiful, eye-catching, client-snagging portfolio will include work samples, but if you're short on projects, there's still a LOT you can do to create a dynamic portfolio that showcases your best qualities.

GET TESTIMONIALS

When you finish a product you're proud of, ask the client (and anyone you collaborated with) to shoot you a testimonial. Just make sure you get permission to feature it on your site. And you can get testimonials about other work you've done. If you're changing careers, ask your former co-worker to write a few sentences on what working with you was like. And don't forget to return the favor!
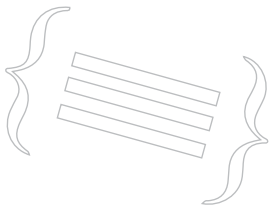
SHOWCASE YOUR EDUCATION

Don't be afraid to feature your education in your portfolio, even if it is informal or not accredited. Explaining what you learned in a training program like Skillcrush can go a long way. It shows what skills you have and how dedicated you are to your new career. And don't shy away from featuring other courses you've taken online (even free ones!) or in-person workshops through meetups like Girl Develop It.

FEATURE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Another non-digital aspect to point out in your portfolio is your participation in any groups or organizations. If you attend tech meetups or are part of professional organizations, it's pretty much a no-brainer to list them.

Even soft skills that demonstrate what a great addition to a team you can be are worth including. For example, if you act as project manager, work with a remote team of other volunteers, or handle things like copywriting for an organization, be sure to highlight those things, too.

CREATE RESOURCES FOR OTHERS
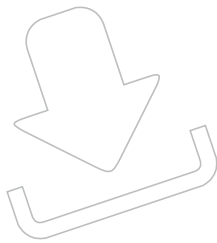
Creating things for the design and tech communities is a great way to get your name out there. And it goes beyond just getting exposure among the design and tech industries. When potential clients are searching for designers, they sometimes come across these free resources. This, in turn, establishes you as an expert in their mind. Try something like an icon pack, template, or font (consider premium offerings for an added income stream).

TELL YOUR STORY

If you can't show someone your latest work (yet!), you can help them get to know you by explaining who you are and where you're coming from. Try building an infographic that maps out how you got here. This tip might seem like it's just for graphic designers, but using a pen and paper and a trusty smartphone can make it low-tech and fun for developers too.
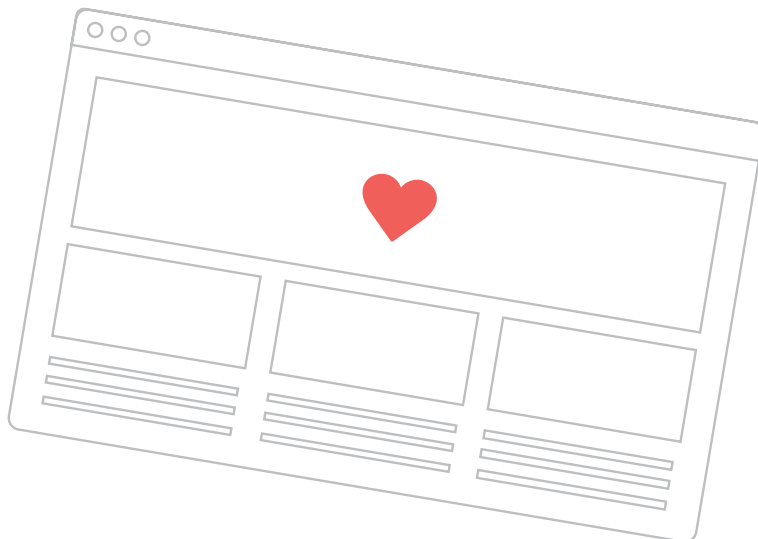
PORTFOLIO
RESOURCES

THE DEFINITIVE PORTFOLIO DOS AND DON'TS

What goes into your portfolio depends a lot on what your career goals are. But there are a some things that virtually every portfolio should (or shouldn't) do.

These basic principles can guide you in designing your portfolio, planning its content, and keeping it up to date. The dos and don'ts included below will give you a clear-cut roadmap for building your portfolio.

Keep these best practices in mind as you create your portfolio to set yourself apart from all of the mediocre portfolios out there.

THE DOS & DON'TS OF AN AWESOME PORTFOLIO

1

DO: Include your personality

▶ *Give visitors a taste of who you are and what you're into*

DON'T: Just pass off a list of bullet points about yourself

2

DO: Include a photo of yourself

▶ *Try something professional but with some character!*

DON'T: Be a face-less rando

3

DO: Include relevant work experience

▶ *Don't forget volunteer work or internships!*

DON'T: Include your high-school babysitting gig or other unrelated jobs

4

DO: Include context with your projects

▶ *Tell the who, what, where, when, why, and how*

DON'T: Just list URLs or have a bunch of screenshots

5

DO: Give users a clear action to take

▶ *Hire me! Get a quote!*

DON'T: GIve users too many options

6

DO: Put thought into your site's layout and appearance

▶ *After all, it's an example of your work in itself*

DON'T: Get too complicated and risk confusing visitors

7

DO: Make your contact information easy to find

▶ *Link in the main nav, plus basic contact info in the footer*

DON'T: Give out your home address or personal phone number

8

DO: Show samples of your work

▶ *Duh! This is where you get to shine!*

DON'T: Show too many samples, or samples that aren't your best work

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9

DO: Think outside the box

▶ *Figure out what sets you apart from your competition and show it!*

DON'T: Limit yourself to just experience, education, & skills

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10

DO: Think about SEO

▶ *If a site doesn't show up in the first 10 pages of Google, does it exist at all?*

DON'T: Clutter your site with keywords in every sentence

11

DO: Check your site's grammar and spelling

▶ *No one likes a sight literd with typos and bad grammer.*

DON'T: Put your site online without a thorough read-over

12

DO: Update your portfolio site regularly

▶ *Any time you complete a cool new project, update!*

DON'T: Build it and forget about it

A *checklist* FOR AN AMAZING PORTFOLIO

There are a ton of things to keep track of when you're building your first (or fifth) tech portfolio.

How do you make sure that your portfolio is the best it can be? How do you create a portfolio that's not the same as a thousand other portfolio sites out there?

And most importantly: how do you make sure it's good enough to land you your dream job?

Just use the checklist on the next page. As you work through your portfolio, use this checklist to stay on track—but remember, your portfolio does NOT need to be perfect. This list is meant to help you evolve your portfolio over time. So don't let a missing checkmark prevent you from getting out there and applying for the jobs you want!

CHECKLIST FOR THE PERFECT PORTFOLIO

☐ Does your portfolio show off your personality?

☐ Did you include a photo of yourself?

☐ Does it include at least a few samples of your best work?

☐ Did you prioritize your best projects and show them first?

☐ Did you detail what you did and/or your process on each project?

☐ Did you make it easy for visitors to contact you?

☐ Is your design easy to navigate?

☐ Does your design put the focus on your work?

☐ Did you consider SEO and keywords when writing your copy?

☐ Did you proofread your entire site?

☐ Did you get at least one friend or colleague to proofread
   your site?

☐ Have you tested all of your links and images?

☐ Does your portfolio look good regardless of the device (laptop,
   smartphone, tablet, etc.) it's being viewed on?

☐ Do you have a plan for keeping your site up-to-date?
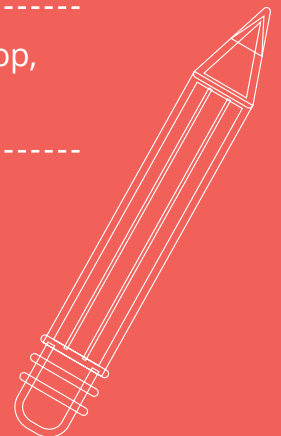
LEARN TO CODE WITH US IN A 3-MONTH ONLINE COURSE

Are you pumped about working in tech but not sure where you'll fit in, or that you have what it takes? Or maybe you know you want to take advantage of the flexible work schedules and high salaries that are common in the tech industry, but you have no idea where to start? (Coding...what?) A Skillcrush Career Blueprint could be right for you.

Skillcrush Blueprints are our 3-month class packages designed to give you the skills and confidence you need to earn more money, level-up your career, and find fulfilling, flexible work. In a Blueprint, you can learn everything from how to design a website users love, to how to build web apps from scratch.

In each Blueprint, you'll get short, digestible lessons in your inbox daily, live office hours with instructors to ask all your questions, and access to the Skillcrush community of fellow learners.

And you can enroll in ANY of them with absolutely zero experience with code.

LEARN TO CODE.

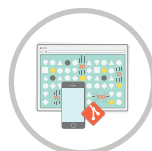Get hired. Make more money. It's that simple!

ENROLL NOW!

HERE ARE SOME OF THE BLUEPRINTS WE OFFER:

VISUAL DESIGNER

AVERAGE SALARY: $87,000

FRONT END DEVELOPER

AVERAGE SALARY: $92,000

FREELANCE WORDPRESS DEVELOPER

AVERAGE SALARY: $85,000

LEARN MORE ABOUT SKILLCRUSH CAREER BLUEPRINTS HERE

HAVE YOU JOINED *the* CLUB?
Find more on <u>our blog</u>

If you found this resource (and the ones listed here) helpful, there's even more to discover on the Skillcrush blog.

We share top career advice, inside tech tips, real-life stories of getting into tech, and tons of FREE guides, worksheets, and resources.

Sign up for our newsletter now so you won't miss a post. Each week, we send you 2 researched, detailed, easy-to-read articles to help you harness the power of tech and get the career you deserve.

Join thousands of happy readers! Here's what a few of them have to say:

"I read a blog post every day and learn something new. The resources you give us are priceless!"

SARA EVANS

"I have been on your mailing list now for 8 months and in that time alone I saw the platform grow so much. Seriously, in the online education space you guys have some of the best content marketing. (Some online learning platforms neglect it entirely, while others only post articles about latest updates or course offerings, which is a bore.) Skillcrush actually generates valuable content for readers."

LAURENCE BRADFORD

"The 99 Tech Terms You Need to Know When You're New to Tech has been a big help! I love materials that cover the basics."

APRIL HARRIS

"Skillcrush, Thank you for offering such a great newsletter to your subscribers. The content that you send out is always helpful and something that I can refer back to as I improve my coding skills. I especially love your PDF quicksource guides."

JUBILEE GRACE

"Your email newsletters, videos and articles are so inspiring, I really look forward to them and I love your attitude, all of you, and the great images. You make me feel included in a world where it seems everyone is an expert, and I wanted to say thanks."

ATTY CRONIN

"I love your blog posts! They always end up being my lunchtime reads at work!"

CAROLINE KIM

WHAT *are* YOU WAITING FOR?

Sign up to our newsletter now so you won't miss a post.

SIGN UP NOW

THANKS FOR JOINING US.

Feel free to email us with any questions at
hello@skillcrush.com