



How to Create a Freakin' Sweet Instructional Design Portfolio

Some portfolios are like people. Some shine. Some don't. You may be thinking to yourself, "I don't need an instructional design portfolio," and also, "Did you steal that line from the seminal, 1980 horror film *The Shining*?" The answer is, "yes you do," and, "definitely not."

In fact, a little boy named Tony that lives in our mouths told us this very quote about your future instructional design portfolio! And anyway, we all know *The Shining* is **actually** about instructional design, but don't get us started on that!

The point is, every instructional design freelancer needs a freakin' sweet portfolio! And the difference between a crappy portfolio and a great portfolio can mean the difference between landing that incredible gig and being the caretaker of an isolated, bedeviled hotel to make ends meet. Your portfolio is almost literally your meal ticket to scoring decent gigs!

We're going to walk you through some of the basics of creating an impressive instructional design portfolio that will help you stand out from the rest! Get ready to have the shiniest portfolio in the game!

Nagging Thoughts

Let's get some nagging thoughts you may be having about portfolios out of the way!

1. First off— yes, you really do need a portfolio. Sorry! There's just no getting around this one, guys.

2. Like most things in life, the hardest part about building your instructional design portfolio is simply starting it. We know how daunting it can be to build a portfolio from scratch. But you wanna know something cool? Chances are you've already got some stuff that you can figure out how to morph into a portfolio piece. If not, there are some tried and true ways to generate material that will show your goods (the G-rated, professional ones) to your clients.

3. Think of your portfolio as a "work in progress." You will never think it's perfect. In fact, it shows how much you care and want to grow by continuously improving it.

4. You cannot conjure a portfolio through magic, manifestation, or a wish made on a monkey's paw.

Building The Basics

Now that you're feeling a little more at ease with the task of creating an instructional design portfolio, let's talk basics.

A portfolio refers to your collection of work samples, which can be housed anywhere from your website, to some URLs on LinkedIn, to a profile page on an online community. So, how do you get started? We've got some ideas:

Get Articulate 360

Learn how to use it (duh). Yes, we know it costs a pretty penny (remember – you can write it off on your taxes! Thanks, Uncle Sam.). But, honestly, if you can figure this one out, you could be doin' quite alright! Not to mention, the technical and troubleshooting skills you gain in learning how to use Articulate stuff will help you in so many ways.

If you want to test the waters before taking the purchase plunge, they offer a free trial. E-Learning Heroes is an amazing online Articulate-sponsored community resource that has tutorials galore!

Put It to Use

Build some Articulate samples on E-Learning Heroes. You know how overwhelming it is to stare at a blank paper and just "create" something, with no direction or deadline? Well, tough noogies, friends. You no longer have that excuse! The E-Learning Heroes community has eLearning Challenges every week that encourage IDs just like us to tackle and flex their skills. Then share, share, share!

Once you have your profile set up and some challenges under your belt, go to your profile and click “add a course.” You’ll need to give URLs for the samples. This will help you promote your sweet skills to the larger community which can lead to professional connections, cool new friends, and killer contracts! It also enhances your credibility to your clients! What a win-win!

Upload your A.S.S. (Articulate Sample Stuff)

Ok, now it’s time to upload your work! You can upload your Articulate Sample Stuff to places like your personal website, Google Cloud, or Amazon Web Services. We know that sounds scary if you’re not a website wizard.

If you are able to put the samples of your work on your own website, do it! Why? The URL you provide on E-Learning Heroes will send people to your website, which is always a good thing. They might even click around, see your other samples, read your bio, and maybe even reach out!

Linkin’ It Up

Don’t forget to put the links to your samples on LinkedIn! People will probably stalk you there first, anyway. So, you might as well meet them where they are. There are lots of places to showcase links to your portfolio pieces. But if you want to be efficient with your time, start with LinkedIn and E-Learning Heroes. You can expand your horizons as time goes on.

Frequently Asked Questions

As you’re putting in the work on your portfolio, we’d like to take some time to answer some common questions new freelancers usually have. Let’s jump into it!

Are hiring managers looking for me to demonstrate ID principles when they look at my portfolio?

The short answer is; yes, of course. The longer answer is; different managers look for different things. Some wanna see if you have the basics like title, purpose, learning objectives, quiz questions and a conclusion screen down. Others might look for basic interactive features like fill-in-the-blank, drag & drop, matching, short answer questions and the like. Even more want to see scenario branches, motion graphics or videos.

This all makes life a bit tricky since you’re trying to hit a moving target. The solution? Try to capture a good variety of these things as you build your portfolio. But don’t go nuts!

Every course doesn't have to contain the whole kit n' kaboodle of design principles. Not only would this be exhausting, but most hiring managers will only look at the first few screens of each sample. Make the first 5-7 screens count in each of your samples, and you can cover all your bases that way! Remember, all work and no play makes freelies...you know the rest.

Do I need to put other stuff besides eLearning in my portfolio?

Another great question! It all depends on what your heart desires. Do you want to ONLY do eLearning? If yes, that's cool. No need to worry about other samples then.

However, let's be real. You may have a greater chance of landing more projects if you can do eLearning, instructor-led training, and virtual live training. Those are the BIG 3. It's cool to put the most emphasis on eLearning in the beginning of your freelance career, and then, when you can, make samples of ILT and VILT (usually on PowerPoint or an equivalent program). This includes a lesson plan, a participant guide, and a facilitator guide.

If a hiring manager is a pro at adult learning principles, how do I impress them with my stuff?

First off, use analogies! Remember taking the SAT's? Wow, that was nuts. Anyway, analogies are a highly effective way to connect new content to something the learner already knows. It's a fast way to bridge a knowledge gap and to get creative.

Another great way to impress hiring managers is by using real case studies. They're real-life examples that create immediate, practical meaning to learners. This is especially true if you can make case studies that come from within the client's own company.

Lastly, 2D or 3D immersive experiences will totally knock the socks off anyone checking out your portfolio! If you can make this happen, do it. These can put everything into context for the learner, and sometimes context is everything. Plus, they're great for "hard skills" training.

Cold Truths, Hot Tips

We've covered a lot so far. How are you feeling? Do you need a sit down or a tall glass of chocolate milk? Go ahead and take a breather. We'll wait.

Now we're going to talk about some of the cold truths of portfolio creation and review. Don't worry, we'll throw some hot tips in for good measure!

Name Brands Sell

Let's face it. A portfolio of name brand clients usually weighs more than a portfolio of no-name eLearning samples. We know, it's a bummer. If your website showcases the logos of well-known clients, this can mean a bit more to a prospective hiring manager than the array of sample work you have done. But do not be dismayed, everyone knows this takes time. Like a fine wine, with age you'll only get better and find your time to shine.

Books Are Often Judged By Their Cover

It's true in life and it's true in the biz, books are often judged by their cover. In our experience, hiring managers tend to be impressed by how courses look and feel more than how they are instructionally designed. Sad but true! Make sure your portfolio pieces have nice graphics and an appealing visual design.

Extra Homework Is Sometimes Needed to Land A Gig

Want to know a sure-fire way to increase your odds of landing a contract? During an important interview, take it to the next level. Don't only show samples of your past work, also show a short sample of your work that's relevant to your prospect's subject matter/business. Show them how you could use your design & development skills in the exact world in which they live and work on the daily!

Conclusion

There ya have it! You don't have to follow all of our advice to be successful, and you may hear differing opinions throughout your career. That's normal. We're just trying to show you, from our personal experience, how to get your contract faster by having a solid portfolio strategy in place.

Part of what we're trying to do here at IDLance is demystify the freelance world and break down the Walls of Intimidation that a lot of people feel trapped behind when they're just starting out.

We believe everyone is gifted in some way and deserves to live the life they want.

Remember, you are the caretaker of your own success. You've always been the caretaker.