University of Northampton

UON

Your portfolio guide.

What is a 'portfolio' and why do we need it?

On application for our Arts courses you will be invited to provide a portfolio of your creative work. We recognise that each of you is an individual, with different personalities, skills, interests and inspirations. Your portfolio allows you to express yourself, demonstrate your strengths, style and creative potential. It also serves as evidence of true commitment to your chosen creative subject.

Every university and course has different expectations and requirements when it comes to their applicants and their portfolios. Putting together a portfolio for the first time can be quite daunting. To help you, we've put together tailored advice, which we hope you will find useful.

# Contents.

Fine Art/ Fine Art Painting and Drawing

What we look for in your portfolio are examples of your art work to date and experimentation with media, which gives us a good idea of your skills and experience in producing visual art. Your portfolio could also give us a good sense of what drives you as a person, your interests, passions and why you are interested in art.

What we are looking for.

- A strong interest in Fine Art or Painting & Drawing
- An ability to demonstrate which aspects of Fine Art/Painting and Drawing you are interested in
- Research skills and an ability to use a range of sources of information to develop your enquiry
- Evidence of experience in experimenting and working in a range of media and methods
- The ability to select and organise material in the portfolio to show your personal ideas, influences and aspirations.

Michael Sheppard
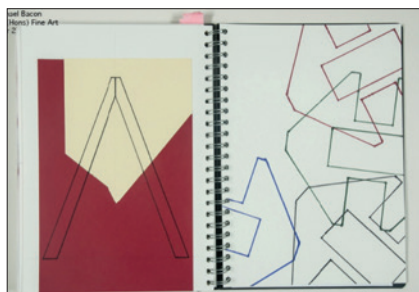
Michael Bacon
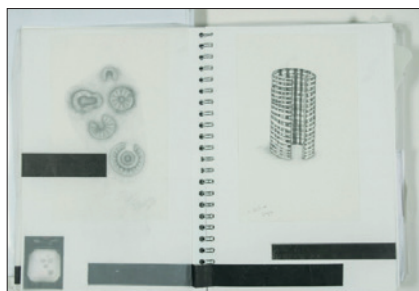
Sophie Lockwood

Top portfolio tips.

- Your portfolio should be varied, with an emphasis on sketchbooks and experimentation, including trials that may not necessarily have worked
- Work does not have to be mounted or presented too formally
- Include work that represents your character, personality and creative aspirations.

Sketchbooks

This is a key tool for any artist. It shows the viewer how you work, acting as a visual diary of your projects, containing research, ideas development, problem solving and technical development, leading to more finalised artworks. These should include studies you have conducted, from both life and imagination, and contain annotated reference of your sources of inspiration.

Your sketchbook may include:

- Research into specific artists or any other research you have undertaken
- Development of projects or course work
- Documentation of technical development
- Experimentation with various forms of media
- Any other material relevant to your work.

Physical portfolio

The portfolio may contain examples of course work, documentation of experiments in media, paintings, drawings, life drawing (if you have experienced this discipline), technical experiments using printing, photography, video, or 3D media and processes.

Written work

This can be an essay or a contextual report, which will give us some insight into how you write formally and your familiarity with key texts. The topic should be one that is important to you.

Illustration

In your portfolio, you should show us your interests and ideas, what inspires, excites and influences you. Above all else we want to see your drawing and image making skills (which may include 3D work), exploration of a subject and media, your development and research methods.

What we are looking for.

- A passion for illustration, to be able to talk about your particular interests and influences
- A knowledge of the variety of applications of illustration
- Research skills and ideas development
- Evidence of engagement with drawing
- Experimentation with a variety of media, such as: 2D, 3D, screen
- Demonstrate your approach to process and project development
- An understanding of the wider context in which images operate
- Capacity to select appropriate materials and apply ideas to a brief/project.

Jenny Dale

Jenny Dale

Lauren Gouldie

Top portfolio tips.

- Your portfolio should have 12-20 finished images i.e. illustrations, drawings, paintings, digital images or photography of 3D pieces. Don't worry if you are 'short' for whatever reason, just include what you can
- We suggest that you organise your portfolio into sections based on particular projects or themes
- Try to provide a careful selection of work in your portfolio, both ongoing projects and finished outcomes
- You could bring along work produced on your current or most recent course, and personal work produced outside your curriculum as these are a reflection of your interests and passion for your subject
- Select a range of work to demonstrate the variety of your experience, abilities and interests.

Sketchbooks

It is vital that you are able to show us how ideas are generated, the development of your ideas, your depth of research, and how you resolve this towards visual outcomes. Sketchbooks should evidence the starting point of your project, right through its development to finished outcomes. Sketchbooks might also take the form of loose pages compiled into a folder and/or blog.

Your sketchbook may include:

- Research into specific artists or any visual research you have undertaken
- Project and image development
- Contact sheets of photography or digital tests
- Experimentation with techniques and media
- Images of three dimensional work
- Composition ideas
- Evidence of your process and project management.

Written work

This can be an essay or a contextual report, which will give us some insight into how you write formally and your familiarity with key texts.

Graphic Communication

Your portfolio is a visual diary of your creative process, which shows how your skills and ideas have developed over a period of time. When we assess a portfolio, the research and processes used to develop the work are as important as the final work itself. We are particularly interested in the most recent work, even if it is unfinished and/or extra-curricular.

What we are looking for.

- Creativity, research and development skills
- Evidence of software skills – e.g. Creative Cloud
- Ability to attract a defined TA, brand/product space or need
- Visualisation skills and testing of concepts beyond sketchbook ideation – scamps, logo development etc.
- Awareness and evidence of cross disciplinary and multi-medium outcomes
- A basic understanding of how design fits into the world.
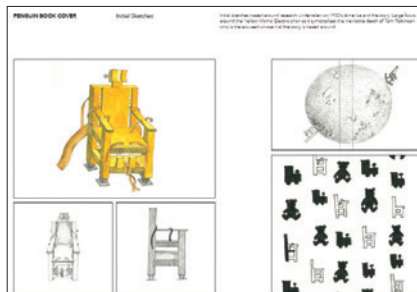
Example of initial sketches
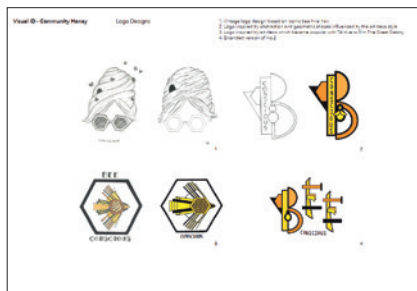
Example of logo design

Example of a project

Top portfolio tips.

- Your portfolio should contain 15-20 projects of a good variety that shows breadth of inspiration and skills
- Form and size can vary depending on what works best for the content – A4, A3, etc.; or Digital – PDFs with high resolution images
- It shouldn't be necessarily 'edited' but a selective series of projects or studies
- Keep the presentation format uncluttered and relevant – i.e. don't include everything you've ever done. Avoid over-decorating a portfolio as this can detract from the content
- Ideally it could have logical, visual, chronological order or narrative: best or favourite first, experiences, skills development, projects themes and links
- It might include drawings, paintings, sketchbooks, colour studies, CAD graphics, materials investigation, design development (2D and 3D), construction, consumer and market information, written notes, design/client presentation sheets, videos, music, animations, and website links.

Sketchbooks

Show your research and helps us to understand how you think. They form the background to the finished work and demonstrate your creative processes and development.

3D pieces

3D pieces should be photographed and presented within portfolio.

Client boards

An organised, annotated and creative series that could be presented to a client.
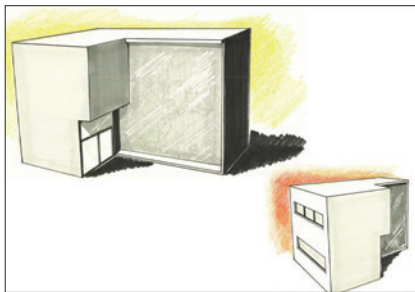
Architectural Technology

Our main interest is in your potential as a prospective student and future Architectural Technology professional. In your portfolio you should attempt to demonstrate your interests and ideas, what inspires, excites and influences you in the world of design, architecture and technology. We are also happy to see any relevant professional experience and skills in writing, working/research methods. We do not expect from you to demonstrate that you are an Architect but merely show the interest and engagement.

Example of material and technology research

Example of building sketches

Example of physical model making and photography

What we are looking for.

- A passion for Architectural Technology
- An understanding of specifics of the subject and its relationship to the industry
- Drawing skills and computer skills
- Evidence of engagement with creative thinking in relation to the subject
- General interest in architecture, space, place and form-making
- Ability to illustrate personal ideas and aspirations on variety of media
- Interest in looking at issues outside the box
- A methodical approach to project development.

Top portfolio tips.

- There is no right or wrong when choosing an approach for your portfolio – we are very flexible
- It is a tool to express yourself and your interests and show how you think these are relevant to the profession of Architectural Technology
- Don't worry if you are not able to cover some of these points as we welcome students from various backgrounds
- Your portfolio can take the form of various shapes and sizes depending on the content, digital and physical formats and hence can include: sketchbooks, mood boards, finished project or assignment work, finished or development of physical models, computer skill evidence, finished photography, written work, digital websites, blogs.

Sketchbooks

Your sketchbook may include:

- Drawn and/or written observations of spaces, elements from built environment
- Photography of places, spaces and objects of interest
- Creative exploration of idea illustration
- Project/image development
- Notes and note taking methodologies
- Record of inspiration sources
- Research into specific artists or any other research you have undertaken
- Exploration of technology and assembly/disassembly of elements
- Work overlays and/or traces
- Digital sketchbook and/or blogging

Product Design

Your portfolio should demonstrate a passion for Product Design. Ideally it should contain drawings, design projects and photographs of any 3D models that you have previously created as part of an art or design project.

What we are looking for.

- Ability or aptitude to study Product Design at university
- Drawing skills and evidence of an interest in 3D design
- Ability to demonstrate your interest in Product Design by referring to a favourite designer and/or examples of products that you believe demonstrate excellent design qualities
- If you have studied Product Design or a related subject at school or college, either at GCSE or A level, we would like to see these design projects included in your portfolio
- If you have not studied Product Design or a related subject then we would like to see sketches, art projects, graphics design work and/or experimentation with 3D form and models.

Example of concept sketching

Top portfolio tips.

- Your portfolio will be a snapshot of who you are, so what you choose to include in your portfolio depends on your previous experience, your interests and your personality
- It will allow us to evaluate your skills and help us to more clearly describe the course content and how it will benefit you on your journey towards becoming a professional product designer.

Sketchbooks

Your sketchbook may include:

- Examples of sketchbooks illustrating observational drawing and idea development
- A demonstration of alternative drawing techniques using different media and colour
- Illustrations of products that you may find around your home. If you can, disassemble a product and create an exploded view that illustrates both the external covers and the internal components
- If you have them, examples of previous 3D or product design projects carried out at school or college

- If you have them, examples of technology projects or demonstration models
- If you have them, examples of designs or images created using 3D computer aided design software
- As an alternative to 3D design projects, we would be very interested to see examples of graphics design or art projects
- An example of a short piece of written work.

Interior Architecture & Spatial Design

In your portfolio you should attempt to demonstrate your interests and ideas, what inspires, excites and influences you in the world of space, design and architecture. You could also include any relevant professional experience work and skills in writing, working/research methods. We do not expect you to demonstrate that you are an Interior Designer, but show your interest and engagement.

What we are looking for.

- A passion for Interior Design
- An understanding of specifics of the subject and its relationship to the industry
- Drawing skills
- Evidence of engagement with creative thinking in relation to the subject
- General interest in architecture, space, place and intervention making
- Ability to illustrate personal ideas and aspirations on a variety of media
- Interest in looking at issues outside the box
- A methodical approach to project development.

Example of inspiration and research

Example of spatial planning proposal models
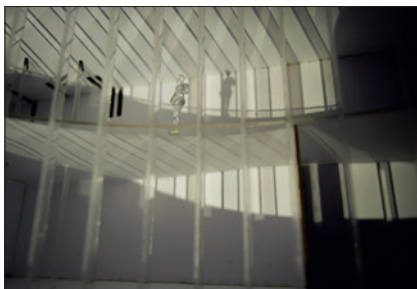
Example of physical model making and photography
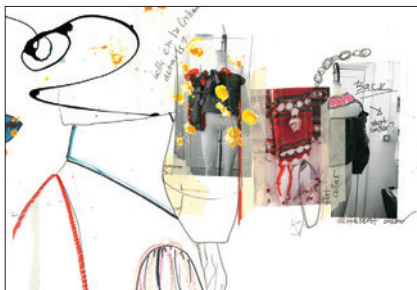
Top portfolio tips.

- We encourage you to use the portfolio and/or sketchbook as a tool to express yourself and your interests and show how you think these are relevant to the profession of Interior Design
- Your portfolio can take the form of various shapes and sizes depending on the content, digital and physical formats and can include: sketchbooks, mood boards, finished project or assignment work, finished or development of physical models, computer skill evidence, finished photography, written work, digital websites, blogs
- Don't worry if you are not able to cover some of these points as we welcome students from various backgrounds.
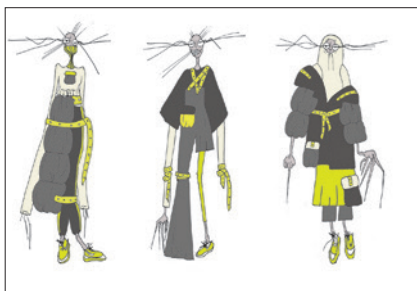
Sketchbooks
Your sketchbook may include:

- Drawn and/or written observations of spaces, elements from built environment
- Photography of places, spaces and objects of interest
- Creative exploration of idea illustration
- Project/image development
- Notes and note taking methodologies
- Record of inspiration sources
- Research into specific artists or any other research you have undertaken
- Work overlays and/or traces
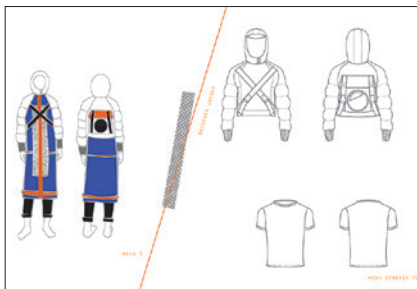- Digital sketchbook and/or blogging.

Fashion/ Fashion (Textiles for Fashion)/ Leather for Fashion

These innovative programmes are designed for students who are driven to forge successful creative careers in the Fashion arena. We are looking for portfolios, which demonstrate how you develop research and ideas in response to project briefs. They should demonstrate creativity and a lively engagement with your work.

What we are looking for.

- A passion for the broader subject area of Fashion, and wider arts
- Awareness of current developments in the area of Fashion both design related, and also an understanding of people who influence Fashion, e.g. bloggers, stylists, photographers, artists, etc.
- Ability to demonstrate how you generate research and ideas
- Experimental and innovative approaches to developing projects and briefs
- Knowledge and understanding of the broader subject area of styling, journalism, photography and digital images.

Example of concept board

Example of illustration board

Example of specification sheet

Top portfolio tips.

- Your portfolio could consist of art or design based projects as part of your course, and also independent work, which supports your creative passion to develop unique and innovative outcomes
- You could include drawings, sketchbooks, photographs of any garments or products created, life drawing, work in a variety of media, personal work representing creative development and research and evidence of interest in Fashion/Fashion (Textiles for Fashion)/Leather for Fashion.

Research

An indication of any recent exhibitions or events which you may have attended, and recorded your interpretation of.

Drawings

This could be fashion illustrations, life drawings, still life. We would like to see, how you see, and communicate in visual form.

Skills in drawing to communicate research and ideas should also be included.

Design artefacts

Please include visuals or if possible bring an example of an item you have made.

Digital work

Whilst you will be taught CAD skill across a variety of programmes, evidence of the use of Photoshop and basic image creation would be beneficial to include.

Footwear and Accessories

Designed for students who are driven to forge successful creative careers in Footwear and Accessories within the fashion and related industry sectors of design, product development, buying and marketing. Whilst we do not necessarily expect you to demonstrate skills in the technical making aspect of Footwear and Accessories design at this stage, this is a very practical based course. We are looking for portfolios which demonstrate how you develop research and ideas in response to project briefs.

What we are looking for.

- A passion for the subject area of Footwear and Accessories and for the broader area of Fashion
- Awareness of current trends, influential designers/brands and developments in Footwear and Accessories
- An ability to demonstrate how you generate research and ideas
- Experimental and innovative approaches to developing projects and briefs - both 2D and 3D
- The ability to use different drawing and illustration techniques, including using colour to explore and present ideas
- Primarily we are looking for an ability to draw and illustrate ideas; this does not specifically need to be in the area of Footwear and Accessories.
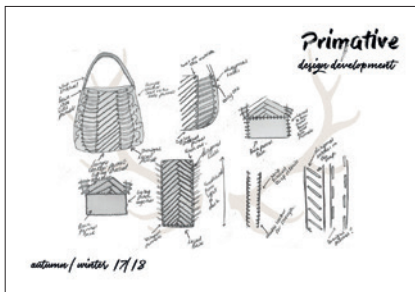
Example of technical drawings by Rebecca Rodgers

3rd year final major project sketches by Loren Buckingham

3rd year final major project sketches by Loren Buckingham

Top portfolio tips.

- Your portfolio could consist of art or design based projects as part of your course, and also independent work, which supports your creative passion to develop unique and innovative outcomes
- It could be drawings, sketchbooks, photographs of any products created, life drawing, work in a variety of media, personal work representing creative development and research, evidence of interest in Footwear and Accessories.

Research

- Visual records of any recent exhibitions, events or places which you may have visited
- Research into designers, artists or art movements that interest you
- Collections of secondary images that inspire you, and evidence of your own drawing to communicate research and ideas should be included.

Visual presentation

- Examples of photographic images you have created for either research or to show 3D work you might have created
- Initial sketches, design development and possibly technical drawings
- You will be taught CAD skills during the course, however if you do have some of these skills already it would be beneficial to include examples of them.

Photography

Our main interest is in your potential as a prospective student and future Photography professional. In your portfolio you should demonstrate your interests and ideas, what inspires, excites and influences you, as well as your photographic skills, experience, and working/research methods.

What we are looking for.

- A passion for Photography
- An understanding of the variety of applications of Photography
- Research skills and ideas development
- Evidence of engagement with photographic techniques and experimentation with a variety of media
- A methodical approach to project development
- Knowledge relevant to the wider context in which images operate
- Capacity to select appropriate material to illustrate personal ideas and aspirations.

Example of sketchbook by Sophie Whybrow

Example of sketchbook by Sam Hurst

Example of sketchbook by Sophie Warwick

Top portfolio tips.

- Try to provide a careful selection of work in your portfolio, both ongoing projects and finished outcomes
- Select a range of work to demonstrate the range of your experience, abilities and interests
- Organise your portfolio into sections based on particular projects or themes
- Depending on your own preferences, you should bring along photographic work produced on your current or most recent course, as well as photographs produced outside your curriculum as these are a reflection of your interests. As a guideline, you could include 12-20 finished images, but do not worry if you are 'short' for whatever reason (e.g. no access to current work as it is being assessed etc). Just bring what you can
- It is vital to show us how ideas are generated, the development of your projects, your depth of research, and the resolution of problems towards visual outcomes. Sketchbooks should evidence the starting point of your project, right through its development to finished outcomes.

Your sketchbook may include:

- Research into specific artists or any other research you have undertaken
- Project/image development
- Contact sheets
- Techniques
- Notes on location shoots
- Plans for presentation
- Mood boards
- Evidence of project management
- Any other material relevant to your work
- **You could also include a piece of written work** – an essay or a contextual report, which will give us some insight into how you write formally and your familiarity with key texts.

Games Art

We are looking for applicants that demonstrate the ability to become a creative within the field of games development. Through your portfolio you can demonstrate an intent to research the subject of games, generate ideas, experiment with themes and produce final pieces. Games Art is a hugely diverse field and we expect your portfolio and personal statement to reflect this.

What we are looking for.

- A passion for the subject – demonstrating knowledge of computer games
- Drawing skills – to be able to draw well from observation
- An ability to generate new ideas in response to a specified brief
- Written skills – to be able to construct an argument and communicate it through writing.

Example of still life drawing
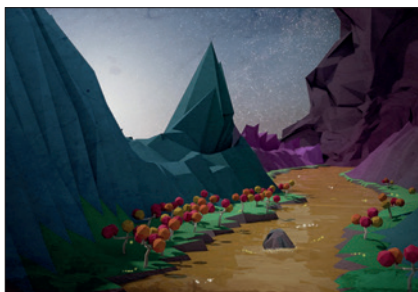
Example of 3D environment

Example of 3D modelling

Top portfolio tips.

Your portfolio should ideally be around 20-30 pieces, containing:

Drawings

A range of drawing using different media and depicting different subjects. Subject matter should include drawing from observation - humans, interior and exterior environments, still life etc., but also imaginative design work of your own i.e. designs for futuristic spacecraft, engaging characters, fantasy environments etc. The media can include both traditional methods (pencil, paint, etc.) and digital (Photoshop and similar programs).

A demonstration of good visual judgement through presentation is expected.

Sketchbooks

Sketchbooks reveal how you work as they are a visual diary and a key tool for any artist. These should include studies you have conducted, from both life and imagination, and contain annotated reference of your sources of inspiration.

3D modelling
(desirable, though not essential)

3D modelling skill is not an essential for entry to the course, as this is taught during the degree. However, any prior knowledge and demonstration of skill in this area will be taken into account during the application process. To present this work, print out renders showing the final model, wireframes, UV layouts and textures. Alternatively, digital images (i.e. JPEGs) can be brought to interview on a memory stick.

Projects

We are looking to see how you work; taking a brief and developing it to a conclusion that fulfils the initial intent. To do this, show evidence of a project in your portfolio that demonstrates creativity, deep involvement in your work and concludes with a final piece. This could be any art or design project, not necessarily a game or games related, for example sculpture, photography, graphic design, fashion, textiles etc.

Written work

To help us determine your writing ability you could include a recent example of an essay or a report.

Portfolio format.

Your portfolio can take the form of a standard art portfolio with sleeves, and/or a digital portfolio that can be viewed on an iPad, tablet or laptop.

Some of you might be invited to a one-to-one interview with the tutor, and if you've chosen a digital format for your portfolio we would ask you to bring your own viewing devices along for presentation of your work, as not all digital files may be compatible with the equipment that is available at the interview. International applicants will normally be expected to submit an electronic portfolio as a PDF document.

Interview tips.

On application for some of our Arts courses, you might be invited for a face-to-face interview with a member of our teaching team, where you will present and discuss your portfolio. This will give us the opportunity to meet you in person, for you to meet us, speak about your practice and to clarify any information you might need.

We want to help you prepare and do the best you can, so we've listed a few useful interview tips below:

- Research the course content and prepare some specific questions – even courses with the same name may differ
- Have ideas and opinions
- Practice talking through the portfolio – what, why and how – improvements and extensions
- Remember your Personal Statement – after talking through the portfolio, the tutor may ask about specific claims or experiences included
- If an 'influence' is mentioned, you need to be prepared to prove it
- Read the University prospectus and course details, you will most likely get asked 'why this course?' or 'why our University?'

- Think about what you see yourself doing after graduation
- Be aware of the latest issues in current affairs and your respective subject fields – we may bring these into the discussion
- Think how you can demonstrate passion and knowledge of your subject outside of school / college projects
- Differentiate yourself from the rest – talk about an art exhibition/piece of art/ advertising or branding/film/photograph/ fashion show etc. that has particularly inspired you or gained your attention – be ready to explain why it is of interest
- Prepare some questions to ask tutors – cultural visits, guest speakers, technical demonstrations, studio space, access to Macs and software, cameras, printing or other material costs.