

How to Create a Powerful Portfolio for Admission to Design School

A well-crafted portfolio brings your creativity to the fore and showcases your keen eye for design — the perfect recipe that top design schools are looking for.

If you are seeking admission to a top design school — NIDs, Symbiosis Institute of Design (SID), NMIMS School of Design, or ARCH College of Design & Business — be ready with a strong portfolio. These institutes include a **Portfolio Review** as a vital component of their admission criteria. The portfolio allows the jury to understand your thought process, creative skills, and judge whether you are the right fit for the institute.

Your written exam performance alone will not suffice — the portfolio must back it up. Below are five structured steps to make yours stand out.

What is a Portfolio?

A portfolio is a curated collection of your **best works** — a reflection of your ability, commitment, creativity, and passion in your chosen field. It enables the interview panel to judge your competence and skill set at a glance.

Think of your portfolio as a **story of your growth** — one that demonstrates maturity, depth, and a clear creative vision. It is not a dump of everything you have ever made; it is a carefully selected showcase of who you are as a designer.

Portfolio at a Glance — Quick Reference

Parameter	Recommendation
Pages	10–15 pages (quality over quantity)
Paper size	A4 or A3 for sketches
Format	Printed hardcopy preferred; digital as backup
Labels	One-line project intros on each item
Models	Carry a physical model/prototype if available
Extras	Sketchbook showing ideation process (optional but impactful)

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STEP 1: Showcase Your Best Works

Quality selections that reflect your creative strengths

The portfolio must project your best works in front of the interview panel. Each piece should reflect your interests, creativity, understanding of design fundamentals, and aspirations.

Study each work in minute detail and identify its strengths and weaknesses before including it. The interviewer may ask questions about any piece — you must be prepared with clear, confident answers. If you are unsure about a work, **do not include it**.

- Only include work you can speak about confidently and in depth. Uncertainty shows.

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STEP 2: Sell Quality, Not Quantity

Keep 10–15 pages of curated, purposeful work

In the rush to impress, don't overstuff the portfolio with random work. Experts recommend keeping it within the **10–15 pages range**. This allows you to pay close attention to every item, take mental notes, and prepare for probable questions.

Make sure every item in the portfolio:

- ✓ Is one of your genuinely best works
- ✓ Includes images that reflect your interests and design sensibility
- ✓ Showcases your command over colour combinations, themes, and design styles
- ✓ Demonstrates your ability to work across tools, media, and design techniques

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STEP 3: Delight the Jury with a Sparkling Presentation

Design is also about how you present

Design, among other things, is about presentation. Your portfolio itself is a demonstration of that skill. A poorly presented portfolio undermines even exceptional work.

Here is how to make your presentation stand out:

- ✓ **Use labels:** Add a one-liner introduction to each project. Avoid lengthy explanations — the work should speak for itself.
- ✓ **Keep it crisp and unique:** Every item must justify its presence and make a clear case for why it is included.
- ✓ **Clean layout:** Maintain a tidy, well-organised visual flow throughout the portfolio.

■ Treat the portfolio itself as a design project. Layout, spacing, and typography all signal your design eye.

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STEP 4: Bring Models or Prototypes

Tangible work makes your thought process visible

If you are skilled at making models, bring one to the interview. Physical models make it significantly easier for panelists to understand your thought process, skill set, and spatial thinking.

Models do not need to be elaborate or expensive. Simple materials work well:

- ✓ Clay models for form and 3D concepts
- ✓ Paper models for structural and packaging ideas
- ✓ Foam for product and industrial design prototypes

■ Even a rough model that shows your ideation process is more impressive than a polished image alone.

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STEP 5: Choose the Right Format — Printed or Digital

Reliability matters on interview day

Web-based portfolios are gaining popularity, but they come with a key risk — unreliable Internet connectivity at the interview centre. A **printed hardcopy portfolio** remains the safest and most dependable option.

If you choose to carry the portfolio on a laptop, ensure it is:

- ✓ Simple to navigate — the panel should not struggle to view it
- ✓ Not over-designed or cluttered with animations and transitions
- ✓ Fully accessible offline, with no dependency on internet or streaming

Bonus tip — Include a Sketchbook:

Many experts recommend including a sketchbook that shows your ideation process and raw creativity. It adds authenticity and depth to your portfolio. Use **A4 or A3 size paper** for sketches.

■ Carry both a printed portfolio AND a digital backup on your laptop. Never depend on just one format.

Your Portfolio Readiness Checklist

- ✓ Selected 10–15 of your best, most representative works
- ✓ Each piece reflects your design interests and skill range
- ✓ One-liner labels added to every project
- ✓ Layout is clean, tidy, and visually consistent
- ✓ Physical model or prototype ready (if applicable)
- ✓ Printed hardcopy portfolio prepared as primary format
- ✓ Digital backup ready on laptop, accessible offline
- ✓ Sketchbook packed with ideation sketches (optional but recommended)
- ✓ Prepared to answer in-depth questions about every included piece

This guide is prepared by Shiksha.com for students applying to design schools in India. For more resources on design admissions — NID, NIFT, SID, CEED, UCEED — visit shiksha.com/design.