

The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up Your Writing Portfolio

Creating an organized online home for your nonfiction writing samples gives you a strategic advantage.

I'll admit it—until recently, like many writers, my online portfolio (TinyURL.com/mvt38ajx) looked less in need of Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* and more in need of *How to Keep House While Drowning* by therapist KC Davis. When I began writing, I housed my writing clips in a physical portfolio. Showing a potential employer clips was easy; you brought your portfolio to an in-person job interview or mailed out photocopies.

However, today, sharing your portfolio is digital, and nonnegotiable. Betsy Loeff, a freelance writer based in Grand Junction, Colo., calls an online portfolio “table stakes” for a professional nonfiction writing career.

“You have to ante up and get one,” she said. “The expectation is that you can show (editors) your work. And the people who are going to want to hire you grew up with the internet.”

Over the better part of a year, I've researched how to take an online writing portfolio from out-of-control to outstanding. What I have found is that organizing your samples gives you a strategic edge, demonstrates your competence to tackle assignments, and yes—to quote Kondo—brings you joy.

ONLINE CLIPS: NOW YOU SEE THEM, NOW YOU DON'T

Keeping your portfolio current involves dealing with website churn. A story you linked to written five years ago may not be found at that URL anymore. Heck, that *publication* may no longer exist.

The Pew Research Center noted after completing a 2024 analysis of disappearing online content: “We found that 25 percent of all the pages we collected from 2013 through 2023 were no longer accessible as of October 2023. ... Not surprisingly, the older snapshots in our collection had the largest share of inaccessible links. Of the pages collected from the 2013 snapshot, 38 percent were no longer accessible in 2023. But even for pages collected in the 2021 snapshot, about one-in-five were no longer accessible just two years later.”

We'll return to dead links later, but for now, be warned the World Wide Web can resemble the Wild West of the late 1800s. Things change fast; getting caught flat-footed is bad.

CHOOSING A PORTFOLIO PLATFORM

There's a portfolio hosting option for every budget. To ensure you get

your work online, you'll want to choose the one that best matches your freelance output, your aspirations, and your cash flow.

For a free or low-cost portfolio site, try a free blog platform like WordPress. There are limits to what you can do with these: no custom URL, no online payment acceptance unless you upgrade, and you're limited to predesigned templates. If you aren't a web wiz, though, a blog gets your work online quickly and easily.

For more control, but not more to take care of, host your clips on a portfolio-specific site like Authory or Journo Portfolio. Both allow some design customization, and you can add clips by URL or PDF. You can also host video or audio clips. Both Authory and Journo offer free starter plans with limited clips.

If you're ready to make the investment, your own branded website, complete with a custom domain, is a wonderful option; but upkeep is entirely on you (or those you hire). You'll pay for essential services like design, domain name ownership, and site hosting.

THE THREE RULES OF PORTFOLIO ORGANIZATION

After settling on a platform, it's time to organize your clips. I spoke with

people on both sides of the writer-editor relationship for guidance on site structure.

Be User-Friendly

Shay Moser, senior managing editor at the W. P. Carey School of Business at Arizona State University, gives new freelance writers half a minute to capture her attention from the moment she opens their email.

She said her perception of the writer depends on whether “I can find two strong clips in 30 seconds. If I can’t find the clips, what does this mean for the future of working with them if this is hard?” She emphasized that not only should a writer’s portfolio site be well-organized, their email of introduction should also get right to the point and feature the URLs to the clips prominently.

Jennifer Goforth Gregory of Raleigh, N.C., who describes herself as a B2B freelance technology content marketing writer, keeps the portfolio page (TinyURL.com/bmh5u2zx) of her website clean and simple. She uses hyperlinks for samples and drop-down accordion categories to organize the work.

“You have to speak to your audience,” she says. “If I were a lifestyle brand writer, I would make a portfolio that’s prettier. I would include an image of the article layout. But my audience is tech people, or agency people focusing on tech. What they care about is the content.”

Gregory has a significant amount of non-bylined work in her portfolio. Gregory says, “My biggest guideline is follow your NDA on non-bylined content. If it’s ghostwritten, you never break that.”

However, she said, that rule applies only to work where the writer pretends to be another person

and writes using *their* voice and *their* perspective. Non-bylined work samples not forbidden by your contract and reflecting a brand voice should be fair game, she said.

Be Strategic

All of my sources emphasized organizing clips with your potential editor or client in mind. Loeff, who writes largely for business and technology publications and hosts her portfolio (TinyURL.com/hpda67bu) on her own website, explained how she prioritizes and arranges her clips.

“I like writing articles, white papers, case studies, longer pieces that pay well and generally offer you a chance to learn something new,” she said. “I mostly display pieces on business and technology, because those are the things I like to cover.”

When it comes to niches where she wants to continue pulling in work, she’ll reach back to a powerful, older clip. “There’s one article on power factor, which is a very difficult concept in the power sector. I’ve had engineers tell me that my piece was the best explanation of power factor and reactive power they’ve ever seen, so that’s why it’s up there. It impresses the people I’m trying to impress,” she said.

Be an Active Curator

Portfolios don’t reach their full potential if they aren’t current. Gregory is adamant that portfolio upkeep be done biweekly or monthly.

“You shouldn’t have to go to your designer and hire them to update your portfolio,” Gregory said. “It should be easy enough that you can do it on a Friday afternoon.”

Gregory has a virtual assistant help her with the first step in the

process: checking article hyperlinks and identifying dead links. The VA searches for the clip at a new link (if site content has been reorganized) or inserts a PDF version of the content if no link can be found.

Gregory’s second step is to review links and their placement. “You need to look at your portfolio with a fresh eye, and make sure the most important clips are on top,” she said.

Finally, Gregory advises making a PDF of a clip with potential long-term value. Most browsers will let you “print to PDF,” so it’s an easy, but essential, step. “I highly recommend (making a PDF) if it’s a specific clip that you really care about,” she said. “I lost some very high-profile, valuable clips by not PDFing.”

YOUR ONLINE PORTFOLIO IS A BUSINESS INVESTMENT

Loeff emphasizes that portfolio-building has been crucial throughout her 30-year career.

“The very act of putting up or cleaning up your portfolio lands you into business development mode. It sets you into action. It gives you a tool to use when you’re trying to get new business,” she said. “If you’re in a slow period or feeling a little down, the magic of going through your portfolio is that it reminds you, you have plenty to give.” **WD**

Liz Massey (Authority.com/lizmassey) is a freelance writer, editor, and writing coach based in northern Maine who loves helping people learn and apply new writing skills. After graduating with a journalism degree from the University of Kansas, Liz edited a university alumni publication and an LGBTQ news magazine in Phoenix. She has freelanced for, among others, *Next Avenue*, *Spirituality & Health*, and *Pierce Magazine*.