

The Gifted Person's Guide To Strategic Tools For Explaining A Multi-Faceted Career

When You Can't Explain Your Job, Show It



LIZ MASSEY
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Note: Today's article is by a talented and experienced author I admire, [Liz Massey](#). She's been a writer, editor, and content orchestrator for nearly 40 years and is one of the gifted adults in our Beyond Gifted community who knows firsthand what it means to have a successful [portfolio career](#). In today's article, she outlines some enormously helpful strategies for gifted, multitasking, and creative folks to market themselves and their careers effectively when traditional tools don't cut it. Enjoy!

— Emmaly

Does this sound like you?

- You tend to fix problems at work before they become problems — leaving no evidence you fixed anything.
- You have work-related artifacts (articles, user maps, activity plans) you're proud of — but potential employers are unimpressed. Worse, the more you demonstrate your "wins," the more confused they are about the focus of your career.
- Attempts to assemble your resume, a cover letter, or update your LinkedIn profile throw you into the [Gifted Guilt Cycle](#).

I can relate. I was identified as gifted in second grade and was a high-achieving student from junior high through college graduation, then spent the majority of my twenties trying to get my "career airplane" off the ground. In my thirties, I found myself editing an alumni magazine at a large public university. As the time came to move on from the university, the world was shifting away from print magazines. I had to draw throughlines from previous interesting early-career positions (book-sale

coordinator, veterinarian's assistant, training video producer, and file clerk) to that one — coherent stories about my career journey that enticed potential employers.

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I tried everything: chronological resumes, functional resumes, hybrid chronological-functional resumes, and separate resumes for different types. Interviews inevitably resulted in potential employers scratching their heads, asking, "... And why did you put [awesome achievement but not in their narrow band of specifications] in your resume?"

In recent years, however, I became acquainted with the concept of [portfolio careers](#). I learned [many gifted adults](#) follow exactly this type of career path. That explained a lot of my previous struggles, and set me on a road to finding better ways to demonstrate my career accomplishments.

In this article, I'll show you four tools I've found useful for telling the story of your multifaceted career. I'll also discuss a fifth tool – strategy – to make the other four more effective. While my career focus has been writing, you can use these tools in any field.

One note before we get started: I understand it's a bit confusing to hear "portfolio career" and "career portfolio" in the same article. For purposes of clarity, a "portfolio career" means you work at multiple roles (often in different fields, although not always) to earn your income. A "career portfolio" is a collection of artifacts that represents your best work, whether you work at one job at a time, or many. These tools are useful for all gifted professionals, not just those pursuing a portfolio career, although those who are pursuing a portfolio career may find them especially helpful.



What Is A Career Portfolio?

This post ¹ on the Get Set Resumes website offers an excellent definition of what a career portfolio is and why it matters:

"A career portfolio is a curated collection of documents, projects, and evidence that showcase your skills, accomplishments, and impact. Unlike a resume, which summarizes your career in a limited format, a portfolio gives a deeper, more tangible picture of your professional journey."

The power to document past successes in a tangible way is especially important when your career appears to have gone in multiple directions. Career portfolios are gaining importance in a workplace that now often emphasizes skills over bare credentials.

A recent roundup of online career portfolio statistics ² revealed:

- 86% of employers will visit a portfolio website when one is presented.
- 74% of companies adopting skills-based hiring evaluate skills in new ways.
- In a survey of hiring managers for instructional designers, the ability to solve real-world problems ranked as the top portfolio evaluation criterion.

When it comes to figuring out what experiences to include in your portfolio, I love the concept author Pamela Slim articulated in her 2014 book *Body of Work*. She defines your body of work as "everything you create, contribute, affect and impact throughout the course of your life." While employers want to see what you've done on the job, it's perfectly acceptable to reinforce your ability to provide value by highlighting successes from other parts of your life.

Four Tools To Capture Your Career Contributions

1. Publication Portfolios

An online site to showcase your writing is valuable for many professions. You can emphasize your thought leadership and grasp of nitty-gritty details. You can invite others to contribute to your research, scholarship or passion for your occupation. You can help others learn more about domains you have mastered, and you can

demonstrate how you solve problems. You can share your storytelling, your sense of humor, and the things that matter most to you.

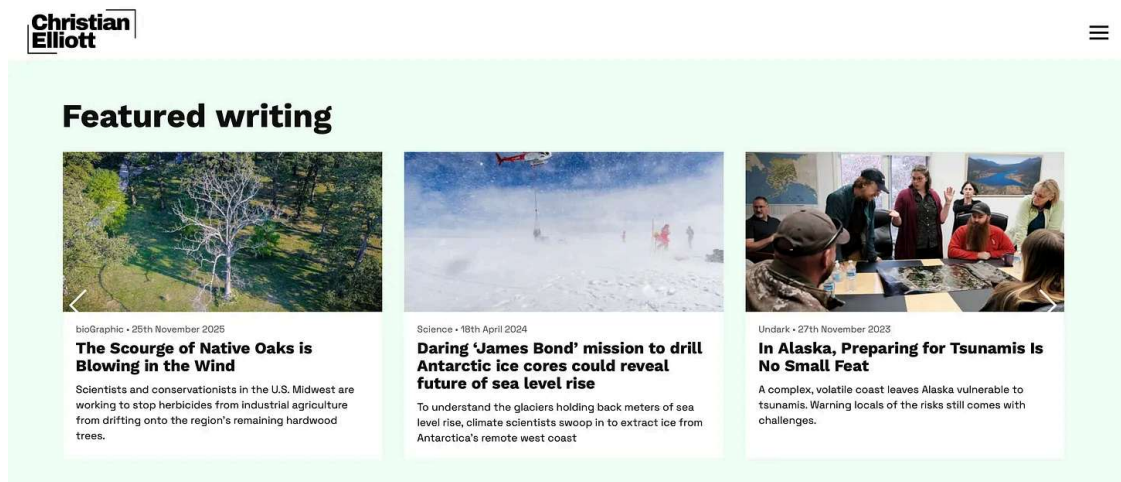
Publication portfolios can include a variety of writing samples:

- Published articles or stories
- Academic writing and research studies
- Articles and posts in professional association journals, websites and newsletters
- Writing published on a blog, website, or newsletter, including the Substack platform

One critical caveat: If your byline is not on the writing sample, and you created it for someone else, make sure you are allowed to share it. Professional copywriters often check their contracts for “nondisclosure” clauses; if you’re unsure whether you can share, ask the company or publication where it’s used.

Example of this tool in action:

- [Christian Elliot](#) is a science journalist and audio producer based in the Midwest United States. His portfolio, created on the [Journo Portfolio platform](#), features a writing carousel at the top of the page to highlight important work. Further down, visitors can use a filter to find articles by publication or topic.



Christian Elliot's writing portfolio.

2. Case Studies

It's easy to understand why case studies are used by professionals in many industries. The format pairs a description of your approach to a project with artifacts such as documentation, illustrations, charts, etc.

Essentially, case studies are highly structured stories. Often the story looks like this:

- **Description** of the problem, challenge, or assignment
- **Analysis** of the problem or description of the **problem-solving approach**
- **Solutions** developed
- **Impact** the chosen solution had on an important outcome
- **Lessons learned** and recommendations for future projects

The precise case study format can vary. I found a template [created](#) by Andrew Shea for design professionals that is flexible enough to be useful in other fields.

Examples of this tool in action:

- Jill Eddy, who works in career services at Simon Fraser University, [wrote a case study](#) detailing how she created activities that helped students envision various positive futures for themselves.
- Heather McBride [created an online case study](#) that broke down her writing and editing contributions to the first online TEDxSeattle event, held early in the COVID-19 pandemic

Heather McBride

UX Strategy and Content Design

[Portfolio](#) [About](#) [Resume](#) [Contact](#)

TED^x Seattle
x = independently organized TED event

Heather McBride's career portfolio website with a case study demonstrating her experience as a TEDx organizer.

3. Designs/Prototypes

This category of tools includes anything visually representing something you created (or proposed creating) for work. If you nodded at “You tend to fix problems at work before they become problems,” this tool can help you produce an artifact showing how you fixed it. It makes your invisible work visible!

Some types of design documents in this category include:

- Before and after flowcharts of processes you improved
- The [Work Breakdown Structure \(WBS\)](#) from a project you managed
- Lesson plans
- Blueprints
- Wireframes of websites or apps you collaborated on
- Specification drawings of construction-related projects

Design documents tend to live in a two-dimensional space. Prototypes are often three-dimensional creations. To represent your prototypes online, you have to recreate them in a two-dimensional medium.

Examples of this tool in action:

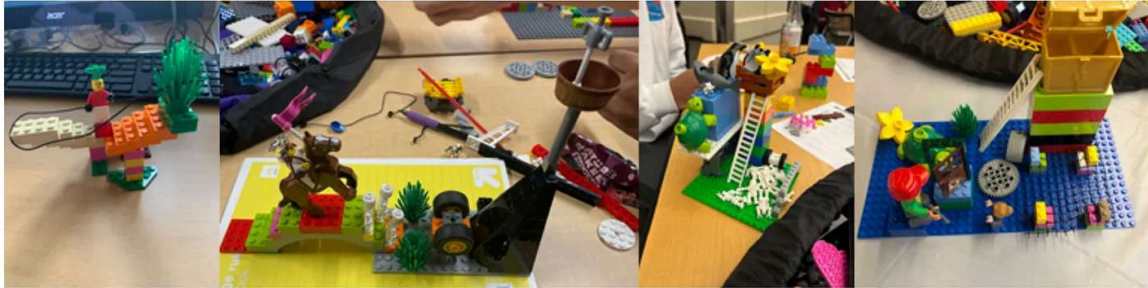
- Washington, D.C., teacher Laura McCarthy's [lesson plans for early primary grade students](#) on her blog.
- Jeff Lilly's photos of [restoring a 1967 Mustang Shelby](#).
- A post by MIT's Assistant Director of Career Advising & Training Erik Pavesic on [how his department uses LEGO® construction](#) to help students ideate about their ideal career.

How a pile of LEGO can help you ideate about your career

"Innovation is an outcome. Play is a state of mind. Innovation is often what we get when we play." – Ivy Ross, VP Design for Hardware Products at Google.

It's time to raid your old toy box! Did you know that CAPD offers workshops and events utilizing LEGO® Serious Play® as a way to help you ideate, prototype, and plan out your career? One way to think about how LSP works is to think about how it is like **3-D printing what is on your mind**. You can use LEGO bricks to explore topics through story, metaphor, and symbols. Thinking about how what you build comes together both literally and figuratively can offer you some unique insights into your needs—and is a lot of fun to do while you're doing it!

CAPD has hosted a [variety of workshops](#) to help you reflect on how your values and strengths come together to provide a more holistic idea of what you are looking for in your future career.



Erik Pavesic visually demonstrates his LEGO® Serious Play® workshops.

4. Screencasts

A screencast is a digital video recording of your computer screen and usually includes audio narration.

Common examples of screencasts are step-by-step tutorials, training videos, video lessons, and recorded presentations. ³

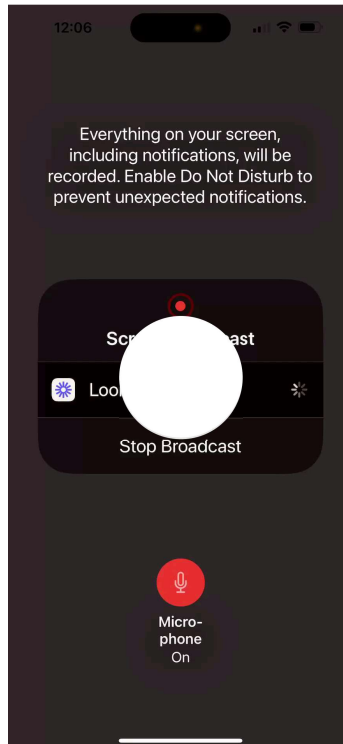
Screencasts are still seen rarely enough during job searches to make you stand out in demonstrating your accomplishments. Whatever your line(s) of work, there is a screencast format to enhance your career narrative.

Some ways you could use this tool as part of your career portfolio include:

- Showing your ability to train a learner in real-time, a common scenario in the workplace
- Giving feedback on a text, a video, a website or another online source
- Creating an “explainer” screencast that demonstrates your ability to communicate clearly and concisely, as well as your mastery of a skill or concept critical to a job

Examples of this tool in action:

As part of a freelance writing assignment involving evaluating the Loom video platform, I created a screencast for True North Resumes, a resume-writing service I run as a side business. This screencast, designed as a post for LinkedIn, provides information about how I evaluate job postings for keywords.



Pulling It All Together With The Ultimate Portfolio Tool: Strategy

Whether using one or more of these tools to strengthen your career marketing, it's important to consider your potential audience.

You may find, like I have, that your many interests have resulted in you creating a great deal of content. Kudos...but the people visiting your site may not be interested in reviewing EVERYTHING you've ever done. A **career portfolio strategy** prevents your portfolio site from being an undifferentiated archive and ensures an easy-to-follow path for your visitors.

Journalist and entrepreneur Bridget Thoreson, who runs the MyCareerRiver.com website, talks about identifying the "20 percent of your career a potential employer wants to hear about."⁴

An example of this idea in action:

Colorado-based freelance writer [Betsy Loeff](#) chatted with me a few months ago about her portfolio strategies, mentioning she keeps a nine-year-old clip on her website about a concept known as “power factor.” It’s an older clip, but she says she’s regularly complimented by professionals within the energy sector about how well she explained this concept. Will it land her an assignment with Good Housekeeping? Probably not. It does, however, provide exactly the “20 percent” of her ability that potential assignment editors need to see.

The Takeaway

As a gifted adult with diverse and nuanced achievements, you needn’t rely on the traditional resume and/or LinkedIn profile alone to quantify your workplace value. In fact, these can limit the true expansiveness of your abilities by reducing your work to a few lines — when you contain multitudes. Strategic use of publication portfolios, case studies, design documents or prototypes, and screencasts may provide a stronger sense of your impact.

To get started, make a simple list of work-related accomplishments of which you’re most proud. Do any of those accomplishments involve a piece of writing you’d like people to see? Do any of those have elements that can be represented as a case study? Do any of these accomplishments have parts that can be expressed as a design document or a prototype? Can you walk viewers through your mastery of a computer skill in a screencast?

If so, take one or two hours this weekend to experiment and create something for your portfolio to make your skills stand out. Then, the next time you have a chance to tell your career story to a possible client, employer, or referral source, you’ll have a tool to do the talking for you.

About the Author

[Liz Massey](#) has been a writer, editor and content orchestrator for nearly 40 years, in roles as diverse as managing editor, video scriptwriter, podcaster, web content marketer, and

writing coach. Liz was identified as gifted at age 8 and has never lost her thirst for learning new things or creating new possibilities. She currently lives in Northern Maine with her wife and a mini-zoo of quirky pets.



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- 1 <https://www.getsetresumes.com/blog/career-portfolio-the-why-when-and-how-to-create-one/>
 - 2 <https://onehour.digital/blog/portfolio-website-statistics>
 - 3 <https://www.techsmith.com/blog/what-is-screencasting/>
 - 4 Personal coaching session with the author, 2/3/26.
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