

Creating a Portfolio When You Don't Got No Samples

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The biggest headache for people just entering the technical communications field, or for those who haven't been in it very long, is creating a portfolio without a substantial body of work to represent. However, with a little ingenuity and the following tips, you can create an impressive portfolio.

The Annotated Portfolio

Deborah S. Ray, in her excellent article "Developing An Annotated Portfolio," recommends showcasing skills and abilities by bringing together excerpts from work you have done, comments from people you have worked with and your own narrative, to present a comprehensive picture. After all, if you think you'd make a good technical communicator, then you've already done some type of planning, organizing, designing, writing and editing work that proves that—right? You can draw on that experience for an annotated portfolio. Read Deborah's article on the TECHWR-L website at <http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/overcominglackofportfolio.html> and then get busy!

Volunteer Work (technical)

Open source is essentially shared application code, which can be altered and shared by whoever possesses the skills to manipulate it. Creators of open source applications believe—and have proved—that an open exchange of information creates a quality product. Volunteers can (among other things):

- write documentation for open source software
- write descriptions of open source books in print
- proofread/edit existing open source documentation
- write, evaluate and use free software

Some open source sites are:

- <http://www.oswg.org/oswg/>
- <http://www.gnu.org/>
- <http://www.linux.doc.org/>
- <http://www.opensource.org/>

Volunteer Work (not-so-technical)

Show your writing and design skills with samples like:

- PTA brochure
- Wedding invitation
- Non-profit website
- Before-and-after product guides (like that infamous VCR)
- Library newsletter
- Newspaper column
- Handout (like this one)
- Instructions to help your mother balance her checkbook

Make Stuff Up

Research the company and job responsibilities for which you're interviewing and develop a piece related to the industry and the type of work the position entails. For example, use a bank's logo, colors and style and produce a promotional sheet for a fictitious financial product, develop training procedures for opening a checking account, or redesign their website homepage.