

# What to do if you don't get in

**PORTFOLIO**

**OOOMPH!**

**Other titles in this series include:**

Writing your personal statement

Creating a sensational portfolio

How to choose the best College for you

How to present and mount work

Deciding which subject to study

How to blow them away at interview

How to photograph your work



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# Portfolio Oomph

## About Portfolio Oomph

Portfolio Oomph was created in 2012 by artist and lecturer Julie Read.

Julie has been at both ends of the system; helping students to be successful in applying to Art College, as well as interviewing applicants for entry to Edinburgh College of Art for 9 years. She was also responsible for leading the student recruitment activity at Edinburgh College of Art (2006 - 9) which involved advising many prospective students and their parents about applying to Art College.



Julie Read is an artist based in Midlothian, 8 miles south of Edinburgh. She received her BA (Hon) in Fine Art Printmaking from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art (Dundee) and a teaching qualification from the University of Strathclyde. Julie has exhibited extensively, both nationally and internationally and undertaken residencies in Switzerland and Austria.

Her work is included in a number of collections, including Royal Bank of Scotland, Archive Centre for Artists Books at Dundee Contemporary Arts, National Library of Scotland, International Portrait Gallery in Tuzla, Bosnia, Karelian State Museum Permanent Collection, Russia. Julie has received 4 awards from the Scottish Arts Council (now Creative Scotland) also the British Council, Friends of the Royal Scottish Academy, Hope Scott Trust, City of Edinburgh Council and the Arts Trust of Scotland.

Julie has extensive experience of supporting and interviewing students at entrance level and creating course materials and tutoring students in an online environment.

### Teaching posts held by Julie Read

- Edinburgh College of Art on First Year General Course (9 years)
- Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art on First Year General Course
- Dundee College on BA Design and Creativity, HND Graphics and Illustration courses - (9 years)
- West Lothian College on HNC Contemporary Art Practice course
- Interactive Design Institute, UK's leading provider of online qualifications in design
- Visual Art Studios on Portfolio Preparation course, Glasgow
- Chesterfield College on Diploma in Foundation studies in Art and Design

### Guest Artist

- Edinburgh College of Art
- Glasgow School of Art

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## INTRODUCTION

### Don't panic!

**Failure** - fear of it is universal, experiencing it is inevitable and running from it is dependably routine. So let me tell you a story - about my very own experience as a young, excited artist wanting to go off and explore the world of Art College.

“ I had a portfolio and went off to Norwich School of Art (as it was called then) for an interview. I'd chosen this place as it seemed quite intimate, not the size of some of the large cities I'd visited such as Manchester and Leeds. I was so desperate to get into this College and I knew very little about the place, the College or the reputation as it stood. Had I done my research properly I would have known that it was a very competitive college to secure a place at. Not that this should have influenced my decision but it could have saved a lot of upset as you will later find out.

My interview, I thought went quite well, I didn't have to say much; I was so timid and quiet that really the interviewers got nothing out of me at all. I had nothing to say about my work as it was so bland - how was I going to get them excited about my work if I wasn't even excited about it - hmmm, think about it? I naively came away thinking that they didn't talk much to me because my work gave them all the answers, I was SO wrong!

I'd worn my smartest clothes as my parents had advised. And I'd dropped in a name of my tutor who had studied with one of the interviewers as I thought this might help - yay!

Nay. I didn't get a place. I didn't ask for any feedback either. So, on I went to my 2<sup>nd</sup> choice college as in those days that's how it worked, you had a 1<sup>st</sup> choice, 2<sup>nd</sup> choice and then it went to clearing. Having no accurate indication why I didn't obtain a place at Norwich I went on to Humberside Polytechnic and probably did the same thing there - didn't say much, wore my smartest clothes and thought it went well too. I didn't get a place there either. Gutted.

I went through clearing too at Farnham and surprise, surprise I didn't get a place there either!

Having asked for no feedback on my travels from any of these institutions, I had really no idea why they weren't interested in me or my work. It wasn't based on my clothes being too smart I don't think(!) but I certainly didn't feel that comfortable in them.

I found myself begrudgingly repeating my Foundation Diploma to build my portfolio pretty much from scratch, when thud (!), the penny finally dropped as to what my portfolio was lacking - passion and commitment. In this extra year my interests were broadened and my portfolio flourished (with some excellent support from my tutors at Chesterfield College, Dave Horan, Tony Currell and Shirley Stevenson if you're reading, thanks a million... oh and my parents who patiently listened to my wishes to go to Art College - whatever!)

Once my confidence grew, I secured a place at 2 Colleges the following year and took up my place at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art in Dundee in 1991. I'll tell you more about this story in the eBook 'How to make a Sensational Portfolio' as there's still lots to tell.



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So, if you don't get into Art College this year, don't give yourself a hard time - parents please listen to this too! APPLYING TO ART COLLEGE IS VERY COMPETITIVE.

But what are you going to do about it?

Pat yourself on the back for applying, creating and presenting your portfolio and for attending what must seem like quite a daunting task - the interview. It might not seem like it now, but it is good experience. Some schools have this thing about 'there are no losers - everyone's a winner' and that's just not true and you'll be finding this out for yourself right now. Life is competitive and no-one is going to hand anything to you on a plate just for trying and this is just the beginning.

So in a way, my previous question of what are you going to do is quite important. What ARE you going to do?

## OPTIONS:

- [a] Cry and give up
- [b] Cry, give up and never set foot inside a gallery or look at art again - I HATE ART
- [c] Dunno, see what happens.....
- [d] Take a year out to travel and apply again with same portfolio next year
- [e] Take a year out to travel and work in sketchbooks whilst away, apply again with additional work
- [f] Get a job instead, don't apply again
- [g] Take a year out to work and apply again with same portfolio next year
- [h] Take a year out to work, attend some evening classes and add to portfolio to apply again next year
- [i] Apply for a portfolio building/foundation course and apply again next year with revised portfolio
- [j] Take up a place on another course that you're keen to do too

Most of these options are right for many of you. Art College isn't for everyone and it would be wrong for me to say to you that you must try again, only harder and you will get in. You might not. You might not have the ambition or finances or commitment to do that. So actually you need to decide if your ambition to go to Art College is great enough to spend another year, in terms of time and money, applying again.

However, under no circumstance do I suggest that you do either [d] or [g]. Why? Because there is no point applying with the same portfolio if it didn't get you a place this time - it probably won't get you a place next time. If you apply with the same portfolio to the same College, they will expect that you have done something creative in the year since they last saw you - and often they will remember you, I assure you.

So, if you've decided that you are really destined to go to Art College like I was, then you have to try again. If you have supportive parents to help you improve your portfolio by staying on at school, or attending evening classes or a foundation course then you are very lucky and do make the most of it.

One step at a time - OK?



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## ➡ Step 1 - learn from my mistakes:

Phone the College, ask them what the procedure for getting feedback from your interview is and DO IT. This is your right - any institution that has made written notes about you is obliged to send those details to you. You'll probably get short notes from the session, they could be quite minimal and could be in a foreign language, that of 'art speak'. Ask your art teacher to help you to translate it. If you're really, really stuck for a translation, feel free to email it to me and I will take a look, however remember it's only my translation of it, nothing absolute.

You will probably be advised to send an email or a letter to the College (find out exactly who you need to send this letter to) asking for feedback, something like this would suffice:

*'I would like to thank you for interviewing me and viewing my portfolio on [insert date].*

*Although I was unsuccessful in my application, I still found it a valuable learning experience. I do understand that there was much competition for the places on the course that I applied for.*

*However, I would like to improve my application, interview skills and portfolio for next year, so I would be most grateful if you could provide me with some feedback on my portfolio and performance.'*

## ➡ Step 2:

Spend a little time, I mean weeks not minutes, thinking about what the feedback is really saying. There will probably be notes made in connection to different aspects of your application and your portfolio. So, what elements made up your application?

**Exam results/qualifications** - this may sound daft but were you qualified for the course you applied to? Sometimes it does happen that people apply who are not qualified. If you're waiting for exam results this is a different matter and if you are accepted, it will be on the condition that you make the grades necessary in the course requirements - called a conditional offer.

**Personal statement** - there might be comments about this on your notes but I don't believe that this is such a big part of the application that you would fail to be offered a place based on this.

So that leaves the **portfolio** - this is the big hurdle. There will be notes made about your work and it might be split into categories such as: ideas/concepts, research/investigation, drawing skills, developmental work, resolved work (critical judgement and selection), presentation, influences/contextual awareness and sketchbooks. Whatever is written in relation to each of these categories, you'll need to take on board and ask yourself, 'how could I have done better?'

You might not know what you could have done better, your teacher might not know either but you will have to start to think about it and over the summer is probably a good time to start - not once you're back at school/college if you're returning or if you're taking a job on for a year as you'll forget and get caught up in other things.



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Finally, your **interview** - this might have severely let you down. Of course interviewers realise that you will be nervous and possibly not very confident so comments don't usually relate to that unless it's been a particularly bad interview. Usually comments relating to the interview would be about attitude, late arrival to interview, seeming lack of commitment or caring about your future artistic career, lack of engagement in the creative process, unable to communicate about the work in your portfolio etc.

### Step 3:

If this eBook has been useful for you, then I suggest that you buy some of our other eBooks and eCourses, particularly the eBook titled '**How to Create a Sensational Portfolio**'. This eBook gives you some really useful pointers on how to make your portfolio not only interesting but personal to you. As your portfolio is the only way to show your personality, commitment, imagination and talent in creative terms you really have to demonstrate that you have the high level of skill and creativity to be successful.

If you didn't already read our eBook titled '**How to blow them away at interview**', then I suggest that before you attend your next interview you take a good read through it and practice all the suggested preparation. Buy the book well in advance of your interview, not the night or week before, you'll need more time to prepare than that.

Read the quotes below from 2 very successful people out there, Sir James Dyson and Twyler Tharp about how failure is an important part of creativity.

“I made 5,127 prototypes of my vacuum before I got it right. There were 5,126 failures. But I learned from each one. That's how I came up with a solution. So I don't mind failure. I've always thought that schoolchildren should be marked by the number of failures they've had. The child who tries strange things and experiences lots of failures to get there is probably more creative.”

“We're taught to do things the right way. But if you want to discover something that other people haven't, you need to do things the wrong way. Initiate a failure by doing something that's very silly, unthinkable, naughty, dangerous. Watching why that fails can take you on a completely different path. It's exciting, actually. To me, solving problems is a bit like a drug. You're on it, and you can't get off. I spent seven years on our washing machine [which has two drums, instead of one].”

**Sir James Dyson**



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*“If you do only what you know and do it very, very well, chances are that you won’t fail. You’ll just stagnate, and your work will get less and less interesting, and that’s failure by erosion. True failure is a mark of accomplishment in the sense that something new and different was tried. Ideally, the best way to fail is in private.”*

*Twyler Tharp* One of America's most celebrated living choreographers

**FINAL, FINALLY.....**

If you’ve found this eBook useful, please tell your friends - we’d also love to hear how it’s helped you on our Facebook page.

If not, we’d be keen to hear how we could make it better - let us know!

**GOOD LUCK!**

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## Other eBooks and eCourse titles in this series:

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- How to present and mount your work
- How to photograph your work
- Writing your personal statement
- Choosing the right college for you
- Drawing skills; exploration
- Drawing skills; development
- Outdoor / environmental art
- Conceptual development
- Video art
- Dynamic colour
- Abstract art
- Sketchbook development
- Mixed media approaches

## FINAL, FINALLY.....

Thank you for purchasing this eBook, we really hope it goes on to help you succeed in your application for art college.

Many hours were spent writing and gathering ideas and research for the Portfolio Oomph eBook series for your use. We would appreciate it if you would respect this and not share or distribute the eBook to anyone else without the prior permission of Portfolio Oomph.

### Socially driven organisation

Portfolio Oomph is a socially driven organisation meaning that we exist foremost to tackle social issues in the form of improving people's life and career chances in the arts. We make money from selling our goods and services, but we reinvest any profits back into the business. *And so when we profit, society profits.*