

oomph

PORTFOLIO

getting you into art college

HOW TO AVOID THE

TOP 10 MISTAKES

HOLDING YOU BACK FROM

GETTING INTO ART SCHOOL

PORTFOLIO-OOMPH.COM

THINK
OUTSIDE
THE BOX



Julie Read here, Specialist portfolio advisor

25 min
read

"I'm very happy to say that your prior experience with us [ECA] has helped lead to a very useful document. We are definitely singing from the same songbook in terms of what applicants should be demonstrating in their portfolios." Jared Taylor, Head of Animation, Edinburgh College of Art




Everything that I know about creating a successful portfolio for art college, I have been teaching for years to the students that I mentor face to face and inside my **PLAN CREATE SUCCEED** course.

In this short document I'll be sharing with you the top 10 mistakes that are holding you back from success at your first choice art school.



And I know, because I was guilty of many when I didn't get into art school first time!

You need to **GENUINELY** be interested in:

-  not getting a quick fix, there are no quick fixes for a successful portfolio
-  being strategic and making a plan
-  being prepared to put the work in, not just go through the motions of what the school exam boards request like a tick box exercise

If this is you, then you're going to love this. **Let's get cracking!**

There are questions at the end of each section, it's worth spending a bit of time to deliberate & reflect upon.

"We are convinced that Julie's expert guidance and critical eye made all the difference and helped our daughter reach this exciting stage in her academic career"

Kitty Bruce-Gardyne
daughter accepted for Interior Design and architecture at both Glasgow School of Art and Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee.

10 MISTAKES

#1

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What are you currently doing to get your portfolio together? Let me have a guess - following your school curriculum and doing what the teachers suggest?

If you're doing this you're unlikely to have a portfolio that is individual to **YOU**.



If you've recognised that you're lacking in ideas, what impact is this going to have on the tutors assessing your folio and at interview?

So what is your folio?

- a demonstration of **YOUR** visual and creative ability.
- it is the documentation and culmination of **YOUR** experiences.
- the voice of **YOUR** ideas; it speaks and shows what **YOU** are about, **YOUR** vision, **YOUR** passion - your portfolio is **YOU**.

10 MISTAKES



#2

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Each College / Uni has different requirements for an applicants portfolio for each course they offer. So for example what Sheffield Hallam University want to see for their BA Hons Illustration might be a bit different from what University of the Arts might want to see.

Their portfolio submissions procedure will also be different, some Colleges / Unis will only want to see a digital portfolio, others will want to see the real folio and interview you. Dates will vary too, aside from the UCAS deadline of the end of January every year.

You'll need a structured plan that considers these different elements and how you're going to navigate this process.



If your portfolio doesn't score well in certain aspects of the College's/Uni's assessment criteria how will your folio make the grade?

Competition is fierce, for example at **Edinburgh College of Art** there are in the region of 4000 applicants for approximately 150 places (1:26). You need to learn to think creatively, prepare your portfolio in the best way possible so that you don't miss out.

10 MISTAKES

#3

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Your portfolio will have work in it that you are proud of, naturally.

Therefore students often throw work away that isn't 'good'. Even worse, many students that I work with tear pages out of their sketchbooks that they don't like for one reason or another.

This is a **HUGE** mistake and very costly because by doing this you're not showing the creative process to full effect. Some of the 'bad' work that you make forges the way to the successes.

IS THIS YOU? Then you must stop doing this and learn to accept that mistakes are important.



One of the most useful things I learnt from Portfolio Oomph was in terms of developing sketchbooks and really learning how to work in a sketchbook. Having that guidance and support from someone who knows about the process and who knows how hard it is to get into art college was key.

Ellie Thomson - 5 unconditional offers, studied Fashion at Edinburgh College of Art



How can you start to let yourself go and trust your own judgement?

What have you already thrown away that was crucial to the development of an idea?

How will the College's/Uni's assess the creative process if you've thrown much of it away?

10 MISTAKES

#4

**YOU'RE DRAWING FROM
PHOTOS MAINLY, OFTEN
ON YOUR MOBILE PHONE**





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YOU'RE DRAWING FROM PHOTOS MAINLY, OFTEN ON YOUR MOBILE PHONE

Copying from photos, be that your own photos or from magazines and the internet is not the best way to create your work.

Working from photos on mobile phones is also very common however the Colleges / Unis don't want to see this, and they will know!

There will be times that you have no alternative, but the rule of thumb is from life as much as you can.

WHY? You have not composed a photo from a magazine/internet. Also a camera has one lens, we have 2 (our eyes) therefore your perception of depth will be flawed and your drawings will look very flat.



“ Before Portfolio Oomph came into our lives Emily was happy drawing, painting but she was not creating. She clearly had the skills but was copying from photos, paintings etc. Although her teachers were very encouraging they weren't helping her to think for herself.

Sally Lyall- parent of mentee studying at DJCAD



How can you show your skills with composition if it's already been composed in the camera - or by someone else?

And as our parent above stated, you're not creating and developing ideas, you're only copying.

10 MISTAKES

#5

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#5

YOUR DIGITAL PORTFOLIO IS RANDOM AND LACKING CLARITY

So you've spent the best part of 4 months creating your portfolio and it's time now to get it in order for your digital submission. Some Colleges / Unis ask for this, others don't.

Each College / Uni will have guidelines of how many images they want to see in each category of the creative process.

Some Colleges / Unis want 20 images, others more or less.

There are limitations on file sizes and types, some asking for Tumblr accounts, other a direct upload to their portal. So here you need to know your pixels from your pencils!

You need a digital plan

- represent your portfolio well with your digital submission
- ensure that the journey of the creative process is evident throughout your portfolio
- get your file types and sizes correct for each institution
- leave no stone unturned, in that there should be **NO DOUBT** that you are right candidate for them



What skills do you need to acquire to ensure that you're representing yourself best with your digital portfolio?

Alternatively, what outside support do you need to do this?

10 MISTAKES

#6

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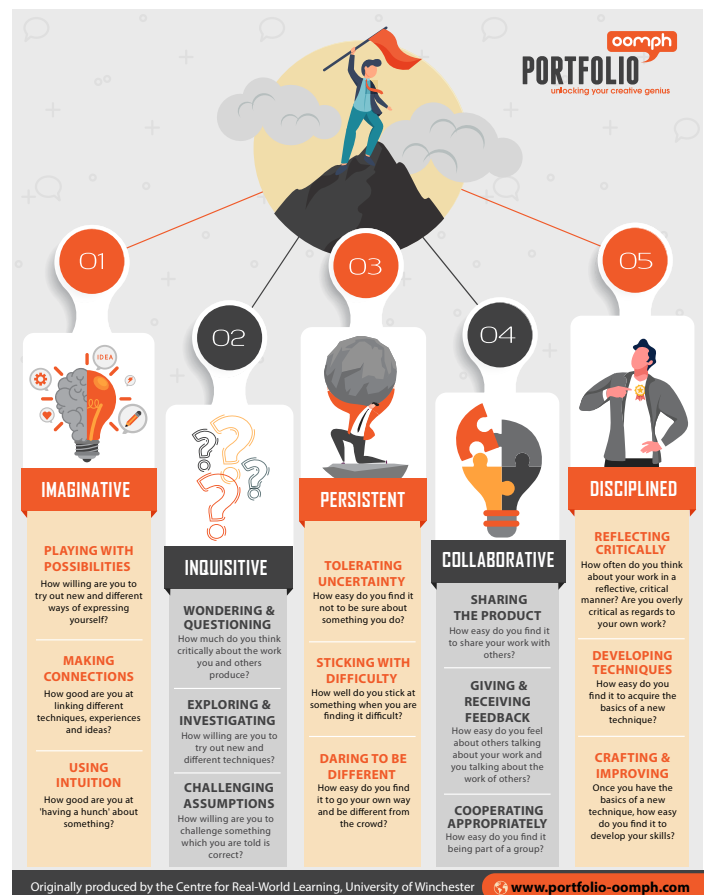
It's easy to get into the habit of drawing in a certain way and it seems to 'work' - you're in control and you can pretty much do anything you want to with your materials and techniques.

You maybe even feel like you've developed our own **STYLE** which seems to be a good thing.

However, having too much of one style of drawing or working and in too limited a range of materials can be harmful to your portfolio.

You want to show that you're able to: take risks, experiment, not always be right, fail sometimes, use your intuition and a whole lot more.

In fact, these are all traits of a creative individual - see Winchester University's creativity wheel to the right.



If your portfolio shows very limited skills and topic but done to perfection, what does this say about you?

10 MISTAKES

#7

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When you're researching artists and designers to show as an influence to your work, you're often informed of suitable names from your teachers.

And the school curriculum is designed to take you through the important art movements of the 'isms' - Surrealism, Abstract Expressionism, Cubism, Futurism and other such as Bauhaus, Opt Art etc.

The information is readily available online and in books, libraries.

The Colleges / Unis want to see that you're engaging in the art and design world **TODAY**, now, in the present **NOT** in the past.

They want to be sure that you're keeping up with what's current in your subject specialism, both in concepts/ideas and processes.



If you're only researching well known artists, it's usual that these are older, not contemporary artists. How can you demonstrate that you're in touch with the art world today in the **HERE** and **NOW**?

10 MISTAKES

#8

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Thinking that drawing, in particular life drawing is the be all and end all can be a costly error.

Just because your mum and your friends think that you're great at drawing the cat and the fruit in the bowl and all manner of other things around the house, it doesn't mean that you're cut out for art college (and there really is nothing wrong with cats - I love them!)

Yes, drawing is important but actually you would be surprised that it is not always essential for an art college application.

If you have taken note of our **mistake no.1** and **mistake no. 2** then you

should have a fair idea of what your chosen college is wanting to see.

One thing that a college does not want to see in an art college application is a whole load of drawing that is just really demonstrating your drawing ability.

What can you do to expand the scope and ideas in your portfolio?



What is drawing? What can drawing be? It's not always pencil on paper - or anything on paper!

10 MISTAKES

#9

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Researching artists and designers is really important - it helps form your own ideas and understand how other artists have tackled similar ideas.

The internet is a great way to learn about artists and designers - but imagine what I had to do as I studied before the internet existed!

Yes, books were the **ONLY** way to research - and of course visiting exhibitions.

And to be honest, seeing a photo of an artwork in a book comes nowhere close to visiting it and seeing it in real life.

And with so much art now being experiential, installation, interactive pieces, you're missing out on a lot by just viewing in the comfort of your own home.

Getting along to events and experiencing art first hand is the best thing you can do and gives you something to discuss in your application.



If you don't set foot into the real world and see some art in the flesh, what impression do you think this gives of you?



10 MISTAKES

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When you work on loose paper and then stick these drawings / artworks into your sketchbook, it then becomes more like a scrapbook.

By working like this you're 'curating' your sketchbook, showing the highlights only.

And by doing this, it takes you back to **mistake no. 3** of throwing work away and **mistake no. 6** doing what you know works.

Your sketchbook is to show the whole process, the creative process. If you're not careful your sketchbooks will become stale and lack creativity.



If you're only showing the highlights, you're essentially 'curating away' half of the creative process. How are you going to explain this at interview?



What a difference a year makes - this time last year it seemed daunting at the amount of work ahead to create the portfolio and I think that caused a bit of apathy & procrastination... but your encouragement and program kept her focused to work at achieving her final goal! It definitely paid off!

Gina C. - parent of PLAN CREATE SUCCEED student

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE AWAY FROM THIS GUIDE

Do you identify with any one of these mistakes? I know I did when I first applied to art college - most of them!

Each of these 10 mistakes are just the basics of what you need to address to AVOID getting stuck.

I'm not going to pretend to you that knowing what I've just told you is enough to start creating that knockout portfolio, that would be silly....

But it's a start, the building blocks that you need to build your portfolio around.

Making change and moving out of your comfort and habits is painful. But not as painful as staying stuck and certainly not as painful as not getting your place at your first choice art course - I remember!



Are you happy for things to stay the same or are you brave enough to start challenging your creativity to improve your folio?

FOR THE RIGHT PERSON WITH THE RIGHT MINDSET AND GUIDANCE, EXECUTED WELL, ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE. I'M OFFERING THE GUIDANCE, CAN YOU BRING THE REST?



“Taking on board all the advice you shared Rosanna has been in a extremely fortunate position and has had an offer to study textiles from ECA, GSA and Dundee.

We really could not be more happy and grateful for the eye opener from those years ago. I would like to say you have played a large part in Rosanna's success. Thankyou for all your advice and input.

Fiona Matheson - parent of student studying Textiles at GSA

OPTION #1

COVER IT ALL WITH MY 'PLAN CREATE SUCCEED' COURSE WITH 5 TUTORIALS AND DIGITAL PORTFOLIO CREATION

This is the Rolls Royce, my
flagship course!

It takes you through
from researching
your college/uni
and course, the
nuts and bolts of

a portfolio, sketchbooks, ideas,
5 projects exploring a range of
issues and ways of working,
reflection, context (artists/
designers) **AND** I edit and compile
your digital portfolio for you.

FIND OUT MORE

"I just wanted to tell you that your assignments have been amazing - I've really been impressed with the work that our daughter's done.

*It's amazing she got into all 5 UK schools she applied to!
Plus she got into USC Roski School of Design as a Design
Major which is currently ranked #1 in design in the US".*

parent of student on PLAN CREATE SUCCEED



OPTION #2



GET PERSONAL BESPOKE SUPPORT, FACE TO FACE OR ONLINE WITH 1:1 MENTORING

If you're looking for support I offer mentoring / private art lessons in Edinburgh on a face to face basis or by Zoom for those further afield.

gained 5 unconditional offers for leading Colleges / Unis in the UK for Fashion Design.

My unique ability occurs within the larger skill of helping students solve creative problems.

I can work with you in a way that enables you to come up with creative solutions in your artwork you hadn't thought of before.

I create space that brings forth innovative solutions from my students, with a respect for the creative process.



In the past 12 years I've worked with 117 students helping them to gain 244 places for art and design courses in the UK and overseas.
ELLIE (above)

"That was worth every penny, it is total value for money... the amount of time Julie devotes to your child it's utter value for money - it's changed Charlotte's life."

Alex Lascarides, parent of mentoring student with 3 offers for Performance Costume and Set Design

▶ LISTEN TO ELLIE AND FIND OUT MORE

THIS IS
THE SIGN
YOU'VE BEEN
LOOKING FOR

thankyou

THANK YOU

FOR READING THIS GUIDE

I really hope you're feeling inspired to start your creative career **TODAY** and take the first steps by getting to grips with your art college portfolio.

Please act **NOW** if you're applying to art college this year as it takes longer than you might think to create a winning portfolio!

I'd love to go on the creative journey with you - so please get in touch if you're wondering if I can help.

By booking a complimentary consultation with me you can take essential time to:

- talk about your current situation
- decide the next right step
- find out how **PLAN CREATE SUCCEED** or my mentoring can elevate your portfolio
- leave feeling heard and supported

So go ahead and book your complimentary consultation on a day and time that suits you:

- book straight into my diary, choose **Discovery Call**
- contact me by email julie@portfolio-oomph.com
- contact me by phone **07815 810797**



Help is just one decision away - I look forward to working with you.

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ABOUT JULIE

Julie Read (BA Hons, PGCE), is a **Creativity expert**, mentor & speaker. She's a leading educator in the Creative Industries on a mission to create a legacy to 'unlock your creative genius'. Her primary passion is in enabling individuals to explore the world and their experience of the world, through their art. Portfolio preparation, in particular the creative process and sketchbooks are the founding principles. Her passion and mission is assisting students in creating an art portfolio for university.

Julie has been at both ends of the system; helping students creating art college portfolios for university as well as interviewing applicants for entry to Edinburgh College of Art for 9 years.

She led the student recruitment activity at Edinburgh College of Art from 2006 – 9. This involved advising many prospective students and their parents about applying to art college and creating art college portfolios for university.

Julie was also a student who didn't get a place at art college many, many years ago - in fact didn't get a place at a staggering 3 art colleges!

She realised that she clearly had NO IDEA when creating an art college portfolio, what the tutors were looking for in her or her work – crucial. What she didn't realise was that it said nothing about her, what she was interested in and it showed quite clearly that her passion for art hadn't really been ignited.

However, success did prevail and Julie is an **artist** based in Midlothian, 8 miles south of Edinburgh. She received her BA (Hons) 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.

She 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.

Feel free to contact Julie anytime on 07815 810797