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# Frequently Asked Questions



## Do employers really think portfolios are important?

Yes! Over 80% of employers think having a portfolio is helpful. It is a great way to showcase your skills and work samples in one place while giving an employer a good first impression.

## What are the best sites to make a portfolio?

The sites we recommend are Wix, Weebly, and Wordpress because they're free and relatively easy to use. However, they each have their pros and cons. Check out our section about comparing web builders to see which one is the best for you!

## How do I develop my brand?

Your personal brand is created through your choices of fonts, colors, logos and layout. Check out our personal branding section for specific tips on how to develop each of these components.

You want to make sure your personal brand is both professional and personable. You want to make sure that your images and professional, but your text is a good place to show personality.

## Do I need a logo?

No, but having a logo is a good way to maintain a consistent brand on all of your platforms. If you're not super savvy with Adobe Illustrator or InDesign, check out Canva! It's a website that makes graphic design easy.

## How do I showcase the skills I want to show my employer?

There are many ways you can showcase your skills, but the best way is through your work samples. Choose work samples that best illustrate your ability with the skills of your profession, and be sure to include a synopsis that explains the context, purpose, and value of your work sample. This makes it easier for potential employers to skim your work and to find the examples they are interested in.

# Frequently Asked Questions



## I'm applying to multiple places, should I send the same portfolio to all of them?

It depends. If the jobs you are applying for are similar in style and require the same skills, you might be able to use the same portfolio. However, if you are applying for jobs that are very different, you might want to think about making a separate portfolio with a different focus.

## Should I include my resume on my portfolio even though my employer already has it?

Yes, you should include your resume on your portfolio. Your employer is probably looking at a bunch of resumes and websites and may not have your resume in front of them. This is a good way to show your employer your resume online and make that connection to your portfolio. It's also a good idea to have it available for the visitors that may not have your resume.

## I'm applying for grad school; do I need a different portfolio for this?

You should consider making another portfolio tailored to this audience. If you are applying to grad school, you are probably dealing with a different audience and are highlighting different skills, so you might need a different portfolio.

## What are the most important things employers are looking for?

Employers are looking to make sure you will fit in with their organization. They're looking at your portfolio to see what kind of person you are and what skills and experience you have.

## How can I use my portfolio in an interview?

A portfolio is a great talking point in an interview! It allows you tell your employer about the projects you've done, as well as show them. It also shows initiative and dedication that you've taken the time to make a personal website.



# Personal Branding

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- Overview
  - Where to Start
  - Colors
  - Fonts
  - Logo



# Personal Branding

## An overview: What is personal branding?

People with strong brands are clear about who they are. They know and maximize their strengths. Developing your brand will give you the chance to define the unique skills that make you [stand out](#) from the crowd.

An online portfolio gives you the ability to present myriad talents and showcase your range of skills. However, in order to best appeal to employers and tell your story effectively, you'll need to make an added effort to develop consistency among all of the work and information you share on your portfolio. In addition, having a consistent personal brand ties all of your professional content together: your resume, cover letter, business card, LinkedIn, etc.

Personal branding, then, is the process of managing and optimizing the way that you are presenting yourself online.

## Where to start?

The best place to start when considering your personal brand is by examining your characteristics and your key values.

Ask yourself:

- What do you stand for?
- What are your defining skills?
- What are your defining characteristics?

For instance, maybe you are passionate about traveling to foreign countries and immersing yourself in new cultures through food, conversation, and exploration. You might easily identify

yourself as “adventurous.” Now consider how that quality can translate to a relevant characteristic for your career trajectory. Employers want to hire adaptable and coachable individuals. If you are always up for a new challenge and love trying new things, perhaps you will choose “adaptable” as one of your personal branding values.

**“Values are the ideals and stands that you live life by, regardless of external pressures or incentives.”**

The rule of thumb when considering your personal branding values is to pick three adjectives that speak to the fundamental characteristics that shape your life and work. While you might include these verbatim on your portfolio, you don't have to. The personal branding exercise is helpful to create guiding characteristics that are showcased in all of your work samples and offer cohesion and a clear message about who you are and what you will bring to an organization.

The most important factor when constructing your personal branding values is to **be confident**. Putting your best foot forward professionally means owning your strengths, and letting them shine. Your values should be:

**Authentic**—representative of your strengths

**Backed**—can be demonstrated by your work

**Consistent**—can be seen in all aspects of your work, and represented across all parts of your brand



Take a look at Media Fellow Marlana's portfolio home page (below) for another example.



As you will see, Marlana chose to brand herself as “compassionate, optimistic, and committed.” These are values that she holds both personally and professionally. When brainstorming your own values, try to think of adjectives that you would want both your boss and your best friend to use to describe you.

## Designing your brand into being: Colors, fonts, and logos

Once you have decided on your three key adjectives, you will want to think about designing your brand. Designing your brand comes down to a few basic components: colors, fonts, and logos. You will want to use these design elements to visually convey your values and build your brand.

## Color

Color sends a powerful message and is key to representing your personal brand. Your brand color is the most important element of your visual brand identity. People remember color because it stirs up emotions. In fact, color increases brand recognition by up to [80 percent](#). Therefore, you want to choose colors that best represent your personality and your skill set.



Your choice of color should be intentional, and should be dictated by your values. The Color Emotion Guide (pictured above) is simplistic, but offers a general overview of some of our cultural interpretations of color.

Once you identify the best color for your personal brand, be sure to note the HEX values so that you can incorporate these specific colors into your portfolio, resume, business cards, etc. Once you have chosen your color and have the appropriate codes, be sure to apply the color consistently to all your branding materials.



## Fonts

Much like handwriting conveys personality, the fonts that you choose for your personal brand should reinforce your values. For instance, if you are seeking a creative profession, feel free to be more daring and decorative with your font choices. Are you planning to work for a more conservative firm? Try a clean and classic font. While [DigiComm's Pinterest](#) page has an entire board dedicated to font pairing ideas and inspiration, to get you started, below are a few basic tips:

- [Contrasting fonts](#) are visually appealing and create hierarchy
- Use decorative fonts for headings/titles
- Use serif and sans serif fonts for body copy

THIS IS A FUN FONT! (DECORATIVE)

This is a more serious font. (serif)

This is a good choice for online text.  
(sans serif)

## Your logo: Trademarking your brand

Logos can serve as the foundation for your brand. Have no fear—you don't have to be a graphic designer to create a logo that illustrates your brand. Free graphic design program [Canva](#) is a user-friendly, intuitive platform that you can use to create your own logo.

As illustrated in the above example, Lauren Stearns' logo has gone through several iterations. You can develop and redesign your logo as you see fit.

Creating a logo is a highly individualized journey, and you should be intentional about creating a logo that you feel represents yourself and your values. One important consideration as you develop your logo is your intended career trajectory. Are you seeking a creative career, or a more technical career? Maybe you're somewhere in the middle. Think about how this might impact your logo and branding designs.



# Web Building Basics

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- Overview
  - Comparison Chart





# Web Building Basics

Now that you have an understanding of developing your brand, you need a place to showcase it. Picking a web builder is the next step in creating your portfolio.

While there is a range of web building options available, there are three basic web builders that DigiComm refers its clients to for creating a portfolio: Wix, Weebly, and Wordpress. These three are all free web building options, and are great for beginners.

## Overview of the web builders

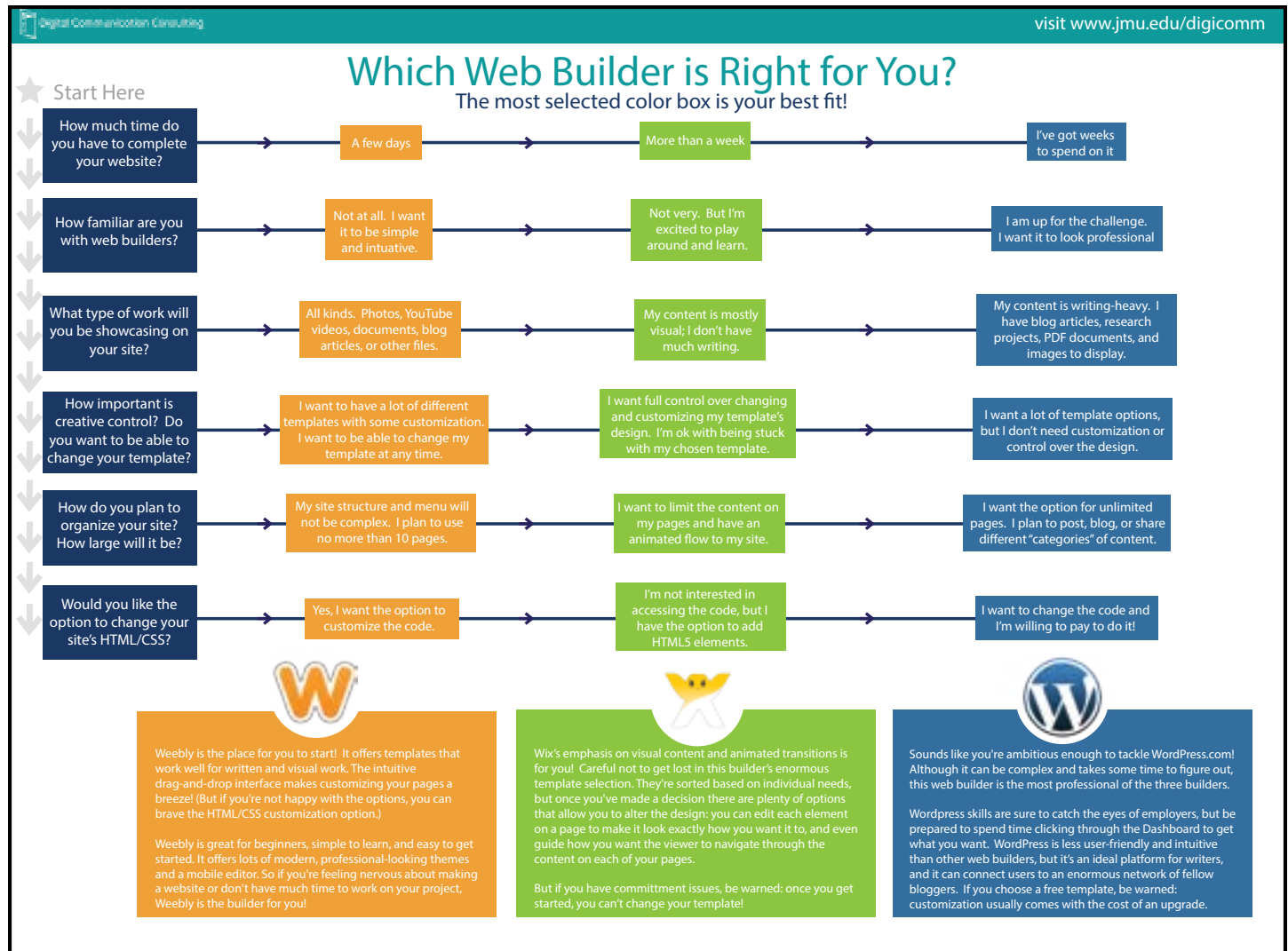
Wix is best for making creative-looking websites. Whereas Weebly is known for its drag and drop features, Wix lets the user customize everything, making the process more time-consuming. Wix has the capacity to display graphics and text well, but downloading some documents can be a hassle. It can be hard to display documents without using a button, and some users have noted that it can also be difficult to upload media exactly the way they want.

Weebly is best characterized by its “drag and drop” features, making it great for beginners who want to build their site quickly. Weebly is very intuitive, making it ideal for efficient website building. Since Weebly displays graphics and text well, it is a suitable option for creative and technical professions alike. Weebly offers a wide range of gallery and portfolio features, giving the user options without being overwhelming. Hyperlinking and uploading videos and other files is quick and easy with Weebly.

Wordpress is great for those who want to keep and maintain a blog on their website or portfolio, or for those in writing-intensive majors who want to showcase a number of writing samples. Wordpress is not ideal for displaying graphic content, and can pose a challenge to a user who has little experience with a content management system.

# Web Building Comparison Chart

Wondering which web builder is best for you? Consider the following questions, and the comparisons of the three web builders under each question.





# Write the “About Me”

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- Getting Started
  - Best Practices
  - Final Touches



# Write the “About Me”

Now that you have your brand developed, and a web builder to house your brand, you need to seal the deal with a solid “About Me”, or personal bio. Besides technology troubles, writing the text for your website may be the most difficult step in creating a professional portfolio. Even if you love to write, it can be hard to find a professional and personable “voice” for your website. A good rule of thumb is to maintain a tone that is personable, not personal. That means finding a good middle ground where you are letting your personality shine through, while still maintaining a professional demeanor.

## Getting started

The text of a website is called *copy*, and the people who write it are copywriters.

Writing your “About” page may be easier than you think. Think about the writing you might do online already: personal blog rants, celebratory Facebook statuses, creative Instagram captions, snappy online-dating profiles, quick work e-mails, *Game of Thrones* fanfic, live-tweets of *Empire... etc.*

Your Instagram bio and your professional “About Me” page may seem very different, but in many ways they’re the same. When writing, channel your inner Twitter superstar. Go for personality and punch. The 140-character limit on Twitter is there for a reason: we all have short attention spans. Besides — you want your “About” to give a sense of who you are, but leave an employer intrigued. If an employer wants to hear your life story, you’ll get the chance at your interview. For now, keep it short and snappy.

The key to writing engaging copy is brevity. Unlike tweets, however, your website’s copy should be thoroughly revised. Edit your work over and over before you publish it, and focus on reducing the number of words you use. Once you cut the clutter, your true personality will shine through your writing. If you don’t know where to start, [HemingwayApp](#) is a useful, and free, online editing tool.

Check out the “About” pages on these [portfolios](#) — they’re regularly listed as some of the best written bios on the Internet!

## Best practices for writing about yourself

Do your homework: know the expectations for your specific professional field. Spend some quality time with Google and check out the websites of at least ten different people who are successful at the career you want.

- 1) Talk in the first person. If it’s awkward for you to say “Heather graduated from James Madison in 2013...” then it’s going to sound unnatural in writing, too.
- 2) Don’t use qualifier words like “may,” “might,” or “would” when talking about your work. You DID this, you DO this, you CAN take on this job and you WILL.
- 3) Vary your sentence length and structure. (Flash back to middle school) remember not to begin every sentence with “I”



Don't be afraid to speak confidently about the work you've done, or list your personal qualities and attributes that make you an appealing employee. If you feel comfortable with it, go ahead and talk about the type of work environment, or corporate culture, that you prefer: is it highly collaborative, or competitive and independent? Creative and innovative, or strategic and goal-oriented? This type of "About" may be more appropriate or accepted in certain professional fields, so refer to your research.

## **Final touches**

Don't be afraid to include personal photos along with your professional headshot, just don't post your entire vacation album. Always use headings and line breaks in your "About Me" page to make the copy easier to scan and read. A long, single paragraph isn't appealing to read. And finally, remember visual hierarchy: the most important information should be bolded, bigger or located at the top of your page.



# Protecting Your Portfolio

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- Watch Your Speed
  - Copyright Consequences
  - Fair Use
  - Resources for Images



# Protecting Your Portfolio

Copyright in regards to a digital portfolio primarily concerns external images for your website.

## Watch Your Speed

Brian Cockburn, the copyright guru here on campus, cautions students to “watch their speed” with copyright. When using the work of another, be mindful of the reduced speed sign ahead. For example, going 30 mph in a 25 mph area can be considered safe. However, you’re still at risk for getting pulled over depending on the police officer. You should be concerned when your speedometer reaches 45 mph. Completely copying another’s work without providing reference is something you should avoid. While using an image from Google and providing a link to the source provides some attribution, our goal is offer the resources and steps to ensure that you stay within the proper speed limit.

## Copyright Consequences

If you violate copyright, the source will either contact you personally to take the image down or have their lawyer send you an initial takedown notice.

## Fair Use

According to the [U.S. Copyright Office](#), a copyright owner possesses the right to “reproduce or to authorize others to reproduce the work in copies or phonorecords.” Several limitations to this right are included throughout Sections 117 and 118 in of the copyright law, one of them being fair use.

In particular, Section 107 outlines when the reproduction of a particular work may be considered fair. These include criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, educational, and research purposes.

Four factors are also considered in this determination process as well:

- 1) The purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes
- 2) The nature of the copyrighted work
- 3) The amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole
- 4) The effect of the use upon the potential market for, or value of, the copyrighted work

These situations are taken in a case-by-case basis since it is difficult to differentiate between fair use and infringement.

Remember: attribution does not always mean permission. Unless the creator has a license that allows for the reproduction or use of a work with proper reference, then take the next steps in receiving authorization if you plan to use a copyrighted work.

## Resources for Images

Various resources exist that provide fair use images. These include web builders, Creative Commons, Free Images, and Google. Weebly offers a wide range of images on their website that you can use for your e-Portfolios.

Additionally, [Creative Commons](#) is a nonprofit organization that connects with other sites like Flickr to share pictures, music, videos, etc. They offer detailed descriptions about licensing options that creators have when uploading their work. A majority of these individuals require that you link the image to the source and provide proper attribution.



## Images Cont.

[Free Images](#) is another website that allows you to discover images tailored for the purpose of your e-Portfolio. In fact, Google Images provides search tools when looking there. After you search on [Google Images](#), click the option for search tools and then usage rights. You'll find several options such as "labeled for reuse" or "labeled for reuse with modification." This will help narrow down your search to pictures that have been authorized for use.

There's always the option to be your own content creator. Take your own images! Right here at JMU, the [Media Resources Center](#) in Carrier Library allows you to check out cameras and equipment with your JACard. Even if you lack experience with photography, the center offers tutorials and workshops on using the devices. Several editing websites for images are available free. These include [Canva](#), [Pic Monkey](#), or even iPhoto on Macs. Trust yourself and give it a try!