

PORTFOLIO Field Guide

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY DISPLAY YOUR WORK

SIZE

The size and orientation can vary depending on content, just as a picture book's can! Be sure to check the requirements at each conference/showcase, but a general maximum at SCBWI events are open dimensions of 15"H x 32"W.

BOOKS & BINDINGS

There are so many options available to be the vehicle for your work, but honestly don't stress about this too much. Just remember: It is very likely that whomever is looking at your portfolio will have something in their hands (i.e. beverage), so making sure your pages turn very easily and your book lies open flat is essential.

Some options include:

- **PRESENTATION BOOK**

A very easy, cost-effective, versatile way to present your work. A basic book of bound sheet protectors that will lay flat and allow you to change out images as you wish.

[Presentation Book Example](#)

- **STAPLED BOOKLET**

A professional-looking nod to an actual picture book! Generally made at your local print shop or from online printing services, these have a very custom look, but do not allow for image-swapping.

[Stapled Booklet Example](#)

- **SPIRAL-BOUND BOOK**

A great option for laying flat and ease of flipping pages (very helpful at a conference). Also made at a local print shop or from online printing services, these are not quite as professional-looking as a stapled booklet, and also do not allow for image-swapping.

[Spiral-Bound Book Example](#)

- **SCREW-POST PORTFOLIO BOOK**

This is generally the priciest option, but has a nice professional look that allows images to be changed out. Can be customized with your logo, and can even be hand-made by you (if you're up for that)!

[Screw-Post Book Example](#)

PRINT QUALITY

This is important for your work to be seen in its best light. Do use a nice paper, and do make sure that the colors are correct and not too saturated or desaturated. This is not the time to print on your home printer using old ink on regular computer paper! Some options include:

- **PRINT SHOP** *Check your local listings*
- **HOME** *Only if you have a professional-quality printer*
- **LIBRARY** *They may have a professional-quality printer*
- **FRAMER / GALLERY** *There may be printing services available*
- **ONLINE PRINTER** *If there are no local options available*

COVER

This can be dictated by what type of book/binding you choose. Covers can be an illustrated piece, your contact information (illustrated beautifully, of course!), a logo, or a blank decorative cover such as wood (if you chose a screw-post option).

CONTACT INFORMATION

Always be sure to include this in an easily accessible location. Either on or inside the front cover is recommended, however the exact location doesn't matter as long as it's easy to find and legible.

CONTENT

Important items to consider when selecting your work include:

- **KIDLIT APPROPRIATE** *Include work that is appropriate for board books, picture books, middle grade cover/b&w spots, and young adult cover art. This is not the place to show off your logo design, surface pattern design, or nakey model studies (no matter how incredible they are).*
- **CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT** *Include one or more characters with varying poses, facial expressions, and surroundings to show that you are able to take a character through a story.*
- **YOUR BEST WORK** *There is always room for improvement, but think about this as a showcase of where you are at this moment in your kidlit career.*
- **WORK YOU WANT TO GET HIRED FOR** *If you love drawing crowd scenes, DO*

include. If you have trouble drawing elephants, DO NOT include.

- **DON'T BE SCATTERED** *If you work in different styles – YES it's ok to include all of them! However, keep them in separate sections so as not to confuse and disrupt the flow. Make sure you have enough portfolio pieces in each style to show that you would be able to illustrate an entire book like this. If you are not at that point yet – table it for later and include when you are ready.*

NUMBER OF PIECES

The general rule of thumb is to include 10-15 pieces. Editing is tricky for everyone, but try looking at your portfolio with a discerning, fresh eye. Fewer high-quality pieces of artwork are better than a large amount of ok-ish work. Consider these questions:

- **WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?** *Are you really good at drawing hands? Make sure you get a few pieces in there that highlight that.*
- **WHERE ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?** *Is there a particular piece that would be the reason to not hire you for a book? Get it out of there and make a note to work on it later.*
- **ARE YOU INCLUDING IT JUST TO REACH 10 PIECES?** *If you are, leave it out. Remember, your talent will be judged on your weakest piece.*

POSTCARDS

There is generally an option to bring a stack of postcards to conferences for ADs and agents to take if they're interested in your work - do not overlook this very important advertising opportunity! Things to consider when making postcards:

- **HOW MANY?** *50 - 100 postcards will suffice. There is usually a rule of no more than 100 placed by your portfolio.*
- **ARTWORK** *The front should have one very strong image. One or two smaller, supporting and related spot images should be included on the back. Always have artwork presented on both sides.*
- **CONTACT INFO** *This can be placed on the front or back, and should include your name, website, phone number, email and (possibly) IG handle. Remember: ADs often hang these on bulletin boards, so be sure to include it somewhere that will be visible along with your art.*
- **DON'T INCLUDE** *A mailing or physical address - there is no reason for this information to be there.*
- **BLANK SPACE** *A little breathing room on the back for recipients to make notes about your work is something you may want to consider.*

(scroll down...)

BOOK DUMMY

If you're an author-illustrator and have a dummy book, great! Many conferences will

allow you to display these next to your portfolio, but they aren't mandatory if you don't have one. Items to consider when creating a dummy:

- **FORMAT** *This is your manuscript sketched and laid out in the size you envision your book being published in. It should include a title page, end pages, room for copyrights/dedications in a (generally) 32-page, stapled format. Each page sketch should convey the vision you have for your book, with text laid out on each page accordingly.*
- **ARTWORK** *Though most of the dummy book should simply be sketched, one or two pages should be fully-fleshed out color artwork. This will show what your vision is for the final look of the book.*
- **CONTACT INFORMATION** *Be sure to include this on the front or back cover!*

OTHER HELPFUL STUFF

Here is a great article written by the wonderful Eliza Wheeler about her SCBWI portfolio journey. It is from 2011, but the information in it is still very relevant: [Portfolio Comparison: What made an SCBWI Winner](#)

Photos of the Portfolio Showcase from the 2023 NYC Conference:





*We can't wait to see all
your beautiful work!*