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2025 GUIDELINES



SOPHOMORE PORTFOLIO REVIEW

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2025 Submissions Due:

Thursday, June 5

9am–6pm

Submit all materials to spr.psu.gd

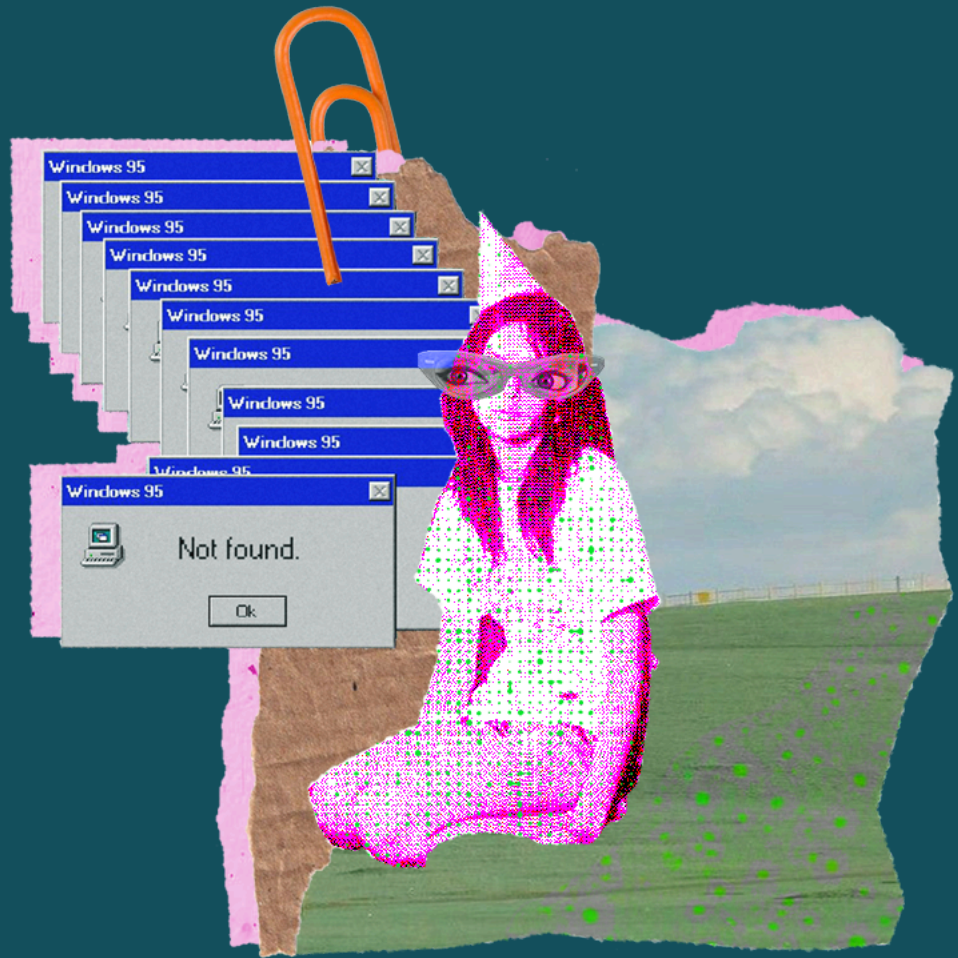
No late submissions will be accepted under any circumstances

Other Important Dates

Q&A Session Dates

- **Tuesday, February 11 at noon:** Art Building rm. 320
- **Wednesday March 5 at noon:** On Zoom at psu.gd/sprinfo
- **Friday April 11 at noon:** On Zoom at psu.gd/sprinfo

Please note: you need only attend *one* of the required sessions. If you miss all three, it is your responsibility to get any questions you have about the material here answered from one of the various resources/people offered. Learn more about [the Q&A session requirement here](#)



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The PSU Graphic Design Program's Sophomore Portfolio Review ensures students have a broad-based set of essential skills required for completing the BFA in Graphic Design degree. It also marks a professional milestone, serving as the first of many portfolios that



Eligibility

Listed below are Review participation prerequisites for students enrolled in the BFA in Graphic Design degree. First year course requirements may vary based on catalog year; please see an advisor for questions about degree planning. To qualify for the Review and major, all coursework listed must have been completed with a final grade of C- or higher or in-progress with a completion date no later than the end of Spring term of your review year.

Missing requirements due to insufficient planning cannot be waived. Not all courses are offered each term; though the chart below is intended for reference, please check the [Course Projection Guide](#) and current academic year's Course Offerings list on pdx.edu/art-design to ensure required courses are taken when available in time to participate in the Review.

Required Second-Year Coursework ([Graphic Design BFA](#), Fall 2020 or later)

Course		Terms Offered			Prerequisites
		Fall	Winter	Spring	
DES 200	Digital Page Design I	✓	✓	✓	DES 120
DES 210	Digital Imaging & Illustration I	✓	✓	✓	DES 120
DES 224	Storytelling & Narrative	✓	✓		DES 120 and DES 121
DES 225	Design Systems		✓	✓	DES 224
DES 254	Typography I	✓	✓	✓	DES 120 and DES 121
DES 290	Histories of Graphic Design	✓		✓	—
ARH 2XX¹	Any 200-level Art History	✓	✓	✓	—

¹ Students may submit if the Art History requirement is missing, but we recommend fulfilling that requirement as soon as possible.

Required Preparation

1. REVIEW THE GUIDELINES (REQUIRED)

This document serves as the Review's guidelines. Reviewing it in full is a necessary first step towards participating in the Review, as it contains the required rules and requirements of the process. Please read all document tabs and sections carefully and take note of key information.

2. WATCH THE GUIDED TOUR (REQUIRED)

Students who want to participate in the Review must watch the guided tour video of SPR requirements online at psu.gd/sophomore. The process and requirements are further explained by a professor with visuals to underscore the information presented in these guidelines.

3. ATTEND A Q&A SESSION (REQUIRED)

After watching the informational video, attend one of the live Q&A sessions. These sessions give you a chance to clarify any questions you have with a member of the faculty after watching the video and reading the guidelines. Note that it is the student's responsibility to attend in order to ensure they are fully informed by attending one of these sessions; faculty do not track session attendance. Students who miss all three of these sessions have the responsibility to get any remaining questions answered themselves from one of the various resources/people offered. See [“Deadline and Key Dates”](#) for dates and locations.



Evaluation

Reviews are based on the totality of work presented, with emphasis placed on the ability to demonstrate the expertise needed to be successful in upper-division courses required for the BFA in Graphic Design.

Each portfolio is reviewed by at least three members of the graphic design faculty against a set of evaluation criteria. Reviewers assign each portfolio an overall score of “pass” or “no pass” indicating whether the portfolio meets with expectations of sophomore-level work.

Additionally, more detailed scores across the various performance criteria of the rubric denoting areas of strength and weakness are given. Please see the “[Evaluation Criteria](#)” section for the full criteria used to inform portfolio scoring.

Pass

Portfolios receiving a passing score demonstrate critical skills and proficiencies necessary to perform successfully in upper-division courses.

All students taking the Review are restricted from registering for the 300-level classes until the results of the Review have been published. This hold is expected. Once you receive your score, the registration restrictions will be lifted and you can register for the 300-level design classes. **All students who pass Review will be required to enroll in DES 320 in fall term following the Review.**

No Pass

Portfolios receiving a “No Pass” score have not demonstrated critical skills and proficiencies necessary to perform successfully in upper-division coursework. Receiving a No Pass does mean that students are ineligible for 300-level required courses and will not be able to register for 300-level classes until they successfully pass the Review.

We encourage students whose portfolios receive a “No Pass” score to meet with an advisor immediately following the Review to put a plan in place for the future. A minor in graphic design, which is completed by all coursework up to the review, is one option. We urge those who wish to continue pursuing a BFA to improve on their design skills, ideally supported by continued class structure (often through auditing a class or two) and interaction with instructor(s), advisors, and classmates. After having improved necessary skills, students may submit a new portfolio in the following year’s Review for reconsideration.

Disqualification

Portfolios that are incomplete or missing key components, do not provide enough material to evaluate, and/or violate the conduct guidelines outlined in this handbook may be disqualified by reviewers. Students receiving a disqualification are equivalent to those receiving a “No Pass” and will result in the student not being able to advance to upper-division coursework. Disqualified portfolios are not eligible to receive portfolio-related feedback from reviewers and, in cases of code of conduct violations, may face additional consequences. See the “[Conduct](#)” section for additional information.

Participation Rules

Conduct

[Portland State’s Code of Student Conduct](#) aims to: “promote a campus environment that supports the overall educational mission of the University; protect the University community from disruption and harm; encourage appropriate standards of individual and group behavior; and to foster ethical standards and engaged citizens.”

Within the Graphic Design Program, we have additional standards we expect students to maintain. Students are also expected to review these standards as outlined in the [PSU Graphic Design Code of Conduct](#). Students who do not agree to comply with these policies will not be eligible to participate in the Review.

Any behavior that violates the student code of conduct will result in immediate dismissal and disqualification from the Sophomore Portfolio Review. This includes but is not limited to: obstruction or disruption of class or other university activities, harassment, plagiarism (including copying of another’s visual works or writing), cheating, threatening others, stalking, or any other illegal activities. We support a safe, equitable and inclusive environment for all of our students, faculty, and administrators.

Students found to be in breach of either the program or university code of conduct will not pass the Review, and will not be provided any portfolio feedback.

Late submissions will not be accepted

Turning in portfolios within the time listed is *mandatory* for all students who wish to participate. No portfolio will be accepted after the specific date and times specified, **without exception**. Submitting materials well before [the final closing deadline](#) is strongly recommended.

All decisions are final

Outcomes of the Sophomore Portfolio Review process are final. Evaluation scores and other decisions reached as part of the Review process are not subject to appeal.

Continue to **Evaluation Criteria** →

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Evaluation Criteria					
		Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Above Average	Advanced
Writing	Use of basic writing/editing skills, as well as critical thinking, analytical skills, and appropriate design vocabulary	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Writing skills are satisfactory but need further development	Writing skills are good	Writing skills are advanced
Research	Use of multiple types of research (audience, competitor, academic, field, and visual research) to inform design process	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Research is satisfactory but needs further development	Incorporates a good amount of research	Incorporates advanced research
Process	Uses a design process to develop ideas from conception to completion, exploring multiple directions at every stage	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Process is satisfactory but needs further development	Incorporates a good amount of process	Incorporates advanced process
Composition	Use of scale, gestalt, rhythm, proportion, unity, texture, emphasis, hierarchy, etc.	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Compositional principles are satisfactory but need further development	Compositional principles are good	Compositional principles are advanced
Color	Use of color, including appropriateness and variety	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Use of color is satisfactory but needs further development	Good use of color	Color is advanced
Imagery	Ability to work with existing imagery	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Imagery is satisfactory but needs further development	Imagery is good	Imagery is advanced
Image-making	Creation and appropriate application of original graphics (photos, illustrations, collages, etc.)	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Image-making is satisfactory but needs further development	Image-making is good	Image-making is advanced
Typography	Working with text and text bodies,	Unsatisfactory or	Typography is	Typography is good	Typography is advanced

		Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Above Average	Advanced
Structure	including structure, hierarchy, grid use, and technical formatting (kerning, leading, line wraps, etc.)	insufficient demonstration of skill	satisfactory but needs further development		advanced
Type & Lettering	Expressive use of existing type or original letterforms	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Typography is satisfactory but needs further development	Typography is good	Typo advanced
Concept	How ideas are communicated through design elements	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Concepts are satisfactory but need further development	Concepts are good	Concept advanced
Production	Use of craft and care individual projects and the overall portfolio, ranging from material choices to rendering quality	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Production is satisfactory but needs further development	Production is good	Production advanced
Taking & Originality	Evidence of taking creative risks, pushing beyond safe forms, and developing original solutions	Unsatisfactory or insufficient demonstration of skill	Creative risk-taking is satisfactory but needs further development	Creative risk-taking is good	Creative advanced

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Part 1: The Portfolio

Part 2: Page Layout Sample

Part 3: Process Sample

Part 4: Cover Letter

Part 5: DARS Report



The portfolio itself is one of five parts which are required for every complete Sophomore Portfolio Review submission.

Part 1: The Portfolio

Recommended file name: FirstnameLastname_Portfolio.pdf

The portfolio will consist of *exactly seven (7) design projects*. The majority of your work should be from 200-level courses with an emphasis on conceptual and creative solutions. All projects, including those with secondary elements, must be represented within the portfolio itself. Portfolios must include exactly seven projects, no more or less. Portfolios which do not follow instructions will be disqualified.

Projects should include clear numbering in both the table of contents and alongside the other labeling information at the start of each project. Projects must be distinct from one another.

The portfolio itself should be well-designed and treated with care. How you present work matters—if a reader cannot separate projects from one another or clearly tell the form of a project from photos, the work itself won't shine. It should clearly demonstrate your skills in layout and image-making. Images should be the correct resolution, type should be refined, and production should be skillful. This can also be a place to set the tone of your portfolio with the layout.

FOUR KEY AREAS TO CONCENTRATE ON:

- **Showing variety across work.** Show you're capable of more than one kind of illustration/concept/type treatment. Varied color palettes across work.
- **Demonstrating effective type detail.** Show you can work with lots of body text over multiple pages that proficiently makes use of hierarchy.
- **Projects that show unique concepts/ideas.**
- **A format that doesn't distract from the work.**

Selecting Projects

Choose work that best demonstrates your ability to meet the portfolio criteria and represents a robust variety of skills based on the Review's evaluation criteria. This will most likely be drawn from your 200-level coursework, but can include a self-initiated project as well.

Among your seven, **there are two required projects which have additional components outside the portfolio** (see below for more information on these requirements):

- **one project must demonstrate page layout skill** and will also be required in full as a separate PDF upload. For many of you, this will likely be the final project you completed in DES 200 Digital Page Design I.
- **another project must demonstrate your design process in the form of a separate PDF** (note that process work itself should not be included in the main portfolio PDF).

REVISION RECOMMENDED

Further revision and critique are strongly encouraged for all projects, even those that received high marks. Using notes from critiques and final turn-ins is encouraged. Engaging in critique from a variety of sources is strongly suggested.

GROUP ALIKE WORK INTO CAMPAIGNS

In the case of related pieces/campaigns (e.g. letterhead, business card, and envelope), these are considered one piece. You are encouraged to look at your projects as springboards for additional applications (like campaigns and systems) if they are a bit light in content and it makes sense contextually.

USING COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

You may include projects you have worked on as part of a team, but you must cite your collaborators, what role you played on the team, and what specific parts of the project you were responsible for designing.

USING WORK FROM OUTSIDE CLASSES

While work completed outside of school may be used, remember that work completed as part of your graphic design coursework has gone through a process of critique and revision from your peers, instructors, and advisors that work completed for other contexts may not have. Discussion of any outside project with an advisor is recommended.

AVOID PRE-EXISTING ILLUSTRATION STYLES

Do not include images of existing cartoon/anime characters. We want to see your original work—not drawings of someone else's drawings.

Form & Format

- PDF at 1920 x 1080 px (landscape orientation)
- 144 ppi images
- RGB color
- Under 20 MB

Portfolios should be 1920 × 1080px (landscape orientation) and in RGB. All included images should be 144 ppi or greater. *Use of Adobe InDesign is strongly recommended for creating portfolios.*

Body type for the portfolio itself should be set at 24 pt or greater, though captions and other details may be set smaller (please note that this requirement does not apply to project work itself; type shown within portfolio projects should be appropriate for the pieces themselves).

Projects within the portfolio can have as many or as few photographs or renderings as is required to adequately depict the work shown, and can vary from project to project. Please avoid redundant imagery.

Portfolio PDFs should be no more than 20 MB in size. Curation of images and use of limited compression is recommended. Cite image sources with captions where required.

COVER PAGE

This can be a place to visually set the tone of your portfolio. Portfolios must include a cover page with:

- **your full name**
- **pdx.edu email address**
- **PSU Student ID number** (or phone number, for transfer students who do not yet have a PSU ID number)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The second page of your portfolio should be a table of contents (TOC). This should list all pieces included with both their project number (1–7) and project title. Use of page numbers, both in the TOC and on individual pages, is recommended.

While no title is required, this section should be titled either “Table of Contents” or simply “Contents” (note the plural in either case).

LABELING

At the beginning of each project, include:

- **the project number (1–7)**
- **project title**
- **course and instructor** (if completed as an assignment)
- **a short statement about the project.** This should be no more than 3 sentences (about 25–35 words) and give reviewers context for the project’s intended audience, goals, and concept.



Part 2: Page Layout Sample

Recommended file name: FirstnameLastname_PageLayout.pdf

- Sample PDF exported from InDesign or similar as spreads (no marks/bleed)
- Minimum 12 pgs.
- Includes flowed text, multiple hierarchies
- Under 20 MB

One project should demonstrate your page layout skill and include typographic detail and flowed text across a minimum of 12 pages.

While images of this work must be included as one of your portfolio's projects, the full contents of it must also be uploaded as part of your submission in a separate PDF sample. PSUGD students should have at least one such project from DES 200. If unsure, ask a faculty advisor. The full PDF of this project should be exported as spreads and generated directly from software such as InDesign.

You must include your page layout project both in your portfolio and in full as a separate PDF upload. The full booklet PDF is required to allow reviewers to inspect your type detail work more closely. Photographs or high quality mockups are only acceptable for the portfolio portion of this project.

Part 3: Process Sample

Recommended file name: FirstnameLastname_Process.pdf

- 1920 x 1080 px (landscape orientation)
- RGB color
- Under 20 MB

One of your seven projects must demonstrate your design process through the upload of a separate process deck PDF that shows your steps from beginning to completion. Do not include process work in your Portfolio PDF itself—just the outcome as your project.

The process deck should be well-developed and include some or all of the following: field research, academic research, visual research, notes, mind maps, readings on your subject, sketches, digital roughs (various rounds), mockups, materials experiments, etc. This gives insight to how you work, and the effort you put in. Choose a project that demonstrates this well—in other words one that shows in-depth research and the thought process that led to your successful and unique design solution.

This process PDF should be the same dimensions and cover page requirements as your portfolio. There is no need to duplicate project pages in this deck, but please include the project number on the cover page.

Part 4: Cover Letter

- 1,500–2,500 characters
- Explains why you want to pursue graphic design, demonstrating specific interests and vocabulary
- Plain text entered directly into submission form

Each student must submit a cover letter, which is meant to give reviewers a sense of why you wish to pursue graphic design as a career. It should demonstrate your ability to discuss design critically, using design vocabulary. This is your chance to show your passion and specific interests within the design world. Offering explanations for why you feel a certain way will give depth to your cover letter.

You will write your cover letter as a short essay (1,500–2,500 characters) that you will enter into the portfolio submission form; no typesetting is necessary. Be specific, and be sure to explain the “why,” rather than give a summary of “what.”

The cover letter will serve as a writing sample. Do **not** include a paper from an Art History course, DES 290, or other writing course as those papers will not fulfill this requirement.

Part 5: DARS Report

Recommended file name: FirstnameLastname_DARS.pdf

Students must upload a separate PDF file of their [DARS report](#) for the BFA in Graphic Design degree to the submission form, printed/exported from MyPSU. **Do not alter or redesign it.** This allows faculty to verify grade and pre-requisite requirements.

Transfer students whose courses have been applied to substitute for PSU coursework should include their DARS report. Otherwise, transfer students should include a transcript. Consult with a [PSU Design, Creativity, and Performance Pathway Advisor](#) for questions.

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Feeling lost? Know that you're not alone. In this section, you can discover resources to help you push your work, develop your portfolio, and plan for your future.

Preparing For The Review

Planning is a necessary component to the Review process, as meeting deadlines is the first professionalism test of any graphic designer. **Because no late submissions are permitted, students are encouraged to submit as early as possible when the submission window opens.** See the "[Preparing to submit your materials](#)" header below to learn more.

All students are urged to do the following to prepare for review:

- **[Seek out feedback and support:](#)** Get critique and incorporate it. Even if you do well on a project, make the edits it needs to be even better and demonstrate your fullest range of skills.
- **Manage time effectively:** Develop a schedule for production and revision and don't be late to deadlines—particularly for the Review itself.
- **[Consider all potential outcomes:](#)** Thinking about a path forward if you don't pass is important and healthy, even if you feel confident.

Finding support

Faculty encourage all students participating in the Review to seek out assistance and critique from a variety of sources in order to push projects, further develop skills, and provide emotional support during the process.

- **Faculty Advising:** Full-time PSUGD faculty are available for project/portfolio critique and to help with course planning during their three hours of advising offered each week of the term. Each faculty member's research specialty can help you find faculty support from a skill area you feel needs the most help. Advising appointment times and drop-in hours can be found at art-design.youcanbook.me.

- **Peer Mentorship!** PSUGD offers peer-to-peer mentorship through our long-running Mentorship program, which pairs planning to take review with those who have already passed. See psu.gd/mentorship for program information..
- **Find or start a student support group.** Use the [Design Club Slack](#) to connect with peers and critique work together.
- **Community events:** This can be the best way to stay engaged, make connections, and improve your eye in developing your work. Visit psu.gd or subscribe to the weekly newsletter at psu.gd/newsletter.
- **Participate in Be Honest!** Our annual student portfolio showcase held in Spring term exists, in part, to help you push your work further in advance of the Review. See instagram.com/psugd_behonest or the PSUGD Newsletter to learn more about this year's event.

Preparing to submit your materials

Faculty strongly advise that all students plan to submit materials at the beginning of the Sophomore Portfolio Review submissions window; this time is listed on the Deadline & Key Dates page alongside the closing deadline.

WHY SUBMIT AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE?

The unexpected can happen at any time. Submitting materials at the early part of the submission window gives you time to find alternative submission methods in the event of a technical issue like a loss of power, loss of internet, emergency, or other unexpected situation. Submitting early also allows you time to double-check all your materials for correctness, as portfolio review-related components cannot be changed after they are submitted.

Faculty strongly discourage students from creating portfolio-related materials on the day submissions are due. Please have all files prepared ahead of the deadline and double-check them before and during the submission process. Time-management related to meeting deadlines is foundational to the review process, and late submission attempts made will be rejected.

Preparing for all outcomes

Performance in the Review is strictly performance-based for each individual participant and non-competitive in nature. However, faculty strongly recommend all students who participate plan for any potential outcome in preparing to submit their work for evaluation.

OPTIONS FOR THOSE WHO DON'T PASS REVIEW

- **Revise and resubmit the following year.** You can go through the Review multiple times (and some who pass on the second—or even third—try have become top grads). All participants who receive pass or no pass scores will also receive feedback for areas that need work, and suggestions of classes to revisit.
- **Complete other degree requirements.** You can finish up classes in the [University Studies](#) or [Race & Ethnic Studies](#) general education requirements, take a small number of upper-division electives (see each course's prerequisites and description in the [Bulletin](#) or registration system to learn more), or consider completing a minor such as the [Business Minor in Advertising for Graphic Design Majors](#)
- **Switch to the GD minor and explore other majors.** Talk to an advisor about the Art+Design BA/BS, the Graphic Design Minor (which you'll have already completed!), or another pathway with an advisor. [Kris Evans](#) and the [Design, Creativity, and Performance Pathway advisors](#) are available over the summer while faculty are not on contract in order to provide guidance.

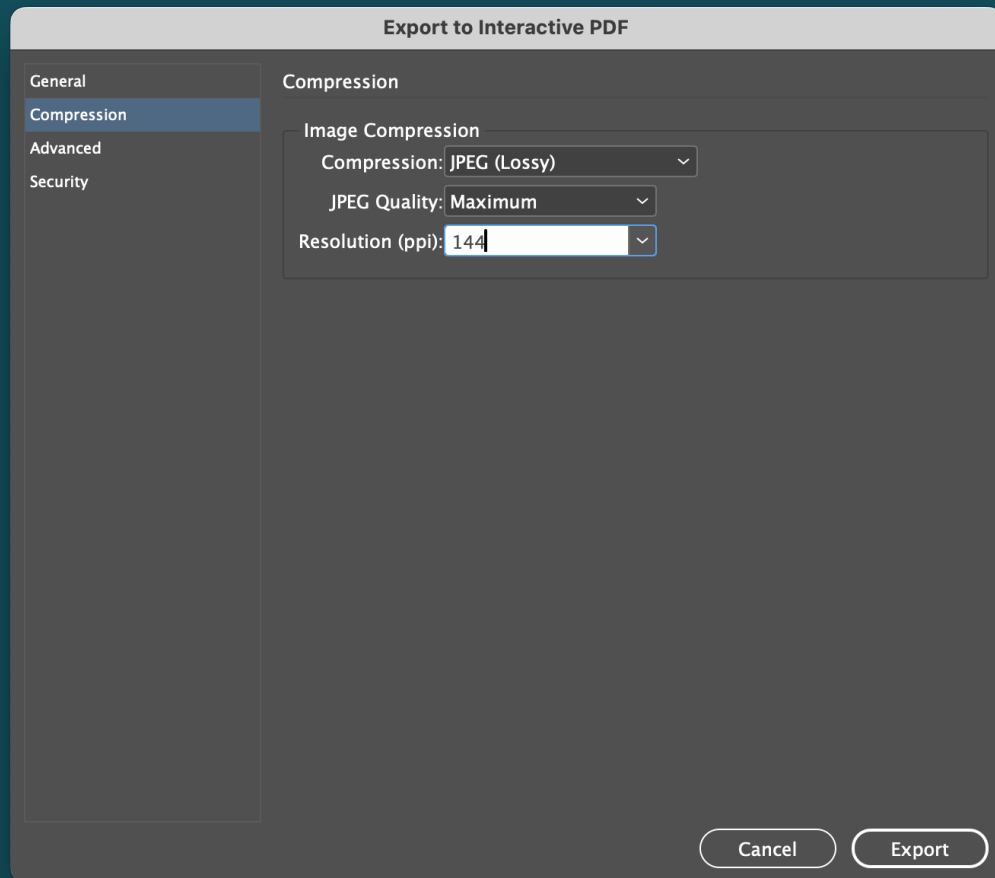
Designing Your Materials

What software should I use to make my portfolio?

Faculty strongly recommend use of Adobe InDesign for generating portfolio files. InDesign has many type, image handling, and compression capabilities not found in other software, including Adobe Illustrator.

Faculty recommend that portfolios be set up as documents for “Web” intent at the dimensions listed under “Form & Format.” Do not use facing pages (also known as spreads) in designing a portfolio for the Review. Use of the Links panel can ensure that the Effective PPI of images remains above the minimum of 144 ppi.

Portfolios are best exported from InDesign as the “Adobe PDF (Interactive)” format. This export format also allows control over image compression as part of the export process to meet resolution requirements. In cases where compression from InDesign’s export to “Adobe PDF (Interactive)” format alone cannot make a small enough document to meet maximum file size requirements, services such as [Smallpdf](#) can help further compress files with minimal quality loss.



What does a portfolio look like?

Developing a portfolio is a unique and individualized creative process. Some information and context is required, but your portfolio is in some ways an eighth project showing your skill. There is no one template everyone should follow.

Want to see samples of past portfolios that have passed Review? [Soph Return](#) on psu.gd is a page with dozens of portfolios from past years, as well as commentary from



After You Submit

Submitting to the Sophomore Portfolio Review is a major achievement, and faculty congratulate all those who are able to successfully complete the required materials and submit them by the deadline. Waiting for the results and knowing what to do next can be hard—while faculty would encourage students to celebrate their achievement during the period in which the Review itself takes place, this section hopes to offer clarity around the process.

When will results be announced?

Generally, results are announced the week after finals week has been completed. **In 2025, this will likely be sometime during the week of June 15.** All of finals week is generally needed in order to ensure all portfolios are reviewed by at least three members of the PSUGD faculty. Additionally, administrative concerns such as lifting the registration hold that allows students who pass the review to register for classes takes additional time. Result announcements will come in the form of an email from a faculty member or member of the administrative staff.

Fall term classes & DES 320

DES 320 is a required course for all who pass portfolio review and is only offered in Fall term of each year. While the Fall course schedule will be posted in advance of the Review's results being announced, registration for all students in this and other 300-level coursework is held until results are announced. The administrative hold for the course is lifted for all students who pass review simultaneously when results are released.

Faculty ensure that there are enough seats across DES 320 sections to ensure all who pass review can be accommodated, though students may not get their preferred choice of sections.



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- Checklist

2025 Requirements Checklist

Before You Submit:



COMPLETE REQUIRED COURSEWORK

See "[Eligibility](#)" for requirements. For transfer students, a completed AA/AS in graphic design or equivalent coursework is considered equivalent to all PSU requirements. If you will not have a completed AA/AS, contact a PSU advisor.



WATCH VIDEO PRESENTATION

This presentation gives a thorough overview of what is to be expected and information about helpful resources. Find it at psu.gd/sophomore.



ATTEND A LIVE Q&A SESSION

Three live sessions will be presented, allowing students the chance to ask clarifying questions about the Review process. See psu.gd/sophomore for dates and locations.

Submission Requirements:

See "[What You Submit](#)" for complete details.



PART 1: PORTFOLIO (PDF)

A portfolio with: a table of contents, seven projects with descriptions for each, one project dedicated to page layout, and one project with a process deck.



PART 2: PAGE LAYOUT SAMPLE (PDF)

A complete PDF (output as spreads with no marks/bleed) of the project you selected for page layout, demonstrating flowed text across multiple pages with 12 pages minimum.



PART 3: PROCESS SAMPLE (PDF)

A PDF deck of one project you select from your portfolio demonstrating process.



PART 4: COVER LETTER

A short writing sample (1,500–2,500 characters) discussing why you wish to pursue graphic design as a career path. This will be entered as plain text into the portfolio submission form.



PART 5: DARS (PDF)

Export your DARS (and/or transcript for transfers) and include it in your portfolio so reviewers can check that all prerequisites have been taken. **Do not typeset or redesign.**