

Developing my portfolio was not just the class project or the box to check off. It turned into a passion project, greatly enlightening my creative process in building a project, and helped me learn about myself in a future career as a software engineer. I was clear from the start that I wouldn't be demonstrating my experience or qualifications because I had none at that point. What I lacked in professional experience, I made up for with my small projects and a voracious desire to learn and create. So, I decided to make it as easy as possible and make it true to what the heck journey I'm on, precisely.

From the start, my objectives were to make the portfolio as simple and honest as you could hope for. I never wanted to fake it by being something I'm not, or make it more complicated with design elements I knew little to nothing about. Instead, I went for function over form, getting down to the basics with a clean layout, easily readable sections, and prominent links to my portfolio of work. I knew that if anyone — be it a teacher, a recruiter, or another developer — were to view it, they should instantly understand what I've created, what I've learned, and what my future goals are.

Going into these design decisions, these are the priorities I knew I wanted to focus on. As this digital portfolio was meant to represent my unique self and design perspectives, I wanted the portfolio to have a personal touch to its presentation yet still be somewhat organized. That's why I began with something simple — a profile section to show who I am, an education section, a project section with real links to code, and a skills section listing the things I know how to use. It might not be pretty, but it gets the job done and most importantly, it's authentic to me.

Getting started on the profile section was a wholly unexpected opportunity for reflection. We know it's difficult to define yourself in a few short lines, particularly when you're just beginning to carve out an identity as a developer yourself. I wanted to reflect on what I'm feeling here, on what it's like to be a student who's mind-blowingly passionate about the work they're doing, who loves building small projects, and who wakes up every day excited about the world that they now inhabit. I said I'd be willing to do internships and fellowships because I'm eager to meet people, not just for the experience, but for the mutual learning experience.

The key element of my portfolio, of course, is the project section. These are perhaps the most dull and deflating things to read, but I spent by far the most time worried about how these are going to come across. On paper, they're basic Python scripts — nothing enterprise-level or professionally polished — but they're the product of earnest effort and learning. The Hangman game in there is one of the first things I ever coded from scratch. It introduced me to the reasoning behind the concept of loops and conditionals, and how to format a very basic program. It left me with a feeling of progress, success, and reward that encouraged me to create even more.

The 21 Game (a simpler version of Blackjack) was next, and it was here my experimentation with object-oriented programming began. In the beginning, it was definitely a challenge mainly trying to determine how to define classes and represent the players and cards in it. I just continued to persevere. That experience was immensely impactful because it taught me that everything that I was learning, I could apply directly to something real, albeit small.

Then there's Rock, Paper, Scissors — a project that looks easy on the surface but forced me to practice working with randomness, user input, and basic logical decision trees. Each of these projects, as rudimentary as they were, contributed to building my belief and understanding of what I could go on to accomplish. I didn't just want them in my portfolio, I wanted them to be the best things I ever did actually in my portfolio, not because they're beautiful icing on the cake professional impressive, but more just because they're real professional touches of my evolution.

Tools were a big consideration for me when sitting down to outline the skills section. It would have been easy to rename everything from programming languages to software platforms just to pad the list and make it seem more impressive. This time, too, I decided to go with the truth. I added Python, because that's what I know. Common development tools and platforms such as Git, Visual Studio Code, and Linux OS were included because I have truly used these in the trenches of my learning journey. I believe it's more interesting to be honest about what I can do than to try to inflate my capacity and end up looking fake. It provides a more definitive basis for future buildout. I can always add additional skills down the road as I come to learn and understand them.

The biggest challenge was figuring out what to leave out. At the time I didn't have any tangible work experience in tech, no hackathons or internships to include just yet, and no micro-certificates from the major online learning platforms. That at first gave me a sense that that would make my portfolio very bare or unfinished looking. Well, duh, this is how it's supposed to work. We know that not all of you are ready to take on a Complete Streets initiative yet — everybody has to start somewhere. Putting something out to show what I've built so far, even if it's rudimentary at first, is always better than the delay caused by trying to get to a point where I feel "ready enough." Cultivating this mindset was essential to my success in completing the portfolio without overthinking every step of the process.

One other huge aspect of the idea process was how to showcase my personality while not making the portfolio too informal. I didn't want it to be too stiff or formal — I'm still a student, after all, and I want people to feel like they can approach me and that I'm excited to learn. That's why I endeavored to strike a tone that was friendly but respectful, professional but human.

I have a few thoughts about how I can continue to build and expand my portfolio in the future. The most significant of which is the conversion from a living document to an actual website

hosted on GitHub Pages. Currently, it's a LaTeX-based CV, which is all well and good for submitting as a document. I want to create a really robust, visually clean, responsive web version that visitors can engage with, explore on their own, and use to dive deeper into this topic. I've been into HTML, CSS, and JavaScript fundamentals, and as soon as I get up to speed (and I can't wait!), I'll build it and launch it.

Ultimately, creating this portfolio was about more than just proving my knowledge. It was less about producing narratives and more about taking a step back to see what I've accomplished, putting my work into an order that would be comprehensible by outsiders, and doing the foundational work to set myself up for long-term success. It was a strong reminder that no action is too small or step too basic to take, and that honesty, clarity, and consistency will always be more impactful than the goal of projecting perfection.

That's my opening move — and I'm inking it with pride.