<u>Describing your Projects:</u>

Here are some writing prompts and tips to help you describe your projects.

<u>In your description, be sure to:</u>

- Tell us about the project. What was the goal?
- What was your contribution? Did you work in a team? Did you work by yourself? What did you learn from the environment in which you completed the project (teamwork, leadership, time management, safety issues, budgeting, etc.)?
- What did you learn in term of new engineering/technical skills from working on this project?
- What importance or application might this project have in the larger world (outside your classroom)?
- Be sure to highlight how all that went into the project helps you be an asset to a potential employer.
- Photographs are a great addition.
- Keep your project description to no more than five paragraphs. Consider including an "executive summary" at the beginning so those who read your portfolio can understand the essence of your project and choose to read further if needed.
  - You may even consider filming yourself coherently describing your project in 90 seconds or less and use that as your executive summary.
    - If you choose to do this, please dress properly (think Career Fair attire) and consider the background of your video.

<u>Also:</u>

- Do not assume people outside your field will understand technical jargon. Be clear in your descriptions. The first stop for a portfolio is generally a Human Resources officer who may or may not have an engineering background.
- Be sure to spell out acronyms once. The typical academic will spell out a term on one occasion and then use the abbreviation throughout the rest of the report. For example, I can write, "I attend Iowa State University (ISU)." Now I am able to use the condensation ISU because I have told the reader what those letters mean.
- Many writers lapse into passive voice often. It is important to write in active voice, as it is much easier for the reader to understand your thoughts. There are a couple of ways to determine if you are using passive voice:
  - In MS Word, go to:
    - File → Options → Proofing → Under "Writing Style," click on the drop down and change the setting to, "Grammar & Style" → Click "Okay."

- - Now MS Word will catch all your passive voice, mismatched verb tense and other common grammatical errors.
    - If you do not use MS Word or it is unavailable at a certain time, here is a tip from the ISU Writing Center:
      - If you can insert the phrase, "by zombies" after the verb and your sentence is still sensible, you are writing in passive voice. For example:
        - In my Digital Logic class, I was taught [by zombies] Boolean Algebra.
          - Since this sentence makes sense with the insertion of [by zombies] it is written in passive voice.
        - This is in contrast to: In my Digital Logic class, I learned [by zombies] Boolean Algebra.
          - This does not make sense; thus, it is active voice.
- Be sure to proofread your descriptions before you place them in your portfolio. As always, spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc., are all important elements of this assignment.

Design Elements:

- Choose your background color carefully. No one will take the time to read a portfolio if its background is electric yellow or some other equally offense color.
- Keep your font readable in style, size and color.
  - **Style**: Although script-based fonts look nice, they are difficult to read. Minimize or avoid their use.
  - **Size**: All your font should be 12-point or larger. After you design a page, set down your laptop and move 2-3 feet away from it; you should still be able to read your major headings. If you cannot, your font is too small. Addtionally, if you cannot pick out your major headings from that distance, you need to emphasize them by increasing the font size, bolding or underlining the words, using a different font, etc.
  - **Color**: A lighter-colored background with darker text is much more pleasing to the eye than a dark background with light text.
- Photos are important! If you have a picture of your project, be sure to include it! Do not forget to caption it, so the reader knows the photo's relation to the project.
- Some prior students have included videos of their projects in action. This is a nice touch, but be sure to check the video's visual and audio background for appropriateness.