

I interviewed Teagan Clark, a friend of mine through my sorority, Alpha Omicron Pi. She is a Michigan State University professional writing alumna who graduated in December 2010 and she currently works in Chicago as a freelance writer, hoping to find a more permanent position soon with a nonprofit so she can write grants. Teagan also has a degree in advertising with a specialization in public relations.

Teagan advised me to find a strong writing-based internship to start our interview. She said the pieces done during the internship would translate into a strong portfolio because of the “real-world” experience it gives you. She also recommended showing off pieces that were not essays (such as a website) because it shows you have more diversity. Employers don’t expect students who have just graduated to have the strongest and most varied portfolios, so some course work is okay to have in there.

Teagan was very involved with our sorority, Alpha Omicron Pi, and was even president during 2007 to 2008. She also was involved with the Women’s Glee Club. When I asked her how professional writing helped her with these extracurricular activities, particularly her leadership positions, she said it gives you so much more to offer. “You can say ‘Oh, I’m in web design, let me work on this with you.’”

She organized her portfolio by the types of writing she has in it, such as grants, press releases, large projects, etc. She said she picked the coursework in her portfolio based on her interests because she felt those pieces really conveyed her strength as a writer.

When asked about keeping a professional identity while still being personal, she talked about Twitter. She has two separate Twitter accounts, and advises others to do the same. One is private and for her personal use where she can tweet at friends and retweet funny articles to her, and the other is public and is used for communicating with companies and jobs that spark her interest. She says it helps her to maintain that professional identity that she wants, while still allowing her to have fun with Twitter.

As Teagan is applying for jobs, she is looking at her portfolio and updating it so that it reflects her best work and what she wants to do. Because of her additional advertising major, she can really show companies what she can do. She said the portfolio is a great conversation piece, as it makes the interviewer remember you.

At her last job interview, Teagan was going over her portfolio and noticed some “bad writing” from her sophomore year at Michigan State. She said it is highly important to keep updating your portfolio, especially as you improve after graduation to show how much stronger you get from workforce experience.

Diversity is key in a portfolio, she said. “Don’t be afraid to throw in weird things that would pique other people’s interest.” It’s often those pieces that get conversations started about why the piece is in the portfolio.

When going on job interviews, Teagan says to say you have your portfolio and reference it while answering questions. Employers will ask about experience on your resume, and you

can reference things you did at that job with what you have in your portfolio. She mentions how one time an interviewer said he sensed weaknesses in her portfolio and she had to defend herself by noting where she needs improvement. "Always know where to improve when your weaknesses are brought up," she said. However, most employers tend to be more interested in the strengths of the portfolio than the weaknesses. If the interview is more casual, the employers tend to be very interested in looking closely at the portfolio and really getting to know the author of the portfolio's motives behind their pieces.

Teagan said the hardest part of making a portfolio is trying to cover all the skills she had with something that would portray it. She is struggling with her branding and trying to revamp her portfolio so she has a clear sense of direction and where she wants to be in ten years.

Her advice to me was to not focus on one area for a job. "I thought all I wanted to do was PR, but you have to make your own job. Ask for work wherever. The second you get discouraged, switch to another focus and come back to your original. Someone is guaranteed to respond." She said that if your portfolio reflects your diverse interests, you could do more in terms of your career and really find your dream job.