THE 8-STEP UX PORTFOLIO BLUEPRINT

BEFORE WE GET STARTED …

Maybe you're trying to optimize the UX portfolio you've been working on for months, but it's taking FAR longer than you imaged.

Or, maybe you haven't even started your UX portfolio yet because you're totally overwhelmed and can't figure out how to start and what to include.

Whatever stage you're at, *The UX Portfolio Blueprint* will help … I promise.

Having a solid UX portfolio has helped me personally in my career as I landed jobs at NYC based startups, had offers from Google (that I turned down), and landed countless clients for my consulting business.

A portfolio is evidence of your skills so you can stand out and get noticed.

This blueprint will walk you through the steps you need to create your first UX portfolio or make your existing one a TON better.

If you have any questions at all, head over to my **free Facebook Group, UX Portfolio Tribe**, where there are over 1,700 UX folks who are laser focused on creating an awesome UX portfolio to help level up their careers.

In your corner,
Sarah Doody

Creator of The UX Portfolio Formula

THE 8-STEPS WE'LL COVER

Here's a quick summary of the steps we'll cover in this blueprint.

Use this as a checklist so you can is blueprint process for you to use as a checklist and get an overview of how it looks.

Ok, so let's get started …

- ☐ **Step 1:** Identify & demonstrate your specific skills.

- ☐ **Step 2:** Create your "Career Compass Statement".

- ☐ **Step 3:** Choose the projects you want to include.

- ☐ **Step 4:** Write your full project case studies.

- ☐ **Step 5:** Gather visuals and project artifacts.

- ☐ **Step 6:** Distill case studies into concise project summaries.

- ☐ **Step 7:** Choose layouts & present each project visually.

- ☐ **Step 8:** Optimize your online presence to stand out.

STEP 1

IDENTIFY & DEMONSTRATE YOUR SPECIFIC SKILLS

Someone once told me …*"Sarah, you're blind to your own skills."* We ALL have hidden skills that we're using and don't recognize or that we're not even using.

Want to be successful in your career? Then you must be able to identify and articulate your skills.

Why? So potential employers know exactly what they're getting if they hire you.

To identify your skills, you can look internally, but you also need to look to two other sources ….

1.   You need to ask other people what they see in you.

2.   You have to think about who you admire. The skills we see in others are often the skills we have but don't actually recognize.

Ok so you might be thinking *"I don't have anyone to ask because I don't want them to know I'm looking for a job.".* Not true.

Here are 4 people you could ask:

1. A former boss you're in good standing with.
2. A colleague, teacher or mentor (lucky you, that's 3 more).
3. A friend who knows you well.
4. A past client.

Wondering what you're going to ask these people? Start with these two simple questions:

1. What do you think I'm naturally skilled at?

2. What do you think are my under-utilized skills?

Got it? Now, do it and execute. Open your email and email two people. I'm serious, do it right now! You want this feedback ASAP.

Now there are a few more questions you could ask…

But we'll talk about them in the emails I've got prepared for you in a couple of days.

So make sure you go email those people now. Because you're going to want this feedback when you write your "Career Compass Statement" which is what I have coming at you next.

STEP 2

CREATE YOUR CAREER COMPASS STATEMENT

Imagine back to elementary school English class ....

Your teacher shows you how to write an essay. My teachers in Canada always compared the "thesis" to a movie trailer.

The thesis draws people in. It gives people a preview of the essay. And for you as the writer, it serves as a compass and helps all your subsequent paragraphs stay on track and not wander.

The "Career Compass Statement" is the same thing. It's a concise statement that instantly tells people who you are and what you do. Recruiters *love* this because it helps them decide if they'll look at your portfolio or not.

I know you might be wondering, "isn't just putting my name and title enough?" … nope, your title is not enough.

To be honest, titles in UX are tainted. Titles mean so many things to so many different people.

What one company calls a "UX/UI Designer" may very well be called an "Interface Designer" at another company.

This is why you should focus on your skills. But how do you write this "Career Compass Statement"?

It should answer these four simple questions:

1. What are your skills?

2. What do you love doing?

3. How are you different?

4. What do you want in your next role?

Easy, right? So get a notebook or open a new document and **do this now.**

There's a lot more to this statement than these 4 questions, but I don't want to overwhelm you so just start with these.

Ok, we've covered YOU. Now it's time to dive into your PROJECTS!

STEP 3

CHOOSE THE PROJECTS YOU WANT TO INCLUDE.

Imagine you're a lawyer. What do lawyers spend a lot of time on?

EVIDENCE. Lawyers spend weeks gathering evidence. Why? Because compelling and convincing evidence can make or break a case.

In the same way, your projects are evidence of your UX skills.

Only choose projects that are demonstrative of the skills you say you have.

So if you say you're skilled at experience design and you don't have user-flows or wireframes, then you need to re-think your skills.

You may be thinking, *"what if I don't have many projects?"* … that's a lazy excuse. There are literally problems ALL around us.

So please … just stop with the excuses already! As designers, we are problem spotters and problem solvers. So here's exactly what you need to do:

Open your eyes and spot some problems. Then ... just solve them. And no, I'm not telling you to learn to code and build an app.

I'm telling you to identify a problem, propose a process, document it, and come up with a proposed solution.

Need help? Take out your phone and create a "Problem Spotting" note or list.

For the next 3 days write down EVERY problem you spot. Then, after 3 days you'll have a great list of problems to solve.

So now it's time to write your full project case studies and show people your process.

STEP 4

WRITE YOUR FULL PROJECT CASE STUDIES.

Want to know one of the top questions designers ask me? *"How do I write about my UX process?"*

It's simple, just tell people what you did. Talk them through the purpose, process, and outcomes. Ok, now I know you're thinking *"Recruiters don't read case studies! They literally spend seconds on portfolios."*

Yes, you're right – they only spend seconds initially.

But listen, the full case study isn't for *them*. It's for *you*. It helps you get 100% clear on the content. This will help you work a lot faster when it comes to "designing" your portfolio.

Here's the cool thing … writing the case studies is an investment for your interview as well. By thinking through these questions, you'll be armed with answers to interview questions.

At a high level, your case studies cover 3 main things:

1. The problem you were trying to solve

2. The process you followed

3. The outcomes and results

Case studies actually have 7 parts to them, but focus on these 3 first because I don't want to overwhelm you!

Alright … now it's time for you to gather all the visuals and artifacts so you can begin to represent your projects in a more concise and visual way.

By the way, what you're seeing here is not just a set of steps to make a portfolio. It's really about building confidence in your skills and who you are as a designer and setting your entire career up for success.

This is why I don't start with the "design" of your portfolio.

I start with YOU and your projects. Then, the very last thing we do is make it visually appealing, because it's all about the content.

STEP 5

GATHER VISUALS AND PROJECT ARTIFACTS.

You know that phrase, "a picture's worth a thousand words" … it's true. Recruiters spend SECONDS looking at portfolios.

So they don't have time to read. This is why it's crucial that your projects have some visual appeal. Here are different visuals you could include:

- Sketches & storyboards
- Customer journey maps & personas
- Wireframes
- Visual designs & style guides

Remember how I talked about EVIDENCE before? Ok, so think of visuals as evidence of your skills.

Now I know you are thinking "but what if my project is NOT visual?" or "what if I'm a researcher and I don't have cool screens?"

Don't sweat it, get creative. Here are some ideas:

- Try and do an"info-graphic" style of your process
- Use icons where possible.

- Try to showcase big numbers (eg. **interviewed 44 people**)

- Show a photo of your research set up or "in action"

See what I mean? There's a ton more ways but that's good for now.

Now that you've gathered all your visuals, we're going to finally layout and structure the projects in your portfolio so they're visually appealing and showcase your skills.

STEP 6

DISTILL CASE STUDIES INTO CONCISE PROJECT SUMMARIES

I was talking with a recruiter friend and she said that on average, she spends less than ONE MINUTE looking at a portfolio.

Imagine … less than a minute. So you don't have very much time to make a good first impression.

This is why it's absolutely critical that you communicate who you are and what you can do in a simple but effective way.

Now, a recruiter cannot actually read your case study in a minute. This is why you need to translate your case studies into shorter and more visual summaries.

You need to present your projects in a way that give people a quick snapshot, so that even if they don't read everything, they still understand the project and your role.

One question people always ask is, *"Sarah, I don't know what to write?"*. Ok, well since you already wrote your case study, you do know what to write. You just have to choose which parts are worthy enough to put in your actual portfolio. Don't overthink it.

Another question I get is, *"Sarah, how much should I write?"*. A good guideline I have is to keep each section to the length of a tweet.

The text for each project should answer questions including:

- What was the project goal?

- What was your role?

- What am I (the recruiter) looking at? (eg. provide context)

There's a lot more to it, but that's what you should focus on for now.

Make sense?

So if you have a portfolio, go through it and honestly ask yourself if the text you have answers these questions and if it's longer than the length of a tweet. Ok?

Perfect! Now, it's time to put together the portfolio -- choose layouts and make it visual!

STEP 7

CHOOSE LAYOUTS & PRESENT EACH PROJECT VISUALLY.

"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."
- Steve Jobs

Now, I know you're thinking, *"Wait, isn't this section about doing the layouts for our projects?"*

Yes …. but NO.

Look at the second part of that quote, **"Design is how it works."** In other words, the UX of your UX portfolio.

Aha! The "how it works" of your portfolio is really how well it does at representing your UX process, beyond just showing the final deliverable.

Show people your process. Show your sketches, low fidelity designs and flows, photos of brainstorms or research sessions, etc.

Are you thinking, "but it's not going to look pretty enough!" … doesn't matter. Your portfolio is not an art project. It needs to be professional and provide evidence of your skills and process.

You're probably wondering **"so what *are they* looking for?"**

Again, your process. If you only show a pretty screenshot, **red flags will go off for recruiters** and they'll wonder if you really did that work.

Don't make them guess at what they are looking at. Here are a few mistakes to avoid:

- Don't just have screenshots
- Don't shrink the visuals so small that we can't decipher them
- Don't only show the final designs

Ok those are plenty of tips to get you started. Go look at your portfolio right now and make sure to use my tips as a guide.

Next up, how to stand out online ... you want that, right?!

STEP 8

OPTIMIZE YOUR ONLINE PRESENCE TO STAND OUT

"You are your greatest creative product."

I can't remember where I got this quote, but I've been saying it for years.

Just like how the products we work on have a marketing strategy, we too must have a marketing strategy.

Maybe you've been in this situation, your product launched and then … crickets. You had no users and no customers.

The best products don't need to market themselves. But, people do need to know they exist. This is why you need a marketing strategy.

There are **two key elements** to your marketing strategy:

1. A home base (eg. a website).

2. A way to drive people to your home base.

Now don't think "I don't code so I can't make a website." You're NOT going to learn to code. Instead you'll use a website builder. You have two choices:

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1. **Design your own landing page** (1 page and include your name, compass statement, and contact info). Use a service such as [Squarespace](), [Wix](), [Weebly](), or [Wordpress]().

2. **Use a portfolio site such as** [Behance](), [Krop](), or [Muse.]()
   Note: The danger with these sites is that if a recruiter is on your profile, they can easily click away if they see someone else's work that catches their eye. So be warned.

Once you have a home base in place, now you need to let people know that your home base exists. So, go put that link all over your social media, LinkedIn, resume, etc. There's more to it than that, but that's a start.

STILL WITH ME?

Want to get serious about your UX portfolio and create something that helps you stand out and hopefully get hired.

My program, *The UX Portfolio Formula*, has helped UX folks get hired at Google, Salesforce, Tableau, Deloitte, and more.

I'll tell you more about it when I open up enrollment again.

In the meantime, get a head start inside my free Facebook group, The UX Portfolio Tribe.

[Join the free Facebook group now](#)