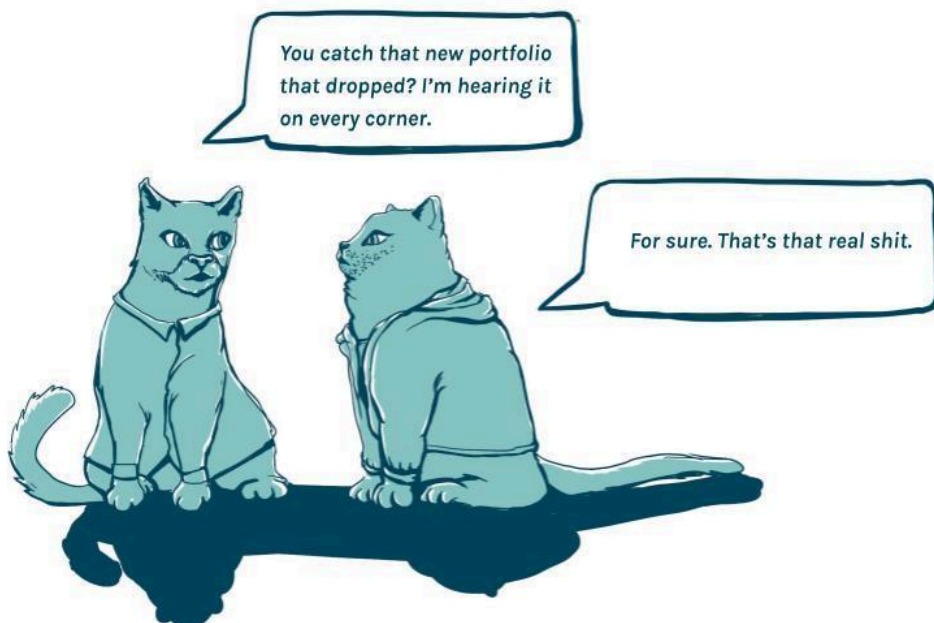


How to Create a Copywriting Portfolio

So you want to be a copywriter, slingin' quips,
Pen any client's content with flair and wit.
You've got the stuff, but is it quite enough?
No portfolio? Provin' it's gonna be rough.¹

You Can't Live Without Your Portfolio²

Before your creative copywriting skills can promote clients by bumpin' on every block, you'll first need to sell them on your talents, know-how, and execution consistency. The classic portfolio method still serves as the best means to do so, accomplishing the professional version of "show, don't tell" that you've heard in every writing class.



But what is a *copywriting* portfolio supposed to show? And how do you make one that shows it?

Much like copywriting, your primary consideration during the initial creation stages should be answering, "What's my portfolio's purpose?"

Picking Your Portfolio's Purpose

What type of copywriter do you want to be? What type of copywriting do you want to pursue? Well, there are different approaches to consider. You could drop single after single that every cat

¹ Too Short. "So You Want to Be a Gangster."

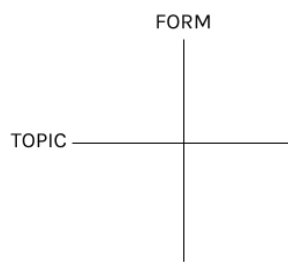
² LL Cool J. "I Can't Live Without My Radio."

keeps kickin' out their JVC, or you could compose LPs that uplifting gormandizers will endlessly gush over.

There's no right or wrong answer, but your portfolio needs to reflect your choice across topic and form to showcase your ability to deliver the goods.

Topic and Form

Topics and *forms* (very loosely) function like the industry's cartesian coordinates (i.e., X and Y axes).



A *topic* can cover just about anything—hence the analogy's looseness. You'll find yourself amazed at some of the topics that clients need coverage for.

Different cat breeds' inclination or aversion to various music genres? Yeah, someone out there probably needs it.

(We'd read it for sure.)

Copywriting *form*, however, is much more easily categorized. Some examples of copywriting forms, in order of shortest to longest (generally speaking), are:

- Social media posts
- Emails
- Web copy
- Video scripts
- Blog articles
- White papers

Are you hot-on-the-mic with spit-fire one-liners? You might want to focus on short, punchy copy. Do your keyboard klacks compose crescendos more slowly? Look at long-form.

Generalist or Specialist?

Deciding on topic and form will inform your portfolio's composition. It's best to pick one as the "fixed variable" across the content you choose, as it lays a solid foundation.

A generalist will want to demonstrate the breadth of their copywriting capabilities across a scattershot of topics but may stick exclusively to one form in doing so (e.g., packing their copywriting portfolio examples with deep-diving blog articles). In contrast, specialists will settle on their favorite topic and exhibit flexibility across different forms.

(Conversely, you can also flip this and specialize in a favorite form wielded across any topic.)

The trade-off of your portfolio style is which client you appeal to. Do you want to appeal to more clients regardless of form, or do you want to establish a niche audience for which you can handle the full gamut of content needs? Spreading your portfolio across too many topics *and* forms may leave the viewer confused about what type of copywriter you are.

Ever put on an album trying to do too much and quickly decide it's not for you?

Half the challenge is proving you can execute; the other half is convincing potential clients that you can do so consistently and in a way that matches *their* brand and content needs.

The Hyper Specialist

Suppose you're committed to writing one topic and in one form. If so, that makes portfolio construction the easiest, as you can exclusively focus on mic-drop examples within that type of content. However, bear in mind that being too specialized poses its own risks and rewards.

When a potential client suffers from needing that content, you'll immediately jump out as the best candidate. However, if they're looking for flexibility on topic or form, they'll be more likely to look to another writer.

Some genres and styles are polarizing, and hyper-specific copywriting portfolios aren't dissimilar.

What Content to Choose?

Depending on the size of your written repository, choosing which content pieces to include in your portfolio will probably comprise the most painstaking effort. It's also the most personal.

As a writer, your words are a reflection of yourself, and resultantly, stepping back to assess what makes the cut isn't always the easiest. But, after heavy consideration, most great albums have their B-sides left off the final release.

You're not only looking for your best work; you're also deciding on the pieces that will truly leave an impression in a shortened timeframe. Unfortunately, the sad reality is that regardless of how much time you've spent scrupulously crafting an article, someone else may not invest an equivalent effort when perusing your portfolio (especially if it's in a pile of others).

Make a Strong First Impression



Whether your portfolio includes a brief bio or you strategically order your content's presentation, the first impression you make has to stick.

It's all about your demo hitting hard enough on the first listen to catch someone's ear.

Your portfolio needs its “Bring Da Ruckus” to really kick the door in, its “Wu-Tang: 7th Chamber” to demonstrate composition versatility, and its “C.R.E.A.M.” to showcase depth and narrative.

However, “Protect Ya Neck” was the underground hit that combined each of these elements in a way that first made listeners crave more. There’s no *Enter the Wu-Tang* without it. That’s the track that earned the record contract.

Two or Three Pieces Per Category

A good rule to keep in mind is limiting your portfolio selections to two or three pieces per category. It doesn't need 36 chambers. Not only will this better ensure that the included content is your very best, it inherently forces that content to stand out. *Fires burn a helluva lot brighter at night than in the day.*

If your portfolio contains too many pieces, you run the risk of the recipient either:

- A. Being unable to determine what they should focus on
- B. Deciding that combing through all the pieces is too much effort

Just because your B-sides don't make the initial release doesn't mean that they aren't valuable or won't help in the future. If your portfolio catches someone's attention, they may ask to see more of your work covering a given topic or form. You'll already have that extra content on-hand.

Hardcore fans often pick up the deluxe release and dig through back catalogs.

Choosing Portfolio Pieces by Topic

If you’ve decided to establish a specific topic as your portfolio’s foundation, then focus on two to five different forms to show you can write on it comprehensively. Combining a few quick and snappy social posts with longer, expository work readily showcases range.

Suppose you know that you want to write about cats (c’mon... who wouldn’t?). It's all you've ever dreamed of, and you don't care which form it takes. Your copywriting portfolio examples could include various on-topic forms, such as:

- **Social post 1** – It’s almost National Cat Day! If you want to get a little something extra special for your extra mischievous miscreant, be sure to order soon for delivery by Oct. 29th.

- **Social post 2** – Give your feline friend some slow blinks to show you care! A [UK study](#) strongly suggests that giving a “cat smile” helps deepen the connection with your lovable rascal.³
- **Web copy 1** – We believe that a healthy cat is a happy cat, and it starts with their diet. Our food is specially blended to provide the right animal proteins and fats your companion needs, sourced from real cuts rather than byproducts and completely free of fillers.
“Truly deserves the four paw rating.”—Milo
“This year’s healthy eating resolution is easier than ever”—Oatmilk
- **Web copy 2** – Our deluxe cat tree is the playground setup that we wish we could’ve played in as kids—and still probably would. Extra sturdy, it’ll hold up against the most rambunctious pounces onto every level, and each provides a different activity to amuse.
- **Blog article 1** – So What’s *Actually* the Deal with Schrödinger’s Cat? A 101 Breakdown
- **Blog article 2** – Purring in the 25 to 150 Hz Bandwave for Better Feline Health⁴

Spread out your topic-based portfolio across a few different forms but also target various subtopic spaces. A portfolio comprised of six different cat personality listicles and posts doesn’t demonstrate your ability to deliver much else.

Choosing Portfolio Pieces by Form

When using content form to ground your portfolio, similarly choose two to five topics you’ve covered or have an interest in. The more disparate they are, the more flexibility they’ll show. As a rough guide, you may pick a couple of content examples across categories such as:

- Lifestyle
- Travel
- Technical
- Educational
- Finance
- Business-to-business (B2B)

³ Humphrey, T., Proops, L., Forman, J. et al. *The role of cat eye narrowing movements in cat–human communication.* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-73426-0>

⁴ Elizabeth von Muggenthaler. *The felid purr: A healing mechanism?* <https://asa.scitation.org/doi/10.1121/1.4777098>

- Fashion
- Do-it-yourself (DIY) processes
- Wellness or fitness
- Essential household goods

You can also choose one category and drill down into subcategories or the different types of businesses within them to demonstrate your versatility.

Keep in mind that your chosen form may dictate how many pieces of content comprise your portfolio. For example, a collection of social media posts or emails should include at least a few full campaigns to better demonstrate your capabilities (and cohesion), given that they're shorter in length. On the other hand, two or three blog articles per topic in the range of 800-1250 words will demonstrate depth to the reader without bogging them down.

Report Your Results if You Have the Numbers

How are your album sales?

If you have success metrics associated with your copywriting, be sure to include them in your portfolio in some capacity. Data including the following will be sure to catch any marketing manager or SEO specialist's eye:

- Click-through rates (CTR)
- Pageviews
- Session lengths
- Bounce rates
- Interactions

Your potential clients want copy that purrs *and* converts. Conversion metrics will help further raise your writing in their esteem.

First Copywriting Cut?

If you're attempting to first break into the copywriting game and are concerned about not having published content to include in your portfolio, don't sweat the technique.⁵ First, brainstorm a few made-up companies. Then, consider their content needs (e.g., email campaigns) and start writing.

It's that simple—although you may want to include a disclaimer about them being fictional.

⁵ Eric B. & Rakim. "Don't Sweat the Technique."

Presenting Your Portfolio

After choosing your purpose and content, your portfolio's presentation is the most important thing to mull over. You might meet a client who wants to see physical print-outs, but most will expect digital displays. Things done changed; delivery and browsing add new challenges to getting airplay.⁶

Much like copywriting that buries the lede, recipients don't want to have to hop hurdles on their way to browsing your best. If the pieces of content in your portfolio are too difficult to access or require clunky navigation to transition between them, your audience is more likely to pop in someone else's demo.

Consider building a quick microsite to present your portfolio with the most pomp. For a simpler (and free) presentation, compile an organized cloud storage folder you can easily share out.

Microsites

Microsites are websites that only feature a few pages, like a quick EP. They're perfect for portfolios. For example, you can provide a brief intro page or bio, the collection of your content, and contact information.

Building your own microsite for portfolio presentation is more accessible than ever with platforms such as:

- Wix
- Squarespace
- WordPress

The design elements on a microsite also allow you to incorporate other aspects of your creativity. Do you also shoot photography, draw, or paint? Use your artwork—just remember that these additions shouldn't outshine your words in a purpose-built copywriting portfolio.

Shared Folders

Microsites are great, but they require some set-up effort and may not be free (e.g., hosting costs). Sharable cloud storage accomplishes the same aim if you're looking for a simple solution to push your portfolio out there. However, you'll want to organize and title each piece for the most accessible navigation and viewing experience.

⁶ The Notorious B.I.G. "Things Done Changed."

Content Rules Everything Around Marketing

Marketing and branding leverage content to achieve a purpose—connection and conversion. Quality copywriting adds the intangible elements to make that content compelling and the purpose more achievable.

Similarly, your portfolio needs to be purpose-built to compel recipients.

It needs to reinforce their conviction that you've got copywriting chops as it bumps in their brain like that track you can't get enough of.

If you think it's only right you were born to copywrite, send us your portfolio. If you're looking for copywriters inflictin' composition that connects and compels—with portfolios to back it up—you need a Copycat.⁷

Because the blastmasters at Copycat Reign Supreme Over ~~nearly~~ everybody.⁸

Most importantly: remember that your portfolio should remain a reflection of yourself and your work regardless of topic, form, presentation, or any other considerations. It's you that the portfolio sells.

Sources:

Elizabeth von Muggenthaler. *The felid purr: A healing mechanism?*
<https://asa.scitation.org/doi/10.1121/1.4777098>

Eric B. & Rakim. "Don't Sweat the Technique."

Humphrey, T., Proops, L., Forman, J. et al. *The role of cat eye narrowing movements in cat-human communication.* <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-73426-0>

KRS-One, "MC's Act Like They Don't Know"

LL Cool J. "I Can't Live Without My Radio."

Nas. "N.Y. State of Mind."

⁷ Nas. "N.Y. State of Mind."

⁸ KRS-One, "MC's Act Like They Don't Know"

The Notorious B.I.G. "Things Done Changed."

Too Short. "So You Want to Be a Gangster."