Accreditation Portfolio Tips (two documents)

The portfolio: Where do I begin?
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The ABC portfolio is not like a job interview portfolio that contains samples of a range of projects on which you've worked. The two portfolios you'll submit are more like entries for a communication competition (Gold Quill or Silver Quill, for example) in which you'll describe the research, goals and objectives, measurement, etc. You'll also include samples of the work done throughout the project such as surveys, timelines, memos, budget, etc. in the Work Sample section.

How to choose your portfolio samples

- **Select two different kinds of projects** – not two publications or two media campaigns, for example. (Evaluators would like to see a range or variety of experience.)
- Although there is no "statue of limitations," you should generally **select projects that are not more than five years old** – to be able to demonstrate the latest communication channels, measurement, etc. If your projects are older than five years, be sure to note any channels of communication, measurement tools, etc. you would use now if you were doing the project. Put them at the end of your narrative: If I had to do it over:
- Projects must have measurement built into the communication plan. **Each objective must be measured.**

Developing the narrative

Typically, narratives are four to six pages (12-point type). The narratives can be longer, but the information must be relevant. You're not writing a thesis – or even a term paper – so a longer narrative doesn't necessarily make it better.

- Follow the narrative outline on IABC.com. Answer all the questions.
- Use the tip sheet on the next page.
- Make sure you have clear, measurable communication goals and objectives.
- Write **clearly and succinctly.** Proofread carefully. Edit irrelevant, redundant information. When possible, use bullet points to make information easier to read.
- In the measurement section, repeat each objective and show how you measured it. (Make it easy for the evaluators so they don't have to go back in the narrative and find the objectives.)
- Reference the materials you will include in the Work Sample. For example: in the narrative, you could refer to your department organizational chart as Exhibit 1. Put a label or type the number of the exhibit on it.

- Your Work Samples (marked as Exhibits) could include research, your communication plan, schedules, memos, brochures, samples of news releases, videos, CDs, budgets, surveys, focus group findings, ads, publications.

- Show your narrative to accredited communicators before sending it to IABC to review. (If you are an IABC/Chicago member, check with the Director of Accreditation as to when the portfolios are due. If you're in another chapter, see if you have a formal accreditation program. If not, contact IABC/Chicago or any other chapter with a program to ask if accredited members would review your portfolio. Arrange this well in advance of your portfolio due date.)

Other

- Put your portfolios in a three-ring binder. Make a second copy of your portfolio for yourself – in case the first one gets lost and to use as reference for future projects. Plastic sleeves are not necessary in the binder. Put the narrative in front and the Work Sample in the back. Your portfolio samples should be sent to the accreditation coordinator at IABC headquarters.

- If your portfolio does not pass, you will receive comments on what information is missing. Answer/revise as asked. If you have questions, contact the examiner immediately so that you're clear on the instructions. If the exam date is near, convey that to the examiner so that the portfolio can be reviewed again quickly.

Portfolio Tips
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Describing the organization and communication function

- Use the blurb at the bottom of press releases as a starting point. Mention who the company is and a little of its history, where it is headquartered and its market reach, what it does for whom, or what it sells to whom, size (sales/employees).
- Describe the communication function, down to your role in the organization and the project you are submitting. Attaching an org chart in the appendix is a great addition.
- Could use a heading that says Role of Entrant when describing your role in the project. Make sure your role is clearly described.

Identifying the opportunity

- What caused this project to occur? Highlight readership survey results, client satisfaction results, industry trends, etc.
- Who is affected by this (audience)? Where is the audience? General characteristics of the audience (demographics/psychographics).
- Goals and objectives can be listed at the end of this section, since they are driven by the reason the project is done.

Developing the plan

- Discuss how the plan was developed and possible constraints.
- Use of Matrix: Audience, Channel Used, Objective, Key Messages, Distribution, Timing, Measurement, and Cost.
- Leads into budget considerations.
- Discuss how measurement of success will be done. Try to use quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Selling the Plan to Management

- Discuss approval chain, decision-making involved in who gets approval from whom and why. In the approval chain, discuss what the focus of each approver is and how you supplied them with the information to approve the project.

Implementing the Plan

- Who did what and when in your plan and how it was managed.
- Use matrix and discuss what went as planned what needed to be revised. How did you respond to any revisions?

Evaluating the Plan

- How did your assumptions hold up? What constraints did you encounter? Use goals and objectives and how they were met or not met. What would you do different next time? Using matrix, assess each audience and the message – how did it go? List results of measurement.

Other Information

- This section is only needed if you have additional info.
- If the project was done a while ago, what's the status now?