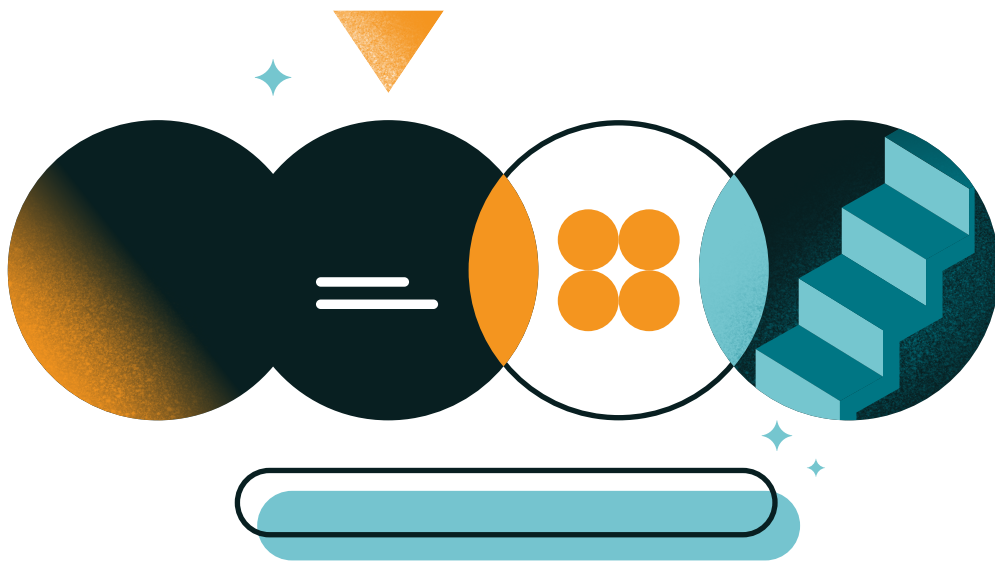A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

How to Create an Instructional Design Portfolio That Makes You Shine

Contents

Introduction

Hello!

An instructional design portfolio is an important tool that allows freelance instructional designers to demonstrate their skills and helps them build their professional practice. If you want to do more freelance work, are looking for a job, or want to submit your work for awards, you'll need an eye-catching online presence with samples of your work.

In this guide, we'll discuss the why, what, and how of creating a great instructional design portfolio. It's equally useful for novice IDs looking to create their online portfolio and seasoned IDs who still don't have a portfolio.

Have a super productive time mastering the ID portfolio!

Why You Need an Instructional Design Portfolio

There are three main reasons you need a portfolio of your work:

Demonstrate your skills

If you are an experienced instructional designer and have been in corporate learning for a while, your mother still may not know what to tell people what you do when she has an occasion to talk about you to others!

We all know that "a picture is worth a thousand words," and an online portfolio is a good example of this fact. Having your own space to show your skills is a gratifying experience to demonstrate to the world that you have contributed and move your profession to the next level.

Impress potential employers or attract more clients

It goes without saying that an online eLearning and work portfolio is important for developing an instructional design career – it allows you to impress potential employers and/or attract more clients when coupled with your online social media presence.

Having a single place for colleagues, bosses, and others to look at your work is important when sending out resumes in a job search or when tweeting about new software, development, or research elements. It shows that you have done the work and are able to comment in a credible and professional manner.

Determine your development needs

As well, a portfolio is an excellent place to show your best work and determine where you need to develop your skills to become even more amazing!

You could also set up a portfolio to see what you've mastered and what you could work on to compare with those around you in the instructional design world. There are a huge number of instructional design portfolios online today and it's easy to find both good and bad examples. Although comparing yourself to another person is a fruitless pursuit, learning from their example or using their portfolios as your inspiration are how all the great masters have built and honed their skills.
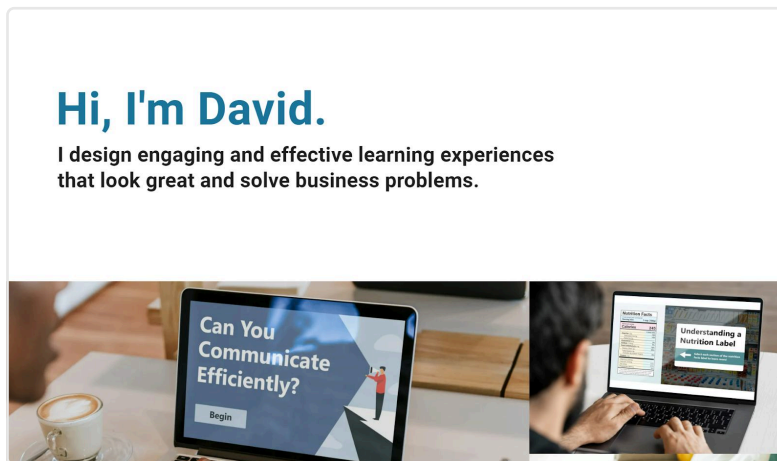

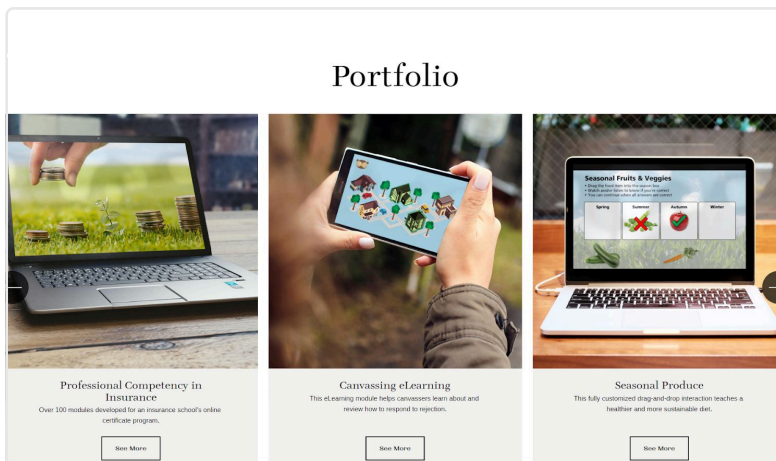# Examples of Good Instructional Design Portfolios

Here are some examples of different types of instructional design portfolios. Some are hosted and developed based on pre-existing templates (like iSpring Cloud, Bluehost, or WordPress) and some are custom built. These are presented in no particular order but are good examples of layout, content, and flow.
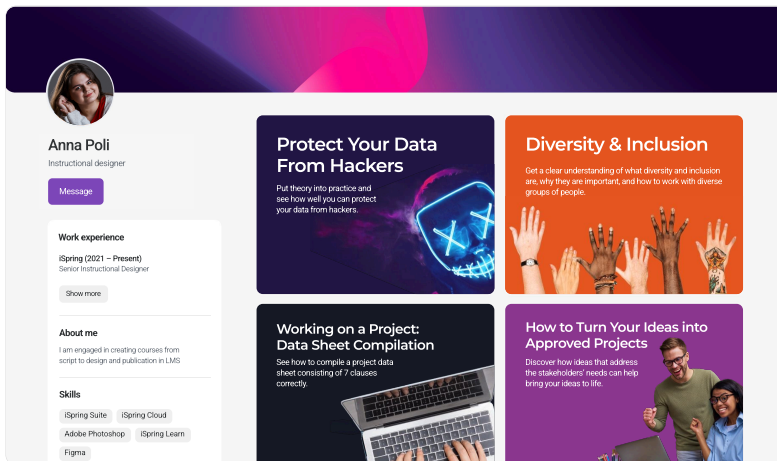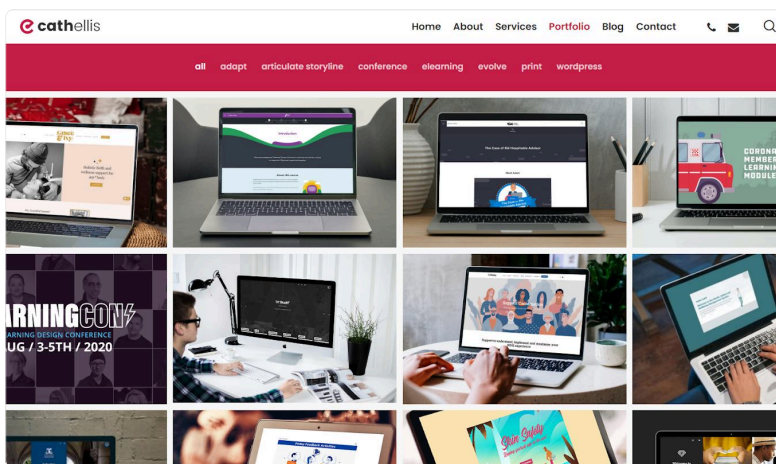
Anna Poli's instructional design portfolio captivates with its intuitive and visually appealing design. Visitors can quickly find everything they need to see, thanks to its well-organized layout. Anna's expertise shines through concise project descriptions, making it easy for potential clients to grasp her capabilities at a glance. Her portfolio impresses with its seamless user experience and showcases Anna as a top choice for instructional design needs.

David Leisey's instructional design portfolio is an impressive showcase of expertise, creativity, and versatility. With a visually appealing design, diverse projects, and measurable outcomes, it communicates his skills effectively. This user-friendly portfolio is a valuable resource for those seeking a talented instructional designer.

[Frederic Brewer's](link) instructional design portfolio impresses with its sleek design, clear project descriptions, and evidence-based results. It effectively showcases Frederic's expertise, proficiency in utilizing various instructional strategies, and commitment to delivering impactful learning solutions.

[Cath Ellis](link) has given a lovely modern look and feel to her portfolio and displays her instructional design projects by technology type. She also uses easily recognizable icons and navigation that helps one feel comfortable when looking at her examples or moving around in her portfolio.

[Shalini Mathias](link) has a really interesting portfolio that was built with the Prezi presentation software! Both the outline and the presentation are available. While Prezi isn't as popular as it once was, this is a great way to demonstrate both knowledge and skill in different types of learning technologies.

4 Steps to Build an Instructional Design Portfolio from Scratch

The examples above are beautiful and interesting, but they weren't built overnight. You can also create a great looking portfolio; you just need to decide on a few things before you dive in and start sharing with the world. Here are some steps you'll want to consider before you build your portfolio:

Step 1: Develop your brand

The first thing to consider is the content approach, or how viewers will see you and your brand with your display.

Ask yourself why you are building this display of your ID talent and what you want it to say about yourself and your work.

Take a look at your online presence from an external perspective. **Build a persona for your social media presence.** Is it inconsistent, with your personal and professional worlds mashed together? This is alright if that's what you want. But if it's not, now is the time to consider what you want your online persona to be and start to shape your portfolio to reflect that.

Who are you building this portfolio for: employers, grad school, or potential clients? **Create a persona of who that 'person' is** (just like creating personas for the learners in your programs!) so you can position the samples in a way that viewers will find interesting and appealing.

Try different views of your portfolio tailored to the groups that you want to attract to view your work. If you haven't seen one before, use an empathy map.

An empathy map is a picture of your client, audience, or employer. It adopts an outsider's view (a view that's empathetic to the situation and environment of the portfolio's viewer). It makes a list of what your viewer will be exposed to in their current circumstances, what they know about ID, what their own work environment confronts them with, what they are hearing from their bosses, clients, and employees, and other things that allow you to see your portfolio from someone else's perspective.


SAYS   THINKS

USER

DOES   FEELS
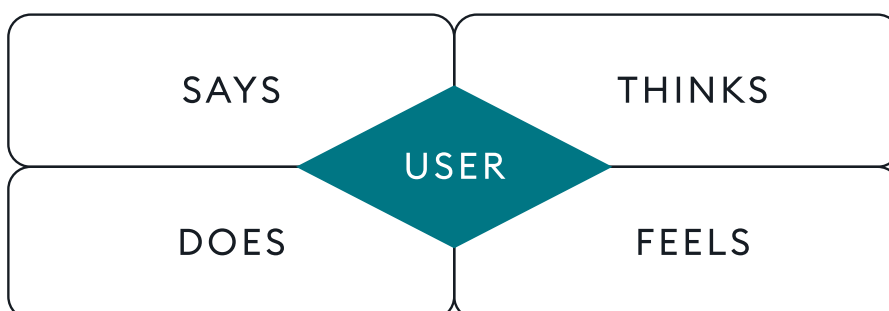
Traditional empathy map

Look around! Make a collection of elements, pages, samples, layouts, etc. to gain inspiration.

Of course, no one is advocating stealing or copying here, but many artists have used others' works as a way of inspiring their own projects. These are often referred to as "mood boards." A mood board is a collection of images, colors, layouts, writing, and navigation from all over the Internet that you feel would be representative of you, your brand, and your message.

Here's an example:
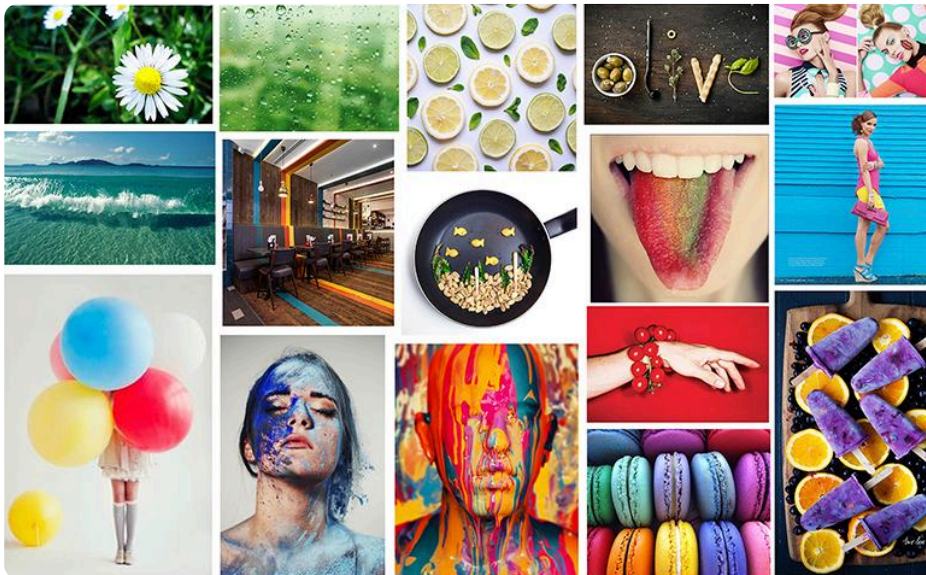
If you've been working in a corporate environment with strict branding guidelines, you've seen examples of the company's mood board. The collection of colors, fonts, images, layouts, and language styles should be consistent and reflect the persona you are trying to promote (which, ultimately, should be you).

Assembling a mood board will help you identify the style and brand you want to create for yourself. Use it when looking at the templates or sites that you will choose to set up your portfolio.

Step 2. Assemble the content for your portfolio

Are you aiming to get a new job, take on new clients, or expand your professional network and reputation? To accomplish any of this, you'll first need to consider the content you have and prepare eLearning samples to include that.

Begin gathering your work

Collect all the work that you want to represent in your portfolio and categorize it.

If you have a very large portfolio or have multiple potential types of viewers, you may want to categorize against a grid such as type of client vs. modality, industry vs. timeline, client vs. budget. It's your call to determine how to make your samples super easy to use.

- If you have more offline than online samples, you can convert your face-to-face PowerPoint and workbook samples to HTML5 format if you prefer (using authoring tools like iSpring Suite), or you can post thumbnails of your work.

- If you have work that is restricted by an NDA or can't be used due to a contract, you can still take sample slides that are representative of your work and remove identifying marks, names, or other elements. There must certainly be some work you've done that isn't entirely restricted by an NDA. If there isn't, you'll need to make some generic samples for display and mention that they represent the work you did for the employer.

- If you only contributed part of the design, writing, or coding for the project:
  That's okay! You will need to explain how you collaborated, what you contributed, and how it worked out. Just don't misrepresent others' work as your own.

Tell the story of each sample

- Each of your samples should have information that's relevant to your audience (remember your audience personas and write for them!). In some cases, you will want to outline your contribution, tools used, context for the development (the intended audience and time period), and the outcome.

- Your samples should tell the story of how you have used a variety of ways to solve problems with design, accessibility, client management, or something that demonstrates not only your technical proficiency but also your style, your ability to manage or participate in collaborative work, and your overall professionalism.

- If you are grouping your projects by industry (e.g., healthcare, defense, and banking) consider an opening paragraph before the samples summarizing your experience in the industry, including your role titles, level of authority or influence, and overall length of time in the industry. Your potential employer in that industry will appreciate your relating to them specifically.

Step 3: Create and optimize your portfolio

Now it's time to put your eLearning portfolio online. Even if you aren't experienced with websites, hosting, or other elements of cyberspace, it's fairly easy to navigate if you stick to platforms built for people who aren't coders. Here is a general explanation of the platforms you'll want to consider.

1. iSpring Cloud
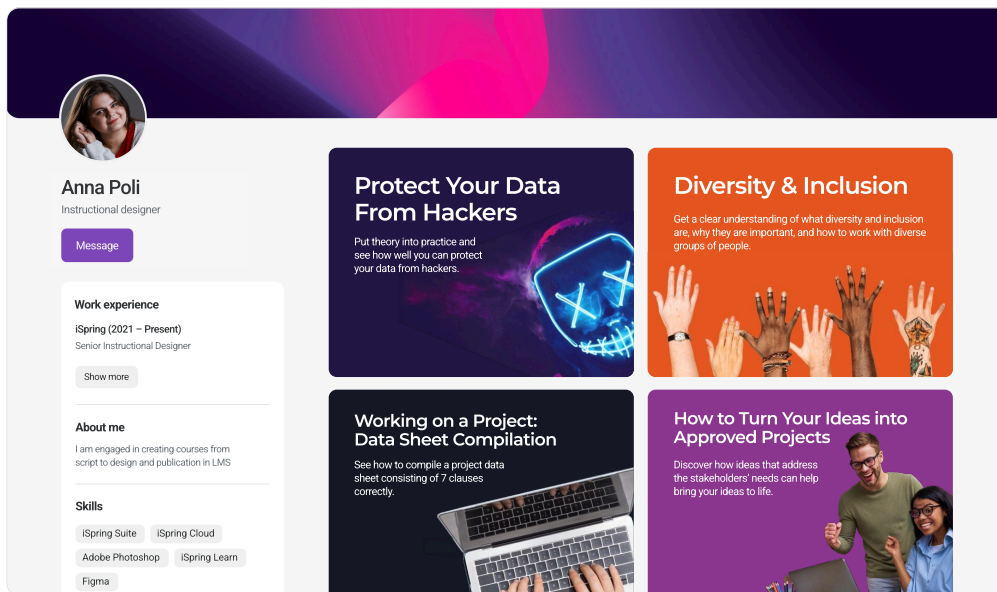
An example of a portfolio created with iSpring Cloud

iSpring Cloud is iSpring Suite's online tool for storing, reviewing, and creating eLearning projects. Unlike other platforms, it has a portfolio builder designed specifically for instructional designers, course developers, and other eLearning specialists. You don't need any extra platforms, tools, widgets, etc. – simply build your portfolio in iSpring Cloud and share a link to it with potential clients.

The key benefits of this option are that you can upload your actual SCORM courses (this is rarely a possibility), and that the layout template is tailored to instructional designers' needs showing clients everything you need them to see: your name, bio, the tools you use, and your projects with descriptions. So, it's really easy to build an appealing, effective portfolio without any coding, converting projects to HTML5 or video formats, etc.

You can also make the portfolio feel truly yours by customizing colors and fonts – it only takes a few minutes to create something authentic and unique.

As for the price, you don't need to pay anything extra if you already use iSpring Suite in its best Max plan. No need to worry about domain registration, buying extra widgets, and so on – you build your portfolio with the same tool

you create your courses with and host it in the same online space where you store all your projects.

2. Hosted portfolio platforms
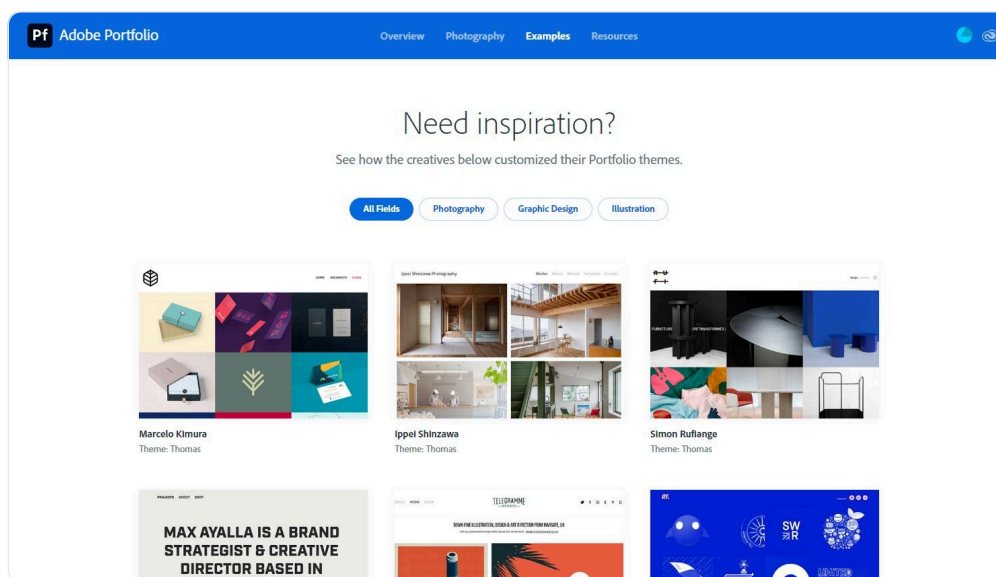
An example of a portfolio created with Adobe Portfolio

In this type of setup, the website, server (that will host your designs and eLearning samples) and everything else is done for you by a single company. The benefit of this approach is that they are purpose built for portfolio use and easy to use and maintain because they have premade templates for building a portfolio. And although these portfolio sites don't often come with a lot of templates (especially free ones), they do give you a chance to create a portfolio with basic technical skills and no programming requirement.

Some of the most popular portfolio website builders are Behance, Dribble, and Adobe Portfolio. Keep in mind that these portfolio sites are usually for visual artists and graphic designers, so you may not be able to do more than show individual slides or images, unless you pay for more storage space on the site and the widgets to show interactive pieces (such as eLearning courses).

you create your courses with and host it in the same online space where you store all your projects.

3. Website platforms (business websites)

The benefit of this type of site, beyond just portfolio-specific sites, is that there are more types of templates (not all of them will be relevant) and widgets to add contact methods, social linking, etc. that you may find useful if you are or will consider being a freelancer. Website platforms have all the templates, hosting, storage, layout, and other widgets already built for you. You do not need to know how to write HTML code, JavaScript, or any other type of programming to get beautiful results.

Many of these sites are free if you don't select the "premium" templates. The platforms are easy to use and the most popular ones include WordPress, Weebly, and Wix. These sites have hundreds of templates and widgets for people who want to make an online entrance but aren't programmers or media companies. Keep in mind that there is a huge difference between the .com and the .org versions of WordPress. If you don't know how to program HTML, you'll want the .com version.

As with the portfolio platforms, you will need to pay for the ability to use widgets that will host your eLearning samples and make some things interactive, like contact widgets and video spaces.

4. Self-hosted websites

If you know coding or can manage HTML, building your own website will be the best solution because it helps you control all of your design and data. Of course, you don't have to start completely from scratch as there are plenty

of codebases you can download and then use to help you optimize your time.

The site and codebase that is probably used the most for this purpose is WordPress. Unlike the hosted version, wordpress.org is a downloadable HTML program that you can use to create your own site and manage your own widgets or navigation for your users. If you are an instructional design developer, you may definitely want to take this route to demonstrate your skills.

If you are going to choose this option, you'll need the base code, a domain host, and probably some widgets and add-ons from the WordPress library.

How to Build a Portfolio with iSpring Cloud

iSpring Cloud is the easiest and fastest way to build an impressive ID portfolio from scratch. If all of your projects are ready, it will take you no more than half an hour (the first 25 minutes of which are spent brainstorming a witty bio). Check out the entire process:

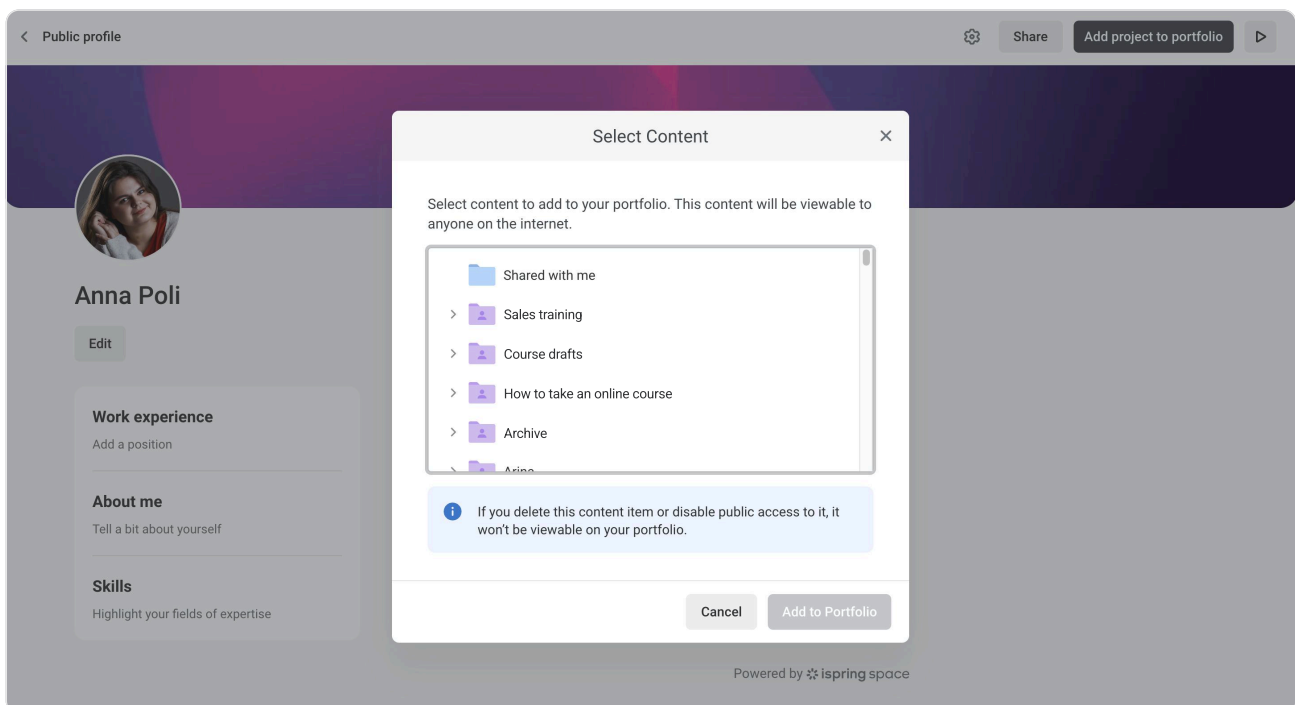1. Upload the projects you want to show in your portfolio to iSpring Cloud and go to your Cloud account.

    Please note: You'll need an iSpring Suite Max subscription. If you don't have it yet, you can download a 14-day free trial.
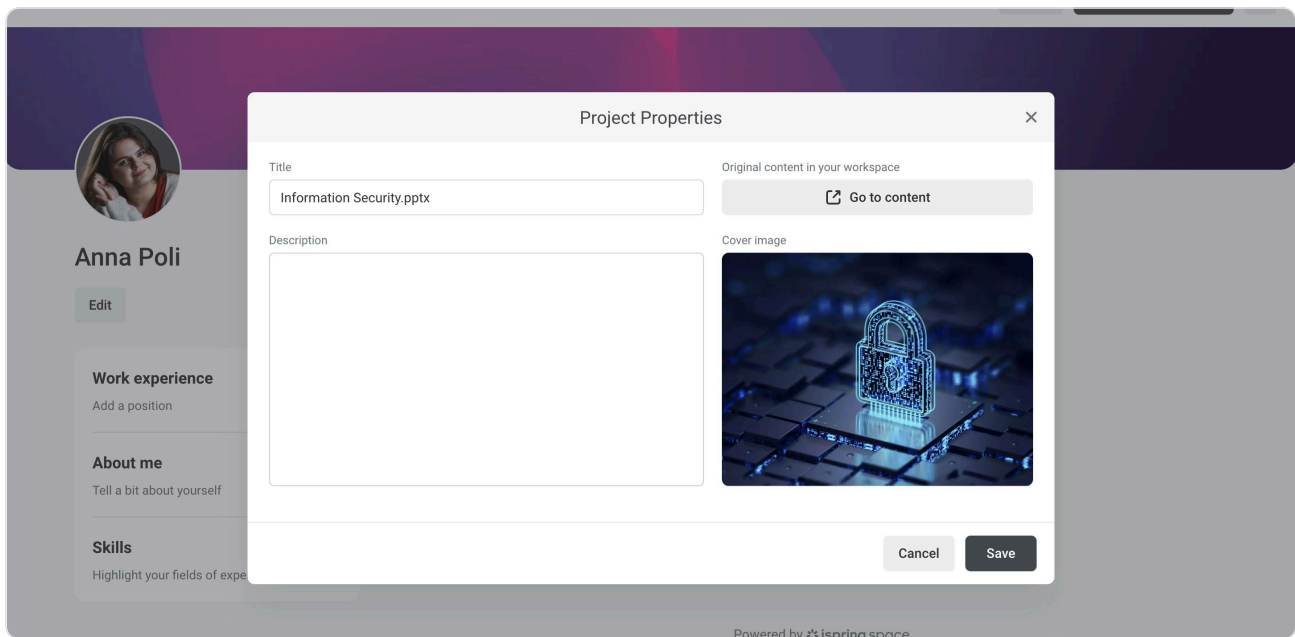
2. Click on **Portfolio.**

3. Click on the **Add Project** field.
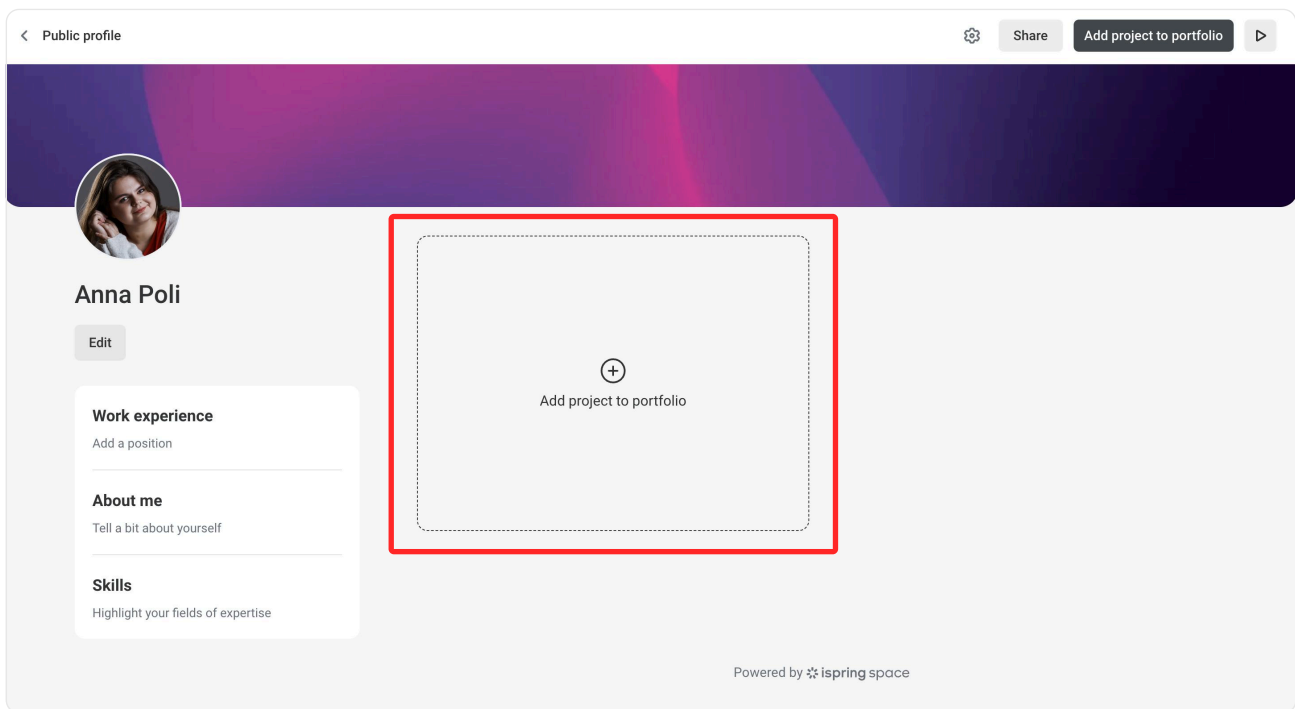
### 4. Select the project you want to add, and click **Select**.

5. Add the project name, description, and cover image. Click **Save**.


Repeat this process with other projects.

6. Once you've added all the projects, add info about yourself. Click the **Edit** button under your avatar. In the opened window, fill in the blanks with your bio, profession, work experience, and the tools you use. Click **Save**.
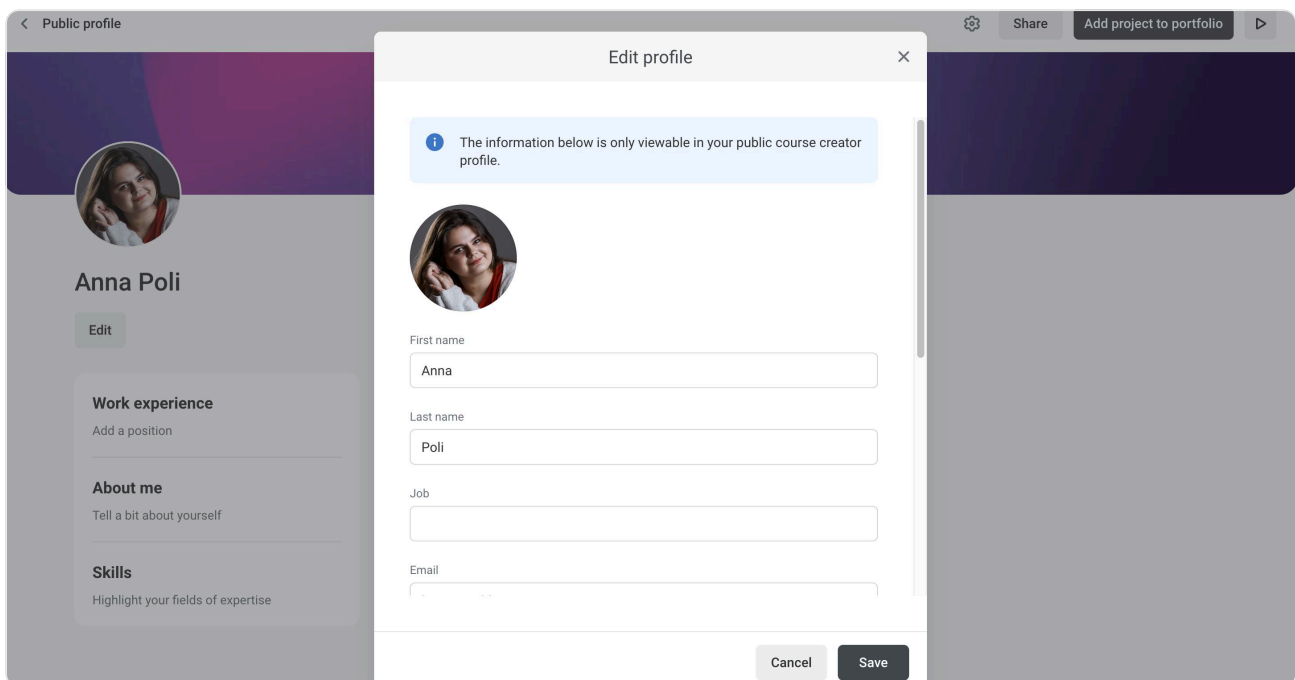
7. Now it's time to make the portfolio feel like you! Click on the settings button in the upper right corner. Customize the colors and fonts of your portfolio page. Once finished, click **Save.**
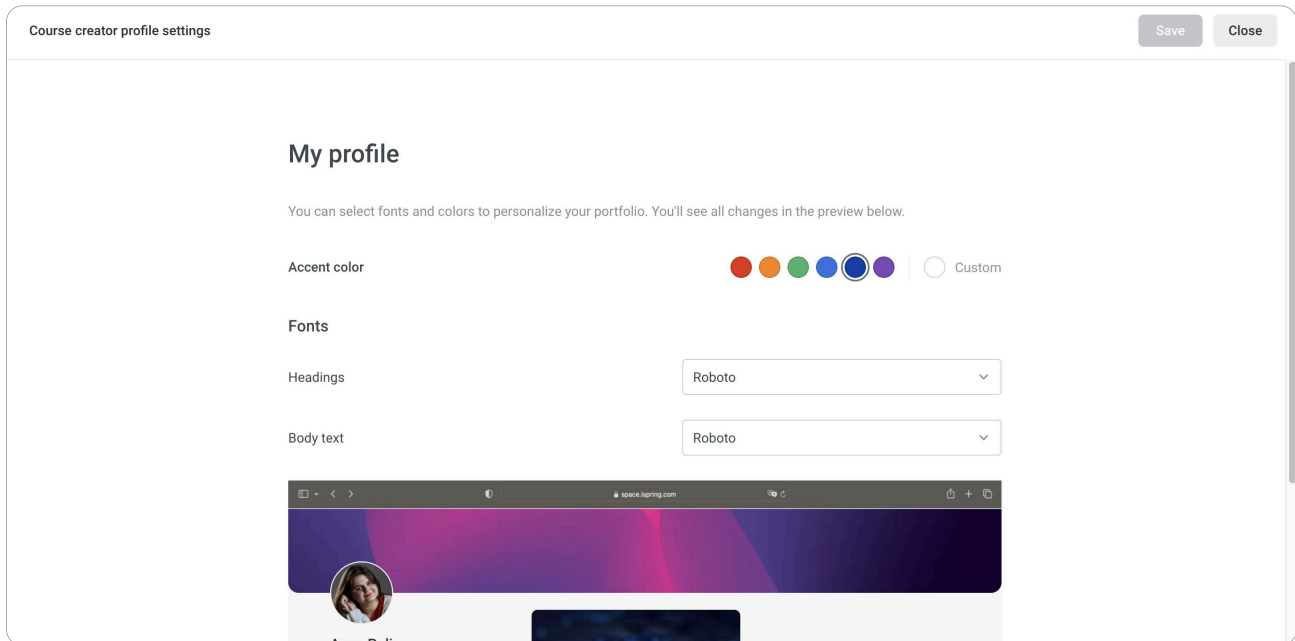
Congrats! Your portfolio is ready. To share your portfolio, click Share in the top right corner, copy the link, and post it wherever you want.

Optional Step: Optimize your website

This is an optional step for those who host their portfolio on a website. If you use iSpring Cloud, skip to Step 4.

Once you have your site up and running, make sure it operates smoothly for the audience. Here are some handy things to consider:

1. **Check your images and videos.** You'll want to compress them as much as you can so they will load quickly.

2. **Check all links, buttons, calls to action, and contact buttons.** Make sure you put contact buttons in the right places so viewers can connect with you if they have questions or see something they like.

3. **Have someone check your overall navigation** to make sure that the structure of your site is easy to follow and not too difficult to navigate. Most website viewers will only have the patience to click 2 or 3 times at most before losing patience, so don't make your instructional design portfolio so deep that viewers will give up before finding your brilliant examples.

Step 4: Promote your portfolio

You have built this instructional design portfolio for a reason, and that is to get noticed. However, you won't get noticed if you don't let people know your portfolio is available! There are a couple of great ways to get your portfolio noticed and improve your overall social media presence:

1. Use social media to let people know that you have a new portfolio. What social media platforms do you connect with: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or Instagram? Others? Tell your collaborators, friends, and followers to check it out. Offer to discuss anything they see or to share experiences.

2. Join a professional group or association. Are you a member of the ATD, eLearning Guild, or the CCCE? There are many local, national, and international learning associations through which you can promote yourself and your portfolio while contributing to the profession and learning from the experience of others.

3. Use good old-fashioned word of mouth! It's amazing how many people will be willing to help you spread the word about your new portfolio and even give you additional work if you ask. It's not a burden to talk to people about what you are hoping to do. If there is quality in your work and your relationships, having a good conversation offering to help people can really aid you in promoting your portfolio and perhaps your career.

Extra Tips

As an instructional designer, you know a lot about designing information to help the learner acquire knowledge and skills. Do your homework in looking over the websites suggested above and figure out how your portfolio fits with your personality and how you intend to present your work to your audience.

Here are a few more tips you may find useful:

- Make your websites fully accessible for those who may need special accommodation due to issues regarding sight, mobility, or language. Accessible design is good design.

- Make sure you have your contact information prominently displayed in the header or footer of the site. Ensure that you also have working contact buttons where needed, but not buried at the bottom left corner of any page.

- Continue to review and update your projects and work samples so you can always present a fresh perspective on how you are progressing.

Portfolio Building Checklist

Once you have created your portfolio, quickly run through the checklist to make sure you haven't missed anything and your portfolio works just as you want it to. Also, make sure:

- ☐ Your bio includes the latest information that is completely work-related.

- ☐ There are no misspellings or grammatical errors.

- ☐ The contact information is correct and easy to find.

- ☐ The portfolio has your vibe, i.e., represents your social media/ professional persona.

- ☐ There are no projects in the portfolio restricted by an NDA.

- ☐ You mentioned all people who contributed to the projects in your portfolio (if there are any).

- ☐ All links, navigation buttons, and project samples work fine.

Summing Up

Creating an instructional design portfolio is a professional activity that will help you keep yourself on top of your skills, allow your design abilities to shine for others to see, and provide you with more credibility in the world of instructional design.

Instructional designers and other learning professionals need digital representation now more than ever, as the world becomes more globally connected and less reliant simply on word of mouth or resumes to get work.

Your portfolio should be carefully thought out as part of your personal brand and a reflection of your true skills. You can do this by carefully preparing your content, creating a site that is easy to use, and delivering an accessible experience to all of your prospective clients, employers, and colleagues.

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- Cloud storage for courses
- An online tool for reviewing content with stakeholders
- An online tool for collaborating with SMEs
- And more

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Useful Resources

Whether you're a novice ID who wants to delve deeper into instructional design or a seasoned professional who wants to refresh their knowledge, check out some more articles about ID and course authoring:

- Instructional Design: The Art of eLearning Architecture
- How to Become an Instructional Designer
- The Top 5 Instructional Design Skills
- 9 Instructional Design Principles: Keys to Authoring eLearning Content
- The 50+ Best Instructional Design Software Tools You Should Bookmark
- Instructional Designer Salary: 5 Proven Ways to Earn More
- How to Create an Online Course – A Complete Guide

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