

# How to Prepare for Portfolio Reviews

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**In advance of attending portfolio review events, consider the following advice:**

### **SET GOALS, THEN RESEARCH!**

Consider in advance what results you are seeking from this investment. Are you seeking advice/guidance/information, or are you looking for more tangible results? Are you hoping to sell prints? Are you seeking representation by a gallery? Do you wish to place an exhibition of a completed body of work with a museum or institution? Are you hoping to secure a publishing contract? Be clear about what you want, research the professional biographies of the reviewers towards making the most of your time towards your desired goals.

### **TIGHTLY EDIT**

your photographs to a number of prints that allows you to present your body of work in an efficient, thorough manner. A portfolio in the range of twenty images is not so overwhelming in scale to hinder discussions; if the project or series is substantially larger, you can of course bring more to show during the review session, but understand that to engage in a meaningful dialogue, less may be “more.” If you have two bodies (or more) of work, perhaps one that is completed, one or more on-going: consider bringing small selections of each, research the likely tastes and interests of the Reviewers, and consider asking which they’d prefer to see. Understand, however, it may be impossible, time-wise, to discuss all work with each reviewer.

### **PRACTICE**

your presentation - keep it short and simple! Be mindful of the 20-minute limit with each Reviewer; you will want save time within those 20 minutes to receive feedback from them. DO plan on speaking on your work, leave time for dialogue with the Reviewers, too.

### **PRESENTATION IS IMPORTANT**

as are “first impressions.” I suggest you print your images similarly on the same size/paper. Protect the work, but not to such an extent that it takes too much of your 20-minute session to wrap/unwrap each print.

### **EASE IN HANDLING**

will maximize your time to talk with the reviewer, so select a box, book or portfolio that will allow you to show the photographs relatively quickly and be seen without harm to the objects. It is not necessary to mat your work for presentation - you can fit more prints in your box, or travel lighter; your prints will be frequently shown and may reflect this.

### **SIZE(S)**

If possible, show work to reviewers in the size that you prefer for final presentation size. That said, the tables you will be presenting your work on will be 3' x 6' and if prints are larger than that, several samples rolled in tubes with a supplemental more manageable portfolio may be a wise choice. Installation views will help Reviewers to interpret large-scale, installation-based or

other non-traditional work. Consider making a small "portable" portfolio to have with you at all times throughout all events, i.e. a box of 4x5's, an 8x10 presentation book of prints, or laser/inkjet copies so you will be able to share your work with other photographers and reviewers if an opportunity presents itself outside of the formal review sessions.

### **KNOW THE REVIEWERS**

Go to the event host's website one last time and cut/paste your own copy of all the reviewer's bios and keep it at your fingertips, to refresh your memory as needed on Reviewers you will present work to, or meet socially during the weekend. In addition to making notes directly on these individual pages, consider bringing a tape deck to record your session with Reviewers (always wise to ask their permission before hitting "record" button).

### **PREPARE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS FOR REVIEWERS**

Consider producing a business card that features an image for easier recollection; I always appreciate it when the image matches one the photographer shared with me at the event; this aids the Reviewers in recalling your work and your presentation to them. Present yourself in a professional manner by having current information on the card.

Design/produce a simple promotional piece that will serve to remind the Reviewers of your work as well as providing them your contact information. I appreciate having something in print (or CD-ROM) featuring reproduction of several images from your body of work (all Reviewers will meet with many photographers during this event; it never hurts to remind them visually of your work).

Make sure it is small enough for Reviewers to file in a traditional (8-1/2 x 11) file folder, for ease in referencing your work. Be mindful of the possibility that materials can become separated; put your name and contact information on EACH individual page. If being distributed to a small group of individuals, you can self-produce this piece and save the expense of commercial printing. Note: this printed piece and/or CD-ROM can do double-duty for you if it is designed to also serve as a mailer beyond distribution at this and other similar events. **YOU MAY PREFER TO PRODUCE & SEND THIS OUT AFTER THE EVENT**, having gained insights from Reviewers as to which images are most powerful, rather than preparing it ahead.

Shop for well-designed yet functional presentation/storage materials. There are many options available through office supply/art supply vendors. Be original yet functional.

Beware of metal clips/clasps as they can damage your piece(s) in transit or when filed.

Producing a Targeted Promotional Packet for RSF: If you are meeting with Reviewer(s) about a specific exhibition project you would like to place, ensure that the information provided is relevant to their needs such things as total number of images, size, mat/frame needs, space required (linear and/or square feet, ceiling height, panel sizes), suggestions for educational components, AV requirements if any, and other site specific details. If you have previously exhibited the work, perspective/installation views are an asset to accurately interpreting the exhibition at their venue. Likewise, if you hoping to secure a publication contract with the

Reviewer(s) for a completed body of work, be certain to provide visually effective materials for them to retain. Many times the person to whom you present may not be the final decision-maker at their business or institution; you need them to become your advocate, representing the work/project to their colleagues after RSF towards your mutual advantage – be sure to provide them the tools to do so!

### **WHEN ATTENDING THE PORTFOLIO REVIEW EVENT:**

**BE ON TIME!** If late for your scheduled review appointment, the time will not be made up.

### **REMEMBER YOUR GOALS**

Be up front about your wishes – is this a “work in progress” in which case you are seeking feedback? Are you seeking advice regarding technique? Editing? Presentation? Or, Are you asking for advice regarding gallery contacts? Publishers? Museum Curators? Let the Reviewer know at the outset what you hope to gain from this experience.

### **TIMING IS EVERYTHING**

Make sure that your presentation takes LESS than the 20-minute appointment so that you have time to gain feedback/advice from the reviewer.

### **MAKE NOTES**

for your reference following each session on the alphabetical sheets you prepared - who you saw, their comments on the work and/or on specific images, printing, presentation, general advice and other remarks you will want to review. Carry your binder with you at all times for this purpose, and add to it comments about Reviewers and their upcoming projects as you learn these things from other photographers during the event. Another idea is to make yourself a list of reminders or “prompts” to print below the Reviewer Bios – reminder notes TO YOURSELF to ask for their business cards, ask if they’d like to be added to your mailing list and what format they would prefer materials to arrive in (CD/Website, print, slides?).

Don’t assume that a reviewer would like to keep more than a simple business or promotional card. At the end of your session, ask if they would like to retain additional materials for their future reference, and if so, indicate whether you can provide these on site, or offer the courtesy to ship things to their office following the event (at your expense). Ask too if they would like to be kept informed of your work as it evolves, and if so, in what format – print, CD-Rom, notices of additions to your website, etc.

Be sure to ask Reviewers for their business card if you intend to add them to your mailing list.

Keep your business and/or promotional cards handy and give them out. Ask for cards from other professionals at the event to add to (or begin) your promotional mailing list. Ask for cards from fellow photographers, too, and keep in touch with your community.

Be courteous to fellow photographers by respecting the 20 minute time slot and pack up your materials before the next person’s session with your Reviewer is set to begin.

## **AFTER THE EVENT**

Following up with your new contacts is essential if you want to maximize your potential for tangible returns from this experience. You will initiate relationships – now cultivate them.

Write each Reviewer and thank them for their insights towards your work, advice, and their time. Send follow-up packets within a few weeks to those who requested additional materials at your expense (never send C.O.D. unless specifically told to do so).

If a Reviewer encouraged you to provide more material for their files, such as an artists' resume, an overview of a current or past project, an exhibition proposal, photocopies/laser prints of images, sets of slides, CD-Rom or other such promotional materials. If you wish to have these items returned to you following their review, you must provide return postage, ideally in the form of a pre-paid overnight delivery service such as Federal Express, UPS, etc.

Take advice to heart: re-edit your work, alter presentation format(s) and apply other advice in order to enhance the returns from your next portfolio review opportunity

If there were Reviewers that you had wished to meet with but were unable to, don't hesitate to write and express your wish to have done so, and your interest in their becoming aware of your work, that you look forward to showing the work at an industry event in the near future. Add them to your mailing list. Don't forget to continue to share your work with your peer group between attending such events – critical dialogue among art makers is invaluable.

*I hope that this advice will be helpful to you, and that your career will benefit from your efforts before, during and after attending the portfolio review event.*

*-Mary Virginia Swanson*

## **About the Author**

Mary Virginia Swanson makes it her goal to help photographers find the strengths in their work and identify appreciative audiences for their prints, exhibitions and licensing placements. Her informative seminars and lectures on marketing opportunities have proven to aid photographers in moving their careers to the next level. Photograph Magazine's "In Profile" column highlighted Swanson's career in the July/August 2011 issue. Ms. Swanson currently works individually with photographers as a marketing consultant to guide artists in their careers. Swanson maintains a popular blog about opportunities for photographers called Marketing Photos and coauthored Publish Your Photography Book with Darius Himes (Princeton Architectural Press, Spring 2011). Her website address is [mvswanson.com](http://mvswanson.com), and the website for their book is [publishyourphotographybook.com](http://publishyourphotographybook.com)