

## Portfolio Viewings: What your portfolio MUST show Art Directors

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/portfolio-viewings-what-your-portfolio-must-show-art-directors/>

This entry is part 4 of 5 in the series [Bologna Book Fair 2016](#)

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*In talking with many people about Portfolio Viewings at the [Bologna Book Fair](#) and what a portfolio needs to demonstrate to publishers, it seems most artists have some funny ideas about the publishing industry, so I thought I should tackle a couple of concerns and misconceptions.*

**If you have a portfolio and it doesn't seem to be getting the response you want, it may simply be because you're not showing the right stuff.**

**Here's what Art Directors and Agents are hoping to see from you.**

Sign Reads: "Illustrators Welcome!" Days and hours provided.

When you as an artist attend an event like the [Bologna Book Fair](#) (above is publishing house [Carlsen](#) inviting illustrators to their portfolio viewings), you have an incredible advantage over writers hoping to "get a foot in the door." I bet you didn't know that! (Unless your writer-friend has already complained about it to you.)

I don't know who started the rumor that writers are more respected than artists in the publishing industry, but it seems that many artists are under this impression.

**Here are some things that might surprise those of you who wield a brush:**

Artists only get 3-10 minutes (usually 3) to show their portfolio to an Art Director.

Writers also have 3-10 minutes to pitch a story, and typically that timeframe leans towards the 3-minute marker. Whether we have a mock-up or not, the time allotted is the same.

Artists are concerned that they don't get enough attention at book fairs, that they are only provided certain specific hours when they can show their work.

Writers don't get specific times to pitch our work (would really love a Writer's Pitch Time or something like that), and when we do try to make a pitch, it may or may not be to the right Decision Maker. We inhale deeply, approach the nearest person and ask if there's someone we might talk to about our story. Oftentimes, there is no one there at that particular moment. Here's what we often hear:

Try again in X-minutes. No, I don't know for certain if they'll be here then, but it's the best possible time. No way to make an appointment, I'm sorry.

Or worst possible response: "I invite you to visit our website and read the Submissions Guidelines." *Really? Honey, I wouldn't be here if I hadn't already done that.*

So writers do a lot of running around in zigzag circles. Sometimes we hit gold, but most of the time we just get muddy.

Trust me when I tell you: I wish I had a ready portfolio to show! It would mean actually getting a spot in line at the portfolio viewings with an *actual* Art Director, not a Second Assistant to an Assistant (yes, really). That my portfolio would then "come with accessories" like a story with characters? I'd just slip that in with the pictures. Ahem.

## Portfolio Viewings: Showing the Right Stuff

**In talking with Art Directors at various publishing houses and art organizations, here's what I discovered should be in your portfolio.**

### **Characters doing stuff, maybe crying about it.**

Create a character and show that *one* character in 3-4 images, doing different types of action. One of the biggest errors artists do is create several beautiful portraits. Publishers don't really want that. They need you to demonstrate that you can:

1. Show characterizations (that's writer-speak for personality traits),
2. Show action,
3. Show repeated images of a character from different angles having different *emotions*.

Do this with 2-3 different characters of varying kinds. If your forte is animals, do that. If your forte isn't animals, don't do that – do what you love. If you want to illustrate kid's books, you ought to be able to illustrate kids. Surprisingly, many portfolios don't have any examples of that (and they should!).

### **Range Choices. Be Decisive.**

Your artistic range can be whatever you want it to be, but it should be clean – meaning no muddy colors. It should be something that would print beautifully and clearly, something that would appeal to kids and to the adults who get books for them.

**Remember too:** being market savvy isn't selling out. It's the exact opposite! It's about knowing as much as you possibly can about your art. You cannot possibly be a leading illustrator if you don't know anything about what's been done and being done. You must strive to know everything about what's out there. Same goes for writers.

### **Show Your Style. Show Also Respect - do the research.**

Artistic style can be whatever you want, but you then need to do some research and see what types of books that publisher is bringing to the market. If the publisher tends to create board books for babies, they very likely won't go for your highly textured, grey color palette. That's something that would appeal to either an older readership or to the Russian book market.

That said, it wouldn't hurt to just show your portfolio anyway (so long as being in that publisher's line for a portfolio viewing doesn't mean you're passing-up being in a line where the publisher better suits your style). If you get lucky, the Art Director will maybe give you some helpful tips on how to improve your portfolio – or they might even suggest a publisher you should approach. You never know.

**If you've got a lot of beautiful but static images of people posing, toss those right out of your portfolio.** They don't help you at all.

**If you've got an illustrated storybook on the market right now** (be it self published or traditionally published) do bring in a full-color hardback copy of your book with you. BUT you should *also still bring in your portfolio*.

It's tradition. Your portfolio does not have to be huge though. I saw portfolios of all sizes at the Bologna Fair. Bigger isn't necessarily better (I saw a few that were really just enormous and wondered how they manage to travel with them). Remember that you need to rest your visuals on a small countertop space.

### **One other ~~important~~ vital visual: your card.**

The other thing you'll need to bring with you, regardless of where your portfolio viewing is located: a sharp business card that reflects you and your art style. Don't try to save money on the cost. This is where you should pull out all the stops.

- Make your business card something people want to keep (think: something to treasure) and you'll have a much higher rate of success. You have imagination, so you can do that.
- Make it cheaply and it will, I promise, end up in the trash.

I'll be writing about business cards and what they should do for you in a future post. Check back for that here on GSB, or just sign-up for my newsletter and I'll send it right to your inbox.

Do you have a business card (be it for your artwork &/or writing)? How do you feel about it – is it working for you? Write below, let me know – or as ever, send me an email. You know I love getting those!

**Keep creating, no matter what.**

**This entry is part of the series**

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