

Building a UI Design Portfolio:

Purpose, Audience, and Success Criteria

- ✓ - A portfolio is evidence of judgment, not a gallery
- ✓ - Reviewers scan for role fit, ownership, and proof in seconds
- ✓ - Homepage gets 6-8 seconds; first case study gets 30-60
- ✓ - Recruiters scan for fit; hiring managers scan for judgment
- ✓ - Success: clear positioning, 3-5 outcome-led case studies
- ✓ - Myth: more projects, polish, or AI mockups win on their own





What Reviewers Actually Look For (and How Fast They Decide)



- Reviewers pattern-match in sequence: role, relevance, ownership, proof, stay-or-leave



- Impact hierarchy: business outcomes, behavior change, team impact, then craft



- Read your first two sentences: do they describe what changed?



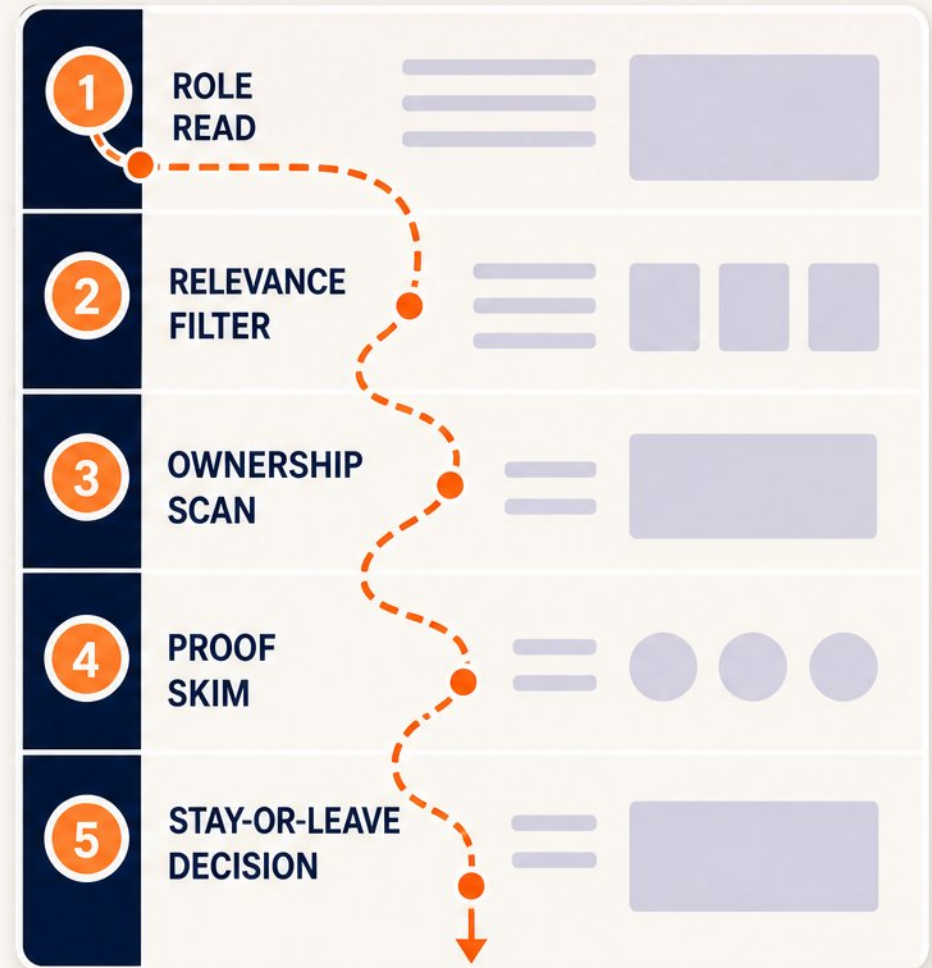
- 2026: AI screening parses text first — keep roles and outcomes selectable



- Homepage must signal level, domain, and collaboration style without a click



- Portfolio, CV, LinkedIn, and applications must stay consistent



Positioning: Choosing a Target Role and a Clear Point of View



- Niche beats generalist: fewer competitors, sharper signal



- Write one role sentence a stranger can repeat in 30 seconds



- Match pitch to level: junior, mid, senior read differently



- The hero section has one job: help people place you



- Career switchers: connect your prior domain to your design shape



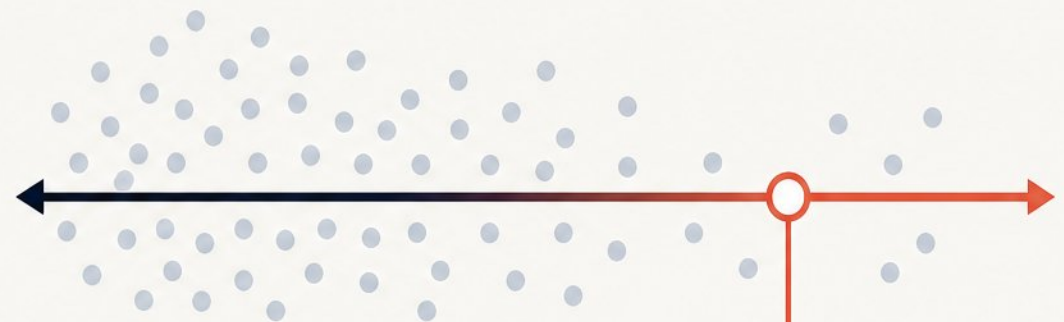
- Vague breadth reads as uncertainty; keep breadth only when quality supports it

GENERALIST

Crowded and easy to blend in

NICHE

Focused and easier to be remembered



I help [target users] achieve [outcome] through [unique approach] as a [target role].

A single positioning sentence cuts through the noise.

Selecting Projects: Range, Depth, and Relevance

KEEP

3–5 Case Studies



Project One

Ownership Project

Lead with your strongest piece.



Project Two

Collaborative Project

Show impact through partnership.



Project Three

Different Surface

Demonstrate range and adaptability.

CUT

Not Making the Cut



Project Four

Stale or Unconstrained



Project Five

Thin or Duplicative



Selection Checklist

- ✓ Sweet spot: 3–5 case studies; juniors 2–3, mid-level 3–4
- ✓ Every project must pass the selection test: fit, clarity, decisions, outcomes
- ✓ Build range: one ownership project, one collaborative, one different surface
- ✓ Lead with your strongest piece; most reviewers never reach case study three
- ✓ Cut the rest: stale student work, unconstrained concepts, thin contributions, duplicates, anything indefensible

Sourcing Projects When Your Professional Work Is Thin

- Self-initiated work, redesigns, bootcamp and volunteer projects all count
- Treat fictional briefs as real: run actual research and usability tests
- Label concept work honestly as self-initiated—never imply it shipped
- Under NDA: sanitize visuals, swap brands, show flows and redacted wireframes
- Keep results in ranges, ask clients about sanitized writeups
- Worst answer is no—and you are no worse off

A SPREAD OF NON-PROFESSIONAL PROJECT SOURCES BY HONESTY LEVEL



Self-Initiated Redesign

You choose the problem.
You drive the work.



Volunteer Work

Real impact, real people.
Designed to help.



Concept Brief (Fictional)

Invented context.
Real process and craft.



Under NDA

Sanitize and protect.
Show the thinking, not the details.

MORE
HONEST

LESS
HONEST

The Case Study Structure Reviewers Can Scan



- Consistent arc: summary, context, role, evidence, decisions, solution, outcome, reflection



- Lead with the outcome in the first paragraph, then tell the story



- Put the snapshot up top: role, team, timeline, status, scope



- Meaningful headings beat generic labels; write a skim layer plus a detail layer



- Outline in plain text first; more mockups won't fix a weak story

1 — SNAPSHOT

2 — OUTCOME

3 — CONTEXT

4 — MY ROLE

5 — EVIDENCE

6 — DECISIONS

7 — THE SOLUTION

8 — REFLECTION

CASE STUDY SNAPSHOT

ROLE

TEAM

TIMELINE

STATUS

SCOPE

THE OUTCOME

THE CONTEXT

MY ROLE

THE EVIDENCE

KEY DECISIONS

THE SOLUTION

REFLECTION & LEARNINGS

Making Decisions and Trade-Offs Visible

- Decisions are the unit of value; reviewers should name one after reading
- Micro-structure: what you decided, alternatives, evidence, trade-off, remaining risk
- Show the messy middle: rejected directions, failed tests, stakeholder pushback
- Include one version that didn't survive, and why you caught it
- Replace 'we' with your slice: 'I owned checkout research and interaction design'



CHOSEN PATH

A focused, progressive checkout flow



EVIDENCE

Research insights, behavior patterns, stakeholder input, and past learnings.



ACCEPTED TRADE-OFF

Fewer fields up front means we'll ask for some details later in the flow.



REMAINING RISK

Some users may drop off before completing later steps.



REJECTED ALTERNATIVE

A single-page checkout with all fields upfront



EVIDENCE

Usability tests showed cognitive overload and confusion on long forms.



ACCEPTED TRADE-OFF

Collecting everything early felt efficient, but increased friction and errors.

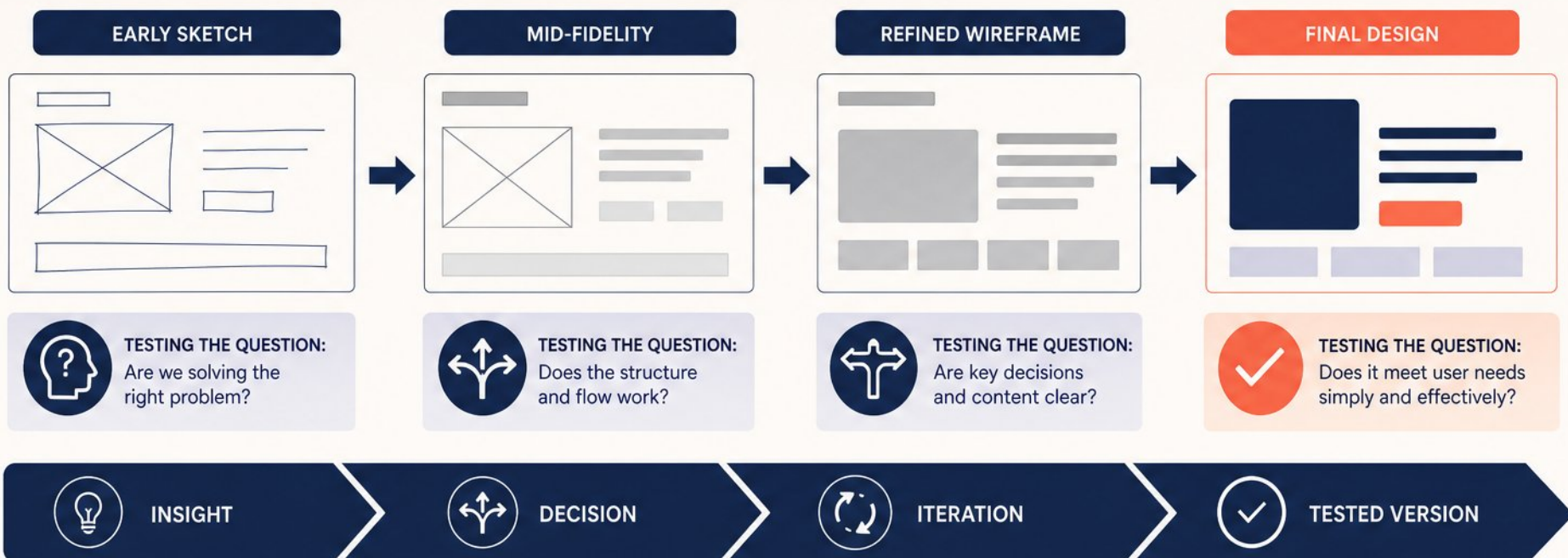


WHY WE CAUGHT IT

Prototypes exposed pain points; feedback confirmed drop-off risk.

Documenting Process, Wireframes, and Iteration Without Process Theater

- Wireframes earn their place: hierarchy, flow, step count, decision points
- Before adding one, write: "The decision here was..."
- Connect wireframes to final design — what carried through, what was cut
- Cut sticky-note walls, unreadable diagrams, method montages, every screen
- Pipeline: insight → decision → iteration → tested version, with captions
- Two or three artifacts that show thinking beat twenty showing activity



Outcomes, Metrics, and Honest Gaps



Conversion



Time saved



Retention



Support load



Qualitative evidence is valid.

No hard data? Use qualitative evidence with sample size stated.



Name gaps openly.

"we didn't measure this; here's what we saw"



- **Non-shipped work counts:** adoption, unblocked decisions, validated next steps



- **Reflection is highest signal:** what you'd change, what stayed open

Visual Presentation: Layout, Typography, and Screenshot Quality



- The portfolio itself is a meta-test; sloppy alignment undermines any case study



- **Typography:** two font families max, 16-18px body, ~65 characters per line



- **Layout:** clear hierarchy, generous whitespace, one grid, restrained color



- **Fewer, better mockups:** real screenshots, 2-4 per project, consistent ratios



- Test dark mode, retina, and responsiveness on real devices



- **Restraint** reads as confidence; heavy gradients and parallax signal compensation



WEAK APPROACH

My Work



I build digital experiences that solve problems.

About Me

I'm a designer with a passion for crafting beautiful and functional products across platforms.



Selected Projects



Project One

A complex solution with many moving parts and custom interactions.



Project Two

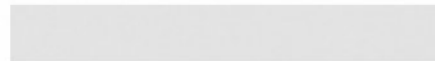


Project Three

Another project with various features.



Project Four



STRONG APPROACH

My Work

I build digital experiences that solve problems.

About Me

I'm a designer focused on crafting clear, usable, and thoughtful experiences across platforms.



Selected Projects



Project One

A complex solution with many moving parts and custom interactions.



Project Two

A focused solution that simplifies a key workflow for users.



Project Three

Designing for clarity and consistency across multiple contexts.



Project Four

Exploring new ideas through research, prototyping, and iteration.

Narrative, Bio, and Calls to Action

- ✓ Project titles carry the problem, not the assignment
- ✓ Rewrite the two template lines everyone notices: headline and About opener
- ✓ About page: one or two paragraphs of personality, then contact
- ✓ Replace 'passionate' and 'pixel-perfect' with specifics and an opinion
- ✓ Align language with target job descriptions for keyword screening
- ✓ Put a selectable email address on every page

BEFORE

Passionate UI Designer

Hi, I'm a UI designer who loves creating beautiful, pixel-perfect experiences.



AFTER

I design clear, human interfaces that help complex ideas click.

I turn vague requirements into simple flows and interfaces people instantly understand. I care about outcomes, not trends—so I challenge assumptions and design with purpose, accessibility, and empathy.



Let's connect: hello@yourname.com

Platform Choice: Personal Site, Builders, and PDFs

Five Publishing Routes Compared

Route	Control	Speed	Motion Capability
Webflow or Semplice: full control, senior-feeling case studies	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Framer for motion; UXfolio or Notion for guided, case-study-first publishing	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Squarespace: polished template live this weekend	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
PDF or deck still works as an interview leave-behind	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●
Dribbble and Behance as distribution, not destinations	● ● ●	● ● ●	● ● ●



Highest-Leverage Step:
Register your own domain—unmemorable URLs lose follow-ups



Register your own domain—unmemorable URLs lose follow-ups



PDF or deck still works as an interview leave-behind



Keep Dribbble and Behance as distribution, not destinations



Load under three seconds: WebP or AVIF images, lazy-load below the fold



Add analytics to see whether visitors open case study one

Publishing, Feedback, and Iteration



CHECKLIST



Two passes: completeness first, then effectiveness across all key pages



Ask specific questions, not "what do you think?"



Outside reviews catch more than self-review ever will



Run the 30-second incognito test: Can you tell the designer's focus?



Ship at 80%; a live portfolio beats "coming soon"



Review and refresh every three months



Common Pitfalls, Standing Out, and Your Four-Week Build Plan



- Fix in order: add outcomes, fix mobile and speed, cut to 3-5 deep projects



- Traps to avoid: process worship, vague pronouns, inflated metrics, hidden contact



- Stand out with deliberate choices, not maximalist ones



- AI fluency is baseline; show reasoning and trade-offs instead

WEEK 1



- Week 1: pick projects, write one-paragraph summaries

WEEK 2



- Week 2: draft case studies, get two readers

WEEK 3



- Week 3: produce and compress four to six screenshots

WEEK 4



- Week 4: build, test on a phone, set a launch date



----- APPLICATION AND ITERATION CONTINUE PAST LAUNCH -----

PersonWise.

PersonWise • AI digital-human course platform



Scan the code or click anywhere to watch this course live, with voice Q&A

personwise.ai/t/ad04a5da/public