



BROWN-RISD MASTER OF ARTS  
IN DESIGN ENGINEERING

# Brown-RISD MADE Portfolio Guidelines

*Last Updated: August 13, 2025*

## Purpose

Your portfolio should engage reviewers and generate excitement about your work. This document outlines what we look for in portfolios, who reviews them, and how the MADE admissions process works.

## Core Principles

1. **Lead with Impact, Not Process.** One of the most common portfolio mistakes is explaining your process before revealing your project concept. This creates unnecessary confusion and loses your audience's attention. **Instead:**
  - Present your finished product or experience first
  - Show what you created and why it matters
  - Then explain how you got there
  - Remember: suspense is not an asset in portfolio composition. Your audience doesn't have time to guess your intentions—it's your responsibility to communicate them clearly.
2. **Know Your Audience.** Throughout your career, you'll present to diverse audiences. For each, consider these key questions:
  - **Problem:** What challenge is your audience trying to solve?
  - **Context:** What environment are they in? What are their logistical constraints (language, file formats, time limitations)?
  - **Experience:** What do they typically see? How do they usually consume information?
  - **Response:** What questions will they ask after reviewing your work?

## MADE-Specific Guidelines

- **Our Review Process.** We review every submitted portfolio and select fewer than 30 applicants annually. Our goal is building the strongest possible cohort—a diverse group

of energetic, empathetic, and talented collaborators who will support and challenge each other.

- **How We Evaluate Portfolios.** Our priority order is roughly: 1. Project ideas (finished products or experiences that excite us), 2. Process management (how you executed your vision), 3. Impact narrative (why you chose to work on this and what impact it had for you and others). Your projects and process reveal more about you as a thinker and collaborator than personal statements alone.
- **Show the Project Journey** We're just as interested in your process as your output. To help us understand the full journey of your projects, please embed the following information within your portfolio for each project.
  - Problem: What was the problem the project was addressing or solving and why does it matter?
  - Audience: What was the target audience for the project and how does the project help them?
  - Duration: What was the duration of the project?
  - Functionality: Is the output presented in the portfolio fully functional? Clearly state if the materials presented are renderings, mockups, or "looks-like" prototypes.
  - Collaboration: Was this project independent or collaborative? If you worked with others on the project, clearly state your role, and list collaborators or supervisors and their role on the project.
  - Tools: What tools and software did you use to create this project and how?
  - Realized Impact: What was the realized impact of the project? e.g., press, awards, patents, user reviews
  - Reflection: Briefly reflect on the project's outcomes, including whether everything went as planned, any technical or other challenges you faced, how you addressed them, and what you would do differently or improve if you tackled this project again.

## Your MADE Audience

Our review panel includes faculty, program directors, staff, and sometimes alumni. Here's how we'd suggest thinking about your portfolio audience:

- **What problem are we solving?** We're building a community that will enrich our program and support each other's success. We want students who create projects that engage, challenge, and improve our shared world.
- **What's our context?** We review many portfolios with limited time per submission. We value: Compelling storytelling through images and text, concise, focused presentations, respecting the portfolio instructions (page limits, etc), thoughtful use of video (when appropriate, but keep it brief)
- **What do we like to see?** We're real people with diverse backgrounds and interests. Research us online, understand our program's unique position among similar programs, and show us why MADE specifically appeals to you.

- **What questions do we ask?**
  - Does your work align with MADE's mission?
  - Does your academic journey make sense?
  - Have you thoughtfully considered why you want to join MADE?
  - Will you succeed in our program?
  - Will you contribute positively to our community culture?
  - What makes you memorable?

## Portfolio Structure

Template Overview: 10 Pages Total

- Showcase your range of skills and understanding
- Present your strongest work upfront
- Demonstrate breadth across different approaches
- Provide deeper insight into your featured projects
- Show your process and problem-solving approach
- You don't need to use identical research methods across all projects

Supporting Materials

## Personal Website

- Should complement, not replace, your portfolio
- Designed for a broader audience than your portfolio
- Make it easy for visitors to find specific types of work they're interested in

## What The Admissions Committee Will NOT Do

- **Review physical materials** sent by mail or dropped off in person
- **Read unsolicited emails** or statements sent directly to us
- **Return physical portfolios** or other materials you send
- **Accept additional materials** after the deadline, regardless of circumstances
- **Discuss financial matters** during the review process
- **Consider personal connections** unless they're directly relevant to your work

Questions?

For questions about the application process, contact the MADE Program Coordinator. We're here to help you put your best work forward.

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*Ready to apply? Remember: show us what you've created, why it matters, and how you made it happen. We're excited to see your work.*