

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Proof of Process

*A polished portfolio piece no longer proves you're good.
Showing your decisions does.*

INTRODUCTION

Polish Stopped Being Proof

A portfolio used to do one job: prove you could produce something that looked this good. That's no longer rare. AI can generate a polished draft of a website, a deck, a case study writeup, in minutes, which means a finished, good-looking piece no longer tells a client anything about whether the person who made it actually knows what they're doing.

What's left as a genuine signal is the part AI can't fake: the decisions behind the piece, what options you considered, what you rejected and why, what tradeoff you made on purpose. That's what "proof of process" means, a portfolio that shows the thinking, not just the output, because the thinking is the part a client is actually hiring.

SECTION 1

Why the Old Portfolio Stopped Working

WHAT CHANGED

A prospective client scrolling through portfolios can no longer tell, from the finished piece alone, whether it took you 3 hours with a tool doing most of the work, or 30 hours of deliberate craft. Both can look identical on a screen. The output stopped being a reliable signal of skill.

WHAT DIDN'T

Judgment is still yours. Knowing which of 3 directions actually solves the client's real problem, catching the thing that looks fine but won't work in practice, that reasoning can't be generated after the fact. It has to be shown, deliberately, alongside the work.

SECTION 2

Building a Process Portfolio

You don't need to rebuild your whole portfolio. You need to add the layer that's currently missing: the decisions behind 2 or 3 of your strongest pieces, documented well enough that a client can see you thinking, not just see the result.

WHAT TO ADD TO AN EXISTING CASE STUDY

The options you considered. Show 2-3 directions you could have taken, even briefly, before landing on the one you shipped. A single finished piece looks like there was only ever one answer. There wasn't, and showing that is the point.

Why you rejected the others. One sentence per rejected option is enough: "this version tested well on desktop but broke the mobile flow" tells a client more about your judgment than the final polished screen ever could.

One thing that didn't work at first. A revision, a piece of client feedback that changed your approach, a version 1 that missed the brief. This is the least comfortable thing to include, and the most convincing, because it's the hardest thing to fabricate.

The result, tied to the decision that caused it. Not just "conversions went up 20%," but which specific decision you're crediting for that lift, so the result reads as earned, not coincidental.

PROMPT • TURN A FINISHED PIECE INTO A PROCESS CASE STUDY

Here's a project I completed: [describe the piece and outcome]. Help me reconstruct the decision points, what alternatives I likely considered, what tradeoffs I made, and where feedback changed the direction, based on what I remember about how it actually went. Then help me write a short "behind the decision" section I can add next to the finished piece.

Be honest with what you actually remember rather than inventing a cleaner story, a slightly messy, real decision trail reads as far more credible than a suspiciously tidy one.

*Anyone can now produce something that looks finished.
Almost no one shows the decisions that got them there.
That gap is where trust lives now, and it's yours to fill.*

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