

5th Year Check List - Launch

For students following a Five-Year Undergraduate Pathway.

Welcome to your 5th year at RISD! This is a pivotal time as you focus on finishing strong academically, refining your portfolio, and making the transition from student to professional. Whether your next step is a full-time job, studio practice, freelance work, a design role, an artist residency, graduate school, or another creative opportunity, this guide will help you move intentionally toward your goals and confidently launch the next stage of your career.

Fall: Clarify and Position

- ☐ **Clarify Your Professional and/or Creative Identity**
Be able to clearly articulate what you do, what kinds of roles or opportunities you're pursuing, and what makes your work distinct. Refine your [Artist Statement](#), professional bio, or [LinkedIn](#) profile so they align with your goals.
- ☐ **Create a Target Opportunity List**
Develop a focused list of 10–20 companies, studios, organizations, residencies, or graduate programs that align with your interests. Research them thoroughly and track application deadlines.
- ☐ **Assess Industry Expectations**
Research required skills, salary ranges, geographic trends, and hiring timelines in your field. Compare your current portfolio and experience to posted job descriptions to identify any gaps you can address this year. Use our [Resources by Major](#) page for directories and industry sites.
- ☐ **Refine and Tailor Your Portfolio**
Transition from a broad academic portfolio to a focused, professionally positioned body of work. Tailor it toward 1–2 clear career directions. Curate your strongest work and remove pieces that no longer represent your skills or interests. Make sure your website or PDF is polished, easy to navigate, and professional.
- ☐ **Strengthen Professional References**
Identify 2–3 faculty members, supervisors, or collaborators who can speak specifically about your strengths. Maintain those relationships and prepare them in advance for potential requests and recommendations.
- ☐ **Meet with a Career Advisor**
Schedule check-ins with the Career Center via [ArtWorks](#) to fine-tune your portfolio, website, and career materials before graduation. Use these meetings to get targeted feedback on your applications, discuss post-graduation

opportunities—whether that’s jobs, grants, residencies, freelance work, or grad school—and make sure you’re taking the right steps toward your goals.

☐ **Attend Career Center Programs & Events**

Take advantage of career workshops, panels, and networking [events](#)—especially those connected to your creative field. These gatherings can give you valuable insight into how artists and designers navigate the professional world, from industry expectations to building sustainable careers.

☐ **Take Part in the Art of Business Series**

Business skills can benefit every aspect of your creative professional goals – freelancing, studio practice, and full-time and part-time work. Gain knowledge from [Art of Business](#) guest speakers that can help you succeed and prepare you for what lies ahead in your professional life – finances, legal issues, pricing, marketing, and building your freelancing or business.

☐ **Consider Doing an Internship**

Fall is the time to search for an internship during Wintersession or Spring and to register the internship in ArtWorks. Wintersession is an optional opportunity to gain hands-on experience through a short-term [internship](#) or course related to your interests. If you decide to participate, it can provide you with portfolio-worthy work and help expand your network. If you’re an international student, it’s important to meet with [ISSA](#) and to confirm the requirements for [CPT – Curricular Practical Training](#) – if you plan on doing an internship in the U.S.

☐ **For Architecture Students: Review Departmental Professional Requirements**

If you are in a program with specific professional milestones — such as Architecture — review your department’s internship expectations, licensure preparation steps, or other graduation requirements. Confirm timelines with your department and ensure your job search and internship plans align with these benchmarks. The Career Center can help you strategize how to meet both departmental and professional goals.

Winter: Apply with Intention

☐ **Conduct Informational Interviews**

Wintersession is a perfect time to [network](#). Try to reach out to 3–5 alumni or professionals each week in your field on [LinkedIn](#). Ask them about their creative interests, career paths, day-to-day work, and potential opportunities in their fields. Don’t worry about their level or status; [LinkedIn](#) is all about making connections.

☐ **Begin Finalizing Your Portfolio for Spring Applications**

Use Wintersession to complete, refine, and polish your portfolio so it is ready for spring applications. Edit projects carefully, strengthen written descriptions, clarify your process, and ensure your website or PDF is cohesive and professional. Tailor your portfolio toward the types of roles, firms, residencies, or programs you plan to apply to in the spring. Schedule a portfolio review with a Career Advisor for targeted feedback before submitting applications.

☐ **Prepare for Interviews**

Use this time to practice for [interviews](#). Schedule a mock interview with a Career Center advisor, and use their feedback to refine your approach. Rehearse talking about your work—your influences, materials, and process—so you can confidently communicate your ideas in interviews, critiques, or studio visits.

☐ **Research Opportunities**

Look for open calls, exhibitions, jobs, and more that fit your creative goals. Many organizations and employers have deadlines months ahead, so start early. Use the connections you've built through classes, internships, and RISD events to learn about opportunities and get referrals. Keep your portfolio updated and customize each application to highlight how your work aligns with what they're looking for.

☐ **Engage in an Internship or Course**

Participate in an [internship](#) during Wintersession or experience a course during this time period within or outside your field. If you decide to participate, it can provide you with portfolio-worthy work and help expand your network.

☐ **Finalize Graduate School Applications (if applicable)**

If pursuing further education, ensure your materials are cohesive, thoughtful, and submitted on time.

Spring: Secure & Transition

☐ **Continue to Apply to Opportunities**

This is the time to ramp up your opportunity search. Use [ArtWorks](#), [job boards](#), and [networks](#) to find opportunities. Apply to opportunities that align with your interests and goals. Customize your resume and cover letter for each role and ensure your portfolio is up to date. If you're an international student, it's important to meet with [ISSA](#) and to confirm the requirements for [OPT - Curricular Practical Training](#) - if you plan on working in the U.S.

☐ **Follow Up on Applications and Opportunities**

Maintain communication with employers, residency programs, or collaborators. Express continued interest where appropriate.

☐ **Use CreativeStudy Tutorials for Finance, Business, Legal, Freelancing Help**

[CreativeStudy](#) can provide you with key personal business and finance knowledge that can be vital to your creative practice.

☐ **Attend the Design or Fine Arts Portfolio Reviews**

This is the perfect time to attend these major events to gain professional feedback on your portfolio as you prepare for internships, jobs, freelance and more related to your fields of interest and industries. Find lots of helpful information about the [Design and Fine Arts Portfolio Reviews](#) through their websites.

☐ **Evaluate Offers Thoughtfully**

Consider salary, growth potential, mentorship opportunities, location, financial sustainability, and alignment with your long-term goals.

☐ **Learn to Evaluate and Negotiate Offers**

Understanding contracts, compensation, freelance pricing, and benefits is an important part of beginning your professional career. Attend the [Art of Business](#) series or meet with a Career Advisor to discuss negotiation strategies and evaluating offers.

☐ **For Architecture Students: Confirm Completion of Professional Milestones**

Ensure you are meeting any required internship documentation, professional practice coursework, or licensure preparation steps outlined by your department. Staying organized now can prevent delays after graduation.

Post-Graduation: Keep Building & Growing

☐ **Keep Networking After Graduation**

As you transition into the workforce or grad school, continue to reach out to alumni, employers, and colleagues you've met during your RISD years. Attend [alumni events](#), maintain relationships via [LinkedIn](#), and continue networking within your creative community.

☐ **Continue to Grow Your Portfolio**

Even after graduation, your portfolio should grow with you. Keep adding new work, projects, and experiences to show your evolving artistic practice and professional skills.

☐ **Follow Up on Job Applications and Offers**

If you've applied for jobs but haven't heard back, follow up with the hiring managers. If you've received offers, take time to consider them carefully. Assess your salary, the culture of the organization, and how the position aligns with your career goals. You can also book an [appointment](#) with a Career Advisor for guidance on follow up and salary negotiation.

☐ **Stay Organized and Set Goals for Your Career**

Establish a plan for the first few months after graduation. Whether it's finding

full-time work, applying for residencies, or expanding your practice, staying organized and setting clear goals is key.

☐ **Meet with a Career Advisor**

The [RISD Career Center](#) is here to support you through your final year and beyond! As alumni, you can always book [career advising appointments](#) with us for any stage in your career. We're excited to help you take the next step in your career, whether that's through employment, freelance work, grad school, or entrepreneurial pursuits. Reach out to us at any time to ensure your transition into the professional world is as successful as possible.