

4th Year Check List - Launch

Welcome to your 4th 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, or graduate school, this guide will help you move intentionally toward your goals.

Fall: Focus on Preparing for Life After Graduation

Clarify Your Goals

Identify what you want to accomplish in your final year—this might mean securing a full-time job, creating a cohesive body of work for your professional portfolio, applying to grants and residencies, submitting grad school applications, or laying the groundwork for freelance and client work. Break these into defined steps and set target dates.

Search for Opportunities in ArtWorks

Use [ArtWorks](#) to search for jobs, internships, freelance, and artist opportunities. Explore the job board regularly and set up email alerts to learn of opportunities that match your interests. Also tap the Employer Directory with a listing of hundreds of companies and organizations that have posted opportunities to RISD. Set up a career advising appointment if you need help with any of these resources.

Research Grant & Residency Opportunities

Many grant and residency applications have deadlines starting in the winter and spring and even sometimes in the fall. Researching them now can help you prepare in time for their deadlines and to make effective applications. You can find extensive information and listings at our [Residency](#) and [Grant](#) pages on the Careers site.

Refine Your Portfolio and Website

Curate your strongest, most representative work, including your thesis or capstone projects. Update your [artist statement](#) if you're a fine artist and make sure your [portfolio](#) is well organized, succinct, professional, and easy to navigate for employers, curators, collaborators, or clients.

Meet with a Career Center 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.

Consider Professional Practice Classes

Seek out Professional Practices classes that may be available in your department for this year. They can provide you with excellent preparation for your field and life after RISD.

Expand Your Network

Grow your network through visiting artist/designer talks, [Career Center events](#), and RISD networking gatherings. Reach out to alumni in your field for insight into their career paths. Use platforms like ArtWorks, [LinkedIn](#), the [Alumni Directory](#), or Instagram to connect with peers and professionals. [Networking](#) is a critical part of your long term professional goals and builds and builds over time.

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 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.

Apply for Graduate Schools (if applicable)

If you're planning to pursue [graduate studies](#), fall is the time to start finalizing your materials, confirming your recommendation letters, and ensuring deadlines are met.

Winter: Take Time to Experiment, Expand, and Plan

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.

Continue to Build Your Portfolio or Website

Wintersession is a great time to catch up on any [portfolio](#) work you'd like to showcase. This could include new projects, personal work, or collaborations that highlight your growth.

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.

Refine Your Networking Skills

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.

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.

Spring: Make the Transition

Apply to Opportunities

This is the time to ramp up your job search. Use [ArtWorks](#), [job boards](#), and [networks](#) to find opportunities. Apply to full-time positions 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 - Optional Practical Training](#) - if you plan on working in the U.S. after graduation.

Prepare for Post-Graduation Work and Projects

If you plan to work independently or [freelance](#), start building a schedule for your first few months post-graduation. Organize your freelance or studio work into manageable tasks and set your rates, contracts, and systems in place.

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.

Schedule Final Portfolio Review

Meet with a faculty member, mentor, Career Center advisor, and attend the [Design or Fine Art Portfolio Review](#) to gain feedback on your portfolio before you graduate. Make sure it's professional, polished, and ready to present to potential employers or opportunities.

Practice Interviewing and Finalize Your Job Search

If you have interviews lined up, practice with the Career Center. Rehearse responses to questions about your work, goals, and the creative process. You'll want to be confident when discussing your portfolio and career aspirations.

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.