



# Guidance for Using Student Portfolios in Educator Evaluation

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND  
SECONDARY EDUCATION



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# OVERVIEW

## Why Use Portfolio Assessments?

Research shows that students at all levels see assessment as something that is done to them by someone else—**out of their control or circle of influence**<sup>1</sup>. Most often, they do not acknowledge knowing any evaluation criteria beyond the letter grade or percent correct recorded on their work. Portfolios can bridge this gap by providing a structure for involving students in developing and understanding criteria for good work and through the use of critical thinking and self-reflection, enable students to apply these criteria to their own work efforts and that of other students'. Through the use of Portfolios, students are regularly asked to examine how they succeeded or failed or improved on a task or set goals for future work. No longer is the learning just about the final product, evaluation or grade but becomes more focused on students developing metacognitive skills that will enable them to reflect upon and make adjustments in their learning in school and beyond.



Research has found that students in classes that emphasize improvement, progress, effort and the process of learning rather than grades and normative performance, are more likely to use a variety of learning strategies and have a more positive attitude toward learning.



## What is a Student Portfolio?

A portfolio is best described as a *purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in a content area.*ii “Purposeful” describes the way that student work is selected and is indicative of the story you want the portfolio to tell.

A portfolio can serve many purposes: It can highlight or celebrate the progress a student has made; it can capture the process of learning and growth; it can help place students academically; or, it can even simply showcase the final products or best work of a student. Ultimately, a portfolio is not just the pile of student work that accumulates over a quarter, semester or year. Instead, it is a very intentional process: both teacher and student must be clear about the story the portfolio will be telling, and both must believe that the selection of and reflection upon their work serves one or more meaningful purposes.

Although approaches to portfolio development may vary, in an effective portfolio the student must be an active participant involved in constructing the story of his or her journey academically through the portfolio process of selecting, organizing and reflecting. **Effective portfolios** have the following characteristics in common:

- They clearly reflect Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) identified in the core or essential curriculum
- They focus upon a student’s performance-based learning experiences; knowledge and skill acquisition; collaboration and attitude
- They contain work samples that stretch over a designated period of time and represent a variety of assessment tools; and
- They contain student self-assessments and reflections of work samples



### **Students are crucial instructional decision makers.**

We must build classroom environments in which students use assessments to understand what success looks like and how to do better the next time. In effect, we must help students use ongoing classroom assessment to take responsibility for their own academic success.

-Rick Stiggins, (2005)

### *I like the idea of portfolio assessment but isn't it a lot more work?*

It is hard work, but your efforts will be well rewarded by your students' increased motivation, involvement in their own learning, and by improved achievement. The challenge of portfolio assessment lies in the organization of the whole endeavor. Effective portfolio assessment requires planning in advance and keeping records. These will quickly become a habit and result in more efficient, professional work.

# CREATING AND USING PORTFOLIOS

## How do you Create a Portfolio?

The task of designing the portfolio assignment may be approached by thinking of it as a series of questions to be answered.

1. **Why** is the portfolio being created? (**purpose**)
2. **Who** is the **audience(s)** for the portfolio?
3. **What** samples of **student work** will be included? (**content**)
4. **What** **processes** will be engaged in during the development of the portfolio?
5. **How** will **time and materials** be managed in the development of the portfolio?
6. **How** and **when** will the portfolio be **shared** with pertinent audiences?
7. **How** will the portfolio be used for **evaluation** ?

### 1. Why is the portfolio being created?

Before beginning a portfolio process, it is essential that there is shared understanding about its purpose. The purpose and student learning object(s) will determine the type of portfolio and the artifacts you want students to include as well as the criteria on which those artifacts will be assessed. Without purpose, a portfolio is just a folder of student work. Portfolios can reflect a single learning objective, a series of learning objectives, or all learning objectives in a given subject. They can also cross subject areas. If the portfolio is to be used to document student growth, a complete picture or record of where the student was at the beginning of the designated period of learning (time interval), including activities, drafts, revisions, projects, presentations, quizzes, assessments, etc., should be included. This allows for a clear picture of student growth toward the attainment of the Student Learning Objective(s) (SLOs).

The Portfolio process should be continuous, capture a rich array of what students know and can do, involve realistic and relevant contexts, communicate to students and others what is valued, portray the processes by which work is accomplished, and be integrated with instruction. Portfolios typically are created for one of the following purposes: a) to show growth, b) to evaluate cumulative achievement, and c) to showcase current abilities. Since the purpose of the Showcase Portfolio is not typically on student growth, but more on displaying a student's best efforts, this document will focus its attention on the growth and evaluation portfolios.

*I see that the assessment process also includes students' evaluation of themselves and each other. How reliable are my students' evaluations?*

With individual guidance, time, practice, and especially given clear assessment criteria, students will learn to become better evaluators and will benefit from the process--deepening their understanding of their own learning.

a) **Growth Portfolios** – Collection of artifacts that demonstrates growth in particular skills over time. Appropriate when your purpose is:

1. to show growth or change over time
2. to help develop process skills



3. to identify strengths and weaknesses

4. to track development of one or more products or performances

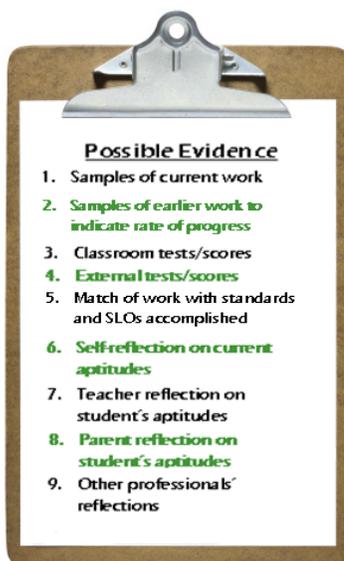


**b) Evaluation Portfolios** – Collection of teacher-directed student artifacts that respond to specific criteria determined by the teacher. Appropriate when your purpose is:

1. To show process and product of work
2. To evaluate and report on student progress



3. To show student achievement with respect to specific curricular goals



“Becoming reflective learners, developing an internal feedback loop, learning to set goals, and noticing new competencies and new challenges are all habits of thought we can cultivate in students through the use of portfolios.”

—RJ Stiggins, JA Arter, J Chappuis, and S Chappius, (2004)

## 2. Who is the audience(s) for the portfolio?

Selecting relevant audiences for a portfolio goes hand-in-hand with identifying your purposes. Who should see the evidence of a student's growth? The student, teacher and parents are good audiences to follow the story of a student's progress on a certain project or in the development of certain skills or knowledge. Who should see a student's best or final work? Again, the student, teacher and parents might be good audiences for such a collection, but other natural audiences might be the class, schoolmates, school faculty, external audiences such as employers or colleges, the local community at large or school board. Just as the purpose for the portfolio should guide the development of it, the selection of audience should help shape its construction. .

## 3. What samples of student work will be included?

The decision as to what content to include in the portfolio should be dependent on the purpose and audience for the portfolio. Since knowledge, reasoning, skill, product and disposition could be the focus of evidence gathering for portfolios; all forms of assessment can be included as evidence: pre-tests, tests and quizzes, extended-response assessments, performance assessments, documentation of the results of personal communication, student work samples, reflections, video, audio, graphs, photos, etc.



However, regardless of the assessments used, perhaps the most important concept to remember is that portfolios used to show student performance growth over a specified period of time must include initial examples of student work to document baseline data, formative examples after teacher instruction, and a culminating performance piece to document growth.

## 4. What processes will be engaged in during the development of the portfolio?

One of the greatest attributes of the portfolio is its potential for focusing on the processes of learning. Although a variety of processes can be developed or explored through portfolios, three of the most common are:

- Selection of contents of the portfolio
- Reflection on the samples of work and processes
- Conferencing about the contents and processes

**Selection:** As students make work selections and create their portfolios, they are actively involved in —and reflecting on— their own learning. Increased metacognition has a positive impact on a student's self-confidence, facilitates student use of learning strategies, and increases the student's ability to assess and revise work. To satisfy a purpose, there needs to

be a rationale for the selection of the items to be included; this requires an analysis of the work and what it demonstrates. *Work sample annotations* are comments by students or teachers about each piece of evidence selected for the portfolio.

**Reflection:** Another essential element of the portfolio process is the student reflection on his or her learning and progression towards the mastery of the material documented in the portfolio. Students are missing a vital benefit of the portfolio process if they are not required to reflect upon the quality and growth of their work. Student identification of and reflection upon strengths and weaknesses, examples of progress, and strategies for improvement will be more meaningful and purposeful if goal-setting is part of the process. The reflection phase holds the most promise for promoting student growth and moving learning to Level 4 on Depth of Knowledge (DOK).

As a skill, reflection is not something that can be mastered in one or two attempts. If students haven't done reflective thinking before—not the fill-in-the-blank thinking, but open-ended, deep thinking about his or herself as a learner—be prepared to spend time helping them learn how to do it through instruction, modeling, lots of practice and feedback..

**Conferencing:** Conferencing on student work and processes can provide valuable information about the student's thinking and progress and provide the student with meaningful feedback. The teacher could meet with individual students or with small groups of students in high functioning classrooms. Another beneficial means of conferencing can be peer-to-peer conferencing, which gives students the opportunity to learn how to provide feedback as well as receiving it. However, it is important to note that peer conferences should never replace student-teacher conferences.

## **5. How will time and materials be managed in the development of the portfolio?**

The physical and time constraints of developing a portfolio can be daunting. Where do you keep the stuff? How do you keep track of it? Who gets access to it and when? Should you manage paper or create electronic portfolios? How you answer the many management questions, in part, depends on how you answer the questions about purpose, audience, content and process. As a general rule, it is good practice to develop a management system and schedule before initiating the portfolio process.

## **6. How and when will the portfolio be shared with pertinent audiences?**

Portfolios are meant to be shared. The samples, reflections and other content invite others to observe and celebrate students' growth and accomplishments. Students should be the ones telling their stories. In doing so, they take ownership and are active participants in the process that led to their growth and achievement. Of course, deciding how to tell the story will be influenced by the intended audience.

## 7. How will the portfolio be used for student evaluation?

If the purpose of evaluation is to demonstrate growth, the teacher may want to make judgments about the evidence of progress periodically and provide feedback to students or make note of them for his or her own records. The student could also self-assess progress shown or not shown, goals met or not met. On a larger scale, an evaluation of the contents within the portfolio may be conducted by the teacher, by peers, or external evaluators for the purpose of judging completion of SLOs, standards, or other requirements. Regardless of the purpose, however, the criteria must be fully and carefully defined and transparent to all. This is usually best done through the use of a rubric. Giving students a voice in defining success criteria gives them ownership in the process.

|  | 1 - Beginner   | 2 - Developing   | 3 - Accomplished   | 4 - Advanced  | Comments |
|--|--|--|--|---|----------|
| Topic selection<br><input type="checkbox"/>                            | Identifies a topic that is too general and unwieldy as to be manageable and doable.        | Identifies a topic that while manageable/ doable, is too narrowly focused and leaves out relevant aspects of the topic.  | Identifies a focused and manageable/ doable topic that appropriately addresses relevant aspects of the topic.  | Identifies a creative, focused, and manageable topic that addresses potentially significant yet previously overlooked aspects of the topic. |          |
| Existing Knowledge, Research, and/or Views<br><input type="checkbox"/> | Presents information from relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches. | Presents information from relevant sources representing limited points of view/approaches.                               | Presents in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.  | Synthesizes in-depth information from relevant sources representing various points of view/approaches.                                      |          |
| Analysis<br><input type="checkbox"/>                                   | Lists evidence, but it is not organized and/or is unrelated to focus.                      | Organizes evidence, but the organization is not effective in revealing important patterns, differences, or similarities. | Organizes evidence to reveal important patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.  | Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns, differences, or similarities related to focus.                            |          |
| Conclusions<br><input type="checkbox"/>                                | States an ambiguous, illogical, or uninterpretable conclusion from inquiry findings.       | States a general conclusion that, because it is so general, also applies beyond the scope of the inquiry findings.       | States a conclusion focused solely on the inquiry findings. The conclusion arises specifically from and research specifically to the inquiry findings. | States a conclusion that is a logical extrapolation from the inquiry findings.  |          |

There are three possible levels of assessments within the portfolio evaluation process:

- the **work samples** selected
- **student reflections** on the work samples
- **the portfolio** itself

Again, it is essential to have clearly articulated the criteria at each of these levels

### Work Samples

It is important to establish criteria that would commonly be used to define quality performances within a content or skill area. Each of these criteria should be clearly outlined and explained to students so they understand the component parts that indicate mastery. In order to ensure that the portfolio assessment process does not become overwhelming, it is important to assess the individual samples prior to their inclusion in the portfolio. Each work sample included in the portfolio may be assessed using similar types of performance-based assessment tools--checklists, rating scales, or rubrics.

### Student Self-Reflection

The set of criteria on which student reflections will be assessed should support students as they reflect on both the processes and products of their learning. Criteria might include:

- thoroughness of analysis-inclusion of details and evidence
- honesty of assessment
- self-understanding/revelation
- evaluation of personal goals
- statement of future goals
- personal voice
- quality of writing

Each reflection piece included in the portfolio may be assessed using similar types of performance-based assessment tools—checklists, rating scales, or rubrics.

## The Portfolio Itself

The portfolio should reflect those elements that you have determined are critical to the development of the portfolio. You and your students might consider criteria such as:

- Organization
- Neatness
- Visual appeal
- Evidence of growth
- Variety of artifacts
- Evidence of positive attitude to learning
- Balance of process and product
- Risk taking
- Achievement of specific curricular objectives
- Inclusion of all required elements (completeness)

There are many ways to evaluate the portfolio as a whole. Some portfolios are graded simply on whether or not the portfolio is completed as required. In using portfolios to show student growth, teachers may feel that it is appropriate to assign a value to the end product that reflects progress toward or attainment of SLOs.



## PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL FOR TEACHER EVALUATION

### How is portfolio assessment connected to teacher evaluation?

A portfolio based system is one plausible way to assess teacher performance through evidence of student growth. Portfolio assessment has the potential to improve the complex task of student assessment making it possible to document the unfolding process of teaching and learning over time. A successful portfolio assessment that provides evidence of student growth for the purposes of teacher evaluation—

- Includes clearly defined **student learning objectives**
- Begins with a pre-assessment to gauge student learning
- Is ongoing rather than representative of a single point in time
- Allows a window into process as well as products
- Provides opportunities for students to revisit and revise, guided by evaluation criteria
- Allows for diverse means of demonstrating competency
- Serves as a demonstration of student strengths
- Includes student reflection, decision-making and goal setting
- Provides tangible evidence of student's knowledge, skill, abilities and growth
- Involves student choice
- Includes student evaluation and progress monitoring
- Provides a means for managing and evaluating multiple assessments for each student (variety- pre/post, formative, audio, video, essays, letters, journals, self-assessments, reflections, drawings, graphs, etc.)
- Includes an audience
- Allows students the opportunity to communicate, present and discuss their learning with teachers, parents, community and/or experts

The portfolio must be more than just a collection of test results, essays, homework, graphs of student performance, or the products of student activities. It must be systematic, organized evidence of both student learning and the teacher's role in that learning.

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<sup>i</sup>Education Consumer Guide 1993

<sup>ii</sup>Judith Arter and Vicki Spandel (1992)