

Using Portfolios in Assessment

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A portfolio is a helpful item in charting a student’s progress or learning, collecting data for later analysis, and demonstrating to others (and the student) their accomplishments during a period of time. It assembles in one location the student’s materials for more efficient and holistic review.

A portfolio can include:

- Logs
- Journals
- Videos
- Cassettes
- Pictures
- Projects
- Performances
- Assignments

These may or may not mean much individually, but together they complete a learning picture.

Why should we use Portfolios?

- Tools for discussion with peers, teachers, and parents
- Opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills and understanding
- Opportunities for students to reflect on their work
- Chances to set future goals
- Documentation of students’ development and growth in ability, attitudes, and expression
- Demonstrations of different learning styles, multiple intelligences, cultural diversity
- Chances for students to make critical choices about what they select for their portfolio
- Opportunities for students to trace the development of their learning
- Opportunities for students to make connections between prior knowledge and new learning

How should we use Portfolios?

“Portfolios allow students to assume ownership in ways that few other instructional approaches allow. Portfolio assessment requires students to collect and reflect on examples of their work. . . . If carefully assembled, portfolios become an intersection of instruction and assessment: they are not just instruction or just assessment but, rather, both. Together, instruction and assessment give more than either gives separately” (Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer, 1991, p. 61).

Questions to ask before beginning a Portfolio System

1. How will it be used?
 - Period of time
 - Everything or part saved and passed on?
 - Sent home to parents?
 - Reflective piece for students?
 - Part of a grade?
2. How should the pieces in the portfolio be selected?
 - “Still in process” or completed pieces?
 - “Best” work or “Typical” work?

- Teacher or student or both selects pieces?
 - Comments from teacher, peers be included?
3. What specific pieces should be included?
- Homework
 - Class quizzes and tests
 - Peer edited assignments
 - Group work
 - Logs, journals
 - Projects
 - Written work
 - Rough drafts
 - Cassettes, videos, CD's
 - Graphic organizers
 - Self-assessments
 - Goals
 - Pictures
 - Experiments
 - Samples of artwork, etc.
4. What are the evaluation options?
- A tool that is not graded
 - One grade on the entire portfolio
 - Each piece graded separately
 - Pieces (all or some) passed on to the next teacher
 - Used in interview process
5. How can the portfolio be organized?
- Creative cover
 - Table of contents
 - Contents arranged per table of contents
 - Written comment about each piece or items – why selected
 - Self-assessment of portfolio
 - Letter from teacher or parents with feedback, comments
6. What are the options for conducting portfolio conferences?
- Student-teacher
 - Student-student
 - Cross-age
 - Student-parent
 - Student-parent-teacher
 - Exhibition

