

LTSN Generic Centre

Continuing Professional

Development Series No

3



Supporting Portfolio Development

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Continuing Professional Development Series

Welcome to the LTSN Generic Centre's Continuing Professional Development Series.

Continuing	because learning never ceases, regardless of age or seniority
Professional	because it is focused on personal competence in a professional role
Development	because its goal is to improve personal performance and enhance career progression

(Institute of Personnel and Development, 1997)

The Dearing Report stated that only with a strong investment in CPD can effective learning, teaching and assessment truly be developed. This series builds on that recommendation.

Action Learning

Mentoring

Supporting Portfolio Development

Supporting the First Year Experience

Supporting Student Retention

Critical Encounters: Scholarly Approaches to Learning and Teaching

This series is based on practical case studies taken from and easily applicable to, a range of contexts in higher education. The guides will be of use to colleagues involved in learning and teaching in higher education especially to staff and educational developers, and leaders of programmes that support new staff. The varied nature of the topics addressed enables the series to cater for a variety of needs.

Applications include

- mechanisms for supporting new and existing members of staff
- discussion foci for use within departments, schools and faculties
- strategies for tackling student retention
- models of developing the curriculum to widen access
- approaches to enhance the scholarship of learning and teaching.

The series editors are grateful to colleagues in LTSN Subject Centres and other senior colleagues who refereed this series, and of course to the authors for enabling its publication.

We hope that you will find these guides interesting and thought provoking. We welcome your feedback and any suggestions you may have for future work in this area.

Professor Brenda Smith
Head, LTSN Generic Centre

Contents

Summary 3	Portfolio contents 11
Introduction – portfolios and their uses 3	Introduction 11
Uses for and forms of portfolios 3	Contents of a portfolio 11
The portfolio as repository 3	Evidence 13
The portfolio for development 4	Annotation 13
The portfolio for assessment 5	Critical reflection 13
The portfolio for presentation 6	Structure 14
Portfolios for courses on teaching in higher education 6	Indexing 15
Other typologies of portfolios 6	Mapping and claim 15
Benefits of portfolios 7	Questions about portfolios 16
Technology and portfolios 9	Supporting portfolio development 19
Portfolios and plagiarism 10	Introduction – a student’s story 19
	Specify the portfolio requirements 20
	Peer support 20
	Tutor and other support 20
	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning 21
	Acknowledgements 22
	References 23

Summary

This guide explores some of the many ways in which lecturers can productively use portfolios in courses of higher education at all levels, and offers guidance on how lecturers can support students to develop and use a portfolio. Much of this can also be applied or adapted to help staff to produce portfolios for their initial and continuing professional development. The processes outlined may need to be tailored to the particular requirements of different subjects and courses.

A reasonably sophisticated approach to the development and use of portfolios is described. Simplified and reduced versions may be more appropriate in some settings, particularly in the early years of a student's study in higher education or for those new to the use of portfolios.

The guide is written primarily for lecturers. However, some of the content may readily be adapted into advice for students.

Portfolios are not being promoted here as a universal solution to problems in learning and assessment. Rather, portfolios are offered as one valuable method among others to support, record, and then allow for the assessment of student learning and development on courses and programmes.

The guide concentrates on structures, techniques and methods. What the guide may not sufficiently do, within a tight word limit, is indicate the extent and variety and richness of work, and the vivid and persuasive evidence of learning and development over time, which a portfolio can provide. Nor does the guide show the high levels of critical reflection which students can apply, in a portfolio, to their

own work. A health warning is in order here. For them to be thus critical of their own work, students must feel secure that the quality of their reflection and learning will receive at least as much attention as will their other work included in the portfolio, work of whose deficiencies they may be very well aware.

Introduction – portfolios and their uses

This section summarises the main varieties and uses of portfolios, and some of their benefits.

Portfolio Contents

This section explores some of the kinds of content that may be included in a portfolio, with some comments on electronic portfolios.

Questions about portfolios

This section raises and answers some of the questions which students may ask about portfolios.

Supporting portfolio development

This section provides practical guidance on helping students to build a portfolio and on developing the skills to do so. It briefly reviews the use of portfolios on courses in teaching in higher education.

Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning

This section considers the use of portfolios for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

This guide should be read in conjunction with *Assessing Portfolios* (Baume 2001).



Introduction – portfolios and their uses

Uses for and forms of portfolios

There is an intimate relationship between the intended use of a portfolio and its form. Here I suggest some uses for, and thus forms of, portfolios. I also offer other typologies of portfolio. One value of these typologies is to help you to have constructive conversations with your students about the particular type and use of portfolio that you are asking the student to produce.

The portfolio is perhaps most familiar in higher education involving art and design, where it serves as a holder for pieces of work. Using the terminology developed later in this section, it can serve as a repository, a record of and place for development, something to be assessed, and a selection to be presented for the selling of work, or to gain employment or access to further study.

The portfolio as repository

At its simplest, a portfolio is a collection of materials, preferably with structure and index. A lever-arch file or ring binder containing the materials received and the work produced by the student in one course is a kind of portfolio. So would be the same material stored digitally. It may demystify the concept of 'portfolio' for students if you tell them this.

Is there an advantage in describing such a course file as a 'portfolio'? Yes – the students may value a portfolio more highly

than they would a collection of handouts and notes. How can you encourage this?

- You can help students to use the file as a live resource to support present and future learning rather than as a dead record of handouts received or printed from the web and of questions answered. They will do this if you encourage or even require them to use earlier material in the file to back up or contrast with more recently learned ideas.
- You can help students to see the file as a record of their development rather than a collection of bits of paper. They will do this if you encourage, or even require them to use the file to answer questions about their learning and development.

This kind of portfolio can be used in almost any course or subject, and course and subject will have a major effect on the form of the portfolio.

A student's portfolio need not be confined to a single course. It can range across different courses making up a whole year of study, and it can range across the entire programme. Such a year-wide and programme-wide portfolio will no longer be a single object or file, but such a portfolio can still be used in the ways described above. Further, such a synoptic portfolio can bring, and can help the student to achieve, a valuable programme-wide overview and coherence: a quality sometimes lacking in modular programmes.

Students are keeping more of their materials in electronic form and on-line, through the fast-increasing use of Managed and Virtual

Learning Environments (MLEs / VLEs). This development is making it easier for the student to make their portfolio into an accessible, adaptable and thus more widely usable resource. This is considered further below.

A repository portfolio may rapidly become large. Whatever its physical form, it will soon cease to be useful if it is not carefully structured and indexed. Ways to help students to do this are described.

As a portfolio starts to be used as well as simply added to, the word 'repository' may start to feel less appropriate, perhaps having a rather final or even dead ring to it. We need a term that gives the feel of a working document or resource. For now, I suggest below a 'development portfolio'. You may prefer 'working portfolio'.

The portfolio for development

I have described (Baume 1999) a development portfolio as a compost heap. This image is intended to convey, not darkness and odour, but rather something that is refined over time, enriched by addition, reduction and turning over.

For example, in a development portfolio, a student adds notes, images, papers: whatever kinds of resource are appropriate to their particular course and subject. They synthesise these elements into essays, reports, designs, proposals or other kinds of document or artefact, just as in a repository portfolio as described above. They may reject or archive some material as already used or no longer relevant.

The development portfolio is, to use a different image, their workspace, representing at any moment their current state of collecting and thinking and production. As well as externally-produced items, it will include their work and perhaps also their own and their peers' reflections on it along with feedback received on their work, and their own reflections on that feedback. My workspace, for example, whilst I complete this guide for publication includes my computer's hard disk containing other documents I have written about portfolios; printouts of these; web links; a box file of articles, papers and books; and comments from reviewers on a previous draft.

A student's portfolio can record and support a particular cross section through their learning, for example the development of key or transferable skills through a personal development programme (PDP). PDPs and their associated uses of portfolios are described by Jackson and Ward (2001). Details of their work can be found on the LTSN Generic Centre and Centre for Recording Achievement websites.

A development portfolio may be similar in form to a repository, but with a wider range of contents. It will be in a constant state of flux, which increases the need for organisation and indexing. It does not need to be tidy, but the student must be able to find their way around it. It is essentially a private portfolio, to which the lecturer should probably not request access.



The portfolio for assessment

It would be possible to assess a portfolio produced as a repository or as a development portfolio. However, this will rarely be appropriate. Such a repository or development portfolio will include work in progress as well as finished work; it will include a range of material from a range of sources; above all, it will not have been made as something to be assessed. If you suddenly announce to students that you want to assess their repository or development portfolios, they would be justified in being annoyed at your intrusion into something that may well feel personal to them. If you tell them beforehand that you will be assessing these portfolios, this will restrict what they put into the portfolio, and reduce its value, certainly as a tool for their development.

A portfolio for assessment, however, may well make use of the contents of the repository or development portfolio. A portfolio for assessment is likely to comprise a subset of the repository or development portfolio, together with commentary and reflection, and additional annotation and indexing.

I suggest that an assessment portfolio should not be confined to finished work – to the best a student can do. More valuable than this, to the student and to you, is a clear demonstration of the progress the student has made throughout the course. This will require them to include earlier work along with their own views on it together

with feedback from their peers and perhaps also yourself. There will be a demonstration of how the student has used this feedback, combined with further study, to advance their knowledge and understanding.

If you intend to assess student portfolios, you should tell the students, before they start to produce the portfolios:

- The basis on which they will be assessed – the outcomes, the assessment criteria, the standards.
- Those who will see their portfolio.

The assessment of portfolios is considered in much more detail in a separate LTSN Generic Centre briefing (Baume 2001) which contains a detailed case study analysing the assessment of portfolios and references to further sources on research into the assessment of portfolios.

The portfolio for assessment is likely to be a much tidied-up and reduced version of a development portfolio. It needs to be tidied up so that the assessor can rapidly understand, analyse and assess it. It needs to be reduced to remove irrelevancies and distractions and to make it capable of being assessed in the allotted amount of time. Students are likely to put considerable effort into presentation so you need to show them examples of – or tell them about – the minimum (and perhaps maximum!) standards of presentation that will be appropriate.

The portfolio for presentation

Employers will be interested in what a graduate and potential employee can do, as well as in the qualification gained. However, they are unlikely to welcome sight of all the work produced by the student during their studies. Students may therefore find it useful to prepare a presentation portfolio. This should contain the work of which they are most proud. The presentation portfolio should also contain sufficient annotation to enable the employer to make sense of what they are seeing in the portfolio.

The presentation portfolio is likely to be a much-reduced version of the assessment portfolio, with still further attention paid to appearance. You may want to discuss with students the forms and functions of a presentation portfolio.

Students should be aware, however, that employers will only welcome a presentation portfolio if they have asked to see it. If not, then it may be appropriate to introduce some of the contents of the development portfolio during the selection procedures.

Portfolios for courses on teaching in higher education

Portfolios are widely used on staff development courses in teaching in higher education. The advice throughout this Guide applies with equal force, modulated by the fact that the 'students' are peers and colleagues. One might expect this kind of portfolio to include a substantial critical and

reflective statement or commentary followed by systematically ordered, substantiating evidence. This kind of professional portfolio therefore emphasises analysis of issues, evaluation and reflection – with supporting evidence – rather than a collection of evidence with some commentary on it.

Other typologies of portfolios

Gwen Chaney (2000) has suggested a six-part taxonomy of types of portfolios, which she stresses 'does not pretend to be complete':

- A simple (perhaps chronological) collection of things
- A collection of a student's work, cross-indexed to an occupational standard
- An APEL portfolio, which provides commentary and evidence to claim that some or all course outcomes have already been achieved
- A journal, a reflective account of work done and reflection thereupon, possibly without evidence as such
- The 'HE portfolio' which Chaney characterises as often associated with a student project, the portfolio emphasising cognitive development and using referenced theory
- The Professional Education portfolio, which the student teacher uses both to demonstrate their subject-specialist learning and to show and reflect on their use of this learning in their teaching.

Jo Mutlow, in a private communication, describes five uses of a portfolio:

- A process portfolio, which shares learning as it is taking place and promotes dialogue on progress and plans
- A completion portfolio, which demonstrates that planned learning objectives or competencies have been met
- An APEL portfolio, which makes a claim for prior learning or experiences to gain credits or exemptions from study towards a qualification
- A career portfolio, which is used to substantiate a c.v. or job application
- A CPD portfolio, used to demonstrate continuing professional development for the purposes of registration, membership or licensing.

Other forms, and indeed other typologies of portfolio are possible. It is worth you and your course colleagues agreeing on the main type(s) of portfolio your students are to produce, and discussing with your colleagues and then with your students the differences and the relationships between these types and uses.

Benefits of portfolios

For the **student**, the development portfolio in particular can be a coherent and hopefully valued collection, collation and analysis of sources, first thoughts, work in progress, finished work and feedback from peers and tutors. 'Getting organised' is not always top priority for students. Exhortations about the importance of filing and organising paperwork do not always resonate strongly with students who, particularly near the start of their course, have their sights set more firmly on studying for a glittering career or on achieving a deep understanding of vital topics than on becoming filing clerks.

If you value student collaboration and peer learning then the development portfolio is a fine vehicle for students to use to share their learning and progress, and to give, receive and use feedback.

Individual pieces of student work provide the **lecturer** only with snapshots of the student's current state of knowledge, understanding and performance. If the student cohort is small, you may be able to remember how they did in previous work, and thus see how they are progressing. If the cohort is large, all you may have for most students is a previous mark and more – or less! – precise memories.

An assessment portfolio that contains elements of a development portfolio can show the stages of the student's progress. It can show them doing work, reflecting on it, taking and using feedback and thus advancing. For it to serve this function, students must be clear that you will assess their current capabilities and their proven ability to learn from experience and feedback, and that you will not mark them down for less capable work done early in the course.

If for any reason it is not possible or appropriate to see and assess student development in this way, then the assessment portfolio still has advantages over the production of a single piece of assessed work. It can better show you the range of a student's work, in different forms

and perhaps produced under different conditions – alone, working with others, with and without access to sources. And it may well be more interesting to assess.

For an **employer**, a presentation portfolio can usefully elaborate on a degree certificate or transcript and c.v. It can give a more vivid picture of the student's work and their capabilities. It can provide a solid basis for an interview conversation. Students should ask in advance if the employer wishes to see it, and to tailor their presentation portfolio to each interview, rather than relying on a generic one – and they should keep the presentation portfolio short!



Technology and portfolios

The student clearly could spend a lot of time managing and re-making their portfolio for these different purposes (storage, development, assessment, presentation) and audiences (self, peers, assessor/s, employer). Some of this time will be valuable and developmental; some of it may be clerical. An on-line portfolio can speed some of the less productive portfolio-management activities.

We could imagine an electronic repository of the work produced and used by the student, with each element of that e-repository labelled as to author, date of production and what it was – original piece of work, commentary on work of another, etc. And from this e-repository the student could assemble particular portfolios for particular purposes, adding linking sections or an overview as required by the particular function of the portfolio.

As institutions implement virtual and managed learning environments, students will be able to store and access their data in these more efficient ways. Students will be able to store relevant work against specific courses and modules within the online environment. This database will only be recoverable by the student who created or stored it and by specific people – at the

student's discretion – who need to access it for peer sharing, review or for assessment. Further, as common data formats are agreed and implemented and hence VLEs and MLEs become more interoperable, it will become possible for students to store data in standard format that can be transferred between institutions for lifelong learners who attend different institutions throughout their learning lives. Employers, too, with the student's permission, will be able to access a more complete picture of the student's educational achievement.

There are technical problems to be solved here, and we should take seriously the warning that 'the tool can easily stand in the way of the process' (Jackson and Ward 2001), but the e-repository and the portfolios derived from it may speed the handling and organisation of portfolios to the benefit of those who produce, read and assess them. More information on this can be found at the website of MAPPING, a SHEFC-funded project 'to help staff developers and lecturers create reflective portfolios' (McKiggan-Fee 2002). Although the project is concerned with staff portfolios, many of the ideas are useful for those working with student portfolios.

Portfolios and plagiarism

Plagiarism is a matter of growing concern in higher education. Can portfolios help? Plagiarism can be harder to sustain in a portfolio. Why? Because a portfolio may contain, as well as pieces of work by the student, early outlines and drafts of this work; feedback from peers and tutors; subsequent revised versions of the work; and critical commentaries on the work. Such items are much harder to plagiarise than straight essay-style academic text because they are much more personal and reflective.

Further, plagiarism, certainly of work by other students, is more difficult to achieve when each student is following their own particular interests and trail of enquiry than when every member of a class of students is undertaking the same task.

Beyond this, the usual defences against plagiarism apply as well to portfolios as elsewhere. These include a clear policy against plagiarism; time to discuss and explore with students what plagiarism and the policy mean, and why and how the university takes plagiarism seriously; a strong insistence on proper referencing throughout the student's work; encouragement to acknowledge co-operative work and the contribution of others; attention by the assessor to sudden and unexpected changes in the style of writing or other portfolio elements; and the assessor's own knowledge of the literature of the subject being studied.



Portfolio contents

Introduction

Student 1 What should I put in my portfolio?

Tutor Anything you think is relevant!

This (hopefully hypothetical) exchange shows several things. The student, perhaps being asked for the first time to prepare a portfolio, asks what feels to them to be a very reasonable question. The tutor, perhaps also new to the use of portfolios, answers in a way that shows them to be excited with the many and splendid opportunities and freedoms that this new educational method brings.

How might the conversation continue?

Student 1 So can I put in [a long list of things]?

Tutor Yes! Any and all of those, and more besides!

And how might the student report this conversation to another student?

Student 1 The tutor said we could put anything we want into the portfolio.

Student 2 So what are you going to put in?

Student 1 I don't know.

Contents of a portfolio

Introduction and summary

The functional tutor quoted above is both accurate and unhelpful. I shall here use a typology of portfolio contents that I have found useful. Other typologies are possible. What matters most is to have a language in which you, colleagues and students can talk together about portfolios and their contents with minimal confusion. After presenting the typology, I shall say a little more about each element of it. This suggested typology has six elements. After presentation in the table, each is discussed further.

Element	Discussion
1 <i>Evidence</i>	<p>This may have been what the tutor above meant by 'anything you think is relevant'. It can comprise reports, papers, notes, and sketches: in general terms, any and possibly all work produced by or used by the student during their studies. Some of it may have been produced especially for the portfolio, but much of it may well have not. (Different subjects produce different types of evidence.)</p> <p>Evidence is defined here partly by contrast with item 3, 'critical reflection'.</p>
2 <i>Annotation</i>	<p>It will not always be obvious what a particular piece of evidence is, nor what it shows. Most or all items of evidence should be annotated by the student to show (a) what it is and (b) by whom and (c) when and (d) why it was produced. You may also ask the student to say (e) what each item is intended to show – perhaps learning outcomes achieved, problems solved, development or progression or learning successfully undertaken. It can also be useful for the student to include (f) keywords or indexing terms to these annotations.</p>
3 <i>Critical reflection</i>	<p>Here the student takes a step back from the evidence. They analyse subsets or the totality of the evidence, critique it, say what it now means to them, perhaps what they learned in producing it, how it affected their subsequent work and thought and action. (Different subjects take different approaches to critical reflection, and may well have different names for it.)</p> <p>The student might also demonstrate how their thinking led to, rather than followed, from the production of evidence and how that evidence has subsequently modified their thinking or led to changes in what they do. This critical reflection may also relate what the student has done and produced and learned to the goals of the course, as considered under item 6, 'mapping', below.</p>
4 <i>Structure</i>	<p>The portfolio structure should be clear and explicit so that the assessor as well as the student can readily find their way round the portfolio. At minimum, a contents list is necessary.</p>
5 <i>Index or search function</i>	<p>The presentation of a digital and/or on-line rather than paper-based portfolio greatly increases the possibilities for sophisticated indexing and search, as considered in the section entitled Technology and Portfolios. However, at minimum, an index to the main content is needed, unless this function is adequately met by the contents page.</p>
6 <i>Mapping and claim</i>	<p>Hopefully, the intended learning outcomes or the key assessment requirements or criteria of the course have been specified (or perhaps negotiated). Students and assessor alike will then benefit from a short document or table showing which assessment requirements are claimed to be demonstrated in which part of the portfolio. In effect, this will summarise the main arguments and issues raised, and indicate why the student believes that each item, and the items taken together, prove what they are intended to prove, about the student's development and achievement.</p>



1. Evidence

The evidence may take any appropriate form. The main judge of appropriateness has to be the student, for their repository and development portfolio at least. For an assessment portfolio, the tutor may well make recommendations, or even impose requirements, on evidence. For example, you may specify how many pieces of evidence you need to show each major outcome or assessment criterion achieved. You may require that certain information or evidence is to be included, and/or that other items are not.

2. Annotation

A portfolio is easier for the student to use, and for you to assess, when each item of evidence is annotated. Six possible kinds of annotation for evidence are suggested in the table above. Other materials in a portfolio – for example, critical reflection – should similarly be annotated. The same six headings for annotation, or your own version of these, should also apply. You may want to extend this list of required annotations to meet the particular requirements of the course, the subject and the assessment. As well as being useful to the student, the annotation should meet your needs as portfolio assessor. A presentation portfolio for an employer may need different annotation.

3. Critical reflection

The importance of critical reflection to learning is widely, though not universally, accepted and perhaps more widely accepted in theory than in practice. The portfolio can

be a fine vehicle for developing capability in critical reflection.

Critical reflection may take one or both of two distinct foci. It can look at particular items or sets of items in the portfolio. It can also consider the learning outcomes and assessment criteria which the development portfolio is intended to help the student develop and the ways in which the achievement of these outcomes will be demonstrated in the assessment portfolio. The latter kind of reflection is considered further below.

Schön (1982) has described two kinds of reflection that underpin professional, and by extension academic, practice.

A student has written an essay, undertaken a group project or undertaken some smaller-scale task such as finding a particular piece of information or interviewing someone for a project. After completing this task, the student reviews how well the activity went and why, how successfully it achieved what they wanted it to achieve and why. Schön call this 'reflection on action'.

Reflection can also be part of the undertaking of a task. Schön's 'reflection in action' describes the moment-to-moment processes whereby we monitor our progress and adjust what we do. Schön sees this reflection in action as at the heart of professional practice, along with the necessary professional knowledge. It is harder to access and analyse than reflection on action, as suggested below, and perhaps also harder to do.

Cowan (1998) valuably adds 'reflection for action', the reflection on and learning from previous activities to inform the planning for the next. Each of these three kinds of

reflection can be practised and evidenced in a portfolio, and their effects shown.

Before any kind of reflection (and indeed before most action!) should come planning. Hence, *What am I trying to achieve here?* (Goal-setting)

Useful prompts for reflection for action include:

What have I learned from my previous study and from undertaking similar tasks that may be helpful with this task? and

How might I apply what I have learned to this upcoming task?

Prompts for reflection on action:

Did I achieve what I set out to achieve? and In what particular respects did I achieve and not achieve what I set out to achieve?

In each caseWhy?

Reflection in action is harder to demonstrate, and is subject to after-the-event rationalisation. Showing reflection in action requires not just the product that the student produced, but also an account of the process that they went through. For example, if the process was an interview, a student could annotate the interview transcript to show them analysing, and then confirming or changing, what they did during the interview. If the student has undertaken a project, then a project journal would describe what they did at the time, their immediate views of its appropriateness, and if and how they changed their approach. The journal is a very useful medium for showing reflection in action, and can form part of a portfolio (Moon 1999).

4. Structure

A portfolio can be organised in many ways, for example:

- By **time**, showing the development of a student's work and capabilities, week by week or month by month, during a course, a semester, a year or a complete programme
- **Around individual pieces of work**, each with the associated preparation (outline, earlier draft(s) with feedback) and review (comments from peers, tutor, and the author's own critique)
- By *topic or theme*. These topics or themes might be the main topics or themes under which the course is organised and described. Alternatively, they might be topics or themes chosen by the student to reflect their own particular interests within the course or programme.
- By **learning outcome or assessment criterion** addressed, with a distinct portfolio section for each learning outcome or assessment criterion.

Which approach is best? The portfolio structure must be explicit. The portfolio must be workable for the author and assessable for the assessor. The portfolio structure should be easy to grasp, and should make sense to the author and the assessor. Beyond these essential requirements, the best structure will depend on the primary purpose of the portfolio as well as on the preferences of the portfolio's constructor and assessor. You may choose to specify portfolio structure, or to leave this decision to the student.

Perhaps more important than structure, especially in an on-line portfolio, is indexing.



5. Indexing

The importance of annotating each item in a portfolio is discussed on page 12 in relation to 'Annotation'. Annotation comes into its own when a portfolio is indexed. A well-structured paper-based portfolio is organised and sequenced around one organising principle, as discussed in relation to 'Structure'. Good indexing enables the portfolio to be interrogated in many different ways. In helping students plan how to index their portfolios, work with them to identify the main questions with which you or they may approach their portfolio. Such questions may include:

- Where in the portfolio can I find...
- ... everything about topic X?
- ... everything about author Y?
- ... all the feedback from other people on my work?
- ... all the finished work I produced?

This approach to indexing will work for a portfolio of any size. It may not be necessary for a portfolio of, say, only ten or twenty pages. But small portfolios grow, good habits are best developed early, and indexing is much easier done as the portfolio is being built than when it is complete and large.

Mapping and claim

Mapping is a particular form of indexing. The student may be developing, and then demonstrating attainment of a set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria (henceforward 'assessment requirements').

These assessment requirements may be specified by the course, by the student, or both, or they may be selected or adapted by the student from those offered by the course. In either case, it is essential that students can show, and assessors must be able to judge, that the assessment requirements have been met.

It may be possible to structure the portfolio around the assessment requirements. However, life and learning are rarely this tidy. A particular piece of evidence can often – and fruitfully – show that more than one assessment requirement is met. Whatever other annotation is done or not, the student should be strongly encouraged to produce a mapping document. This should list the assessment requirements addressed and then demonstrated. Alongside each item in this list should be a note of the places from across the portfolio where the supporting evidence and critical reflection are to be found.

Such a list may suffice. However, a valuable additional element can be the student's account of how each item of evidence, and the sum total of the listed evidence, together show that the student has met the assessment requirements. In writing this, which may be called a claim or a proposed self-assessment, the student both synthesises and critiques their learning. Students can produce high-level and valuable work under such a prompt. This student claim or self-assessment also makes your job of assessing easier, and more interesting.

Questions about portfolios

What exactly is involved in producing a portfolio?

How can we help learners to produce a good portfolio?

For a learner, the first step is to understand what is being asked of them. When told, 'on this course you will produce a portfolio', they may have these questions, among others:

- Why?
- Will it be assessed?
- What's a portfolio?
- What should I put into it?
- How big does it have to be?
- How many copies do I have to hand in?
- Will I get it back?
- Could I see one from last year, please?

The more sophisticated may ask:

- Can I include work I've already had assessed?
- Does everything in it have to be my own work or can I include – things done by other people – published sources – things we did in group work – relevant things I did outside university?
- How will it be assessed?

I encourage you to invite your students to ask you questions about the introduction of portfolios. Use of *Assessing Portfolios* (Baume 2001) should enable you to answer most of students' questions about assessment. Here are some notes towards answering each of the questions above, where appropriate with connections to other parts of this guide.



Questions	Notes on your responses
Why?	<p>You will have your reasons. They may include your wish to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help students collect and collate their work rather than leaving it scattered • Enable students to record their development over a period of time. • Enable student to analyse their development and identify future development needs and interests • Ensure that students can take evidence of their capability forward into further study or employment
Will it be assessed?	<p>Students are more like to take seriously the production of a portfolio if it will be assessed.</p>
What's a portfolio?	<p>You could say: 'A portfolio is a structured collection of evidence, reflection and critical analysis thereof, designed to support and document your learning and development towards the intended learning outcomes of the course and to be used as a vehicle for assessing your attainment during the course.' Students will be reassured by a definition. Supplementary questions will reinforce the definition and ensure it is understood.</p>
What should I put into it?	<p>As sketched against 'Evidence' on page 12 above, this is both important and difficult to answer. You may want to say, 'Please put in whatever will make the case that you are trying to make.' Say it, if you mean it. But also say 'For example, the following kinds of items may do the trick...'</p> <p>Students need help with unfamiliar learning and assessment activities.</p>
How big does it have to be?	<p>How to measure portfolio size? By word limit or page limit? Take into consideration if evidence is to be included, and the font and page size. Where other media are included, specification of size obviously gets more difficult. One approach is to say how long the assessor will agree to spend assessing each portfolio, and work back to size requirements from that, perhaps via a tariff of number of words read or pages looked at per hour. Again, this is harder with other media.</p> <p>An approximate answer is much better than none – fairer for the students and better for controlling assessor workload.</p>
How many copies do I have to hand in?	<p>Printing and copying are expensive. Some items may be difficult to copy. The answer should be 'one', even if this requires good co-operation between assessors where there is more than one assessor. You should advise students to keep their own copy, for safety.</p>
Will I get it back?	<p>The answer to this will depend on your university's assessment regulations. The answer will probably be something like, 'Yes, when all assessment processes (including any appeals) and all quality assurance requirements have been met.' You should tell them how long this might be.</p>



Questions	Notes on your responses
<i>Could I see one from last year?</i>	<p>This is tricky, unless of course you are in the first year of using portfolios. But even in the first year you will probably have at least mocked-up a portfolio to see how it might work, what resources it will need, and how long it might take a student to produce and a tutor to assess.</p> <p>Beyond that, there are pros and cons for showing portfolios to students.</p> <p>Pros: This year's students will be fascinated to see a real example or two. They should be able to see several, so these serve as illustrations and inspiration rather than as exemplars to be slavishly copied. Students will be interested to see the range, of type and content and quality (and grade gained – assessment grade and commentary should be included in example portfolios shown to students).</p> <p>Cons: Portfolios can contain personal information and reflection. Anonymising a portfolio is time-consuming, and not always successful. Students may not want their portfolio to be seen by others. The Data Protection Act applies to portfolios, therefore a student's written permission must be sought even if anonymised. Portfolios produced in employment may contain confidential materials. Portfolios may be physically fragile, and items may be easily extracted.</p> <p>On balance: Solve these problems, and give students access to previous portfolios</p>
<i>Can I include work I've already had assessed?</i>	<p>The grades or marks for a piece of work should not contribute more than once to the same award. However, a student may include previously assessed work to show their progression, or as material from which they develop new ideas or practices. The rules on this should be clear.</p>
<i>Does everything in it have to be my own work or can I include – things done by other people – published sources – things we did in group work – relevant things I did outside university?</i>	<p>If the course also values the ability to find, critique and use ideas, information and materials from sources other than the student, then these too properly belong in a portfolio. As in any academic work, all sources should be properly acknowledged and referenced.</p> <p>If the course further values the key skill of collaboration, then work produced jointly with others, whether these others are students or people outside the university, belongs in the portfolio. As well as the jointly produced work itself, the portfolio should include the student's statement detailing their particular contribution to the work. You may want to see such a statement from each participating student to assure that you are receiving a consistent account of who did what.</p>
<i>How will it be assessed?</i>	<p>Will there be one, two or more assessors? Who will they be, or from which pool of staff will they be drawn?</p> <p>The course handbook or guide should describe the intended learning outcomes and the assessment criteria to be applied to the portfolio, together with any other rules on size and format and any consequences of not adhering to these. Because the portfolio can include personal material, students have a right to know from the start who will see it.</p>

Supporting portfolio development

Introduction – a student’s story

We [second-year students] were asked to prepare a portfolio analysing, from an academic perspective, the technical skills we had used in a recent group project. We had not previously done a portfolio. The portfolio counted for fifty per cent of the module marks. We asked, ‘How big should the portfolio be?’ and were told, ‘As big as it needs to be.’ We asked, ‘What does “analyse from an academic perspective” mean?’ and they said, ‘Use and refer to some academic sources’. A few of the best portfolios from the previous year were available, but not enough to go round.

How did we feel? Unprepared, unrehearsed, unbriefed and therefore concerned. In fact panicky – a lot of marks were at stake, it was the biggest single piece of work we had done on the course, and we could have written thousands of words only to be told they were irrelevant and we’d failed the module.

What would we have liked? Practice at doing a small portfolio in the first year. A full briefing. A chance for us all to look at, discuss and analyse some real portfolios, and talk to the students who did them. Tutorials and some feedback while we were making our portfolios, to check we were on the right lines.

What lessons may we learn from this story?

Make sure students know why you are asking them to produce a portfolio

It may be obvious to you. Make it also obvious to them. Some possible reasons for you to want students to prepare a portfolio are listed in the table on page 17 above. As you talk to students about their production of a portfolio, encourage them also to find their own reasons, so that they are partners in the quest, not just compliant. Current students can particularly benefit from talking with students who have previously prepared a portfolio.

Help the students to understand how their portfolios will be assessed

This is considered in much more detail in the briefing entitled *Assessing Portfolios* (Baume 2001). You should at least explain and explore with them the learning outcomes to be assessed and the assessment criteria you will use in making your judgements. It is not enough simply to tell them in writing or even in a lecture. Each student needs to spend time and effort to internalise the assessment requirements, and what these requirements mean for them and their own work. Conversation is essential.

Specify the portfolio requirements

Tell students what is fixed and required about the portfolio and what is not. Fixed may be:

- Schedules, crucially hand-in dates
- Word count, page count or other measure of size
- Form of binding or cover
- The inclusion of particular items – for example, a short c.v., a contents page, an index, mapping to learning outcomes, particular feedback or other documents.

Where you require specific information from students, consider giving them a pro-forma to complete. For completeness, you should also tell them about the consequences of not meeting any of these requirements. The resultant portfolio guidance document may in parts look a little unfriendly, but accuracy and clarity are in the final analysis more friendly and useful than vagueness and its sometimes unpleasant consequences, both for the students and for you. These unpleasant consequences can include ad-hoc decisions and subsequent accusations of inequity, leading perhaps to appeals, as well as unduly protracted assessment boards.

Also, tell the students what is not fixed. Tell them whether you will or will not welcome innovatory and experimental forms of portfolio and types of portfolio content. Students will experiment in creative and sometimes productive ways when they know where it is safe to do so.

In deciding what you will require in and of a portfolio consider not just what will be educationally desirable but what will make the assessment of the portfolio easier for you.

Peer support

Within a clear framework of written guidance, as suggested above, students can be very helpful to each other in producing portfolios and in reviewing and giving feedback each other's work. They will do this more readily if they believe that assessment is not competitive, more readily still if they know that helping peers and receiving help from peers are valued activities, evidence of which in the portfolio can gain additional marks.

Tutor and other support

Lecturers rarely have time to give feedback on successive drafts of student portfolios. Given restricted time, perhaps the best point for feedback is early, when the student has an outline of their portfolio with perhaps a little draft material included. At this stage, before the student has gone too far down what may be an inappropriate road, the lecturer can steer and encourage as appropriate.



Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning

It has been assumed thus far that the portfolio is produced as a part of a course or programme. Portfolios can also be produced as a claim for academic credit or professional accreditation or for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

An APEL portfolio can usefully be considered to be a claim that certain requirements have been met. These requirements may be expressed as learning outcomes, assessment criteria, professional competencies, or in other forms. An APEL portfolio thus takes the implicit form of a statement such as:

The evidence and discussion in this portfolio shows how I have met the requirements of the qualification sought, as follows: ...

APEL portfolios can be produced with various degrees of support. However, unsupported APEL, in which candidates are simply told the requirements and asked to get on with the process, is not advisable: the experience is likely to be trying for the candidate, and success rates may be very low. Your participants will need to know the formal requirements, of the APEL process and of the portfolio itself.

Each of the forms of support indicated above can be provided and adapted for participants in an APEL process.

If you know from the start that a portfolio-based course is also to be offered in an APEL form, then you can save time and effort by separating out guidance which is specifically about the construction of a portfolio from other guidance on taking the course. This stand-alone Portfolio Guide will be useful to APEL and current students at the same time.

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