



# Organize for a Successful Year

Organization is crucial to starting the school year on the right foot. Parents, students, and the principal expect teachers to be organized. Many teachers find that maintaining informal portfolios helps track student performance in an organized manner.

## Informal Portfolios

Informal portfolios may be as simple as having a folder for each student in which to keep copies of major assessments or work examples used to make a judgment or an evaluation. Teachers may use a set of portfolios for their own use and for sharing with parents during formal conferences or a spur-of-the-moment phone call. After all, what busy teacher will remember in November specific reasons for a student's success—or lack thereof—on an assessment given in September? The portfolio helps teachers to remember fundamental aspects of a student's performance.

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What should a teacher keep in an informal portfolio? Foremost, keep things that can be shared with parents and the principal. Parents are legally allowed to view anything that teachers use to evaluate their children, including copies of tests, scoring rubrics, and answer keys. Therefore, keep copies of major assessments and the procedures used to grade them. Don't forget dates! Include dates on all assessments to help you recall when you gave specific tests.

## Informal Portfolio Rundown

- Labeled folder for each student
- Copies of major assessments, including essays
- Instructions for major projects
- Scoring rubrics
- Notes to share with parents
- Dated items placed in folders

## Gradebooks

Remember that the informal portfolio does not replace the legally mandated gradebook. It is not used to assign grades, but is the backup and justification for the grades documented in the gradebook. An informal portfolio also provides a written record of the major curricular concepts you teach. Think of it as a historical map of the school year's assessments. Of course, you must keep your gradebook up-to-date and organized as well—the gradebook and informal portfolio are a team. Each time you record the grade of a major assessment, place a copy of that assessment into the portfolio.

## Pruning the Portfolio

Without proper pruning, the portfolio can become a disorganized mess. Try to include only important assessments and consider starting a new folder each marking period or semester. For example, at the end of the first marking period or first round of parent-teacher conferences, store completed portfolios and create new ones for the new marking period. Clearly label them "First Marking Period 200\_" and keep them in an easy-to-find place for quick reference should a parent or the principal have a question about a previous grade or test. At the end of each school year, with the principal's approval, you can send the portfolios home with your students.

## Final Thoughts

You get only one chance to begin the school year. An organized informal portfolio will go a long way toward helping people view you as someone who is orderly and structured. Be sure to let your principal or supervisor know that you intend to keep informal portfolios, in case he or she prefers a specific structure. 🍏



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