

A Guide to Portfolio Preparation for New Teachers

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Are you worried about preparing your professional portfolio? Relax. It need not be a high-anxiety, blood-pressure-raising event. To help you through the process, we offer some quick ideas to assist you in orienting to and preparing for your professional portfolio assessment.

Orientation

How you accustom yourself to the process of developing a professional portfolio for assessment sets the stage for your experience. We suggest that you approach the process as a natural extension of your teaching; that it is simply a means of documenting your work with students. Shifting focus from doing extra work for a high-stakes assessment to providing evidence of what you do with your students on a daily basis means that preparing to teach each day also prepares your portfolio. Thus, in a very real sense, you are already doing a lion's share of the work for your portfolio each and every day.

Show and Tell

Think of your portfolio as a sophisticated show and tell. Just as students display their work and share items for which they're proud, through your portfolio, you can share your professional work with others. If you view the portfolio as a medium for sharing your ideas rather than an assessment of your competency, the context is less intimidating. Though portfolios truly represent both elements, a balanced perspective will ease the pressure you feel. Recognize, too, that the natural result of sharing ideas is feedback on your strengths and weaknesses. Regarding feedback as a way to learn rather than a critical analysis is another important mindset to adopt when preparing your portfolio. You can *expect* and *accept* feedback to improve your professional practice by validating and increasing strengths and bolstering deficiencies.

Nuts and Bolts

Knowing the nuts and bolts of the portfolio process is as crucial to the experience as orienting your mindset. The first bolt to put in place is to familiarize yourself with the portfolio format used in your district or state. With foreknowledge of what is expected, you can plan lessons and align your teaching with the standards by which you will be assessed. As in orientation, your day-to-day work will then contribute to the development of your portfolio.

Broad Components

If you follow state and district expectations for the nuts and bolts assembly of your portfolio, you can look at broader components for building this professional album. Generally speaking, your portfolio should contain the following four works: Evidence of Planning for Instruction, Evidence of Effective Teaching Practice, Evidence of Assessment, and Evidence of Reflective Practice.

Evidence of planning for instruction. Your portfolio should show evidence that you are able to construct an effective unit and, in some cases, lessons too. Unit plans usually contain an outline of six to eight lessons. A basic model for a unit plan includes 1) lesson objectives, 2) central skills, concepts, and cues that will be used throughout the lesson to show whether or not the objectives have been met, and 3) activities for practicing skills, concepts, and cues associated with the lesson. Your knowledge of content standards, appropriate benchmarks, and developmental appropriateness of the lesson also should be evident.

Evidence of effective teaching practice. Your portfolio must show evidence of your ability to teach effectively. Videotapes of lessons taught often are used to show teaching practice. This visual evidence should depict set-up of the learning environment and how it's managed, your various interactions with students, including examples of how you provide feedback. The best way to gather useful video clips is to regularly videotape yourself. Frequent taping lets you and the class get used to being in front of the camera, in addition to ensuring a broad array of taped lessons from which to choose for your portfolio.

Evidence of Assessment. This part of the teaching portfolio reveals whether or not learning objectives were met. Assessments may be unique and traditional, but no matter what evidence you present in your portfolio, it must illustrate appropriate methods of assessing students.

Evidence of Reflective Practice. This final section is about professional growth and improving practices. Being able to review your classroom practices promotes your professional growth. Consider the following sample questions for guiding your reflective process: How did the lesson go? Did the students meet my objectives? What changes should I make if I teach a similar lesson in the future?

Portfolio assessments can and should be good for new teachers because they provide a means to improve instructional practice and student learning. Rather than fearing the portfolio process, embrace it, keep it in perspective, and see it as part of your day-to-day work. It will serve as a tool for professional growth and long-term efficacy in the noble profession of teaching.

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