

HOW TO CREATE A PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

What is a Portfolio?

As an academic, there are different types of portfolios that you might prepare. These include the course portfolio, the professional (scholar) portfolio, and the teaching portfolio.

A **course portfolio** includes information specific to a particular course. Such a portfolio would include syllabi, course materials, sample assignments, and an explanation for the rationale behind the assignments, and how your teaching methods and your course materials help students learn.

A **professional portfolio** is a collection of documents that you might submit as you go through the promotion and tenure process. This type of portfolio would include all of your work as a scholar, including your research progress, your teaching experience and accomplishments, as well as your record of academic service.

The **teaching portfolio** describes and documents multiple aspects of your teaching ability. There are two basic types of portfolio.

- A **summative portfolio** is created for the purpose of applying for an academic job or for promotion and tenure within a department.
- A **formative portfolio** is created for the purpose of personal and professional development.

Because your teaching experience changes as your career progresses, it is a good idea to periodically update your portfolio(s) in order to keep current with your progress, and to give yourself a regular opportunity to reflect on your teaching. At some point in your career, you may find that you need to keep a summative as well as a formative portfolio, since they serve different purposes; note, though, that those two portfolios may have several materials in common. The materials provided here focus on the teaching portfolio.

Some people describe a teaching portfolio as a place to summarize your teaching accomplishments and provide examples of classroom material. Others describe it as a mechanism and space for reflecting upon your teaching. And for the rest of us, it can be described as a space to do both.

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What are some Characteristics of Effective Portfolios?

The format of a portfolio varies considerably. An effective portfolio should be well documented and organized. The American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) suggests that a teaching portfolio should be structured, representative, and selective.

Structured

A structured portfolio should be organized, complete, and creative in its presentation. Some questions for you to think about might be: *Is my portfolio neat? Are the contents displayed in an organized fashion? Are the contents representative for the purpose that it is intended?*

Representative

In addition to attending to structure, a portfolio should also be comprehensive. The documentation should represent the scope of one's work. It should be representative across courses and time. Some questions for you think about might be: *Does my portfolio portray the types and levels of courses that I have taught? Does my portfolio display a cross-section of my work in teaching?*

Selective

The natural tendency for anyone preparing a portfolio is to want to document everything. However, if a portfolio is being used either for summative or formative purposes, careful attention should be given to conciseness and selectivity in order to appropriately document one's work. We suggest that you limit the contents of your portfolio to what is required by the reviewer while also keeping the purpose in mind.

- It is a way to collect evidence of your teaching ability.
- It provides the reader with a context for your teaching.
- It provides summary data on your teaching in a simple, readable format.
- It is focused on quality, not quantity.
- It is organized and its various sections relate to each other.
- It is an ever-changing, living document.
- It allows for self-reflection.
- It provides an opportunity to be unique and showcase your personal style of teaching.
- The process of creating one is more important and meaningful than the end product.

What are some Key Functions of a Teaching Portfolio?

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Why Create a Portfolio?

The teaching portfolio can serve many purposes, some of which include the following:

- reflecting on your goals as a teacher,
- assessing your teaching strengths and areas which need improvement,
- documenting your progress as a teacher,
- generating ideas for future teaching/course development,
- identifying your personal teaching style,
- using elements of the portfolio to promote dialogue with fellow teachers,
- considering new ways of gathering student feedback,
- gathering detailed data to support your goals,
- collecting multiple sources of evidence that document the implementation of your teaching goals and their success.

One would use a portfolio during the academic job search, promotion and tenure process, and for personal and professional development.

There are several ways that you can use your portfolio in the job application process. For example, you could do one or two of the following:

- make it an appendix to your curriculum vitae,
- provide a table of contents of portfolio materials, listing all as available on request,
- bring it to your job interview and refer to it as needed,
- make it an additional item in your application materials, which is referred to elsewhere (e.g., in a 2-3 page required teaching experience summary).

How is it used in the Job Application Process?

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What goes into a Portfolio?

The portfolio describes and documents the abilities of a unique individual, and therefore, no two teaching portfolios look alike. A portfolio can include a number of different types of documents, and which you choose to include will depend on the type of teaching you have done, your academic discipline, the purpose for creating one, and the intended audience. For a list of items that are appropriate for inclusion in the teaching portfolio, go to [Items that might be included in a teaching portfolio](#).

In spite of the variation that exists across portfolios, here is a short list of documents that often are part of one:

- statement of teaching philosophy,
- description of teaching experience (responsibilities),
- course planning artifacts: sample course syllabi, lesson plans, assignments, exams,
- evidence of teaching effectiveness: summary of student feedback, department evaluations,
- teaching awards and recognition,
- professional development efforts.

A table of contents is an important tool in organizing the various sections of your portfolio. For examples of these, go to [Examples of Table of Contents](#).

Some of the sections above, such as the statement on teaching philosophy, are strictly narrative (reflective). Other sections consist of a set of materials as well as a narrative or rationale that explains what they are. The narrative component should answer the following questions:

- Why did you include it in the portfolio?
- How did you use it in the classroom?
- How do you know that it was effective, i.e. that your students learned as a result?
- How has your teaching changed as a result?
- What have you learned about yourself as a teacher?

The portfolio is not, however, simply a binder with all of the teaching documents inserted with random pages of reflection. "It includes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance. In addition, the portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all of the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it presents selected information on teaching activities and solid evidence of their effectiveness.

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The following is a list of some general strategies on developing a teaching portfolio:

- Start as early as possible.
- Plan well and systematically collect data.
- Develop a good filing system.
- Regularly sort through, organize, and update information.
- Involve others as consultants and contributors.

*How should You
Get Started in
Creating it?*

References:

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