Assembling Writing Portfolios

❷ FAQ

What is a writing portfolio? (p. WP-1)
What should I include in my writing portfolio? (p. WP-2)
What is a reflective statement, and why do I need one? (p. WP-9)
How will my writing portfolio be evaluated? (p. WP-15)

A **writing portfolio,** a collection of coursework in print or elec- ❷
tronic form, is a unique opportunity for you to present your intel-
lectual track record, showing where you've been and how you've
developed as a college writer. Increasingly, colleges have been using
portfolios as a way to assess individual students' performance—and
sometimes to see if the student body as a whole is meeting university
standards. In addition, some employers request portfolios so that
they can assess an applicant's writing proficiency. Because portfolios
are so widely used, knowing how to assemble a portfolio is an impor-
tant skill. Although the requirements for assembling portfolios may
differ from course to course (or from situation to situation), all effec-
tive writing portfolios include the basic elements described in this
chapter.

Understanding Writing Portfolios

The purpose of a writing portfolio is to demonstrate a writer's im-
provement and achievements. Portfolios allow writers to collect a
body of writing (and writing-related material) in one place and to or-
ganize and present it in an effective, attractive format.

In writing courses, portfolios enable students to display their effort
and progress through the stages of the writing process: planning,
shaping, drafting, revising, and editing and proofreading. A writing
portfolio contains work completed for several different assignments,
giving the instructor a view of a student's writing that focuses more
on the complete body of work than on individual assignments. All the
writing you do—from exploratory writing to preparing a final
draft—documents your development as a writer in the context of
your entire portfolio.

Chapter prepared by Karen Mauk.

Students who assemble writing portfolios become active participants in their own education. Effective portfolios highlight what writers learn over time, making connections between multiple assignments and demonstrating knowledge and skills in different writing situations. While compiling individual items (sometimes called **artifacts**) to include in their portfolios, students reflect on their work and measure their progress; as they do so, they improve their ability to evaluate their own work.

There are two kinds of portfolios:

1. **Growth** or **process portfolios** are designed to show a writer's improvements over time.
2. **Best-works** or **presentation portfolios** are designed to highlight a writer's notable achievements.

If a portfolio is intended to show a writer's progress, it will include material that demonstrates the writer's ability to plan, shape, draft, and revise an essay. This material consists of multiple essay drafts with instructor comments (and sometimes peer reviewers' comments as well) in addition to other work completed in and out of class for each assignment.

If a portfolio is meant to demonstrate mastery of writing-related skills, it will contain only finished products, such as the final drafts of essays or reports. Whether its purpose is show progress or to demonstrate mastery, your writing portfolio may contain material that spans an entire term—or even an entire academic career.

> **CLOSE-UP**
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> **PORTFOLIOS AND JOB APPLICATIONS**
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> Just as your résumé provides an at-a-glance look at your educational and professional responsibilities and accomplishments, best-works or presentation portfolios show prospective employers the range of writing-related skills that you have mastered and can use on the job.

Individual course requirements determine how a portfolio is compiled and formatted. A **print portfolio** collects and presents hard copy in a file folder. In contrast, an **electronic portfolio** compiles material in electronic files stored on a USB flash drive, a rewritable CD or DVD, a Web site, or another storage device (see the Computer Tip on pages WP-7 and WP-8 for a list of options). Some portfolios may **combine print and electronic formats**—for example, posting finished material on a Web site and collecting hard copies of early essay drafts with handwritten instructor comments in a folder. The components of effective print and electronic writing portfolios are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

CLOSE-UP

PORTFOLIOS IN OTHER DISCIPLINES

Portfolios are not limited to writing courses; in fact, instructors in disciplines other than writing may require portfolios that collect and assess students' work. For example, a math portfolio might indicate a student's progress during a particular unit of study or over an entire semester, and a Web design portfolio might demonstrate mastery of a particular set of skills.

■ **EXERCISE 1**

Be sure you understand your instructor's requirements for assembling a writing portfolio. Then, list the items you might include in your portfolio, and think about how you could arrange it. Finally, write a paragraph proposing the specific content and format of your portfolio.

■ **EXERCISE 2**

Working in a group of three or four students, compare the paragraphs you wrote in response to Exercise 1. Discuss each student's proposed portfolio content and format. Then, consider whether you can incorporate any of your classmates' ideas into your own portfolio, and revise your paragraph accordingly.

Assembling a Print Portfolio

The first step toward assembling an effective print portfolio is to understand your instructor's guidelines. Instructors may specify exactly what portfolios should contain, or they may permit students to choose their own content. A writing portfolio may include all the writing completed for a course both in and out of class, including journal entries, rough essay drafts showing handwritten revisions, and clean final drafts; alternatively, writing portfolios may include only those examples of coursework that demonstrate improvement over time or mastery of certain writing-related skills. Instructors may even require that portfolios include writing completed for courses in other disciplines or personal writing, such as poems or songs. Before selecting material for your portfolio, be sure you understand your instructor's exact requirements.

CHECKLIST

CONTENT FOR PRINT PORTFOLIOS

The following material might be included in a print portfolio:

☐ **Table of contents** listing portfolio material
☐ **Reflective statement** in the form of a cover memo, letter, or essay

(continued)

CONTENT FOR PRINT PORTFOLIOS *(continued)*

☐ **Writing assignments** that provide a context for the artifacts in the portfolio
☐ **Planning material,** such as journal entries, freewriting exercises, brainstorming notes, and cluster diagrams
☐ **Shaping material,** such as thesis statements, informal and formal outlines, and storyboards
☐ **Rough drafts with comments** made by peer reviewers, instructors, and writing center tutors
☐ **Rough drafts with revisions** made by hand or with Track Changes
☐ **Final drafts**
☐ **Photocopies and printouts** of source material
☐ **Visuals** that enhance your essays
☐ **Essay exam answers**
☐ **Transcripts of oral presentations** and supporting material
☐ **Group work** (collaborative work), with your own contributions clearly marked
☐ **Personal writing** that enhances the portfolio
☐ A **print résumé,** if the portfolio will be submitted to a prospective employer

Once you are sure you understand your instructor's guidelines, you can begin to assemble your print portfolio, using the following checklist as a guide.

CHECKLIST

ASSEMBLING A PRINT PORTFOLIO

As you assemble your print portfolio, keep the following guidelines in mind:

☐ **Select material** that corresponds to your instructor's guidelines.
☐ **Revise individual artifacts as needed,** using comments made by peer reviewers and by your instructor.
☐ **Collect your material** in a file folder.
☐ **Format your material,** using the principles of document design to help you present your work.
☐ **Arrange your material** in the order specified by your instructor's guidelines, and include a table of contents.
☐ **Write a reflective statement** that demonstrates your thoughtful analysis of your portfolio and of the individual artifacts within it.

Figure 1 shows the contents page for a student's print portfolio. Notice how an effective design emphasizes important elements and distinguishes them from one another.

Box highlights title, student's name, and skills demonstrated by portfolio

English Composition I Portfolio

by

Samantha Mahoney

Drafting and Revising | Thinking Critically |

Identifying an Audience

Color-coded type can be used to emphasize elements and distinguish skill categories

Contents

Bulleted list identifies portfolio's contents

- Reflective Statement
- "Moments of Silence" (Relationship Essay)
- "Winter Meal" (Observational Descriptive Essay)
- "Pass the Brussels Sprouts" (Research Project)

Instructor   Professor Russell

Course   English 101, Section 046

Date submitted   4 December 2006

FIGURE 1 Table of contents for student's print portfolio.

■ **EXERCISE 3**

Using the checklist on pages WP-3 and WP-4 as a guide, assemble your print portfolio. Then, reread your instructor's writing portfolio guidelines and add, remove, or rearrange material as necessary.

■ **EXERCISE 4**

Ask a classmate to evaluate the content and design of your print portfolio and the arrangement of the artifacts within it. Is material presented in a logical way? Is any content superfluous, or is any important content missing? After considering your classmate's suggestions, revise your portfolio if necessary.

Assembling an Electronic Portfolio

As with a print portfolio, the material you include in an electronic portfolio depends on individual course requirements. An electronic format allows for a wide range of possible content, including all the material that might go in a print portfolio as well as various kinds of multimedia content—for example, video or audio clips, *PowerPoint* presentations, and Web pages.

Many academic disciplines are moving toward electronic portfolios because, when posted on the Internet, they are immediately accessible to peers, instructors, and prospective employers. However, not all material lends itself to an electronic format. You may need to supplement your electronic portfolio with a file folder containing original print documents, such as rough drafts with handwritten comments made by peer reviewers or instructors.

CHECKLIST

CONTENT FOR ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS

The following material might be included in an electronic portfolio:

☐ **Table of contents or home page with internal hyperlinks** to portfolio material
☐ **Reflective statement** in the form of a cover memo, letter, or essay, with internal hyperlinks to portfolio content
☐ **Writing assignments** that form the basis for portfolio content
☐ **Planning material,** such as electronic journal and blog entries
☐ **Shaping material,** such as thesis statements, informal and formal outlines, and storyboards
☐ **Rough drafts with revisions** made with Track Changes
☐ **Scanned rough drafts with comments** made by peer reviewers, instructors, and writing center tutors
☐ **Final drafts**
☐ **External hyperlinks** to online source material and other Web sites that support the portfolio

☐ **Visuals** that enhance your documents
☐ **Audio and video clips of oral presentations**
☐ *PowerPoint* **slides**
☐ **Group work** (collaborative work), with your own contributions clearly marked
☐ **Personal writing** that enhances the portfolio
☐ An **electronic résumé,** if the portfolio will be submitted to a prospective employer

Once you understand your instructor's guidelines, you can begin to assemble your electronic portfolio, using the following checklist as a guide.

CHECKLIST

ASSEMBLING AN ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO

As you assemble your electronic portfolio, keep the following guidelines in mind:

☐ **Select material** that corresponds to your instructor's guidelines.
☐ **Revise your material,** using comments made by peer reviewers and by your instructor.
☐ **Compile your material** in electronic files and save your files on a storage device or post them to a Web site.
☐ **Format your material,** using principles of effective Web design to help you present your work.
☐ **Arrange your material** in the order specified by your instructor's guidelines, and include a home page.
☐ **Write a reflective statement** that demonstrates your thoughtful analysis of your portfolio and of individual artifacts within it.
☐ **Collect additional materials** as hard copy in a folder (if necessary).

COMPUTER TIP   academic.cengage.com/eng/kirsznermandell

STORING FILES FOR ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS

Storage Device	Benefit	Limitation
USB flash drive	Files can be resaved; compact and easy to transport	High storage capacity flash drives can be expensive; can be easy to lose
Recordable CD (CD+/-R)	Relatively inexpensive	Files cannot be resaved
Recordable DVD (DVD+/-R)	Holds more content than CD+/-R	Files cannot be resaved; more expensive than CD+/-R

(continued)

STORING FILES FOR ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS *(continued)*		
Storage Device	**Benefit**	**Limitation**
Rewritable CD (CD+/-RW)	Files can be resaved	Holds less content than DVD+/-RW; more expensive than CD+/-R
Rewritable DVD (DVD+/-RW)	Files can be resaved; holds more content than CD+/-RW	More expensive than CD+/-R
Web site	Files can be edited offline with Web authoring software and uploaded	Files must be password protected for privacy

CLOSE-UP

FREE VERSUS PROPRIETARY ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO TOOLS

Electronic portfolio tools available through free or **open-source** software, such as *Drupal*, *Sakai*, and *uPortal*, allow users to edit the software's source code and customize their online portfolio experience. Because open-source software is free, users are granted unlimited access.

Proprietary or **closed-source** software, such as *WebCT* and *Blackboard*, restricts users from editing its code but may still allow various customization options. Proprietary software requires a paid subscription that expires unless renewed. If you consider using an electronic portfolio tool, be sure to find out what its restrictions are before using it to assemble your portfolio.

Figure 2 on the facing page shows the home page for a student's Web-based writing portfolio. Notice how effective Web design elements highlight and distinguish key information on the page.

■ **EXERCISE 5**

Using the checklist on page WP-7 as a guide, assemble your electronic portfolio. Then, reread your instructor's writing portfolio guidelines and add, remove, or rearrange material as necessary.

■ **EXERCISE 6**

Ask a classmate to evaluate the content and design of your electronic portfolio and the arrangement of its content. Is material presented in an effective, attractive way? Is any content superfluous, or is any important content missing? If your portfolio is Web-based, is it easy to navigate from one item to another? After considering your classmate's suggestions, revise your portfolio if necessary.
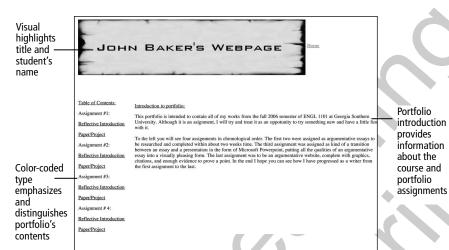
Visual highlights title and student's name

Color-coded type emphasizes and distinguishes portfolio's contents

Portfolio introduction provides information about the course and portfolio assignments

FIGURE 2   Home page for student's Web-based writing portfolio.

Writing Your Reflective Statement

An effective writing portfolio should demonstrate a writer's focused, reflective evaluation of his or her work. For this reason, instructors usually require students to introduce their portfolios with a **reflective statement**—a memo, letter, or essay in which students honestly assess their writing improvement and achievements over a period of time. Reflective statements allow students to see themselves as writers and to discover both their strengths and the areas in which there is still room for improvement. In fact, the reflective statement is often the key component that distinguishes a true writing portfolio from a collection of assignments.

A reflective statement may examine an entire writing portfolio, or it may focus on certain assignments or even on a single assignment. To direct readers to particular assignments, writers of electronic portfolios may supply links to individual artifacts and discuss how they demonstrate progress or mastery of the subject matter. Writers may also summarize, paraphrase, and quote from portfolio content to support claims made in their reflective statements. Keep in mind, however, that a reflective statement is not merely a summary of completed work; it is an opportunity to look closely and analytically at your writing and thus to gain insights about your development as a writer. For this reason, you should be candid and honest in your assessment both of your writing and of your progress. Don't say what you think your instructor wants to hear or exaggerate to make

your work sound impressive. Avoid empty generalities, and be as specific as you can, pointing to successive drafts, peer comments, and instructor comments to support your claims.

CHECKLIST

WRITING A REFLECTIVE STATEMENT

As you write your reflective statement, answer the following questions:

☐ What skills or knowledge does each item in your portfolio demonstrate? How do these skills and knowledge relate to your instructor's goals? How do they relate to your own academic or professional goals?

☐ How are the individual items in your portfolio related? What have you learned about each assignment in the context of your entire portfolio?

☐ How have comments made by peer reviewers and by your instructor helped you revise your work?

☐ How, specifically, has your writing changed throughout the course? What skills will you continue to work on?

☐ Which items in your portfolio best exhibit your development as a writer? Now that you have some distance from these pieces, do you have new insights about your writing that you didn't have before?

Following is the reflective statement for a student's print portfolio. Notice how both content and design highlight the skills progress demonstrated by the student's writing portfolio.

Mahoney 1

To: Professor Russell

From: Samantha Mahoney

Subject: English Composition I Portfolio

Date: December 4, 2006

This memo summarizes the knowledge and skills demonstrated by my English Composition I Portfolio.

Drafting and Revising

What scares me even more than staring at a blank computer screen is sweating over an essay only to have it returned covered in red ink. The relationship essay assignment made me confront my fear of revision and realize that revision is essential to my success as a writer—both in college and after I graduate.

This assignment asked us to explore the deep layers of a relationship. In my essay, "Moments of Silence," I wrote about the relationship I have with my hair and what it says about the relationships I have with my mother, my history, and my identity. While the topic was personal and interesting to me, I was unsure how to present it to my readers so that it would interest them. I ended up writing my first draft in a standard five-paragraph format: stating my main idea in a thesis statement and then discussing supporting points in the body paragraphs.

However, comments I received from peers and from you during our one-on-one conferences made me realize that my structure and general approach to my topic needed work. One peer reviewer told me that my essay's traditional organization made him feel distanced from a story that should have been both personal and unique. I worked

Margin annotations:

Opening component

Purpose statement

Color-coded headings can be used to emphasize and distinguish skill categories

Body of memo describes each assignment, how each essay responds to the assignment, and the skills and knowledge each essay demonstrates

Explanation of how peer and instructor feed-back helped student writer to revise

Mahoney 2

through another draft before realizing that my essay needed to show my readers why this particular relationship is so important to me. At that point, I changed the entire structure of the essay into a personal narrative to better convey the emotional impact of the relationship I was describing.

This assignment showed me that it is not enough to have a compelling topic; I also need to present that topic to readers in a compelling way. As I realized again and again throughout the semester, considering my audience and incorporating suggestions from my readers will help me to achieve my purpose for writing. This assignment made me see early in the semester how important revision is to my development as a college writer and (as I explain later) as an aspiring journalist.

Thinking Critically

The observational descriptive essay assignment asked us to describe a place twice using the same set of details: one description should emphasize the positive aspects of the place, while the other should emphasize the negative. I did not see the value of this assignment until I started working on it and realized it was harder than I had originally thought.

As I observed the restaurant I would write about in "Winter Meal," I began to see the complexities of the place and wonder how I could explain what I saw to others. I tried to view the restaurant from the perspective of a fictional character: a traveler taking refuge from a blizzard or a child who would rather be sledding than eating with his family. In this way, I could describe both the positive and negative qualities of the restaurant to an audience who had never been

Discussion of how revision relates to course goals as well as to student writer's academic and professional goals

Mahoney 3

there. Writing this paper helped me to think critically about my subject and to see that any topic can be viewed from multiple angles.

 This essay was the most creative and, in some ways, the most challenging of all my portfolio essays. I had to overcome my fear of "creative writing"—something I had never imagined myself doing. I learned that observing and describing a topic in detail meant analyzing it—turning it over and over again in my mind and on paper. I learned that creative writing and critical thinking are closely related, and that I could use the analytical skills I developed earlier in the semester (especially with my "Moments of Silence" paper) to write creatively. Now that the semester is over, I can see how much this assignment helped me in my final research project to persevere with my research and to think critically about each source I read.

Identifying an Audience

 Our end-of-the-semester research project asked us to explore the information available on a topic and argue our own position. In researching my topic on nutrition and writing my project, "Pass the Brussels Sprouts," I evaluated the credibility of my sources, examining their language for bias and deciding how they would fit into my paper. During one of our first conferences, you reminded me to keep my audience in mind as I wrote and revised this project. Because of the exploratory nature of the assignment, you suggested that I write for an audience much like myself: people who are not nutrition experts, but who are open to learning new information that challenges or even contradicts their ideas.

Student writer makes connections among items in her portfolio and explains her insights as a developing writer

Explanation of how instructor feedback helped student writer to revise

Mahoney 4

Developing the ability to identify and then write for a specific audience helped me in two major ways. First, it allowed me to refine my selection of sources. For example, I realized that in order to persuade the different members of my audience, I needed to consider the importance and limitations of the government's food pyramid on the one hand and of alternative nutrition plans on the other. Second, identifying a specific audience helped me to set my tone. I found that establishing my credibility as a writer was crucial to persuading my audience.

Discussion of how audience considerations and revision relate to course goals as well as to student writer's academic and professional goals

This assignment was by far the most valuable for me academically and professionally. First, it helped me improve my ability to consider my audience's needs and expectations —a skill that will help me to focus my work in future writing and other courses. Next, this assignment showed me how to see my work from my audience's perspective and to revise accordingly. Finally, it expanded the skills and knowledge I gained from the relationship essay assignment by making me view my work objectively and revise those sections that needed clarification or development. Being able to write and revise for a specific audience is an essential journalistic skill, which I hope to be able to apply in a future career in journalism.

Conclusion summarizes student writer's development and identifies an area for continued improvement

Each of the three essays included in my portfolio— "Moments of Silence," "Winter Meal," and "Pass the Brussels Sprouts"—helped me to develop my ability to revise multiple drafts, to think critically, and to identify and write for a specific audience. "Winter Meal" and "Pass the Brussels Sprouts" best show my development as a writer, but they also reveal one area in which I would like to continually

> Mahoney 5
>
> improve: the ability to distance myself from my work so that
>
> I can gain the critical perspective necessary to write and
>
> revise essays as well as newspaper articles and editorials. The
>
> work I completed for this course, compiled in my writing
>
> portfolio, represents a big step toward reaching that goal.

■ **EXERCISE 7**

Using the checklist on page WP-10 as a guide, write a reflective statement for your portfolio. Ask a friend to read your statement and mark any sections that seem vague, unclear, or unfocused. Then, revise the statement to make it as readable and precise as possible.

Evaluating Writing Portfolios

Evaluation criteria for portfolios may differ from discipline to discipline, but all effective writing portfolios should be *comprehensive, well-organized, attractively presented,* and *consistent with your instructor's style and format guidelines.*

Comprehensive. A **comprehensive** portfolio includes a varied collection of coursework and demonstrates a writer's ability to respond to various writing situations. Be sure to include all the material requested by your instructor, using the lists of possible content on pages WP-4 and WP-6 and WP-7 as guides.

Well-Organized. A **well-organized** portfolio emphasizes a writer's improvement and achievements. Effective writing portfolios follow a consistent, logical organization that smoothly guides readers through a writer's work.

Portfolio content may be organized in various ways. For example, portfolios may be arranged chronologically, or they may be arranged by assignment, format, skill, level of improvement, or applicability to a student's major. Regardless of the method you use, be sure to label each item in your portfolio with a title, your name, your instructor's name, the course number, the date it was submitted, and any other information your instructor requires. To show the portfolio's content and organization at a glance, include a table of contents for print portfolios (see Figure 1 on page WP-5) and a home page for electronic portfolios (see Figure 2 on page WP-9).

Attractively Presented. An **attractively presented** portfolio represents a writer's work in the best possible light. You should use the principles of effective document design or Web design when assembling your writing portfolio and enhance the readability and accessibility of your work. Remember, however, that design elements should never be superfluous or obtrusive; rather, they should always identify and emphasize important information on a page.

Consistent with Your Instructor's Style and Format Guidelines. When your portfolio is **consistent with your instructor's style and format guidelines,** it fulfills expectations established by the instructor and by his or her academic discipline. Carefully follow the documentation style and format guidelines your instructor requires for each assignment.

NOTE: Writing portfolios represent a writer's original work. To avoid committing unintentional plagiarism, be sure to distinguish your ideas from those of your sources.

■ EXERCISE 8

Using the checklists on pages WP-4 or WP-7 as models, create a ten-item customized checklist that addresses the specific concerns you need to consider when assembling your writing portfolio. Compare your checklist with your classmates' and incorporate into your checklist any important steps you omitted. Then, use your checklist to help you assemble, revise, and fine-tune your portfolio.