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# TECHNIQUES

CONNECTING EDUCATION AND CAREERS

## Student Portfolios: Documenting Success

*By Hope J. Gibbs, Techniques Contributing Writer*

Traditionally, portfolios have been used as a visual arts tool showcasing an artist's accomplishments and personally favored works. Today, maintaining a portfolio in the classroom has been found to have many uses both to the teacher and the student. And the contents are just as diverse as the students who create them. A folder—paper or electronic—containing a student's work from start to finish allows the teacher and the student to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various works. Whatever medium or method is used, the value of developing a student portfolio is priceless.

A well-kept portfolio mirrors the comprehension and performance of a student.

New instructional approaches emphasizing the student's role in understanding what, why and how they are doing have increased the value of portfolios and the appreciation of portfolios as an assessment tool for classroom-based performance. Many educators and researchers feel that a portfolio assessment is a superior and more accurate indicator of student progress than the more conventional types of assessment. And, unlike separate testing that takes away from instructional time, student portfolios supplement the learning process. Students develop a better understanding of the criteria used in the grading process by having a visual reference such as the portfolio. Motivation to meet the criteria increases, and the results are a better understanding of the process and materials. Students, teachers and parents are able to view the progress made over the course of a semester, a school year and beyond.

There is no single correct way to develop a student portfolio. However, portfolios are not meant to include everything a student produces. By having clear guidelines and examples of what is required to assemble a portfolio, the student will begin to generate criteria for good work. Students are expected to "collect, select and reflect."

Students become active learners when they assume ownership of their learning.

Suddenly, the classroom becomes student centered instead of teacher centered. Students take an active role in the decision-making process for materials they would like to include in their portfolios. They become the authors of their own academic success.

### **The Paper Portfolio vs. the Electronic Portfolio**

One way to assemble a portfolio, and perhaps the most common, is simply placing selected materials into folders with the student's work. Various sections may be marked off, from "student profile" to "career aspirations." As stated earlier, there is no one right way for the portfolio process as long as it is an orderly and accurate representation of the student and his/her work.

The patented Future Planner Portfolio (published by Talent Assessment, Inc.) is an innovative academic, career and personal planner developed by Bob Douce.

Douce, who is retired after 35 years in education helping students with career, technical and academic challenges, says, "I developed the Future Planner to help students become organized and structured with their goals and planning. The Portfolio provides for career development, academic planning and sequential course learning."

Douce believes in encouraging students to take ownership and responsibility for their educational and career planning.

"The Future Planner Portfolio may be customized to meet the needs of students in any school," says Douce. "I have found that customized portfolios give a personal identity and focus to the school and enhanced learning to students."

The Future Planner Portfolio is unique in that it is durable, expandable and has six to eight insert attachable sections for students' documents, achievements and records. The comprehensive planner includes numerous components for students achieving a successful seamless transition to college and/or employment. Some of these components include:

- Student Profile
- Academic requirements for graduation (four- to seven-year plan)
- Local/state/federal standards for graduation/career
- Career electives required for student's occupational choice
- Grade level timelines and check offs
- Individual Career Path Diary for ninth grade-postsecondary

(Includes: steps to take each year, assessment test scores, community service projects, volunteer services, work experiences, internships, attendance, accountability, etc.)

- Career interest, inventories: ASVAB, personality, etc.
- Class schedule—nine-12, six-12, etc.
- Certification requirements for student's major, technical or career program in secondary and postsecondary levels
- Second year college insert page (requirements, programs, etc.)
- Value/strength inventories
- Specific career related test/assessments used: post exams, fed/local/state technical exams, etc.
- Internships, career related work experience opportunities
- Student documents: resumes, applications, letters of inquiry, projects,

achievements, skill applications

"The Future Planner helps students to maintain their focus. It is designed to hold important documents and records," explains Douce. "It is flexible for students' use in all school systems with different requirements. The planner can be specifically geared or customized to meet a student's career focus program, college preparatory program and/or employment goal."

On the other side of the coin, counselors, teachers, administrators and parents can counsel, evaluate and measure the student's accountability through the portfolio process.

Douce has worked with career and technical schools in developing programs that meet the specific needs of their students.

"All students in a technical school can use the same Portfolio," explains Douce. "Specific programs are color coded and can be attached to the appropriate six/eight attachable sections in the planner. For instance, nursing students may use red inserts, while the aspiring electricians are using blue inserts."

A well-kept portfolio is very useful for those tech schools with articulation agreements, and Douce has created a user friendly one with his Future Planner Portfolio.

"Students can use the portfolio to check off certification requirements that lead to college credits. They may also check off individual requirements during high school while taking a specific course or after completing the course," says Douce. "Various certifications can be defined for students in specific career programs, such as course, industry, employment, state and apprenticeship certifications."

Talent Assessment Inc. is in the process of developing an Electronic Future Planner.

Douce says that he continuously talks with people across the country and finds that most people want a hard copy, something tangible to work on, monitor progress and to which they can attach resumes, applications, projects, and other student achievements and certificates.

"There are schools that do not have enough or any computers available, and they do not have the funding to equip the school with the hardware and software needed for such a program," explains Douce. "There will always be a place for original documents and the value they hold."

### **Pupil Pages**

It is not surprising that portfolios have made their way online. There are several benefits to the online or electronic portfolio. As with the traditional portfolio, they are created with selective and purposeful collections of a student's work. Unlike their predecessors, however, electronic portfolios can include varied media such as text, graphics, video and sound, going beyond the standard pen-and-paper submissions. Electronic portfolios also take up less classroom space, and that is always a plus for the teacher.

Some of the other advantages in employing electronic portfolios are the active learning involved in placing information on the website; allowing others to share

in the process and viewing of the work online; accessibility and portability; ease in upgrading; and the value of a tool that is easily shared among students, teachers, parents and administration. As with the development of any portfolio, the electronic portfolio starts with a clear view of the purpose. Great portfolios require considerable effort on the part of teacher and student alike, but this undertaking produces tangible results, a sense of accomplishment and motivation for the student.

One provider of electronic portfolios is Online Solutions for Educators. Its trademarked Pupil Pages allows students to create and maintain an online portfolio that will follow their progression in school. At the end of the students' secondary schooling they have an organized and stylized presentation of their accomplishments.

Cindy Penchina of Online Solutions for Educators says, "Pupil Pages makes it easy to upload original creative writing and artwork, music, movies or pdfs. There is a bio, resume and journal for each student, and students can use a "Portfolio-2-Go" service to keep their sites when moving out of a school district or after graduation."

What about security for these online sites?

"There is also a password protection so that the teachers and administrators can control who can view student sites," explains Penchina. "The school can also decide to password protect all the student sites so that visitors cannot get access to them without a user name and password. We take into consideration the privacy issues when working with children very seriously."

New York's Brewster Central School District introduced electronic portfolios (using Pupil Pages) with a pilot program for grades three through 12.

Steve Moskowitz, Brewster's director of technology, says, "We are pretty happy with [Pupil Pages], and the teachers are very comfortable with it. We have seen a definite improvement in instruction, and we are planning on formally incorporating the program in every grade from third through the 12th in the school district."

He also notes, "Basically, in keeping with the No Child Left Behind Act, we were already thinking about promoting more technology, and we wanted to introduce web-based applications. That was the direction we wanted to go, but we needed to have applications on both sides of the desk."

The year before, web pages were implemented to all of Brewster's teachers, and it worked well.

"We have over 300 web pages on our system for all to view", says Moskowitz. "We have clearly seen a substantial improvement in teachers' technical skill, based on assessments given before and after the project. We worked with the teachers first and monitored the systemic growth with technology. We got them to a comfortable place with online environments, posting information relevant to their programs, and empowering them. This year our strategy has turned toward the students. When we approached Penchina with our specifications for a tool we wanted written, we basically flushed out the problems, and now we have a program that is simple enough for the teachers and the students to use."

One of the focuses Moskowitz had in developing the program with the provider

was making sure it did not require too much customization. "The tool forces the student to spend more time actually working," he notes. "Many kids are working harder, and you can see it in the revisions they make on their work. It forces them to reflect."

A distinct advantage of the electronic portfolio is the ability to broaden the audience, and that has increased the students' desire to improve.

"Now, the student's grandma, who may be located across the country, and other family members can view the portfolio," explains Moskowitz. "Many kids work a lot harder knowing that others can see their efforts and successes, too."

The Brewster School District communicated with parents openly and frequently about the development of the program and offered an opt-out for those parents who still felt uneasy with the program.

In addressing the site's security, Moskowitz says, "When we first started looking at sites, we noticed there were some with the students' names and some personal information, and we didn't want that. We wanted a site that students, teachers and parents would feel secure working with. We use no names and have a total log-in scenario. There are two levels of security just to view it, which means to access the Brewster District Pupil Pages you would have to know the user name log-in and their password."

Moskowitz's advice for schools considering an electronic portfolio system is to look into how it works with the school's specific program or criteria, and let the program drive the technology, not the other way around.

### **Using Both Paper and Electronic Portfolios**

ACTE member Gay Johnston is employed as Gordon Cooper Technology Center's (GCTC) graphic design instructor. Johnston's students maintain a paper portfolio that illustrates the projects they have completed and job skills they have learned, and they also produce a digital portfolio.

"My philosophy of education includes the fact that I must first set the example for my students. I take pride in my work by keeping an up-to-date portfolio," Johnston says.

"In the computer graphic design program that I teach, the students earn points toward the purchase of a leather portfolio. In this, a student places his best work to show during an employment interview," explains Johnston. "Because our program covers several types of software, a student could have several sections of work, with the key sections being page layout, photo manipulation and drawing. All work is printed on a color printer and mounted to matte board for the best presentation."

Johnston takes the same key elements and has the students design and produce a digital portfolio using Adobe Acrobat. Students burn this information on a CD to leave with prospective employers as a handy reference.

"Currently, I am working on a website that will incorporate these portfolios and allow the students to update as their career progresses," she notes.

"The Gordon Cooper Technology Center Trade & Industrial (T&I) Education program has taken portfolio development to the next step in providing a way to

illustrate the range of assignment, goals and record of activities for students in a given program,” explains Johnston.

Jodie Eiland, GCTC’s residential/commercial construction instructor uses certificates extensively in his program. When a student completes a unit, he or she receives a certificate of completion that includes the specific objectives of the unit and can be placed in the portfolio. The prospective employer can see exactly what skills the interviewee possesses.

Johnston adds, “In the T&I arena, student portfolios are used as a showcase for the skills a student has developed in his designated program. It is a pictorial representation of the skills developed, showing the growth and accuracy of the student’s work.”

Johnston has placed emphasis on students becoming prepared for the interview process that they will face once leaving school. She guides her students in the collecting, selecting and reflecting of works to be placed in the portfolio that is used as a marketing tool to prospective employers. Resumes, course objectives, course projects, completion certificates, student organization certificates and awards, state and national competency certifications, and references are included in the portfolio.

“When a student can go to an interview armed with his best work, a definite level of confidence is gained,” explains Johnston. “Many times, when placed against others without a portfolio, the student interviewing with one has a better chance of being hired simply because the employer sees what the student is capable of doing. This is yet another way of teaching our students about real-life experience.”

The growing interest in the development of portfolios prompted Johnston and Eiland to present at the ACTE Annual Convention in Orlando last December. The topic, “A T&I Perspective: Creating Student Portfolios,” examined the process of compiling student-managed portfolios in the digital and notebook versions to enhance student progress, productivity and marketability.

“Along with individual progress charts, the portfolio can add motivation to students in the classroom,” says Johnston. “With so many hands-on activities in the classroom, I use the progress chart to help students keep a record of completed assignments and the grade received. As the student continues to add to a portfolio, a sense of pride emanates from seeing his work and the progress made. As the student sees this progress, it motivates him to continue to develop and produce.”

As further proof to her students in illustrating how an individual can progress, Johnston keeps her own portfolio available to her students to review at any time. Her portfolio contains her very first item she created up to the most current.

“This allows my students to see my development as a designer,” Johnston says. “It shows them that I, too, started simple and expanded my horizons. By seeing this transformation, the students begin to realize that designing is a lifelong learning process.”

### **For Further Exploration**

These are some of the sources for more information on developing student portfolios.

### **Portfolio Providers and Websites**

Talent Assessment, Inc.  
P.O. Box 5087  
Jacksonville, FL 32247  
1-800-634-1472  
[www.talentassessment.com](http://www.talentassessment.com)  
e-mail: [talenta@bellsouth.net](mailto:talenta@bellsouth.net)  
Contact: Bob Douce

Online Solutions for Educators  
[www.os4e.com](http://www.os4e.com)  
You can try a free demo of *Pupil Pages!*  
Contact: Cindy Penchina

Creating Electronic Portfolios  
On the Alphabet Superhighway  
[www.ash.udel.edu/ash/teacher/portfolio.html](http://www.ash.udel.edu/ash/teacher/portfolio.html)

### **Books and Publications**

*Creating Portfolios: For Success in School, Work, and Life*, by Martin Kimeldorf and Pamela Espeland

*The Portfolio Organizer: Succeeding With Portfolios in Your Classroom*, by Carol Rolheiser, Barbara Bower and Laurie Stevahn

*The Portfolio Book: A Step-By-Step Guide for Teachers*, by Cathy Grace, Elizabeth F. Shores and Kathy Charner

*An Introduction to Using Portfolios in the Classroom*, by Charlotte Danielson and Leslye Abrutyn

(You can find all of these on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).)

*Creating Your High School Portfolio, Second Edition* is from JIST Publishing, which also publishes *Creating Your High School Resume, Second Edition*. The accompanying support materials include the *Instructor's Guide for Creating Your High School Portfolio* and *Creating Your High School Resume*. For more information, see the ad on page 10 in this issue of *Techniques*, or visit [www.jist.com](http://www.jist.com).



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