



## **ESTABLISHING PORTFOLIO EVALUATION**

### **What is a portfolio?**

A portfolio is a collection of student writing designed to track students' writing progress over the course of a semester or a year. Having a sense of how students' writing has developed over time can help instructors determine students' progress towards their college-readiness goals. By providing students with an opportunity to compile their written work and reflect on their own growth as writers, portfolios also help develop students' metacognitive abilities and capacities for self-assessment.

A portfolio should include:

- Examples of both formal and informal writing assignments, at least some of which have undergone revision
- A variety of genres or modes of writing
- A letter or memo in which the student reflects on his or her progress over the course of the semester or year.

Ideally, students should take an active role in deciding which pieces of writing to include in their portfolios. Articulating why they have selected these pieces as examples of their best work should be part of their reflective letter or memo.

While portfolios are often presented in folders or binders, some instructors have found that asking students to publish their work in online “e-portfolios” gives students the opportunity to think through the rhetorical demands of web design. E-portfolios save on paper and storage space, and also provide students with the means to share their writing with an audience beyond the classroom.

Portfolios should be reviewed at least once each semester, but they can be reviewed as often as once per unit. Collecting portfolios more often will allow teachers and students to track incremental progress, while collecting portfolios after a longer period of time will offer a more dramatic view of long-term development.

Teachers who review portfolios on a once-per-semester basis may find it helpful to have students revise their early writing before submitting the portfolio. Revision gives students the opportunity to showcase their development, while also giving them a chance to see how much they have developed over the course of the term.

### **What should instructors be evaluating?**

The criteria for assessing portfolios should be consistent with the goals of each unit as well as the school-wide goals. When creating a rubric, use language drawn from the school-wide goals and benchmarks so that students understand how each assignment in the portfolio contributes to their writing goals—students should be able to use these rubrics to self-assess their portfolios before

turning them in. The rubric should offer a range of categories to show students how close they are to meeting their goals (see Sample Portfolio Rubric).

**How should instructors follow up on portfolio evaluation results?**

Evaluating student portfolios using a rubric allows instructors to communicate areas of strength and weakness to individual students. Collectively, these rubrics also helps instructors determine which benchmarks have not been met by large numbers of students, or which areas students seem to be struggling with as a group. Teachers can then develop a plan for implementing curricular changes or designing practical classroom activities to address those weaknesses.