## Course: Ed St 5170
## Instructor: OBrien

Title: Week 10: What Makes A Portfolio a Portfolio?
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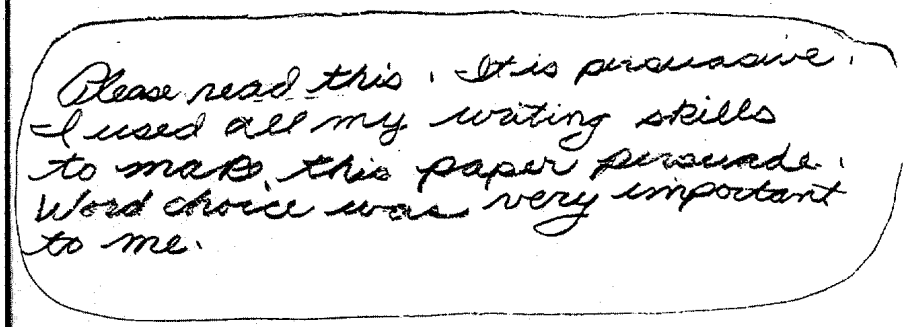
# What Makes a Portfolio a Portfolio?

Eight thoughtful guidelines will help educators encourage self-directed learning.



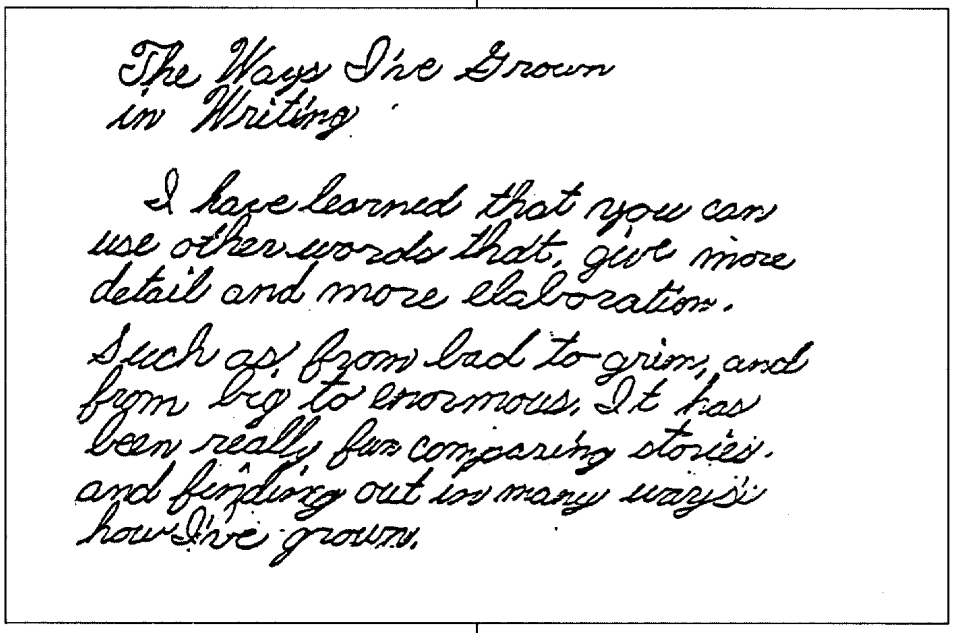

"I used all my writing skill to make this paper persuade. Word choice was very important to me." Tony attached these words to a paper in his writing portfolio to explain why the paper was significant to him. His self-reflective statements help illustrate a key value associated with student portfolios and a rationale for using them: portfolios permit instruction and assessment to be woven together in a way that more traditional approaches do not.

This article explores the question, "What makes a portfolio a portfolio?" Let's begin with a definition that we helped formulate while working with a group of educators from seven states under the auspices of the Northwest Evaluation Association[1]:

> A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection.

The writing portfolios used in Tony's class are in many ways similar to the portfolios artists assemble in order to gain entrance into an art school or to secure a commission. For example, the Pacific Northwest College of Art[2] gives the following rationale for portfolios:

An application portfolio is a visual representation of who you are as an artist, your history as well as what you are currently doing.... It is representing you when you're not present.... Part of the evaluation of a portfolio is based on the personal choices [you] make when picking pieces for the portfolio. It tells the school something about [your] current values; that's why you will rarely get a school to be very specific about what they look for in a portfolio. [You] should not be afraid to make choices.


The Ways I've Grown in Writing

I have learned that you can use other words that give more detail and more elaboration. Such as: from bad to grim, and from big to enormous. It has been really fun comparing stories and finding out in so many ways how I've grown.

## The Portfolio: A Powerful Concept

Portfolios have the potential to reveal a lot about their creators. They can become a window into the students' heads, a means for both staff and students to understand the educational process at the level of the individual learner. They can be powerful educational tools for encouraging students to take charge of their own learning.

Portfolios allow students to assume ownership in ways that few other instructional approaches allow. Portfolio assessment requires students to collect and reflect on examples of their work, providing both an instructional component to the curriculum and offering the opportunity for authentic assessments. If carefully assembled, portfolios become an intersection of instruction and assessment: they are not just instruction or just assessment but, rather, both. Together, instruction and assessment give more than either gives separately.

To Whom it May Concern:

In the pages that follow in this portfolio, you will find the work that I feel represents my strengths in my written work from my junior year at Hillsboro High School. In order that you may see the overall picture, I have included expository, informative, and creative pieces in this portfolio. All six samples were constructed in an atmosphere that provided ample time for revision and peer reviewing. Each sample represents skills that I have found to enhance the quality of my writing.

## Guidelines for Realizing That Power

Fulfilling the potential of portfolios as an intersection of instruction and assessment is neither simple nor straightforward. We must find new ways for the two processes to work together. Doing so involves answering a question that has no simple answer: "What makes a portfolio a portfolio?" The portfolio is a concept that can be realized in many ways. Portfolios are as varied as the children who create them and as the classrooms in which they are found. However, to preserve those aspects of the portfolio that give the concept its power, we offer this list of guidelines[3]:

1. Developing a portfolio offers the student an opportunity to learn about learning. Therefore, the end product must contain information that shows that a student has engaged in self-reflection.

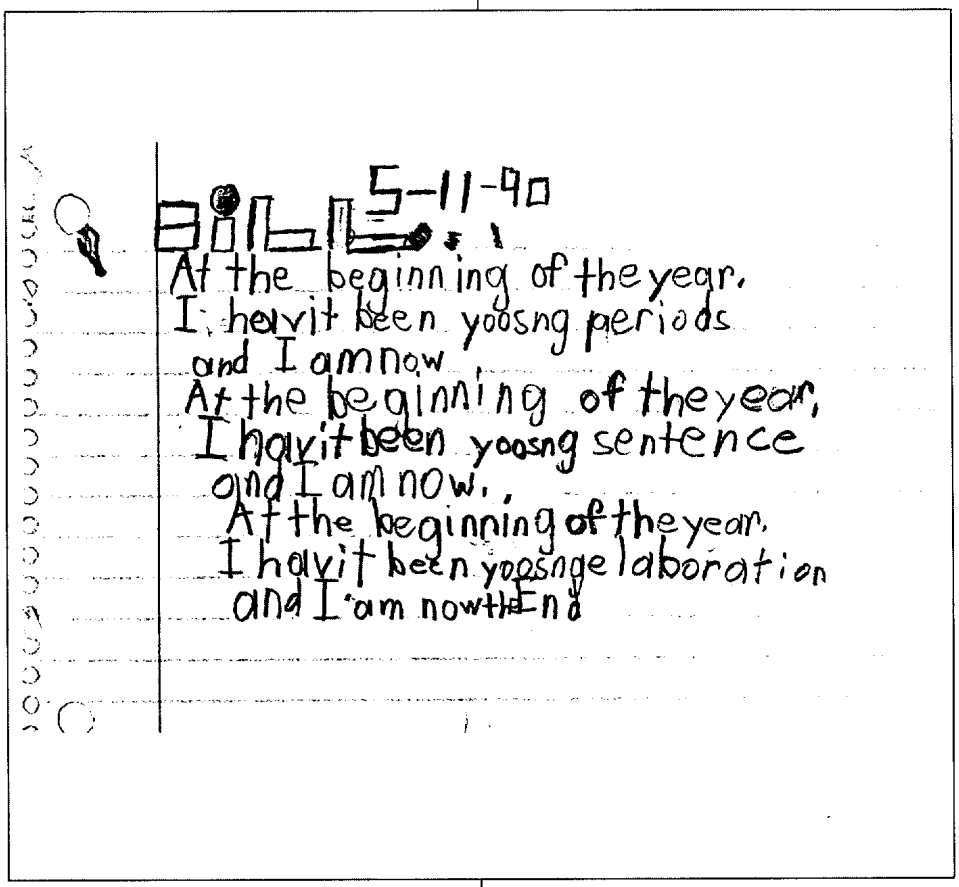
2. The portfolio is something that is done *by* the student, not *to* the student. Portfolio assessment offers a con-

crete way for students to learn to value their own work and, by extension, to value themselves as learners. Therefore, the student must be involved in selecting the pieces to be included.

3. The portfolio is separate and different from the student's cumulative folder. Scores and other cumulative folder information that are held in central depositories should be included in a portfolio only if they take on new meaning within the context of the other exhibits found there.

4. The portfolio must convey explicitly or implicitly the student's activities; for example, the rationale (purpose for forming the portfolio), intents (its goals), contents (the actual displays), standards (what is good and not-so-good performance), and judgments (what the contents tell us).[4]

5. The portfolio may serve a different purpose during the year from the purpose it serves at the end. Some material may be kept because it is instructional, for example, partially finished work on problem areas. At the end of the year, however, the portfolio may contain only material that the student is willing to make public.




**Portfolios can become a window into the students' heads, a means for both staff and students to understand the educational process at the level of the individual learner.**

6. A portfolio may have multiple purposes, but these must not conflict. A student's personal goals and interests are reflected in his or her selection of materials, but information included may also reflect the interests of teachers, parents, or the district. One purpose that is almost universal in student portfolios is showing progress on the goals represented in the instructional program.

7. The portfolio should contain information that illustrates growth. There are many ways to demonstrate growth. The most obvious is by including a series of examples of actual school performance that show how the student's skills have improved. Changes observed on interest inventories, records of outside activities such as reading, or on attitude measures are other ways to illustrate a student's growth.

8. Finally, many of the skills and techniques that are involved in producing effective portfolios do not happen by themselves. By way of support,

students need models of portfolios, as well as example of how others develop and reflect upon portfolios.

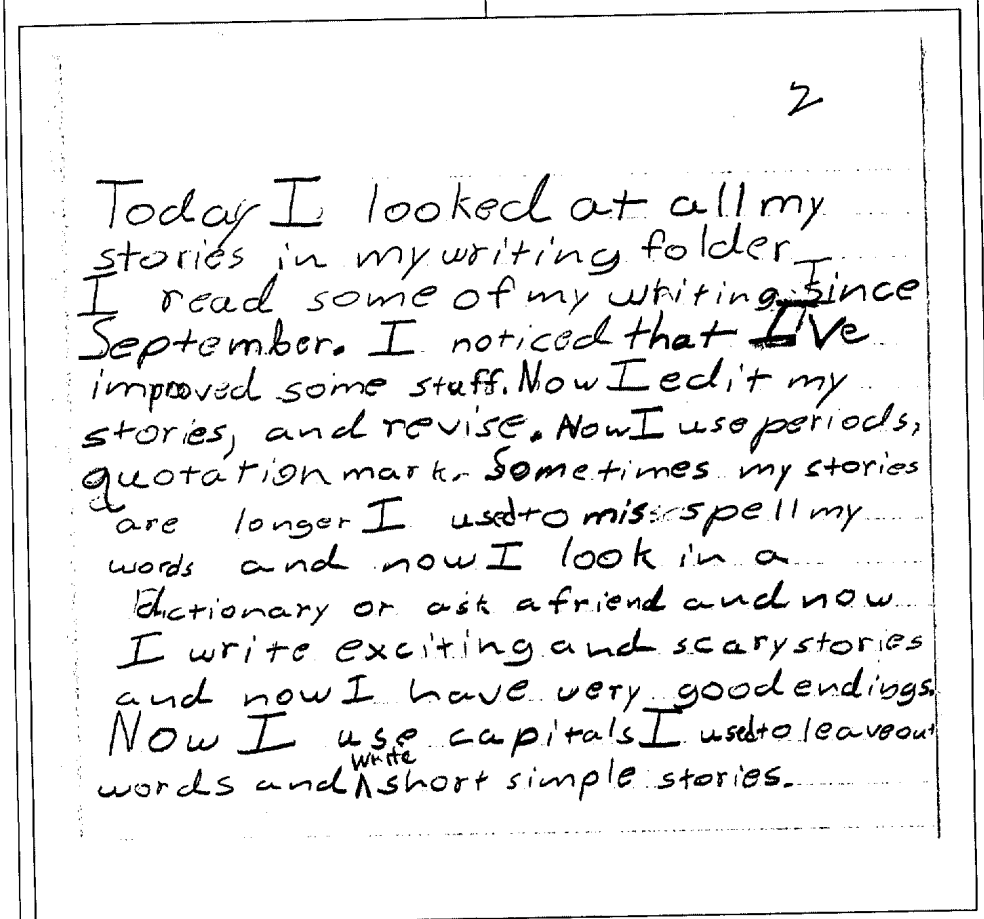
There are a considerable variety of portfolio assessment projects appearing in schools, reflecting the fact that portfolio assessment is a healthy and robust concept. We recommend, however, that when designing programs or purchasing commercial portfolio assessment materials, educators reflect on the eight aspects of the portfolio that we believe give the concept its power. We offer our list as a way of initiating thoughtful critiques.

### A Broad Look at Learning

Portfolios offer a way of assessing student learning that is quite different from traditional methods. While achievement tests offer outcomes in units that can be counted and accounted, portfolio assessment offers the opportunity to observe students in a broader context: taking risks, developing creative solutions, and learning to make judgments about their own performances.

**Portfolios are as varied as the children who create them and as the classrooms in which they are found.**

A portfolio, then, is a portfolio when it provides a complex and comprehensive view of student performance in context. It is a portfolio when the student is a participant in, rather than the object of, assessment. Above all, a portfolio is a portfolio when it provides a forum that encourages students to develop the abilities needed to become independent, self-directed learners.□



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Today I looked at all my stories in my writing folder. I read some of my writing since September. I noticed that I've improved some stuff. Now I edit my stories, and revise. Now I use periods, quotation mark. Sometimes my stories are longer I used to misspell my words and now I look in a dictionary or ask a friend and now I write exciting and scary stories and now I have very good endings. Now I use capitals I used to leave out words and write short simple stories.

[1]This working definition grew out of discussions at a conference on "Aggregating Portfolio Data" held at Union, Washington, in August 1990. For more information, see: *White Paper on Aggregating Portfolio Data*, rev. ed., (1990), by C. Meyer and S. Schuman, which is available from the Northwest Evaluation Association, 5 Centerpointe Dr., Lake Oswego, OR 97035.

[2]Pacific Northwest College of Art, (1985), *Preparing your Application Portfolio* (pamphlet); available from the college at 1219 S.W. Park, Portland OR 97205.

[3]This list draws on discussions on metacognition (thinking about thinking) held at Northwest Evaluation Association conferences on portfolio assessment in December 1989 and August 1990. Participants were from seven states and included teachers, curriculum and assessment specialists, administrators, and representatives of state departments of education. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the 57 people who participated.

[4]See F. L. Paulson and P. R. Paulson, "How Do Portfolios Measure Up?: A Cognitive Model for Assessing Portfolios," paper presented at the conference of the Northwest Evaluation Association on "Aggregating Portfolio Data," Union, Washington, August 1990 (available from the authors at the addresses given below and also through ERIC).

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