Portfolio


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A portfolio is a collection of a student’s work. The intent is to provide a more complete and richer display of a student’s abilities to deal with complex problems. The portfolio is one answer to those who feel that the traditional evaluation of student performance, limited to letter grades or points for academic work and behavior, is too narrow to depict other possible student talents. While grades seem cold and conclusive, portfolio collections often can open constructive conversations among teacher, parent, and student about the processes that have brought the student to the conclusion of the most recent product and raise plans for future possibilities.

Portfolios can, if gathered and maintained in a systematic manner, provide a record that: has been compiled with the participation of the student through self-reflection and selection of the pieces to represent his or her record. It is tangible and can be compared to others in the class and to previous work by the student to clearly show areas of progress or need for attention, and it leads to a progressively more complex and demanding set of academic requirements, tailored to the student’s individual talents and needs.

Portfolios can, if not valued as a valid means for evaluation and if not regularly groomed and updated, become space-consuming clutter, vulnerable to those who are quick to criticize educational fads.

The means for evaluation and the potential content for the student portfolio have been given reasonable attention over the past decade. Implementation of portfolio assessment is still at the experimental stage, but some schools are making progress. Composition and science seem to be the frontline curricular areas to adopt this approach. Progressions in student grammar, spelling, sentence structure, and communication of meaning are clearly composition elements that can be demonstrated and compared from one year to the next. Defining terms, practice in basic experiments, documenting observations in narrative and numeric methods, and drawing conclusions or making predictions offer scope and sequence that can be reflected in science portfolios.

The portfolio approach opens evaluation to richer descriptive records. Reading performance, for example, becomes more than a number of titles read or reading ability at, below, or above a specific grade level. Reading teachers and library media specialists can comment on the student’s ability to make reading selections and the student’s growth in discussion about the content of what has been read. The portfolio record may even document the student’s reflections on what he or she has selected and favored over the years and can define a goal for reading more in terms of questions to be explored and personal interests rather than just mastering basic phonetic skills.
The same may be true for portfolios in information literacy. Will they be used to document basic steps or to illustrate critical thoughts?

**The Portfolio and Information Literacy**

What is the potential for use of portfolios to document the information literacy performance of students? Should this be a record compiled by classroom teachers, by library media specialists, or both? Can such records be realistically gathered and maintained in a timely, efficient, and understandable manner? These are demanding and largely unexplored questions for the school library media field. Library media specialists who have established information skills instruction integrated at the point of need with specific assignments, collaboratively planned and implemented with the classroom teacher, are clearly on the cutting edge for instruction today. They may feel that there is no need to expand this instructional role into the evaluation of student performance through portfolio records. Some schools have adopted a scope and sequence curriculum that includes identification of specific information skills; however most have not coordinated such efforts so that information literacy is a performance to be evaluated in a variety of curricular settings across the students academic career.

Without such a curricular framework it is difficult to illustrate the degree of proficiency of a student’s information selection and use skills. To add an evaluation process that requires documentation of student work; conversations with student, teachers, and parents; and writing a constructive judgment may be asking too much of the library media specialist. And yet, we must speculate on the possibilities if the teaching role is to be implemented fully. Conducting evaluation completes the teaching cycle. Evaluation can take many forms, including the assessment of student information needs through reference interviews, determining reading options through readers advisory, and feedback to classroom teachers for purposes of revising collaborative lessons. Evaluation of student performance, however, is the key to becoming a full player in the information literacy educational process. Such evaluation can tell us much about what students really select as valid information, when and how they make those judgments, and what library media specialists and other teachers should do to encourage or correct various information use or misuse behaviors.

It seems that the most reasonable approach for introducing the potential for portfolio assessment in the information literacy curriculum is to further expand the basic principles that provide the foundation for the collaborative instructional activities. Information literacy becomes a component of the assessment criteria for the portfolio, and this component can appear in a record related to any area of the curriculum. The criteria, however, remain the same across the curriculum. These criteria can be introduced to teachers with the hope that they will adopt them as part of the established evaluation process, or these evaluation criteria can become an extension of the collaborative teaching role now seen as key to ensuring that students are effective users of information.

**The Colorado Model**
Work in development of information literacy rubrics in Colorado has led to identification of some of the evaluation criteria measures that should be applied in portfolio assessment for information skills.

A rubric is a descriptive measurement, given on a progressive scale. Often the rubric defines in a set of related statements what the learner should know and be able to demonstrate for self-evaluation or evaluation by others. The progressive scale usually ranges from basic skills to advanced skills relative to the age group being measured. Target indicators are used to show the skills to be considered. Measures range from entry-level actions such as in the process of making progress toward this skill to showing signs of being proficient in this area to demonstrating advanced, creative, exceptional performance compared to peer group. The Colorado Information Literacy Rubric provides one of the first systematic frameworks for documenting the ability of every student in how he or she:

- constructs meaning from information;
- creates a quality product;
- learns independently;
- participates as a group member; and
- uses information and information technologies responsibly and ethically.

As with any pioneering document, there is still room for refinement and greater specificity, but the Colorado instrument goes a long way in introducing some skill development strands, which can be converted to evaluation criteria applicable to student portfolios of information use, composition, and critical thinking. One rubric strand is illustrated below.

Target Indicator: The student acquires information. Progressive, observable actions for the student to reflect on and for others to consider in evaluation of performance:

**In Progress:** Someone helps me extract details from information.

**Essential:** I can extract details and concepts from one type of information resource.

**Proficient:** I extract details and concepts from different types of resources.

**Advanced:** I extract details and concepts from all types of resources.

Taking this one example from the Colorado plan, in isolation, does not illustrate the full range of information literacy skills contained in their proposed rubric framework. However, this one sequence, as others from the rubric, can give rise to ideas concerning evidence necessary for the components in a portfolio that would represent information literacy. Examples from the student’s work would be sought to indicate that the student:

1. Follows specific steps concerning what to read and what information to look for to answer a given question. Guidance may be given by the library media specialist, classroom teacher, parent, or other student. A worksheet with pre-stated questions and specific examples for guidance may be evidence of the practice of this first-level skill.
2. Knows the difference between fact and concept. Along with this, the student can demonstrate how to extract facts and concepts from an information source which is commonly accepted as a resource for the students' ability level: an almanac table and summary, an encyclopedia article, a magazine article. Exercises in practice of fact and concept identification from an information source may serve as evidence of this ability.

3. Examines several resources for identification of related information, similar or conflicting, from several sources and links these pieces together to construct aspects of an argument, to expand perspective by listing several related issues, or to describe in detail an event or phenomenon. This is a jump to sophisticated skills. Demonstration of the ability to move through a variety of information sources for such purposes may be difficult to document. One option is a collection of note cards that contains both direct quotations and paraphrasing of information extracted by the student. In addition, the student needs to show evidence from a variety of sources and to document which sources were most useful and why. Therefore, notes should include room for the student to document judgments concerning the adequacy of the source and information extracted.

4. Can determine which resources are most likely to provide the information necessary to confirm, contradict, and therefore expand a line of argument; provide association and clustering of issues; or enrich a description of an event. Evidence at this point is more than simply showing that the student can extract information from a personal interview, a self-conducted survey, a televised debate of experts, a primary source, or any other type of resource we might identify. Extracting information from any one resource is basic and doesn’t change the skill level, even through the student may now be able to demonstrate how to extract information from an almanac, a journal, and a personal interview. Evidence that the student has used three different sources is simply one skill times three a repetition of level one unless newly introduced sources require a different set of skills for extracting information. Assignments in which the student has been required to use three sources, whether necessary or not for the completion of the report, do no more to document advanced skills than do basic worksheets for practice use of one source. Knowing why other sources are necessary and best in predicting where, when, and how to approach those sources for gathering the potential evidence to meet a specific information need are the advanced skills to be documented. While these may be reflected in a students product, such as a report based on use of multiple resources, these advanced skills are best documented by a reflection paper or a critical discussion by the student in which he or she explains why certain resources were selected and what limitations as well as merits each resource provided in helping the student accomplish his or her desired communication goal.

The Colorado Information Literacy Rubric does not get into the details for specific student products for portfolios, nor does it expand on each indicator suggested above. It is, however, an invaluable collection of potential evaluation categories from which can be extracted checklists, questions, and evaluation criteria for student portfolio review. Moving from this given rubric to information literacy portfolio evaluation criteria will result in additional consideration as to what critical skills are worth the time and effort to document.

The Evaluator’s Rubric
Getting started in the complexities of information literacy portfolio construction and review may require some consideration of a rubric that illustrates the roles and actions of those involved. Division of time and effort among other tasks is certainly a key factor that will delay full implementation of portfolio review for information literacy skills; however, the potential is enormous if the review process is established in relation with successful portfolio programs for student composition, reading, and critical analysis skills across the curriculum.

**Target Indicator:** The School Library Media Specialist as Evaluator of Student Information Literacy Performance

**In Progress:** The teacher of school library media collaborates with the classroom teachers to integrate information literacy with various assignments requiring the use of multiple resources. Specific student performance skills for information use have been identified and organized in a scope and sequence across the academic program for typical, special need, and gifted students K-12.

**Essential:** The school library media specialist and the classroom teacher collaborate to present, facilitate, and coach students as they develop skills in the selection, analysis, synthesis, and application of information to solve problems. Both the school library media specialist and other teachers feel comfortable in conversing with students about their information needs, interpretation of information content, and alternatives for further information. Exercises in information use are evaluated by both teachers from the library media center and from the classroom. Student information literacy performance has an influence on the overall evaluation of the student.

**Proficient:** Evaluation of the students product includes evaluation of the information selection and use process. Criteria for this evaluation have been established and provided to the student prior to the beginning of the process, and the application of the criteria has been modeled by the school library media specialist and the other teachers. Application of the criteria for evaluation includes student self-evaluation as well as feedback from the library media specialist and other teachers.

**Advanced:** Examples of communication products, including those electronically recorded with narrative and visuals, are gathered to reflect the progression in information literacy by the student. A record of the evaluation of student performance by the library media specialist, other teachers, student peers, and the student are contained in checklists and descriptive notes. The students progress is mapped against the scope and sequence measures for the school's information literacy curriculum.

**Related Readings**


