



## THE PORTFOLIOS IN THE WRITING CLASSROOMS

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### ABSTRACT

*The portfolio is, essentially, a collection of writing by a student in a course, informed by reflective thinking and writing, which allows students to look back and think forward. Following guidelines established by the professor, the student assembles a portfolio to demonstrate any number of things: mastery in written form of a particular course's material; development over time of skills; a selection of artifacts to support a narrative claim for excellence. This list is not exhaustive. Portfolios are highly flexible. Because they provide multiple samples, too, they are in general a more accurate reflection of a student's progress than a final term paper or other single document.*

Writing essays can be a crucial tool for teaching writing to non-native speakers, and adopting portfolios in the writing classroom would promote not only teaching writing itself, but also assessing the worksheets students write in the classroom authentically. In addition, portfolio assessment can be helpful for EFL students to increase confidence in writing by allowing the students to see their progress over time.

The term portfolio started from collections of an artist's work for getting admission into an art school. In an educational context, portfolio is defined as "a purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas". Portfolios include materials such as "essays, compositions, poetry, book reports, art work, video- or audiotape recordings of a student's oral production, journals, and virtually anything else one wishes to specify". In this sense, using portfolios in the classroom is considered a shift away from a traditional teacher centered teaching to student-centered teaching, form-focused instruction to meaning-focused instruction, and valuing the product to the process of learning.

Portfolios have been adapted to the assessment fields because of the incongruity between process learning and product assessment. Moya and O'Malley state that the information derived from a standardized test cannot give the information needed to understand students' progress and achievement; thus, educators have started finding an alternative form of assessment, and portfolio assessment has been seen as a crucial alternative to traditional assessment. Portfolio assessment is one of the most widely used alternative assessments.



Portfolios have been incorporated in the writing classroom and performed significant roles for facilitating writing instruction as well as assessing students' writing. According to Judy Lombardi, in the mid-1980s, today's portfolios emerged from requiring students to submit collections with several genres in order to exit a writing program instead of requiring students to take an exam. This requirement can be interpreted as a new focus on the process of learning. Shameem, Rafik-Galea argues that writing portfolios help students develop themselves as writers. Portfolios can show the writing process from incubating ideas to writing the final draft. Substantial revisions and re-writings can show the process of writers' developing their ideas. This feature of portfolios is directly related to the characteristics of the process writing instruction.

Furthermore, writing portfolios encourage students to focus on practicing writing in the classroom. According to Rafic-Galea, using portfolio assessment gives students the impression that developing ideas about a topic is more important than correcting grammatical errors in the early stage of writing. In addition, portfolio assessment gives teachers ideas about how to give feedback on students' writing and helps students take responsibility to lead their rough drafts to the final well-organized draft.

To investigate students' perspectives on using portfolio assessment in the EFL writing courses, actual field research was conducted. Rafik-Galea explores whether adopting writing portfolios in the writing classroom is helpful to improve pre-university students' writing ability. The results prove that students have a positive attitude toward writing portfolios; students answer that writing portfolios promote their learning and help them feel involvement in their own learning and assessment. Since writing portfolios emphasize the strengths of students writing rather than the weaknesses, students gradually have more confidence in their writing. In addition, students respond that writing portfolios and portfolio assessment contribute to improve their writing ability such as increasing clarity of their writings and identifying the basic rules of sentence structures and mechanics.

Rafic-Galea points out that through analyzing students' portfolios, students can have a better understanding of the writing process (outlining, drafting, revising, proofreading, and writing the final draft) and put more effort to develop each piece of writing to get a well-written final draft. Writing portfolios provide an environment where students can focus on writing without constantly worrying about their writing grades. Although portfolio assessment tends to assess students' final products, the final products are considered the evidence of the writing process, and the progress over time is also highlighted in assessing writing portfolios. Teachers agree that portfolios bring a positive effect to interaction between students and teachers as well as increase students' confidence in writing and lower students' anxiety toward writing. The results of the study suggest that the writing portfolio is an effective method for teaching process writing; thus, utilizing portfolio should be encouraged in EFL writing classrooms. In short, both studies indicate that portfolios are beneficial in writing courses as a learning tool as well as an assessment, and students should be informed of the benefits of using portfolios in the writing courses.

Krest, who has used portfolios in her process writing classroom in high school, acknowledges the numerous positive contributions of portfolios to teaching writing. From her experience, she illustrates three main functions of portfolios in the process writing classroom.



First, they serve as collection of students' writing including outlines, drafts, revisions, and final writings. Teachers should instruct students how to use the portfolios and what should be included in their portfolios. For example, teachers should inform students of keeping everything they write and writing the dates on the paper to keep track of their writings. Second, portfolios document students' development over time. Portfolios record students' risk taking and progress for their parents, peers, and administrators as well as students themselves. By reflecting on the documents, students can understand the writing process better and can use the documented papers as resources for idea generation. Even though students sometimes complain about all the writing work, they tend to be eventually satisfied with progress on their writing skill and confidence in writing due to the writing portfolio .

Third, portfolios can assess students' writing realistically in light of the criteria established by both the teacher and student together; the teacher and student look over his/her portfolio and discuss what the student has accomplished and what the student expects to accomplish in the future. Teachers do not need to assess every paper student have written. Instead, teachers should give students choices to select which papers to assess. The period and grading focus of the assessment can be varied depending on students' levels and the objectives of the lessons. For example, if students are at the advanced level, teachers can give them more time to polish their writing without worrying about grading; thus, the assessment for the advanced level class can take place less often than the intermediate class. In addition, the grades of the final work in the advanced level class will be affected by grammatical and mechanical errors as well as content and organization of the writing . In short, the three main functions of portfolios in the writing classroom are collecting students' writing, documenting students' development, and assessing students' writing realistically.

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