What We Mean By *Portfolios*

Composition Program Teaching Talk
Wednesday, March 27, 2019

Although the Composition Program at Virginia Tech has not in recent history been portfolio-based, there are good reasons for us to shift gradually toward more explicit guidance of student projects that cares for the intentional collection and arrangement of all of the work that goes into each of the three major projects: in-class fast-writes, peer review documents, exit tickets (i.e., send-off writing at class's end), research memos, journal entries, revision plans, in-progress drafts (i.e., half-drafts), and more.

The suggested structure for ENGL1105 and ENGL1106 is as follows:

Project One with *Invention Portfolio*	Project Two with *Invention Portfolio*	Project Three with *Invention Portfolio*	Project Four, or *Course Portfolio*

Each invention portfolio is a collection of daily writing, notes, homework, in-class writing, and so on. Whether you adopt an approach to collecting work that is fully online, fully paper-based, or some combination of the two (hybrid), the invention portfolio involves students in project management, in practicing organization with weeks-long writing development. All items in the invention portfolio may be graded as you wish, though it's perfectly appropriate to provide feedback that matches with the time you have available for it. I recommend a check, check-plus, check-minus system because it returns a general rating to students quickly in some instances, while also allowing you to write more developed comments on selected pieces of work. This rating system expresses value in this way:

Expression	Meaning	Corresponding Letter Grade
✓+	Exceptional	A
✓	Acceptable	B
✓-	Needs Improvement	C or D
0	Missing or unacceptable	F

Over the duration of a project, these expressions develop into a **pattern**, which allows you to assign a corresponding grade to the overall invention portfolio when the project is submitted on its deadline. It is a flexible system that is not points-based, and, as such, allows you to lightly calibrate weightier items, such as a half draft, as distinct from minor items, like a fast-write at the start of class. We'll look at an example of this together during the teaching talk.

Program Assessment - Working with Relatively Common Units
For the program, this approach also helps us collect materials and to read them across multiple sections. That is, say, for example, we want to look at a random sample of Project Two from thirty students ENGL1105 (at random). We can ask for Project Two and the corresponding invention

portfolios and gain insight into a much more nuanced dimension of the work. Assessment can inquire a bit more into process when the invention portfolio is included. This is invaluable to understanding how writing is *really* working in this program--how we are sponsoring it, how students are doing it, how we are evaluating it, and so on.

Variations and Late-arriving Work

Portfolio contents--for each major project as for the course overall--will vary considerably from one class to another, from one instructor to another--and that's okay! Portfolios also allow students a flexible edge for late-arriving work. That is, let's say you collect a reading response from students on a Monday. Two students miss class and another showed up but did not do the homework. (All of this is your call, of course). But notice how the portfolio allows you to extend the option of students submitting this late work for *some* credit (half credit or full credit, or some variation between). You can still proceed with reading, rating, and responding to the on-time submissions; any late-arriving work can *very* lightly factor in then the completed project is due.

When Turning in Each Major Project

Upon the due date for each of the three major projects, students write a reflective cover letter, documenting how their work has developed, accounting for questions or uncertainties that remain, noting what they have learned and what they remain unsure or tentative about. They do not have to comment on every course outcome in the reflective cover letter, but they are encouraged to discuss at least three or four of them.

Course Portfolio

At semester's end, students organize and spotlight the work of the class, and they write a reflective essay that discusses their learning (discoveries and surprises, as well as setbacks and digressions) making specific reference to the program's principles: rhetoric, process, conventions, multimodality, and reflection.

This handout is a supplement to the teaching talk slides, which will be shared on March 27 and circulated online after the session. The purpose in framing portfolios in this way is to share openly with everyone the approach being modeled for GTAs, especially, though of course we would be happy to see everyone adjust their approach to allow for portfolios framed in this way.

If you would like to talk more about portfolios in the context of your teaching, please let Derek, Julie, Steve, and Katie Beth know, and we will do all we can to be helpful and supportive.

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If you are interested in exploring the system used in the talk whereby attendee responses to questions appeared in the slides in real-time, check out Poll Everywhere at **polleverywhere.com**. For free, you can embed into PowerPoint or Google Slides a viewport that will show the responses sent in via SMS. On March 27, there were two slides that worked this way, each posing a question, with the responses appearing on screen (the settings for this specific example were "Open-ended"). If there is interest, maybe we can hold a teaching talk on Poll Everywhere in the Composition Program, or perhaps some of you are interested in convening such a session (a workshop, perhaps) at the 2019 Corridors Conference on Saturday, September 21.