

Constructing Your Portfolio For the Teacher Interview

by
John Snyder, Tina McKelvey, and Danielle Edwards
Office of Career Services
Slippery Rock University

Funded by a grant from:
MAASCUS
The Middle Atlantic Association for School, College and University Staffing

Contents:

What is a portfolio?.....	2
A portfolio quiz.....	2
Why you need a portfolio.....	3
Getting started.....	3
Collection, selection, reflection.....	4
How an administrator may use your portfolio.....	5
Tips for constructing your portfolio.....	6
Items to place in my portfolio.....	6
Results of the MAASCUS portfolio survey.....	6
Comments from administrators.....	9
Answers to the portfolio quiz.....	11
References.....	12

Copyright 1998, Office of Career Services, Slippery Rock University
Permission is granted to make copies of this guide for individual or institutional use.

What Is a Portfolio?

Portfolios are playing an increasingly important role in the interview process, therefore, take charge and learn how to create one now. A portfolio complements your resume, letters, and applications. The portfolio will show your strengths and goals as a teacher. Many administrators like to see your portfolio and how you use it during an interview.

Resources in our literature review provided specific definitions for the term *portfolio*:

✍️ “a collection of evidence that constitutes a compelling argument that you are proficient in or have made progress toward a goal – in other words, it will represent some of the things that you have learned or are learning about – during your journey to be the teacher that you want to be.”¹

✍️ “a collection of materials assembled to demonstrate to others what you have done and/or are able to do”⁷

✍️ “a portable collection of papers or documents describing the specialized training an individual has attained”⁹














✍️ “a systematic collection of materials selected and assembled by a professional and used to document professional accomplishments”¹⁰

A portfolio quiz: Answers are on the last page.

- 1) How long should your portfolio be?
- 2) When should you start gathering information for your portfolio?
- 3) Why should you construct one?
- 4) In what order should you place your materials?
- 5) Should you place a videotape in your portfolio? Why or why not?
- 6) What materials would you place in your portfolio?
- 7) When should you show it to your interviewer?









Why You Need a Portfolio

Portfolios may be used for a variety of reasons: 2,3,4,6,7











-  Obtain a volunteer position
-  Make career choices
-  Gain employment
-  Enhance scholarship applications
-  Communicate between home and school
-  Prepare for post-secondary education entrance
-  Develop self-esteem, promote abilities and success
-  Being evaluated for promotion or tenure by administrators
-  Present palpable evidence of your abilities
-  Begin a job search
-  Track your professional career
-  Use to show your skills and abilities that administrators desire in a teacher
-  Document your accomplishments

Getting Started

Start by asking yourself these questions: 4,5,7

-  What type of job am I looking for?
-  What have I done in my teaching career?
-  What can I do from this point on?
-  How have I been improving my teaching ability?
-  Who is the intended audience for the portfolio?
-  What does the audience want and need to know?
-  What am I trying to communicate through my portfolio?
-  Am I trying to convey too much information?

Helpful advice:

-  Do not wait and construct it all at one time
-  Do it in steps, work on one section at a time
-  Start with a simple class or group project
-  Helpers, co-op teachers, professors, tutors, parent volunteers, aides, etc. can assist you with good feedback on your teaching techniques and strengths
-  Make an outline of your material
-  Lay out the portfolio in a sensible order – by order of importance, chronological order, or theme areas
-  Gather and organize all of your materials, then select representative materials of your best work
-  Keep your portfolio accessible and manageable at all times
-  Store it in a safe place (away from heat, direct sunlight, etc.)
-  Update it regularly with the most current material

Collection, Selection, and Reflection

Collection:

First create a “folio”. A “folio” is your complete collection of materials, documents, papers, pictures, certificates, letters, work samples, and audio/video-taped performances. From this large amount of evidence or artifacts, which supports your efforts in reaching your educational and career goals, you’ll choose the materials to place in your portfolio. Be sure to organize your “folio” files so you may easily find specific materials. For example, if you organize your portfolio by theme areas, they may include sections such as math, reading, behavior management, student tests, and student evaluations. If by chronological order, you may start with student teaching and move back in time.









Selection:

Be selective when choosing artifacts. Plan how you will convey the portfolio’s purpose to the audience and how they might best review the portfolio. Examine and discuss the possible sections of your portfolio.

Reflect upon each and how it might be useful for your purpose. You want to find a practical way to present your beliefs and the most important documents about your ability as a professional educator. What do you want to share? How can you share the information? From your folio, thoughtfully select specific items to place in your portfolio to present at job fairs or individual interviews. Remember, these items highlight your qualifications. Eliminate repetition and excess papers. Select representative materials that provide a balanced perspective.

Reflection:

Your portfolio may reflect your

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Philosophy of education |  Strengths |
|  Teaching effectiveness and strategies |  Professional improvement |
|  Personal goals |  Exemplary work |
|  Knowledge and skill in teaching |  Multi-dimensional views |

Think about what you want administrators to know about you and your goals. Critique yourself to see if you are reaching your goals or if it is time to set new ones. The wider the range of projects your folio contains, the more help it will be in making selections to place in the portfolio.

Some questions to reflect on:

- Am I enthusiastic?*
- Do I follow through on projects?*
- How do I strive to be a better teacher?*
- What are my teaching skills?*
- What are my accomplishments as a teacher?*
- What goals do I have?*

Your portfolio illustrates the answers to these and other questions. Show growth by proving your accomplishments and identifying the goals you are working towards to become a better teacher.

Videos:

Any videos should be short in length (3-5 minutes). Administrators do not have the time to watch a video that is an hour long. Cue a longer video to an important moment or edit a longer video or videos into a collection of highlights illustrating professional competencies, teaching techniques, student interaction, and so on.

How an Administrator May Use Your Portfolio

There are 3 major situations that may arise at any time.⁷ Be prepared for all of them.

Situation #1 – An administrator may require your portfolio as evidence of your abilities.

Situation #2 – An administrator may look at it and process the information only if you offer it.

Situation #3 – You may offer the portfolio, but it may not be examined, or the portfolio may not be asked to be examined at all.












Administrators are very busy and, as such, need your portfolio to be clear and concise with only the most important documents inserted. If *Situation #3* would occur, do not take offense at administrators not examining your portfolio. They may first want to examine verbal communication.

Administrators may want a better look at you in addition to what they read on resumes or letters of recommendation. By providing a portfolio, you give them a chance to see your capabilities. This adds to what they have already read about you in previous paperwork.

It may be beneficial to have a few pages of crucial documents copied from your portfolio to leave with the interviewer. This gives the interviewer information that can be reviewed at a later time. Include a sentence on your resume that states that you have a professional portfolio available for review. This will let the interviewer know ahead of time that you will be bringing it to the interview.

Always be prepared to explain why you have placed an item in your portfolio. Know every page thoroughly. An interviewer may ask a question that you have a very good example for, but you must be able to refer to it quickly and not fumble around to find the page.

Administrators assessing your portfolio may be looking for evidence of the following: ⁸

-  Overall teaching potential
-  Depth and breadth of subject matter knowledge
-  Depth and breadth of instructional methodology knowledge
-  Perspectives on the creative abilities as related to curriculum and instruction
-  Knowledge of particular school cultures
-  General, professional, and personal qualities
-  Characteristics of internship experiences
-  Potential for social interaction in a variety of school and community settings and with a diverse population of students
-  Beliefs about teaching, students, specific content areas and specific instructional strategies
-  Ability to organize and collect assessment information
-  Examples of academic and professional tasks and products


























Tips for Constructing Your Portfolio

Place your portfolio materials in a three-ring binder. Never punch holes in documents, use plastic sleeves to hold them. A binder with a zipper will keep all loose documents safe. The loose documents could consist of extra resumes or references. Use tabs to organize your materials.

This is not a scrapbook, but a representation of your teaching ability. Make your portfolio professional and to the point, but also allow it to be personal and creative. While reflecting your personality, the portfolio must demonstrate your ability to be a professional educator.

Items to place in your portfolio

Items in your portfolio may include some of the following:

- | | |
|--|---|
|  Unit plans (samples/summary) |  Extracurricular activities |
|  Lesson plans (samples) |  Technology |
|  Student evaluations (samples) |  Responsibilities |
|  Self-designed instructional material |  Philosophy |
|  Behavior intervention examples |  Examples of students' work |
|  Professional growth activities
(seminars/workshops) |  Transcripts |
|  Reflection journal |  Pictures (illustrating educational
points) |
|  Video tape |  Test scores (Praxis and others) |
|  Cooperating teacher critique |  Grades |
|  Evaluations |  Camp experiences |
|  Anecdotes |  Field practicum |
|  Case study |  Student teaching |
|  Publications | |

Results of the MAASCUS Portfolio Survey

During the spring and summer of 1998, the Office of Career Services mailed surveys to 265 school administrators in Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Delaware, and Virginia. Seventy-two (72) surveys were returned for a response rate of 27%. The responses of administrators returning the survey revealed four major points for you to consider:

- 1) *Be organized.* Administrators consistently made suggestions to keep it concise, specific, and brief. Administrators commented on using tabs or highlighting the pages in some manner to point out 3-5 specific examples you would like to share. If you are showing pictures, have an explanation, location, and date below each. Be able to access specific information quickly.
- 2) *Be considerate.* Ask interviewers if they would like to review your portfolio. Then place the portfolio facing the interviewers open to the section you want them to see. Your portfolio should be professional, but it should also fit your personality. Some administrators feel you should present the portfolio at the beginning of the interview and others feel the end is better. The reason for the beginning is that it provides a good starting point. The reason for the ending is that it provides a good closing point. It also turns the interview into a less formal meeting and gives the interviewer a chance to learn more about you as a person and a teacher. Your best option would be to ask what the interviewer prefers.

- 3) *Know your portfolio thoroughly.* Be able to defend why you chose the documents in the portfolio. Know what is on every page. Be sure to show learning outcomes that you have accomplished and those you wish to accomplish. Be able to identify your strengths and show how you are working on your weaknesses. Administrators want to use the portfolio as a tool in the interview, not just to look at what you have done. Interviewers want to be able to see how you use it in conjunction with your communication skills in answering the questions.
- 4) *Get to the point.* Summarize the highlights of your experiences. Carefully select the contents of your portfolio. Pick out your strengths and explain those areas. Do not ramble on about yourself or one specific project. Remember, there are time constraints in an interview that need to be considered. One administrator said, “No videos,” for this reason. Another administrator expressed concern with time at job fairs. He felt that there was not enough time to look at students’ portfolios, but preferred to talk with them at this point. So, remember to focus on your strengths and be specific.

While there is no one right way to construct a portfolio, it is critically important that the portfolio be well organized, focused on educational issues, and be easy to read. Time constraints during an interview prevent administrators from thoroughly reading a portfolio. Even if you point out specific items or sections of your portfolio during an interview, rarely will the interviewer read the content. The interviewer will skim it. Therefore, you should design your portfolio in a similar manner as your resume – design it for skimming.

If your portfolio is well designed, a glance at a page will reveal the educational content you wish to communicate and invite the reader to examine the details more closely. If you have documents with significant text (such as reference letters or a philosophy of education essay), include a “highlights” page with headlines and/or bullet statements summarizing the content of the text.

Although administrators responding to the MAASCUS survey often confirmed what resources in the literature review revealed, one area emphasized by the MAASCUS respondents was the need to be concise. Since the portfolio is part of the interview process, time constraints prohibit in-depth exploration of it. Even when you use the portfolio in an interview, most likely only parts of it will be reviewed. In many ways, constructing a portfolio for an interview is like organizing a broadcast of the evening news. Just as news editors must decide what few items (from a choice of many) make it on-air, you must select a few items to reflect your professional competencies. Packaging is important, too. News editors show a few seconds of tape to capture the viewers’ attention and to introduce a news story; you design each page to capture the readers’ attention and to illustrate specific points.

Keep in mind that this survey concentrated on portfolios designed for an employment interview. A portfolio for professional evaluation or reflection will be designed differently.

Table One (see next page) reports how administrators responded to questions concerning what to include in a portfolio. The top four items listed as “very important” include lesson plans, evaluation of student work, letter of reference, and unit plans. (Note: you would not include the entire unit plan in your portfolio!) The top four qualities listed as “very important” include planning effective instruction, communicating with parents and students, assessing learners’ needs, and teaching the subjects. Obviously, the administrators want your portfolio to illustrate how you plan, instruct, and assess lessons – the nuts and bolts of teaching. Letters of reference provide administrators with another person’s perspective of your professional competencies.

Table Two reports what areas administrators feel can be effectively determined through a portfolio. Over three-quarters (76%) of administrators responding believed that the portfolio is an effective method of determining your ability to instruct students. On the other hand, 62% of the administrators did not think a portfolio effectively communicates your critical thinking and problem solving skills. Table Two confirms the results of Table One. Administrators want to see tangible evidence of your planning, instructing, and evaluating skills.

It is interesting to note that while 74% of the administrators believe that assessing learners' needs is a very important quality to include in your portfolio (Table One), only 45% believe that the portfolio is an effective method of determining your ability to do so (Table Two). Likewise, 72% of the administrators view teaching subjects as a very important quality to include in the portfolio, while only 41% think that the portfolio effectively demonstrates it. In these situations, letters of reference confirming your skills in these less tangible areas are helpful in the interview. These responses also point out the limitations of a portfolio and, once again, communicate the need for a portfolio to be focused on specific issues and areas.

Table One:

Please rate the importance of including the following items and qualities in the portfolio:

<u>ITEMS*</u>	Very Important	Moderately Important	Not Important
Table of Contents	24 (42%)	20 (35%)	13 (23%)
Philosophy of education	29 (48%)	26 (43%)	5 (8%)
Lesson plans	42 (71%)	14 (24%)	3 (5%)
Unit plans	32 (57%)	19 (34%)	5 (9%)
Picture of classroom	22 (37%)	30 (50%)	8 (13%)
Picture of bulletin board	18 (29%)	31 (50%)	13 (21%)
Student work	32 (54%)	18 (31%)	9 (15%)
Evaluation of student work	33 (57%)	19 (33%)	6 (10%)
Test and/or quizzes	15 (30%)	27 (54%)	8 (16%)
Learning centers	24 (39%)	30 (49%)	7 (12%)
Letters to parents	16 (27%)	38 (64%)	5 (9%)
Class newsletter	18 (30%)	36 (60%)	6 (10%)
Letter of reference	33 (56%)	19 (32%)	7 (12%)
Certificates	21 (35%)	29 (48%)	10 (17%)
Other items available	10 (19%)	27 (52%)	15 (29%)
Professional reflection	19 (37%)	23 (45%)	9 (18%)

***It is assumed that items such as pictures have captions that explain their significance.**

QUALITIES

Evidence of professional growth	41 (71%)	16 (28%)	1 (2%)
Plan effective instruction	51 (88%)	6 (10%)	1 (2%)
Communicate with parents and students	47 (81%)	10 (17%)	1 (2%)
Assessing learners' needs	43 (74%)	14 (24%)	1 (2%)
Critical thinking/problem solving	40 (68%)	17 (29%)	2 (3%)
Reflective thinking	30 (52%)	24 (41%)	4 (6%)
Enthusiastic mannerism	33 (64%)	16 (31%)	3 (6%)
Teach the subjects	42 (72%)	13 (22%)	3 (6%)

Table Two:

For each of the following, circle whether or not you feel the portfolio is an effective method of determining the candidate's:

	YES	NO
Professional growth	36 (61%)	23 (39%)
Effective instruction	45 (76%)	14 (24%)
Communication skills	37 (64%)	21 (36%)
Assessing learners' needs	26 (45%)	32 (55%)
Critical thinking/problem solving	22 (38%)	36 (62%)
Reflective thinking skills	31 (54%)	26 (46%)
Enthusiastic mannerism	26 (45%)	32 (55%)
Ability to teach	23 (41%)	33 (59%)

Comments from Administrators

Lummie Smith, Middle School Coordinator, Accomack County Public Schools, VA: “A portfolio brings excellent closure to the interview process and draws a nice conclusion.”

Albrie Love, Jr., Baltimore City Public Schools, MD: “One to two inches in depth is plenty. Keep it organized to let ideas flow. Always remember professional sharing.”

Elfreda Massie, Baltimore County Public Schools, MD: “Focus on evidence that students learned because of your abilities to be an effective teacher. Show evidence of working with diverse populations and diverse learning styles.”

Kenneth D. King, Assistant Superintendent, East Orange Public Schools, NJ: “Keep it short and relevant.”

Carol H. Jacunski, Director Special Services, Franklin-Essex Hamilton BOCES, NY: “Do not present in a manner beyond what the hiring agency’s technology can support. Sometimes, candidates may bring in portfolios and just wait to have them addressed by the interviewing committee. Do not be insulted or pushy, offer your portfolio one time during the interview.”

Michael Copin, Certified Personnel Officer, Frederick County Public Schools, MD: “We are looking for references and observations.”

Paula Lawton, Certified Personnel Administrator, Frederick County Public Schools, MD: “Read the interviewer to determine the appropriate time to reference the portfolio. For example; when asked to describe communications with parents, whip out the portfolio that contains samples of newsletters, letters of introduction to parents, etc.”

Bill Smith, Hadonfield Board of Education, NJ: “Use the portfolio as evidence during the interview process.”

Gary Blair, Assistant Director, Henrico County Public Schools, VA: “During the interview, use the portfolio to support the specific skills you are discussing. Use the portfolio as part of the interview process instead of just showing it at the end of the interview.”

Patrese A. Pruden, Human Resources Specialist, Henrico County Public Schools, VA: “The portfolio is not emphasized during the human resources interview; however, candidates are encouraged to take the portfolio when they interview with principals.”

Steven Achramovitch, Director, Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda School District, NY: “Present information and work (lesson and unit plans), communication, etc., which show what they have done. Do not just put pictures in a three-ring binder. A portfolio should be self-explanatory and well organized. The candidate should not have to go through page by page to explain.

Stan Schaub, Director, Division of Staffing, Montgomery County Public Schools, MD: “Organization – prepared in a manner and style that quickly demonstrates to the reader what the candidates have achieved. Content – include only that which demonstrates performance and illustrates potential.”

Gordon H. Moore, Director, Piscataway Township Schools, NJ: “The portfolio is most often used to tip the balance between two similar candidates. View it as an aid to the interview, something to be scanned quickly in your presence.”

Lee B. Nicklos, Director, Pittsburgh Schools, PA: “The portfolio should be presented in an orderly fashion so that when it is reviewed it would be easy to follow. It should not be filled with unrelated photos. Only a few photos should be included if they display specific things such as a bulletin board theme related to a specific lesson plan.”

Thomas A. Valentine, Administrator for Personnel, Sweet Home Central School District, NY: “Present the portfolio to the committee to be reviewed during the interview.”

Joyce C. Flynn, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Services, Three Village Central School District, NY: “References and photos with students are helpful to a degree, but the interview and demonstration lessons are critical to complement the portfolio.”

Nikki Isherwood, Director Of Instruction, Winchester Public Schools, VA: “Carefully select items in the portfolio. It should be well designed, organized, and delivered. Speak to the portfolio parts as you present.”

Answers to the Portfolio Quiz

- 1) There is no right page length. You'll need to determine what length works best for you; however, your portfolio must be portable, manageable, and easily accessible. The portfolio is a summary of highlights, not an extensive collection of everything you have done. Be concise.
- 2) Right away. Always keep it updated with your newest accomplishments and materials. Your portfolio is a work which is continually refined.
- 3) This is another way to illustrate your competencies during an interview. It may be a deciding factor between you and someone else in an interview situation. Also, the process of constructing a portfolio will help you focus on the professional skills and knowledge you have to offer a school district.
- 4) There are three general ways to organize a portfolio. You may decide to arrange your material in order of importance, by theme areas, or in chronological order. You may design a portfolio by combining these choices. Whatever your order, make sure your portfolio is well organized.
- 5) If you have a video, it should be part of your portfolio, but due to time constraints, rarely will administrators view it during an interview. The video should be cued to an important part of the lesson. If you have several lessons on tape, you may want to edit the tapes into one, short "highlights" tape. Whether you have one tape or several, create a summary page in your portfolio that captures the essence of the tape(s). Carrying the tape with you during a job fair may be impractical; therefore, the summary page communicates what you have learned from your video and that it is available for viewing at an interview at the school.
- 6) Documentation showing your strengths as an effective teacher. Specific items are cited in this guide.
- 7) Ask the interviewers when and if they would like to see it. The portfolio may also be used to illustrate an answer to an interview question.

References

Noted Resources:

- (1) Portfolio <http://www.auburn.edu/~whangpa/PORTFOLI.ins.htm>
- (2) Employability Skills Creating My Future Student Portfolio.
<http://www.magi.com/~ccdffcac/cgcf/employability.html>
- (3) Wegner, T., Creating a Teaching Portfolio. Is It Worthwhile?, *Teaching Concerns* Oct 1995
<http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/tcptw.htm>
- (4) Portfolios: Students, Teachers, & Electronic, TEACHER PORTFOLIOS Not Just a “Box Full of Junk” ASCD, Education Update, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, V.38, N3 May 1996 <http://www.lacoe.edu/pdc/second/portfolio.html#teacher>
- (5) McKay, M.A., Some Thoughts About the Portfolio and Its Presentation, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA 1997
- (6) Ask Donna, Teaching Portfolios, July 1997, <http://www.studentcenter.com/who/ask/ask9707c.htm>
- (7) Eilers, A. Portfolio Manual, College of Education, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA, July 1996, <http://www.uni.edu/coe/portfolio>
- (8) Adams, T. L., A Paradigm for Portfolio Assessment in Teacher Education, *Education*, Summer 1995, v115 n4 p568 (3) <http://web3.searchbank.com/infotrac/session/100/666/19501724w3/51xml>
- (9) Neikirk, A., Professional Portfolios – Where Do I Begin?, Bolant, PA 1997
- (10) Glatthorn, A. A., The Teacher’s Portfolio: Fostering and Documenting Professional Development, Pro.Active Publications, Rockport, MA 1996

Additional Resources:

Portfolio Information, College of Education, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock, PA, 1997

Darling-Hammond, L., NASDTEC, State of Iowa, Board of Educational Examiners, 1994

Developing a Teaching Portfolio:

<http://admin.www.flinders.edu.au/womensinfo/teaching-portfolio.htm>

Selling Yourself Creating the Ultimate Teaching/Interview Portfolio, July, 1997

<http://www.teachnet.com>

Doolittle, P., Teacher Portfolio Assessment, ERIC/AE Digest, April 1994

http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed385608.html

Student Shelly Hittle’s Portfolio Comments, <http://www.acs.ucalgary.ca/~aelproce/port.htm>

(Note: All Internet links were accurate at the time of researching this report.)