

# How To Produce A Teaching Portfolio

---

The following are extracts from Peter Seldin's book

## "The Teaching Portfolio - A practical guide to improved performance and promotion/tenure decisions, 2nd Ed."

### Contents

The Teaching Portfolio (Chapter 1)

Choosing Items For The Portfolio (Chapter 2)

This material is copyrighted by Anker Pub. Co. Inc. and is presented here with their permission.

Reuse must be in compliance with standard copyright practice.

The ISBN number of the book is 1-882982-150-0. It can be ordered directly from the publishers.

Anker Publishing Company, Inc.

P.O. Box 249

Bolton, MA 01740-0249, USA

Tel: (508) 779-6190

Fax: (508) 779-6366

email: [103072.357@compuserve.com](mailto:103072.357@compuserve.com)

---

### Contents

---

- About the Author
- Contributors
- Preface to the Second Edition
- The Teaching Portfolio
- Choosing Items for the Portfolio
- Preparing the Portfolio
- Using the Portfolio
- Answers to Common Questions About the Teaching Portfolio
- Some Final Thoughts
- Preparing the Portfolio: A Personal View  
*Joseph A. Weber*
- Developing an Institutional Portfolio Program: A Step-by-Step Report  
*Karen E. Mura*
- Improving Teaching Through Portfolio Revisions  
*John Zubizarreta*
- The Electronically Augmented Teaching Portfolio  
*Devorah A. Liberman and John Reuter*
- Sample Portfolios From Across Disciplines Afterword  
*Linda Annis*
- Appendix: Key Points on Revising a Portfolio  
*Peter Seldin and John Zubizarreta*

---

### Chapter 1: The Teaching Portfolio

---

An historic change is taking place in higher education: teaching is being taken more seriously. At long last, after years of criticism and cries for reform, more and more colleges and universities are reexamining their commitment to teaching and exploring ways to improve and reward it.

As for faculty, they are being held accountable, as never before, to provide clear and concise evidence of the quality of their classroom teaching. Why? Perhaps it is the result of the growing chorus of complaints from those who serve on tenure and promotion review committees that they are given little factual information about teaching performance. They argue that the typical curriculum vitae describes publications, research grants, and other scholarly accomplishments but says very little about teaching.

It is no surprise that committee members are pressing for more information about what professors do in the classroom and why they do it. Without such meaningful information, they argue, how can they be expected to judge a professor's performance? And how can they give the teaching function its rightful value?

Is there a way for colleges and universities to respond simultaneously to the movement to take teaching seriously and to the pressures to improve systems of teaching accountability? The answer is yes. A solution can be found by looking outside higher education.

Artists, photographers, architects all have portfolios in which they display their best work. The portfolio concept can be adapted to higher education. A teaching portfolio would enable faculty members to display their teaching accomplishments for the record. And, at the same time, it would contribute to more sound personnel decisions and to the professional development and growth of individual faculty members.

What is a teaching portfolio? It is a factual description of a professor's teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance. It is to teaching what lists of publications, grants, and honors are to research and scholarship.

Why would very busy-even harried-faculty members want to take the time and trouble to prepare a teaching portfolio? They might do so in order to gather and present hard evidence and specific data about their teaching effectiveness to tenure and promotion committees. Or they might do so in order to provide the needed structure for self-reflection about areas of their teaching needing improvement. Are there other purposes for which professors might prepare a portfolio? The answer is yes. They might do so in order to: a) document for themselves how their teaching has evolved over time; b) prepare materials about their teaching effectiveness when applying for a new position or for post-tenure review; c) share their expertise and experience with younger faculty members; d) provide teaching tips about a specific course for new or part-time faculty; e) seek teaching awards or grants relating to teaching; f) leave a written legacy within the department so that future generations of teachers who will be taking over the courses of about-to- retire professors will have the benefit of their thinking and experience.

An important point: the portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all of the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it presents selected information on teaching activities and solid evidence of their effectiveness. Just as statements in a curriculum vitae should be supported by convincing evidence (such as published articles or invitations to present a paper at an academic conference), so claims in the teaching portfolio should be supported by firm empirical evidence.

The teaching portfolio concept has gone well beyond the point of theoretical possibility. It has been used in Canada (where it is called a teaching dossier) for nearly twenty years. Today it is being adopted or pilot-tested in various forms by a rapidly increasing number of American institutions. Although reliable numbers are hard to come by, it is estimated that as many as 1,000 colleges and universities in the United States are now using or experimenting with portfolios. That is a stunning jump from the approximately ten institutions thought to be using portfolios in 1990. Among the many current users or experimenters with portfolios are Hobart and William Smith Colleges (New York), Clemson University (South Carolina), Georgia Southern University, The College of William and Mary (Virginia), Rhodes College (Tennessee), Valencia Community College (Florida),

Wake Forest University (North Carolina), and Rutgers University (New Jersey).

---

## Chapter 2: Choosing Items For The Portfolio

---

Because the portfolio is a highly personalized product, no two are exactly alike. Both content and organization differ widely from one faculty member to another. (See the sample portfolios in this volume.) Different fields and courses cater to different types of documentation. For example, an introductory economics course is world's apart from a studio arts course. A graduate seminar in organizational theory is far removed from a freshman biology course. The items chosen for the portfolio depend on the teaching style of the professor, the purpose for which the portfolio is prepared, and any content requirements of a professor's department or institution. Individual differences in portfolio content and organization should be encouraged so long as they are allowed by the department and institution.

Based on empirical evidence, certain items clearly turn up in portfolios with much more frequency than others. From personal review of hundreds of portfolios prepared by professors in institutions representing all sectors of higher education, the writer can assert that certain items appear again and again, falling into three broad categories.

### Material from Oneself

- Statement of teaching responsibilities, including course titles, numbers, enrollments, and a brief statement about whether the course is required or elective, graduate or undergraduate.
- A reflective statement by the faculty member, describing his or her personal teaching philosophy, strategies and objectives, methodologies.
- Representative course syllabi detailing course content and objectives, teaching methods, readings, homework assignments.
- Participation in programs on sharpening instructional skill.
- Description of curricular revisions, including new course projects, materials, and class assignments.
- Instructional innovations and assessment of their effectiveness.
- A personal statement by the professor, describing teaching goals for the next five years.
- Description of steps taken to evaluate and improve one's teaching, including changes resulting from self-evaluation, time spent reading journals on improving teaching.

### Material from Others

- Statements from colleagues who have observed the professor in the classroom.
- Statements from colleagues who have reviewed the professor's teaching materials, such as course syllabi, assignments, testing and grading practices.
- Student course or teaching evaluation data which produce an overall rating of effectiveness or suggest improvements.
- Honors or other recognition from colleagues, such as a distinguished teaching or student advising award.
- Documentation of teaching development activity through the campus center for teaching and learning.
- Statements by alumni on the quality of instruction.

### The Products of Teaching/Student Learning

- Student scores on pre- and post-course examinations.
- Examples of graded student essays along with the professor's comments on why they were so graded.
- A record of students who succeed in advanced study in the field.
- Student publications or conference presentations on course-related work.
- Successive drafts of student papers along with the professor's comments on how each draft could be improved.

- Information about the effect of the professor and his or her courses on student career choices or help given by the professor to secure student employment or graduate school admission.
- These are the most commonly selected items, but they are not the only ones to appear in portfolios. Some professors, for reasons of academic discipline, teaching style, or institutional preference, choose a different content mix.

### **Some Items that Sometimes Appear in Portfolios**

- Evidence of help given to colleagues leading to improvement of their teaching.
- A videotape of the professor teaching a typical class.
- Invitations to present a paper on teaching one's discipline.
- Self-evaluation of teaching-related activities.
- Participation in off-campus activities relating to teaching.
- A statement by the department chair, assessing the faculty member's teaching contribution to the department.
- Description of how computers, films, and other non-print materials are used in teaching.
- Contributing to, or editing, a professional journal on teaching the professor's discipline.
- Performance reviews as a faculty advisor.

How much information is needed to represent a professor's teaching performance fairly and completely? Experience suggests that a selective document of eight to ten pages plus supporting appendix materials is sufficient for the vast majority of faculty members. (Some institutions put a ceiling on the number of pages or number of pounds they permit in order to prevent data overkill in the portfolio.)

Being selective does not mean constructing a biased picture of one's teaching but rather providing a fair and accurate representation of it. As Zubizarreta (1994, p. 324) points out, "Even the occasional flop is worthy material for a ... portfolio if it reveals a process of genuine adjustment and growth, if the teacher has articulated innovation and risk as key components of a teaching philosophy, and if the institution recognizes experimentation and change as signals of vitality in teaching."

### **Integrating the Items in a Portfolio**

A sound portfolio integrates documents and materials from oneself and others as well as the products of teaching (student learning). It offers a coherent teaching profile in which all parts support the whole. For example, a statement of philosophy might reflect an emphasis on scholarship in teaching while methods and materials will reveal a complementary focus on scholarship through rigorous library assignments. Another example: not only will comments from faculty observers bolster a claim of effective active learning strategies but student evaluations will as well (Seldin, Annis, Zubizarreta, 1996).

### **The Appendix**

Just as information in the narrative part of the portfolio should be selective, so, too, the appendices should consist of judiciously chosen evidence that adequately supports the narrative section of the portfolio. Should the portfolio require additional appendix space-for supplemental descriptions, hard copy disks, or audio or video tapes, for example-then the professor may briefly discuss such materials in the narrative and make them available for review upon request.

Rather than offer a separate, isolated commentary for each appendix item, many professors weave references to appendices within unified essays. Why? Because this approach strengthens coherence. (See sample portfolios, this volume.) Further, many faculty include in their appendices supporting documents such as syllabi, student evaluations, peer reviews, graded student papers, and invitations to speak at a conference on teaching their discipline.

The appendices must be of manageable size if they are to be read. Millis (1995) encourages faculty to organize their appendices with two directives in mind: integrity and lucidity. By integrity, she means that certain key

items, such as syllabi and student ratings, are expected and must be included to support the validity of the portfolio. These key supporting documents must be presented in a manner that reflects a discernable pattern, such as all evaluations for one course for the past three years or all syllabi for all courses taught for the past two years. Further, says Millis, a key test of the lucidity of the appendices is if they are clear to potential readers, especially those outside of the department or discipline.

A word of caution: sometimes faculty preparing portfolios fall into the trap of permitting the appendices-the supporting documents-to determine the portfolio creation. Should that happen, professors may find themselves focusing on a shopping list of possible portfolio items, determining which are easily accessible, and then creating the reflective section of their portfolios around the evidence they have at hand. The result? Unfortunately they end up focusing on the "what" rather than the "why."

A far better approach is to first reflect about one's underlying philosophy of teaching, then describe the teaching strategies and methodologies that flow from that philosophy (why you do what you do in the classroom), and only then to select documents and materials which provide the hard evidence of one's teaching activities and their effectiveness.

### **The Value of Self-Reflection**

In truth, one of the most significant parts of the portfolio is the faculty member's self-reflection on his or her teaching. Preparing it can help professors unearth new discoveries about themselves years? Are these changes for the better? What do your syllabi say about your teaching style? What do they say about your interest in students (Rehnke, 1994)?

### **A Typical Table of Contents**

A table of contents identifies the major headings of the portfolio. When the purpose is to improve teaching, a typical table of contents might look like this:

## **TEACHING PORTFOLIO**

**Faculty Member's Name**

**Department/College**

**Institution**

**Date Table of Contents**

1. Teaching Responsibilities
2. Statement of Teaching Philosophy
3. Teaching Methodology, Strategies, Objectives
4. Description of Course Materials (Syllabi, Handouts, Assignments)
5. Efforts to Improve Teaching
  - a) Conferences/Workshops Attended
  - b) Curricular Revisions
  - c) Innovations in Teaching
6. Student Ratings on Diagnostic Questions
7. Products of Teaching (Evidence of Student Learning)
8. Teaching Goals: Short- and Long-Term
9. Appendices

One element of the portfolio which may go unnoticed is the date, an item important to any portfolio because it helps the faculty member establish a base line from which to measure actual development in teaching performance. Such growth can be gauged by the degree to which the portfolio demonstrates instructional improvement resulting from the faculty member's reexamination of his or her philosophy, strategies, objectives, and methodologies (Seldin, Annis, and Zubizarreta, 1996). A typical table of contents for a portfolio prepared for evaluation purposes might include the following entries:

## **TEACHING PORTFOLIO**

