Chapter 6 Personal Career Portfolios

Students can use personal career portfolios to gather, organize and illustrate examples of learning and accomplishments.

It is the process of creating and collecting work samples, reflecting on the individual pieces and selecting those that demonstrate a certain aspect of learning, that engages students in continuous reflection and self-assessment. The end product is important, but it is the development process that creates the most valuable learning opportunities.

Through developing individual portfolios, students have many diverse learning opportunities, including:

- documenting their own activities and accomplishments over an extended period of time
- charting their growth and skill development
- monitoring and adjusting their actions and plans
- communicating their learning with others
- expressing and celebrating their creative accomplishments
- providing a foundation by which to assess their personal growth and change, and set future goals.

Portfolios develop students’ organizational skills and increase their sense of responsibility and ownership in their work. Students are encouraged to produce their best work, value their own progress and select products for their portfolios that represent what and how they are learning. Portfolios give students a measure of autonomy and self-expression that can be highly motivating.

Using portfolios in CALM

There are many opportunities to use portfolio development with students within the CALM program.

There are multiple opportunities through the CALM program to incorporate portfolio development. For example, students can create portfolios focused specifically on their learning skills, including identifying and implementing action plans for strengthening essential competencies and learning capacity.
Sample contents for a portfolio focusing on a dimension of well-being.

The focus of student portfolios is on:
- thinking
- growth over time
- health and life skills connections
- the decision-making and goal-setting processes.

- A report of a group project, with comments about the individual’s contribution; for example, a survey of recreation opportunities in the community
- Work from another subject area that relates to CALM, such as data collected about eating habits presented in another class
- A list of important CALM questions generated by the student, with or without answers
- Completed self-assessment checklists
- Notes from an interview
- Print-out of a relevant Internet search
- A ticket attached to each product briefly explaining the learning context and why the piece was chosen for the portfolio
- A diagram, photograph or sketch, an outline and a description of a presentation to the class
- A solution to an open-ended question showing originality and creative problem solving
- Draft, revised and final versions of a research project on a health issue, including such items as writing, diagrams, graphs and charts
- Excerpts from response journal
- Audio or visual work done by student
- A table of contents
- Goals and action plans outlining commitment to improved health
- Print-out of a relevant Internet search
A basic student portfolio focusing on a particular concept, topic or issue may contain:20
- a cover page
- a table of contents
- a statement of student goals
- items that represent understanding of concepts
- items that illustrate the process of learning, including excerpts from learning logs and journals, a sample project in all stages from conception to final product, with student’s commentary on decisions made along the way
- performance items that demonstrate application of concepts and skills
- self-assessment rubrics
- labels and captions that identify items in the portfolio, explain the context in which they were produced and provide reasons for choosing them.

It may also include:20
- a piece chosen from the student’s work by a classmate, with a caption explaining why the classmate considered the piece a valuable addition
- a piece from another subject area that relates to the portfolio subject, such as a graph from mathematics that relates to the topic of active living because it indicates daily activity choices of students
- an artifact from outside the school demonstrating the transfer of concepts and skills, such as a report on a volunteer placement that assesses leadership skills.

Career portfolios

The most common use for portfolios is in the area of career exploration. Personal career portfolios are carefully organized collections that illustrate a student’s skills, abilities and talents. Compiling career portfolios helps students identify, select and organize evidence of knowledge and skills that can help them make successful transitions from school to work, or further training or education.

Learner outcomes

All eleven specific learner outcomes in the Career and Life Choices component of the CALM program focus on personal career portfolio development.

The specific outcome for portfolios is C5. Develop a quality career portfolio
- describe various sources of personal career aspirations
- assess a wide range of career possibilities
- build a personal occupational profile, including information gathered while envisioning possible futures, examining future employment trends and researching possible career choices
- discuss the importance of persistence and the creation of options throughout career development planning
• build a quality career portfolio by combining the occupational profile and the personal information profile
• discuss how a career portfolio can be used

Creating and developing career portfolios is an effective learning strategy. Through the process, students learn to organize information into a format. The information in a career portfolio is personal, so the end product is of personal value to the student.

Benefits
Students need to be adept at communicating their knowledge and skills. Many students:
• possess various skills, but cannot identify them
• are uninformed about what employers want
• underestimate the relevancy of their skills.

Students who have developed career portfolios are able to:
• reflect on their values, interests and strengths through self-assessment
• contribute to their own sense of accomplishment
• connect home, school and community activities
• use information to prepare for employment, college, technical school or university entrance
• identify and demonstrate skills for employment
• communicate a sense of accomplishment
• demonstrate personal accountability.

A completed career portfolio is a summary of abilities and accomplishments. In a world of competitive selection for education and employment, portfolios can be valuable marketing tools. Portfolios give students a measure of autonomy and self-expression that can be highly motivating.

Career portfolios demonstrate the many skills of students. And, while they provide a framework for students to direct their own learning, they can also provide teachers with documentation of students’ work.

When applying for jobs, career portfolios can provide useful information for writing cover letters, preparing for interviews and discussing experience and skills.

The true value of career portfolios is that students have collections of relevant information from which to create concise submissions to potential employers. The actual portfolios can also be used in situations in which students are asked back for a second longer interview.

Planning considerations
Career portfolios are toolkits for making career decisions. They are practical—a portable means of storing, tracking and presenting samples that demonstrate skills and abilities.
The career portfolio project functions as both a learning and an assessment tool. In the end, students have a detailed personal collection of work. To accomplish this, the teacher needs to schedule time for students to learn and work on their portfolios.

A portfolio project requires instructional time in the classroom as well as out-of-class student work. Many specific outcomes will be addressed during this time. Almost all the instruction for General Outcome Career and Life Choices can be woven into the activities of the portfolio project.

There are various ways to schedule work. Some teachers plan short activities throughout the length of the CALM program, scheduling these with the teaching of all three outcomes. In this case, students collect the results of these activities and store them for their portfolios. Later, larger blocks of time focus specifically on portfolio work, usually when career-related outcomes are the focus of instruction.

Other teachers prefer to commit larger blocks of class time to portfolio work for a shorter span of the CALM program. This can be done by scheduling one class each week for portfolio development. Then, a block of concentrated time, when appropriate, can be used to assemble and refine portfolios.

Many students will have worked on preparing learning and career plans in junior high school. The CALM teacher can take advantage of this prior learning by using what students recall of the experiences and the portfolio skills already developed. In some cases, students may actually have portfolios or folders of their junior high school work that can be updated, revised and incorporated into the current career portfolio project.

Process versus product
Although the ultimate goal of a portfolio is a product, the process of creating that product is where much of the learning takes place. Learning to become conscious of one’s skill development impacts career planning, goal setting and personal confidence for a lifetime.

The portfolio process can be summarized in the following four steps.

1. Collect
2. Reflect
3. Select
4. Present.

Step 1: Collect
It is important that, from the beginning, there is effective organization and management in place for collecting possible samples. Consider the following ideas for managing portfolios.21

- Choose and use a system to store all work until portfolio selections are made. Storage boxes, large envelopes, unused pizza boxes and three-ring binders are all sturdy, inexpensive options.
• Provide students with checklists of requirements to make and organize their selections. Checklists can double as the table of contents.

• Include photographs of projects and activities at various stages of development. Photos can document skills in action.

• Label samples and pieces. Some may be directly labelled with dates and brief descriptions. Others can have tags attached to them. Tags can be as simple as index cards or slips of paper made into portfolio tags. (See Student Tool 23: Portfolio tags, page 158.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name ___________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portfolio tag</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title of sample _________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I chose this sample because ______________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date _________________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRAFT  ❑  FINAL COPY  ❑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date sample added to portfolio __________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• If samples have been assessed, assessments should be attached to the samples.

• Consider computer-based portfolios. Portfolio contents can be saved electronically using word-processing or desktop publishing software and scanners.

• A sample table of contents with four sample portfolio content pages is in the Appendices, pages 163–167. This is adapted from Creating a Career Skills Portfolio: Showcasing Students’ Strengths and Abilities (Alberta Education, 1997).

As students complete various self-assessment inventories in CALM and other courses, they become more aware of what interests and motivates them, what they have accomplished and what their values are. This may provide clues about what could be included in their portfolios.
Employability Skills 2000+

One useful guide for the development of a career portfolio is the Employability Skills 2000+. It outlines skills that representatives of industry, business and service identify as essential for the Canadian workforce. They include:

- academic/technical (fundamental) skills
- personal management skills
- teamwork skills.

A list of Employability Skills are included in the Appendices, pages 168–169.

The Alberta Framework of Essential Competencies

A second useful guide for the development of a career portfolio is The Alberta Framework of Essential Competencies for Working, Learning and Living (ECF). The ECF identifies essential workplace competencies within the following four dimensions:

- building personal capacity
- interacting and communicating
- planning and managing
- using data and computer technology.

The competencies are stated as a series of performance indicators. More information on these essential competencies are included in the Appendices, pages 170–173.

The framework also has an Action Planner teacher resource guide that contains a self-assessment and a process for learners to document their successes and plan for future growth. The set is available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre.

Step 2: Reflect

To make wise selections for their portfolios, students must reflect on each sample they have collected.

Teachers can use the portfolio process to teach students to critique their work and reflect on its merits. As students review their samples in order to select potential portfolio items, teachers can prompt students’ analysis and decision-making skills by asking questions and encouraging critical analysis.

It may be useful for students to maintain two portfolio files. The first holds all the material collected. The second, or show portfolio, contains selected pieces that best demonstrate learnings and skills.

Step 3: Select

It is important to establish clear criteria for what is to be included in a portfolio. Teachers and students need to work together to establish criteria and begin the selection process.
In *The Mindful School: The Portfolio Connection*, Burke, Fogarty and Belgrad offer a sample list of criteria that includes:

- accuracy of information
- connection to other subjects
- correctness of form
- examples of creativity
- indication of development of process
- diversity of entries
- evidence of multiple intelligences
- evidence of thoughtfulness
- evidence of growth and development
- insightfulness
- knowledge of concepts
- organization
- persistence
- progress
- quality products
- examples of self-assessment
- visual appeal.

Students should select items that provide solid evidence of their strengths and accomplishments. They should select items that demonstrate a positive, comprehensive picture of who they are and what they want to accomplish.

Once items are selected, students have the ingredients for basic career portfolios. The next task is to organize items. A basic career portfolio may contain the following.

- **Introductory section:**
  - a cover page
  - table of contents
  - a personal profile/introduction
  - key life and work goals
  - résumé that summarizes strengths, interests and accomplishments.

- **Strengths and accomplishments:**
  - academic competencies—competencies developed in core subject areas, such as mathematics, science, English language arts, social studies
  - technical competencies—competencies developed in subject areas, such as career and technology studies, fine arts, international languages, physical education
  - essential competencies and learning capacity (employability skills)
  - other competencies developed through work, hobbies, extracurricular activities, sports
  - accomplishments including challenges that have been overcome and programs and projects completed.
• **Evidence:**
  – school transcripts
  – report card comments
  – selected examination results
  – attendance reports
  – copies of awards
  – certificates
  – letters of recommendation and references.

**Step 4: Present**
Presenting a portfolio means sharing it with others. There are many different reasons to share portfolios and many different ways to present information.

In general, a career portfolio needs to be:
• well-organized
• concise, incorporating specific examples
• constantly updated, as skills develop and new skills are learned
• self-directed and self-driven
• representative of the individual
• visually attractive.

Portfolios can be presented in different formats. Potential formats include:
• print format (text, pictures, graphics)
  – folder
  – scrapbook
  – binder with dividers and/or page protectors
• portfolio case format—large zippered case or box large enough to hold materials, such as art work, blueprints, sculptures
• multimedia format, such as videotapes and audiotapes, CD-ROMs or photographs
• Internet or web-based format.

As students select items from their career portfolios to present to various target audiences, they will need to regroup them in smaller binders or folders. Students should select appropriate items from their career portfolios to develop presentation portfolios targeted for specific purposes, such as interviews for employment, post-secondary entry or scholarships.

Students need to be well-prepared for presentations. Consider the following questions to prepare for presentations.
• **Purpose and goal of presentation**—What do you want to accomplish? What do you expect from your audience? What do you know about their interests and expectations?
• **Key messages**—What two or three key messages or personal strengths and attributes do you want the audience to learn and remember about you? Which messages will likely have the most impact on the audience?
• *Documentation*—Which items from your portfolio most effectively demonstrate your key messages? Do they need updating?

• *Tools and props*—Will you use any technology or props in your presentation? If the technology fails, what is your back-up plan?

• *Timing and sequence*—How much time is available? Will the audience have questions? What questions might be asked?

• *Plan for feedback*—How will you assess the impact and effectiveness of the presentation? For example, will you do a personal assessment or ask for audience feedback?

• *Be prepared*—What will you take? What will you wear? How will you get there? How will you prepare mentally?

It is important to provide opportunities for students to share their portfolios in a setting that is comfortable and supportive. They could present their portfolios to another student, in small groups, at parent–teacher meetings, to teachers or career advisors.

Students should reflect on how they feel about their presentations. As well, they can solicit constructive feedback from the audience by asking these questions.

• What worked well?

• What was the most interesting about this process? What was the most surprising about this process?

• What could have been improved?

Students may need coaching on the self-assessment process and how to provide constructive feedback to others.

A number of schools host formal graduate presentations in which Grade 12 students showcase their acquired skills to a panel of adults using their portfolios to demonstrate readiness for transition from school. The panel could consist of an employer; a teacher, counsellor or administrator, and a school council member.

**Additional resources**
Along with the information provided in this guide, teachers may wish to use other resources while working on the development of personal career portfolios.

The *Student Learning–Career Planner* is available for middle/junior high and senior high school students. The planners can be downloaded from Alberta Learning’s Web site at [www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp](http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/k_12/curriculum/other.asp), or can be purchased from the Learning Resources Centre.

The *Student Learning–Career Planner* file folder provides opportunities for students to connect their senior high school course selections with their evolving career plans. The planner should be updated regularly and reviewed several times throughout the school year. It provides a place for students to summarize their ideas about themselves, their futures and their career planning activities. It also helps students identify essential information for their portfolios.
The planner is organized into six sections.

- **Personal profile:**
  - interests, competencies, values, favourite subjects, awards and certificates of recognition

- **Student experiences:**
  - school activities, volunteer experiences, other activities

- **Education information:**
  - grade, courses

- **Career planning activities:**
  - self-assessment, investigations, work experience, action plans

- **Career goals:**
  - career goals, reasons, steps to success

- **Consultation record:**
  - dates, participants, items discussed, follow-up plans

### Using career portfolios

Students can use career portfolios to:

- identify courses that will build the skills needed for particular occupations
- help set the path for work or learning plans
- help get jobs or volunteer positions by identifying the match between the skills they have and those required
- assist in applying for scholarships by focusing on strengths, abilities and accomplishments
- document relevant skills from school, community, home and work in an engaging, organized manner to use on job or training applications
- use in interviews for university, college or technical school acceptance
- have ready access to information needed to relate skills directly to specific job requirements.

Parents can use career portfolios to:

- see the development of their children’s competencies and accomplishments over time
- recognize efforts being made to prepare for the transition from senior high school
- provide a framework to discuss future plans, work and learning challenges.

Post-secondary institutions and employers can use career portfolios to:

- see clear evidence of students’ skills, strengths and accomplishments
- better understand the career development initiatives happening in schools, such as work experience programs, work study programs and mentoring.
Assessing career portfolios

Basic principles of effective assessment apply when assessing career portfolios. Assessment practices need to be continuous, collaborative, comprehensive, criterion-based and effectively communicated.

Assessment practices should focus on the positive and help students identify and celebrate their strengths and accomplishments. Formative assessment should help students strengthen the competencies they need to achieve their dreams and goals. As much as possible, students should be given options to demonstrate the required learner outcomes in a variety of ways, such as presenting information through written, verbal or multimedia formats.

All career portfolios should:
• be up-to-date
• be accurate
• be well-organized and attractive, with
  – a logical flow
  – effective use of graphics, pictures, dividers, cover pages
  – effective labels
• include clear and comprehensive description of:
  – academic competencies
  – technical competencies
  – essential competencies
  – credentials, awards and recognition documents
  – work and volunteer experiences.

Rubrics
The following are two sample rubrics. The first is for assessing student portfolios. The second is for assessing student portfolio presentations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard of excellence</th>
<th>Approaching standard of excellence</th>
<th>Meets acceptable standard</th>
<th>Needs improvement to meet acceptable standard</th>
<th>Not acceptable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly states the reasoning for including information</td>
<td>clearly explains importance of each entry and reflects on personal experiences</td>
<td>explains importance of entries in detail</td>
<td>explains importance of a few entries</td>
<td>does not explain importance of entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relates information directly to future career goals and reflects on future plans</td>
<td>relates information to future career goals and links to future plans</td>
<td>provides minimal information on how entries relate to future career goals</td>
<td>provides no information on how entries relate to future career goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identifies skills needed for success in chosen profession and assesses these skills against current skill level</td>
<td>identifies basic skills needed for success in chosen profession</td>
<td>identifies a few skills needed for success in chosen profession</td>
<td>does not identify skills needed for success in chosen profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzes, researches and gathers information to reach a conclusion</td>
<td>identifies and reflects on values and interests within a career</td>
<td>relates values and interests within a career</td>
<td>minimally relates values and interests within a career</td>
<td>does not relate values and interests within a career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gives specific examples and convincing reasons for career choice</td>
<td>gives detailed explanation for career choice</td>
<td>provides minimal explanation of career choice</td>
<td>no explanation of career choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates knowledge of chosen occupation and training required</td>
<td>explains specific senior high school courses needed to pursue chosen career; has back-up plan</td>
<td>explains senior high school courses needed to pursue chosen career</td>
<td>provides incomplete information on senior high school courses needed to pursue chosen career</td>
<td>provides incomplete or inaccurate information on senior high school courses needed to pursue chosen career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>describes types of post-secondary training or schooling needed and gives examples</td>
<td>describes post-secondary training or schooling needed</td>
<td>provides basic information on type of post-secondary training or schooling needed</td>
<td>provides incomplete or inaccurate information on type of post-secondary training or schooling needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lists basic information on senior high school courses needed to pursue chosen career</td>
<td>provides basic information on type of post-secondary training or schooling needed</td>
<td>provides incomplete information on type of post-secondary training or schooling needed</td>
<td>provides incomplete or inaccurate information on type of post-secondary training or schooling needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard of excellence</td>
<td>Approaching standard of excellence</td>
<td>Meets acceptable standard</td>
<td>Needs improvement to meet acceptable standard</td>
<td>Not acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demonstrates knowledge of chosen occupation and training required (continued)</strong></td>
<td>- relates current skills to goal</td>
<td>- gives additional example of current skills related to goal</td>
<td>- provides example of current skills related to goal</td>
<td>- provides no examples of current skills related to goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- describes specific skills and examples, education or volunteer work that would help in achieving career goals</td>
<td>- explains some skills, education or volunteer work that would help in achieving professional goals</td>
<td>- provides basic information on the skills, education or volunteer work that would help in achieving professional goals</td>
<td>- provides minimal information on the skills, education or volunteer work that would help in achieving professional goals</td>
<td>- provides no examples of skills, education or volunteer work that would help in achieving professional goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content and organization</strong></td>
<td>- includes diverse examples of best work, achievements and skills</td>
<td>- includes a number of examples of best work, achievements and skills</td>
<td>- includes some examples of best work, achievements and skills</td>
<td>- provides incomplete work samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- presents information in a skillful and engaging way using a number of different layouts, media and graphics</td>
<td>- presents information effectively using different layouts, media and graphics</td>
<td>- presents information using basic formats and appropriate graphics</td>
<td>- presents information using confusing formats and inappropriate graphics</td>
<td>- lacks format, no graphics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appearance</strong></td>
<td>- provides printed information that is easy to read and engages reader/audience</td>
<td>- provides printed information that is easy to read and enhances portfolio</td>
<td>- provides printed information that is clear and reader-friendly</td>
<td>- provides written information that is incomplete or undecipherable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- organization enhances understanding and inspires reader/audience</td>
<td>- the portfolio has logical and interesting organization</td>
<td>- the portfolio is organized in logical order</td>
<td>- the portfolio is not organized in logical order</td>
<td>- no organization is evident</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Portfolio presentation assessment rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Needs improvement to meet acceptable standard</th>
<th>Meets acceptable standard</th>
<th>Approaching standard of excellence</th>
<th>Standard of excellence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication with audience</strong></td>
<td>communication is confusing and misleading</td>
<td>communicates clearly with audience</td>
<td>communicates clearly with audience and uses effective body language</td>
<td>communicates clearly with audience, and engages and inspires with effective use of voice and body language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enthusiasm</strong></td>
<td>displays minimal enthusiasm and interest for project</td>
<td>displays appropriate enthusiasm and interest for project</td>
<td>displays enthusiasm and interest for project, and engages audience</td>
<td>displays exceptional enthusiasm and interest throughout presentation and engages and motivates audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depth, breadth and substance of content</strong></td>
<td>content lacks substance or is not fully developed</td>
<td>content is complete</td>
<td>content is well-developed</td>
<td>content is well-developed and shows depth and breadth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization of ideas</strong></td>
<td>presentation of ideas is confusing</td>
<td>ideas are organized</td>
<td>ideas are organized in a clear and logical format</td>
<td>ideas are presented in a clear and interesting format</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>