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# Putting It Together: Selecting and Arranging Artifacts

How many potential portfolio entries have you created so far in this course? Have you kept track of your choices and decisions as you composed each piece? What have you produced that you'd like to keep working on? Which artifacts are you going to finish, now that the due date is looming?

Even if your instructor has assigned the number of entries you are required to include, you still must choose which artifacts and decide how much revision each one needs. Can you include multiple drafts of the same assignment to demonstrate your revision skills? Does your instructor prefer to see the final revisions first and then previous drafts, or something chronological? Even in writing classes with very structured portfolio requirements, you'll need to make a number of choices about what types of changes to make and how to present the materials.

In the section titled "Setting Goals and Planning Ahead," you were asked to define your goals for the course as well as for your portfolio (see pp. 8–11). Did you write them down in your journal or blog? This is the ideal time to review what you've written along these lines and to see how your portfolio addresses or reflects your goals. It's also time to confirm answers to questions that you may have had when you started the course:

- Can I include brief response pieces, blog entries, position papers, e-mail, or chat transcripts? Can I include journal entries or impromptu or timed writings done in class?
- How polished, finished, or different do the artifacts or entries need to be?
- How much time do I have at this point to revise and put together my portfolio?
- Do I have the technological know-how I need?
- Does everything I include have to be revised, edited, or both? Can entries be in their "original" state if I include an explanation of why I chose not to revise them?

You might write down what you plan to include in your journal or blog. Meanwhile, in consultation with your instructor and classmates, make sure you understand the scope of your portfolio and what it can include:

- Written text in terms of pages or number of words
- Bulleted lists (like this one)
- Photographs that you've taken or found online
- Clip art
- Charts and graphs
- Audio and video clips
- Hyperlinks to internal files offline and to external files on the Internet

Ask yourself what purpose each artifact serves. Your instructor will examine the choices you make very closely, so you want to think through and be able to explain your decisions. The more content you can include, of course, the more difficult and time-consuming your choices. So find out as soon as possible what kind of entries and how many of them your instructor is looking for.

## STARTING THE SELECTION PROCESS

Once you're clear about what you can include in your portfolio, and once you have a general image in mind of the content and design of your portfolio, set aside time for initial planning and storyboarding. (See the sample storyboard in Figure 7.1 on p. 46.)

If you're creating a print portfolio, sit down with your working folder in a place where you have plenty of room to spread out the folder's contents and sort through them. If you are using an electronic folder, label each file clearly first and then open as many files as possible and try to arrange them so that they are all partially visible onscreen and can be easily minimized and restored. Here's where keeping an organized working folder pays off. (If you haven't kept up with labeling and sorting, now is definitely the time to do it.) As you pull labeled pieces out of your working folder, remind yourself what each piece is about and do some initial sorting. Think of three piles: pieces you plan to include, pieces you don't plan to include, and maybes. If you are sorting through electronic files, create three folders and label them something like, "For Portfolio," "Not for Portfolio" and "Maybe for Portfolio." Then move into those folders the relevant files. We talk more about the selection process below. It is not uncommon in a writing course to have as many as fifty pieces of information to sort through at this point.

## THE NAVIGATIONAL SCHEME

If you're creating an e-Portfolio, it's now time to settle on a navigational scheme. Readers of print-based portfolios may follow a table of contents, but they move through a portfolio mostly by turning pages, typically in

order. In an electronic portfolio, the writer can set up a navigational scheme that links each section, or node, in the portfolio. By clicking on an icon or other hyperlink, readers can move through the work in different sequences. So one reader may choose to review the portfolio in chronological order, while another may choose to start with the final artifact and its process components and then move to another entry. The e-Portfolio writer can create multiple sequences; conversely, the writer can set up a navigational scheme that directs all readers to specific artifacts. Whereas the print portfolio allows readers to flip through pages as they will, the e-Portfolio writer can control page flipping if it makes sense to do so. One thing that is especially convenient, too, is that the navigational scheme can be placed on every section simply by copying and pasting. Readers can see the links *to* all sections *from* all sections.

Although they can be used for both print and electronic portfolios, metaphors are especially meaningful in e-Portfolios because of the graphical user interface. Instead of using words as links to different sections, you can create icons. An *icon* is a pictorial symbol, in this case of the content in a section of the portfolio. Like the topic sentence of a paragraph, an icon needs to tell the reader what to expect when he or she clicks on it. Choosing or creating an icon requires writers to consider their readers: What will my audience think when this picture means? In a good navigational scheme, the icons representing each section should all be related. In other words, you should think of an overarching metaphor that symbolizes the work and your efforts in the course, and then develop a series of related icons.

## METAPHORICAL THINKING

What word or phrase best describes your work in this course? If, for instance, *growth* encompasses much of your success in this course, then the metaphor of a garden might be appropriate. The icon for one section could be a seed; the icon for another, a sapling; the icon for still another, a fruit-bearing tree. Or suppose *new understanding* captures your progress well. You might explore how the metaphor of a person climbing a mountain symbolizes your work. It's a long path and a difficult struggle through "course" terrain; but as you climb, what's below becomes clear. If you think metaphorically and holistically, your ability to make connections between ideas and artifacts in your portfolio will increase. See the companion Web site for types of symbols and metaphors often used in e-Portfolios; these might spark an idea for you.

## PRESENTATION TOOLS

There are three types of presentation tools used to create e-Portfolios, and each has its benefits and limitations (Table 7.1). The type of presentation tool you use plays a significant role in the type of navigational structure you can develop. Ask your instructor which type of presentation tool you

**TABLE 7.1. PRESENTATION TOOLS FOR E-PORTFOLIOS: BENEFITS AND LIMITATIONS**

| PRESENTATION TOOLS | BENEFITS | LIMITATIONS |
|---|---|---|
| **Common tools:** Using a combination of Microsoft PowerPoint and Microsoft Word, for example. | • You do not necessarily have to upload your work online.<br>• You are already very familiar with these programs, and much of your work is ready to go.<br>• Hyperlinking is very easy once you put all of your files into the same folder.<br>• These tools lend themselves to creativity.<br>• It is easy to add animation if you want it. | • Your work isn't as portable. You will need to save it on a USB drive, a network drive, a CD, or some other system for submission. And you probably won't be able to e-mail your e-Portfolio.<br>• Working from multiple computers is difficult unless you save all of your work to a medium that is compatible with each computer.<br>• You can store your work online, but the files will be relatively large. |
| **e-Portfolio program:** Using Mosiac, for example. | • Free programs are available and accessible through the companion Web site.<br>• Your instructor may be using a program like Blackboard, WebCT, or TaskStream, which has e-Portfolio tools built in.<br>• Your work is online and easy to update and access from multiple computers. | • Your school may not have ready access to these programs.<br>• Hyperlinking can be a challenge in some of the programs.<br>• The program may limit your ability to personalize your e-Portfolio. |
| **Web page–building program:** Using FrontPage or Dreamweaver, for example. | • Your work will be scalable and can grow as you read, write, and think about concepts during and after the course.<br>• Your navigational tool set can include useful mouseover effects<br>• You can share your work with family and friends by sharing your Web site address. | • You may be tempted to spend too much time on the design and look of your e-Portfolio at the expense of reflection and work on its content.<br>• It can be confusing to upload work to an online space.<br>• It is easy to get links wrong.<br>• It is difficult to troubleshoot. |

can use: common tools, an e-Portfolio program, or a Web page model. If the presentation tools are up to you, read through Table 7.1 carefully and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each type.

## CHOOSING THE ENTRIES

To begin choosing the entries for your portfolio, consider both the focus of the course and the principle of variety. Review the handouts, assignment sheets, and other course materials to determine which qualities of writing the class has emphasized, and to choose pieces that best illustrate those qualities.

Then consider the variety of the pieces. Which pieces best demonstrate your learning? Your writing ability? Will those pieces also illustrate variety? Try sorting your possible entries by, for example, audience. In your working folder, how many different audiences have you addressed or invoked? Can you demonstrate your ability to write a number of different pieces for different purposes? Sort your entries again chronologically—from those you wrote first to those you wrote most recently. Could you make a case for variety by including entries from early, middle, or late points in the course? Depending on the assignments you've been given, you may think you don't have a variety of work, but consider several options. For example, could you condense one entry and develop another so that your portfolio pieces demonstrate a variety of lengths?

Reread or skim enough of your writing to remember what each piece is about. Then quickly reread your instructor's comments and peer reviews, to remember as much of the context of your original draft as possible. Once you have reread all of your essays or projects, you might want to begin a process of exclusion by creating a storyboard (see the following section).

Some students find it easier to identify the pieces they don't want to include than to pick those they do. You might start by setting aside the essays, projects, or pieces that you cannot imagine working on again. These are the ones for which you have very little enthusiasm, for whatever reasons. Maybe you didn't make good choices to begin with, or you lost interest somewhere along the way. Perhaps it's a project that always frustrated you and never did quite come together, or maybe the piece was timely two months ago but now seems dated. Maybe you've become bored with the topic, or perhaps you think that you still have a lot to learn about the issue before you can write convincingly. In any case, how you feel about a project is extremely important, and only you can determine that.

If you begin with the definite no entries, turn next to the definite yes candidates. Which pieces please you, make you feel satisfied, or still interest you? Which ones do you catch yourself rereading from start to finish? Naturally you may be tempted to ask, "Which one did my instructor like best?" However, the projects you like best are better choices because your

instructor isn't the one who is going to be taking the entry through the revising, editing, and polishing stages. Because you have to live with this piece for the next two or three weeks, make sure it is a project that genuinely interests you.

The definite yes and no candidates are the easiest to identify, but your maybe pile is likely to be the biggest of the three. How do you decide among the possible entries in the maybe pile? Perhaps most important, you'll need to envision what each maybe entry would look like in final form. A maybe piece doesn't have to be in excellent shape right now because there's still time to revise, edit, and polish—and that could be exactly what's expected. Your instructor has intentionally designed this course to give you time near the end of the term to revisit the writing process with each of your essays or projects that show the most potential, and to finish them now. Try sorting through the maybe pile with these options in mind:

- Choose a piece that shows promise or potential but that still needs quite a bit of work; the revised work will demonstrate your ability to finish a promising piece.
- Choose a piece that offers an interesting contrast to one or two of your other entries, a piece that adds variety to the portfolio.
- Choose a piece that ties together two or three other entries, that provides a thread or common theme to your portfolio.

In general, use your own instincts and reactions to a piece to judge whether or not to include it. If you can't get excited about a piece, how will you make your reader like it? If you're bored with it, your boredom is going to show. Readers can sense how you feel about your work, so choose examples that get your writing juices flowing. In addition, choose entries about which you have something to say. If you can readily think of points you want to make about a project—about the writing process and how the essay evolved, or about why you wrote the essay, or about what you think its strengths are—then it may be an excellent choice for inclusion. After all, you need to revise each entry, but you also must be able to discuss why you chose it and what it demonstrates about your learning or your writing ability.

## STORYBOARDING

A *storyboard* is a series of drawings that depicts a sequence of events. Directors use storyboards to plan their shots in the scenes of a movie, for example. (Sometimes the director's storyboards are included in the bonus material on a DVD.) In effect, storyboarding is similar to clustering or mapping. When you have a handle on what you want to include in your portfolio, stop and plan how you want to organize the entries *before* you begin building. Too often, students spend far too much time at this stage

paying attention to the look and design of their portfolio (especially their e-Portfolio) when they should be focusing on the content. Hours or even days later, they may have found the right font or color but do not have a dominant structure or see the relationships between artifacts clearly. Your instructor will evaluate your work primarily for the reflective and critical thinking it demonstrates, and a storyboard can be an enormous help here.

Figure 7.1 is an example of a storyboard. You can draw your own on paper or use a computer program to diagram the structure of your portfolio. Begin with an introduction that leads into your artifacts. You may want to give your readers the opportunity to read through your journal or blog for the course, or you might include the instructor's and your classmates' feedback. In any case, your task is to demonstrate the relationships between and among the artifacts. Think about the lines between each piece here as a contextual reflection, that is, a connection you will have to make in tracing your development from one artifact to another.

As you make your choices and prepare to revise and edit each piece, consider which piece might work best first or last, and how the placement of each entry affects the whole. We know that first impressions are very important and sometimes lasting, so the first few pages of the portfolio are crucial to establishing your credibility as a strong careful writer. Research, in fact, has found that portfolio readers in large-scale assessments make their judgments very early in the process of reading a portfolio, and that



FIGURE 7.1
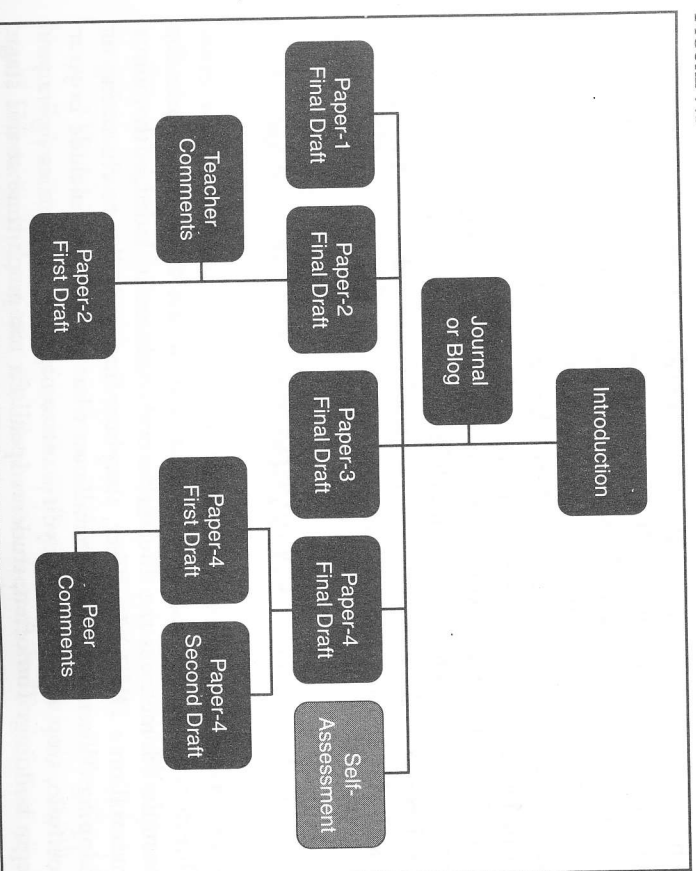
entries in the middle or at the end do not much alter their evaluation.* This finding emphasizes the importance of a well-crafted introduction and suggests that your best entry should follow the introduction. Remember, however, that the study was conducted in large-scale assessments, which means that hundreds of portfolios were being evaluated in one session. If your situation differs, so might the outcome. You need to decide, of course, on the best order, and you may want to address the reasons for the order in the introductory piece. Whatever your decisions, your job in the introduction is to give some of the reasons behind them.

## TAKING STOCK 9: Getting Help Choosing Artifacts

Who can help you choose? The people who know your work best include the instructor, of course, but also (and perhaps even more so) the classmates with whom you've collaborated in this course. Without giving them any hints or showing them your writing folder, ask your peer response group members which of your pieces they remember best. Their answers can tell you a lot about which of your essays had an impact. You can ask the same question of your instructor: "Without looking at my writing folder, what did I write that you really remember?" Your instructor might be willing to answer that question, but many instructors will want you to make your portfolio choices independently, without prodding or direction from them.

If all of your sorting and rereading still leaves you uncertain, talk to your instructor about other options. Maybe you want to write one of the projects or assignments again, which would mean an entirely new draft. Your instructor might approve of that, but be sure to check first. Some instructors do not want any surprises in the portfolio, or they might need evidence that you have taken the entry through all of the stages of the writing process.

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*This reader-response study was conducted at the University of Michigan. See Liz Hamp–Lyons and William Condon, "Questioning Assumptions about Portfolio-Based Assessment." *College Composition and Communication* 44.2 (May 1993): 176–190.