

Different Roles of Electronic Portfolios

It is common practice for educators to use student portfolios to showcase examples of “best practice” work completed. And it is becoming more common for students to use computer-based resources to create electronic or “digital” portfolios. This enables student accomplishments to be communicated to an audience beyond the classroom. But electronic portfolios can play a variety of important roles BEYOND acting as a vehicle for communicating best practice. The chart below presents a variety of different roles that electronic portfolios could play within the teaching and learning environment.

Role	Description
Artifact Creation as Instructional Context	<p>An electronic portfolio is defined by the digital artifacts it presents. The content of such artifacts do not often relate directly to the use of technology, but successfully using technology to create artifacts often necessitates the learning and/or application of a variety of worthwhile skills. This represents a very concrete learning context.</p> <p>In addition to defining concrete creation-oriented learning contexts, the actions surrounding the development of digital material often defines experiences that involve learning and/or applying problem solving as well as collaboration skills.</p>
Goal-Setting	<p>Portfolios can help define both large “meta” instructional goals as well as smaller goals. Planning the creation of portfolio artifacts involves teacher-learner communication and clear goal-setting. If analytic rubrics will be used to evaluate the artifacts, specific categories and items within the rubric constitute clear goals available for review at any time throughout the learning process.</p>
Assessment	<p>Successfully developing artifacts for an electronic portfolio can constitute evidence of learning. The learning of content-related as well as technology and collaboration skills can often be clearly identified by within a successfully-completed portfolio artifact.</p> <p>Designing and developing electronic portfolio artifacts generally constitutes a complex set of tasks, so detailed assessment instruments (including analytical rubrics) are often used. This type of assessment can encourage the learning and testing of higher-order, critical-thinking intellectual skills.</p> <p>In addition, learners can use detailed assessment rubrics as guides to help them acquire the intended skills.</p>

<p>Reflection</p>	<p>The experience of designing, developing, and presenting electronic artifacts provides numerous opportunities to reflect on the learning experience.</p> <p>It is very easy to include reflection requirements within the portfolio. Directing reflective activities and experiences is a very effective instructional strategy, particularly for adult learners.</p>
<p>Communication</p>	<p>Electronic portfolios make it easy to distribute artifacts to others (family, friends, colleagues, and potential employers), especially if the digital portfolio is Web-based. Electronic portfolios can also provide the mechanisms for helping group members living in different geographic locations work collaboratively on projects.</p>
<p>Instructor Planning and Management Tool</p>	<p>Creating a learning environment in which learners must develop electronic portfolio artifacts can help teachers manage the instructional process by enabling them to view, track, and evaluate progress. Also, determining the types of artifacts to be included within student portfolios and creating the analytic rubrics to help guide student portfolio development constitute effective planning practice.</p>
<p>Learner Organization Tool</p>	<p>Portfolio development can help learners organize their time and resources throughout a learning experience. "In Progress" and "Completed" folders, as well as calendars, timelines and progress checklists can help to organize resources and monitor progress. In addition, analytic assessment rubrics can be used as instructional scaffolds, and existing artifacts can be used as instructional examples.</p>