

Testing and assessment

Name: Portfolio assessment

Aim: to provide a means of assessment that is appropriate for a blended learning course

Contexts: all

Level: B1 and above

Type of tool: computer/ phone or tablet

Type of materials: web-based e-portfolio, in this example, Mahara

Planning: ongoing

Preparation:

1. Portfolio assessment needs to be integrated into the course and thus the various elements of the portfolio have to be identified before the course starts. Identify what needs to be assessed, e.g. speaking, writing etc. and in which parts of the course. We include three examples of portfolio tasks.
2. Decide on the type of assessment for each of these skills and what element of the course will be involved. For example, for speaking, you may decide that you want to link a speaking assessment to a student presentation.
3. Finally, decide on the grading criteria. This must be clear. For example, in process writing, is only the final product assessed or will grading criteria reflect the extent to which the student has reacted to feedback?

Procedure:

1. In the classroom:

Set up the task. In this example, you have decided to use “A learning journey” as a way to gather students’ work for their portfolio. This involves students writing a weekly learning journal containing reflections on any difficulties encountered during their course, “wow” moments, identification of their own weak points, etc. This should probably not be assessing language, but give credit for actually writing an entry each week, based on guidance given. For example “Each week, write about something you found hard, a success moment for you, and a question you want to be able to answer”.

2. Outside the classroom:

Students complete their learning journal.

3. In the classroom:

Organise individual tutorials to discuss how students are keeping up with their entries. Finish the process with student reflection on how they did, and how they could do better next time.

Variations:

1. Students submit a piece of writing to their portfolio. Process writing: “Using a writing genre of your choice (e.g. newspaper article, blog entry, report, academic essay), write about the positive and negative effects of globalisation”. A plan, a first draft and a final version will be submitted.
2. Speaking. Students prepare a presentation and deliver it in class. Their reflection on the presentation and the subsequent teacher feedback are entered in the portfolio.

Notes:

1. An e-portfolio is “a purposeful collection of information and digital artefacts that demonstrates development or evidences learning outcomes, skills or competencies. The process of producing an e-portfolio (writing, typing, recording etc.) usually requires the synthesis of ideas, reflection on achievements, self-awareness and forward planning; with the potential for educational, developmental or other benefits. Specific types of e-portfolios can be defined in part by their

purpose (such as presentation, application, reflection, assessment and personal development planning), pedagogic design, level of structure (intrinsic or extrinsic), duration (episodic or life-long) and other factors” (Cotterill 2007).

1. You will also need to decide how the various elements of the portfolio will be managed. The leading product here is currently Mahara. This provides a comprehensive environment that allows a complete portfolio to be produced and assessed within one site. However, it has to be hosted, so many will not have access to such a resource. There are, however, freely available, free-to-use alternatives where students can produce their portfolio. The advantage of such sites, including Mahara, is that their work can be made available to potential employers, family members etc. A demo site for Mahara can be found here: <https://demo.mahara.org/>. Other free portfolio sites include PortfolioGen (<http://www.portfoliogen.com/>).
2. An alternative to using a portfolio site is to use a range of resources readily available on the web. This could involve blogging and wiki sites, online forums or groups such as those on LinkedIn, “pinboard” sites such as Lino, YouTube, etc. While involving a higher administrative overhead due to the fact they are not all in one place with one login, this approach means the teacher can take advantage of whatever is available, rather than being limited to the resources found on a given e-portfolio website.
3. A final alternative is that the portfolio is sent to the teacher by mail. This can be either as a series of documents or as one, say, Word document, possibly with links to other content.
4. There is an argument that says that the way we assess students should relate to the way we are teaching. Very often a highly communicative, well-integrated, blended learning course is assessed in a very uncommunicative, detached and non-digital manner. Using portfolio assessment allows the assessment process to be integrated into the course and to establish a direct link between the teaching, the learning and the assessment.
5. Note that portfolio assessment can be quite easy to plan, in that it often contains descriptive assessments rather than having to seek out content and devise questions to be answered. The flip side of this is that the marking load can be quite high.
6. Try and find ways for part of the grading process to take place before the end of the course rather than everything happening at the end.

Reference

Cotterill SJ (2007) *What is an ePortfolio?* Available at: <http://www.eportfolios.ac.uk/definition>.

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