

The Top 4 Reasons to Implement Digital Portfolios in the Classroom

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Digital portfolios in education have evolved over time to become an essential learning and assessment tool. A digital portfolio is a web-based collection of student work gathered over time. Students are able to upload multimedia content, demonstrating their learning and skills in a variety of ways. These individualized collections of work help students develop and reflect on their skills and facilitate effective communication with teachers and parents. Here are our top four reasons why you should implement digital portfolios in your classroom today.



1. Portfolios encourage students to become self-directed learners

Student-driven portfolio building promotes ownership of work and self-regulation. By giving students the freedom to contribute to their portfolios at their own pace, teachers grant them autonomy and a space that is their own. Teachers who use myBlueprint portfolios say that some of their students' most authentic, in-depth writing samples are journal entries written in their portfolios. With a greater sense of freedom and ownership, students feel empowered to create their best work.

Students gain insight into their development through the maintenance of their portfolios. As they revisit their previous work, students monitor their progress and become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Identifying areas that need improvement is an initial step towards developing a growth mindset. As students reflect on their weaknesses, they can start to think strategically about where they need to spend energy and effort in order to expand and develop their work.

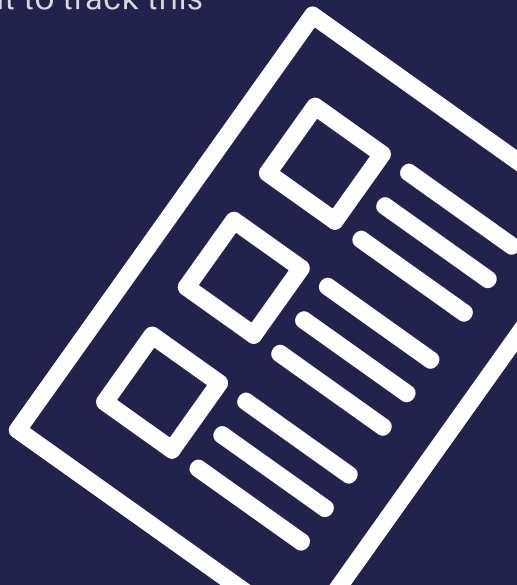


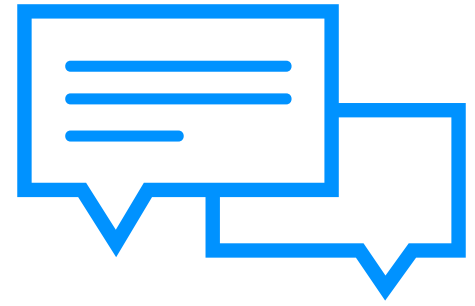
A particularly useful exercise is to have students perform a self-assessment of their portfolios. This helps teachers understand how students see themselves and their work. Self-assessments also help students take responsibility for their projects and assignments, reinforcing the reality that we are all ultimately accountable to ourselves. Accountability motivates students to improve their work for their own fulfillment and create a plan for how they are going to do so.

2. Portfolios facilitate effective assessment

Let's face it, not all students are good test-takers, but that doesn't necessarily mean their skill level is lower than their peers. They are likely able to demonstrate learning in other ways. Digital portfolios allow students to upload work across diverse mediums - writing, photography, videos, audio recordings, etc. This wide range of content provides a fulsome view of a student's skills, giving teachers more opportunities to discover strengths and areas that need attention.

In addition to providing insights for self-reflection, portfolios also document student growth and development for teachers. Oftentimes, it's the journey that is more valuable than the destination and that is definitely the case with education. Each time a student contributes material to their portfolio, they provide a snapshot of where they are in their learning journey. As students continue to contribute throughout the year, teachers can see how their work is evolving and how they are progressing through course material. Digital portfolios can be accessible the entire year (and in some cases, across multiple years), making it convenient to track this growth and development.





3. Portfolios promote productive communication

Just as some students may not excel at tests, others may not thrive in classroom discussion. Some students are shy or simply need more time to formulate thoughts before speaking up in front of others. One-on-one portfolio interviews can promote meaningful, individualized communication between teachers and students. These interviews are centred on the contents of the student's portfolio, grounding the conversation in tangible work examples. Students can discuss their progress, ask questions, and receive suggestions and strategies for improving their work.

Teachers can of course reach out to students outside of scheduled interviews to discuss notable aspects of their portfolios. This can be done in person or by using the commenting or messaging feature that most digital portfolio tools provide. For example, if a student has uploaded a number of impressive photographs, a teacher may comment on one, recommending a photography book or the school photography club. If a student has been consistently uploading subpar materials past their due dates, a teacher can send that student a direct message suggesting that they plan more prep time for projects moving forward and maybe cut back on extracurricular activities.

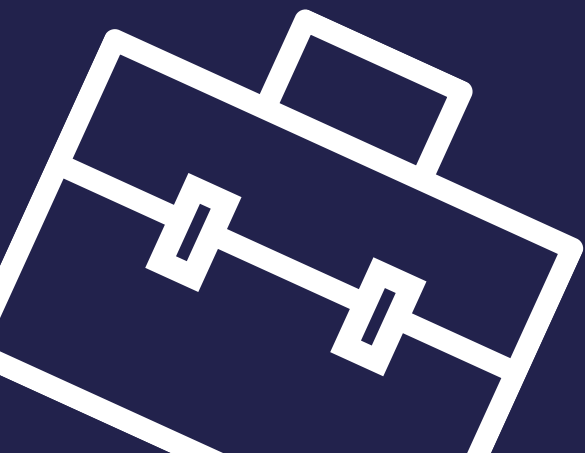
Digital portfolios can also improve home-school communication through the use of family accounts. Without real evidence, it can be difficult for parents to understand how their child is progressing through school, even with direct feedback from teachers. Family accounts give parents access to their child's portfolio throughout the year, giving them the insight they need. This can make for productive parent-teacher conferences and promote open dialogue beyond scheduled interviews.

4. Portfolios prepare students for the world of work

By learning how to build and maintain a portfolio in the classroom, students form habits and skills that they will use in all stages of their career exploration. As previously explored, portfolios encourage students to review their past work and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. This act of self-discovery helps students hone in on skills and areas of interest that can translate into a career path. If students are attuned to their learning and work style in school, they will make mindful career choices grounded in self-awareness.

Portfolio review and self-reflection prepare students for the job hunt itself. As we think about how to market ourselves to prospective employers through resumes, cover letters, and during interviews, we review our past work and focus on key achievements to highlight. Sometimes we will share our portfolio with employers as a presentation of work samples. In some job fields (and post-secondary institutions), portfolio submission and presentation is a standard element of the application process. During portfolio interviews, students go through the same journey, revisiting their body of work and discussing highlights with their teachers. This builds positive habits and routines that students can take with them when applying for jobs.

Once they enter the workforce, students will realize that the use of portfolios is common in many fields, from photography, to journalism, to graphic design, to cosmetology - the list goes on. Just as students are building and maintaining a body of work in the classroom, working professionals save and present their work as a showcase of who they are and what they can do. Portfolios are used as marketing tools to acquire new business and maintain clients. By building portfolios in school, students aren't just preparing for the job search, they are gaining actionable life skills for their careers.



So what are you waiting for? Use portfolios in your classroom today to enhance your students' learning and prepare them for their future.

myBlueprint is a leading edtech company and developer of digital portfolios and career/life planning software for K-12 and post-secondary. For more information about myBlueprint's digital portfolio tools, implementation ideas, and examples visit www.myBlueprint.ca/support or email us at support@myBlueprint.ca.



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