



ePortfolios in Introductory Composition: Enlarging Conceptions of Composing

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Project Information

Building on last year's Electronic Portfolio Contest, Catalyst Research & Development is currently partnering with the Expository Writing Program to study how students learn to compose in the format of an ePortfolio. EWP currently uses a well-developed paper portfolio assignment as part of its introductory composition course. Within this context, we are studying what effects the transition from paper to electronic portfolios has on teaching and learning. Graduate student instructors (TAs) piloted the use of ePortfolios in three sections of English 131 in winter 2006 and are using ePortfolios in six sections this spring. Students in these sections are using Catalyst Portfolio to assemble and comment on their writing for the course.

Challenges

English 131: Introduction to Expository Writing is built around four course learning outcomes. For the portfolio, students choose five to seven papers to demonstrate how they have achieved the outcomes. Currently, for the paper portfolio, students write their argument in the form of a cover letter to their instructor. One challenge has been translating the genre of a cover letter to a multi-page online portfolio format and encouraging the use of a wider range of artifacts as evidence for a claim.

We have attached selected pages from our template here (created in Portfolio Project Builder). In writing the directions for the ePortfolio, we sought to integrate the lessons we learned from our contest study. Specifically, we sought to:

1. make clear what a portfolio is and how it is similar to/different from other types of writing.
2. help students to think about audience as they create each page.
3. remind students about the criteria being used to evaluate their work.
4. provide scaffolding to help students write effective reflections and make explicit connections between their artifacts and the course outcomes.
5. provide information about how students can use HTML to produce a more professional look in the ePortfolio presentation.

Preliminary findings: Ask us about what we are seeing and hearing from instructors and students!

ENGL 131 Portfolio Template

owner Catalyst Research Team created Nov 28, 2005 9:48 AM

[Instructor](#) | [Description](#) | [Objectives](#) | [Instructions](#)

Project description [Edit](#) | [Hide](#)



The final assignment in ENGL 131: *Introduction to Expository Writing* is to create a portfolio of your work that demonstrates your achievement of the course outcomes. A portfolio is essentially an argument that uses artifacts to support a claim. The artifacts for this class include all documents you produced for each assignment sequence as well as any in-class assignments and any comments you received from instructor or peers. In creating an electronic portfolio, you are essentially creating a website to organize and display your portfolio contents.

We included an explicit definition of a portfolio...

Follow the instructions and select those documents that best represent your learning in ENGL 131. You will organize your work according to the course outcomes:

1. To produce complex, analytic, persuasive arguments that matter in academic contexts.
2. To read, analyze, and synthesize complex texts purposefully in order to generate and support writing.
3. To demonstrate an awareness of the strategies that writers use in different rhetorical situations.
4. To develop flexible strategies for revising, editing, and proofreading writing.

Project learning objectives [Edit](#) | [Hide](#)

The portfolio assignment targets course outcomes #1 and #3 in particular. You are asked to create a coherent and convincing argument about your learning in this course, drawing directly on your work for support. You are also asked to write in a new genre; in creating an electronic portfolio, you are creating a web page. You must consider not only the content of your argument, but also its visual representation on the page. As with other types of documents, you must make editorial and design decisions that clearly communicate your message and are appropriate for your audience.

and sought to make clear how it is like/unlike other types of writing.

A reminder about the needs of an audience.

Suggestions for how students might use HTML to achieve a desired look.

ENGL 131 Portfolio Template

Page 1: Introduction and Overview

[Add section here](#) [Preview](#) [Save](#) [Finished](#) [Cancel](#)

Read through all of the instructions on EACH PAGE of this portfolio before you begin.

In this section, provide an introduction to your portfolio. Explain to a reader the purpose of the portfolio and what it demonstrates. Include a brief description of ENGL 131 to set the portfolio in context.

Your reflection: _____

List here the title of each document you have selected for your portfolio. Remember that you must include one major paper and 4-6 smaller papers.

Refer to your HTML guide if you would like the titles to appear as a bulleted list, and click below to "display content as HTML".

Your reflection: _____

Display content as: Plain Text HTML

Home

Introduction and Overview

Introduction and Overview

Outcome #1

Outcome #2

Outcome #3

Outcome #4

Final Reflection

My experience in English 131 this quarter has been quite different from that of any other English class I have been a part of. It has been far more challenging. I don't mean by this that I thought the grading was too harsh or the expectations too high. Rather, what I mean is that this is the first English class that has challenged me to make my writing matter to academia and other people and communities. In high school, and even in English 198 and 200, college classes I have taken, my writing has rarely existed to more than a handful of people: my teacher, two or three peers who would occasionally "review" a major paper, and myself. My "claims" for papers in these other English classes were hardly required to be more than a simple statement or rearrangement of the author's own words. I feel that this English 131 class represents my first experience with true, academic, college-level writing. In this class, I have been able to get a real sense of my strengths and weaknesses as a writer.

With my strengths and weaknesses in mind, I've selected four short papers and my second major paper to be included in this portfolio:

- *Would You Like a Woman With That? An Examination of Gendered Representations in Three Olives Vodka Ads*
- *'Ad'ded Meanings*
- *Safe Motels: The Importance of Making Safe Houses Temporary*
- *Taking My Own Advice: Reflections on Peer Response Groups*
- *Cultural Criticism: How Questions about Other Communities Lead to Understanding*

I chose these papers in particular because I feel that, after revision, they are the works that will best demonstrate my achievement in the four class outcomes. On the following pages, I discuss each outcome and highlight specific parts of my work that I feel display the required characteristics.

An explanation of conventions in the genre and how they support interpretation of information.

Scaffolding to help students write effective reflections: the bulleted questions are meant to guide students' selection of artifacts as well as provide focus for their writing.

ENGL 131 Portfolio Template

Page 2: Outcome #1

[Add section here](#) [Preview](#) [Save](#) [Finished](#) [Cancel](#)

Copy the text for Outcome #1 in this section: **To produce complex, analytic, persuasive arguments that matter in academic contexts.**

Remember that in creating an electronic portfolio, you are essentially creating a web site. Each page should include a header that describes or frames the content on that page. By including the Outcome here, you're telling your reader what this page is all about. Refer to your HTML guide if you would like the header to appear in bold text, and click below to "display content as HTML".

Your reflection: _____

Introduce here the artifact(s) you've chosen to demonstrate your achievement of Outcome #1. **Write about and attach ONLY ONE ARTIFACT PER SECTION** (you may include multiple drafts of the same assignment in a single section). Add more sections to this page as needed.

For EACH section, explain exactly HOW the attached artifact demonstrates achievement of Outcome #1. Be detailed and highlight or excerpt passages in your paper(s) that demonstrate your learning. For example:

- Do you have a sequence of drafts that show how you were able to create a stronger, more focused argument? What sentences show that change?
- Does one of your papers demonstrate especially compelling support for a claim? Talk about how you found and utilized this evidence to make your argument.

For help in writing about your artifacts, draw upon the Course Outcomes, your assignments, the assignment handouts, instructor comments on your work, your peers' comments, and your own self-assessments. **You will be evaluated on your ability to talk knowledgeably and convincingly about this outcome and your own learning.**

Attached artifacts:

[Attach artifact](#)

Your reflection: _____

A reminder of evaluation criteria.

Home

Introduction and Overview

Outcome #1

Outcome #2

Outcome #3

Outcome #4

Final Reflection

Outcome #1

To produce complex, analytic, persuasive arguments that matter in academic contexts.

Safe Motels

Personally, I think outcome #1 was the hardest outcome to meet. My paper, "Safe Motels: The Importance of Making Safe Houses Temporary," has a claim that is both complex and arguable. The argument involves analysis of both the course readings and of different interpretive communities. I feel like my argument is well organized and utilizes effective transitions. For example, in my claim I write, "At the same time it must be emphasized that safe houses should be created only for oppressed groups and should be temporary organizations. If safe houses become permanent institutions, they run the risk of reducing cultural understanding by shifting members' focus always onto their own identities, and never on those of others. People who are only focused on their community and its way of interpreting things will often berate, devalue, or even resort to violence against other communities rather than trying to compromise, share ideas, and persuade. Also, the creation of many safe houses polices society on a slippery slope, for having allowed one group to form a safe house, it would be very difficult to deny another group that same right."

Would You Like...

3 Olives Image #1 **3 Olives Image #2**

My second major paper, "Would You Like Woman With That? An Examination of Gendered Representations in Three Olives Vodka Ads," argued that a certain brand of vodka was using advertisements to try to establish a link between its product and sex. I included stakes in the claim saying that teenagers and other young people are able to view these ads and that drinking and pregnancy are problems among them. In creating a complex and persuasive argument, I stated the problem: "ads used to market your product, 'Three Olives Vodka,' are a prime example of this because they conjure up a false reality where women are sexual objects on display. In this way, they perpetuate hegemonic gender relations and cultural stereotypes. Specifically, they encourage any viewer to make a mental connection between alcoholic beverages (yours especially) and sex." Then I told how and why that problem was important or needed attention: "Your ads become even more alarming when one realizes that they can and are being viewed by teenagers and other young people. Given that teen drinking and pregnancy are serious problems in the United States, the message that your advertisements send is potentially harmful." Finally, I suggested some steps toward a solution: "You ought to run a more responsible ad campaign that focuses on the quality of your product." My analysis of the image in the advertisement and pieces of data that I included then serve to strengthen my claim and support my stakes.