



2. How are E-Portfolios being used?



By students, faculty and institutions, for assessment, accreditation and self-expression—and lots more

What can E-Portfolios be used for?

Because there are so many potential uses for electronic portfolios, it can be helpful to think of them as belonging to certain categories. A common way of looking at e-portfolios is to divide them into three groups: *assessment*, *developmental*, and *showcase*.

In this context, an **assessment** portfolio has a specific structure and purpose. The structure may be defined by requirements for a specific department or even an external body, like an accrediting agency. Although this type of e-portfolio may be viewed as a bit rigid, it can still offer a great deal of flexibility – especially when it incorporates reflection, integration, and synthesis as part of the e-portfolio process.

A **developmental** portfolio is less about meeting specific evaluation requirements and more about the demonstrating advancement and improvement over time. Advancement may be in terms of specific skills or it might be process-based—focusing on how the student learns from and improves with respect to a certain process such as writing. This type of e-portfolio will tend to put considerable emphasis on reflection and self-assessment.

A **showcase** portfolio is more about the culmination of learning rather than the process. It is intended to illustrate exemplary skills and knowledge. A showcase portfolio can be very helpful in a job search.

Certainly many e-portfolios have the attributes of more than one of the categories mentioned above, and some e-portfolio systems help to make the transition from one to the other or to gather artifacts in a way that supports other uses. While at a very basic level e-portfolios are a collection of artifacts, what makes e-portfolios

beneficial is much more than that. As Dr. Helen Barrett noted, “A portfolio without standards, goals and/or reflection is just a fancy résumé, not an electronic portfolio.”¹

Who can take advantage of E-Portfolios?

Students can use them as part of their learning process and for assessment; *Faculty* can use E-Portfolios to demonstrate skills and proficiencies; *Institutions* can use them as part of an accreditation exercise, demonstrating adherence to governmental, industry or accreditation standards.

What about E-Portfolio Implementation?

Many factors can impact and determine the success of an e-portfolio implementation. Barbara Cambridge identifies five specific factors:² *vision*, *assessment*, *technology*, *logistics* and *culture*. An analysis of these factors can begin with corresponding questions. “What should a student know and be able to do?” “How can students demonstrate the school vision?” “What hardware, software, and networking will we need?” “Where will information be digitized?” And “Is the school open to sharing standards?” Those questions are just the beginning.

Dr Barrett describes five stages of the portfolio development process:³

1. First is *defining the goals and context* for the portfolio. The intended audience and available resources are important considerations for this stage.
2. Next is the *working portfolio stage*, which involves selecting the tools, collecting and storing the appropriate artifacts.

A sample E-Portfolio produced via OSPortfolio:





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We can help.

Footnotes:

1 See *Student Electronic Portfolios* by Dr. Helen Barrett. (1999, October 14). Paper presented at ESSDACK, Hutchinson, Kansas. Retrieved from <http://electronicportfolios.com/portfolios/ESSDACKStudent2.pdf>

2 See *Electronic Portfolios as Knowledge Builders* by Barbara Cambridge (2001) in *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty and Institutional Learning*.

3 See *Electronic Portfolios in Educational Technology Encyclopedia* by Helen Barrett (2001) <http://electronicportfolios.org/portfolios/encyclopediaentry.htm>.

2.E-Portfolios In Use, *Cont'd*



3. Third is the reflective portfolio, which as the name implies involves reflection on the part of the participants.
4. Next is the connected portfolio, and it is during this stage that electronic portfolios really become differentiated from paper portfolios. Taking advantage of technology, during this stage artifacts and reflections can be explicitly connected in order to show their relationship.
5. The final stage is the presentation portfolio, and this is when it is made available to a wider audience.

Those are just a handful of ways of looking at the implementation process. More examples can be found in the resources listed below.

How can Serensoft Help?

Serensoft is a higher education services firm, meaning our goal is to use technology-based services to help colleges and universities meet their teaching, learning, and administrative objectives. We have helped several institutions work through issues associated with electronic portfolios. From developing a more complete understanding of electronic portfolios in general to focusing on how they might fit with a particular institution, we can help. From designing a best-fit solution to developing a pilot implementation, from training faculty on the use of electronic portfolios to helping your IT staff support them, we can help.

Assessment portfolios? Accreditation? Cost-effective and flexible solutions? We can help.

Where can I get more information?

Serensoft produces this “Wonderings” series with the hope it will help higher education professionals as they explore subjects of interest. An electronic copy of our “Wonderings” can be found at the Serensoft web site (<http://www.serensoft.com/>). In addition Serensoft posts Webinars on related topics to the website—and, below are additional resources for electronic portfolios.

- Dr. Helen Barrett’s Electronic Portfolio website (<http://electronicPortfolios.org/>) provides what may be the most exhaustive treatment of the subject on the web. The website includes Dr. Barrett’s ongoing blog, writing and presentations—and links to numerous other resources.
- As e-portfolios are becoming more prevalent, many publications are devoting more and more space to the subject. Online articles for e-portfolios can be found at publications such as Educause (in particular Educause Quarterly at <http://connect.educause.edu/Library/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/>) and Campus Technology (<http://www.campusTechnology.com/>).
- *Handbook of Research on ePortfolios* by Ali Jafari and Catherine Kaufman. A comprehensive treatment of the subject. It includes contributions from over 100 authors and addresses major aspects of rationale, technology, and implementation. Dozens of case studies detail current usage.
- *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning*. Barbara L. Cambridge, Susan Kahn, Daniel P. Tompkins, and Kathleen Blake Yancey, editors. Thorough treatment of major portfolio categories - student, faculty and institutional - using many case studies to examine and illustrate e-portfolio considerations, issues, and solutions.
- *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education* by Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta. Focused on the larger question of assessment, this book does devote a few pages to how portfolios can be a useful assessment tool.
- Assessment Institute (<http://planning.iupui.edu/574.html>). Held annually in Indianapolis, the Assessment Institute is the United States’ oldest and largest conference focusing on outcomes assessment in higher education.
- Making Connections (<http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/conference/>). Organized by LaGuardia Community College’s Center for Teaching and Learning, this conference provides an opportunity for thought leaders, practitioners, and newbies to gather and exchange information on their e-portfolio research and experiences.