

ePortfolio concepts

for learners



'After writing just one experience according to the 'formula' suggested by the ePortfolio team, I could notice a change in my thinking. I was learning to consider my experiences from an employer's perspective and to identify – in all facets of my life – examples of skills that employers would value.'

AeP.

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– Postgraduate student, QUT



ePortfolios are becoming popular with students around the world as a tool to enhance learning and assist with personal career development. As a learner, you might be wondering how you can use an ePortfolio to support your learning. This guide will introduce you to ePortfolios, their benefits, and issues you need to consider when developing your own ePortfolio.

What is an ePortfolio?

This guide uses the term 'ePortfolio' to refer to an electronically stored collection (or archive) of a student's experiences, achievements and artefacts, together with their reflections on learning.

Why use an ePortfolio?

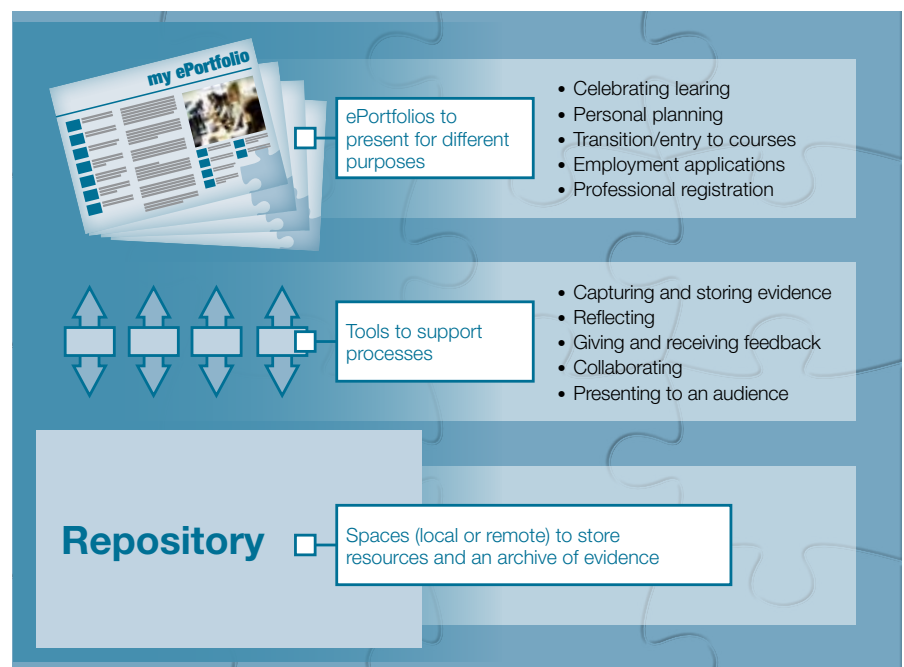
ePortfolios can be customised and personalised into a one-stop-shop to demonstrate your skills and experiences to teachers, peers and employers. Many students find their ePortfolio to be a valuable resource when it comes to writing job applications and preparing for interviews. Students who have used ePortfolios report having a greater awareness of their skills, greater confidence in their abilities, and feeling more independent as a learner.

In the academic context, an ePortfolio can assist you with your personal development by providing a single, organised repository from which you may:

- Develop an holistic overview of your learning/experiences/development beyond individual subjects/classes

- Understand your learning and experience in terms of graduate attributes and employability skills
- Extract evidence to represent your learning and achievements, for example to develop selection criteria responses
- Identify skills gaps through review of and reflection on your ePortfolio content
- Plan, set and review personal development targets.

An ePortfolio is not only a product, but more importantly a process, which can help you to better understand not just *what* you have learned, but *how* you have learned. As you reflect on your learning to create your ePortfolio, you will also develop important lifelong learning abilities that complement your technical knowledge and skills.



Adapted from JISC. (2008). *Effective practice with e-Portfolios*, p. 7. www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/effectivepracticeeportfolios.pdf

'It was only when I came to write about my experiences that the really great value of the ePortfolio became apparent. My confidence in myself as a valuable future employee increased dramatically!... And when it came to applying for jobs. I could readily draw together evidence from a wide variety of areas to demonstrate my competence... I believe that this confidence and maturity was evident in both my written applications and interviews, and helped me to secure a professional job prior to graduation.'

– Postgraduate student, QUT





What do I need to think about with regards to creating and maintaining an ePortfolio?

What is my main reason for creating an ePortfolio?

Your reason(s) for creating the ePortfolio will guide you as to what evidence to include:

- To help me address job applications
- To showcase my skills and experiences to potential employers or professional organisations
- To demonstrate the attainment of professional standards
 - > Refer to the employability skills required by your industry (available from job advertisements, industry associations or career advisory services), and think about which of your experiences and achievements align with them.
- To help me plan my personal development and develop life-long learning skills
 - > Refer to the graduate attributes identified as important by your institution, and think about which of your experiences and achievements align with them. Identify which of the graduate attributes you don't have much evidence for. Consider what training or experiences you require to be able to develop those skills.
 - > Use your ePortfolio to look for patterns in your learning. Are there certain types of experiences or assessment items from which you seem to learn more from? Aim to structure future learning opportunities around those type of experiences.
- To help me transition from university to work, or between learning institutions
- To support my application for the recognition of prior learning (RPL)
 - > After you have entered a range of experiences, sit back and reflect on which graduate attribute or employability skill each entry represents. You will probably find that each entry can be used to demonstrate more than one skill or attribute.

How do I go about creating an entry in my ePortfolio?

To get the most out of your ePortfolio, you need to do more than simply add examples of your work. Each time you add a piece of evidence, you need to provide a brief context for the piece – why are you adding it? What does it display? What do you want your audience to know about that piece of work?

One useful method to help you provide a succinct context is called the STAR-L framework. Stands for **Situation, Task, Action, Result** and lessons **Learnt**, can help you to structure your reflections about an experience in such a way that the meaning and outcome of the experience can be clearly identified and communicated to others.

- Situation – the context in which the experience occurred.
- Task – what was actually required of you in the situation.
- Action – the steps that you personally took in response to the task. When reflecting on your actions, ask yourself why you chose to respond in that particular way.
- Result – the outcome of your actions. How did your actions contribute to the completion of the task? How did your actions affect the final outcome of the situation?
- Learnt – the things you have learned from the experience. Highlight any skills or abilities that you have developed or improved as a result of the experience. Think about how you might apply what you've learned to other situations.

How will I ensure my ePortfolio is kept up to date?

To ensure your ePortfolio gives you the greatest benefit, keep your information up-to-date. Think about how you are going to achieve this:

- Set aside half an hour every Friday to add that week's achievements to your ePortfolio.
- After a major event (e.g. seminar, lecture, assignment, performance), take time to reflect on your experience and add an entry about it to your ePortfolio.
- At the end of each month, spend an hour browsing through your ePortfolio. Consider whether there are any new experiences or artefacts you could add to it as evidence of your learning or skills.

Who will have access to my ePortfolio?

It is important whenever you add information to the World Wide Web to remember that it is a public space. While all ePortfolio systems provide privacy controls, it is essential that you understand exactly who can access your ePortfolio.

You will probably be able to customise your ePortfolio for different audiences, for example by selecting some experiences/artefacts for your teacher to be able to see, whilst keeping other experiences for your eyes only. Check your institution's ePortfolio guides to make sure you understand how this works.

What sort of experiences and artefacts should I include in my ePortfolio?

Think broadly when selecting experiences to include in your ePortfolio. You can include evidence of skills you have gained at university, at work, in volunteer roles or in your personal life. Some examples might include:

- Assessment pieces you performed well in during your university degree
- Roles or achievements in part time jobs or voluntary work
- Awards you have won at university, work, or in your personal life

Whatever you include should provide clear evidence of a particular skill or attribute that you possess.

What will happen to my ePortfolio in the long term?

In many cases, institutions will continue to provide former students with access to ePortfolios after graduation. Check your institution's ePortfolio policy to find out whether this is possible.

Alternatively, you may be able to transfer your material between different ePortfolio systems, such as that of your employer, a different educational institution, or professional association.

Finally, it is important to know whether there is a point at which your ePortfolio will be deleted by the institution storing it, for example, if it is inactive for a certain period of time.





Remember

you are not alone! Other stakeholders are part of the ePortfolio process, so consider the issues that are relevant to your own perspective and context!

Need more information?

Visit www.eportfoliopRACTICE.qut.edu.au

- ePortfolio concepts for academic staff
- ePortfolio concepts for institutional managers
- ePortfolio concepts for information technology and teaching and learning support services
- ePortfolio concepts for employers, professional bodies and career services

Further reading

Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). (2008).
Effective practice with ePortfolios: Supporting 21st century learning.
Available from www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/e-portfolios

Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). (2008).
InfoKit on ePortfolios.
Available from www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/e-portfolios

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Australian ePortfolio Project

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