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Using Portfolios Effectively in Tenth Grade English Classrooms

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Abstract

This action research project explores ways in which portfolios can be used in an English classroom. Students created portfolios by choosing which works were included in the final product. Students improved their organization, showed greater use of voice and style, gained confidence as writers, and acquired some important editing and evaluation tools. The survey shows that most of the students feel that portfolios are worth the time and effort, they allow the teacher to see what the students have accomplished as writers and artists, and that portfolios are an accurate form of alternative assessment.

Problem Context and Rationale

I have observed the following problems in my tenth grade English classes, both advanced and regular: Students have trouble writing effectively for discussion questions, opinion pieces, business letters, explanations of processes, and literary analysis. They have trouble maintaining a structure that provides the relevant information in an orderly fashion while still allowing for individual differences that contribute to the development of the voice of the writer. Students rely too heavily on the remarks and grades of teachers rather than learning to recognize and evaluate quality work of their own or that of other students.

According to Grant Wiggins (1990), "Assessment is authentic when we directly examine student performances on worthy intellectual tasks." I plan to use portfolios and their assessment by both the teacher and student to address all of these problems.

Research in the areas of authentic assessment, constructivism, and portfolios will be important parts of my project. According to Peggy Bishop (1996), portfolios are one of the best ways for students to analyze their strengths and weaknesses as writers, to construct learning as they need it to create the portfolio, and to demonstrate their abilities in a variety of ways.

Introduction

If our educational system is going to change to address both the needs of our students and the increasing demands of society, then a “back to basics” approach that stresses direct teaching and standardized testing is not the answer. Because information changes so rapidly, students must learn to manage the exchange of information through research, reading, and evaluation that leads to writing about what they have found and learned in an organized fashion. Creating a portfolio that showcases the talent and growth of the student as a writer, reader, and editor serves the needs of the student, and it helps to create literate, confident problem-solvers who have tangible evidence of their success.

At my school, we face an unusual paradox. For the past three years, our students in grades 7 – 12 have recorded scores on standardized tests, like the Terra Nova, TCAP/CT, Gateway, and ACT, that have placed our school on the list of low-performing schools by the Tennessee Department of Education. One of the areas with which our students struggle the most is reading. Our scores are consistently low when compared to national, state, and even city norms. In contrast, our writing scores on the TCAP Writing Assessments in grades 7 and 11 are at or above city and state averages. It does not make sense that students who cannot, or do not, read at grade level can write expository and persuasive pieces that meet or exceed grade level expectations. In the same manner that standardized tests may fall short of revealing the abilities of our students, objective tests in my classroom are likely to show only a portion of what my students can do. This discrepancy, along with my own desire to improve the writing of my students, has led me to the decision that implementing portfolios may help bridge the gap between these scores, and it will help my students evaluate their own writing, as well as the writing of peers, teachers, and published authors.

I teach at an inner-city school. It is also a Title I school. Of the five tenth grade classes that will take part in this project, two are honors classes, and the remaining three are standard classes. The students range from gifted readers and writers to those who struggle just to get through the day. Attendance is a major obstacle for many of my students. I have about 140 students total, and all but two are African-American.

Literature Review

One major area of the literature on writing assessment addresses the validity of the portfolio as an assessment tool and the effectiveness of authentic assessment in comparison to standardized testing and the use of objective, quantitatively measured tests. The second area is that of the construction and use of the portfolio. While some are continuous works in progress, others are collections of selected works that represent only the best work the student has done. The selection and evaluation process involves the teacher and student to varying degrees. While the use of standards and rubrics helps to streamline the goals and expectations of portfolio use, it still allows for the artistic element of the teacher and the learner to surface and to avoid the pitfall of finding the “right way” to make and evaluate a portfolio. The final area is that of studies and

responses by teachers and students who have implemented portfolios and have evidence and/or testimony to support the use of the portfolio as a teaching and learning tool.

Assessment is authentic when it is used to examine the performance of students on tasks that are both intellectual and worthy, according to Grant Wiggins (2000). Assessment should be created from intellectual challenges such as having students evaluate problem-posing and problem-solving in mathematics, engaging in experimental research in science, conducting document-based historical inquiry, and revising imaginative or expository writing until it “works” for the reader and the writer. Although the process needed for evaluating and scoring any of these projects is more complex and time-consuming than what is needed to score an objective test, the finished product would surely be more impressive than a numerical score report. The use of objective tests is misleading if it leads teachers, students, or parents to believe that correct answers are more important than the thought processes needed to arrive at those answers and the justifications of the test-taker’s approach to the question and his or her results. Additionally, traditional tests rely heavily on secrecy to maintain their validity. This can make it difficult for teachers and students to rehearse for their performance obligations in a way that builds confidence. If the student and teacher know the challenge of the approaching task, it is possible to hold both to higher standards.

Wiggins (2000) asserts that the following are important distinctions between authentic assessment and traditional tests:

- ⌚ Authentic assessments require students to be effective performers with acquired knowledge. Traditional tests tend to reveal only whether the student can recognize, recall, or plug-in what was learned out of context. This may be as problematic as inferring driving or teaching ability from written tests alone. (Note, therefore, that the debate is not “either-or”: There may well be virtue in an array of local and state assessment instruments as befits the purpose of the measurement.)
- ⌚ Authentic assessments present the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities: conducting research; writing, revising, and discussing papers; providing an engaging oral analysis of a recent political event; collaborating with others on a debate, etc. Conventional tests are usually limited to paper and pencil, one answer tests.
- ⌚ Authentic assessments attend to whether a student can craft polished, thorough, and justifiable answers, performances, or products. Conventional tests typically only ask the student to select or write correct responses.
- ⌚ Authentic assessment achieves validity and reliability by emphasizing and standardizing the appropriate criteria for scoring such varied topics; traditional testing standardizes objective “items” and, hence, the (one) right answer for each.
- ⌚ “Test validity” should depend in part upon whether the test simulates real-world “tests” of ability. Validity on most multiple-choice tests is determined by

matching items to the curriculum content, or through sophisticated correlations with other test results.

- ⌚ Authentic tasks involve “ill-structured” challenges and roles that help students rehearse for the complex ambiguities of the “game” of adult and professional life. Traditional tests are more like drills, assessing the static and too-often arbitrarily discrete or simplistic elements of those activities. (p.1-2)

If the objectivity and reliability of those who score and judge the authentic assessment are in question, Wiggins adds that a number of state and national testing programs now include judgement-based components in their tests, and they have maintained a high degree of credibility and integrity. Some examples are the New York Regents exam, the Advanced Placement program – particularly in the Art Portfolio and Foreign Language exams, state-wide assessments, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and performance-based and portfolio-based testing in Arizona, California, Connecticut, Kentucky, Maryland, and New York.

According to Larry Johannessen (2001), writing instruction needs to focus on problem solving or inquiry. The teacher should present a puzzling event, question, or problem, and the students should formulate hypotheses, collect data, draw conclusions, and reflect on the original problem and the possible answers. This method of teaching writing will help produce citizens who will fulfill the needs of our growing country. Johannessen continues by stating “the instruction needs to engage students in exploring problems that are intrinsically interesting to them” (p.39).

W. James Popham (1999) contends that the most compelling reason that standardized tests should not be used to evaluate the quality of a student’s education is that test scores are heavily influenced by three causative factors: what is taught in school, a student’s native intellectual ability, and a student’s out-of-school learning. Because of these, an objective test, by itself, is not likely to measure the degree of influence a school curriculum has on a student. Popham suggests using written compositions, history lessons that are applicable to today’s problems, and solving high-level mathematical problems in addition to traditional tests to assess the success of the student or of the school.

Amy Brualdi (1996) uses Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory to support the use of authentic assessment. Because our educational system has stressed the development of the mathematical and linguistic intelligences, students who do not learn primarily in those ways may be overlooked for the gifted-talented programs, or they may be placed in special education classes unnecessarily. Since children do not learn in the same way, they should not be assessed in the same way. Because traditional tests require students to show their knowledge in a predetermined manner, the test scores may not accurately represent the knowledge or development of the child. Students should be allowed to explain the material in methods that utilize the intelligence that they understand best. One of the preferred methods of assessment is a portfolio.

Donald Graves (1992) compares writing portfolios to portfolios that have been used by artists for many years. The portfolio, for the artist, represents the “range and depth of their best and most current work” (p. 1). Writers, as professionals or beginners, can benefit from the same process and product. Graves is concerned that portfolios are already becoming too rigid a process that attempts to show positive results too soon. He believes that “sustained, long-term learning about the possibilities of portfolios as a learning/evaluation medium may be lost in the rush to mandate their use”(p. 1). He adds, “Without careful exploration, portfolio use is doomed to failure. They will be too quickly tried, found wanting, and just as quickly abandoned” (p. 1). To insure the growth and use of portfolios, Graves offers these principles:

- ⌚ Involve the students.
- ⌚ Help the staff keep portfolios of their own.
- ⌚ Broaden the purpose of portfolios.
- ⌚ Keep instructional opportunities open.
- ⌚ Reexamine issues in comparability.
- ⌚ Study the effect of school policy on portfolio practice.
- ⌚ Enlist the ingenuity of teachers. (p. 3)

Graves sums up the need for flexibility in the use of portfolios with by saying, “If our goals are to keep students reading and writing, to help them get better at both, and to help them become independent learners, then we must nurture self-evaluation of writing and reading as process and as a final product” (p. 60).

Because portfolios will have to be assessed if they are used in the school setting, it is of the utmost importance that an evaluation tool that is fair, flexible, and understandable by students, teachers, and parents be used. The assessment tool that works best is the rubric. According to Barbara Moskal (2000), “Scoring rubrics are typically employed when a judgement of quality is desired and may be used to evaluate a broad range of subjects and activities” (p. 1). The rubrics may be analytic or holistic, and they may be general or specific. Rubrics are generally four to six point scales that have descriptions for what the score represents. In creating a rubric, Moskal suggests that the teacher start with the qualities that represent a top-level product and assign that the highest score. Next, the lowest level should be established. The descriptions should suggest what type of performance would show a very limited understanding of the task. The middle range scores should then be established, with descriptions, by contrasting the top and bottom of the scale.

Barbara Moskal and Jon Leydens (2000) assert that in order for a teacher to create a valid rubric, he/she must first clearly state what he/she wants to learn from the students and how the students are expected to demonstrate the proficiencies. It is crucial that students and teachers know what is expected before the task is undertaken. Reliability is established by having well-defined scoring categories, having clear differences between categories, and by using anchor papers as guides or models for what each score represents. The goal is to have two independent evaluators assign the same score to any given paper or project.

Vicki Spandel (2001) suggests that a six-trait assessment of writing is one of the best ways to teach writing. She provides a five and six level rubric for scoring writing, and she shows how the traits and rubrics can be used with various elements of writing ranging from individual pieces to collections and portfolios. The heart of her technique lies with these six traits:

- ⌚ **Ideas** are the heart of the message: the main thesis, impression, or story line of the piece, together with the documented support, elaboration, anecdotes, images, or carefully selected details that build understanding or hold a reader's attention.
- ⌚ **Organization** is the internal structure of the piece- like a skeleton or the framework of a building. Strong organization begins with an engaging lead and wraps up with a thought-provoking close. In between, the writer links each detail or new development to a larger picture, building to a turning point or key revelation and always including strong transitions that forms a kind of safety net for the reader, who never feels lost.
- ⌚ **Voice** is the presence of the writer on the page. When the writer's passion for the topic and sensitivity to the audience are strong, the text virtually dances with life and energy, and the reader feels a strong connection to both the writing and the writer.
- ⌚ **Word Choice** is the precision in the use of words- wordsmithery. It is the love of language, a passion for words, combined with a skill for choosing words to create just the mood, meaning, impression, or word picture the writer wants to instill in the heart and mind of the reader.
- ⌚ **Sentence Fluency** is the finely crafted construction combined with a sense of rhythm and grace. It is achieved through logic, creative phrasing, parallel construction, alliteration, absence of redundancy, variety in sentence length and structure, and a true effort to create language that literally cries out to be spoken aloud.
- ⌚ **Conventions** include almost anything to which a copy editor would attend. This includes punctuation, spelling, grammar and usage, capitalization, and paragraphing- the spit-and-polish phase of preparing a document for publication. (p. 49-54)

Spandel prefers using these traits on a five-point scale, but she explains how they can be adapted to a six-point scale. One of the major reasons for the six-point scale is to eliminate the mid-point dumping ground of three. On the six-point scale, typically scores of four through six are considered competent, and scores of one through three are not. Spandel also provides rubrics that are more user-friendly so that students can use them to evaluate their own work on the same scale used by the teacher. Parents also find the rubrics helpful in understanding the accomplishments and progress of their children.

Beth Schipper and Joanne Rossi (1997) sum up the need for rubrics and portfolios with this statement:

We know when a student is reading for meaning, or when a paper deserves an A, but we do not always make this information explicit. It is a “teacher thing” that remains a mystery to kids. If we do not articulate the specific characteristics of A work, kids will have difficulty assessing what constitutes an A. (p. 9)

Involving students to the degree of evaluating their own work, if it is accurate and effective, represents teaching and learning at the highest possible levels.

A major change for Penny Bishop (1996) and her class of eighth graders came when she began using portfolios in her language arts classroom. For many of Bishop's students, one of the primary motivating factors was the widening of the audience for their work. Bishop was involved in a statewide program on the use of portfolios, and the work of her students was seen by educators from around the state of Vermont. The students saw themselves as becoming published authors, not just middle school students trying to make a good grade. In addition, Bishop included student evaluations as part of her evaluation, so students were able to judge what they did as part of their grade. She also had students present their portfolios to the class, along with rationales for why and how they chose their entries. Students saw their audience as themselves, peers, parents, their teacher, and other writing/teaching professionals. This understanding of audience and the simulation of the real-life setting of being a published writer changed the attitude of her class considerably. The learning and writing was meaningful and real, not an abstract attempt to be graded by the teacher and filed.

Lizabeth Berryman and David Russell (2001) were involved in the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) and its effect on Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington, KY. One of the mandates of KERA was that every school would institute portfolios in grades four, eight, and twelve, and that the portfolios would be graded on a four-point scale by the faculty of the school, not just the English teachers. For the seniors, completion of the portfolio was a graduation requirement, but there was no minimum required score. Schools were to be assessed by the state according to how much progress their students made during each two year cycle. The graded portfolios were audited by a team of teachers from the state, and the expectation was that the auditors' scores and the teachers' scores would be in agreement at least 75% of the time. This required training of all classroom teachers to equip them to teach the process of portfolios, but also to be able to score them in a reliable, valid manner that was in line with the state's guidelines and rubric. The study found several things. First, it takes time, usually years, for fundamental changes in assessment to take place. Most of the time, 100% participation by the staff does not happen. At Dunbar, the major change was acceptance of the fact that teaching students to write was the job of the school, not just the English teachers. The faculty also came to the conclusion that writing is an effective method of learning. Because these portfolios required entries from a variety of classes, other departments had a stake in the improvement of the scores. Although the article did not provide statistical results of the progress students made, the authors did remark on the acceptance of the general faculty that reading, writing, and evaluation of those practices are critical to a complete education, and they are skills that make students marketable as potential employees and/or college students.

Carol Porter and Janell Cleland (1995) cite the story of Brian as a reason to use portfolios. Bryan, as an eighth grader, was known as the local version of Stephen King. Bryan read all of King's book, and he emulated King's style of writing. His weaknesses were two-fold: He had an erratic work ethic, and his exposure to writing styles and authors was too limited. Bryan loved reading and writing, but he did not care for English classes. By the time Bryan was senior, he was in a remedial writing class because of his poor grades in traditional classes. He just happened to show up in the remedial class taught by Carol Porter. She introduced Bryan to the use of portfolios and the process of collaboration. At first, he had no interest in either. By the end of the year, Bryan had learned the value of both. The major change had come as a result of Bryan learning to use the editing process and rubrics to evaluate his own work. Because the portfolio was a work in progress, Bryan could see the evolution of his work, and he could see how collaborating could expand his understanding of his audience. Rather than doing some work and getting a grade, Bryan learned to value his work, assess his work, and appreciate the input of others. Using a portfolio definitely helped him develop as a student and as a writer.

Authentic assessment is an important tool for students, teachers, and parents. It is complex, but it is worth the time and energy needed to master it. Used in combination with effective objective tests, students and teachers can accurately assess where they are and where they need to go. Portfolios can be an integral part of that assessment. Because portfolios focus on writing, they are obviously great tools for the English classroom, but their flexibility allows for their adaptation to almost any classroom. The keys are teaching the portfolio as process and product where students know the audience and the expectations. When students and teachers know the expected outcomes, they are allowed to participate in the process, and they are involved in learning that is meaningful and is evaluated in meaningful, understandable language, they are more likely to succeed in a way that will reach beyond the walls of the classroom. The body of literature on the topic of using portfolios in the high school English classroom clearly supports the use of portfolios as a valid means of authentic assessment that allows students and teachers the freedom to grow as writers, learners, and educators while maintaining reliable methods of assessment that can show growth and development that is in line with educational standards and objectives.

Plan of Action

I introduced the project to my classes in the following sequence:

- ⌚ I provided examples of portfolios that I have created for graduate classes and discussed how they work as examples of my best work and as an example of the growth/progress that I made over the course of the class. I provided guidelines to help students understand the goals of the portfolio, as well as its structure.
- ⌚ Students created portfolios from prior journal entries and essays. This took three weeks.

- ⌚ The portfolios were graded by me and returned to the students to make sure that the students understood the process.
- ⌚ I introduced the student scoring guide and the rubric that I planned to use to evaluate their writing. Students practiced using the guide and the rubric on samples of their own work.
- ⌚ After gaining an understanding of the scoring guide and the rubric, students revised their portfolios to include work that best exhibits the standards of the scoring guide and rubric. They had the option of revising existing work or creating new entries.
- ⌚ At the end of the process, students completed a survey to provide their input on the use of portfolios.

Data Collection

I collected data from student surveys, the graded portfolios, student responses in the portfolios, attendance during the project, classroom management issues during the project, and a journal kept by me. My goal was both to triangulate the data to assure the accuracy of the interpretation and to get a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to represent the levels of achievement and success of the project. Data was collected from all of my English students over the course of a full semester.

Findings

Most of the students, approximately 85%, were able to successfully create a portfolio that followed the guidelines established by me. I was surprised by the attitude that many students showed: They were quite receptive to the task, and they were enthusiastic in their efforts. In general, they preferred the portfolios to tests and standard assignments.

I noticed that the writing of my students improved in both organization and voice. After they learned that voice and style are highly valued aspects of writing, they worked to find ways to interject their personalities into their writing. Although I encouraged them to use a five-paragraph form for their essays, I showed them a variety of ways to structure the essay and its paragraphs to make it more interesting. We spent most of our time on the introduction so that they could learn to hook their readers by using questions, facts, personal experience, riddles, quotations, or thought-provoking statements to entice the reader. Too many students believed that good writing should sound like a textbook.

Although there was not a tremendous difference, attendance was slightly better during the project. I attribute this to students feeling more successful in class and less threatened by an assignment they may not understand.

At first, classroom management was worse because students were a little frustrated and intimidated by the open-ended nature of the project. They had grown

accustomed to looking for the “right answer.” When they were told that there is no one right answer or correct approach, they didn’t really know where to go next. After seeing some examples and trying a few entries, their confidence rose and they settled into the project. At that point, classroom management problems diminished because the students had a clear understanding of the project, and they had individual plans and time-lines for completion of their portfolios.

One major finding was that the portfolios helped students with issues of organization. They liked having their work collected in a single, ordered binder. Several spent as much time organizing and justifying the inclusion of documents as they did writing the documents in the first place.

An added benefit was a small percentage of students who were failing the class made up their minds to use this project as proof that they could rise to the challenge of passing tenth grade English. Most of students in this group had passed the TCAP Competency Test, but the classroom grades were poor. This was mostly a result of boredom or apathy. I believe that the opportunity to inject some personality into the portfolio inspired them. For about six of the group of nine, the turnaround will mean the difference between passing and failing my class. I did not offer this as an option at the onset of the project by telling them that a successful portfolio could pass them. They used this chance to prove to me that they are proficient English students, and it has continued beyond the scope of the project.

Finally, I found that the project helped me to look at student development as a whole, not just as a series of achieved or failed objectives. It helped me to refine some of the ways that I teach writing, and it helped me to look the written product holistically as well. I know that in the past, I have not done a good job of teaching and evaluating style and voice. I believe that this project has helped me become a better writing and reading teacher.

Further Research

I would like to see this implemented over a longer period of time, preferably an entire school year. Next year, I plan to do just that. I believe that a full year will show greater results and growth than the one semester program. I plan to continue my search for methods of teaching writing on my own and by continuing my graduate work. I would like to develop this project, or one similar to it, into a proposal for my dissertation.

I plan to share what I have learned with my colleagues through meetings, in-service presentations, and dialogue.

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Appendices

Writing Rubric (Spandel 2001)

Traits	SCORES				
	5	4	3	2	1
Ideas					
Organization					
Voice					
Word Choice					
Sentence Fluency					
Conventions					
Total _____ / 6 (the # of traits) = _____ Average					
5 = 100 4 = 90 3 = 80 2 = 70 1 = 60					

Scoring Guide for Students (Spandel 2001)

Ideas

5. **My paper is clear, focused, and filled with details not everybody knows.**
 - You can tell I know a lot about the subject.
 - My writing is full of interesting tidbits, but it doesn't overwhelm you.
 - I can sum up my main point in one clear sentence.
 - When you start reading, you won't want to stop.
 - You can picture what I'm talking about. I show things happening (Fred squinted); I don't just tell about them (Fred couldn't read the small print).
3. **Even though my writing grabs your attention here and there, it could use some spicy details.**
 - I know just enough to write about this topic – but more information would make it more interesting.
 - Some “details” are things most people probably already know.
 - My topic is too big. I'm trying to tell too much. Or else it's too skimpy.
 - It might be hard to picture what I'm talking about.
 - I'm afraid my reader will get bored and go raid the refrigerator.
1. **I'm still figuring out what I want to say.**
 - I need a LOT more information before I'm really ready to write.
 - I'm still thinking on paper. What's my main idea? Beats me.
 - I'm not sure anyone reading this could picture anything.
 - I wouldn't want to share this aloud. It's not ready.
 - Could I sum it up in one clear sentence? No way! It's just a list of stuff.

Organization

5. **My paper is as clear as a good road map. It takes readers by the hand and guides them along every step.**
 - My beginning hints at what's coming, and makes you want to read on.
 - Every detail falls in just the right place. Nothing seems out of order.
 - You never feel lost; however, there could be a surprise or two.
 - Everything connects to my main point or the main story.
 - My paper ends at just the right spot, and ties everything together.
3. **You can begin to see where I'm headed. If you pay attention, you can follow along pretty well.**
 - I have a beginning. Will my reader be hooked, though?
 - Most things fit where I have put them. I might move some things around.
 - Usually, you can see how one idea links to another.
 - I guess everything should lead up to the most important part. Let's see, where would that be?
My paper has an ending. But does it tie things together for the reader?
1. **Where are we headed? I'm lost myself.**
 - A beginning? Well, I might have just repeated the assignment

- I never knew what to say next, so I wrote the first thing that came to me.
- I'm not really sure which things to include – or what order to put them in.
- Things are just piled together – like in a messy closet!
- An ending? I just stopped when I ran out of things to say.

Voice

5. I have put my personal, recognizable stamp on this paper.

- You can hear my voice booming through. It's me.
- I care about this topic – and it shows.
- I speak right to my audience, always thinking of questions they might have.
- I wrote to please myself, too.
- My writing rings with confidence.

3. What I truly think and feel shows up sometimes.

- You might not laugh or cry when you read this, but you'll hang in there and finish it.
- I'm right on the edge of finding my own voice – so close!
- My personality pokes out here and there. You might guess this was my writing.
- I didn't think about my audience all the time. Sometimes I just wrote to get it over with!

1. I did not put much energy or personality into this writing.

- It could be hard to tell who wrote this. It could be anybody's.
- I kept my feelings in check.
- If I liked this topic better or knew more, I could put more life into it.
- Audience? What audience?

Word Choice

5. I picked just the right words to express my ideas and feelings.

- The words and phrases I've used seemed exactly right.
- My phrases are colorful and lively, but not overdone.
- I used some everyday words in new ways. Expect a few surprises.
- Do you have a favorite phrase or tow in here? I do.
- Every word is accurate. You won't find yourself wondering what I mean.
- Verbs and nouns carry the meaning. I don't bury my reader in adjectives.

3. It might not tweak your imagination, but hey, it gets the basic meaning across.

- It's functional and it gets the job done, but I can't honestly say I stretched.
- OK, so there are some cliches hiding in the corners.
- I've also got a favorite phrase lurking around here someplace.
- Verbs? What's wrong with good old is, are, was, were . . . ?
- I might have overutilized the functionality of my thesaurus.
- You can understand it, though, right? Like, nothing's really wrong.

1. **My reader might go, “Huh?”**

- See, I’m like this victim of vague wording and fuzzy phrasing.
- It’s, you know, kind of hard to get what I’m talking about. I don’t even remember what I meant, and I wrote this stuff!
- Maybe I misutilized a word or two.
- Some redundant phrases might be redundant.
- I need verby power.

Sentence Fluency

5. **My sentences are clear and varied – you’ll WANT to read it out loud.**

- Go ahead – read with expression! You won’t need to practice.
- Sentence variety is my middle name.
- Hear the rhythm?
- Deadwood has been cut. Every word counts.

3. **My sentences are clear and readable.**

- My writing is pretty smooth – you can get through it all right.
- Some sentences should be joined together. Others might be cut in two.
- There’s a little deadwood, sure, but it doesn’t bury the good ideas too badly under extra verbiage, even though I must say it wouldn’t hurt to cut some unneeded words here and there and shorten things up jus a bit now and then.
- I guess I did get into a rut with sentence beginnings. I guess I could use more variety. Sometimes I start a sentence a different way.

1. **I have to admit it’s a challenge to read aloud (even for me).**

- You might have to stop or reread now and then it just feels like one sentence picked up right in the middle of another a new sentence begins and, oh boy, I’m lost . . . Help! Untangle me!
- My sentences all begin the same way. My sentences are all alike. My sentences need variety. My sentences need work. My goodness.
- Some sentences are short. They’re too short. They’re really short. Way short. Short. S-h-o-r-t. Get it? Right.
- Reading this is like trying to skate on cardboard. Tough going!

Conventions

5. **An editor would fall asleep looking for mistakes in this paper.**

- Capitals are all in the right places.
- Paragraphs begin at the right spots.
- Great punctuation – grammar, too.
- My spelling (even of difficult words) would knock your socks off.
- I made so few errors, it would be a snap getting this ready to publish.

3. **Some bothersome mistakes show up when I read carefully.**

- Spelling is correct on simple words.
- Capitals are mostly Ok. Maybe I should look again, Though.

- The grammar and usage are OK for everyday writing.
 - A few pronouns do not match what IT refers to.
 - You might stumble over my innovative! punctuation.
 - It reads like a rough draft, all right.
 - I'd definitely need to do some editing to get this ready to publish.
1. **Better read it once to decode, then once again for meaning.**
 - Lostuv errors Mak? The going ruf.
 - I've forgotten some CAPS – otherS aren't Needed.
 - Look out four speling mysteaks.
 - To tell the truth, I didn't spend much time editing.
 - I'll really have to roll up my sleeves to get this ready to publish.

Guide for Portfolios

Categories:

- 🕒 **Handouts-** Anything that I give you needs to go in this section. All entries should be annotated, including the date that you received it. That is how I know that you have read the material at least once. It also shows me what you think is important in the document.
- 🕒 **Reflections-** This should include your paragraphs explaining your strengths and weaknesses. It should also include your evaluation of your portfolio.
- 🕒 **Expository-** This section must have examples of expository writing. This means a paragraph or essay that informs or explains. It should not include opinions, but it should include descriptions and explanations. Examples are how to play a game, directions to your house, how to cook your favorite meal, etc.
- 🕒 **Narrative-** This section must have examples of stories written by you, in first person. It must be your personal experiences.
- 🕒 **Descriptive-** This section must include descriptions of items that appeal to all five of the senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Food is a great source for this type of writing.
- 🕒 **Persuasive-** This section must include writing that expresses an opinion. It must clearly pick a side of an argument and give logical reasons for why you have chosen your opinion. It must be written in the form of a business letter addressed to *The Commercial Appeal*.
- 🕒 **Interpretive-** This section must include writing that interprets the meaning of a poem or of song lyrics. You must include a copy of the poem or song that you are interpreting. You should discuss elements such as symbolism, theme, point of view, figurative language (metaphor, simile, hyperbole, personification, etc.), and style. The primary issue you must address is what does this MEAN?
- 🕒 **Prior Work/Works in Progress-** This section contains any work from the previous six weeks or any work that you are developing. For example, at the beginning of the 5th six weeks, all of the portfolio work from the 4th six weeks will move to this section.

Only finished products that are typed or written in black ink are to be placed in sections one through seven. **This is not a collector for your work in other classes, nor is it a folder for homework, classwork, or notes.** This is a portfolio, an exhibit, and a showcase for your talents, gifts, and hard work as a writer. Any decorations should be minimal and tasteful.

For your final portfolio project, you must include Handouts and Reflections, but you may choose any three of the five types of writing, Expository, Narrative, Descriptive, Persuasive and Interpretive, to showcase your work. Remember to choose the best of what you have done.

Student Comments

- ⌚ Portfolios help me to be organized.
- ⌚ A good portfolio shows the progress a student has made.
- ⌚ Portfolios are more accurate. Tests show what you know about that subject on that day. Portfolios show a variety of skills over a period of time.
- ⌚ I can be creative and original, and I am more organized than before.
- ⌚ The rubric helps me to understand my strengths and weaknesses because I find them myself instead of a teacher pointing them out.
- ⌚ I like portfolios better than tests because when I take tests I get nervous.
- ⌚ The scoring guide helps me compare/contrast my writing to that of others.
- ⌚ I like portfolios. One reason is that it is an easy grade, but it can get exciting, and it is easy to catch on.
- ⌚ I learned that I am a better writer than I thought I was, and the more I write, the better I become.
- ⌚ The rubrics and scoring guides help me evaluate my writing because they break it down into categories.