



Academic Handbook  
Section 40  
Guide to Creating and Marking Portfolio  
Assessments

Version: 1.1  
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Last updated: February 2016  
Review date: February 2017

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## INTRODUCTION

1. Portfolio assessments have the potential to be a really effective tool for student learning. They:
  - can show development of ideas or experiences;
  - are well suited to the assessment of practical tasks;
  - can provide students with freedom to choose how they demonstrate they have met the assessment criteria;
  - may be less susceptible to plagiarism than some assessment types.
2. This guidance has been written to support staff in creating and marking portfolio assessments. Further advice on good practice and external links to information sites can be obtained from The Solent Learning and Teaching Institute. Academic Handbook Section 2B Academic Framework contains the policies relating to unit and course design.

## WHAT IS A PORTFOLIO

3. A portfolio might be described as a *“collection of work that relates to a given topic or theme, which has been produced over a period of time. Typically, a portfolio contains a number of pieces of work, usually connected by a topic or theme. Students are usually required to organise the collection of examples and the portfolio often includes some reflective accounts (diaries/logs)”* (HESA 2012).
4. Definitions of portfolios differ depending on the discipline and the anticipated outcomes for the assessment. A portfolio in the visual arts may be a collection of images, a work based learning portfolio may be made up of pieces of work completed as part of the job with a reflective element, a study skills portfolio may consist of short exercises demonstrating skills and a piece of work showing how they are applied. The key definition in all of these types is that the portfolio allows students to present a range of information on a theme that aligns to and is marked against one set of assessment criteria.
5. It is important to remember that, although it may have multiple parts, a portfolio is one assessment, meaning that there is one overall mark and one assessment hand in date covering the whole portfolio. If a single mark and a single hand in date cannot be applied then the assessments should be separated out; for an existing unit this will require a modification to the unit descriptor for future cohorts via the Unit Approval and Course Modification Process.
6. A series of disparate pieces of work, even on a similar theme, does not necessarily mean that a portfolio is the most appropriate type of assessment, unless they can clearly be marked as one piece of work. If there is no overt linking strategy between the components or if items remain discrete and there is no overall assessment of learning, a portfolio may not be an appropriate form of assessment.

## CREATING EFFECTIVE PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENTS FOR STUDENTS

7. External research and advice suggests that some key points to note in creating a suitable and effective portfolio assessment for students are:
- it should provide appropriate learning opportunities;
  - the structure should be kept simple;
  - the assessment scheme should be clear and simple;
  - students and assessors should be briefed to provide clarity about the type and content of the portfolio.

In addition, the portfolio's structure and required content should be reviewed and refined over time to ensure that it remains an appropriate form of assessment.

### Structure of Portfolios

8. Whether the portfolio is a collection of pieces of work or individual pieces of work that are all assessed as one, having a clear pedagogic rationale for the portfolio structure is crucial so that students can be appropriately briefed about the assessment.
9. Some portfolio structures may blend separate parts to form a whole, as students have to demonstrate how they have met the assessment criteria. The final product at the end of the process is more than the sum of the parts. Some may contain a series of competency statements that form the spine of the assessment, with evidence collected by students running through it and with evidence splitting off to support one or more competencies. Collectively, each supports the other in creating a secure framework.

### Reflective Statements

10. A key aspect of many portfolio assessments is the inclusion of a written or verbal self-reflection which demonstrates the learning that has taken place. Being able to write reflectively, and in the process to analyse situations and behaviours, is also a key transferable skill that is relevant to a student's professional development.
11. Reflective writing can be challenging for students. The [succeed@solent](mailto:succeed@solent) Solent Online Learning pages include information which students may find useful on reflective thinking and writing. It includes:
- advice on how to think and write reflectively;
  - the difference between reflective and academic writing;
  - how to structure the writing and what to include;
  - how to identify good reflective writing; and
  - what reflective writing tools are available.

### **Formative assessment**

12. Formative assessment may be used to provide feedback on the portfolio, or parts of it, before the actual submission date. However, the portfolio must only be marked at the time it is submitted for summative assessment and the mark/grade given must reflect the work at the time of final submission.
13. Marks/grades should not be provided as part of the feedback given for formative assessment to avoid confusion with the summative assessment mark/grade and to avoid any suggestion of a guaranteed mark. However, if unit leaders wish to provide students with an indication of progress, an indicative degree classification can be provided for that specific assessment.
14. Students must not be penalised in the summative assessment mark for not submitting work for formative assessment; this will have no impact on their summative marks. However, students who do not participate will not benefit from feedback, and this may impact on their eventual assessment performance.

### **MARKING PORTFOLIOS**

15. The multiple pieces of work submitted as part of portfolios mean that it is important to have an overall set of marking criteria which is clearly understood by staff and students alike.
16. As it is a single assessment element, there must be one set of assessment criteria for the whole portfolio and the portfolio should be marked as one piece of work.
17. The assessment criteria should organise the feedback and form the basis for deciding a mark. As these assessment criteria relate to all the pieces of work, rather than to specific pieces of work, the amount of feedback given on individual pieces of work in the portfolio should be determined by the marker.