

## LEARNING MODULE 3 :

# Understanding portfolio assessment

### Module overview

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### Viewing learning as a continuous process

Graduate Diploma programs have been designed to encourage ongoing learning that continues and builds throughout the program and beyond. This may be quite different from other school experiences you have had, where each course ends with a product such as an exam, major paper or pile of assignments. Learning in this program is viewed as an integrated experience rather than a series of discrete courses with differing content and expectations.

### Working within the university calendar

Each semester of your program has a title, course number and credit value. These will appear on your official transcript at the end of the program. You still have to register three times a year. You will pay fees according to the designated credit value for each semester. However, this does not mean your learning will fit nicely into twelve-week packages that match the academic calendar.

Sometimes your program may list two courses in the same semester (for example, a Special Topic course and a Field Study course), but the learning experiences may actually be seamless. You might not be able to tell which activities belong to which course. At other times one course may stretch across two semesters (e.g., January-June).

Your instructional team will guide you through the steps necessary to register, pay fees and maintain your enrolment. Your responsibility is to keep the learning growing throughout the program, and to periodically represent where you are, how you have progressed along your path, and where you want to go.

## Tracking learning through portfolio assessment

A portfolio is not a product, but an ongoing and dynamic record of learning and growth. The portfolio assessment process involves making ‘snapshots’ of where you are at periodic intervals in your learning journey.

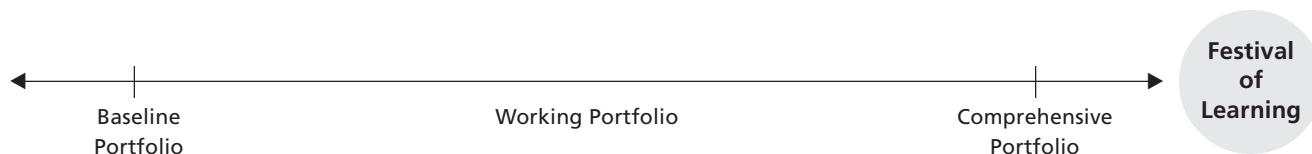
At these points, you pause to:

- review your learning activities since the previous snapshot;
- highlight a major event, recount your learning adventures, or explain an insight that is especially powerful;
- summarize and synthesize what you have been learning;
- select appropriate examples to illustrate your work;
- evaluate your progress in relation to the capacities; and
- develop a learning plan for the next phase of your journey.

These pauses in the learning journey frequently correspond to the end of a university semester, but not always. You will find timelines for your program on the Diploma website.

## Previewing the stages of portfolio development

There are three stages of portfolio development: the *baseline portfolio* that you create in the first semester; the *working portfolio* that tracks your ongoing learning; and a *comprehensive portfolio* that celebrates your learning journey and represents what you have accomplished by the end of the program. Each of these stages is explained in greater detail in other Learning Modules.



With the exception of the first (*baseline*) and last (*comprehensive*) portfolio intervals, we refer to the accumulation of periodic portfolio snapshots as your working portfolio.

## Representing learning

Portfolio assessment is first and foremost a process to aid in self-understanding. This kind of portfolio is NOT a cumulative collection of items showing what you have done. Its main purpose is to represent what you are learning from your program activities, and to show how this learning is affecting your thoughts and actions as an educator. Consider the following meanings for the word ‘represent,’ taken from the *Rodale Synonym Finder*: depict, exemplify, illustrate, draw, paint, sketch, describe, set forth in words, present, produce, bring forward, set forth, put on, display, exhibit, bring out, stage, etc.

Like your own students, you and your colleagues in the program will experience learning in different ways and at different rates. Rather than expecting the same kind of representation from everyone, we ask each

individual to explain and show learning in ways that are personally meaningful and relevant to their situations. There are many exemplary portfolio formats. Portfolio comparisons between one person and another are not appropriate, because each learner is following a different path.

The most important components of your portfolio are your periodic summaries of learning and evaluations of growth, supported by carefully-selected examples. You could gather and represent these in one or more different formats—scrapbook, binder, PowerPoint presentation, video, Hyper studio stack, website, conference with your mentor, or even a live demonstration. You might choose different formats for different aspects of your portfolio, depending on what you wish to represent. Individual portfolio snapshots may look and sound different, and they may change over time.

Some people like to write from a personal perspective, and express their ideas best in a narrative form. Others may use point form, or choose to incorporate charts and other graphic organizers as summarizing tools. You may feel uncomfortable with this flexibility at first, but with experience you will find the process of portfolio building validating and satisfying.

## Trusting yourself

The learning represented in your portfolio belongs to you. It is alive and growing, adding to your capacities as a capable and thoughtful educator. The portfolio is only a means to show and share its value with others.

We encourage you to let your portfolio speak on your behalf. Choose a style that best communicates the person you are and hope to become. Use the first person ‘I’ to show that you own the learning. Reveal what is most important to you—as an educator and as a learner.

## Using the program capacities as a framework for self-evaluation

The program capacities provide the framework for evaluating your progress. You can find a list of the capacities for your Graduate Diploma, with more specific examples of what they embrace, on the website home page for your program.

You will notice that the capacities are very broad. They include many different aspects of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are complex, multidimensional processes that cannot be described or explained simply. Furthermore, they look different according to the individual and the situation.

It is not easy to reflect on your own practice, analyze your thoughts, feelings, understandings, decisions and actions, and then determine what capacities you used when you put these all together. As you work with the capacity statements, it will become easier to see how your learning fits into these different areas of growth. Take the time to make sense of the capacities by putting them in your own words and thinking of examples from your own experience. If you have not already completed the following learning tool from Learning Module 1, this would be a good place to start.

**[Exploring the program capacities](#)**      **[\[PDF\]](#)**

As you begin to develop your baseline portfolio, we suggest that you also try the next learning tool. It may help you see the links between your individual strengths and the program capacities. This will give you a starting point for tracking your future growth in each area.

**[Starting with strengths](#)**      **[\[PDF\]](#)**

## Sharing your learning with colleagues

Sharing of learning is an important part of the portfolio assessment process. You will have regular opportunities to discuss your working portfolio with others in your cohort, and to find out what they have done and learned. Since individual portfolios are not graded, sharing among colleagues is a valuable way of giving and receiving meaningful feedback. It can be both supportive and inspiring. The program ends with a comprehensive portfolio sharing and celebration of learning.

## Presenting your learning to the instructional team

Someone from the instructional team will also review your portfolio snapshots. This is most often a mentor, but could also be a faculty associate or resource person. Usually these will be people you know and with whom you have developed a relationship. They will be familiar with your work context, and interested in your progress.

You may have an oral conference with the person who responds to your working portfolio, or you may be given written responses. The responses are intended to support further learning. They may include responses such as:

- encouraging comments;
- questions to deepen your thinking;
- ideas to consider for your learning plan;
- resources to investigate;
- people you might consult to learn more about your interests;
- suggestions for enriching your next portfolio representation.

## Earning university credits

Courses in a Graduate Diploma program are graded as either 'S' for satisfactory, 'U' for unsatisfactory, 'DE' if more work is needed or 'N' if you do not complete a portfolio snapshot at all. Your instructional team will record an 'S' if your portfolio snapshot adequately represents your learning within each interval.

## Learning more about portfolio assessment

There are three more Learning Modules that expand on the portfolio assessment process. You may refer to them many times during the program as you prepare your snapshots of learning. Check the Learning Module links on the home page for these resources.

## References

Rodale, J.I. (1978). *The synonym finder*. New York: Warner Books