

**TIME TO REFLECT** 8—*Imagining a Place for Support*

Where might you find ideal readers, those who are trained and attentive? Many campuses have a writing center, career center, or learning center. As your portfolio process gets well under way, it might be time to find out where it is, and go there! Take notes or collect a brochure or pamphlet that explains the center's services and procedures. In a short paragraph, describe what you found when you got there, whom you talked to or corresponded with, and what you found out about the help that's available to you. Then write clear directions for students or visitors who have just arrived on your campus or who are just learning their way around the school's Web site. Be sure to put what you've written into your working folder.

and audience in creating this portfolio. See if you can answer each of the following questions.

- Is my portfolio supposed to show development, best works, or some combination of the two?
- Do I make all of the choices about what to include, or will I be following guidelines, and am I sure what those are?
- How many artifacts or entries should be included? What kind? Can I include work I've done in different contexts — or from different classes? work I've produced for an internship or job? pictures, maps, or other graphics? sound clips or other multimedia files?
- Do all of the entries I include need to be revised and polished? If so, what level, quality, or extent of revision is expected?
- What are the stakes for this portfolio, or how will it be assessed?
- If it is assessed, are the different artifacts or entries assessed separately? Or is the entire portfolio evaluated as a single document?
- Who will be reading, viewing, or grading my portfolio?
- What writing will I have to do specifically for the portfolio? Will I need a preface or introduction? Does each entry need its own introduction? Is reflection or self-assessment expected, or are description and explanation adequate?

If you are uncertain of anything, now is the time to get answers as you start to prepare your portfolio for assessment.

## PART TWO

# From Process to Product—Preparing for Assessment

# 7

## Understanding Assessment

You are producing a portfolio for a particular course, program, or internship. You want to represent the range of your academic or creative work or your preparation for a professional career. Developing your portfolio will be challenging whatever its purpose or intended audience. If it's a process portfolio, the end of the process may be marked by simply sharing your portfolio with others. A process portfolio is about the journey, not the destination, which is why it's important to identify what you have learned and what it means to you.

While the task of keeping a process portfolio may be enjoyable and fulfilling to you personally, the final product might not be formally evaluated. A presentation portfolio, on the other hand, is likely to be evaluated in order to determine whether it demonstrates your development or documents your skills. For some portfolio keepers, the success of their portfolio will affect their course grade, program completion, or certification. In other cases, prospective employers or graduate or professional schools' admissions committees may judge how effectively your portfolio captures and conveys your abilities; they may also use portfolios to help them determine your aptitude and fitness for a job or postgraduate program. Whether or not it is formally evaluated, a portfolio is inherently an assessment-oriented project because the end goal of demonstrating learning is embedded within the practice of portfolio keeping. Anticipating the final evaluation of your portfolio, then, Part 2 of *Portfolio Keeping* turns to analyzing and preparing for the completion of your portfolio. Whatever steps you take along the way, it's crucial to keep the end in mind as you maintain your working folder, reflect on your learning, and prepare to choose your portfolio entries.

## ASSESSMENT FROM THE PORTFOLIO KEEPER'S PERSPECTIVE

To begin, try analyzing the situation you're in as a portfolio keeper and decide, accordingly, how to present yourself and how to best reach and most effectively engage your reader. When deadlines approach for you to share your portfolio with others, you need to be prepared to convince an audience that you have met certain expectations or criteria and can document your learning with solid evidence. Because you are faced with assessment, the impression you make on your audience has measurable stakes. Through a whole series of decisions, with every sentence you edit and every sample of work you include, you are affecting the outcome.

Although this picture may be intimidating, try to think of your portfolio as a situation that can be analyzed, broken down into parts, and managed. Rhetoric gives us the tools for just this purpose. *Rhetoric*, the study of effective communication, helps people analyze what goes into complex human behaviors — like preparing a portfolio or assessing writing. The study of rhetoric teaches us the importance of *situation* and tries to break down the concept of situation into manageable parts. First, effective communication doesn't really begin until someone has identified a reason to communicate and feels compelled to act on it. When people feel the pull or need to say something, they take the first step toward engaging in a rhetorical act. The second step is to recognize at least some of the constraints involved — the obstacles, sensitive areas, or differences that can impede communication. The third step is to shape the form of the communication (tone, style, voice) in light of its purpose, its audience, and the form and medium through which to deliver the information.

For portfolio assessment, your purpose is fairly clear: you need to convince your readers and/or evaluators that your portfolio represents the skills or experiences that demonstrate your success in becoming a reflective learner, and/or that you have attained the level of ability necessary to move forward to the next step in your coursework, program, or professional career. If portfolios are fairly new to you, it might help you to know that learners in a number of different programs, and in a variety of learning situations, are being required or encouraged to keep portfolios and to maintain or update an already established portfolio.

Students in accredited degree programs are expected to produce portfolios as evidence that they are ready to work as professionals in nursing, business, engineering, pharmacy, or education. Students in instructor certification programs, almost without exception across the United States, are being asked to create portfolios that demonstrate mastery of standards or proficiencies, and that are targeted to an audience of educators or departments of education. As the reliance on portfolio assessment grows in a

number of fields, your ability to see your work as a whole, and how your work both fits into and prepares you for larger projects and initiatives, is essential. So the purpose of your portfolio will almost certainly be related to the demonstration of your learning and skills to others; understanding your purpose and audience can help you make smart rhetorical choices.

Whether this portfolio represents your learning process or presents your best works, whether it is produced electronically or with more traditional tools, your target audience is one of the most important elements of the rhetorical situation. Obviously your audience in this rhetorical situation is anyone who may encounter your portfolio, including those who are tasked with evaluating your work. If the audience is an academic instructor, you have an advantage. You have a relationship with this person; you have read the course outline and assignments; you have listened to lectures and explanations; and you have participated in activities that this instructor designed and conducted. You probably have determined something about this person's values, preferences, or sense of humor. It is especially important, however, to judge your audience not by stereotypes or careless assumptions, but, whenever possible, by concrete evidence. If you are keeping a portfolio in an academic situation, what evidence have you collected about your intended reader from the syllabus, assignments and readings, or program guidelines and expectations?

You may also be asked to prepare your portfolio for an audience other than your instructor. Sometimes portfolio assessments involve instructors from other classes or are assessed by a team of instructors. Other times, of course, portfolios are assessed by external evaluators or potential employers, who are looking at them without the context of a semester-long course or without even knowing you. In addition, in some schools, every artifact composed in every class is uploaded to a central location called a *course management system*. Students then give various types of evaluators access to the specific work each one is in charge of evaluating. For instance, an advisor for a major might see all work for that major; a recruiter for a specific job might see all work that prepares prospective employees for that job; or an evaluator of work toward specific licenses or certificates or degree plans may be given access to specific types of artifacts.

If the audience is unknown to you, your decisions will be more difficult, but you can ask questions about your audience that might help you determine how to more effectively compose and present the portfolio. For example, you might think about your audience's values and attitudes in relation to the type of portfolio you are creating. If you are composing a portfolio for a first-year writing course, you can review the information from the syllabus on the course's goals to help you talk about how you have met the standards or outcomes the program has set for its students. If you are composing a portfolio as a capstone or exit requirement for an academic credential, you can review the program's requirements, guidelines, and objectives to remind

yourself of what your portfolio will be expected to demonstrate. If you are creating a portfolio for professional certification or employment purposes, you can review the code of ethics or professional standards for your field to identify the key criteria and principles for practitioners.

In rhetoric, the term *discourse community* is often used to refer to a group of people who share common goals, values, and communication practices. As you begin to consider the assessment of your portfolio, remember that when you present your work for evaluation, you are entering a discourse community, and you need to learn as much as you can about how that community thinks, functions, and communicates.

Once you understand what your audience — a particular discourse community — values, you can choose how best to appeal to their sense of reason or emotion and how to establish your own credibility. You will have to decide which appeals are most appropriate given the purpose of your portfolio and whether you are emphasizing process or products. Once you have envisioned your audience, you can choose how best to approach that audience through your voice, or your self-presentation. What image of yourself do you want to convey?

#### TIME TO REFLECT 9—Analyzing Traits of a Discourse Community

A discourse community shares certain values or expectations of how language and knowledge should be shared. What are the features or characteristics of the discourse community your portfolio experience is a part of? What values will your portfolio readers or evaluators share in terms of evidence, authority, style, or persuasion? If you are in a first-year writing class at a college or university, find a Web site that indicates what the writing program or department “values.” For example, members of a writing program (discourse community) that emphasizes classical forms of argument are going to read portfolios differently from members of a writing program that focuses on personal writing and self-disclosure. Determine what qualities of good writing your readers value. In your journal or blog, rank those qualities in order of importance, and write a brief rationale for each; then share your list with your workgroup or the entire class. If you are preparing a portfolio for certification or for goals beyond a classroom setting, then you are probably trying to become a member of a particular discourse community (technical writers, for example, or web designers, or certified teachers). In this case, determine the preferences, expectations, or values that your target readers or evaluators are likely to hold. Compare your list with others and discuss how your portfolio choices will touch on or echo those values.

Self-presentation is obvious when you give a speech. Speakers make careful choices about their appearance depending on the audience and the formality of the gathering. In a portfolio, your careful choices show up in your language and design. If your course, program, or profession uses particular forms and genres for communication, you should consider how to demonstrate your ability to create those kinds of texts. If you are creating an e-portfolio, will it be as effective if you only present purely textual documents? Or will you need to show that you can take advantage of the affordances of the digital medium, like linking and multimodality, in order for your portfolio to be viewed as successful?

To demonstrate your understanding of your audience, of the situation, and of the course or program you are completing, you can show mastery of the vocabulary and forms of that discourse community. If you are in a writing course that has emphasized *audience, context, focus, invention, genres, and revision*, your evaluator might expect you to use these terms in your discussion of writing. Many readers value strong vocabulary and precise word choices, as well, a way of using language often called *style*. To present yourself as a thoughtful communicator, find an appropriate level of formality in your language and become comfortable with it. Are you typically formal and reserved in your academic work? Your language might reflect that. If you are an easygoing, casual person at school, your language can reflect that too, if that is appropriate to the situation.

Your decisions about tone and level of formality show up not only in your word choices but also in your use or avoidance of the first-person point of view. Experienced readers are able to tell if your language sounds hollow or forced, so try as much as possible to be yourself even while acknowledging the needs of your audience. Most students understand the art of appearing studious or serious, and eager or engaged. Your language must convey sincerity, however, because an experienced reader — and your reader *will be* experienced — can easily detect overblown claims and pretension. Constructing an appropriate and effective speaking or writing persona is known in rhetoric as *ethos*, a Greek term meaning “character.” In portfolio assessment, *ethos* is a particularly important factor for assessment because the portfolio author’s ability to come across as credible and trustworthy can affect how an evaluator responds to the portfolio. Your goal is to convince others of your skills, abilities, development, and learning, so you should carefully consider the authorial voice and persona that come through in the portfolio in relation to your purpose and audience.

No matter how carefully you attend to tone and vocabulary and try to match your language to both your personality and the context, a rhetorical situation can be more complicated than you might expect. No matter how well prepared a writer might be, some elements of the context are simply unknowable or may change, especially if your portfolio is publicly available

online. Your task is not to try to hold the situation still but to learn to recognize and then negotiate the changes. That is, understanding how rhetorical situations evolve and change, and how complex they are, can help you know when and how to intervene. Unfortunately it is impossible to know everything about the situation surrounding the assessment of your portfolio. You cannot know if your evaluator is going to get enough sleep the night before the evaluation, or if she shares experiences similar to those you discuss, or if he knows more than you do about your research topic. The idea is not to *guess* your readers' backgrounds, beliefs, politics, or personal lives. Instead you need to learn to make appropriate judgments about your readers as educated, intelligent, aware people who value critical thinking and strong communication skills.

### ASSESSMENT FROM AN INSTRUCTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Assessing skills such as critical thinking and reflective learning, writing ability, and professional competencies is a difficult task. Most instructors know, from their experiences both as writers and as instructors, how complex it can be to assess portfolios. Testing specialists, education researchers, and instructors on all levels find assessment to be one of the most challenging areas of their profession. Most people, however, value assessment of their work in the form of feedback, response, report, or even criticism if it is offered in the right spirit and if it helps them improve or recognize patterns in their work. In environments other than school, grades are not relevant to the working and learning process; in fact, they seem almost unnatural. However, evaluation or assessment is built into most working environments, just as grades are a very real part of any academic environment. Portfolios must be graded, too, when the time comes.

How will that grading or evaluation proceed? What is it like to be the evaluator? As you approach the assessment of your portfolio, it might help to imagine the task of that evaluation and what it means from the evaluator's perspective. Below are some of the myths about evaluation that circulate in our culture. Discussing these myths with your peers might help you to prepare realistically for the assessment of your work.

*Myth 1. Evaluation is purely subjective, and everyone is entitled to his or her opinion.* Evaluation, like reading or writing or other forms of critical thinking, is a complex act. Furthermore, language and images can elicit very different responses from people. It is easy to think that evaluators are being subjective when they decide that something is excellent, average, or poor. But evaluators do not develop criteria for good writing idiosyncratically, rather those criteria come from experiences, from mentors, or from the media. In an academic setting, most judgments

rely on evidence or support; therefore, writing is evaluated not from personal opinion but from a shared understanding by a discourse community of the characteristics of good writing and communication in a particular field. Instructors and evaluators of writing have developed a sense of good writing from years of reading in their discipline, from listening to and working with colleagues, and from writing their own texts. Although the criteria for effective communication vary across fields and in different contexts, those criteria are shaped over many years of subtle negotiations and implicit social contracts. Even when it's difficult to identify the criteria or to know how to measure the success of a product, a trained evaluator relies on shared or community standards. Readers from any background rely on criteria that are neither purely objective nor purely subjective, but a little of both.

*Myth 2. Evaluators are autonomous and independent, and can do whatever they want.* Evaluators are not autonomous, even if they pretend to be. In obvious and subtle ways, their efforts are shaped and controlled by a number of institutional codes, rules, or guidelines. College instructors, for example, are not free to inflict any kind of torture they dream up on students, and they have to satisfy certain requirements, cover specific material, and undergo annual reviews. If instructors were autonomous, most would not give letter grades, knowing that the instructional value of grades is so questionable. But almost all colleges and universities require that instructors give a single letter grade at the end of a term. That alone limits the procedures an instructor can use for assessment.

*Myth 3. A letter grade is the only way or the best way to assess one's performance on a project.* In your school experience, you might have received letter grades more than any other kind of response, but there are other ways to assess projects. Most common are notes written in the margins or at the end of paper documents, or inserted as comments in an electronic document. Some editors or evaluators type their comments on a separate sheet, without marking the printed or digital text at all. Other means of assessment include having a conversation about the project — what some instructors call a *conference* — in the classroom, a hallway, or in the instructor's office. Conferencing can also take place online or over the phone, or via e-mail. Some respondents might record their responses on an MP3 file that others can listen to at their leisure. Whatever the method, effective response needs to be a dialogue, an exchange of ideas. An experienced reader may offer advice, but the decision to accept it and implement it is up to the author or researcher. In short, letter grades really don't initiate the kind of feedback or input that's essential to the assessment of a work in progress; they are much more appropriate for finished work and are limited, of course, to academic settings.

*Myth 4. Readers value only error-free prose. When they read, they look mostly at commas and spelling.* All readers, even trained writing instructors, are interested first in ideas or content; then they look to be pulled in by the language and style. If the writing portions of a portfolio are lively and intelligent, an evaluator may be willing to forgive some mechanical lapses or a dead link. But if parts of the portfolio are predictable, undeveloped, or unpersuasive, or are characterized by grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors, then the evaluation is going to be more challenging. While they are not the only thing that count, errors are more noticeable in writing that is unfocused or poorly organized. Ultimately, though, if the errors or mistakes get in the way of the reading experience, then the perception will most definitely be affected.

*Myth 5. Evaluators have plenty of time to spend on each individual project or submission.* It's useful to remember, as you think about how your portfolio will be assessed, that the person reading your work has a number of responsibilities and a wide variety of interests. Those reading your portfolio have full personal lives and demanding professional lives as well. Your evaluator may, for example, teach several courses, conduct research or write for publication, serve on committees and national boards, and do other professional work. When your evaluator encounters your portfolio, many other tasks are waiting. This doesn't mean that you and your portfolio aren't important, but it does mean that you need to make an impression within a very small window of opportunity.

*Myth 6. Electronic portfolios need to have lots of hyperlinks, graphics, and audio and video to be effective.* Bells and whistles might attract readers, but to sustain readers' interest, your portfolio will need good-quality projects and examples to support your claims for your learning and accomplishments. You cannot depend on technological savvy to secure a good grade. If you've developed an e-portfolio, you must take care not to assume that technology can replace thoughtfulness or mask carelessness. At the same time, an e-portfolio that does not take advantage of any of the opportunities for design and multimodality offered by digital media may be viewed as ineffective even if the work contained within it is strong. If you are going to work in the digital medium, you must make thoughtful design and composition choices in order to effectively showcase your work and your reflective and critical thinking.

*Myth 7. Evaluators are the only audience students need to think about.* Particularly if you're working electronically, your classmates and others may have access to your work. In some cases, your portfolio may be shared, both in draft and final forms, with a number of people in your class and perhaps in other classes. You need to write for those audiences as well as for the evaluator or evaluators and, perhaps, even the general public.

There are more myths about assessment, but keep the above in mind as you prepare your portfolio. They address a dilemma that evaluators struggle with every day: how to encourage portfolio keepers to develop their strengths and have a positive attitude toward collecting, selecting, and reflecting despite the fact that their work is going to be corrected and critiqued.

It might also help to put evaluation into perspective by considering the differences between response and evaluation. For writing instructors the primary goal is to give students the feedback and advice of a more experienced reader. This kind of reading response requires evaluation of what is and is not working in the text. Not all forms of evaluation, however, include response. An instructor could, for example, slap a big red C on the project and be done with it. The letter grade would serve as evaluation but not as response: most writing instructors agree that oral and written commentary is more instructive than a letter grade. Distinguishing between response and evaluation is tricky because we are constantly evaluating images, messages, goods, or services. Still, acknowledging the differences between response and evaluation might help you assess the stakes involved in different situations. Is your evaluator going to respond, evaluate, or both — and at what points in the process?

#### TIME TO REFLECT 10—Preparing Your Working Folder

At approximately the halfway point in your portfolio journey, it is time to review your working folder and record your first impressions of your work to date. Taking notes at this point can help you begin to think about the analysis or reflective components that your portfolio will need. This is a good opportunity to record some of your observations or impressions of your own work so far. What surprises you? What patterns do you see? Make a simple chart or table in which you list your artifacts and note each one's subject matter, strengths and weaknesses, and the particular skills it highlights or demonstrates. When you notice any similarities or connections, group those artifacts together under a heading (e.g., projects that emphasize visual design or images, projects that show strong research skills, projects that deal with a similar topic). Then see if you can find any patterns or similarities between those groupings and make note of those. Does your work come together in a "network"? If so, what are the main connecting threads? If there are pieces that seem not to fit in with the majority of your work, what makes them different and why? What might be left out in order to create a greater sense of coherence and unity in your portfolio? How can you keep the coherence and connection between entries while still remembering the key portfolio-keeping principle of variety?

Understanding the elements of assessment should help you make reasoned choices based on what you know and what you can safely assume. Rhetoric can inform those choices by giving you a set of tools with which to analyze the context or situation and to respond appropriately, reasonably, or judiciously. You demonstrate your rhetorical understanding with each set of decisions you make about your portfolio, beginning with your choice of artifacts to include in your portfolio and how they should be arranged, and your recognition of how that choice can influence your readers' experience.

## 8

### Putting It Together: Selecting and Arranging Artifacts

How many potential portfolio artifacts have you created? Have you kept track of your choices and decisions as you composed or designed each artifact? What have you produced that you'd like to keep working on? Which artifacts are you going to finish, now that the due date is looming?

Even if you are required to include an assigned number of products or entries, you must still choose from your working folder which artifacts are the most appropriate and decide how much revision each one needs. Should you include multiple drafts of the same project to demonstrate your revision skills? Should your work be organized in chronological order according to when it was produced or should it be arranged according to categories or classifications of work? Even in courses or situations with very structured portfolio requirements, you'll need to make a number of choices about what types of changes to make and how to present the materials.

In Chapter 1, you were asked to define your goals for the portfolio. Did you write them down in your journal or blog? This is the ideal time to review what you've written along these lines and to see how your portfolio addresses or reflects your goals. It's also time to confirm answers to questions that you may have had when you started the portfolio keeping process:

- Can I include discussion board postings, brief response pieces, blog entries, position papers, e-mail, or chat transcripts? Can I include sketches, storyboards, wireframes?
- How polished, finished, or different do the artifacts or entries need to be?
- How much time do I have at this point to revise and put together my portfolio?

- Do I have the technological know-how and tools I need?
- Does everything I include have to be revised, edited, or both? Can entries be in their “original” state if I include an explanation of why I chose not to revise them?

You might record what you plan to include, at least for now. Meanwhile, in consultation with your instructor and peers, make sure you understand the scope of your portfolio and what it can include:

- Written texts and/or multimodal compositions
- Bulleted lists (like this one)
- Images
- Charts and graphs
- Audio and video files
- Hyperlinks to outside files or Web sites

Ask yourself what purpose each artifact serves. Your evaluator will examine the choices you make very closely, so you want to think through and be able to explain your decisions. The more content you can include, of course, the more difficult and time-consuming your choices. So find out as soon as possible what kind of entries and how many of them are required.

## STARTING THE SELECTION PROCESS

Once you’re clear about what you can include in your portfolio, and once you have a general image in mind of the content and design of your portfolio, set aside time for initial planning.

If you’re creating a print portfolio, sit down with your working folder in a place where you have plenty of room to spread out the folder’s contents and sort through them. If you are clicking through digital files, label each file clearly first and then open as many files as possible and try to arrange them so that they are all partially visible on-screen and can be easily minimized and restored. Here’s where keeping an organized working folder pays off. (If you haven’t kept up with labeling and sorting, now is definitely the time to do it.) As you pull labeled pieces out of your working folder, remind yourself what each piece is about and do some initial sorting using the Time to Reflect 10 activity at the end of the previous chapter. Then create three categories: pieces you plan to include, pieces you don’t plan to include, and maybes. If you are clicking through computer files, create three folders and label them something like, “For Portfolio,” “Not for Portfolio” and “Maybe for Portfolio.” Then move the relevant files into those folders.

## THE NAVIGATIONAL SCHEME

If you’re creating an e-portfolio, it’s now time to settle on a navigational scheme. Readers of print-based portfolios may follow a table of contents, but they move through a portfolio mostly by turning pages, typically in order. Again, drawing on your responses to Time to Reflect 10, consider how you would like to group and link the artifacts in your portfolio, remembering that when reviewing an electronic portfolio, a reader can choose to follow a chronological order, or not. Likewise, a print portfolio may follow a linear organization scheme, but a reader can still flip through pages, as they will, and not necessarily move from piece to piece in order. The important thing to remember is to frame the work in the portfolio clearly and effectively in an introduction that provides the reader with enough context to understand the purpose and goals of the portfolio pieces regardless of the order in which she or he reviews the contents.

## CHOOSING THE ENTRIES

To begin choosing the entries for your portfolio, consider both the purpose of the portfolio and the principle of variety. Review the course materials or program objectives to determine what you need to demonstrate and emphasize, and to choose artifacts that, with revision, will best illustrate those skills and accomplishments.

Then evaluate the variety of all the artifacts you are considering. Which pieces best demonstrate your learning? your writing skills? your ability to work in multiple media? your ability to make connections between courses or activities? Will those pieces also illustrate variety? Try sorting your possible entries by, for example, audience. In your working folder, how many different audiences have you addressed or invoked? Can you demonstrate your ability to communicate with different audiences for different purposes? Sort your entries again chronologically — from those you created first to those you created most recently. Could you make a case for variety by including entries from different stages in your course or internship? Depending on the assignments you’ve been given, you may think you don’t have a variety of work, but consider several options. For example, could you condense one entry and develop another so that your portfolio pieces demonstrate a variety of lengths? Reread or skim enough of your artifacts to remember what each piece is about and in what context it was composed. Once you have reread all of your essays or projects, you might want to begin a process of exclusion by creating an *information architecture* (outlined in the next section of this chapter).

Some students find it easier to identify the pieces they don’t want to include than to pick those they do. You might start by setting aside the

essays, projects, or pieces that you cannot imagine working on again. These are the ones for which you have very little enthusiasm, for whatever reason. Maybe you didn't make good choices to begin with, or you lost interest somewhere along the way. Perhaps it's a project that always frustrated you and never did quite come together, or maybe the piece was timely two months ago but now seems dated. Maybe you've become bored with the idea, or perhaps you think that you still have a lot to learn about the issue before you can be convincing. In any case, how you feel about a project is extremely important, and only you can determine that.

If you begin with the definite no entries, turn next to the definite yes candidates. Which artifacts please you, make you feel satisfied, or still interest you? Which ones do you catch yourself reviewing from start to finish? Naturally you may be tempted to ask, "Which one did other people like best?" However, the projects you like best are better choices because you are the one who is going to be taking the entry through the final portfolio stages. Because you have to live with this piece for the next few weeks, make sure it is a project that genuinely interests you.

The definite yes and no candidates are the easiest to identify, but your maybe pile is likely to be the biggest of the three. How do you decide among the possible entries in the maybe pile? Perhaps most important, you'll need to envision what each maybe entry would look like in final form. A maybe piece doesn't have to be in excellent shape right now because there's still time to revise, edit, and polish — and that could be exactly what's expected. Perhaps your course or internship has been designed to give you time to revisit the process with each of your projects that show the most potential, and to finish them. Try sorting through the maybe pile with these options in mind:

- Choose an artifact that shows promise or potential but that still needs quite a bit of work; the revised work will demonstrate your ability to finish a promising piece.
- Choose an artifact that offers an interesting contrast to one or two of your other entries, a piece that adds variety to the portfolio.
- Choose an artifact that ties together two or three other entries, that provides a thread or common theme to your portfolio.

In general, use your own instincts and reactions to judge whether to include something. If you can't get excited about a piece, how will you make an audience like it? If you're bored with it, your boredom is going to show. Portfolio readers can sense how you feel about your work, so choose examples that excite you. In addition, choose entries that you have an investment in. If you can readily think of points you want to make about a project — about the process and how it evolved, about why you wrote or created it, or about what you think its strengths are — then it may be an

excellent choice for inclusion. After all, you need to revise each entry, but you also must be able to discuss why you chose it and what it demonstrates about your learning, writing, or problem-solving ability.

## BUILDING AN INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE

In Web site design, the process of deciding how to organize vast amounts of information for easy navigation and retrieval by users is referred to as *information architecture*. In deciding how the pages of a Web site should be grouped and labeled before beginning to build the site, the Web designer thinks about categorizing and organizing information in ways that will make sense and be easily understandable and usable by an audience. Information architecture is a useful concept for portfolio keepers as they work to select and arrange artifacts. When you have a handle on what you want to include in your portfolio, stop and plan how you want to organize the entries *before* you begin building. It's easy to spend far too much time at this stage paying attention to the look and design of your portfolio (especially if it is electronic) when you should be focusing on the content. Hours or even days later, you may have found the right font or color but do not have a dominant structure or see the relationships between artifacts clearly. Your instructor will evaluate your work primarily for the reflective and critical thinking it demonstrates, and establishing a clear structure or architecture for your portfolio can be an enormous help here.

Figures 8.1 and 8.2, on pages 60 and 61, are examples of portfolio wireframes. A *wireframe* is a visual representation of the page layout and/or information architecture of a Web site that helps a designer define and show the relationships between elements of the site and establish the structure of the site. You can draw your own wireframe on paper or use a computer program to diagram the structure of your portfolio. Begin with an introduction that leads into your artifacts. You may want to give your readers the opportunity to read through your journal or blog, or you might include a course instructor's and classmates' feedback. In any case, your task is to demonstrate the relationships between and among the artifacts. Think about the lines between each piece here as a contextual reflection, that is, a connection you will have to make in tracing your development from one artifact to another. As you make your choices and prepare to revise and edit each artifact, consider which piece might work best first or last, and how the placement of each entry affects the whole.

FIGURE 8.1

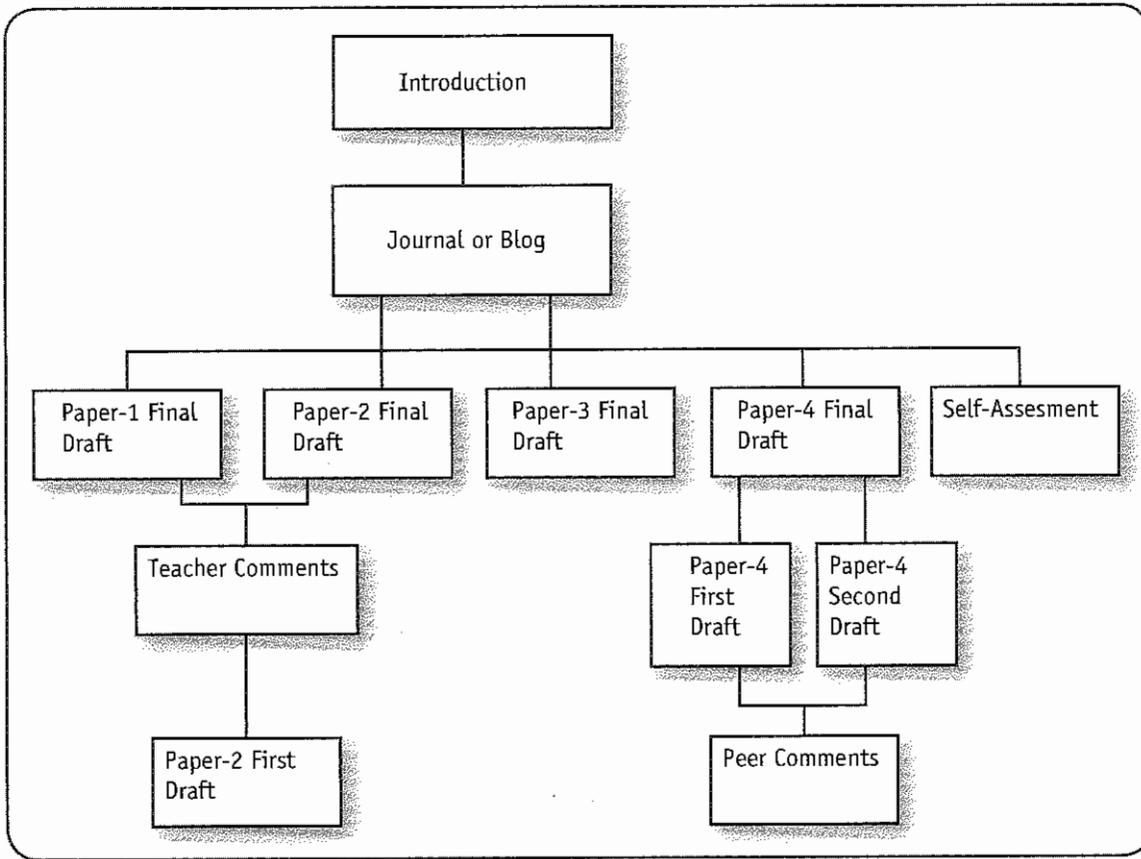
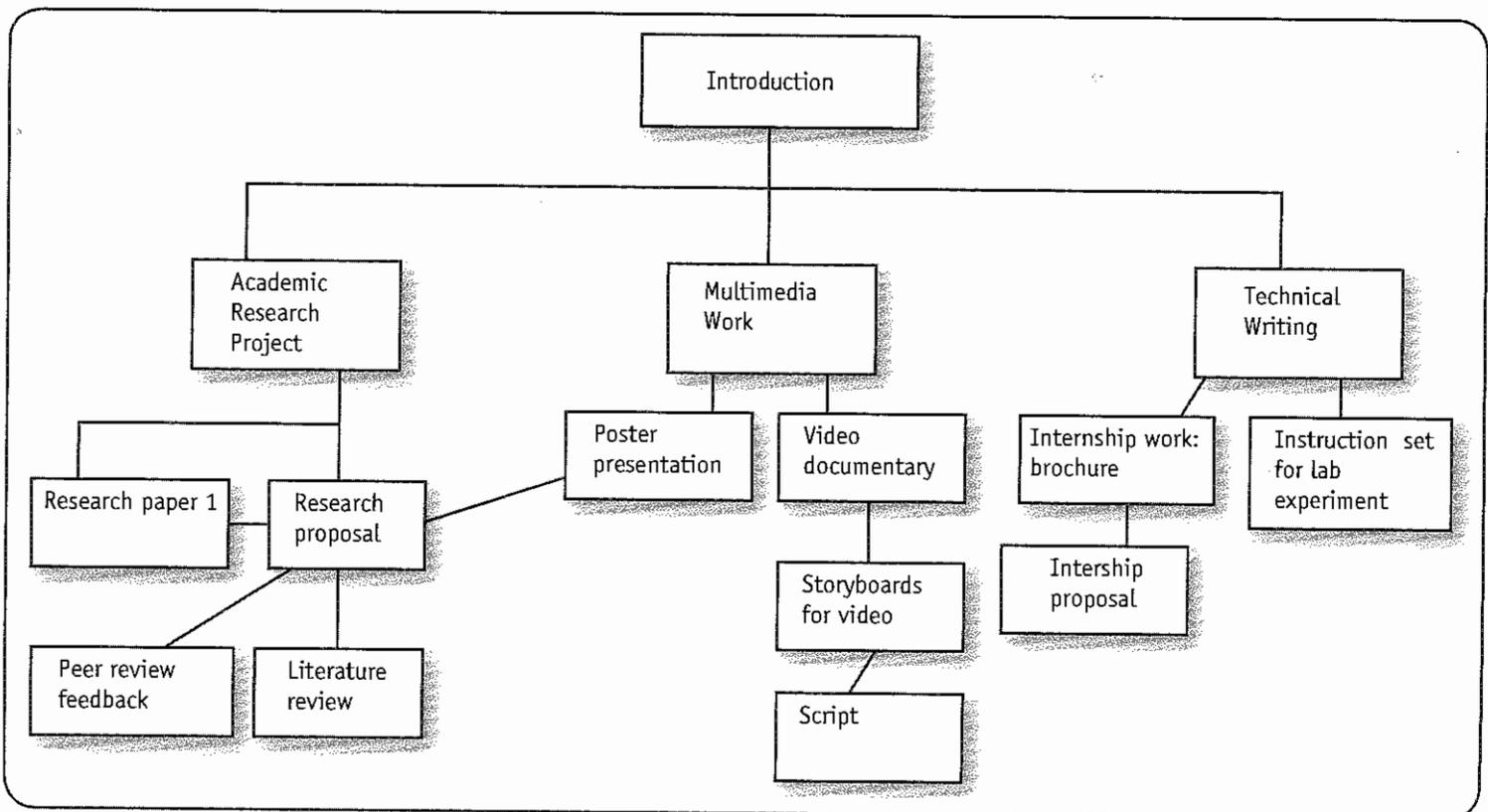


FIGURE 8.2



**TIME TO REFLECT** 11—*Mapping Connections between Artifacts*

Draw a wireframe and label the lines between things with descriptive writing about the relationship represented by that line. In what ways (as many as you can think of) does that artifact connect to the one you've linked it to on the diagram?

If all of your sorting and review still leaves you uncertain, talk to an instructor or mentor about other options. Maybe you want to try one of the projects or assignments again, which would mean an entirely new draft, an alternative approach, or a new target audience. While that might be acceptable, be sure to check first because it may be that you need to provide evidence that you have taken the entry through all of the stages of the development process or that you are only showing work produced in the context of a particular course or program.

## 9

## Preparing to Write the Introduction and Other Reflective Components

Along with choice and variety, reflection — also referred to as self-assessment or analysis — is the third major characteristic of a portfolio, and as you prepare for assessment, reflection moves to the top of your list. You'll need to find out whether you are expected to write a reflective or analytical essay to introduce your portfolio or if you have other options for the reflective elements necessary to your portfolio. We know that first impressions are very important and sometimes lasting, so the introduction to your portfolio is crucial to establishing your credibility as a strong, careful writer. Research, in fact, has found that portfolio readers in large-scale assessments make their judgments quite early in the process of reading a portfolio, and that entries in the middle or at the end do not much alter their evaluation.<sup>3</sup> This finding emphasizes the importance of a well-crafted introduction and suggests that your best entry should follow the introduction. Remember, however, that the study was conducted in large-scale assessments, which means that hundreds of portfolios were being evaluated in one session.

If your situation differs, so might the outcome. You need to decide, of course, on the best order, and you may want to address the reasons for the order in the introductory piece, particularly if you have grouped artifacts into categories rather than presenting them chronologically. You need to ensure that your reader understands the reasons for that categorization and this, in turn, emphasizes your ability to see and articulate the connections and relationships in your work. Whatever your decisions, your job in the

<sup>3</sup>This reader-response study was conducted at the University of Michigan. See Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon, "Questioning Assumptions about Portfolio-Based Assessment," *College Composition and Communication* 44.2 (May 1993): 176–190.

introduction is to give some of the reasons behind them. If the introduction does not establish a clear purpose for the portfolio and provide a context for the artifacts contained within it, your reader may not see the learning, growth, or accomplishments you intend the portfolio to demonstrate.

Because of the importance of reflection and/or analysis in portfolio keeping, you should spend a significant portion of the portfolio composition process considering and analyzing what your choices and changes *mean*. Can you address the “so what?” question about the work you are presenting in your portfolio? Reflection can and should take place throughout your portfolio-keeping experience, but at some point it’s important to make the analysis more formal, to present and discuss evidence of your learning. Before you begin, be sure you understand how the reflective elements in your portfolio should function and what role this type of analysis should play in terms of the purpose and audience for your portfolio. Here are several points to consider in planning and writing your introductory analysis or what some evaluators will call a reflective introduction or essay:

- Who will be reading this self-assessment? Is the evaluator reading to suggest changes?
- What is the situation surrounding this reading? Is it to assess your work and make a decision about your effort or demonstrated abilities?
- What will the outcome of the reading be? Can you influence it? If so, how much and in what ways?
- What qualities of writing does your reader value?

Clarify with your instructor or supervisor what the reflective or analytical elements of your portfolio should be or include. Some audiences may expect an opening statement — a cover letter, introduction, preface, or essay. A longer reflective element does not have to be the first entry in a paper portfolio, but it often is, owing to its role in establishing a relationship with your readers and evaluators. Even if you are not required to present an opening statement or cover letter directed to your audience, you may be expected to provide accounts of your choices or descriptions of your process throughout the portfolio. In an e-portfolio, of course, you may have more options for the placement of the reflective elements, so you might have introductions to each artifact with some analysis or other commentary. Others may prefer to see a preface to each artifact in order to assess how and why the entry was developed or what contribution it makes to your portfolio’s purpose. That way, no matter how they navigate through your digital portfolio, users will encounter each artifact within a context that you provide. Ask your instructor or program director if each entry should have a preface.

Whatever form your reflective elements or self-analysis take — an informal letter to your reader, a formal thesis-driven essay, paragraphs presenting each artifact, a video, an audio podcast, or all of the above — the

reflective writing you do could well be your most important writing in the course. Reflective components demonstrate your ability to be a thoughtful, conscientious learner and to effectively analyze a rhetorical situation. Evaluators want to see you engaging in analysis of your own choices in compiling the portfolio and demonstrating your ability to judge your own learning. One demonstration of reflective thinking is being able to identify important features or patterns in your work. Think of it this way: readers of your portfolio — even your instructor — do not have access to your entire working process, academic coursework, or the experiences you’ve had in classroom or digital environments. Your readers have not watched you do online research; they haven’t participated in your collaborative groups; they haven’t seen all your projects evolve from brainstorming to finished product. They won’t know how a paper you wrote in one of your courses connected to an experience you had in a study abroad program. Readers will be aware only of what you share with them as you break down the parts and present the essential features in the reflective elements. In fact, it is for this reason that many students like to use video in their e-portfolios: to show themselves working and talking about their work.

To provide this insight into your working and thinking process, especially if you are working on a process portfolio, you may want to consider these ideas for developing the reflective portion(s) of your portfolio:

- Outline the process you went through to produce one or more of your entries.
- Acknowledge your weaknesses, but show how you’ve worked to overcome them.
- Discuss each project you’ve included, touching on its strengths.

If yours is a presentation portfolio, you might try some of the following for the analysis or reflection components:

- Discuss the strongest artifact and why it is your best.
- Detail the revisions you’ve made and the improvements and changes that you want readers to notice.
- Demonstrate what this portfolio illustrates about you as a writer, student, researcher, or critical thinker.
- Acknowledge the readers-respondents who have influenced your portfolio pieces and describe how.
- Analyze what you’ve learned about writing, reading, or other topics of the course or program.
- Include specific examples or passages from your working folder.

For many portfolios, the reflective introduction or other analytical elements function as a type of final exam — the ultimate test of what you’ve learned in your course, internship, or degree program. If you think of those

**TIME TO REFLECT** 12—*Synthesizing Your Expectations Then and Now*

Review your answers to Time to Reflect 1 (p. 8), where you practiced reflection. Reread what you wrote about your expectations for this course and about the areas in which you thought your strengths would help you. Do you still agree with what you wrote? How did your expectations match up with the reality of the course? What parts of this exercise can you use in writing your self-assessment or reflective elements?

elements as a final examination, you begin to see the importance you should place on them. Sometimes students work throughout a course or program very diligently on their assignments and projects, and then spend twenty minutes on a reflective piece. That's simply not enough time for what is a critical component of your portfolio. The good thing about thinking of reflection as your final exam is that it gives you the opportunity to be part of the assessment of your work: with reflection, you have to assess yourself and then show that you can evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your own work, that you understand what you do well and what you still need to work on. Portfolio evaluators are not always looking for perfection but, for the most part, they are always looking for learners who are insightful, conscientious, and engaged in the development of their own skills and knowledge.

If you have maintained a working folder and have managed to save, label, and file all of your work in print, in electronic form, or in some combination of the two, here comes the payoff. Retrieve all of the notes, reviewer memos, and journal or blog entries in which you've recorded something about your working process, your struggles and triumphs, the adjustments you've made. With these materials, you should be ready to begin drafting your analysis about what it all means. Have you ever written the body paragraphs of an essay before writing your introduction or title? This is a similar process.

As you reflect on your learning and analyze your own choices, habits, or tendencies, think of a vivid or memorable way to represent that learning to your readers. Most portfolio evaluators are looking specifically for an indication that you can name your learning and identify its significance. Ultimately, the portfolio process is coaching you to make good decisions in the future, not simply to produce final projects right now. This is where the metaphor you select can come in handy.

**METAPHORICAL THINKING**

What word or phrase best describes your work in your course or program? If, for instance, *growth* is the term that comes to your mind most frequently,

then the metaphor of a garden might be appropriate. Or suppose *new understanding* captures your progress well. You might explore how the metaphor of a person climbing a mountain symbolizes your work. It's a long path and a difficult struggle through "course" terrain; but as you climb, what's below becomes clear.

If you think metaphorically and holistically, your ability to make connections between ideas and artifacts in your portfolio will increase. Metaphorical thinking can be a very good place to start when developing the reflective components of your portfolio. (Metaphors can also help provide you with design themes for electronic portfolios.) Selecting a metaphor for your portfolio can be an effective way to jump-start your thinking as you prepare to compose your reflection. Metaphorically speaking, the reflective elements of the portfolio are the connective tissue that binds the muscles and bones and organs of the portfolio together and allow it to function as a working whole rather than a random assortment of parts.

You may find it easier to develop a unifying metaphor *after* you've chosen your artifacts and articulate how each piece contributes to the whole.

- Tam, for example, describes her portfolio as the Boston T, with each artifact a stop along the way between where she boards the subway and her destination. Looking out the window as a passenger, you see a flurry of objects whizzing by you; but when you stop, you understand where you've been.
- Diego chooses a baseball theme. There are nine innings in the game, and different events happen in each of them. A run in the third inning may or may not be significant; it's impossible to know until later, when an analysis of the entire game clarifies its importance.
- Frank, a student who grew up helping on his family farm, uses cropping corn as a metaphor. You have to have the right tools and equipment; you have to apply your experience to choosing the right week to plant and the right week to harvest; and you have to be lucky with the weather. In much the same way, to write well you need to have good tools and the ability to reason based on experience; and, of course, you need a situation that encourages quality writing.

What you see in these examples is a deep connection between the students' personal experiences and their new learning experiences. These students have a better understanding of their skills because they are able to see them through a unifying idea. The sum can be worth far more than its individual parts. That, in effect, is a primary value of portfolio keeping.

The navigational scheme you develop may or may not include a unifying metaphor. Regardless, the scheme should both inform your reflection in the introduction and provide context for each artifact. The navigational scheme helps your reader move through your work, but it also helps you

understand the connections you've been making between your world and the work you've produced in this course.

Your course or program will no doubt provide other points to consider that you need to examine carefully. Be sure to look back over the comments on and responses to your returned projects, review the course syllabus and assignments. What patterns do you see in the feedback you received on projects? Use what you've learned about your evaluators' values as readers to compose a convincing, well-developed reflective introduction or essay. It's doubtful that readers of your portfolio are looking to be flattered, and asking for an A is probably not the best strategy, but humor, liveliness, or anecdote might be very effective.

If your evaluators are unknown — that is, if a team of instructors or administrators will be reviewing your portfolio — ask for some information about them so that you can decide which logical, ethical, or emotional appeals might be most effective. In this scenario, you won't know your readers personally (and they won't know you at all). Still, it's safe to assume that your evaluators will be trained in portfolio assessment. If your course or program has a set of guidelines or policies and grading criteria, consult it for information as you begin composing, and try to find out as much as you can about who will be reading and/or evaluating your portfolio.

For a portfolio being evaluated at the end of an introductory course, you might determine that your readers want to get to know you as a person as well as a writer. Readers might want to know how you feel about the pieces you've written, what you're proud of, and what techniques or activities were most helpful to you. In this case, the genres of narration and description are appropriate, where you "tell a story" of your journey, for example. In this situation, your style might be characterized by dialogue or an extended metaphor or humor. Such an approach might not be your best bet, however, in a more formal assessment context.

For a portfolio being evaluated at the end of an advanced course, a capstone or one required for graduation, or as the culmination of an internship, the expectations may be more formal and more rigorous. The more "professional" your portfolio is supposed to be, the more urgent it is to clarify and understand the expectations regarding reflection. In some assessment situations, it will not be appropriate for you to share personal anecdotes about your writing habits or to discuss your struggle with editing. For a career-oriented portfolio, narrative and description are not the genres that should characterize your reflective elements. Instead, to develop your reflective introduction, depend on evidence-based assertions about your learning or your achievements. Each assertion you make, of course, will need to be supported with examples, illustrations, or "facts" — like quotations from your own writing. Your style should probably be direct and precise, without digressions.

How long should the reflective introduction or essay be? Again, check with your mentor, supervisor, or instructor for such details. Remember, however, that you need to develop your ideas or support your claims as you would in any effective piece of writing. In this situation, you are trying to convince your reader that you have learned the subject matter and developed the appropriate skill set. If you are asked to write a reflective letter, follow the format for a business letter (check your style and usage handbook), and include the date and inside address, as well as an appropriate salutation and closing. Above all, remember how important first impressions are: it is critical that you take all of the reflective elements through stages of drafting, getting feedback, revising, editing, and proofreading.

## 10

## The Final Stages: Revising, Editing, and Proofreading the Artifacts

Once your reflective elements are well under way, it's time to turn to the final stages of preparing each portfolio entry. For the parts of your portfolio that are text or written passages, it might help if you treat revising, editing, and proofreading as discrete processes for improving written work: that is, you might find it helpful to honor the differences among these three methods for improving a text. Because it is so important to make a good impression with each of your portfolio entries, this section gives you strategies for sharpening your skills of reviewing texts and finding places for improvement. At the same time, however, digital elements may also need the kind of careful attention that these later stages of the composing process emphasize. Do all of your links work, for example? Have you checked each and every one? Are your images cropped effectively to have an impact without taking up unnecessary space? Is the volume level appropriate and consistent in your video and/or audio files? One principle to remember is that any revision you do will create the need for more editing, and any editing you do will require proofreading. Each time you tinker with a piece or artifact, you need to attend to all three procedures.

### REVISING

To *revise* literally means “to see again.” The idea is to view your projects differently, from a different angle or through a different lens. When writers revise, they make global, wholesale, or fundamental changes in a text — big changes, not sentence-level stuff. For example, Farah drafts a proposal to state lawmakers about raising the legal drinking age. When the members of

her peer response group agree that lawmakers are not going to be convinced and that her points are too general, she revises the proposal by altering both the audience and the purpose. In her revision, she addresses the university's president directly and proposes a tightening of drinking rules on campus. While the genre or type of writing remains a proposal for change, and its topic is still drinking by college students, Farah's shift from lawmakers to the university's president allows her to be far more specific and to cite examples from the campus community that her peer reviewers and the president will recognize and understand. Her proposal has become more specific and more immediate; and because its purpose has shifted — from a legislative change at the state level to a rule change locally — she has added to the proposal's credibility and its potential for success. As Farah has discovered, revision is bigger and more involved than sentence-level changes: for her proposal, revision meant writing an entirely new introduction to set a different tone, restating her purpose (or thesis), and adding far more examples. Although she was able to save many of her sentences about responsible drinking, Farah's revising activities included frequent rereading, writing new copy, deleting old copy, and moving or rearranging sentences and paragraphs.

For a similar topic, Carlos writes a traditional essay trying to convince his target audience (college-age adults) that they should resist binge drinking. Prompted by one of his early peer reviewers, he realizes that he needs to deliver his message in a form that his target audience will be more receptive to. After his realization that his peers may not choose to read a formal essay, Carlos, with the help of some friends, radically revises his essay into a three-minute video featuring rapid images of the consequences of binge drinking and a dramatic soundtrack. The ideas of the original essay did not change, but the content and delivery system underwent massive revision.

Revision begins with you. Every time you review a passage or section of your work, looking and listening for places where you need to say more or frame things differently, you are revising or considering ways to make the text receptive to its audience, more focused, coherent, and effective. You may revise naturally and automatically as you compose because composing involves a series of pauses and rereadings. Each time you reread or review your work, you may find something to change, move, or clarify. Even though others — your instructor, your peer reviewers, your friends — will recommend certain changes, you should develop independent revising habits. Try to read as your audience, not as the composer, and anticipate where your audience is going to have questions or is going to want more explanation.

Many students consider revision one of the most challenging tasks in college courses. Many have not had opportunities to revise work once it has been submitted for assessment and, therefore, think projects are finished once they have been submitted. However, because revision is the foundation of portfolio courses — giving students time and opportunity to present their

**TIME TO REFLECT** 13—*Checking Places for Revision*

Review your working folder for evidence that you have practiced revision as it has just been defined or described — that is, making global or large-scale changes involving adding, deleting, moving chunks of text, or changing the form or delivery system. Where can you demonstrate your effort to revise? Write a short response to share with others about your understanding of revision, the efforts to revise that you found in your working folder, and your goals for revising your portfolio entries.

best possible work — understanding and practicing revision are key to your success. There's a good chance that your instructor chose to assign portfolios because they invite revision, almost insist on it, by providing a context for the revision — that is, the end-of-course assessment.

**EDITING**

Editing is another part of the composition process that you should be able to do independently although you also will benefit from the fresh eyes of other readers who may catch lapses in syntax or usage that you don't see. *Editing* means working through a text in a systematic way, looking for places to tighten the prose, clarify the ideas, and to add emphasis. In written papers, this may mean varying sentence patterns, making more precise word choices, and tightening prose. In multimodal projects, it may also involve making subtle visual design changes or smoothing out transitions between slides or frames of video, in addition to or instead of those textual changes. Once he had revised his argument about binge drinking, Carlos spent hours editing his video and splicing different segments together smoothly. It's important to remember that editing is about making choices, not necessarily about following rules. When writers edit, they make conscious choices to achieve a certain style or tone, for example, or to make particular features of the text consistent with their purpose or thesis. Likewise, when filmmakers edit video, they are thinking about the overall effect their presentation will have on the audience.

You would do well at this stage to consider your document design, and there are many sources on effective design that can be helpful to you. Document design involves decisions about the use of white or blank space; headings and subheadings; font sizes and styles and colors; use of italics, boldface, and so on. You need to understand that, for example, the **Comic Sans** font choice sends a different message than does Baskerville or

Courier. Consistency is important, but sometimes, so is drawing the eye to a particular image or text box. Document design is another important set of rhetorical decisions that you make when working on the editing stages of a portfolio.

Editing is usually not as extensive as revision: revision typically involves adding, deleting, or moving sections of text, while editing makes the revised text smoother, more polished, and more cohesive. Copy editors often add key word transitions or cut unnecessary repetition. A good writing handbook can help you with editing techniques, and some of the strategies listed in the proofreading section that follows also can help with editing. The key to careful editing (and careful proofreading, too) is to review differently from the way you review for content. Editing (and proofreading) requires that you *see* the text differently. One way to do that when you're editing a written text on-screen is to change the background color and the color of the text. If you've been writing an essay using black letters on a white or gray background, change to white letters on a purple background. This kind of change can give you a fresh perspective on the piece.

**PROOFREADING**

It's time for proofreading after you have revised and edited many times and your best judgment says that the text is finished, or you've simply reached a deadline for delivering the piece to others. By the time proofreading is needed, however, you may have memorized the paragraphs and sentences. Therefore, the key to good proofreading is finding ways to see and hear the text differently or to break up the way you usually read, especially when you have read the text from beginning to end dozens of times. Although "seeing the text differently" may sound much like revision and editing, *what* you're trying to see changes: when you proofread, you are looking for mistakes and errors and flaws in formatting. That's it. The most straightforward of the three stages, proofreading asks you to find what's wrong that might make readers stumble while they are trying to concentrate on your ideas with your essay or its formatting. When students talk about fixing a paper, they usually are referring to proofreading because the solutions to proofreading problems don't involve making choices. In contrast to editing, which is all about choices — to improve the style, tone, order, or coherence of a written work — proofreading is about following conventions. You don't have to make choices, but you do have to either know the rules or know where to find them.

With proofreading, then, your job is to find mistakes and errors. There is a difference between the two. Mistakes are easier to find and to fix because you recognize that something must be done as soon as you see them — "Oops, I meant *their*, not *there*" — and then you make the correction.

Errors are more challenging because you often don't recognize them as readily: you may sense that something is amiss, but you can't identify it. Mistakes are accidental; errors show a lack of understanding or a lack of information. You never did understand the rule for using the possessive apostrophe with a plural noun ("the commuters' lounge"), for example, so you've omitted the apostrophe entirely. Errors and mistakes can be tackled through the same techniques, but rooting out the errors will take more time and diligence and maybe a helpful proofreading partner.

Here are some techniques that may help when it's time to edit and proofread the final entries for your portfolio:

- *Work on a hard copy of the document, essay, or project, if possible.* Text does not look the same on-screen as it does on a page. After revising and editing on-screen, printing out a hard copy is another way of altering the appearance of a familiar text so that you can see things you might be missing. Mark up the hard copy with changes that you can later enter on the computer.
- *Read aloud.* Try reading the piece aloud, as though you are reading to an audience. Stand up, project, and enunciate. How will this help when there's a good chance that anyone who sees you will think you're crazy? Reading aloud helps you hear the words, not just see them. Reading aloud helps clarify your decisions about sentence length and punctuation. Because reading your text aloud is just plain different from reading it silently, your perspective will change — and that's all that many writers need to enable them to make improvements.
- *Read backward.* Read backward? Not word by word, of course, but line by line. This is very unnatural, and that's precisely the point. Because you've probably read your piece dozens of times from beginning to end, you are so familiar with the ideas and the sentence order that you are only skimming the text. You have, in fact, probably memorized the text, which means you know what comes next, and that doesn't help you find errors and mistakes. Begin reading backward from the last sentence of the piece. Read up the last page or slide or frame and up the next, sentence by sentence. The last sentence you proofread will be the first sentence of the document. Why does this method help? When we read, we don't process every word; instead we process chunks of meaning. Our familiarity with written documents gives us powers of prediction — we know what to expect — and the repetition of language patterns make it easy to skim and comprehend long passages without necessarily remembering every key word or phrase. For proofreading, however, you need to be able to see every word, every mark of punctuation. Proofreading requires a different kind of reading, something that becomes easier with practice. (And you'll discover why publishing companies hire good proofreaders.)

- *Cover up parts of the text or put small chunks into a new document in your word processor.* Covering up some parts of the page to concentrate on others is a strategy similar to reading backward: It breaks up the normal reading pattern and forces you to zero in on particular passages or paragraphs. For this technique, you need two blank sheets of paper. Lay them lengthwise, one at the top of the page you are proofreading and the other two or three lines down. The blank pages should cover up most of the lines on the page, leaving only a few lines showing. As you proofread, move the blank pages down to keep as much white space as possible and to isolate the lines you're reading. Alternatively, cut and past single lines or chunks of text into a new, blank document in your favorite word processing program. This can be especially helpful when you are working on a multimodal composition like a slide show or a video or a Web site. Taking the text out of the context of the larger composition isolates it so that you can see the words and letters without being distracted by other visual elements. How does this help? The marks on a page that constitute writing often begin to blur and run together, especially when a reader is tired or intimately familiar with the text. This technique of isolating parts of the text reduces the lines of type a reader can see and creates more white space, which highlights the lines and the words that are visible. Again, this changes your normal view of the text and therefore changes the way you see it.

Finally, as you proofread, don't forget to attend to all of the details that will direct your readers' attention to what it is you want to emphasize, not to mistakes and errors. For a paper portfolio, you should check your page numbers and headers. If you have provided a table of contents, be sure the titles and page numbers are correct, and that the format is easy to follow. Consult a good handbook for proofreading guidelines, or ask your instructor. For an e-portfolio, you want to be sure all of the links work. Also check that you have provided enough headings, titles, and signposts to help your readers navigate easily.

On every page or for every artifact, your portfolio should meet high standards. It should consist of texts ready for public presentation, a product in which you can take pride. Even in a process portfolio that focuses more on your development and learning, you should remember that the portfolio will most likely be reviewed by others, and demonstrating care and attention to the presentation of your work to others is important. Taking pride in your work means concentrating on revising, editing, and proofreading in the last days before the portfolio is due. In addition, some students find creative ways to give their portfolio that final touch or distinctive feature; for example, they have their paper portfolio bound or do a collage on the cover. For this assessment situation, however, it's important to remember

that a cool video stream, sounds between your slides, or a great color scheme cannot make up for weak writing, poor composition, or careless editing; and neither can a cheerful cover, photographs, or a fancy binding. Check with your instructor about the extent to which you should spend time on the technical or artistic aspects of your portfolio. Some instructors may actually object to this sort of adornment, so ask questions about any creative touches you want to add. In general, you can make the best impression by following the instructions and guidelines you are given, by investing time and care in your portfolio entries, and by making the most of the help, advice, and instruction you have received throughout this book.

# 11

## Portfolio Keeping Continued: Revisiting Your Learning

Portfolios are an obvious choice to enhance student learning and to tap into the capabilities of electronic storage and delivery systems. As we have reviewed, you may be required to produce a portfolio for a course or for your major. You may be required to produce one as part of a capstone course for your university. But there are many situations where a portfolio might be the appropriate way for you to demonstrate your qualifications or experience. Considering graduate school one day? You might use a portfolio as part of your application. And, of course, portfolios can provide an effective sampling of your talents and capabilities when you start looking for a job. You might choose to make a Web site for yourself that functions as an ongoing portfolio of your work that can be edited, added to, or adapted as you move on through your academic and professional careers. It's likely that you can reuse or retool much of the analysis and reflection you have produced in creating this portfolio. Of course, when the rhetorical situation changes — because the audience and purpose are different — so too must the writing and the samples. Thus, portfolios are never static; they must change with the context.

Portfolios are increasingly being used for large-scale assessments in which hundreds of students have their work evaluated via the portfolio method. Some colleges and universities are using portfolios for long-term assessment measurements, or to test students' competence (perhaps as an exit examination for a particular course). For example, at DePaul University all first-year writing students create e-portfolios of their work as do all education students. But also keeping e-portfolios are faculty in a certificate program and tutors in the Writing Center. And in the DePaul Career Center, students are creating "focused e-portfolios directed at particular employers."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup><http://resources.depaul.edu/distinctions/words-and-deeds/Pages/integrating-learning-with-electronic-portfolios.aspx>

Career-centered portfolios are increasingly common and are important to develop for those who are making the transition from college to a profession. E-portfolios can be shared easily but also offer far more information about a job candidate than do a cover letter and resume. An electronic resume, as part of a digital portfolio, can contain links to artifacts that you produced as part of an internship or to the home page of the department where you received a degree.

At Randolph College in Virginia, all students archive their experiences in an e-portfolio, part of “the Randolph Plan.” The portfolio process begins with orientation and continues through commencement, with students encouraged to collect artifacts from their academic, co-curricular, and personal experiences. Students are provided with a framework, including guidelines and suggestions, for each of their four years of e-portfolio keeping.<sup>5</sup>

Other forms of portfolios are increasingly popular at all levels of education. Graduate students earning master of arts degrees in English or other disciplines often have the option of compiling a portfolio in lieu of writing a thesis or taking a reading-list examination, and instructors-in-training or newly hired instructors often keep portfolios that track their progress as teachers. Graphic designers, artists, architects, and web programmers also maintain portfolios that provide evidence of their skills and working process from projects they have worked on over the course of their careers. When faculty members apply to different institutions or are reviewed for promotions or tenure, they often submit a portfolio of their accomplishments in the areas of research, teaching, and service, accompanied by a narrative or rationale for each portfolio artifact.

Because portfolios allow for making connections across the curriculum, students increasingly are being asked to create portfolios that link their work from a number of different courses and contexts. Internships, study abroad, co-curricular activities, service learning, and volunteer work all provide excellent material that can be integrated with your academic work in a portfolio. For example, during her senior year, Amanda enrolls in an internship program sponsored by the university. In addition to working at a local television station, Amanda attends weekly meetings with a mentor that prepare her for transferring the skills she has learned in college to the workplace. Portfolio keeping is an important part of this internship. By the end of the semester, Amanda has collected and arranged for credit in her internship course a portfolio that contains a copy of her current résumé, evaluations by her supervisors, journal entries about her experiences at the television station, an essay that makes connections between her academic coursework and her work at the station, and a brochure written to attract other students to the internship program. If you do an internship or spend a

<sup>5</sup><http://www.randolphcollege.edu/x16334.xml>

semester studying abroad or participating in a community service program, save artifacts of your work while you are producing them because it's difficult to go back and gather them. You may well have an opportunity to share what you have learned as you prepare a portfolio to meet a graduation requirement, to apply for graduate school, or to find work.

We noted above that the portfolio you've created for this course might also be used as an artifact in another portfolio. Sometimes that other portfolio is someone else's. For example, to demonstrate the quality of his or her teaching, your instructor might ask to use your portfolio in a teaching portfolio. Your instructor's portfolio might then circulate through wider networks and ultimately be part of a university's portfolio for accreditation.

In the event that your portfolio is retooled, to scale and sustain your work you must maintain its structure. Your working folder — in print or electronic form, or both — must be very well organized. If you are asked to put together a portfolio for your undergraduate work, you would be well prepared if you are a habitual saver of documents, artifacts, notes, and drafts. In particular, as time passes, it's difficult to recapture your thinking and your writing processes. In effect, you must become a researcher of your own learning. Because good reflection is in the details, practice keeping track of those details through a system that makes the most sense to you.

As institutional, educational, and professional uses for portfolios increase and change, you may decide to keep your own portfolio for your personal development and to track your learning or to record different stages of your career or professional development. Perhaps the self-motivated portfolio is the best kind because you create for yourself the opportunity or reason for portfolio keeping, and you become the best judge of your reflective learning. Whatever the purpose of your portfolio, good luck with it and all of the hard work and learning it will represent.