FAQ’s – Electronic Portfolios

1. What is a portfolio?

A portfolio is an organized set of materials that exhibits concrete support of an individual’s progress and development. An effective beginning teacher portfolio is a thoughtfully selected and reflected upon document designed to demonstrate your pedagogical content knowledge and ability to apply that knowledge in your classroom (see figure 1). A portfolio is not a scrapbook of lesson plans and ideas. What will distinguish your work from a mere scrapbook will be how well you

- thoughtfully select your artifacts,
- clearly link your artifacts to the specific principle you are exploring and,
- reflect upon your experiences, artifacts, and beliefs in relation to your past, present, and future.

Figure 1: Pedagogical Content Knowledge

![Diagram of PCK (Pedagogical Content Knowledge) showing domains and levels.](image-url)
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2. Why do a portfolio?

Portfolios are a strategy designed to allow beginning teachers to capture the complexities of learning, teaching, and learning to teach during their preparation program. The ability to reflect on and in action is what defines the profession of teaching. We are professionals and not technicians. Portfolios provide you with a medium to reflect on your experiences this year and create a foundation from which to look forward into your future career. As Shulman (1983) notes “The teacher is capable of reflection leading to self knowledge, the metacognitive awareness that distinguishes craftsman from architect, bookkeeper from auditor. A professional is capable not only of practicing and understanding his craft, but of communicating the reasons for professional decisions and actions to others” (Shulman, L. S. Autonomy and obligation; the remote control of teaching. In L.S. Shulman and G Sykes (Eds.), Handbook of teaching and policy. New York: Longman.)

3. What is an electronic portfolio?

An electronic portfolio contains the same subject matter as traditional portfolios but utilizes multimedia materials in a digital format – web pages, databases, PowerPoint, video, CD’s, disks, and so on. Electronic portfolios allow you to make reflective connections within and between principles, artifacts and experiences.

4. Why do an electronic portfolio?

Electronic portfolios are used to document learning of pre-service teachers within the context of (a) discipline specific National Standards, (b) on-going efforts to prepare tomorrow’s teaches to use technology, (c) NCATE and state teacher education standards,
and (d) a recognition that learning to teach is a socially constructed process of self organization and enculturation.

So where does the technology fit in? It is of course, extremely significant in your program. First, as a beginning teacher, your teaching will be enhanced by your technological competence; therefore, your program at Virginia Tech is designed to assist you in learning and using the latest technology. Second, as a licensure program, we must document your competence according to technology standards set forth by the International Society for Technology Education. The electronic portfolio is the means by which we will be able to certify your competence in meeting those standards. At the same time, you will have the opportunity to reflect on the total teaching and learning experience, including the use of technology. For example, Principle #6 on the Portfolio Guidelines relate specifically to the use of technology in both your program and in the portfolio. In relation to that standards, what we will be looking for is the use of technology as it relates to the teaching and learning of your specific discipline. The emphases are how and why technology is used in the classroom and your evaluations of your experiences with it.

As you reflect on the ways technology has been used in your program and how you will use it in your own lessons, the following guidelines will be salient:

1. **Introduce and infuse technology in context.**
2. **Focus on the importance of technology as a tool or partner within your classroom.**
3. **Model teaching and learning while infusing technology.**
4. Evaluate critically when and how to use technology in the classroom.

5. Provide a wide range of opportunities to use technology.

6. Examine and determine ways of analyzing, evaluating.

7. Emphasize lessons of equity and diversity.


5. Upon what standards are the electronic portfolios based?

The evaluation of portfolios is modeled after recommendations from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), discipline specific National Standards from the National Council for the Social Studies, and the standards from the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Technology standards have been incorporated into both National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Commonwealth of Virginia’s accreditation protocols for colleges and schools of teacher education.

6. How will this portfolio help me after graduation?

“Digital teaching portfolios are one of the best ways for teachers to communicate the level of their knowledge and skill within educational technologies. The increasing role of technology in learning environments makes the demonstration of technology competence more important now than ever before. Teachers who create portfolios in this way demonstrate their knowledge of hardware, software, and the integration of the two for the purpose of creating useful educational tools . . . . Although the process of making
traditional teaching portfolios helps teachers examine their competence and chart their future growth as professionals, the creation of digital teaching portfolios also provides them the opportunity to think more seriously about how their career will be affected by the role of technology in the classroom and society” (Kilbane & Milman. (2003). What Every Teacher Should Know about Creating Digital Portfolios. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, p.6).

7. Will I have access to my portfolio later?

Yes. The ultimate goal is for you to have accessibility to your electronic portfolio for five years.

8. What are the expectations of my professors for my portfolio?

The portfolio rubric clearly lays out expectations for the electronic portfolio. The rubric is provided to you in the methods class. You should use this rubric as a guide, complete the rubric yourself, and include it within your portfolio. This will give you the opportunity to clearly argue your case for meeting the portfolio expectations.

In history and social science, students must include evidence of their ability to plan, organize, and assess instruction based upon the National Standards (At a minimum this means including your 10 themed lesson plans). You should also include reflections on how you addressed the 10 themes within your internship. You must also include multiple reflections that link a range of artifacts together in order to reveal not only that you are capable of practicing the craft of teaching, “but of communicating the reasons for [your] professional decisions and actions to others” (Shulman, 1983).

9. How many pieces of evidence do I need to include in my portfolio?
The amount of evidence is specified on the Portfolio Evaluation Rubric in the descriptors below. You goal should be to provide multiple and layered forms of evidence.

_This evaluation is modeled after recommendations from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and the standards from the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE). Please complete the evaluation using the following scale and descriptors:_

3 - _Distinguished_: The candidate exhibits superior mastery of the knowledge, skills or dispositions required by the standard. The candidate substantially exceeds expectations by providing multiple layers of connected and convincing evidence to show exceptional performance in meeting the professional principle.

2 - _Proficient_: The candidate exhibits intermediate to advanced performance in relation to essential knowledge, skills or dispositions required by the standard. The candidate exceeds minimum expectations by providing multiple sources of clear evidence to make a strong case for meeting the professional standard.

1 - _Basic_: The candidate exhibits minimum to intermediate performance in relation to essential knowledge, skills or dispositions required by the standard. The candidate meets minimum expectations by providing at least one piece of evidence to meet the professional standard.
0 - Unsatisfactory: The candidate exhibits unacceptable performance in relation to the essential knowledge, skills, or dispositions required by the standard. The candidate provides little or no evidence for meeting the standard and does not meet minimum acceptable expectations.

10. When are the deadlines for the electronic portfolio?
The final defense of your portfolio is generally in the first week of May. All portfolios are to be made available to your committee 3-5 days before the defense date. Please note dry runs for the portfolio presentation are always scheduled.

11. Who is my audience for the portfolio?
Your audience, primarily, is your evaluation committee (see FAQ #31). However, you should keep in mind the potential of your electronic portfolios. Thus, a secondary audience would be administrators and other educators who will come into contact with you as you embark upon your job search.

12. How much time will the electronic portfolios take?
There is no way to fairly and accurately answer this question. You will need to learn (or review) new computer programs and technology, as well as gathering, selecting, reflecting, and connecting on the various materials in your electronic portfolio. Ultimately, the electronic portfolio should be a yearlong process of learning, exploring and reflecting.

13. How do you create an electronic portfolio?
There are no set rules for creating your electronic portfolio. We will go over the nature of the portfolio in class. However recently we have students have created a portfolio that on the one hand evidences their ability to meet standards- in the form of a matrix, but also
then created an alternative entry to the portfolio that tell the story of their journey to the other side of the desk. It is this multimedia narrative that forms a key part of the Final exam defense. Here are some general guides for understanding portfolio development:

- **COLLECT:** Gather together materials that represent and/or form a part of your learning to teach experiences.
- **SELECT:** Pick meaningful artifacts that serve to evidence your growth as a teacher.
- **REFLECT:** Examine these materials in the light of “critical incidents” and experiences and detail how these experiences have influenced your transformation from content specialist to content teacher.
- **CONNECT:** Weave the evidence together to create a “story” of yourself as a strong beginning teacher who (1) is committed to all students, (2) knows the subject and how to teach the subject, (3) is responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, (4) can think systematically about your practices and learn from experiences, and (5) is an active member of a learning community.

Here are some more specific guidelines for developing your electronic portfolios:

- Each portfolio should be designed for electronic access on the web.
- Each portfolio should include a table of contents and an opening narrative that highlights how your portfolio meets professional standards.
- Each portfolio must include a personal statement of your educational philosophy and a current résumé.
• Each portfolio should contain evidence of your teaching and learning that represents you as a professional educator in terms of the five propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and professional teaching standards in your field (ex. lesson plans, unit plans, photos, video clips, evaluations, classroom organization and management information, and so on.).

• Each piece of work or evidence should contain a caption, annotation, or short narrative to explain how this piece connects to your learning and the professional standards.

Your electronic portfolio should demonstrate that you have the knowledge, skills, and perspectives to be an effective beginning teacher. Finally, use and complete the portfolio rubric. This is your map to successful portfolio completion.

14. How creative can I be?

Be as creative as you can. You must be able to show that you have met the rubric standards, but such elements as design, reflections, links, and your choice of materials to include are definitely areas that can highlight your creativity. As mentioned above the final defense is your final chance to use perform and evidence yourself as a strong reflective and knowledgeable beginning teacher.

15. What do you mean by “reflection?”

Reflection is the heart of the electronic portfolio. “Reflection involves thinking about an experience with the intention of deciding what it means, how it can be explained and what the meaning and explanations might imply for the future” (Haigh, N. 1999)

Your reflection statements will be the mode through which you communicate your
1) Understanding of the INTASC principles you are exploring

2) Reasoning behind artifact selection

3) Explanation for how your chosen artifacts reflect your knowledge, skills and disposition as a strong beginning teacher, and

4) Understanding of the impact of your present actions upon your future professional development as an educator

Here are a few guidelines for reflecting on your teaching practices:

• Focus on your own teaching and learning and student learning in relation to professional teaching standards. Do not focus on the teaching of your cooperating teacher. Your focus should be on how you helped students learn in the context of the school culture in which you are teaching. Place your educational decisions within macro cultural, social and academic contexts and address the impact of your decisions on your students’ performance, actions and dispositions. Identify emerging themes and connections among your practices, and consciously and thoughtfully theoretically ground your practices.

• Because your written reflections will be public, you have a responsibility to communicate to your audience in a professional manner, avoiding judgments and comments about other teachers, administrators, parents, or students, which may be construed as hurtful or derogatory.

• Use pseudonyms for students, teachers, and schools when reflecting on your experiences.
• The program advisor should approve any written analysis of students, classroom, or the school community before it is added to your web page.

• Photos or video clips of individual students should not be posted on the web. Photos of student teachers or backs of students are acceptable.

• Students may have the option of linking their electronic portfolio website to the TESH or other program websites.

16. May I choose which type of computer to use – MAC or PC?

Yes, either Mac or PC is acceptable to use.

17. Do I check my website different browsers?

You should be able to view your website on multiple browser- It helps to use DREAMWEAVER to build your website.

18. How do I get a digital video camera to use?

Program advisors will allow you to sign out digital video cameras.

19. In what ways can I implement digital video effectively?

There are many ways in which video may be creatively and effectively incorporated into your electronic portfolio. Here are a few examples: video-taping a guest speaker that you invited to your class, video-taping yourself reflecting on a practice or interviewing a fellow teacher or guest speaker, or creating digital movies.

20. In what ways can I implement audio effectively?

Again, there are many ways in which audio may be creatively and effectively incorporated into your electronic portfolio. Here are a few examples: tape a reflection, tape a student reading out loud, tape an interview, or tape a guest speaker’s lecture.

21. Where is my portfolio going to be stored?
Currently, your electronic portfolio will be stored in Filebox (and you will provide me with a CD).

22. Who owns the electronic portfolio?

Because you are using Virginia Tech’s equipment and space, your electronic portfolio is ultimately the property of the university.

23. Where do I find support for creating my electronic portfolio?

There are several areas of support offered throughout the year (and throughout campus) while working on your electronic portfolio.

- As a student at VT, you are able to use the on-line web tutorial ElementK for free. ElementK offers on-line tutorials on Dreamweaver and other computer programs.
- War Memorial 220 computer labs offer all software needed to create your electronic portfolio (I-movie, Dreamweaver, and so on). Besides the hardware and software, lab technicians are an extremely helpful and useful resource. Part of their job is to be available to you.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the support possible for you as you create your electronic portfolios.

24. Do I have to show up for the workshops?

The support classes provided throughout the year by lab staff are not mandatory.

Expectations for the electronic portfolios are very high. Professionalism dictates that you do what is necessary to not only reach but also exceed the expectations set for you. Thus, attend sessions that you need. Use the on-line tutorial, lab technicians, and so on, to fill in your learning gaps.
25. Can I name people, students, schools, and/or places in my electronic portfolio?

The concept of anonymity is vital here. You should make every attempt to avoid naming people, students and schools in your portfolio. See your advisor for guidance if you are having difficulty with this issue. No photo’s of students.

26. What are some good web design principles?

Entire books have been written on the subject of good web design. For the sake of brevity, here are a few tips offered by VT professor Peter Doolittle:

- Consistency is key. Pages should use the same colors, fonts, and design features.
- Loading time is very important. Minimize the number and size of any images you use on a web page.
- Reduce eyestrain by using a subtle background.
- Include a menu bar along the top or side of every page.
- Keep your pages simple.
- Stay away from animation unless it is crucial to demonstrate your points.
- Research has shown that people don’t read the web. They scan it. If possible, simplify your text to bullet points.
- Make sure your hyperlinks link to something important and try not to use too many.
- Avoid putting lengthy text on a single page.
- Make sure each page is useful.
- Look at the site on more than one computer and in more than one browser.
- In general, stay away from frames.
• Be responsible for your site. Keep it updated.
• Put all your contact information on your homepage in a very obvious place.

27. What is the Electronic Portfolio Exposition?
The Electronic Portfolio Exposition is your final exam in the form of a conference where you will present your electronic portfolio (30-40 minutes) for evaluation. It is also an excellent opportunity for you to watch, encourage, and support other students as they present their electronic portfolios.

28. How long does the Expo last?
The Expo lasts from one to two days, depending on the quantity of student presentations.

29. When is the Expo?
Generally the first week in May (It appears to be a long way off - but trust us, it isn’t)

30. Do I have to show up for the Expo?
Yes. You must plan on spending the entire Expo supporting your peers by watching other portfolio presentations.

31. Who is on the evaluation committee?
The evaluation committee is made up of your advisor and faculty from the school of education and your university supervisors. We are aiming for consistency so each student will generally have the same committee.

32. What happens if I fail?
If your electronic portfolio does not meet minimum requirements, you will be asked to make changes and re-submit your electronic portfolio to the faculty. This is usually
within 2-3 days of the Expo. If not done successfully during this time you will be given a failing grade for your final exam and will not be eligible for graduation or licensure.