TEACHING WITH ePORTFOLIOS: SUPPLEMENT 1

ePortfolios: Core Activities & Basic Elements

Effective ePortfolios invite writers to engage in three key activities:
Selection: In order for you to create an ePortfolio as a carefully constructed and self-determined representation of your work, you need to make choices about what to include and/or how to frame what you include. Whether your instructor requires a number of artifacts that must be included and allows you free rein over the *nature* of the artifacts, or whether you have qualifications each artifact must meet and then you select artifacts you believe exhibit those qualifications, some kind of self-selection is key to your process.

Evidence-Based Reflection: In order for you to engage in deep, long-term learning, you need to analyze and talk about your own work as you would the work of any other scholar, citizen, or professional. You need to point to aspects of your work that support the larger claims your portfolio makes and articulate why and how they do that, just as you would do for any other analytical project. You need to embrace the opportunity to articulate the processes that resulted in the artifacts you include, as well as how each artifact in the portfolio relates to the others, or to a larger narrative about the you *as* a student, scholar, citizen, or professional in your chosen field.

Revision: In order for you to develop the most effective, cohesive argument possible, you need time to draft, reflect on, and revise your ePortfolio, particularly the navigation and reflective writing that frame the artifacts. Approaching revision as an ongoing process allows you to gain ownership of your writing through collaborative discussions with peers and teachers, as well as the opportunity genuinely to "re-view" your writing.

The different elements of ePortfolios are:

Artifacts: Artifacts are the main feature of the ePortfolio--the objects you choose to display in your ePortfolios, such as an essay or a slide show or lab results--and they are framed and contextualized by the reflective writing. Just as in a museum, where each artifact (say, a painting) is accompanied by informational and often interpretive (what museums call "contextual" and "didactic") text, the artifacts of an ePortfolio are what the you select (or "curate") to tell your story.

Reflective Writing: Reflective writing is the contextual, analytical, and affective frame you build to support and highlight your collection of artifacts, creating a cohesive narrative that ties them all together. To continue with the museum metaphor, the reflective writing is akin to the informational and didactic text you find in museums. Reflective writing most traditionally takes the form of:

> **Introduction to the whole ePortfolio:** This is the section where you address your audience and makes a case for the argument their portfolio makes about them as a student, writer, citizen, artist, future professional, etc.

>> Think of the large posters or fliers that introduce a collection at a museum (the questions they ask and why, the themes they address and what they reveal, the period it covers and to what end, etc.), and you've got some idea of what a reflective

introduction can--and should--do. The thing a reflective introduction should *also* do, which goes a step further than a museum collection's narrative, is to reflectively analyze the work. The key here is that the reflective introduction is argument-driven, and it uses evidence from your own work to support the claims it makes.

Introductions to individual sections/artifacts: Some students find the best way to incorporate reflective material throughout the rest of the ePortfolio is to create a brief introduction to each section, each page, or each artifact (or some combination of these)--depending on the breadth, depth, and organizational scheme of the ePortfolio.

In a museum, such introductions would be akin to the small plaques you find on the walls or podiums near individual artifacts or sections of an exhibit. Again, these are a place to provide context, but also reflective analysis, navigation, even dialogue with readers.

Interactive navigation: One of the key things that distinguishes ePortfolios in form and purpose from paper portfolios is their ability to reach public audiences and to allow you flexibility in the navigation you create for those audiences. You can provide pathways that guide your readers around your eportfolios (i.e. around your metaphorical museum) by way of:

Main menus: Most online platforms have built in abilities to create main menus similar to what you'll find on any basic website (main sections listed across the top, for instance, with drop-down pages underneath; or side menus).

Images: Many platforms allow you to turn images into active buttons/gateways that lead elsewhere, such as to sections or artifacts.

Hyperlinks: Most online platforms also include the capability to create hyperlinks from any place on one page (images, as above, or text) to another place on the same page, from one page to another within the ePorftolio, or from any place on a page in the ePortfolio to an outside webpage.

Visual design/Multimodal Writing: Multimodal writing is writing that makes use of more than alphabetic (or linguistic) text. The way people in composition are talking about multimodal writing these days is by acknowledging five different modes (ways of communicating) that a text can have: linguistic (alphabetic text), visual (color, layout, style, etc.), spatial (arrangement of elements, organization, proximity between objects), audio (music, sound effects, ambient noises, silence, tone of speaking voice, etc.), and gestural (facial expressions, hand gestures, body language, physical interactions between people).

The need to make purposeful choices about color, layout, images, incorporation of video and audio, etc, helps you develop digital composition skills. (Research shows that the combination of thinking about design *and* textual content provides higher-impact learning experiences than simply putting words on paper, because you not only have to think in concrete, information-based ways, but you have to synthesize information and make connections across different modes in order to conceptualize your work and apply your knowledge.