

## STEP 3

# Building an academic career

## What you need to know about teaching portfolios

Developed by A/Prof. Abby Cathcart, Queensland University of Technology



### WHAT IS A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

A teaching portfolio is a way of documenting your practice as an academic and providing evidence of a reflective and professional approach to learning and teaching. Teaching Portfolios are increasingly used as evidence for appointment, promotion and award in Higher Education.<sup>[1]</sup> One of the simplest definitions of a teaching portfolio is:

*“a way of demonstrating the quality and range of your teaching.”<sup>[2]</sup>*

### WHY SHOULD I DEVELOP A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

- It is a way of extending and evidencing your personal teaching philosophy.<sup>[3]</sup>
- A well-designed teaching portfolio can be used to support continuing professional learning about academic practice.<sup>[4]</sup>
- You might be asked to refer to it in academic job applications and in interviews.
- It should encourage you to look for outcomes of your work and use them as evidence of your impact, once you have an academic job and want to apply for promotion or an award you will already have evidence of your achievements and development.
- A well-designed Teaching Portfolio may act as an effective tool to support a reflective and scholarly based approach to teaching.<sup>[5]</sup>

### HOW DO I STRUCTURE A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

There are a range of different structures available and you should spend some time exploring which model might be most suitable for your intended purpose. Teaching Portfolios may be paper based or may be stored electronically as e-portfolios. Most teaching portfolios contain some or all of the following elements:

- A teaching philosophy statement (TPS)
- An outline of your teaching experience and responsibilities (e.g. types of teaching, level, numbers, etc.)
- Teaching strategies and methods
- Evaluation of teaching and learning (reflections on student feedback, peer review, etc)
- Summary of Professional Development Activities undertaken and the outcomes
- Goals and Future Directions
- Appendices (evidence of impact on student learning e.g. handouts, student evaluations, feedback from peers, reflections on practice, esteem factors, curriculum maps, scholarship of teaching, etc.)

One model of structuring your teaching portfolio is to group material and reflective commentary around the five selection criteria used for the **Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence:**<sup>[6]</sup>

1. Approaches to the support of learning and teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn.
2. Development of curricula, resources and services that reflect a command of the field.
3. Approaches to assessment, feedback and learning support that foster independent learning.
4. Respect and support for the development of students as individuals.
5. Scholarly activities and service innovations that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching.

An alternative structure for your teaching portfolio is to group material and reflective commentary around the five areas of activity that contribute to the **UK Higher Education Academy Professional Standards Framework:**<sup>[7]</sup>

1. Design and plan learning activities and/or programmes of study
2. Teach and/or support learning
3. Assess and give feedback to learners
4. Develop effective learning environments and approaches to student support and guidance
5. Engage in continuing professional developments in subjects/disciplines

## HOW DO I WRITE REFLECTIVELY IN MY TEACHING PORTFOLIO

The importance of reflection in higher education is widely recognised and is increasingly included in graduate attributes and professional standards. Most teaching portfolios include examples of reflective accounts where you have thought deeply about your teaching experiences and reflected on ways of improving your practice.

There are lots of different models for reflective writing. The '4 Rs' approach in Figure 1 adapts previous work by Bain et al. (2002) and can be used to structure and scaffold your reflective account<sup>[10]</sup>. Use reflective writing as a way of learning from your experiences and guiding your future practice as an academic.

## WHAT IS WRONG WITH TEACHING PORTFOLIOS?

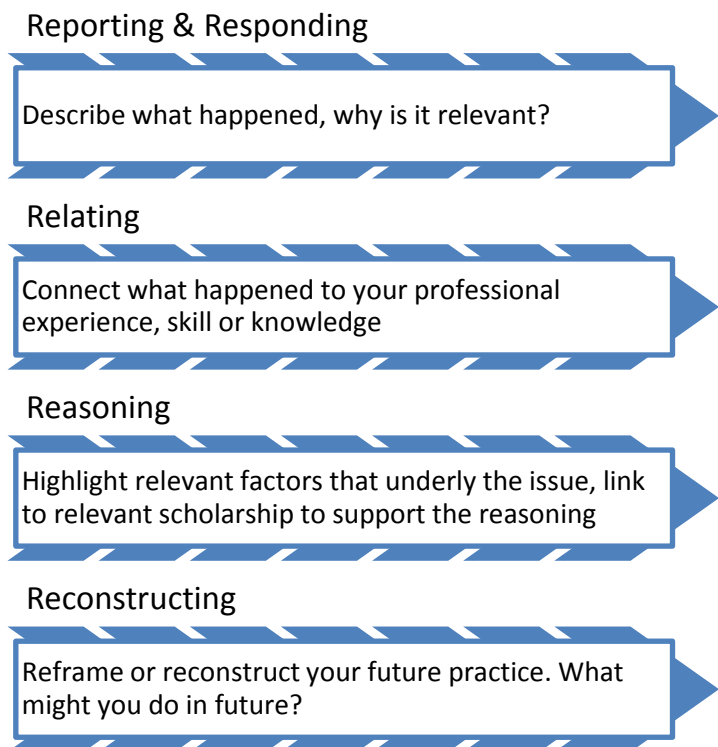
Like statements of teaching philosophy, teaching portfolios can be powerful and useful, or pointless and a waste of time. Here is a reminder of what can go wrong so you know what pitfalls to avoid:

- The teaching portfolio can become a black hole containing everything you have ever done or thought in relation to your teaching practice. Trying to generate meaning from an amorphous mass of learning- and teaching-related artefacts becomes an impossible task. Your portfolio needs a clear structure, a clear purpose, and carefully-selected artefacts.
- The teaching portfolio can be used for formative (i.e., developmental) and summative (i.e., evaluative) purposes. People can become confused about this dual purpose and lose their sense of ownership and connection to the portfolio.<sup>[8]</sup>

The teaching portfolio can become another bureaucratic way in which academics are forced to account for and justify their practice.<sup>[9]</sup> All formative purpose will be lost if the portfolio becomes an exercise in bureaucracy

## FIGURE 1: THE RYAN AND RYAN 4 R'S MODEL OF REFLECTIVE THINKING

(Adapted from Bain et al., 2002)



### References

1. Hughes J and Moore I. (2007) Reflective portfolios for professional development. In: O' Farrell C (ed) *Teaching Portfolio Practice in Ireland: A Guide*. Dublin, Ireland: Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning, Trinity College Dublin, 11-23.
2. Race P. (1999) *2000 Tips for Lecturers*, London: Kogan Page.
3. O'Farrell C. (2007) *Teaching Portfolio Practice in Ireland: A Handbook*. Dublin, Ireland: Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning, , 182.
4. Trevitt C, Stocks C and Quinlan KM. (2011) Advancing assessment practice in continuing professional learning: toward a richer understanding of teaching portfolios for learning and assessment. *International Journal for Academic Development* 17: 163-175.
5. Stefani L. (2005) PDP/CPD and e-portfolios: rising to the challenge of modelling good practice. *Association of Learning Technology*. (accessed 24 September 2008).
6. Office for Learning and Teaching. (2013) *Australian Awards for Teaching Excellence*. Available at: <http://www.olt.gov.au/awards/teaching-awards>.
7. Higher Education Academy. (2013) UK Higher Education Professional Standards Framework.
8. Fitzpatrick M-A and Spiller D. (2010) The teaching portfolio: institutional imperative or teacher's personal journey. *Higher Education Research & Development* 29: 167-178.
9. Trevitt C and Stocks C. (2011) Signifying authenticity in academic practice: a framework for better understanding and harnessing portfolio assessment. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 37: 245-257.
10. Ryan, M.E. and Ryan, M. (2013). Theorising a model for teaching and assessing reflective learning in higher education. *Higher Education Research and Development* 32 (2). 244-257

### Further Reading

- Berrill DP and Addison E. (2010) Repertoires of practice: Re-framing teaching portfolios. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26: 1178-1185.