



# digital portfolios

A growing number of schools are using digital portfolios as a way for students to collect and showcase their work in a single, easily accessible repository.

There are many benefits to this approach. For instance, digital portfolios allow students to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways. They help students take ownership of their work. They make students' work more accessible to a wider audience. And they allow parents, educators, college admissions officers, employers, and others to observe students' growth over time.

You might be wondering how to get started with digital portfolios in your schools. Here are six simple steps that will lead you to success.

## 1 Choose a digital portfolio platform that is easy to use.

If the platform you're using to host digital portfolios isn't easy to use, then students won't be able to work independently. But if students are able to upload their own documents and artifacts, then it becomes a student-directed process—and students will take more ownership of their learning.

Heather Snider, who teaches second and third grade at an elementary school in Ontario, is using cloud-based Nureva™ Troove™ digital portfolio software. She said it's easy for even her youngest students to use on their own.

"They quickly learned how to upload all of their work," she said. "The icons were so clear to them, and they understood what they were supposed to do. They became independent with it, which freed me up to circulate around the classroom and help the children who needed my help. The students were driving their own learning."

## 2 Clearly communicate your goals and expectations, along with a rubric for measuring success.

When assigning projects to students, make sure you give them clear instructions. "I describe in detail for them what they are going to be doing, what tools they might need to use, and what resources they might need to tap into," Snider said.

The digital portfolio platform allows Snider to insert links within the project description that take students to online resources they should use to complete the assignment. For instance, she might refer students to a news story or a video about logging practices from the National Geographic Kids website and then ask them to write a letter supporting or opposing this practice.

Make sure you include a rubric for each project, explaining how the assignment will be evaluated. Some platforms include an easy-to-use tool to help teachers create and customize rubrics for their projects.

"Students can click on an icon to get the rubric, so they can see what is expected for each achievement level," Snider said.

### 3 Allow students to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways.

Digital portfolios “allow us to save students’ work using different means of representation,” Snider said. “And that taps into different learning styles.”

The software works like a document storage and exchange service such as Dropbox or Google Drive, allowing students to upload not just Word files or photos of their work, but videos and other digital artifacts as well. Snider is taking advantage of this ability to give students a variety of ways to demonstrate their learning, such as by creating posters and even magazine articles.

### 4 Include opportunities for reflection.

Student self-reflection is a critical component to using digital portfolios in schools. It encourages students to make meaning from their experience and discover what they learned from it.

The opportunity to reflect is built into the software that Snider is using. “Before students submit their project, there’s a space where they can reflect on what they learned,” she said. “It’s really important to me that they do that. Students record their reflections, so that I can read them and their parents can read them—and hopefully they realize what they’ve accomplished with the task.”

### 5 Share students’ work with a wider audience.

Before Snider’s students submit their work, she encourages them to go back and look at the rubric again, to make sure it meets a high standard—and “they revise the work if they need to,” she said. “When they’re happy with the work, they hit ‘submit,’ and then I can access it or parents can access it” through a secure login.

Making students’ work available to a wider audience is one of the biggest benefits of using digital portfolios. When students know their projects will be seen by others, they are motivated to do their best work.

“I’ve had students who were excited to finish their project, because they could go home and suggest to their parents to look at it,” she said. “They don’t have to wait for a parent-teacher conference; they can show their work to their parents immediately.”

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### 6 Provide detailed feedback on students’ projects.

Evaluating student projects is easy when you have a pre-established rubric to work from. “I use the rubric to mark their work,” Snider said, and students can see this detailed evaluation online when they click on their project.

Parents also can provide feedback on projects or offer encouragement to their children, and students can comment on their classmates’ work as well—allowing for peer review.

Since she began using digital portfolios with her students, Snider has seen their engagement skyrocket. “I’m finding it’s a much better way of recording their learning,” she concluded.

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