



# The Teaching Portfolio

## *A Brief Guide*

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The purpose of this brief guide is to provide NMMU lecturers with information on teaching portfolio development in the NMMU teaching, learning and policy framework.

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# Teaching Portfolio

Teaching

Research

Learning

1

## What is a teaching portfolio?

A teaching portfolio is a means to document, reflect and improve your teaching and students' learning. Your teaching portfolio should fulfil a specific purpose. You may want to use it as a formative (ongoing) for personal development, as a summative (one-time) for showcasing your expertise in teaching and achievements over time, or both. Sometimes you will need to keep both summative and formative portfolios although they serve different purposes. It is important to note the areas of commonality between the two portfolios. A teaching portfolio is a living document; it will change over time as you evaluate your teaching, reflect and act on the results, and develop varied approaches to teaching.

2

## Why should I invest time in a teaching portfolio?

The teaching portfolio is generating significant interest as a developmental, reflective and evaluation tool for lecturers and it is an essential part of the teaching development in Higher Education (Developing a Teaching Portfolio: 2001). Your teaching portfolio will allow you to capture the prosperity of your teaching and your students' learning, so that others will appreciate what you have accomplished. It will give you opportunity to take ownership of your development in teaching and learning, examine your practices and demonstrate your successes in promoting learning by all students for example in your application for promotion or teaching excellence award. When you carefully examine your own practices, those practices are likely to improve.

### 3 How do I get started?

Think about what you want your portfolio to show about you as teacher, and as a learner and how this can best be demonstrated. Collect and analyze all the samples you would like to put in your portfolio. Take care to select examples of teaching strategies you have tried but that may not have been very successful and indicate what you have done to address this. Determine if there is harmony or congruence between your beliefs about good teaching and your practices and, if not, it may indicate a 'gap'. This will provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your professional development as a teacher in higher education. Once you have done the initial work to create a portfolio, it becomes second nature to update it periodically. Critically reflect on each experience you include by asking the following types of questions:

- In which areas do I need to set development goals for myself?
- How have I grown and developed as a result of my experiences or through any difficulties I encountered?
- Which factors constrain good teaching practices in the modules I teach?
- Are my ideas about good teaching affirmed or negated in my practices?

### 4 Why should I invest time in a teaching portfolio?

A teaching philosophy statement is a brief and focused narrative expressing your beliefs, attitudes and values regarding teaching and learning. There is no right or wrong way to write a philosophy statement and it may vary according to your preferred style. The main components of teaching philosophy statement are:

- A brief overview of your teaching responsibilities
- A description of how you think learning happens
- How you think you can get involved in this process
- What main goals you have for your students in particular modules or learning programmes
- What actions you take to implement those goals.

Your philosophy statement should critically reflect on how you put your beliefs about teaching and learning into practice, using evidence such as a syllabus, assignments or other relevant documents from your teaching practice. While statements vary by individuals or discipline, it is meant to reflect your strengths as well as areas for development. Therefore, certain guidelines apply:

» **Be brief**

Keep it short and use a straightforward narrative (first-person) style. Avoid technical language and use broadly applicable language and concepts, since not everyone reading the document is an expert in your field.

» **Reflect**

Make the statement reflective and personal. For example: what skills and values do you bring to the instructional aspect of your job? What is your goal with respect to student learning? What qualities would you like to be remembered by as a teacher?

» **Be concrete**

You should be as specific as possible and provide evidence from your teaching experiences. If you want to use your teaching portfolio as summative assessment you should have factual evidence of achievement in line with objectives, assessment methods stated in your performance contract or relevant policy criteria.

» **Do some research**

No matter how good a teacher you are, you have to engage with the scholarly contribution of others including literature of teaching and learning of a general nature and particularly that in your discipline. This is the first step to develop your scholarly approach to teaching. Just as you are familiar with current trends and issues in your own discipline, it is important to be informed on the trends and challenges in teaching in your discipline.

» **Be creative**

Stand out by making your statement unique to you. Use an interesting organizing style, an original perspective on teaching, or an engaging and creative writing style.

» **Know your audience**

It is important to identify your portfolio's purpose and your audience. If it is to serve as a professional assessment for promotion, make sure to check for any requirements as far as format and structure are concerned. It is essential to familiarise yourself with both Mandela University and your faculty's mission and vision whether you develop a summative or formative teaching portfolio. Identify and reflect on the similarities between your teaching philosophy and these mission statements.

## 5 What goes into the teaching portfolio?

A teaching portfolio is a personalized process. Therefore, when writing a portfolio, you should have a teaching philosophy statement which is the 'heart' of the teaching portfolio and appendices which are solid evidence of the 'claims' you make in your teaching philosophy. Your philosophy statement should address the following questions:

» **WHAT do I teach?**

Describe the courses and modules you are currently teaching, your outcomes for student learning, why these outcomes are important and what students should gain from taking your course. Examples include an understanding of foundational concepts in the field, sophistication as critical thinkers, or the ability to write concise and well-supported arguments. Explain how the courses you are teaching contribute to students' achievements in their university program and after their return to the community.

» **HOW do I teach?**

It is important to document the teaching methods and strategies you use to meet your objectives. Explain whether you prefer lecturing, leading discussion, make use of blended or e-learning, group work or a combination of these methods. Share the instructional technology like Moodle and SharePoint you use, why and how you use them. How will you reach the diverse students in your classroom? List the steps you take to encourage higher level thinking and learning such as synthesis, analysis, application and problem-solving among your students.

» **WHY do I teach that way?**

Document what it is that you believe you accomplish in your teaching that is particularly valuable and worthwhile. When you teach, for example, you may mentor students and contribute to their intellectual growth through gaining new perspectives while you re-examine the key ideas and assumptions that shape the production of knowledge in your field.

## » **HOW do I know that I am teaching in a way that will help students learn?**

It is imperative to evaluate your teaching practice and to reflect on the effectiveness and quality of your teaching. One way to do this is through a narrative statement of how others (students, peers, literature) experience your teaching. Make use of different lenses or perspectives to evaluate if your teaching practice meets your objectives. These include:

- Student evaluation or feedback (the students you teach, students assistants, SI leaders, or tutors)
- Peer evaluation (your colleagues from your discipline, your department, your faculty or Teaching Development)
- Literature in your field (online library databases are useful resources)
- Self-evaluation.

Explain how you use feedback and input from others to develop new strategies for engaging student participation, to meet outcomes and to improve your teaching skills. If, for example, you make group work a regular feature of your teaching, you could cite examples of other cases of people using group work from the literature, or back up your claim that group work is an effective way to teach by referring to some of the 'established' theories which underpin its use.

## » **HOW do I know that I am teaching in a way that will help students learn?**

Reflection is what distinguishes your portfolio from your administration or teaching file. Critical reflection involves analysing your own learning and teaching practices that may contribute to (in) effective teaching, regular evaluation of your approaches to teaching and learning as well as action research approaches such as drawing on alternative teaching strategies to help students to learn when familiar methods fail. It is useful if it is used in a framework, therefore you should look at the theories of learning and identify your own approach to teaching and learning.

## **6 How do I compile my portfolio?**

There are many different ways of compiling a teaching portfolio. The STEPS outlined below are one possible approach that provides a structure for taking you through the drafting process step by step. Feel free to deviate from this plan, skipping or adding steps to accommodate your personal style.

- Clarify teaching responsibilities – Start with an understanding of your role as lecturer in your department with regard to its various functions. This will help you determine what kinds of specifics need to be documented.
- Select items for the portfolio – Based on the teaching responsibilities noted in step 1, you would select information relevant to those responsibilities rather than gathering every piece of data that can be found.
- Prepare statement on each item – You prepare statements on each item that show their relation to overall responsibilities and how they reflect his or her status as a teacher.
- Arrange the items in order – The order might be in terms of importance to your responsibilities. It might be chronological to show growth over time. It might be categories of types of teaching responsibilities to show breadth. The order should reflect the purpose of the evaluation.
- Compile the supporting data – Evidence relating to the statements on each item should be gathered to support conclusions drawn. This evidence is best placed in an appendix.
- Incorporate the portfolio into the curriculum vitae – Since the portfolio is about only one aspect of your responsibilities, it needs to be viewed in the total context for the most accurate interpretation (Seldin: 1993).

Definitely not! Collaborating with Teaching Development on developing your teaching portfolio contributes to the clarity of your portfolio and reduces the feeling of isolation you may encounter while completing your portfolio. Teaching development has different processes of collaborating with academic staff for the development of teaching portfolios which are:

» **Teaching Enhancement Programme (TEP)**

Teaching Development offers learning opportunities on 'Towards reflection: developing a teaching portfolio' within TEP that is open to all Mandela university academics. The purpose is to promote the practice of documenting the scholarship of teaching and to develop competence in reflective practice in order to promote responsive teaching and effective learning. To participate, contact us or register on ProSkills via the NMU staff portal.

» **Consultations and workshops**

On request, Teaching Development offers individual consultations and workshops to the departments and faculties. During workshops and consultations, the teaching development professional explains the rationale for developing a portfolio and aims to provide guidance on writing teaching philosophy statements and overall teaching portfolio development in line with the purpose of the portfolio.

» **Provision of formative and summative feedback**

The Teaching Development will provide developmental feedback on portfolios submitted for comments at any stage of the process. The process and information shared are strictly confidential. Professionals are available to coach and mentor academic staff at the beginning or at any stage of the development of their teaching portfolio.

» **Teaching evaluation**

Evaluation of teaching practice is important as it is a powerful means through which to identify strengths and limitations of teaching a particular module or course. It is the responsibility of each individual lecturer to engage in evaluation in order to determine which teaching practices are more effective than others. Therefore, it is imperative that you yourself take primary responsibility for doing the evaluation.

For further information on teaching evaluation contact **Ms Anne-Mart Olsen 041 504 3037 or . Anne-Mart. Olsen@mandela.ac.za**

» **Electronic portfolio or e-portfolio tools**

You might prefer to develop an electronic portfolio, also known as an e-Portfolio, which is a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed, usually on the Web. There are different tools you may choose from to develop your e-Portfolio, depending on its purpose and the audience you have in mind. Teaching Development offers learning opportunities in TEP through 'Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching'. This focus area will expose you to the online teaching environment and you can link that to your e-portfolio.

The purpose of the focus area is to:

- apply a scholarly approach to teaching with technology promote competence in utilising the tools and resources available at Mandela University to encourage deep learning and flexible delivery in TEL environments.

**Bibliography**

1. Center for Institutional Development and Research. 'Developing a Teaching Portfolio' Accessed online 03 August 2011 <http://depts.washington.edu/cidweb/portfolio/index.html>
2. Seldin, Peter (1993): 'The Teaching Portfolio concepts'. In Successful Use of Teaching Portfolios. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc. Accessed online 03 August 2011 <http://www2.acenet.edu/resources/chairs/docs/Seldin.pdf>



## Recommended reading and web links

1. Cornell University Teaching Evaluation Handbook (1997): The Teaching Portfolio: 'A Model for Documenting Teaching and Its Improvement': <http://www.cte.cornell.edu/resources/teh/ch2.html>
2. Kandlbinder, P., 2014. Constructive alignment in university teaching. *HERDSA News*, 36(3), p.5
3. Marta Nibert: 'Boyer's Model of Scholarship': [http://www.pcrest.com/PC/FGB/test/2\\_5\\_1.htm](http://www.pcrest.com/PC/FGB/test/2_5_1.htm)
4. FitzPatrick, M.A. and Spiller, D., 2010. The teaching portfolio: Institutional imperative or teacher's personal journey?. *Higher Education research & development*, 29(2), pp.167-178.
5. Sellars, M., 2012. Teachers and change: The role of reflective practice. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 55, pp.461-469.
6. The Chronicle of Higher Ed: 'How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy' <http://chronicle.com/jobs/2003/03/2003032702c.htm>
7. UC Santa Barbara's Office of Instructional Consultation: 'Teaching Portfolios': <http://ftad.osu.edu/portfolio>
8. University of Washington's Center for Instructional Development and Research: 'Teaching portfolio resources': <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/PortfolioTools.htm>

Teaching Development team is available to consult with academics wishing to compile a teaching portfolio.

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