

# INSTITUTE WRITING PROGRAM

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## THE WRITING CENTER

### Four tips for designing effective ePortfolio assignments: A guide for faculty

ePortfolio assignments can be extremely effective in getting students to take ownership of their work, to reflect meaningfully on the work they have done, to connect learning across classes and disciplines, and to develop effective writing skills; however, designing ePortfolio assignments to build these skills can be difficult.

### Four tips for designing effective ePortfolio assignments

#### 1. Encourage students to post often and in different formats.

ePortfolio assignments work best when they require students to build their ePortfolios steadily, which provides time for reflection and allows a broad view of their development across a semester (or more). To prevent this from becoming stale or routine, try varying the kinds of material you ask them to post. In addition to reflections on major assignments, try asking students to respond to upcoming readings (which can build analytical writing skills while increasing class participation), to find and post links to outside sources (whether journal articles, websites, or Youtube videos) to enrich class discussions, or to respond to their classmates' ePortfolios.

#### 2. Give students freedom in terms of what they post on their ePortfolios.

One of the most meaningful elements of building an ePortfolio is owning it. Because students have control of the design, organization, and content, ePortfolios become extensions of the students themselves. To acknowledge and support this autonomous work, consider allowing students some freedom in terms of what they post. You might ask them to introduce an outside source they find interesting or to choose an assignment or activity from the course and explain how it was meaningful to them. These kinds of open-ended prompts encourage students to take control of their learning and to practice defining audience-appropriate purposes for writing.

#### 3. Consider dedicating some class time to ePortfolio work.

Building a meaningful ePortfolio requires students to “buy in,” and dedicating a small portion of class time to ePortfolio sends the message that this work is important. For example, on the day that a major project is due, consider setting aside 15 minutes for students to upload their work and compose a short introduction to their project. This indicates that you take their ownership of that work seriously and also helps them to build an expansive archive of their work that is educationally and professionally useful.

#### 4. Alert students to the ePortfolio resources available to them.

Though most students are comfortable surfing the internet, most do not have experience with online publishing, and nearly all will need assistance in understanding ePortfolio design from both theoretical and technical standpoints. To help them succeed, direct students to <http://sites.vmi.edu>, which houses VMI-specific resources for students and faculty building their ePortfolios, and to the Writing Center, which, in addition to housing ePortfolio, has created the Cadet ePortfolio Team. The Cadet ePortfolio team is a group of specially-trained cadet tutors dedicated to assisting cadets with their ePortfolios. Appointments with the Cadet ePortfolio Team can be made through the Writing Center's online scheduling system at <https://vmi.mywconline.com/>.