University of Zurich[UZH]

Educational Development Unit

Learning Portfolios

A Guide for Instructors

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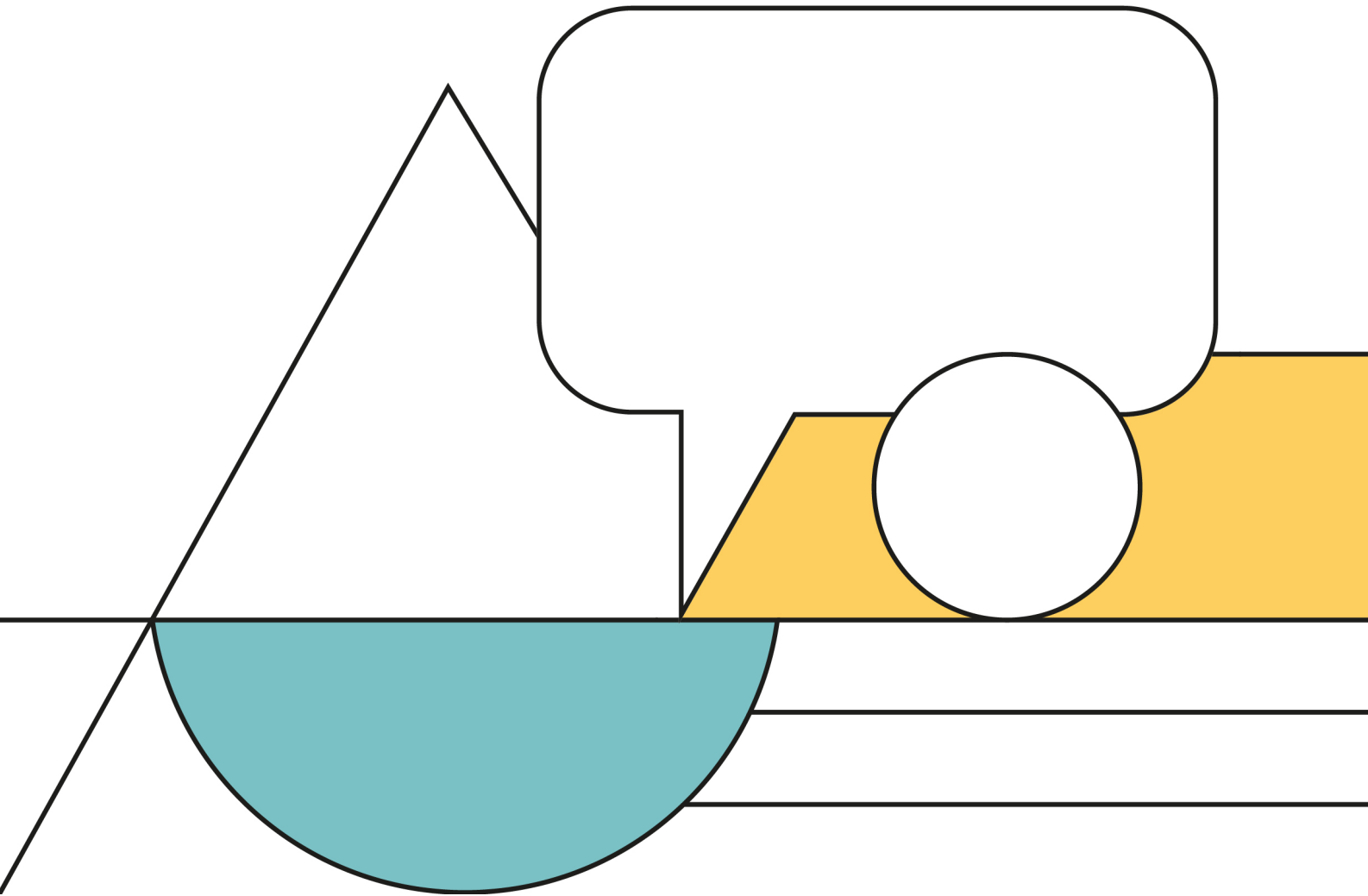

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Introduction

Let's begin with a seemingly paradoxical statement about learning portfolios, from a student survey conducted in late 2020: "Frankly, I don't think that these learning portfolios were useful. However, they were interesting."

This statement allows us two highlight two key questions relating to learning portfolios:

- What is their function (i.e. use) within a particular course, especially as regards teaching aims and learning outcomes?
- How can learning portfolios be made interesting and appealing for students?

This guide aims to help instructors design learning portfolios that are both useful *and* interesting. In what follows, we will show how you can employ learning portfolios as an alternative to, or in combination with, more traditional types of assessment (such as exams, papers, or presentations).

What Is a Learning Portfolio?

According to Peter Goßens' definition, a learning portfolio is

(a) is a type of assessment;
(b) requires students to complete different types of tasks in the course of a semester and, accordingly, may involve the creation of different types of materials;
(c) documents the students' progress over time.

In other words, a learning portfolio requires students to complete a certain number of tasks, of at least two – but usually more – different types. While feedback may be provided more than once (see chapter 7), the learning portfolio is ultimately assessed and graded as a unit.

Note: At UZH, the term *learning portfolio* is often used differently than in the scholarly literature. In chapter 3, we will present four types of learning portfolios, only one of which – the selective-reflective learning portfolio – is commonly considered a learning portfolio in the scholarly literature.

Why Learning Portfolios?

Compared to other types of assessments – especially seminar papers and exams – learning portfolios offer a number of **distinct advantages**:

- Students tend to appreciate the **diversity** of task types involved in learning portfolios: "the diversity [of tasks] made this more interesting than a single written paper would have" (Anonymous, student survey, December 2020). This diversity of tasks also allows instructors to assess different types of skills (cf. Goßens).
- The diversity of tasks also makes it easy for instructors to include space for **creativity** (i.e. in a learning portfolio, one can easily incorporate one or two creative tasks).
- In the case of the selective-reflective learning portfolio, in particular, students can be encouraged to take more **responsibility** for their own learning (cf. Richter 6). For example, a learning portfolio may require students to submit three representative samples from work they have completed in the course of a semester, together with a short written reflection on the quality of their work – which means that the students are (a) responsible for selecting the samples and (b) encouraged to engage in self-reflection (see chapter 3 for more information).

Moreover, while some instructors may choose to use learning portfolios because of these pedagogical advantages, others **may simply be required to use learning portfolios** (e.g. due to departmental/faculty guidelines).

The present guide aims to address the concerns of both groups: those who choose to use learning portfolios and those who are required to do so.

Purpose of This Guide

This guide is designed as a useful tool for new instructors as well as instructors who have already used some types of learning portfolios. It aims to:

- address some of the practical challenges involved in designing a learning portfolio, such as fitting it into a course context, finding good grading criteria, communicating student tasks effectively, and more;
- explain the different functions a learning portfolio can serve;
- address potential pitfalls, suggest possible solutions, and provide concrete examples of learning portfolios (incl. grading criteria);
- encourage you to test this type of assessment even if you feel that incorporating learning portfolios might be daunting.

In addition, this guide also wishes to emphasize the student perspective. Throughout, it is informed by replies from student surveys and workshops conducted between the fall of 2020 and the spring of 2022. (We have also included some direct quotes, which are highlighted.)

How to Use This Guide

This guide can be used in different ways. For those relatively new to learning portfolios, we recommend reading the entire guide. **The sequence of chapters reflects the sequence of decisions instructors have to take** when designing and using learning portfolios:

- Chapters 1 to 5 cover the steps required for preparing a course (i.e. the decisions instructors must take *prior* to the teaching period).
- Chapters 6 and 7 discuss key issues of implementing the portfolio during and after the course, including assessment and evaluation.

Note: As with all project management and design tasks, the process outlined here will include some recursive steps (i.e. double-checking and, potentially, back-tracking). In the chapters that follow, we have included subsections entitled "Review and, if need be, revise" to highlight where you may wish to go back and reexamine earlier decisions before moving on to the next step.

An alternative way to approach this guide, especially for more experienced instructors, is to start with the Checklist provided in Appendix 1. The Checklist constitutes a one-page summary of the present guide, and it cross-references the specific chapters that can be consulted for more detailed information.

In addition, this guide includes examples of learning portfolios from different UZH faculties and departments (see Appendix 2).

Note: **We strongly recommend that both new and experienced instructors read chapter 3**, in which four different types of learning portfolios and their functions are introduced, **as well as sections 4.1 and 4.2**, where the internal structure of learning portfolios is examined in more detail.

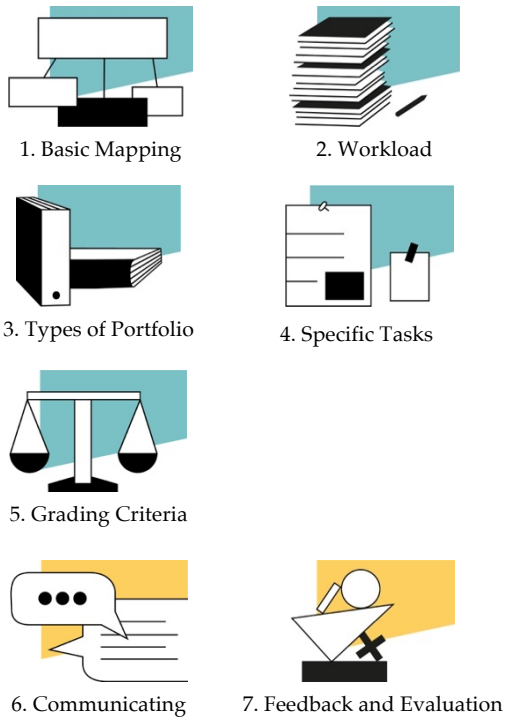


Fig. 1: This instructor's guide presents the key issues relating to learning portfolios in seven steps: chapters 1 to 5 concern decisions that must be taken prior to the course, while chapters 6 and 7 cover issues that must be borne in mind during or after the course.

1 Basic Mapping: Learning Outcomes and Types of Assessment

When designing a course, the first step instructors must take is **to determine what the students should learn and how their knowledge and skills will be assessed**. This chapter presents a way for instructors to map a given module's desired learning outcomes onto specific types of assessment. By mapping their desired outcomes, instructors will gain a better understanding of the appropriate structure for their learning portfolio.

The type of mapping presented in this chapter is related to the pedagogical concept of *constructive alignment* (see Biggs & Tang, 95ff). In the scholarly literature, constructive alignment describes an approach to teaching that recognizes the complex ways in which "teacher, students, the teaching context, student learning activities, and the outcome" are connected, and which aims to ensure that "assessment methods are aligned [to the] curriculum" (Biggs 350). Such alignment significantly improves student learning and performance.

While this chapter focuses mainly on learning portfolios, the mapping technique outlined here may also be helpful in courses with different types of assessment (i.e. mapping desired learning outcomes onto specific assessment types will help you create a constructively aligned learning environment).

1.1 Checking Official Guidelines

In some cases, you may not be allowed to use learning portfolios as a type of assessment. Accordingly, the first and most important step of the mapping process is to **check whether your faculty's/department's regulations stipulate specific types of assessment** (and, if so, which types), or whether you can choose the type(s) of assessment freely. (To find out what is allowed and/or required, consult the module catalog or contact the program coordinator.)

1.2 Learning outcomes

The second step of the mapping process is **compiling a list of the desired learning outcomes for your module**.

For a definition of learning outcomes see the UZH Teaching Tools webpage or Biggs & Tang (113ff.)

Some learning outcomes may already be specified in the module catalog, although possibly in rather general or abstract terms. Once you have compiled these 'official' learning outcomes in a list, you can decide whether or not to add further learning outcomes to the list for your particular course. (This would be practical if, for example, you notice that important points are missing from the general module description, or if you think that the 'official' learning outcomes need to be made more specific).

1.3 Mapping

The third step, the mapping proper, will help you **determine which of the learning outcomes will be assessed by which assessment type** (and, possibly, which learning outcomes will not be assessed at all).

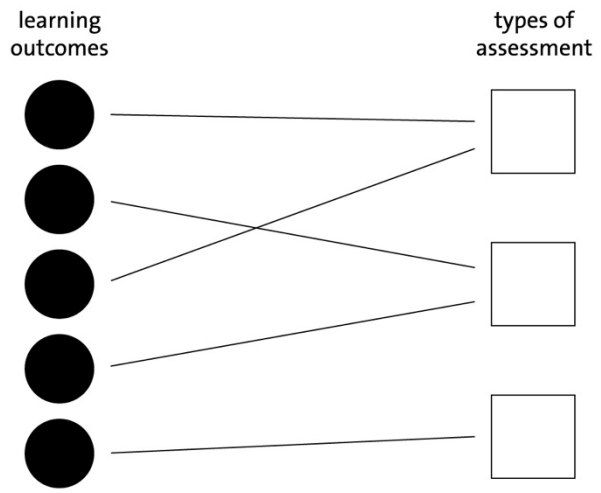


Fig. 2: Basic mapping means deciding which desired learning outcomes will be assessed by which assessment type(s).

To do so, you should create a second list, comprising all the assessment types that you have to/plan to use. For example, the list of assessment types may comprise a learning portfolio and a final exam; or a learning portfolio, an oral presentation, and a final paper. (Note: In some cases, the types of assessment may be determined

by the module catalog or similar regulations; in others, instructors may be able to choose freely.) Once you have a complete list of assessment options, place it next to your list of desired learning outcomes in order to map the latter onto the assessment types (see Fig. 2).

The following questions may help you map your learning outcomes onto types of assessments:

- Which of the types of assessments allows you to test which type of skills?
- Are there any key learning outcomes that you would like to assess in more than one format?
- Are there any learning outcomes that, while important, do not lend themselves to being assessed in any formal way? (For example, instructors may regard students' ability to participate in academic debates as an important learning outcome, but they may nevertheless refrain from formally assessing this skill, as doing so could create a 'climate of fear' and thus prove counterproductive.)

The process of basic mapping will not only help you gain a better understanding of how to design your specific assessments but also make it easier for you to communicate the course requirements to your students (i.e. to answer questions such as 'Why are we assessed in this particular way?' or 'Why are these skills tested and not others?'; see chapter 6).

1.4 Function of the Learning Portfolio

While subsections 1.2–1.4 of this chapter apply to all types of assessment, we will now concentrate on learning portfolios.

As suggested in Table 1, a learning portfolio can fulfill different functions depending on (a) the position of a course within the broader curriculum and (b) the types of learning outcomes that are assessed by the learning portfolio. For example, one task in a learning portfolio could be linked to another type of assessment (e.g. writing an outline for an essay), while the remaining tasks could be more independent (e.g. biweekly homework tasks on different topics).

Table 1: Typical functions of learning portfolios within particular course contexts (i.e. module types, curricular roles, etc.)

Curricular role of the module	Typical learning outcomes / purpose(s) of the learning portfolio	Recommended learning portfolio design
Early studies, mandatory module	Preparation for final exam / final paper	Small tasks; relatively fixed, without too much variation; regular rhythm
Advanced studies, mandatory module	Preparation for other assessments as well as providing a space for students to explore additional topics	Students given a degree of choice; bigger projects rather than many small and separate tasks
Advanced studies, (mandatory-)elective module	A form to explore additional topics; complementing the 'core' curriculum / skills	Stands on its own (i.e. not linked to other assessments); more freedom of choice

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 will provide further information on how instructors can design didactically sound learning portfolios on the basis of their basic mapping.

1.5 DOs & DON'Ts

✓ DO: Make sure that the desired learning outcomes describe *observable* actions, i.e. things that students ought to be able to *do*: "It is necessary to […] use a verb and a context that indicate clearly the level at which it is to be learned and how the performance is to be displayed for assessment" (Biggs & Tang 113). To achieve this, some phrases are less helpful than others. For example, 'Students should *understand* X' does not describe observable behavior. By contrast, 'Students should *be able to explain* X' does. More generally, verbs such as *solve*, *select*, *present*, *list*, *define*, *apply*, or *explain* work well, while expressions like *understand*, *know*, or *be aware of* do not (see Biggs & Tang 119; for a longer list of verbs to use, see Biggs & Tang 123–124; for more on formulating learning outcomes, you may find this UZH Teaching Tools website helpful.

✓ DO: Share the results of your mapping process with your students. This can prevent misunderstandings and increase students' motivation (see chapter 6 for how to communicate this and other information effectively).

× DON'T start designing any specific types of assignment without checking the regulations (e.g. module catalog and / or departmental guidelines).

2 Workload: How Much Is Feasible?

Before designing specific tasks for your learning portfolio, you should pause **to consider the question of workload – for both your students and yourself**. In other words, the learning portfolio should be not only interesting and useful but also *feasible* for everyone involved.

2.1 Workload for Students

The best way to gain a sense of how much work the students can be expected to do is to ask a series of questions:

- How many ECTS points are awarded for this module? At UZH, 1 ECTS corresponds to 30 hours of work.
- If your course is part of a larger module in which the students have to attend several courses (e.g. a lecture, a seminar, and a tutorial), how many of the total ECTS are reserved for your course?
- How much time can students be expected to devote to your class *overall*?
- How much time goes into the class itself (e.g. weekly preparation and participation)?
- If there are other assessment types, how much time will students have to spend on these?
- How many hours does this leave for the learning portfolio?

Moreover, it is crucial to:

- take into account how the module as a whole is assessed and graded. For example, if a learning portfolio makes up only a small percentage of the overall grade, students will rightly expect it to be less work: "I'm spending so much time on [a task that] doesn't even account for 10% of my grade."
- consider the degree of students' familiarity with different types of tasks (i.e. students will usually take longer to complete types of tasks with which they are unfamiliar).

2.2 Workload for Instructors

Whether or not your learning portfolio is feasible also depends on your own workload:

- How much capacity do you have for grading, correcting, and giving feedback?
- When are you especially busy?
- Can you schedule the students' deadlines at times that suit your own timetable and that do not clash with other responsibilities?
- Would incorporating peer feedback help you keep the workload manageable (see chapter 7)?

2.3 DOs & DON'Ts

✓ DO: Fit the design of your learning portfolio to the workload (and not the other way around).

✓ DO: Remember that your module/course is only one among many. Students rely on instructors to design feasible workloads. (In addition, the quality of the work is likely to be better if students have time to do it properly.)

✓ DO: If there is more than one assessment, provide students with some idea as to how much time you expect them to spend on each assignment.

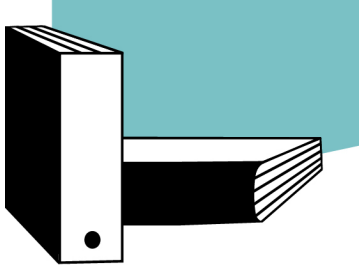
✓ DO: If a task is especially laborious, acknowledge this and explain why it is important.

✓ DO: Think about when students are likely to be particularly busy (e.g. exam weeks) and try to distribute the workload so as to avoid clashes or periods of extreme stress. (For example, you could divide one big assignment into two or three smaller ones that can be completed over a number of weeks, rather than all at once, with one single deadline.)

× DON'T set requirements that lead to a mismatch between the workload required for the task and the weight of the task for the overall grade. (For example, if a module involves two tasks which comprise 80% and 20% of the grade, the workload for each should roughly correspond to these percentages respectively.)

2.4 Review and, If Need Be, Revise

If, after calculating the workload, you realize that your original idea for the learning portfolio is not actually feasible (either because it was too ambitious or too easy), go back to the mapping process and re-distribute the learning outcomes covered by the different types of assessment.



3 Types of Portfolio: Pedagogical Strategies and Learning Process

While the term *learning portfolio* is used frequently at UZH (and other institutions), it is often applied to rather different sets of tasks. In this chapter, we present the **four most common types of learning portfolio**.

Understanding the differences between these four portfolio types will allow you to choose the one(s) that best suits the desired learning outcomes of your course.

3.1 The Additive Learning Portfolio

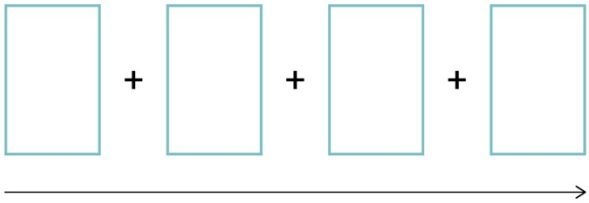


Fig. 3: Additive learning portfolios consist of a specific number of individual tasks that are not linked to each other.

As the label for the first type suggests, the basic logic of such learning portfolios is **additive**. That is to say, the required tasks in this type of learning portfolio are not linked to each other (i.e. they can all be completed independently from each other; Fig.3).

In some cases, the tasks may all be fairly similar to each other, while in other cases, they may vary considerably. Note that it is always possible to incorporate an element of choice (e.g. students have to do three out of five suggested tasks; see chapter 4 for more information on incorporating an element of choice).

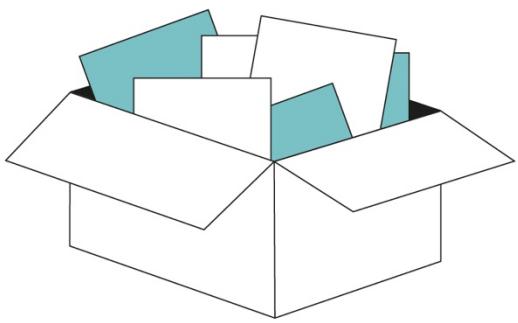


Fig. 4: An additive learning portfolio groups together a set of different tasks that are independent of each other (e.g. three OLAT forum posts, a poster, and a paper outline).

Metaphorically, the additive learning portfolio can be envisaged as a diverse set of documents collected in one single box (see Fig. 4).

Example
An additive learning portfolio can serve as a container for almost every compilation of simple tasks, e.g. OLAT forum posts, homework tasks submitted by email, a statistical problem solved in class and submitted at the end of the session, short translations, case discussions, paper outlines, etc. (cf. Appendix 2, Example 1).

3.2 The Sequential Learning Portfolio

While the first portfolio type is 'merely' a collection of disconnected elements, the second type – the **sequential** learning portfolio – has an internal logic. Specifically, with this type of portfolio, the sequence in which the tasks are completed matters. That is to say, a sequential portfolio comprises a series of tasks that have to be performed in a certain order and that, together, lead to a desired overall outcome or 'endpoint' (Fig. 5).

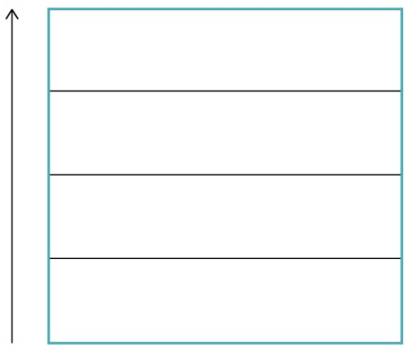


Fig. 5: In sequential learning portfolios, the order of the tasks matters. Often, one moves from basics to increasingly higher-level tasks (i.e. the earlier tasks are prerequisites for the later ones).

The tasks in a sequential learning portfolio thus form part of a series: the first is a prerequisite for the second, the second is a prerequisite for the third, and so on. Completing a sequential learning portfolio is analogous to climbing or building a tower, i.e. you start at the bottom, proceed from one level to the next, and eventually arrive at the top (see Fig. 6 on the next page).

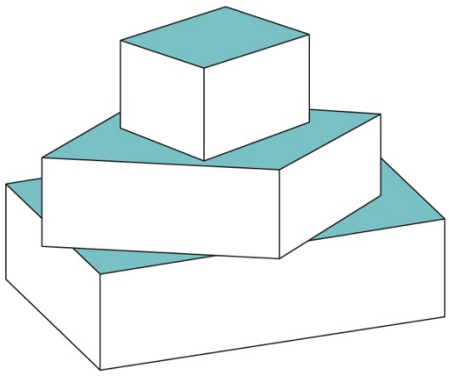


Fig. 6: In a sequential learning portfolio, the sequence of tasks matters (i.e. task 1 is a prerequisite for task 2, task 2 is a prerequisite for task 3, and so on).

Examples

In academic writing courses (especially those for non-native speakers), one might first look at sentence structure and transitions between sentences, and then proceed to paragraph structure and paragraph transitions before moving on to introductions, conclusions, and essay structure (cf. Appendix 2, Example 2).

3.3 The Complementary Learning Portfolio

Like a sequential learning portfolio, this third portfolio type has an internal logic. However, the logic of the **complementary** learning portfolio does not rely on sequence, i.e. what matters is *not* the order in which the tasks are completed. Rather, a complementary learning portfolio consists of several tasks that are eventually assembled into one final product (i.e. the individual parts are intended to complement each other, and together they make up a single, larger whole; Fig. 7).

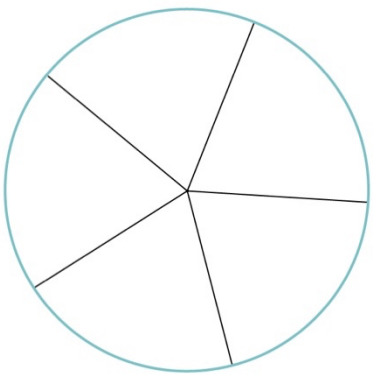


Fig. 7: When put together, the individual components of a complementary learning portfolio form a larger whole.

The best metaphor to describe a complementary learning portfolio is a jigsaw puzzle. When you try to complete a jigsaw puzzle, the order in which you put the pieces together does not really matter. What does matter is that the pieces ultimately come together to form a single whole (Fig. 8).

Example

The complementary learning portfolio could, for example, be a website on a given topic with a number of required rubrics or components. For example, students could be asked to create a webpage about a poem by Oscar Wilde. Each webpage could be required to contain the following: (a) the text of the poem, with line numbers; (b) annotations to explain difficult words or concepts; (c) a video with three observations on the poem's style, themes, and/or genre; (d) an image, with image caption; (e) a short exercise or quiz about the poem; (f) a short bibliography; (g) a creative response to the poem (e.g. another poem, a drawing, a song, etc.; cf. Appendix 2, Example 3).

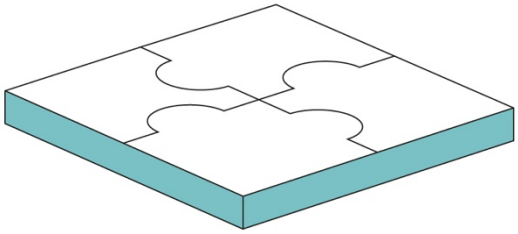
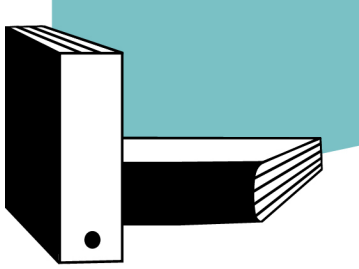


Fig. 8: A complementary learning portfolio is like a jigsaw puzzle. The order in which one puts the pieces together does not really matter. What does matter, however, is that all the pieces fit together to form a single whole.

3.4 The Selective-Reflective Learning Portfolio

The fourth and final portfolio type differs from the other three in two key respects: Firstly, a **selective-reflective** learning portfolio will *always* include an element of choice, as students are asked to submit a *selection* of documents chosen from among a larger set. Secondly, while the first three portfolio types require students to complete only a given number of tasks, this fourth type also prompts students to *reflect* upon their own work, as well as on their own learning process. The reflective part can take any forms the instructor deems fit in the context of their module (e.g., it could be an essay, an oral exam, a questionnaire, a video essay, a poster, etc.). As noted in



the introduction, only this fourth type is considered a learning portfolio proper in the scholarly literature, as the process of reflection is generally considered crucial.

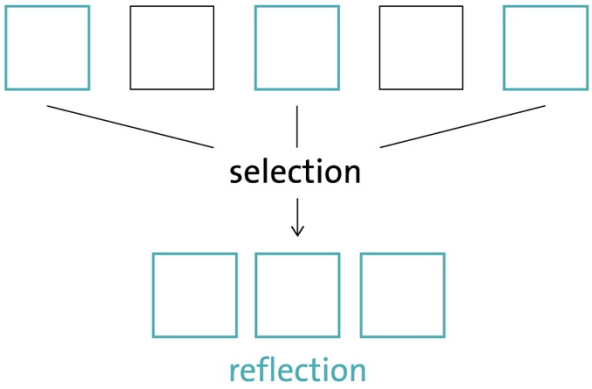


Fig. 9: A selective-reflective learning portfolio requires students to reflect on their own learning, based on a selection of items that document and substantiate their claims.

As shown in Fig. 9, a selective-reflective learning portfolio always involves a two-step process. In the first phase, students complete a number of tasks, thus producing a sort of 'documentary archive' (i.e. the products or outcomes of the various tasks).

In the second phase, students **select** some representative samples from their 'archive,' using these as the basis for a guided **reflection** upon their own work and learning. (Note that the tasks in the first phase can follow an additive, sequential, or complementary logic. Accordingly, **any of the other portfolio types can be turned into a selective-reflective portfolio if one adds a second**, selective-reflective phase.)

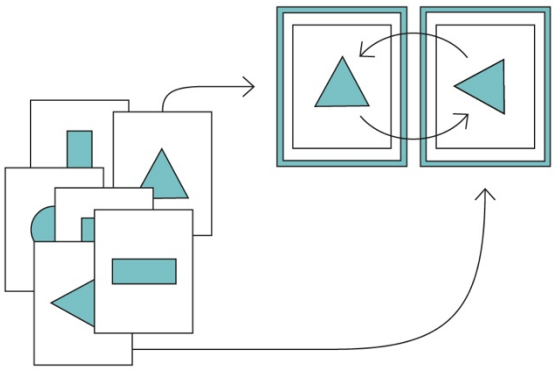


Fig. 10: A selective-reflective learning portfolio encourages students to re-examine their work from different angles, and to reflect upon their own learning (e.g. how effective? useful strategies? relevance?)

The reason why you may want to consider using this fourth portfolio type is that self-reflection is a crucial skill for university students (i.e. university education should not only focus on certain types of *knowledge*, but also on the *methods of gaining knowledge*; see UZH Arbeitsstelle für Hochschuldidaktik, "Lernportfolio," 1).

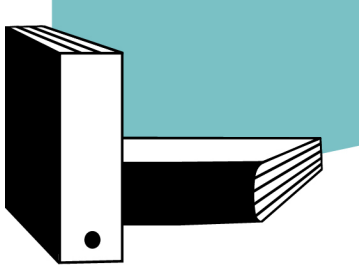
A selective-reflective learning portfolio encourages students to engage in "evidence-based" self-reflection, focusing in particular on their "intellectual development, critical judgment, and academic skills" (Zubizarreta 20; see Fig. 10).

Example

In a writing skills course, students are asked to complete a number of writing tasks based on different types of texts that are useful in their field of study (such as an essay, a review, an abstract, or a dictionary entry). The students get a chance to revise each text after feedback from the instructor. At the end of the module, the students select one of their texts and write a reflective report about the process of writing it. They hand in a learning portfolio that contains all the texts and the report on the text of their choice. (A more detailed description of such a module, offered by the UZH History Department, is included in Appendix 2, Example 4.)

Rather than 'only' at the end of the module, the reflection task could also occur on a regular basis. One example of a recurring reflective task is to have students reply to a particular prompt after each session (e.g. "Please tell us what you found difficult and confusing. If you found nothing difficult or confusing, please tell us what you found most interesting"; Biggs & Tang 139).

Alternatively, one may also use of a "reflective journal" in which the students "record any incidents or thoughts that help them reflect on the content of the course or [program]" (Biggs & Tang 261; for an example from UZH practice, see the module description from the UZH Institute of Education in Appendix 2, Example 5).



3.5 DOs & DON'Ts

✓ DO: If you are unsure which type of learning portfolio to choose, consider the questions below:

- Does it make sense for the various tasks to be independent of each other (i.e. for there not to be any 'strong' links between individual tasks)?
    - If the answer is yes, the **additive** learning portfolio should work well for your course context.

- Can the skill set that students need to acquire be reached only – or at least most easily – in a series of steps that build upon each other (i.e. that are meant to be completed in a given sequence)?
    - If the answer is yes, a **sequential** learning portfolio will work best for you.

- Can students achieve the learning aims best if they create several related component pieces that can eventually be assembled into one single product?
    - If this is the case, the **complementary** learning portfolio is the ideal choice for your course.

- Is it important to you that students acquire meta-cognitive skills (i.e. that they learn how to evaluate and reflect critically upon their own work and learning)?
    - In this case, you should ask them to do a **selective-reflective** learning portfolio.

DON'T rely on gut feeling when choosing the type of learning portfolio. Even experienced instructors will find it useful to consider very carefully what suits their course context best. Students will also benefit from their instructor's clear understanding of the learning portfolio's internal logic (see chapter 6, on communicating the course requirements to students).

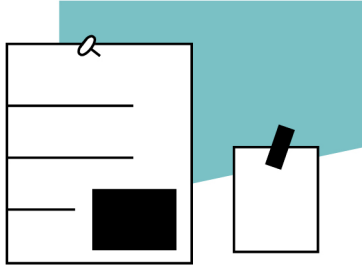
3.6 Review and, If Need Be, Revise

Make sure the learning portfolio you have in mind corresponds to the learning outcomes and workload. If necessary, go back to chapters 1 and 2.

3.7 Some Caveats

- **The four types presented above are ideal types**. In practice, they can be mixed. For example, a learning portfolio could be mostly complementary, while adding one task that is not part of the project, such as a proposal for a research project.

- Note that **there are other typologies of learning portfolios**. For example, Bauer & Baumgartner (2012: 60) distinguish between a reflective portfolio (which focuses on – mainly retrospective – self-reflection; "Reflexionsportfolio"), a developmental portfolio (which focuses on prospective paths and potentials for development; "Entwicklungsportfolio") and a presentation portfolio (which aims to represent one's current profile, e.g. for a job application; "Präsentationsportfolio").



4 Specific Tasks: Timeline and Organization

This section will help you **break down the overall concept for your learning portfolio into individual tasks organized along a specific timeline**. In other words, this chapter focuses on how you can translate the general concept of your learning portfolio into a specific program (incl. administrative aspects like deadlines).

This chapter contains three main subsections:

- Section 4.1 provides general considerations that are relevant for all learning portfolio types.
- Section 4.2 considers specific points for each of the four types of learning portfolio. (To double-check if your chosen type really is the best solution for your course, you can read either just the part on your chosen portfolio type or the entire section.)
- Section 4.3 discusses some key questions about organization and timelines that you, as an instructor, should consider at this point in your planning.

As usual, the chapter will end with some examples as well as some important DOs & DON'Ts.

4.1 General Considerations

(a) Variety of tasks

The term *learning portfolio* raises the expectation of a certain degree of variation (i.e. five tasks of exactly the same type cannot really be considered a portfolio). While the tasks need not be radically different from each other, there should be at least two (preferably more) different types of tasks. For example, three plot summaries would be three tasks of the same type, whereas a plot summary, an analysis of the cast of characters, and a short review of a text are three different types of tasks even though all of them relate to the same literary text.

From a student perspective, one of the features that makes learning portfolios attractive is precisely this type of diversity:

- "[The] learning portfolio changes every week so it doesn't get repetitive and is always a new challenge."
- "[T]he diversity made this more interesting than a single written paper would have."

According to Biggs, having a range of teaching and learning activities creates a higher chance that the teaching objectives will be reached (Biggs 356). However, instructors should keep in mind that different tasks usually serve different purposes and, therefore, must be explained to students separately (see chapter 6). Moreover, having to do a new type of task each week can also be very demanding for students. Instructors should thus aim to create a varied learning portfolio that does not lead to a sort of 'didactic overkill.'

(b) The element of choice

A possible solution is to make some tasks mandatory and others optional (e.g. students have to complete three mandatory tasks and then pick two additional tasks from a choice of five; some of the elective tasks are fairly similar to the mandatory tasks, while others are very different, thus allowing students to influence the degree of variety).

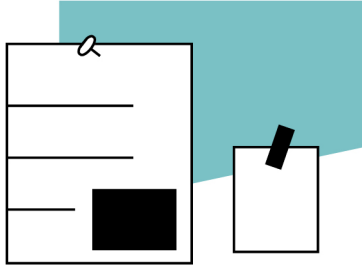
Giving the students the option to choose from a list of tasks gives them more freedom and control over the way they will be assessed:

- "I liked that we could choose our own subjects and were not forced to do a presentation if we'd rather write something […]."

Remember, however, that having to choose can also be demanding for students, and making an informed choice always takes time:

- "I sometimes get […] overwhelmed with too many different choices [… and] having to first figure out what I even want to do."

Thus, if you need/want to keep the workload manageable, it may be better to give your students a limited range of choice, combined with very clear instructions and guidelines (see chapter 6).



Note that optional feedback – from peers, instructors, or both – can also be used to add an element of choice to a given learning portfolio. (For more on instructor and peer feedback, see chapter 7.)

(c) Internal links: portfolio and other course elements

As an instructor, you should also consider how the individual tasks that comprise your learning portfolio will relate to other elements in your course (e.g. to particular session topics, or to other assessment types). More specifically, you need to decide whether you would like the learning portfolio to be:

- closely and regularly linked to the weekly classroom activities;
- more loosely connected (e.g. linked to three out of fourteen sessions);
- running parallel to the course, without direct links to any of the weekly sessions.

For more information on constructive alignment, please see Biggs & Tang (95ff) or this UZH Teaching Tools webpage.

Final assessment

The learning portfolio is often linked to a final module assessment, such as an essay or an exam. Students appreciate learning portfolios that are clearly intended to help them do well in the final assessment:

- "[I liked] the fact that [the learning portfolio] only included aspects which would help with the rest of the course."

This type of link is especially useful in mandatory first-year modules, as students will typically need to pass the final assessment to be able to proceed with their studies.

Class discussion

A learning portfolio can also be used to enhance class discussions (or the seminar atmosphere in general). For example, the learning portfolio tasks could require students to prepare material for class discussions before some or all of the sessions. Students tend to appreciate learning portfolios that contribute to the level and quality of class discussions:

- "[I] liked the […portfolio tasks], as they encouraged us to engage with the texts before we discussed them in class, which led to livelier discussions and more interaction, as we were able to form opinions beforehand"

A learning portfolio that is geared towards improving class discussion tends to work well in first-year classes as well as in more advance modules.

Stand-alone learning portfolios

Alternatively, (parts of) the learning portfolio can be designed as a stand-alone element that is not connected to any other type(s) of assessments. In such cases, the learning portfolio's aim is to *complement* the main path of the course (without interacting with it much):

- "I liked that we were able to gain an insight into topics that we were not able to explore very thoroughly in class."

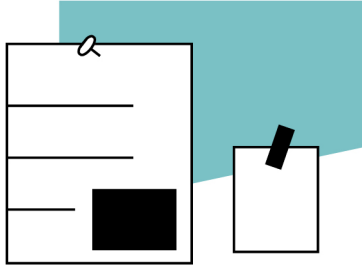
We suggest using this version of the learning portfolio in more advanced classes with students who already have some independent research skills and who will appreciate the opportunity to explore additional topics.

(d) External links: curricular level

In addition to the internal links (e.g. the link between the learning portfolio and other aspects of your own course), you may want to consider how the learning portfolio relates to the overall curriculum of the Bachelor or Master program.

For example, a learning portfolio in a mandatory or mandatory-elective module should arguably concentrate on core skills, whereas a learning portfolio in an elective module may reasonably experiment with more far-fetched and unusual tasks.

Another aspect worth considering is what assessments are used in other modules that your students are likely to book at some point. Is there enough variety in terms of tasks? Could the learning portfolio and its specific tasks contribute to a greater variety and/or balance across the curriculum?



Finally, thinking about external links also involves some rather prosaic considerations. For example, what are the most crucial deadlines in the other modules that your students are likely to take? Is it possible to avoid peak times or even to coordinate your deadlines with those in other courses and modules?

4.2 Specific Considerations Relating to the Four Types of Learning Portfolio

In addition to the general considerations outlined in section 4.1, **each of the four learning portfolio types** – additive, sequential, complementary, or selective-reflective – also **requires some specific considerations**. This section outlines the key questions instructors should ask themselves for each of these types. Please note that the Checklist provided in Appendix 1 contains a condensed version of this subchapter.

(a) Additive learning portfolios

An additive learning portfolio will comprise at least two different *types* of tasks (and, thus, at least two tasks). Depending on the context of your module, there may also be room for an element of choice.

Since there is no overarching project, the timing and organization of an additive learning portfolio is quite flexible. Nevertheless, instructors should think very carefully about the most appropriate time for each task, as timing will be one of the key factors in rendering the tasks meaningful to the students. For each task of the additive learning portfolio, the link to what is going on in the course should be strong and explicit. In addition, it should be clear to students which learning outcomes are covered by which task and why completing these tasks makes most sense at particular times in the course of the semester (and not, say, at some other point earlier or later).

For example, an additive learning portfolio in an English linguistics seminar could consist of six OLAT forum posts, a translation exercise, and a research proposal (paper outline). The six forum posts could be evenly distributed throughout the semester (e.g. to be submitted every other week). This kind of timing makes sense because it encourages continuous engagement with the course material.

Meanwhile, the translation exercise could be due in the first week after a three-week seminar subsection revolving around analyzing and practicing the methods of translation in class. Finally, the deadline for the research proposal could be toward the end of the semester (or even shortly after the final week of classes) because this is when students start thinking about their final paper. Ideally, both the translation exercise and the research proposal would be due in weeks when the students do *not* have to submit an OLAT forum post.

(b) Sequential learning portfolios

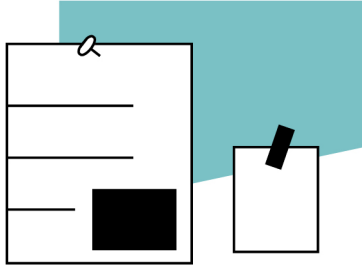
As outlined in section 3.2, this type of learning portfolio involves a sequence of tasks that must be completed in a specific order. The main challenge for instructors is thus to determine how best to 'pace' the tasks. Specifically, is it better and/or more feasible for the students to submit the tasks all at once or in smaller portions throughout the semester?

Note: If you ask students to submit tasks on a regular basis, you should also be able to provide regular feedback so that students actually benefit from submitting portions of their work (see chapter 7 for more information on formative and summative feedback; see subsection 4.3. for more information on how to create a viable timeline).

(c) Complementary learning portfolios

While the order in which students complete the tasks is not important in a complementary learning portfolio, you still need to decide on how and when the tasks have to be handed in. For example, do you want to see some of the tasks at an earlier stage than others to give formative feedback? In this case, to provide students with feedback along the way, you would need to set one or more 'intermediate' deadlines in addition to a final deadline for the overall project.

The alternative, especially when you are working with more advanced students, is to set only one, final deadline for the entire project with no formative feedback at all (see also chapter 7 for feedback). There are two versions of this more independent model:



- Even if there is only one final deadline, you may still want to provide your students with a recommended timeline or roadmap, indicating by when they *should* have done which of the tasks. This is especially useful if the students have no prior experience with the type of project you ask them to do (i.e. without guidance, they will find it difficult to judge how much time is needed for each of the tasks).

- By contrast, if you are teaching advanced students (especially at Master level), it may make sense to tell them very explicitly that you want them to come up with a timeline of their own because acquiring project management skills is one of the desired learning outcomes in your course.

In any case, remember that one can also include optional deadlines (i.e. telling students that they can choose whether or not they would like to submit part of the work at a specific time in the semester in order to receive formative feedback).

(d) Selective-reflective learning portfolios

For this type of portfolio, you should consider not only when the reflection should happen but also what form it should take.

As regards timing, the selection and reflection process typically takes place toward the end of the semester, although it could also be done earlier and/or more than once. Moreover, a reflective task can take various forms: an essay, oral exam, questionnaire, video essay, poster, etc. Your responsibility as an instructor is to decide (a) how comprehensive the students' reflection ought to be and (b) how much guidance you wish to provide.

For example, there are two ways to design a written reflective task. You could provide either a series of specific questions with students providing short replies to each or some general prompts with students responding in the form of a longer reflective essay. (The advantage of a questionnaire is that it is less daunting; the advantage of an essay is that students are given more space and creative freedom for their reflections.)

When deciding which model to choose, consider both the workload involved and the skills you want to assess. (For instance, writing and correcting an essay is more time-consuming and the academic writing skills involved are more demanding than those required for completing a questionnaire.)

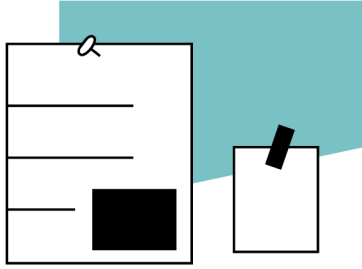
The same considerations apply to other forms of reflective tasks (e.g. video essays or posters): Do you want the students to engage in a coherent, 'deep' reflection, in response to some general prompts? Or is it enough for them to give short answers to a set of specific questions?

A further consideration in the case of a selective-reflective learning portfolio concerns the selection of 'evidence.' When asking students to reflect upon their work and learning, you must also tell them what kind of evidence they need to include to support their claims. Do they need to submit some written documents (e.g. two out of several OLAT forum posts)? Do they have to include references to specific texts that they were required to read for your class? If so, how many? And will they have to create additional material specifically for the portfolio (e.g. a mindmap of the most important concepts encountered in the course)?

Clear and solid grading criteria are, of course, always important (see chapter 5), but they are especially crucial in the case of a selective-reflective learning portfolio, as students may be quite skeptical concerning this task:

- "I hate the idea of a reflective task. […] Don't make us write down what we learned or what challenges we faced, because we're either going to make stuff up or hate you for making us write it down."

It is, in other words, important both to explain that there are objective criteria for what constitutes a good reflection and to communicate the specific purpose of the reflective task in your particular course context. For example, it is not constructive for the student to just talk about how much the module means to them and whether they enjoyed it. By contrast, if students are required to pick three theoretical concepts from the course and to explain why they found these three concepts particularly illuminating (or, alternatively, why they failed



to find these helpful at all), this will lead to a much more constructive type of reflection, as the students will have to explain and substantiate their assessment of these three concepts (i.e. they cannot simply say "I thought it was great"; they will have to demonstrate why exactly they did – or did not – benefit from the concept in question).

John Zubizarretta (11) provides some useful examples of questions that instructors may use to encourage a more objective type of reflection:

- Has my learning been connected, integrated, coherent?
- Is my learning relevant, applicable, practical?
- When, how, and why has my learning surprised me? What have been the proudest highlights of my learning? The disappointments?
- What difference has mentoring in the portfolio process made in my learning?

In addition, Zubizarretta (12–13) proffers several further examples from other researchers:

- What have you learned so far in this class?
- Is this what you expected to learn?
- What else do you need to learn?
- How will you go about learning it?

  (qtd. from Yancey 252)

- What have you learned about the subject that you did not previously know? What have you discovered about your learning style?
- What are the best examples of your work for this project? The worst? Why?
- What do the pieces and the portfolio reflect overall about your learning?
- What new learning strategies have you adopted as a result of the portfolio process?
- What were the most difficult parts of the process? Why?

  (qtd. from Claywell 20, 33, 35, 43 and 49)

4.3 Organizing Deadlines & Timing Feedback

While chapter 7 of this guide contains more detailed information on the types and quality of feedback, there are some aspects concerning the organization and timeline of feedback that you should consider at this stage:

- Do you want the students to submit tasks at various stages or all at once?
- Do you wish to encourage peer feedback? If so, is it optional or mandatory? And when, exactly, should it take place?
- Do students need to receive the feedback on one task before completing the next (or to help them prepare for one of the other assessments)?

It may be useful to plot the various deadlines (including any periods during which you will have to give feedback) onto a semester timeline. This is a good way of double-checking whether or not your learning portfolio tasks are feasible.

4.4 DOs & DON'Ts

✓ DO: Include at least two (preferably more) different *types* of tasks.

✓ DO: When defining the specific set of tasks, consider whether an element of choice might be appropriate (e.g. four mandatory tasks plus one additional task selected from a choice of three).

✓ DO: Make sure to consider very carefully the workload involved in regular deadlines which require frequent feedback, and keep in mind that students benefit from actually submitting something at a given point.

✓ DO: Feel free to mix portfolio types (e.g. one half of the portfolio could be sequential, the other additive).

× DON'T: Avoid a mismatch between the specific portfolio tasks and the overall purpose of your learning portfolio. In other words, make sure that the individual tasks are, by and large, related to the desired learning outcomes.

4.5 Review and, If Need Be, Revise

The best way of checking whether or not the concept of your learning portfolio works is to proceed directly to chapter 5 on grading criteria. At the end of chapter 5, you will be able to decide whether or not you will have to go back to chapter 3 and redraft the overall concept of your learning portfolio.

5 Grading Criteria: Transparency and Fairness

In any course context, **it is of vital importance that students be informed about the grading criteria**, as this is a key prerequisite for transparency and fairness. If the grading criteria are established early on *and* communicated well, this will "send the right signals to students about what they should be learning and how they should be learning it" (Biggs & Tang 191). Providing students with clear and detailed grading criteria thus enables them to assume responsibility for their own learning (Arbeitsstelle für Hochschuldidaktik UZH, "Lern-Portfolio," 6).

Please note that this chapter focuses on the specific challenge of grading criteria for *learning portfolios*. For more information on grading *in general*, consult resources by the AACU and UAF. The Teaching Tools webpage on critical thinking may also be of interest to you.

5.1 Which Components Need to Be Graded?

When creating your grading criteria, it is **useful to start with a list of all components/tasks** of the learning portfolio and to consider their relative weight. As indicated in earlier chapters, the expected workload for each task should roughly correspond to the weight of each task for the final grade (i.e. if it takes a lot of time to complete a task, it should also have a considerable impact on the overall grade). Similarly, the tasks that correspond to key learning outcomes should be given more weight than those that cover secondary learning outcomes.

A list of tasks could look as follows:

- five relatively simple tasks A (e.g. five short OLAT forum posts),
- two more difficult tasks B (e.g. one-paragraph summaries of two essays from an academic journal or edited collection),
- a reflective essay,
- an appendix that contains two of the five forum posts and one of the summaries.

The next step is to convert the list into a table.

Table 2: Once you have an overview of the different tasks, you can decide how much weight they should be given.

Tasks A (5x)	Tasks B (2x)	Reflection (incl. appendix)	Paper outline
3 points each	10 points each	40 points	25 points
15%	20%	40%	25%

As indicated in Table 2, we suggest working with points for the grading criteria, as these points can later be added up (e.g. 10 out of 15 for Tasks A, 18 out of 20 for Tasks B, 30 out of 40 for the Reflection, and 22 out of 25 for the Paper outline → 80 out of 100 overall) and very easily converted into a grade (see section 5.3 below).

Note that students appreciate it if tasks completed earlier in the semester count less than tasks completed later, as this allows them to learn from and compensate for mistakes that occurred early on in the learning process. This is especially important if the learning portfolio is primarily intended to prepare students for a different type of assessment, e.g. a final paper or final exam:

- "As our learning portfolio didn't count that much for the final grade, pressure wasn't too high if you weren't that successful, but you knew what to do better next time."

5.2 Coming Up with a Points Scale & Criteria

When formulating the specific grading criteria for each of the sub-tasks, we recommend starting with the smallest component (e.g. Tasks A in the above example), as the grading criteria for these will also be rather simple (i.e. if there are only a few points to distribute, one cannot come up with a highly complex set of criteria).

The simplest version of a points scale would be to give only 0 or 1 point (done/not done). A slightly more nuanced but still rather simple points scale would award, say, 0 points if the task has not been completed at all, 1 point if it's been done poorly, 2 points if it's been done adequately, and 3 if it has been done well or very well.

The basic balancing act is to leave yourself some freedom for the grading process but nevertheless provide the students with a clear sense of what they are expected to do (i.e. the specific criteria on the basis of which their work will be assessed).

The **criteria do not need to be the same for each of the different types of tasks**. The more important task types may have complex and nuanced grading criteria, while smaller tasks will inevitably come with simple points scales.

Note: To say that one should have clear and nuanced grading criteria does not mean that one always has to provide a specific label for each of the points awarded (see above: 0 = not completed, 1 = poorly done, etc.). For example, in the case of a reflective essay with 40 points overall, one could simply indicate that 5 points will be awarded to language, 5 to formal aspects (incl. bibliography and referencing), 5 to the use of samples from one's coursework to support the claims made in the essay, 5 to the incorporation of theoretical sources, and 20 to overall coherence and argument logic. Indeed, in some cases, students prefer broader categories with verbal commentary to grading grids:

- "[O]ften, with checklist-like feedback, the overall impression and links between the different parts are neglected […]."

And yet, in other cases, a complex and detailed grading grid can save instructors the trouble of explaining everything. In either case, students appreciate being shown the complete grading criteria and having access to the grading sheet *before* starting a task. (For more information on how to communicate with students, see chapter 6. For sample grading grids, see Appendix 2.)

It is worth noting that **different types of portfolios may also lead to a different approach to grading**. Commenting on what we would call selective-reflective learning portfolios, Biggs & Tang suggest grading "the package" rather than "individual items" (357). In our view, however, this does not necessarily apply to the other portfolio types. Indeed, in the case of an additive learning portfolio, it is doubtful that grading the package is even possible as the tasks are, after all, not connected to each other (i.e. there is no "package" to grade).

5.3 Converting Points into Grades

(a) Linear calculation

The easiest way to translate points into grades is to work with a linear formula such as the one offered below. To use the formula, all you need to do is decide how many points students need for the maximum grade (i.e. in the Swiss school system, a grade 6):

$$\frac{\text{points achieved}}{\text{points needed for a 6}} \times 5 + 1 = \text{grade}$$

For instance, in the example above, the total number of points for the learning portfolio is 100. As an instructor, you can decide if students need at least 100 points for a 6, or at least, 98, or 95. Let's assume that you've chosen 98 points as the minimum required for a 6 and that a student in your course has scored 80 points. The grade can then be calculated as follows:

$$\frac{80}{98} \times 5 + 1 = \text{grade}$$

If the learning portfolio is your only assessment, you can round the result to a half grade (i.e. 5.0, in the example above. If there are other graded assessments (e.g. learning portfolio 30%, final exam 70%), you must use the unrounded grade to calculate the overall grade.

(b) Other systems

For other ways of converting points into grades, consult the guidelines published by ETH and UniBe.

5.4 Potential Pitfalls

(a) Creativity

Many instructors wonder whether it is even possible to grade more creative tasks. In general, it may be best to give creative tasks relatively little weight, especially if you yourself feel uncertain as to how to assess them objectively. In our experience, students appreciate the opportunity to be creative even if the weight given to the task is relatively small – provided that the task is not extremely time-consuming. (Note: One way of compensating for the relative lack of weight given to a creative task is to give very detailed, thoughtful feedback: see also chapter 7.)

For instructors wishing to give creative tasks more weight, Biggs & Tang (2011: 263) present detailed criteria for assessing creativity.

(b) Revisions

If you want students to revise certain tasks on the basis of instructor or peer feedback, you should consider whether or not the revision will be graded. We recommend that you ask yourself whether accepting and incorporating feedback is part of what you want students to learn.

There are three ways in which to grade tasks that have undergone revision as a result of feedback: (a) grade only the first draft; (b) grade only the revision; and (c) grade both. For example, you could award 10 points to the first draft and another 10 points to the second draft, giving both versions equal weight. Alternatively, you could prioritize the first draft (8 points) and then simply award some 'bonus points' for the revision (poor revision = 0 extra points / adequate revision = 1 extra point / excellent revision = 2 extra points).

Caveat

"Just tell me what I have to do to get a good grade"

This student quote illustrates not only that students are interested in clear grading criteria but also that achieving good grades can sometimes be more important to them than the learning experience itself. You can counteract this tendency by stressing the purpose behind each task, emphasizing how they will help your students achieve the desired learning outcomes (see chapter 6 for more information).

5.5 DOs & DON'Ts

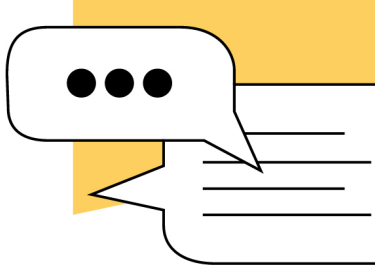
✓ DO: The presentation of the grading criteria should correspond to the type of learning portfolio. For example, if your learning portfolio is complementary, do not break the grading grid down into completely independent elements, but present the grid in such a way that it emphasizes how everything fits together.

By contrast, if your learning portfolio is additive, do not combine the different types of tasks into one single grading grid, as this would seem to imply – incorrectly – that the individual tasks are somehow related to each other.

✓ DO: Leave at least some elements of a course ungraded, or graded 'minimally' (i.e. 0 points = not done, 1 point = done) – especially in contexts where the students are expected to experiment with and/or share more daring ideas:

- "[I liked that some tasks] were not graded (i.e. as long as you write something relevant, it counts as 'done' and is not evaluated in terms of quality), which allowed me […] to test the ground with my ideas without having to be overly concerned with writing something 'neat' that I know would work but might not be as innovative/interesting."

× DON'T: Do not grade group tasks collectively without checking your faculty regulations on group work and 'collective grading' first! If you do grade a group project collectively, keep in mind that students often find this problematic, as this student laments: "I found it unfair that everyone got the same grade." Ideally, collective grading should never be merely a matter of convenience ('It's less work, so I'll do it'). Rather, collective grading should be used if teamwork and sharing responsibility are desired learning outcomes for your course.



6 Communicating: Why, What, When, and How?

As an instructor, you can think of supervision and grading as one aspect of the personal relationship between you and the students. In the case of learning portfolios, in particular, close communication and interaction between instructors and students is key (Arbeitsstelle für Hochschuldidaktik UZH, "Lern-Portfolio," 4).

6.1 Why Is Communication Important?

Navigating the instructor-student relationship can be difficult because it entails **two roles that are, to some extent, contradictory**. On the one hand, the instructor is a *collaborator* who helps the students plan their learning portfolio and gives them formative feedback. On the other hand, the instructor will assume the role of a *judge* when grading and assessing students' work. Accordingly, it is vital that the terms of the relationship be communicated clearly from the start.

6.2 What Should Be Communicated?

Only if there is clear communication will students be able to participate properly and to fully appreciate the learning experience. Specifically, **students need to know the following** (cf. Jones 4):

1. Desired learning outcomes
2. Specific assignments
3. Grading criteria
4. Deadlines and, for exams, dates & duration
5. Communication channels
6. Extent of support by instructor

Points 5 and 6 are especially important in order to avoid misunderstandings between instructors and students (cf. Schmocker): When and how can students reach you? What kinds of questions will you be ready to answer? How much help are you prepared to offer, and how often? Until which point in the semester are you available to answer questions? For example, you may want to tell students that they can contact you by email if they have questions about the learning portfolio, but not more than twice, and only until one week prior to the final deadline.

6.3 When to Communicate?

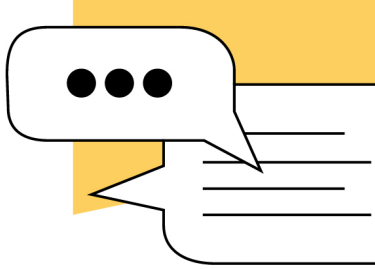
All the **relevant criteria must be made available in writing before or, at the latest, by the time the course starts**. An easy way to do this is to upload a document containing all the relevant information outlined above to OLAT or a similar online learning platform. This ensures that students can consult the document whenever necessary in the course of the entire semester. A very useful strategy is to tell students to read the document carefully as part of their homework for the first or second session, and to let you know if any of the information is unclear. In addition, you should communicate the key information verbally in the first and/or second week. Ideally, the students should know all the conditions and course requirements while they still have the option to cancel the module.

In addition, you should also repeatedly highlight important aspects when they become relevant. In other words, don't shy away from reiteration! For example, once the students have submitted the first set of tasks for their learning portfolio, remind them of upcoming deadlines as well as the next steps they need to take. Another crucial aspect to consider is the timing of feedback, especially in the case of formative feedback. You can find more information on feedback in chapter 7.

6.4 How Best to Communicate?

We recommend that you use material from the planning stages to explain the learning portfolio (i.e. requirements, logic, and purpose) as well as the other assessments to your students.

For example, you can use your mapping of the learning outcomes to illustrate that each assessment is linked to the learning outcomes. Likewise, you may use our typology of learning portfolios (incl. the illustrations provided in chapter 3 of this guide) to explain the structure of your learning portfolio to your students. In addition, you should also share your grading criteria, as this will help students understand your aims for each of the tasks.

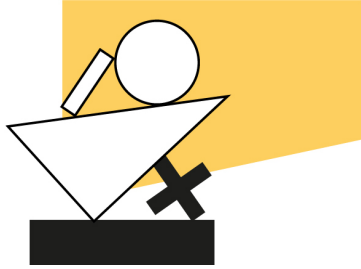


6.5 DOs & DON'Ts

✓ DO: Make sure that all the information about learning outcomes, specific assignments, grading criteria, deadlines, exam dates and duration, communication channels, and extent of support provided by the instructor is available in writing prior to the end of the module cancelation period.

✓ DO: Communicate the key information more than once. Students book many modules with many different requirements, deadlines, etc., so they will appreciate friendly reminders.

× DON'T: Do not assume that the aims and logic of your learning portfolio are obvious to the students. While you have thought long and hard about the types of assessment and understand perfectly why they make sense, this may not be the case for the students. Accordingly, you will want to provide the students with some insight into your thought process and spend some time explaining the underlying rationale as well as the requirements in the first and/or second session.



7 Feedback and Evaluation: Learning from Experience

Constructive feedback not only ensures that students will find a given module or course more satisfactory; it also has a significant impact on the quality and extent of their learning.

Accordingly, we will cover the various facets of giving and receiving feedback in considerable detail. Section 7.1 will consider some general questions (e.g. the distinction between corrections and feedback, and that between formative and summative feedback). The next two sections will focus on learning portfolios, specifically on instructor and on peer feedback. The chapter concludes by outlining why learning portfolios – especially selective-reflective ones – may provide you with useful feedback about your own teaching.

7.1 Definitions & General Considerations

(b) Corrections or feedback?

First, we would like to distinguish between 'linear' **corrections** (i.e. going through an assignment and highlighting things that are wrong) and structured **feedback** that (a) includes comments on what worked well, (b) suggests strategies for improvement, and (c) prioritizes these recommendations (i.e. it indicates which of the problems need to be dealt with most urgently).

Note that, in the case of very short and simple tasks, it may be appropriate to provide corrections only. However, by and large, students appreciate it if you supplement your 'linear' corrections with more structured and extensive feedback that also points out what they did well and, most importantly, how they can improve.

(b) Formative or summative feedback?

The following student comment highlights three important facets related to feedback:

- "[C]arefully prepared feedback [… helps you pass your courses] because you understand what you are doing and what you did wrong, [so that you can] do it better next time […]."

The statement focuses on three temporal levels: (a) what happened in the past, (b) what is happening now, and (c) what could (or should) happen in the future. If you follow the recommendations outlined in this document, the feedback process in your course will address each of these levels:

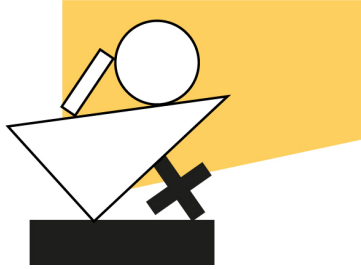
1. By communicating your grading criteria in advance (see chapter 6), and by providing feedback along the way, you are helping students with what they need to be doing.
2. When assessing students' performance in feedback, you look back at what they have done, pointing out gaps and mistakes while also commenting on what they did well.
3. In your feedback, you should focus not only on past work and/or what is going on now, but also on how things can be improved in the future.

As noted above, the first has to some extent already been dealt with in chapter 6 (i.e. clear grading criteria will ensure that students know what they need to do).

The remaining two points can be approached in two basic ways: either in one single step, or in a process that involves two or more steps:

- If you combine everything in one step, your feedback will be exclusively **summative**, i.e. you will look only at the final product. The feedback will combine assessment/grading with recommendations for the future, but the students will not have the chance to implement your recommendations in the current course context.

- By contrast, if you provide feedback in two or more separate steps, these will likely be (partly) **formative**, i.e. while you may grade and assess the work done up to a given point, you will also give recommendations on how students can proceed and improve – and they will have the chance to implement your recommendations as they complete the remaining task(s).



The difference between formative and summative feedback links back to the two roles you have as an instructor (see chapter 6). In your role as a *collaborator*, you may provide formative feedback; in your role as *judge*, you provide summative feedback. (For more information on the distinction between formative and summative feedback see Biggs & Tang 195-6.)

Learning portfolios are especially suited to a process that also includes formative feedback as, by definition, learning portfolios involve at least two (and usually more) tasks. Students will likely have to complete these tasks at various points in the course of the semester – and each completed task constitutes an opportunity for formative feedback. Moreover, note that such formative feedback can be provided either by you, as the instructor, or by peers, or even both (see section 7.3 for a discussion of peer feedback).

Depending on whether students hand in the entire learning portfolio as a single product or as multiple products, formative feedback can be provided in different ways. Three different scenarios are described below:

1. If students hand in their entire learning portfolio as a single product at the end of your course, you can give them the *option* to submit a preliminary draft earlier, for formative feedback. In this scenario, the preliminary assessment *must not* count toward the final grade.

2. An alternative for courses in which students hand in the entire learning portfolio toward the end is to make submitting a preliminary draft *mandatory*. In this scenario, all students will receive formative feedback from the instructor. Accordingly, you can decide freely whether or not the preliminary draft should count toward the final grade.

3. Finally, in courses where students are required to submit the learning portfolio in more than one portion, you can give formative feedback each time a portion is submitted. Ideally, the formative feedback on each of these portions should help students complete the next set of tasks. While each of these portions will likely be graded, in some contexts it may make sense to have students revise each portion (and perhaps even to award them some points for doing so).

In general, we would recommend that you incorporate some form of formative feedback in your module.

(c) The timing of feedback

If possible, you should let the students know how much time you will need to correct their work and prepare the feedback. The timing of formative feedback and/or of feedback on learning portfolios that serve as preparation for other assessments (e.g. a final exam), is crucial:

- "If there is a [preparatory assignment] I would like to receive it before the […] exam […] so I can prepare for the final exam based on the feedback of the midterm."

Not only do students find it frustrating if they have to wait a long time for feedback, but it may also cause unnecessary stress (especially if they are worried about having failed the assignment). Moreover, students may no longer be in the right mindset to process the feedback:

- "If the feedback takes too long, I'll already have forgotten what exactly I did for the *Leistungsnachweis* [i.e. assignment]. It's better to receive feedback while it is still fresh in my mind."

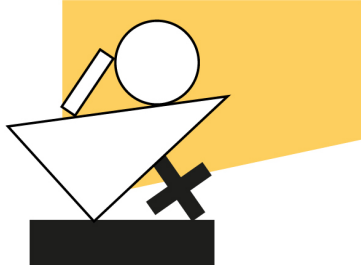
In addition, students find it frustrating if they do not receive any updates. In other words, if you cannot correct an assignment as quickly as you had hoped, you should let your students know that the feedback will be delayed (and, ideally, indicate how much additional time you will need).

Usually, students are very understanding:

- "People get busy… but it'd be nice to know when the feedback will come."

Ideally, however, you should not take longer than two months to provide feedback, as this appears to be the limit of their goodwill.

- "One instructor didn't hand back a paper for over 3 months. That's pathetic."



7.2 Instructor Feedback: Format & Quality

(a) Oral, Written or Recorded?
Feedback can be provided in different formats, the most common of which are oral or written. Note, however, that recorded audio or video feedback may be a viable alternative. Whichever format(s) you choose, many students prefer feedback they can archive for future reference:

- "I definitely prefer written feedback, so that I can save/store the feedback […] and then use the feedback to (hopefully) improve on my next assignment. If it is oral feedback, I might struggle to remember what I've been told […]."

It is also worth considering that some students are intimidated by oral feedback because it means being directly exposed to the instructor's 'judgmental gaze.' Accordingly, they would prefer to be able to react to the feedback without being observed:

- "[T]hat way I don't have to see the disappointment in the instructor's eyes ... I'm kidding but it does factor in a little."

At the same time, some students actually appreciate oral feedback because of its conversational nature, which makes it easy for them to ask questions:

- "I find that oral feedback is most helpful, the instructor is able to fully articulate and express their feedback which can lead to a discussion of the assignment."

Perhaps the ideal solution is to provide some type of permanent, 'storable' feedback as well as oral feedback (or at least an offer to give oral feedback).

(b) Including positive aspects in your feedback
Positive aspects in feedback matter, not because students want to be complimented but because they want to know what they did well and should continue doing. Even if the assignment as a whole is not satisfactory, you should thus also acknowledge what worked (comparatively) well. A good way of doing this is to single out at least one positive aspect and start with this before moving on to criticism.

This does not mean that students want you to make up something out of thin air: "No point in positivity if it's dishonest." Rather, they are interested in authentic and helpful feedback, and the vast majority will appreciate criticism if it is constructive.

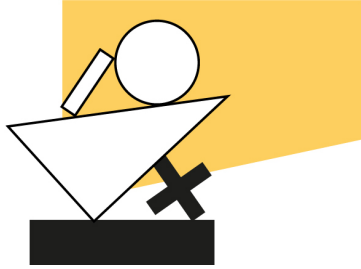
Constructive or 'destructive': what is the difference?
Students have a very clear sense of what distinguishes constructive criticism from unhelpful comments:

- "[C]onstructive feedback analyses the mistakes or problems in the context of what was expected and outlines how a different perspective could have [led] to an optimal project. '[D]estructive' feedback may point out the mistakes and show the correct answer/concept, but it lacks the context necessary to render it useful for future projects."

For example, consider the difference between the following two statements:

- 'Note that you overuse the passive voice.'
- 'Note that you overuse the passive voice. This is quite common for native speakers of German, where the passive voice is used frequently (especially in academic prose). In English, you should generally use the passive voice only if (a) the agent of an action is unknown, or (b) using the passive allows you to move the important information to the end of a sentence, for emphasis (e.g. *He did it* vs. *It was done by* ***him****!*').

The first of these statements isn't in any way rude or aggressive. However, it does not tell the student how they may improve, nor does it provide them with a sense of just how unusual or 'bad' this problem is. The second statement, by contrast, points to a way forward and also makes clear that the mistake in question is common, thus signaling that this particular problem is not, per se, a major reason for concern. (For a summary of student views about constructive and destructive feedback, see Appendix 3.)



7.3 Peer Feedback: Specific Considerations

Peer feedback can be a way of saving time for you as an instructor, but this should not be the primary or sole motivation for using it. **From a student perspective, peer feedback often appears especially helpful if it is provided on draft versions**, i.e. as formative feedback:

- "Peer feedback can help a lot for outlines and unfinished work. It gives one [a] different viewpoint and new input to think about."

Note, too, that peer feedback can have an especially liberating effect for students if the instructor is not present:

- "I respect my peers a lot and there's not [… this] power relation thing between instructor-student feedback, so I get to discuss their feedback with them without seeming rude or disrespecting their authority."

Another positive feature of peer feedback is that students get the chance to practice giving feedback.

By contrast, **students are more skeptical when it comes to peer feedback on finished/completed assignments**, i.e. summative feedback from peers, which means that you as an instructor would have to explain in more detail why you think it is important.

While peer feedback could be included in the learning portfolio as a homework task, you may also want to consider giving the students time during class:

- "I appreciate it if instructors reserve time in their seminars to do proper peer review […]."

When planning a peer feedback session, it is important to give students some instructions for the feedback process (e.g. to not make personal criticisms and, if possible, to suggest ways to improve) and also to choose a point in the semester when they can really benefit from exchanging ideas and asking questions (e.g. a session two weeks prior to an important deadline).

Of course, it is possible to combine formative peer feedback with formative instructor feedback. Different methods of peer feedback processes are described in more detail by Biggs & Tang (142-3).

7.4 DOs & DON'Ts

✓ DO: Make sure to base your feedback on the grading criteria that you communicated to your students (see chapters 5 and 6).

✓ DO: In addition to providing feedback on the learning portfolio, you can also look at the students' learning portfolios as part of the evaluation of your teaching. While additive, complementary, and sequential learning portfolios can be seen as *implicit* evaluations of the your teaching, the selective-reflective learning portfolio will explicitly comment on students learning process and can, therefore, provide you with important insight on what went well or what went wrong and why. (Note, however, that this type of information should only ever complement, and never replace, a proper course evaluation.)

✓ DO: Feedback can be very hurtful for students and can have a negative effect on their learning, especially if the student in question is already struggling (e.g. with health issues or a very high workload). If you know in advance that your feedback may come across as harsh, you may want to provide students with some 'advance warning.' You could, for example, start the feedback as follows:

- 'While I've included quite a lot of corrections below, many of the mistakes are not, in fact, particularly problematic. Moreover, there are also a number of positive points: …').

- 'While I appreciate that you have put considerable time and effort into this learning portfolio, unfortunately there are too many problems overall. I will provide you with detailed feedback and explanations as well as ways in which you can improve below.'

× DON'T: Sugarcoating is not helpful and not appreciated by students. If the feedback is mostly negative, don't pretend that this is not the case. It is important for students to know whether they failed quite narrowly or whether there was a lot missing, especially as weaker students may find it difficult to accurately assess their own work. Be clear about the criticism, and communicate that you want to help them improve. If you are too nice and too positive, they will not become aware of their own weaknesses.

Conclusion

Our aim in writing this guide has been to provide you with detailed information on how to design and implement learning portfolios. Each chapter addresses one major step in the process, answering questions such as the following:

1. What types of assessment does the regulatory framework of your home institution/department allow? What are desired learning outcomes? And how can the learning outcomes and assessment types be mapped onto each other, in order to achieve constructive alignment?

2. With a view to both student and instructor workloads, what kind of learning portfolio is feasible (i.e. how much time is available)?

3. What type of learning portfolio might suit your course best? What is the internal logic of your learning portfolio?

4. How can you turn a *general* concept for a learning portfolio into a series of specific tasks? What is the best timeline for the portfolio tasks (with a view not only to student workload but also to ensuring that feedback can be provided at an advantageous point in time)?

5. What will help you put in place a grading system that will be (a) clear and (reasonably) objective, and (b) easy for you as an instructor to use?

6. What kind of information about your module and the corresponding type(s) of assessment do you need to provide to your students and when? What is the best format for this kind of information?

7. What is the difference between corrections and feedback? What kinds of feedback are most helpful to students, and what should you aim to avoid? When and in what format should you share the feedback with your students?

Overall, this guide shows how to adapt the learning portfolio to all kinds of modules and/or course contexts (including desired learning outcomes).

Sometimes, it will be quite clear which type of learning portfolio best suits the context and learning outcomes of your course. At other times – especially in elective modules and/or where the learning portfolio is 'only' a part of the overall grade – you may want to use a more daring or creative format. In the latter case, you may even want to articulate this when explaining the learning portfolio assignment(s) to your students: e.g. 'This is actually a bit of an experiment, so I'd be really grateful to have your feedback.'

The aim of this guide is not to make you strive for pedagogical perfection. Rather, we hope to have provided you with some food for thought, as well as some didactic tools that will help you design and implement learning portfolios in a structured, reasonably efficient manner.

Ultimately, then, **our goal has been to inspire as well as to inform** in the hope that this will make it possible for you to design learning portfolios that students will find both interesting *and* useful.

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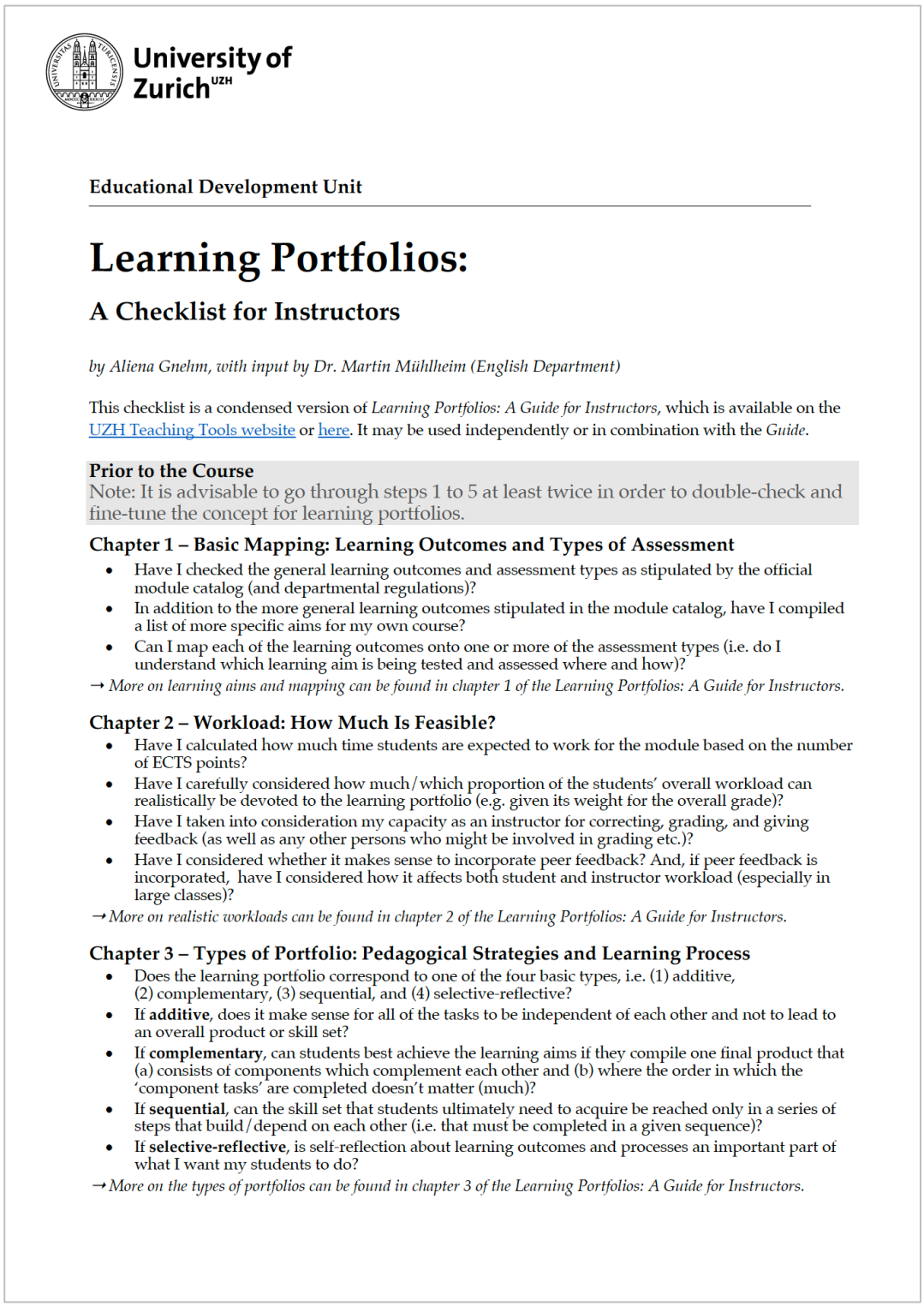
Appendix 1: Checklist

The Checklist is also available as a PDF document, on the UZH Teaching Tools website.



University of Zurich[UZH]

Educational Development Unit

Learning Portfolios:

A Checklist for Instructors

by Aliena Gnehm, with input by Dr. Martin Mühlheim (English Department)

This checklist is a condensed version of *Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors*, which is available on the UZH Teaching Tools website or here. It may be used independently or in combination with the *Guide*.

Prior to the Course

Note: It is advisable to go through steps 1 to 5 at least twice in order to double-check and fine-tune the concept for learning portfolios.

Chapter 1 – Basic Mapping: Learning Outcomes and Types of Assessment

- Have I checked the general learning outcomes and assessment types as stipulated by the official module catalog (and departmental regulations)?
- In addition to the more general learning outcomes stipulated in the module catalog, have I compiled a list of more specific aims for my own course?
- Can I map each of the learning outcomes onto one or more of the assessment types (i.e. do I understand which learning aim is being tested and assessed where and how)?

→ *More on learning aims and mapping can be found in chapter 1 of the Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors.*

Chapter 2 – Workload: How Much Is Feasible?

- Have I calculated how much time students are expected to work for the module based on the number of ECTS points?
- Have I carefully considered how much/which proportion of the students' overall workload can realistically be devoted to the learning portfolio (e.g. given its weight for the overall grade)?
- Have I taken into consideration my capacity as an instructor for correcting, grading, and giving feedback (as well as any other persons who might be involved in grading etc.)?
- Have I considered whether it makes sense to incorporate peer feedback? And, if peer feedback is incorporated, have I considered how it affects both student and instructor workload (especially in large classes)?

→ *More on realistic workloads can be found in chapter 2 of the Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors.*

Chapter 3 – Types of Portfolio: Pedagogical Strategies and Learning Process

- Does the learning portfolio correspond to one of the four basic types, i.e. (1) additive, (2) complementary, (3) sequential, and (4) selective-reflective?
- If **additive**, does it make sense for all of the tasks to be independent of each other and not to lead to an overall product or skill set?
- If **complementary**, can students best achieve the learning aims if they compile one final product that (a) consists of components which complement each other and (b) where the order in which the 'component tasks' are completed doesn't matter (much)?
- If **sequential**, can the skill set that students ultimately need to acquire be reached only in a series of steps that build/depend on each other (i.e. that must be completed in a given sequence)?
- If **selective-reflective**, is self-reflection about learning outcomes and processes an important part of what I want my students to do?

→ *More on the types of portfolios can be found in chapter 3 of the Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors.*

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Chapter 4 – Specific Tasks: Timeline and Organization

- Is the number of specific tasks that I have decided to use in the learning portfolio feasible and appropriate? (Too many small tasks can seem burdensome and pointless to students, while two or three very complex tasks can seem overwhelming to them.)
- Is there a sufficient degree of variation between the types of tasks? (There should be at least two different types because tasks of the same type do not 'feel' like a learning *portfolio*.)
- Have I considered including an element of choice in the learning portfolio (e.g. students have to do only four out of five tasks)?
- Do I understand the links between the learning portfolio tasks and the other types of tasks assessed in my course (e.g. how the learning portfolio relates to, e.g., the paper or final exam)?
- Have I considered how these tasks relate to skills from earlier modules in the curriculum? (Is there reason to believe that students are equipped with the required skills and knowledge to complete these tasks? Are the tasks challenging and interesting for students at this particular level of study?)

→ *More on specific tasks and links can be found in chapter 4 of the Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors.*

Chapter 5 – Grading Criteria: Transparency and Fairness

- Have I implemented a grading system that (a) complies with the relevant regulations and (b) will be easy for me as an instructor to use?
- Have I compiled a precise and reasonably objective set of grading criteria for each task?
- If group grades are to be considered, have I checked whether the departmental and/or faculty regulations allow for group grading? Do the learning aims justify grading students collectively?
- Have I considered whether the quality of students' revisions should have an effect on the overall grade? (Will I grade only final versions, only draft versions, or both for some/all the tasks?)
- Do my grading criteria correspond to the logic and aims of the learning portfolio I have designed?

→ *More on grading criteria can be found in chapter 5 of the Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors.*

Reminder: It is advisable to repeat steps 1 to 5 at least once in order to double-check and fine-tune.

During and after the Course

Chapter 6 – Communicating: Why, What, When, and How?

- Do I have a clear plan for how I can use the mapping of the learning aims onto the learning portfolio tasks to help me communicate the tasks and their purposes to my course participants?
- Do I have a plan for communicating the grading criteria and all deadlines *before* the end of the booking/cancellation period?
- Have I considered which information should be shared when? (Is it better to communicate all the information at the same time, or should it be broken down into smaller segments to be shared at different times?)
- In addition to communicating all these points orally and/or in emails, have I prepared a written document containing *all* the key information that is accessible to all course participants / students (*before* the end of the booking/cancellation period)?

→ *More on communication can be found in chapter 6 of the Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors.*

Chapter 7 – Feedback and Evaluation: Learning from Experience

- Does my timeline for providing feedback allow students to react to my comments and to implement changes? (This is especially important whenever the feedback could help students complete subsequent tasks.)
- Have I ensured that the students know where, when, and how they can receive additional feedback? Or have I explained when and why they cannot receive additional feedback?
- Have I determined which (if any) feedback processes might provide me with implicit course evaluations? Have I considered the limitations of using feedback processes as 'substitute evaluations'?
- Have I decided which of the steps outlined in this checklist can also help me provide more precise feedback and which steps can help me formulate fruitful questions for the course evaluation?

→ *More on feedback and evaluation can be found in chapter 7 of the Learning Portfolios: A Guide for Instructors.*

Appendix 2: Sample Portfolios

Note: The examples included below are based on modules offered at UZH, but have been abbreviated and adapted by the authors of the present guide.

Example 1: Historical Linguistics (History of the English Language)

Learning portfolio type: additive

Context

- UZH English Department
- Bachelor level, mandatory, 6 ECTS, graded
- This one-semester module consists of a lecture, a seminar, and a tutorial. The module is assessed with a written exam (60%) and a learning portfolio (40%). The learning portfolio is completed as a part of the seminar.

Learning aims

- Students have basic knowledge of English historical linguistics (periods of language history, linguistic phenomena and their diachronic developments).
- They are able to read and understand simple Old or Middle English texts in the original using appropriate study tools.

Assessment

The learning portfolio consists of two assignments. The first is a translation task (Old or Middle English into Present Day English) where students write a commentary on the translation passage in addition to the translation itself. The commentary could concern translation difficulties or interesting linguistic features of the text. The deadline for this first task is set in the middle of the semester. The type of the second task can be chosen by each student from a pool of three options: a presentation with a handout; an etymology paper; or defining and answering a set of mock exam questions. For these tasks, the deadlines vary. While the mock exam questions and presentations are distributed throughout the semester based on the topic, the deadline for the etymology paper is also fixed midway through the semester. While students are free to choose these tasks, the module provides a helpful framework for the students' choices: Topics for the presentations can be chosen from a list, and students are encouraged to discuss their presentation ideas with the instructor beforehand; list of etymologically interesting pairs of Old or Middle English words is made available for students to sign up at the beginning of the semester.

Comments:

- The portfolio type is additive because the two assignments are independent of each other.
- Note this learning portfolio includes an element of choice.

Example 2: Writing Academic Reviews

Learning portfolio type: sequential

Context

- Example created for this guide.
- Assessment: learning portfolio

Learning aims

- Students are able to write a short academic review of two or more texts on the same topic in the form of a five-paragraph essay.

Assessment

Students are first given a handbook article on an academic topic and asked to completed and submit a first reading comprehension task. Based on the handbook article, students next have to summarize the state of the art regarding a given topic, in the form of an introductory paragraph for an academic review. During the next session, they work on their introductory paragraphs, giving each other feedback on their draft versions. Students are then given two academic essays on the same topic, and once again asked to submit a second reading comprehension task. Next, they are taught the basics of writing a summary and asked to write a first summary on one of the two essays. In the following session, they are taught how to write a summary of a second text on a similar theme: How can one refer back to the first summary? What kind of linguistic means are there to highlight similarities and differences? Again, they have to write a summary for the next class, during which they give each other peer feedback on the two summaries (including the transition between them). Next, the students are taught how to write an evaluative paragraph (i.e. whereas the summaries remained relatively neutral, they now have to take a stance and judge the merits of the two articles in question). Once again, they receive peer feedback on the paragraph. In a final step, they are taught how (a) to write a conclusion and (b) to revise a first draft. During their next class, they give each other feedback on the complete five-paragraph essay (introduction, summary 1, summary 2, evaluation, conclusion). They revise this draft one more time and then submit it to the instructor.

Comments:

- The course is designed to guide students through the most important steps of writing a particular type of text. Clearly, the sequence of the tasks matters, as students cannot, say, summarize and evaluate a secondary source before actually having read it (i.e. reading comprehension necessarily precedes summarizing and evaluating). This is, therefore, a *sequential* learning portfolio.
- As almost all the component parts will also be put together into one final product (i.e. the five paragraph essay), this learning portfolio is similar to a *complementary portfolio*. However, the two reading comprehension tasks do not form part of the final essay, but still form an essential part of the sequence of tasks.
- Note that the course design includes peer feedback.

Example 3: Literature Seminar (Oscar Wilde)

Learning portfolio type: mainly complementary (with one additive component)

Context

- UZH English Department
- Bachelor level, mandatory-elective, 6 ECTS
- This two-semester course was part of a module containing several seminar groups, of which the students must pick one. Each seminar group consisted of a one-semester course, followed by a critical essay (to be submitted early on in the second semester). The overall assessment in each seminar group was based on a learning portfolio (20%) and the critical essay (80%).

Learning aims [excerpt]

- The students can outline the key features of Oscar Wilde's work.
- Students can write a critical essay that meets conventional academic standards.

Assessment [summarized]

For the learning portfolio, students have to write a paper outline (10 points) and create a webpage on one poem by Oscar Wilde (16 points). The website consists of (a) a correctly formatted version of the poem, with line numbers; (b) annotations with difficult words; (c) one non-copyrighted image that fits the poem, together with a short explanation; (d) a 5-minute video in which the students present three literary-critical observations on the poem; (e) an exercise based on the poem and the material presented on the webpage, created with LearningApps.org; (f) a bibliography; (g) a Wilde Card (i.e. a space for a creative response to the poem).

Comment:

- The webpage on the poem is a *complementary* learning portfolio (i.e. the sequence in which the components are completed does not matter, but they do form a coherent whole). To this, one unrelated component is added (i.e. the paper outline; the relation between the webpage and the paper outline is *additive*).

Grading Grid for Paper Outline

bibliography: formatting *(max. 1 point)*	☐ = 0 missing or too many mistakes		☐ = 1 (mostly) correct	
min. 5 secondary sources, with commentary → *journal articles, book chapters, or books; websites, dictionaries, etc. don't count (max. 1 point)*	☐ = 0 fewer than 5, irrelevant, etc.		☐ = 1 at least five relevant sources	
working thesis *(max. 2 points)*	☐ = 0 missing, or without clear direction/focus and/or not arguable	☐ = 1 solid basis	☐ = 2 very interesting /promising	
main points to be discussed in the paper (at least three, in addition to the point discussed in the sample paragraph) *(max. 3 points)*	☐ = 0 missing, unclear, etc.	☐ = 1 solid basis, but key aspects undeveloped	☐ = 2 good basis, with some interesting ideas	☐ = 3 intriguing, highly promising
sample paragraph *(max. 3 points)*	☐ = 0 missing, or poorly constructed	☐ = 1 solid, but with some problems	☐ = 2 good paragraph	☐ = 3 excellent paragraph
Points Total (max. 10 Points):				

Grading Grid for Poetry Task

1st draft *(max. 13 points)*	**Cover image and commentary**	☐ = 0 late submission; missing image and/or commentary; relevance with regard to the poem unclear; no Creative Commons license			☐ = 1 suitable, relevant image with good commentary; Creative Commons license	
	Reformatted text of the poem	☐ = 0 late submission; no line numbers and/or formatting mistakes; mistakes in the text and/or the bibliographical entry			☐ = 1 correct format, text, and bibliographical entry	
	Annotations	☐ = 0 late submission; no annotations, or too few annotations and/or content inadequate	☐ = 1 at least five correct and suitable annotations		☐ = 2 at least five very useful and well-researched annotations	
	Embedded clip	☐ = 0 late submission; very poor	☐ = 1 imprecise; quite a few mistakes	☐ = 2 only few mistakes / problems	☐ = 3 well done, informative	☐ = 4 highly illuminating
	'Wilde Card'	☐ = 0 late submission; no discernible effort made	☐ = 1 solid effort; well-crafted		☐ = 2 really interesting and/or highly creative contribution	
	Learning App	☐ = 0 late submission; mistakes; task unclear; level of difficulty inappropriate (i.e. far too easy or clearly way too difficult)	☐ = 1 basic idea solid or even good; still, there is need for considerable improvement (e.g. task unclear; mistakes)	☐ = 2 good exercise; some changes are needed, but the exercise is relevant with regard to the poem and works (mostly) well	☐ = 3 great exercise, with few (if any) problems; could be used in a *Gymnasium* class, without any real changes	
final version *(max. 3 points)*	☐ = 0 late submission; required changes not implemented at all	☐ = 1 some problems remain (or new ones have been added); nevertheless, there has been some improvement	☐ = 2 most required changes have been implemented correctly	☐ = 3 all required changes have been implemented correctly and/or there has been major improvement		

The max. number of points for the learning portfolio is 26. The grading scale is as follows:

Points	Grade
25 or 26	6
24	5.8
23	5.6
22	5.4
21	5.2
20	5
19	4.8
18	4.6
17	4.4
16	4.2
15	4
14	3.8
13	3.6

Points	Grade
12	3.4
11	3.2
10	3
9	2.8
8	2.6
7	2.4
6	2.2
5	2
4	1.8
3	1.6
2	1.4
1	1.2
0	1

Example 4: Writing Skills Course

Learning portfolio type: selective-reflective

Context

- UZH Department of History
- Bachelor level, mandatory, 3 ECTS
- This writing skills course is part of a larger module that also contains a seminar class (6 ECTS).
- The learning portfolio is the only type of assessment in the writing skills course.

Learning aims [excerpt]

- Students know the most common types of texts in science of history and their characteristics.
- Students know how to write shorts academic texts which fulfill the academic standards regarding language, structure and argument.
- Students know that academic writing is a practice of interaction with the research community.
- Students recognize academic writing and research as a discursive practice based on currently accepted conventions, which are always evolving.
- Students recognize the opportunities and limitations of such practices.
- Students are able to reflect in written form on how their stances relate to those put forward by other members of their research community.

Assessment [summarized]

All students must write five different types of texts. All texts are discussed and revised in class. At the end of the semester, students must hand in a learning portfolio containing all five finalized texts. Students choose which one of these texts will be graded and write a short report (half a page) about that text, reflecting on their academic writing process.

Comment:

- The portfolio type is selective-reflective because the students are (a) asked to select a specified number of documents or tasks from among a larger pool and (b) to submit a reflective commentary upon the selected document(s).

Example 5: Quantitative Research Methods

Learning portfolio type: mainly additive (with elements of a selective-reflective portfolio)

Context

- UZH Institute of Education
- Bachelor level, mandatory-elective, 9 ECTS
- This module introduces students to quantitative research methods and is offered with different main focuses, such as data acquisition, project design, or project implementation.
- The learning portfolio constitutes 20% of the assessment. The other 80% are determined by a final written exam.

Learning aims [excerpts]

- Students are familiar with concepts of descriptive and inferential statistics and know how to read and interpret published research findings.
- Students possess the skills necessary to implement and interpret their own research project.
- Students know how to apply statistical methods for hypothesis testing in the context of smaller, particularly experimental studies.

Assessment [summarized]

The learning portfolio part of the assessment consist of a learning journal on which students work throughout the semester. The learning journal tasks range from reflection prompts (e.g. What did you find the most important insight and/or concept from this class?) to preparation and follow-up tasks relating to the content of either the seminar or the lecture of the module. In this way, the learning portfolio also serves as exam preparation. Students are given the option of handing in the learning portfolio mid-semester to receive formative feedback from their instructors. Although the learning portfolio tasks are mostly conceived of as homework tasks, students can also work on their portfolio during a number of seminar sessions.

Comments:

- The basic structure of the portfolio is *additive*: there are various tasks that are not very directly connected to each other (i.e. they follow neither a sequential nor a complementary logic).
- However, some of the tasks are explicitly designed to foster self-reflection (i.e. while the *selective* dimension is not particularly important, there is an important *reflective* component).
- Note that students are given the option of receiving formative feedback.

Example 6: Methods and Theories in English Linguistics

Learning portfolio type: additive

Context

- English Department, UZH
- Master level, mandatory, 6 ECTS, graded
- This one-semester module consists of a seminar. The module is assessed with a learning portfolio (70%) and an oral presentation (30%).

Learning aims

- Students are able to apply selected empirical methods of data collection and analysis correctly and appropriately.
- They are able to apply descriptive statistical methods in order to show quantitative distributions of linguistic data. They have basic knowledge of common methods of inferential statistics and are able to apply them.
- They are able to reflect on theoretical approaches in linguistics.
- They are able to develop research questions independently.
- They are able to present these aspects in oral and written form in agreement with the accepted standards of academic presentations and publications in English linguistics.

Assessment

The learning portfolio consists of two assignments. The first assignment is to summarize a seminar session (minutes). Students can sign up for one of five sessions of their choice and hand in their minutes (3-4 pages) one week after the session. The second assignment consist of one practical task documented in writing (4-5 pages). The document should include a description of the method used to solve the task, a theoretical contextualization of the task, and a discussion of the outcome(s) of the analysis (where relevant). For each session, students are given a pair of tasks that focus on practicing the theoretical concepts introduced in class. In total, students have to choose one task from one session.

Comments:

- The basic structure of the portfolio is *additive*: there are two types of tasks that are independent of each other.
- The portfolio includes an element of choice, i.e. while the number of tasks is fixed, students are free to select their tasks for the second assignment from a larger set.

Appendix 3: Constructive Feedback

The following lists are based on a survey conducted at the UZH English Department. The replies provide some useful insight into students' preferences and will enable instructors to provide more constructive feedback.

Constructive Feedback

- Specificity and contextualization:
  "Feedback is useful when it concretely tells me what I did wrong by giving examples and not just generalizing what wasn't good. I can't do much with a general 'This was not enough'. I want to know why it's not enough, and how I could have done better" (Feedback Survey 6).

- Providing the solution or right way to approach the task:
  "Point out what was bad, and provide one or two ways how to do it instead" (Feedback 7)

- Pointing out underlying problems or misunderstandings that constrain the student:
  "Single out the problems or patterns and give concrete examples on how to improve on the issue" (Feedback 7).

- Giving encouragement or including positive aspects of a student's work:
  "I think feedback without ANY sort of positive comment is destructive and disrespectful" (Feedback 7).

- Including a summary or essential message:
  "Giving a little summary at the end as well, so all mistakes are clearly visible" (Feedback 6)

Non-Constructive Feedback

- Ad hominem attacks or shaming:
  "Not so great feedback simply points out the flaws in a project, or worse, in a student" (Feedback Survey 7); "[It is unhelpful to make] the student feel bad about their mistakes, it just causes mental stress and might make them struggle even more with studying in the future" (Feedback Survey 7)

- Too vague or general:
  "[C]omments like 'this is vague' are not very helpful as this comment itself is vague. Tell me how to improve and how to be less vague!" (Feedback Survey 8)

- Confusing or unstructured:
  "an unhelpful feedback is too long [… and] just a lot of information that can only confuse" (Feedback Survey 8)

- Illegible handwriting:
  "when it's handwritten and u can't read anything [sic]" (Feedback Survey 8)

- Certain phrases or responses are perceived as both unhelpful and harsh/offensive, e.g.:
  "???", "this is wrong," "try again," "doesn't make sense," "unclear," "vague," "LOGIC???," or "better luck next time"

- Cryptic messages:
  "My […] instructor told me at the end of the course that I did not deserve my grade. I wondered [… what that meant]. I have not gotten elaboration on that statement whatsoever" (17).

- Feedback provided too late or not at all is very unpopular with students (e.g. a grade simply appearing in the booking system after months, without any personalized message or comment by the instructor).

- Several students also mentioned nitpicking as characteristic of non-constructive feedback.